

BLESSING READY *for* DIVINITY



COMMANDER UNCLE

BLESSING READY
for
DIVINITY



COMMANDER UNCLE

CONTENTS

Introduction	v
Gopal <i>Tera Aarta</i>	viii
Of Longing and Belonging	1
Guruji Places His Hand Over My Children's Head	12
The Omniscient Lord	21
Spirit of <i>Satsangs</i> : Host Simply, Connect Deeply	25
Lesson Learnt – The Hard Way!	29
<i>Satguru Pyara Mere Naal Hai</i> : Journeys in Faith	40
Maharaj's Sewa – The Rites of Passage	49
Guruji's Lotus Feet Bless Gurgaon	54
The Connection	61
...And You Shall Become Guruji's Own	67
Guruji – The Amazing Shiva!	76
Blessings Always: 'I Am Not Leaving My <i>Sangat</i> '	87
How His Grace Makes Light of Karma	95
The Veiled Play of Illusions	107
<i>Shiva Purana</i> for the Modern Times	115
Acknowledgments	124

INTRODUCTION

As an engineer and military man, my written efforts have been limited to routine professional communications, official letters and file notes. Of late, e-mails have taken the center stage, yet the contents remained much the same.

From 2003 onwards, verbal sharing of satsangs, with Guruji Maharaj's Gurgaon *sangat*, has been my only other noteworthy activity in the field of communication.

As my experiences with the Divine grew, so did the desire to put it all on paper, and I tried a few times as well. However, my skill set in the literary field was simply too limited to go beyond the second page. And that was that.

Then came the Covid times and satsangs as we knew came to a stop. I too, like most others, was mostly home-bound, stepping out only for a brisk morning walk. Fortunately, Zoom application came to our rescue. In quick time, Zoom satsangs became the new normal. Even though virtual satsangs were no substitute for the good old “at home” satsangs, they came with their own advantages. Sangat became global and connected in a true sense of “*vasudhaiva kutumbakam*.” Soon we were sharing satsangs across the globe with *sangat* of different nationalities and languages. A practice that continues to date.

Completely unknown to me, Sun Auntie from Canada petitioned Guruji Maharaj to make Commander Uncle (me) share satsangs in English. Guruji almost immediately told her to “talk to Commander.” Sun responded as only she could. “Maharaj if this is your wish, you make it happen.” He did and how!

Same evening Guruji Maharaj made me connect with Sun Auntie and volunteer to share my complete journey at Guruji's lotus feet with her in English. A few of her friends from Canada *sangat* joined as well. It was still a tiny group of five. The storyteller in me was awakened and blessed by Maharaj. It took me sixteen sessions to share all that Guruji made me see, experience, and understand. At the end of it all, we had

11 hours of video recording of my satsangs. The contents, if converted into text, had the potential to become a book and fulfil my dream of so many years. I floated the idea in this small group and everyone in the group readily agreed to this sewa. Few more joined from USA and India. The team now had Sun, Noushin, Rashi Gupta, Shubhra from Canada, Dhirja Bhat from the USA, Sakshi from Australia, and Archie Sahgal, Khushi Gulhar, Richa Khullar and Khushi Solenki all from India. It took the team many hours of painstaking work of “start-listen-pause-type-start” to complete the conversion of an entire set of videos into text in quick time.

I finally had it all on paper, still not sure if it would make sense as a book. I approached Jitendra Pant (Jeetu) Uncle to have a look at the entire material and provide honest feedback. He not only gave a big thumbs up but also volunteered to edit the entire content. He did a brilliant job and sent back to me a complete book in every sense of the word. His depth of spiritual understanding amazed me no end. He filled in all the gaps, rearranged the contents and added material as required. His valuable contribution and continued guidance have been the key to this book’s final look and feel.

Still, I repeatedly went over the book. Every time making some changes. Not sure if I was ready to let it go to print. Then as if on a cue from Maharaj, Chetna Keer aunty, a *sangat* and professional writer appeared on the scene out of nowhere. She accepted my request to look at the draft one final time and recommended subtle changes that made so much sense.

We were not done yet. There were a number of items referred to in the text that needed to be photographed and presented in the book. Charanjeet Dhiman uncle, a *sangat* and media professional, took on this responsibility and did a great job.

When Guruji Maharaj gives us a sewa, He also equips us with the necessary tools to deliver on it. He knew I am not a writer. And yet, he made it happen in His own way through a team only He put together.

This book is about my spiritual journey at Guruji’s lotus Feet. It includes all that Maharaj made me see, experience and realize. I have no

idea where He has placed me in terms of my evolution as His devotee, yet I am grateful, happy and content to be in this eternal journey. All thanks to Guruji Maharaj.

Words fail me in conveying my sincere gratitude to the team who selflessly devoted their time and effort to make this book happen.

I now lay down this book at Guruji Maharaj's Lotus feet and pray for His blessings for all of us.

Commander Uncle



GOPAL TERA AARTA

THE GURU IS AN IMPULSE GIVEN TO THE SPIRIT WITHIN YOU TO COME OUT. IT IS HE who makes spiritual combustion possible, it is he who can kick start our spiritual engine. “The first lamp is the Guru,” says Swami Vivekananda, “and the lamp that is lighted from it is the disciple.” The Guru does not bring spirituality from the outside; he awakens it from within us. The Guru’s job is not of transportation of learning, be it mystical, ritualistic or secular, but of transcending the ignorance of the disciple. He takes a pickaxe to our ignorance and destroys it forever. The Guru is, in fact, the destiny of the disciple.

The Guru takes a form just like the director of a picture takes part in his own film. He creates a role for himself and steps in. He picks up a date and time and chooses a sequence of events. Then he drops into the cosmic picture to change it with his leela. Just such a role was played by Guruji Maharaj. In his form, God himself decided to come down and save His flock.

Guruji’s blessings not only protect the disciple, who has entrusted himself to the Guru’s care against any malicious currents of karma, they are also a positive nurturing force. They provide soil, sunlight and water for the soul that lies hidden under the imperatives of the mind, body, and heart. Slowly, the disciple blooms. His life is transformed, internally, under Guruji’s care. Shiny materialism is exposed to show that it has only rusty pleasure to offer; simplicity comes to the fore with its fraternal virtue, humility, and the devotee finds himself part of the family of his guru, the *sangat*. His atrophied love for humanity is regained.

The *sangat* is not based on bonds of blood but on common love for the Guru. Guruji has patiently woven the *sangat* together, discarding all inequalities that man is heir to. His singular method of teaching is via the *shabads*, which proclaim divine truths: Of One God, of the common message and unity of different religions, and the common ground of different men who come from one source. They teach us that there is but one aim that human life owes allegiance to—God.

They encourage us to make efforts towards spiritual realization. They counsel us to adopt the golden rule of humanity: brotherhood towards one and all. They enjoin us to act in accordance with that rule, serving each other selflessly, helping and never hurting.

The significance of the Guru is akin to that of a gardener, who can find seeds and manure and just the right sun and shade no matter what the soil type. The gardener spends some time gently digging at the hard soil. With the spade of love, he gently breaks our hardened hearts and minds into soft lumps without unsettling the top-soil of our personality. After tilling the ground, the Guru selects the seed that can be dropped into the flower bed. He pats disciplinary mud around it—which is our *sadhana*: It can either be introduced with formality or without orthodoxy, with a casual command. But the vital energy that inspires the *sadhana* is the Guru's grace.

The Guru then waters the seed and steps away for a while. The life of outer circumstances, of sorrow and happiness, of yearning and disappointment, of vitality and ill-health, shines on the young plant. It yearns for true light, and the Guru again steps in. Some weeding is required of our mental habits after a bit of experience gathering; maybe we need a strong pesticide; or more manure or some slight tilling. He does what is needed and steps away again. The process is repeated. The disciple is tended and grown until he blooms into himself. The Guru keeps doing this for those earnest in his sanctuary. He sees into the nature of all those who come and understands who is ripe for what. By deep insight he knows of the *shraddha*, the commitment and conviction the disciple has, and plants the seed natural to that environment. He does not make everybody into one kind of flower. The Guru is not cloning. He is growing a garden full of all kinds of flowers.

The Guru's role is akin to the mother's at home. She feeds, nurtures, cares, protects, teaches, grooms, prods, punishes, loves, forgives, loves again. The Guru is nothing else but the lap of the divine mother. To write about his significance is a foolish fancy. It is foolish because the plenitude of his nature and its transcendence can't be described. Thus, whatever is wrought by words can only point to the Guru. It cannot describe him

fully. It is fancy because the mediator in the act of writing is the mind. The mind, as we know, is unduly capricious. But an act of grace can easily make it sing to the Guru's tune. Attunement to the Guru gets the mind in line, allowing the ideas of His higher consciousness to seep through.

Through the Guru's tending, the aspirant feels a natural expansion of his feelings and thoughts. He loses self-worry and gains concern for others. Not through something as blunt and obvious as moralizing sermons, but through a keen method employed by the Guru which opens his eyes and makes him look into himself and realize his mistakes.

The Guru's task is to make the disciple—perhaps reluctant because this is not the romantic spiritual holiday he may have expected—undergo training. How the Guru does this he only knows, but he uses the pattern of the disciple's life to train him, to make him spiritually fit. This is the most wondrous aspect of the Guru. It is not the supernatural powers he possesses, his intense physical presence that constantly bursts with the divine energy behind it, but the wholesome yet inscrutable way in which he prepares the disciple that is amazing.

Certain preparatory steps are called for, though these may not literally follow the same order or even be present for every devotee: First, the disciple must want the Guru. He must develop love for him, for then alone can he trust him. As the novice disciple stirs with devotion, he begins to feel inadequate to this love. This is natural: If you love a superior person, you soon see where you are coming up short.

Second, the disciple must want to become worthy of the Guru's love. He will come to acknowledge, without the guidance of moral strictures, his misalignment from what the Guru exemplifies.

Third, he must make the effort to purify himself. This purification may be brought about by prayers, rituals, mantras, and other spiritual exercises, but it is not necessary that it should be. A glance of grace from the Guru can set in motion internal processes that bring out and cleanse states of being. It is not a purification that is ceremonial, but a cleansing of the mental swamp that is our common store of mischief. It can come about through *sadhana* and *sewa*. The karmas that make up the body must be exhausted in service—that is *sewa*. The devotee

thinks he is doing selfless service at the behest of the Guru, but it is actually the Guru that is taking pains on one's behalf. And *sewa* is the wish-fulfilling tree which also provides refuge.

Fourth, he must drop the ego. He must cleave less to outer circumstance to fortify himself and depend fully on the Guru. He views himself less as an individual and more as an agency. His commitment to self-seeking and self-aggrandising goals wanes as he feels their hollow transitoriness and acknowledges their futility. He ropes his ego to something more gratifying, more fulfilling. Yet the nature of the higher good, or *dharma*, is such that the ego can't latch on to it. The devotee finds that the *dharma* cannot feed his ego, and the Guru absolutely will not. The effect is that he develops emotional maturity. He may love and yearn for the Guru as much as he wants, but these emotions become interiorized. His prayers may continue, but they lose sentimentality and self-pity. The devotee gives up all self-seeking, he does not seek to bend circumstances towards personal gain. Instead, the disciple sees the hand of the Guru in the shaping of circumstances.

Fifth, he surrenders to the Guru. Along with the relinquishment of the ego comes the Guru's gift of surrender. It is said that the disciple must surrender to the Guru. But who is going to surrender to whom? How can surrender be willed? The minute it is done through force of mind or even through an act of understanding it becomes not surrender, but the effect of an action taken up by an individual. A subtle form of the ego hides behind such noble and meritorious acts, for the true cause of surrender is the Guru's grace¹.

¹ Question: If 'I' also be an illusion, who then casts off the illusion?

Answer: The 'I' casts off the illusion and yet remains 'I'. Such is the paradox of self-realisation. The realised do not see any contradiction in it. Take the case of *bhakti* [devotion]. I approach Iswara and pray to be absorbed in Him. I then surrender myself in faith and by concentration. What remains afterwards? In place of the original 'I', perfect self-surrender leaves a residuum of God in which the 'I' is lost. That is the highest form of devotion [*para bhakti*], *parapatti*, surrender or the height of *vairagya*. You give up this and that of 'my' possessions. If you give up 'I' and 'mine' instead, all are given up at a stroke. The very seed of possession is lost. Thus, the evil is nipped in the bud or crushed in the germ itself. Dispassion [*vairagya*] must be very strong to do this. Eagerness to do must be equal to that of a man kept under water trying to rise up to the surface for his life.

– Padamalai: *Teachings of Sri Ramana Maharishi*; recorded by Muruganar; first English translation by

Dr T.V. Venkatasubramanian; Robert Butler and David Goodman (editor), p 217.

Sixth, he becomes one with the Guru. As such this is not a step, but a consequence of all that came before. The effect of the Guru's grace is rapid after the ego is gone and just the remnants of the personality remain. The personality is then like a shell within which the Guru has his abode. The disciple and the Guru are one. The Guru works through the disciple, who has lost his sense of wrongful identity and fully knows who he is, to take the disciple towards the realization, as Shri Ramana Maharishi put it, that "God, Guru and Self are one." The spiritual light leaps from one bodily frame to another and passes on, ever-lit. The Guru and disciple, thus, form an informal tradition of a continuous 'offering of lights', or *aarti*, to the divine that is present in everyone even as it is beyond and above them.

Seventh, divine sport. The way once walked assiduously has been transcended. The victorious soul has realized its aspiration and been consumed by it. Now, what happens is *leela*. The divine plays through you to bring others to the divine threshold. A fully realized soul, who has transcended all limitations, becomes godly, turns holy and remains sacred even when enmeshed in the affairs of the world.

Knowledge, power, purification, worship, doer-ship all these have been bid goodbye. The soul is done. Even God is done. There is nothing to attain, nothing to fear and nothing to hope for. No beginnings and no ends, for all beings and ends are in one. Being and non-being are the two hands of this divine personage whose foot is on the Earth and whose head in the highest heavens. Through his pores he sustains the universe and through his formlessness he holds it together and goes beyond it. This is not liberation and realization, but the transcending flight of the self beyond the causal dream of the world into the infinite real. This ascent is made possible through the divine manifestation of grace in the form of the Guru. Right through, the Guru's grace is the only constant.

Our Guruji's blessings remain with the fraternity He nurtured. They are with the humble and the common, the good but deprived, those poor in wealth yet rich in warmth, whose hearts welcome both brother and God. God who is always present, but whose recognition

within our heart is only possible with the Guru's grace. Which is why in all circumstances, and for all time, Guruji is victorious—Jai Guruji!

– **Jitendra Pant**



OF LONGING AND BELONGING

IT WAS MY TURMOIL AS A FATHER THAT FIRST TOOK ME TO GURUJI MAHARAJ.

My wife, Kamlesh, and I are proud parents of three daughters, Jaya, the eldest, Shubha, and Ila, the youngest. The pressing reason for my wanting to meet Guruji was Shubha. She had been suffering from asthma and eczema since an early age. Then 16, she had endured these maladies for nearly 14 years, yet there was no cure in sight. We couldn't handle the issue anymore. It was at that point in our lives that I learnt about Guruji Maharaj through a colleague and friend, Saseekala, a senior official with the government. She advised me to seek the blessings of Guruji, who stayed at Empire Estate in Sultanpur (on the Delhi-Gurgaon road). Her words are indelibly etched on my mind even after two decades: "HE is very powerful. HE will cure your daughter."

Like any parent, we were willing to do anything for our daughter. I can't say I believed in her assertion, but hoped it was true for the sake of my daughter. Her condition was complicating her academic life and eroding our happiness. She couldn't appear for her midterm exams and was on the verge of losing a year of studies. So I asked my friend to take me along with her to Guruji. She promised to do so on her next visit.

That very night I had a dream.

Saseekala and I were going to a venue. When we reached the entrance, the door opened and the guard manning the door only let her in. He stopped me, saying, "You have to come alone." The next day, in intuitive obedience to my vision, I called up Saseekala and told her that I would be going to Guruji by myself. That said, we both forgot about the issue.

We had a house in Ghaziabad where my parents lived. I worked in Delhi and to avoid commuting between Delhi and Ghaziabad, I had rented a place at Kalkaji, New Delhi. At the same time, we were allotted

a flat in Jal Vayu Towers, a group housing society under construction at Gurgaon. Financing the construction of this house had become a huge challenge; I was planning to exit the scheme if I could. It must have been the last quarter of the year 2000 when my wife and I were driving down to Gurgaon, and as we went past the Empire Estate colony, I told her about Guruji, repeating my friend's assertion about his powerful ability to heal. Even as I said so, I added a caveat: I would go for *darshan* only after we were able to shift to Gurgaon.

Little did I realize that I had, thus, put a precondition before Guruji. The way out of my financial predicament was to sell my house in Ghaziabad, but I couldn't do so when my parents were living in it. The dilemma was solved when my father called up a few days later to propose that I sell off the house to my elder brother. That meant I'd get the money, and my parents would continue living in the house.

On January 26, 2001, I shifted to our flat in Gurgaon, a place we occupy to date. Here, I was reminded of my mental promise to Guruji: That I would go to Him once I had settled in Gurgaon. Three weeks later, on the evening of February 18, I left for Guruji's place. The person manning the gate at E-Villa in Empire Estate told me that it was the holy day of Mahashivratri and Guruji was at Bade Mandir. I did not know about this temple, the sacred Shiva Mandir that Guruji built, which is filled with blessings and rings with the uplifting joy of the most sacred *Gurbani*. The devotee at the gate pointed to a car with a flashing red light atop it and asked me to follow it.

I drove behind that car for the next ten and a half kilometres to Bade Mandir—it was a deserted and barely lit stretch that went past and way beyond the Chattarpur temple complex. I parked adjacent to the Mandir and joined a line of devotees queuing up for *darshan*.

My first reaction upon seeing Him was—maybe I am at the wrong place!

Guruji didn't look like the way Gurus do. I expected a saintly personage dressed in an appropriately saffron robe with a big beard to boot. The Mandir itself was spectacular without being ostentatious. Guruji looked like He owned this world and I thought to myself:

Maybe He is not the Guru from Empire Estate that I was supposed to come and meet. A devotee was standing in front of me. I gently tapped his shoulder to ask, “Is He the Guruji from Empire Estate?” I could immediately tell he didn’t like being disturbed.

He answered in a hushed tone, “*Uncle, you are at the right place; don’t ever leave this place for another.*”

These two sentences have become my guiding lights. Ever since, I always enjoin my fellow journeymen to follow this sage advice: “You are at the right place. Never ever leave it for another.” The reason is, you are here because Guruji wants you here. It is not that you have come by your own will. He has planned it and He has made it happen—as he did for me even though I stupidly put a condition before Him.

At the Bade Mandir, I followed the simple rules that every devotee observed: Attentively listening to the *shabads* amid a serene silence, the partaking of the *langar* as divine *prasad*, and implicit obedience to the *bukm* made manifest in the Guru’s words. After *langar*, someone walked up to me, perhaps noting that I was new, and asked me not to leave for home without taking Guruji’s *aagya*, or permission. I wondered how to take *aagya*, and was told that I would get it. I did receive the permission and reached home only by around 2.30 am.

Ours was a new house in a remote locality, and though I had a cell phone, my wife didn’t, hence I could not communicate my whereabouts. She was worried. When she gets worried, she gets very upset and that leads to anger. I kept quiet. It is a behavioural nicety. Just keeping quiet even under the most provocative circumstances has helped me big time throughout my life. It never felt like a sign of weakness. Instead, this self-control has always given me a sense of empowerment.

I stayed silent and the storm blew over. I realized my wife wasn’t going to like it if I told her about Guruji, she being then of the opinion that a family man should fulfil his responsibilities foremost and not spend time going to Gurus. She couldn’t be blamed for thinking that way. Yet I began visiting Empire State every Saturday. I never discussed my routine with my wife, as I was not sure of her reaction. I did not want her to object to my visits or criticise my Guru. I felt Guruji would

decide how and when she should come to His presence; I kept silent and she never objected.

The entrance to Guruji's *darbar* at Empire Estate was made heavenly by His presence. Devotees parked outside the residential complex, and as they walked in, this strong fragrance was felt: Rose like, but not rose, perfumed, but not a perfume. It could grow intense as they came closer to the sacred banks of His ever-flowing grace, which was the Ganga that exuded the blessings of Lord Shiva made manifest in His form. Initially, I was sceptical and thought maybe Guruji puts on a wonderful perfume which the surroundings are also sprayed with. Later events set right my thinking.

E-Villa was a residential flat with a commodious and beautiful hall where Guruji sat, full of light. The routine was to wash our hands before coming in to pay our respects to Guruji. I quickly began to come early because Guruji Maharaj could often be seen sitting on a simple cabinet next to the attached kitchen. He would be sporting casual attire, usually a half T-shirt with trousers and sports shoes. In this more informal setup, I could, maybe, have the good fortune of sitting closer to Him and get to listen to what He was saying. Speaking to Him was out of the question. Usually, I'd put my head to His Lotus Feet, step back and sit down—very far away. Guruji would, after some time, go inside His room, change into magnificent robes, then come and grace His asana.

The devotees, the *sangat*, would bring bouquets, and Guruji would speak to some devotees and let others just be. Each would get from Guruji what they needed. For a very long time, my presence was not visibly acknowledged by Guruji; I got a royal ignore. At least that is what I thought at that time. But I never gave up. I felt that this place belonged to me and He was my Guru. I was not leaving this sanctuary even if I didn't deserve or qualify to be here. In fact, I was very careful not to do anything that would create a disturbance and get me thrown out. So as not to upset Guruji with my disconcerting presence, I sat far away from His asana, hiding in a corner so that He wouldn't notice me. The fact that I was there for my daughter who needed healing was

pushed into the recesses of my mind. This was a divine place and its sacred ambience was so fulfilling, so overpowering that the humdrum concerns of one's daily life simply took a backseat.

After devotees came inside and bowed to Guruji, they would be served *chai prasad*. The servitors of the Guru, or the *sewadaars*, would bring the *prasad* up to them. With time, I came to know a few names: there were Singla Uncle, Joshi Uncle and a few others². Around 9 pm, Guruji would give *kada prasad* from His own hands. It was a much disciplined affair. Devotees queued up quietly, went up to their sacred Master, and He would drop the hot *halwa* in their hands. Guruji would use one hand to give us the *prasad* and our two hands cupped together would fill to the overflowing—with His blessings. We would go out and eat every grain, wash our hands, and sit together after some time for *langar*.

Having the sacred meal in front of the Guru was a unique experience. First, *langar* was not to be eaten alone. The *sangat* ate from one plate shared with three other devotees, and they could be strangers. Devotees may have reservations eating with certain people because they were different. Yet they had to eat with everybody, anybody from anywhere, irrespective of their status, age, their dress, their looks and the rest. I initially resisted eating with anybody, a sign of my ego coming in the way.

One evening, as I paid my respects to Guruji at the start of the *satsang*, I felt that the devotee behind me in the queue would be seated next to me. It followed then that I would have *langar* with him. I confess that I did not like his appearance and decided to avoid having *langar* with him and said so much to Guruji mentally. I also manoeuvred to avoid sitting next to him. Suddenly, a *sewak* came up to me and asked me to get up. Then he made me sit next to that very man I was so desperate to avoid.

² In India, the terms Uncle and Auntie are informally used for elders as a means of giving informal respect. They may not always signify that a person is related. By using these familiar terms, Guruji at once engaged with affection and respect towards His *sangat*, be they newcomers or older devotees. Everyone was equal in His presence—as He is equanimity and same-mindedness personified—which was why everybody got the same designation, as it were.

It hit me then: The Guru seems to know whatever goes on in my mind. It was a scary thought, initially. Here, I couldn't even control my mind, there, the Guru knew everything happening inside it. Soon I gave in to the fact, without argument, that I would have to sit with anyone and have *langar*. The first obvious barrier of the ego was gone as I soon started to like the idea of having *langar* with strangers. Guruji thus taught me to stop differentiating and evaluating people based on their status and appearances. The soul sitting with me could be at a much higher level of spirituality than mine, no matter how it was clothed. With time, I got used to sharing *langar*. These days, after so many years, if I am asked to eat *langar* alone, it feels odd. I now make it a point to ask around to have *sangat* join me for *langar*. It took me some time to learn the lesson that human beings are one; that we all feed from the one common plate that nature gives us.

Though I was happy going to Guruji's, there was this apprehension in my mind about me being accepted by Guruji as His *sangat*. I had been going to Guruji for nearly eight months yet He had never spoken to me or acknowledged my presence. I wondered if I belonged here and if He would ever speak to me. On one occasion, as I kneeled in front of Him, eyes down as always, to get *kada prasad*, I realized He had not dropped it into my hands. Afraid and startled that I was not going to get it, and even misapprehending that this was perhaps the end of the road for me, I looked up to find Maharaj smiling at me. He asked very gently (in Punjabi), "What is your name?"³

I had waited for this very moment for so long, but when finally it did come, I felt numb and knocked out. My mind couldn't respond; heart pounding, I mumbled my name, 'Raj Kumar'. He then asked me what I did, and I told Guruji that I had retired from the Navy as Commander. Guruji, with a smile on His face, gently dropped *halwa prasad* in my cupped hands and said, "*Aa jaya kar.*" That was a cherished moment. Guruji spoke to me and allowed me to visit him regularly.

³ Though kept inside quotation marks, Guruji's words are not His literal statements. Guruji usually spoke in Punjabi, and I have endeavored to keep the translation colloquial, not literal.

Halwa *prasad* was always eaten outside the Mandir. As I got up and walked towards the exit, someone whispered in my ear: “Congratulations Uncle, you have been granted admission by Guruji.”

My excitement knew no limits. I stepped out, feeling as if I had cleared the biggest exam of my life. My mind was overcome with emotions and thoughts: “Today onwards, I belong here. He is my Guruji and I have been accepted by Him as His *sangat*, irrespective of all my shortcomings. No one can throw me out now. I’m His devotee and it doesn’t matter who I am. It doesn’t matter what goes on in my mind; it doesn’t matter what I do; what is my background; where I come from—nothing! I am a part of Guruji’s *sangat* and from here on, that is my identity.”

That indeed has been my identity ever since. Everything else, every other designation has become secondary. It means nothing to me in comparison. Guruji’s *sangat* is all that I am and I ever want to be. That’s all I ever desire in the future, too. Such was the overpowering experience of being in the presence of Guruji Maharaj. I still get goose bumps, remembering that moment. This was the second defining moment of my life as Guruji’s *sangat*.

Back home, I told my wife about becoming a part of Guruji’s *sangat*. “You know why,” I said rhetorically, “Because He said so.” She simply stared at me preferring to keep her thoughts to herself.

A year after I had been going to Empire Estate, Guruji went to Punjab. Since the *sangat* rarely, if ever, interacted socially at Guruji’s place, I never came to know about it. I would go every Saturday, bow in front of the locked gate and return home. Then, in March 2002, I dreamt about Guruji. In my vision, He told me that He would be at Empire Estate on April 14, which is when I should come. Not before. I told my wife about it, thinking she would be impressed. She gave me a hard look, as if wondering whether my mind was at the right place or not. But, as always, she said nothing, and I went to Empire Estate only on the given date. It turned out to be the first *sangat* being held after Guruji had come back from Punjab the day before. I was excited: My dream had come true.

Guruji's dreams are not unreal; they are meaningful. This vision encouraged me to believe that Guruji kept a watch over me and had begun to communicate with me. I told my wife that Guruji was present at Empire Estate, as foretold. My wife was surprised, her facial expressions relaxed, but she kept quiet. I felt, for the first time, she had mellowed down a bit and was not apparently upset with my going to Guruji. Yet she never volunteered to come with me even though I had heard from devotees that Guruji always encouraged spouses to come together. I desperately wanted her to come along and hoped Guruji would make it happen when the time was right.

The turnaround came soon. At 5 o'clock one morning, I saw her sitting, harassed, at the edge of our bed. She told me that she had seen an intruder inside the house. After talking over why she hadn't woken me up earlier, we both went to look around for this thief and found none. All doors were securely locked from inside as well. Clearly, there was no outsider inside.

Relaxed, we got talking. I asked my wife what the thief looked like. She said that the alleged thief was a bald man, wearing a royal robe, and looked very handsome. He stood close to the refrigerator, hands folded across his chest, and looked at the entire house smiling all the while. Though the lights were off, it felt as if He was radiating light. Had Guruji Maharaj paid a visit to our house, I exclaimed to myself! I nearly folded my hands before my wife as I revealed what I thought of this intruder. I said I did not want to pick up a fight, fearing she might raise objections to my visiting Guruji, but told her I was certain that the handsome man she had just seen was my Guruji. She kept quiet. Encouraged, I added that He had come to bless her and He would want her to visit His place. I then requested her to come with me just once for His *darshan* and then decide for herself. Surprisingly, she agreed. I was happy that finally I would be able to take her along to meet Guruji. All this while, I had been feeling as if only one half of me was going to Guruji.

As we entered Guruji's place, my wife saw Maharaj and whispered to me that He was indeed the same person who had entered our home

the other day. We paid our respects, following which I tried to usher her towards the rear of the room. She instead decided to sit in front, whispering to me to do likewise. I told her that we should instead sit as far back as possible, but she didn't agree. As Guruji was within earshot, I thought it best to let her have her way. She sat in front of Him and I got back to the end of the room, sitting next to where the music system played the divine *shabads*. One of my reasons for sitting there was that Guruji's heady rose-like fragrance kept wafting out from His closed room. The rich fragrance also emanated from Guruji's entire being, and devotees could smell it even when they remembered Him or when He wanted to signal His presence to them.

My wife sat in the front, looking intently at Guruji. Every time she tried to look at Him, Guruji paused His conversation, turned His head, looked at her and she immediately bowed. This happened a few times.

Back home, my wife could not sleep for four to five days because she could not get Guruji's eyes out of her mind. His gaze was so overpowering and beyond the mind's ability to hold. The next Saturday, she volunteered to come with me—but this time after we had paid our respects, she whispered that she would sit along with me at the end of the room. She could not handle His gaze. I told her that we both belonged to the far end of the room, since the people who sat in front of Guruji were perhaps at a different plane altogether.

Sometime later, my wife got herself a nice haircut, cutting her long hair quite short. As she came to the Mandir on our next visit, other women devotees said they could not recognise her. She thought since she looked so different, Guruji might also not recognize her and she decided to brave sitting in the front again. I sat in the back, as always. She went and sat not more than three metres away from Guruji's asana. As soon as she sat down, Guruji called Singla Uncle over and whispered something to him while pointing towards my wife. Uncle then walked up to my wife and congratulated her, saying Guruji had admitted her to His 'college' directly. Guruji had actually asked Singla Uncle to convey to my wife that He knew that the lady with the bob

cut was indeed ‘Commander Aunty’. There are no secrets between Guruji and His *sangat*. Through this one benign act, Guruji had granted her quick admission into the *sangat*. That day onwards, my wife never volunteered to sit in front. However, there were occasions when we both sat next to the Lotus Feet of Maharaj, but only when He so desired.

My other learning was around the sufficiency of Guruji’s *prasad*. Usually, with four people eating from a plate, each devotee got two chapattis each. I felt this was too little for me, so one evening I decided to eat something before leaving for *darshan*. That day, Guruji gave incredible amounts of *langar*. There was the usual full plate, upon which were heaped *samosas* and at least four different desserts. On top of this, a plate meant for four persons was left just for me and my wife. Between the two of us, we had to finish what easily amounted to four full meals at home. On top of it, my wife ate just as little as she did every day. I had to finish the entire *langar* on my own, which I did, to the surprise of both of us! Lesson learnt. What Guruji gives is always sufficient for us—and then some more!

Slowly, we entrusted everything to Guruji. He took over all our responsibilities. The more we surrendered; the more control passed on to Him. He took complete control of our destiny and of the daily minutiae of our lives. Now nothing ever happens to us without His permission, without His approval, without Him making it happen to us. From the moment we became His *sangat*, our life changed forever.

However, I did want something from Guruji very much: Guruji’s *swaroops*. Like a few others in the *sangat*, I too wanted to pin that small picture of Maharaj on my shirt pocket. These photographs were not readily available. We could not get these printed on our own to distribute them among the *sangat*, as is the practice these days. That was a strict no. They had to be given to *sangat* by Guruji or by His *sewaks*, under His direct orders. Devotees pinned these on their chest pockets, proudly cherishing them. For a *sangat*, Guruji’s *swaroop* was essentially Guruji Himself, so when we got a *swaroop*, we actually brought Guruji home.

I mentioned the matter to Colonel Chatterjee as my wife and I chanced to be seated together for *langar*. Chatterjee uncle, who has since gone to Guruji's abode, was a devotee of the highest order and senior to me in service. He always had one pinned to his chest pocket. He advised me to just ask Guruji for it. I told him I had no courage to do so verbally. He told me to close my eyes and pray, "Maharaj, I need your *swaroops*." I didn't believe in his advice, but I decided to try it out. I quietly closed my eyes, talked to Guruji, asking him if I could have those *swaroops*. I would also like to put one on top of my shirt pocket, I prayed.

We then washed up after *langar* and queued up for *aagya* to go home. Guruji made a gesture and a sewak brought a box before Him. When my turn came, He opened the box, counted four *swaroops*, handed them to me, closed the box and returned it. Swaroops for the entire family: My prayer had been heard so quickly. For a long time, I proudly displayed this *swaroop* on the tip of my front pocket. I still keep them with me as blessings of Guruji. The *swaroops* continue to be a wonderful reminder of those priceless moments.



GURUJI PLACES HIS HAND OVER MY CHILDREN'S HEAD

OFTENTIMES IT SO HAPPENS THAT THE SUFFERING LIFE PUTS US THROUGH TURNS OUT TO BE THE CRUCIAL KEY TO reaching Maharaj.

When everything is going fine, we don't feel the need for God. We need God when we are troubled. If my daughter hadn't been unwell, would I still have made the effort to go to Maharaj? Maybe not. Thus, our suffering was a blessing in disguise.

Once we were connected to Him, we forgot about the issue, but Guruji did not. I never mentioned Shubha's medical condition to Him. Yet, from the time I drove past Empire Estate, telling my wife that therein was a powerful Guru who could cure our daughter, Shubha began to heal.

After we shifted to Gurgaon, my youngest daughter, Ila, needed transportation to go to her school in Delhi. None was available in our remote locality. One person started a taxi service for school-going children and told us about it. My daughter was likely the only child using the taxi service at first. Remarkably, the day her schooling was complete, the taxi-wallah said he was not going to continue with this service. From the time we moved to Gurgaon till the time we needed it, the taxi was plying between Delhi and Gurgaon.

Another issue we confronted was Shubha's admission to a school in Gurgaon. She had not sat for the Class XI exams because of illness and had to repeat the class in spite of being a brilliant child. Again, Maharaj came to her rescue. The principal of the Gurgaon School we went to, took the initiative to save the year for Shubha. She proposed that Shubha prepare, during the two months of the summer break, for the Class XI exam to be specially organised for her. There was just one condition: She should clear the exam with over 80 percent marks to move to Class XII. My daughter was admitted to Class XI even as she prepared at home for the exams. We also engaged the services of a tutor

and with Maharaj's grace, Shubha achieved the required percentage. The principal kept her promise and enrolled her in Class XII. The principal later told us she had no idea why she did this, but that she was convinced this was the right thing to do. That is how Guruji works!

As we would go to Empire Estate every Saturday, we always requested Shubha's tutor to conclude her lessons early for that day. We also told her why. Years later, after Guruji had left His physical form, Shubha's tutor also went to Bade Mandir. She now regrets that she never evinced any interest in Guruji while tutoring Shubha. But we know better: Nobody goes to Guruji by choice. Guruji never puts that thought in our minds till He wants us in His presence. If He had wanted her to come, she would have reacted immediately, but she didn't because He didn't want her to.

Getting the Call, or *bulawa*, from Guruji early or late in life is not a value judgement on the fitness of the aspirant. Guruji does not differentiate between devotees. A mother loves her children just the same. She may treat them differently for a variety of reasons, but she will love them equally.

Guruji healed Shubha with His invisible blessings. Her skin healed, leaving behind marks that began to fade, but her asthma persisted. I never mentioned this to Guruji, even though Shubha wanted me to. I reasoned that since Guruji knew all about my affairs, there was no need to tell Him. Shubha did not take no for an answer and persuaded my wife to speak to Singla Uncle, who agreed to take my wife and Shubha before Guruji. My attitude was that this was not my business. As they came before Guruji, He enquired about my daughter, asked for her name, and then told us to bring a copper tumbler, or *lota*, the next day. I mentioned to Guruji that Shubha had to go to Bangalore early next morning. Guruji said she would go a day later, only after taking His blessings.

We just bowed our heads, touched His feet, and took leave. Shubha had to reach Bangalore the day after before noon to pay fees at her institute. It was 11 at night when we left straight for the airport. Improbably, there was a girl sitting at our airline counter, which

should have closed much earlier. We requested her to shift Shubha's flight to the day after. She asked for her plane ticket, which we didn't have. However, she booked Shubha on the flight for the day after and merely asked her to show up with the cancelled ticket the next day. That done, she shut the counter and walked away as we left. This is how the Universe obeys Guruji. When the Guru gives a *hukm*, every blade of grass bends to His Divine will.

The next evening, we took the copper *lota* and awaited His blessings. When He gestured, we went to Him. He asked for my daughter's name, muttered something, blessed the *lota* and gave it back to her.

The day of her flight, was a typical winter morning in the Capital—full of fog with bad visibility. We worried that the flight may not take off and that Shubha would not make it in time to get herself registered for the next session, which had to happen before noon. Shubha's flight was the only one that took off that day. After that, the airport shut down operations. Following Guruji's orders meant that despite all odds, Shubha reached on time and paid her fees. And she was carrying with her the divine blessings of Maharaj in the form of the *lota*. And that *lota* did what it was supposed to do. She got better with time. Today, Shubha looks like she never had those issues.

A question arises about the means used to affect healing. If there is nothing Guruji can't do and if He is omniscient, why does He need a *lota*? Why does he choose to manifest His blessings in different ways? The means are not for Him; they are for us. I knew I didn't need a *lota* to be blessed by Guruji, but my daughter felt she needed to let Him know. So that is what He did. Guruji does not like intermediaries (*bichaulias*) between Him and His devotees, be it people, processes or props. However, every devotee is not at the same level of understanding or connection with Guruji. Hence, He has different ways to instil confidence in His devotees to be able to receive His blessings.

Guruji takes the disciple along the path He decides is best for the devotee. Everyone is connected to Guruji, but everyone has a different connection. The spiritual connection with Maharaj is akin

to a customised syllabus for each one of His devotees. In the initial stages, a child is taught that A stands for an Apple. He connects the two. Similarly, for some of us, a *lota* given by Guruji is a physical manifestation of His blessings. Our mind interconnects the two. Likewise, Guruji's *swaroop* and His blessings are interconnected; the *langar* and blessings are interconnected; the Mandir and blessings are interconnected. But there is a point at which you don't need a prop to make a connection.

You just look around and you see everything in Guruji and Guruji in everything. That is the ultimate connection. "*Sia Ram mein sab jag jaani:*" The universe is nothing but the manifestation of *Brahm*.

While devotees wait for this level of understanding, it is natural for them to have questions in mind. The mind needs answers, so that it can grasp at faith. It needs something solid to hold on to by way of answers. Devotees do get answers to their questions. However, at the acme of our spiritual connection, all questions disappear, and devotees don't seek answers anymore. In fact, they do not seek anything. There isn't anything they need to know. There is actually nothing to know. There are no questions, only realisation of the true nature of *Brahm*—Guruji.

We can have everything that we desire or we can have no desires whatsoever. Either way, we are at the same level. One can be a king who owns everything or one can be a *fakir*, or saint, who needs nothing. One has all his desires fulfilled; the other has got rid of all his desires. They are both at the same level. A devotee who progresses through his connection with Maharaj, slowly gets rid of that long laundry list of what he needs from Maharaj before he can be happy.

There is no end to desires. That is why one who begs is never happy. When we search for happiness, we look around for things that will make us happy. If I have a Lamborghini, I will probably be happy; a sailing boat will make me happier, a five-bedroom penthouse will further increase my happiness and so on... With time, we realize that things don't give us happiness. Happiness is a state of mind, it's in our heart. Guruji gives us all that we need as well as that state of mind.

When we know that we are loved by Guruji and that we, too, love him endlessly, nothing else matters. If we know what a cosmic embrace between a Guru and His devotee feels like, then we know the true meaning of happiness.

Knowing fully the varying temperaments and needs of His devotees, Guruji decides how to bless them. Since every devotee is unique, each will be blessed in a unique way. Comparisons are not required and may not even be desirable.

Guruji's grace continued to bless Shubha as she progressed in her academic career. She completed her studies and went to the US for her MBA at Washington University (WASHU), Saint Louis, Missouri. She did well, but then the new administration changed the rules and she had to give up her job and come to India with no hope of getting back. Flying back from Liberty International Airport, Newark, she cried in front of Starbucks café and spoke to Guruji: "I don't care how you do it, I want to be back here, in front of this Starbucks, next year, and you have to do it." This was not a request. Like a child fighting with her mother, a devotee, too, can remonstrate Guruji, and Guruji doesn't mind. Shubha came back broken-hearted to India. Here, she applied for PhD courses in the US, but to no avail. Applications had already been processed in the winter, while it was April here.

Guruji's grace stepped in. Out of nowhere, Shubha got a call from a US university, asking if she would be interested in joining a PhD course. Apparently, one of her friends from WASHU had applied on her behalf when another shortlisted person dropped out as a doctoral candidate. Shubha had an interview over the phone and the University sent her a flight ticket. Three days later, she was on a flight and did an in-person interview. She was returning from Newark, standing in front of the same Starbucks café when, lo and behold, she got a message from the University that she had been selected and should join on a given date. Guruji had done it! Shubha cried with joy and gratitude. She is now completing her PhD in Atlanta and everything is going on fine with Guruji's grace. The disappointment she endured gave her faith an impetus and courage.

The important thing to remember is that while life will have its ups and downs, Guruji will always be there walking by our side, always holding our hand.

When Guruji takes care of us, He takes care of our entire family, whether the other members come to Him or not. It's not just one person in the family who gets blessed, but the entire family.

The blessings my eldest daughter Jaya received show how. She had completed her studies and was desperately looking for a job. I never openly prayed to Maharaj about it. Soon, she got a call for an interview from Delhi for the job of a quality assurance person. Jaya went there to be told by the reception desk that she wasn't listed among the invitees. She was never called in the first place. She had no chance because she didn't qualify and had no experience either. But she was nevertheless asked to sit down and wait. Every single candidate was rejected till she was the only one left and the interviewers finally called her in. They looked at her documents, and wondered why she had come. One of them proposed that she be given the job if she promised to learn the task and make it work. She said yes and she had the job.

At home, meanwhile, my wife petitioned Guruji. Her daughter had studied and worked hard, she prayed to Guruji to ensure a salary of ten thousand rupees per month. At the interview in Delhi, my daughter was asked if she was okay with INR 10,000 as salary, and she said yes. When Jaya returned home, my wife told her what she had prayed for. Jaya was a bit upset. She wondered why her mother hadn't asked Guruji for a salary of INR 30,000. It's never enough, isn't it? Guruji heard that, too. When she switched jobs, my daughter went through a simple interview and was offered a salary of INR 30,000.⁴

As each devotee knows, we can speak freely to Guruji. He is not a remote God, but our very own near and dear one, our very loving and protective Father. He loves us so much that He hears us all the time. The fact that He is God is a different aspect altogether. We were never

⁴ My daughter's *satsang* is titled *Guruji's grace in the school of life in Light of Divinity*.

connected to God. We connected to a very loving, caring parent, Who meant everything to us. And Who brought us to the right path.

Guruji's grace has been with Jaya throughout. When she was 23, we were looking to get her married and put up a matrimonial ad in a newspaper. That newspaper was being perused by a family in Faridabad for a potential groom for their own daughter. As they were looking through it, there was a knock at the door of their house. They opened the door to find a saintly figure, tall and handsome, standing outside. The lady of the house addressed him respectfully as "Baba" and asked what he wanted. He replied that he didn't need anything beyond a glass of tea. While she went to the kitchen to prepare tea, 'Baba' told her husband that they should get their son married first. "It will be good for you," he pronounced. The 'Baba' advised them to start their search for a bride for their son, held the teacup in his hand and walked away. No one had seen this 'Baba' come or go in the area.

The family followed his advice and began looking for a girl for their son. They found our daughter's ad in the matrimonial section and called us immediately. Things went well and the marriage was solemnised within a couple of months.

When Guruji blesses us, the effort He puts in from His end is incredible. We go round in circles, but when we leave it to Him, He holds our hand and takes us to a safe harbour.

When my eldest daughter's marriage was being held, Guruji had given out invitations to the *sangat*. Guruji told a *sewak*, who was responsible for seating devotees during *satsangs*, to go to the venue and take care of the sitting arrangements—exactly as he would have done at the *satsang*. That was incredibly helpful, since because of a problem I faced, I couldn't come to the venue on time myself. We had arranged everything out in the open at the venue when suddenly, around 6 in the evening, a big storm threatened to disrupt the program.

My wife came out, looked at the sky and just said: "*Yeh kya kara rahe ho, Guruji?*" (What are you doing, Guruji?) Within five minutes, the storm stopped. The *sewak* sent by Guruji and the *sangat* present coordinated the shifting of the external arrangements to the hall inside.

Rearrangements were made and by eight, dinner could start. By the time I reached the venue, people had already had dinner and were looking for me. The function went well, not because I had anything to do with it, but because Guruji knew that I would not be able to take care of it myself and had intervened beforehand, positioning his *sewak* so that it could be coordinated properly. That is how loving our Guruji is and that is how kind His *sangat* is. He takes control of our lives, but He takes only as much control as we allow by giving up control ourselves.

After Jaya got married, she moved to Noida and didn't quite like the place. She told Guruji mentally that she wanted to get out of there. That night Guruji came in her dream and told her not to worry, in two years, she would be abroad. The next morning, she called her mother, upset that Guruji was sending her out of the country when all she wanted was to move out of Noida. I told Jaya to be careful about what to ask from Guruji because she would get it. "Best things happen when you let Guruji handle it," I advised.

Just about a year and a half later, her husband went to Germany for work. His foreign colleagues liked him and asked him to join them. Three months later, my daughter and her husband were in Germany, where they have happily settled ever since. It was precisely two years from the time Jaya had that dream.

Guruji listens and if He thinks something is for His devotee's good, He makes it happen quickly. But He sees what we don't even remotely see and understand. Therefore, when things don't happen as per our demands, we shouldn't worry. Only He knows what is good for us. We don't! If a child asks for a knife, do the parents simply hand it to him? No, they don't. No mother will ever allow a child to endanger himself or herself no matter how much the child may cry. Guruji is our mother. He knows what is good for us, so never question Him. If possible, never ask. If you do ask, be very careful about what you ask.

Guruji's blessings also flowed abundantly for my youngest daughter, Ila, who is a cool devotee of Maharaj, too. She cleared her Class XII with great marks and applied for admission to engineering colleges. Then, one Saturday, when we went to Guruji, He gave her

a special blessing. As we got *aagya* to leave, Guruji asked her to go to the back end of the Durbar and meditate. We had already taken *aagya*, so we waited outside. Ila sat there, soaking in the bliss, the fragrance, the ambience. Much later, Maharaj asked for us to be called inside the durbar to join Ila. It was around one thirty in the morning, with just a handful of *sangat* seated around Maharaj. Guruji got one of the *sewaks* to prepare *kada prasad* and gave it to the *sangat*. We were then allowed to leave. The next day, my daughter gained admission to Amity University, Noida.

The next Saturday, we visited Empire Estate and mentioned to Guruji about these blessings just as we would tell our parents. My wife walked up to Guruji and thanked Him for Ila's admission. "*Faujiyon ka kam to main aise hi kar deta hun,*" Guruji replied. That is, He always blesses military men easily, without much persuasion. He made a similar remark when Jaya was blessed with a son. We came to Guruji and my wife told Him about the happy circumstance. Guruji said the son had been born because of His blessings.

In essence, everything that happens in our lives happens because of Guruji's blessings.

Ila never wanted to go abroad, but Guruji had other plans for her. Her employer offered to send her to the US, but there was little chance she could obtain an H1B1 visa. We still encouraged her to try. The next thing we knew, she was on her way to the US. She even got promoted recently while Covid-19 was rampant and people feared for their jobs.

Who can do this? How can it happen? It happens because of Guruji Maharaj. One of the biggest blessings Maharaj has given us is taking away our worries regarding our children. They are now His children; we all are His children. We all now belong to Him. We are basically His problem, to resolve and make better. He has complete control of our lives.

I sometimes wonder if my generation of devotees had too many questions that had to be answered before we could submit ourselves to Guruji's will. Our children seem to have had a straighter and simpler path to Him—devoid of any process or rituals.

THE OMNISCIENT LORD

ONCE, DURING A SATSANG AT EMPIRE ESTATE, I WAS THRILLED TO BE CHOSEN TO EXECUTE GURUJI'S HUKM.

Colonel Joshi, a retired Army veteran and one of the senior devotees in Maharaj's *sewa*, told me that Guruji wanted to speak to Colonel Chatterjee Uncle. I needed to find him and convey the message. Excitedly, I searched both the ground and first floor halls, the entrance area where the shoes were left and the approach road, but Chatterjee Uncle was nowhere to be seen. I reported back to Joshi Uncle and he, in turn, conveyed this to Guruji. Guruji pointed out that Chatterjee Uncle was standing next to a white Ambassador parked in the dark, some distance away. I promptly went and indeed found him there.

That was my first lesson about Guruji's omniscience. He is everywhere and knows everything. I realised that there is nothing hidden from Maharaj—nothing at all.

Not only is Guruji all-knowing, He can also, very subtly and discreetly, direct our will in such a way that we don't even come to realise it.

My wife and I were seated on the first floor listening to shabads at Empire Estate during a regular Saturday visit. She whispered that one particular shabad—*"Babut janam bichhre thbe madho /eh janam tumhare lekhe"*—had not been played for a very long time. It is one of her favourite shabads. In it, the devotee says: *"I have been separated from you for many lifetimes; this life is dedicated to you. Because this good fortune of meeting you has come to me after many lives of separation."* She had hardly finished her statement when we noticed that the shabad being played had been replaced by the one she had mentioned.

The *shabads* were being played on cassettes put in a twin cassette deck hi-fi system. (The CD players were not commonplace then.) This *shabad* was perhaps available on another cassette and played by the *sevadaar* uncle on remote cue from Maharaj, without any physical communication, simultaneously with the little chat between me and my wife.

There are many more instances of time obeying Guruji's diktat. Once, a few devotees came to Guruji at Empire Estate to seek His blessings before taking their flight to the USA later in the night. Guruji held them back, saying they would leave only after *langar*. Time was running out, and Maharaj was respectfully reminded about it a few times. Maharaj reassured them that their flight had been delayed and they should have *langar* without any worries. They left after *langar* and reached the airport well past the scheduled time of departure—only to find that the boarding had not been announced till they had arrived. The aircraft was simply not ready. How could it be when Maharaj had decided otherwise!

It was not long before I fully started realising that there was nothing impossible for Guruji Maharaj. He had everything covered. Guruji could not only make the ripples of His powerful Will spread out over the domain of worldly activities but, as the ever-compassionate Guru, He also listened to and answered the prayers of His *sangat*.

This faith was further reaffirmed when a dear friend, Vijay Pushkarna, approached me to get support for building a temple for the housing societies in Sector 56. He wanted to know if I knew someone who could ensure allotment of land from HUDA for this purpose. Since the temple was meant for the public at large, he had already formed a society and applied to HUDA. I replied in the affirmative. My friend naturally thought that I knew somebody in the administration or government who could help pave the way. I let him know my plan to take him to Guruji to receive His blessings. Vijay thought that perhaps Guruji would ask someone in the government to make it happen.

I accompanied Vijay and his team to Guruji Maharaj. We followed the entire routine at Empire estate. Finally, it was time to seek His Aagya. This was the time when Vijay mentioned the purpose of his visit to Guruji Maharaj. Guruji patiently listened to the request and simply said, "*Kalyan*." I quietly told Vijay that Guruji had blessed us and that our prayers had been granted. At that time, Vijay knew nothing about Guruji and His ways. He and his team may have wondered how their

prayer would be granted. Yet, within a short time, The Trust, formed for this purpose, got the letter for the allotment of a 1000-square yard plot to build a temple. Soon after, Vijay, too, became a devotee of Guruji Maharaj.

Since this proposed temple had been blessed by Maharaj, I thought of associating myself with it. Soon enough, I got a call from Singla Uncle with Guruji's directive to me: I was not to be associated with the temple whatsoever. I had to come to Guruji Maharaj only.

This reemphasised the very first piece of advice I had got through a *sangat* during my first visit to Bade Mandir. That devotee had told me that I had come to the right place and I should not go anywhere else. Ever since, I am firm in my belief that Guruji is all I ever need. I have, therefore, pulled myself away from every other place of worship. I always bow my head when I go past any religious place, but my veneration is towards Guruji. No matter where I bow my head, it is always at His Lotus Feet. I have stepped away from all other forms of *puja* or prayer.

I do nothing as a religious man. I don't need to. There is no ritual which will grant me what I already have—my Guruji. I am at His Lotus Feet. He has blessed me! He has asked me to be with Him. What will I achieve searching for Him? So, in continuation with this belief, I have never felt a need to have a durbar at home.

Why? Because the most important temple is already in my heart. If I don't have a temple there, then I could as well be sitting in a temple 24x7, and it still won't make much of a difference. Any place where I am seated and remember Guruji or participate in a *satsang*, becomes my Guru's temple. Even when I am eating; in the kitchen cooking; in the bed sleeping; with my friends; with my wife; with my family; at work; or wherever else, I am in His temple. I am with my Guru all the time. There is no moment when He is not around.

As devotees, we do not have a choice to have Guru around us only when we need Him. Guruji is around us even when we would rather not have Him watching over us. We are always with our Guruji. Where is the need for an external ritual to look for Guruji?

As Sant Kabir puts it: “*Kasturi nabhi bassey, mrug dhoonde jag maahi.*” (The deer searches for its scent around the world, while it is in its navel).

My wife has Guruji’s swaroop in her kitchen, maybe a couple of yards from where she works. She enjoys the idea that while she spends her time in the kitchen, which she considers her office, she can always look at Maharaj. We can’t imagine tying Him down to a specific place or anchoring him to a room or a seat. For me, it doesn’t work like that, but I’m happy for anyone for whom it does. This is a personal connection. Everybody must have their own personal space with Him. My faith is that there is no need for a separate place for Maharaj because my Guruji is in my heart. I feel Him here. I can’t even say Guruji please come to me. Come from where? He is already here. I commune with Him. **Being with the Guru is a state of mind. Not a state of action.**

When I connect with Guruji, it makes no difference what the others are doing. It is their connection, it is their journey and we are no one to judge each other. It is my connection, my journey that is my sole concern. I am sure Guruji will not let me succumb to peer pressure. How will it make a difference to me what a particular devotee does or doesn’t do? In fact, the only thing to do is to do our proscribed responsibility well. All the while keeping Guruji Maharaj in our heart. As Saint Tulsi Das says in the Ramacharitmanasa:-

“*Prabisi nagar keeje sab kaaja, briday raakhi Kaushalpur Raja.*”⁵



⁵ The second line of this *chaupai*, in the Sundarkand, fulfills this proclamation of faith: *Garal sudha repu karbin mitai / Gopad sindhu anal sitlai*. The *chaupai* means: For those who do their work in the world while remembering the king of Ayodhya, poison turns to nectar, enemies become friends, the ocean (of worldly suffering) shrinks to the size of a cow’s hoof, and fire becomes cool.

SPIRIT OF SATSANGS: HOST SIMPLY, CONNECT DEEPLY

Guruji forestalled me from going to the proposed Sector 56 temple because He had already allotted another *sewa* to me. It came about quite innocuously around October 2003. I had reached the parking lot at Empire Estate after taking permission from Maharaj, when Arjun Uncle, a devoted *sewak* of Guruji managing parking arrangements then, walked up to me. He gave me an A4 size paper with names and contact details of the *sangat* from Gurgaon and conveyed Guruji's directive that henceforth I would coordinate the *satsangs* to be held once every month in Gurgaon.

By that time, I had attended a few *satsangs* in Gurgaon. But I had no idea how they should be conducted. Nevertheless, I was hugely excited and feeling blessed beyond words. I called up the devotees and we held the first *satsang* in Gurgaon. We came together and talked about Maharaj, had a lot to eat and went to our homes. The next time, we were at yet another Uncle's house and again we had a wonderful time there with a lavish spread of *prasad*. We all enjoyed it and returned happily sated.

It wasn't long before I was ticked off by Maharaj. Guruji told me that my remit was to conduct *satsangs*, not kitty parties. But I didn't know how to hold a *satsang*. Guruji took me out of my bewilderment. Soon a devotee, who had come from Panjab for darshan, was asked by Guruji to stand up and share his *satsang*. He narrated how his life had changed ever since he came in Guruji's *sharan* and recounted the blessings received from Maharaj. Guruji had thus shown me the essence of a *satsang*: That a *satsang* was "devotees sharing the blessings they had received from Guruji Maharaj, conveying how their lives had transformed for the better."

Then, I got additional directives from Guruji: The *satsang* should be held on every third Sunday of the month, from 5 to 7 in the evening. At 7 pm, all those who wished to disburse for taking darshan at Empire Estate could do so. *Prasad*, too, was to be limited to *chai prasad*, with one sweet and one salty eatable.

During those initial days, the *sangat* was thin in numbers, so we didn't even play *shabads*. We would get together and start sharing *satsangs*. There was no *aarti*, no *Mantra Jaap*, and for some time, there was no *swaroop*. As the numbers grew, devotees would arrive at a different time. So, we agreed to wait for them and play *shabads* till most of them had arrived. People generally arrived on time, so we played at the most one or two *shabads*. The *shabads* were not an integral part of our *satsangs*. The emphasis was on sharing experiences we had with Guruji. The main course of the *satsang*, to the best of my belief, was and continues to be the sharing of experiences. This sharing is most essential to a *satsang* of Guruji's devotees. If there is sharing and nothing else, it is still a *satsang*. *Satsang* essentially means 'to be with the truth'. The Guru is truth and there is nothing beyond Him. He is the Ultimate Truth. Through sharing, we become one with the Guruji—the Truth. That is *satsang*.

In a year, we could only conduct twelve such *satsangs*, one for each month. With the *sangat* slowly growing, devotees would book *satsangs* months in advance. I began to maintain a roster. On one occasion, it was my turn to hold a *satsang* at my home. I got a message from Guruji that a large place was required because many more devotees would be coming. I booked the community centre within my society. The *sangat* arrived in considerable numbers. Guruji was at Empire Estate and mentioned the exact number of *sangat* who had come to the *satsang* at the community centre. Like fools, we even counted the number of plates; the count was exactly what Guruji had foretold. It had to be. Maharaj not only keeps track of the *satsang* and notably controls it; He also presides over it. He participates in it. Those devotees who believe the *satsang* is just among themselves should remember that it is always between Guruji and His *sangat*.

Those days, Guruji would also, on occasions, grace a devotee's house with His presence. On one such occasion, He graced Mathur Uncle's home in Gurgaon. They did two additional activities, which till date inspire our *satsang* format. They prepared an *asana* for Maharaj on a beautifully decorated sofa that Maharaj sanctified. And they did

Guruji's *aarti*—the devotional offering of lights. For all subsequent *satsangs* at Mathur Uncle's home, that sofa was reserved as Maharaj's *asana*, because Guruji had sanctified it when He sat on it. At subsequent *satsangs*, the rest of us, too, offered Guruji an *asana*. The *aarti* was integrated little later into the *satsangs*. *Aarti* was not a regular affair even at Empire Estate. But these devotional offerings at our *satsangs* made the devotees very happy. Now, we had Guruji's *swaroop*, *asana*, *shabads*, *prasad*, *aarti* and sharing of *satsangs*, all dedicated to Guruji Maharaj.

During one of these *satsangs* in Gurgaon, Brigadier Saini Uncle remarked that Guruji takes all our ailments upon Himself and suffers for us in his human form. Therefore, we, as *sangat*, must pray for His wellbeing and health. Some of us did wonder if we, insignificant beings, could do anything at all for our Guruji, the Almighty himself. But Brigadier Saini counselled us to offer prayers for His wellbeing. It was a wonderful testament to his devotion. But what form of prayer could that be? Saini Uncle referred to a running LED display along with Guruji's *swaroop* hung at the entrance of Bada Mandir. The display continuously reeled out the divine mantra, *Aum Namah Shivay Shivji Sada Sahay*. (We bow to Lord Shiva, who is always there to help us.) We could adopt this mantra and repeat it before we commenced our sharing of *satsangs*. Essentially, praying to Guruji, Lord Shiva, to take care of Himself!

One of us proposed adding *Guruji Sada Sahay* to the mantra in every alternate line, because for His *sangat*, Guruji and Shivji are one and the same. Everybody liked this idea. Immediately thereafter, Brigadier Saini Uncle led us into the chant by reciting the divine mantra:

Aum Namah Shivay Shivji Sada Sahay

Aum Namah Shivay Guruji Sada Sahay

This came to be known as *Mantra Jaap* ever since. Initially, we repeated it seven times, in concordance with Guruji's birthday on

July 7. Subsequently, on the advice of *sangat* elders, it was increased to nine repetitions, as nine is the largest single digit. From the next monthly Gurgaon *satsang* onwards, the responsibility of reciting the *Mantra Jaap* came to me. For a long time, the *Jaap* was regularly done orally at the Gurgaon monthly *satsangs*, in the absence of any recorded version.

The *Mantra Jaap* formally received Guruji's sanction a little later. Devotees from Gurgaon were involved in the preparation of *langar* at Bada Mandir for the *sangat* at Empire Estate. They would begin their sacred culinary preparations with the *Mantra Jaap*. It got adopted naturally. A few devotees observed it and brought this new development to the notice of Guruji Maharaj, who readily approved the *jaap*.

After Maharaj's *mahasamadhi*, when the *sangat* gathered at Bade Mandir for the first time, it was a very solemn and sorrowful occasion. Everyone was sombre and sat quietly. None of us had any idea about what to do and what to say. On the advice of elders, I vividly remember standing up next to Maharaj's *asana* and reciting *Mantra Jaap* in the Bade Mandir. Sometime later, a recorded a rendition of the *Mantra Jaap* became available, which has been used regularly since.

The only other thing that got added to the *satsang* was the fulsome *langar* we have nowadays. Again, it happened naturally. Devotees understandably wanted to celebrate and solemnise important occasions with fellow devotees. Gradually, *satsangs* became a regular part of all such occasions. *Prasad* also became sumptuous, befitting the occasions. It wasn't long before a full *langar* became the norm, rather than the exception, just for major celebrations.

As directed by Maharaj, the durbar should have only and only Guruji's *swaroop*. Guruji is the only form of the Divine that we, as *sangat*, have chosen to worship while giving up all other options. The emphasis, during a *satsang*, was and should always be on simplicity, humility, and loving sharing. As Guruji said a *satsang* is not a kitty party. It is an occasion to be in the divine presence of Guruji Maharaj.

LESSON LEARNT – THE HARD WAY!

TOWARDS THE END OF THE YEAR 2003, THE THEN INDIA HEAD OF A defence MNC decided to retire. This position became open with nearly a dozen candidates shortlisted for the role. I was selected and offered the position. Before I could get the offer letter, another person with the right connections burst into the picture and my candidature was put on hold. For months, the position couldn't be filled for a variety of reasons. Unable to wait any longer, the company reverted to me again towards the end of 2004, wanting to know if I was still interested and available.

I was embarrassed and upset at how the whole process had shaped up, but I agreed. The next thing I knew, a close friend of mine landed this position for himself. Months later, he too left and the firm turned to me again.

The rigmarole had gone on long enough, but the package was too lucrative to resist and I said yes. Still, the final offer wasn't sealed. I waited and waited. It had been a long time since this opportunity first came up but went nowhere. I decided to put the issue before Guruji and secure His blessings. I could not just walk up to Guruji and mention my problem. I could hardly open my mouth in front of Him. Even being within proximity to Him was an extremely arduous task for me.

As always, I approached Singla Uncle. I knew he could easily speak to Guruji. I explained the whole issue and uncle agreed. We choreographed the entire sequence—who will stand where, say what etc. He told me he would approach Guruji only if He would be, to our human minds, in a good mood. Otherwise, we would shelve the plan for another day. We decided that I come early so that we could find Guruji sitting on the cabinet next to the kitchen.

When evening came, we both approached Maharaj. I stood there with folded hands while Singla Uncle spoke to Maharaj. Guruji looked at me, paused for a while, thought about it, and said that I didn't need any job. That I needed to come to Him.

“Tennu job di lod nahi hai, tu mere kol aaja,” He spoke.

I did not realize the import of that statement then. Looking back, what more could I have asked for than Guruji wanting me to be in His *sewa*? The job would have taken care of itself. But I stood there quietly, neither saying yes nor no. Singla Uncle then intervened to suggest I needed the money that would come with the new assignment. Guruji paused for a few seconds, looked at me and said: “Okay, go make money.”

I was happy that He agreed to the request. But “make money” was not the blessing I wanted. I was hoping more for something like *kalyan* or *aish kar*, which meant I could be carefree. Never mind, I didn’t say anything in front of Maharaj. I bowed my head, touched His feet, and withdrew. The next Monday, I got a call from the company. They wanted to know when I could join.

It then struck me that Guruji had been holding me back from taking up that assignment. He let me have it only because I persisted with the request. A few days later, Guruji mentioned to a devotee that He had given this job to me. He mentioned the amount of money I was to receive and everything else related to the job. He also pronounced that He had given ‘Commander Uncle’ four years. My wife and I were not sure if it meant he had given me four years of life or given the assignment for four years. Maybe, that was why he wanted me to be in His *sewa*.

When I came to Guruji after taking over the new assignment and bowed in front of Him, Guruji said:

“Commander, retired fauji ko uski gharwali bhi nahi poochhti. Maine teri do lakh ki job lagwayi.”

(“Commander, even a wife ignores her husband after he retires from the military, but I granted you this job.”)

He was teasing me that though my wife might not listen to me, the loving Guru always did. Everybody seated next to Him laughed. Guruji had a tremendous sense of humour. For me even when He teased me,

I knew He was blessing me. What better way to be acknowledged by your Guru—with a smile and a laugh!

Guruji's prediction went to the back of my mind; I was not conscious that I was on a four-year clock. Guruji's words have latent power. They came to their own when the time is right. And, so, they remained at the back of my mind without troubling me. But two years later, Guruji took *mahasamadhi*. Everything changed.

In October of 2009, the four years were up, and, as if on cue, everything began to get dismantled at the job and in life. So much so that the firm appointed a person who wasn't favourably disposed towards me and wanted me to resign. During this time, my equilibrium was disturbed. I became less confident, absent-minded and a nervous wreck. I lost my sleep and was not at peace.

Amongst other things, this state of mind also reflected in my car driving ability. During the fourth year at this job, I couldn't drive properly. I would ram it into the pillar even as I parked the car. On another occasion, I couldn't control the brakes. My Toyota Corolla got dented in every possible place. The front of the car suffered, the rear broke and the car looked pathetic. This beautiful Corolla had more scratches than the paint job could take.

Life continued in this state of brain fade. The four years granted to me had ended. Fearing the worst, my wife had already petitioned Guruji for extension beyond four years to allow our youngest daughter to complete her engineering in May 2010. She wanted nothing to happen till Ila completed her B. Tech course. On May 10, she gave her final exam and on the 14th, I was out of this company. Divine response to my wife's fervent prayer. Unknown to me at that time, Maharaj had already planned to extend my life beyond these four years by accepting me in his *sewa* in 2006. Of course, He, at the same time, also allowed me to endure this suffering to account for my *karmic* debt, all the while keeping me in His *sharan*. More on it later.

The job was gone but the suffering continued. A fortnight later, I was in my car, driving from Noida to Delhi and pleading to Guruji: "*Maharaj I cannot take it anymore. You have to fix it; I don't know how*

you do it, but please do it. Please let me know that you are really listening to my prayers by showing me a car with a ‘Guruji’ sticker. I need to see that car. I need to know you listen to me and you care because my world is falling apart.” I dearly wanted Guruji to respond, and signal it in a specific happenstance.

I was taking a turn under a bridge as I was praying with tears rolling down. As soon as my car took the turn, I saw a car with a ‘Guruji’ sticker on the rear. I looked at it and to say I was in tears would be an understatement. I was howling like a baby, because He had listened to me when I was giving up on life. Thereafter, a sense of relief and happiness came over me. “Let whatever has to happen, happen. I don’t care now”. My life was in Guruji’s hands. I was rid of these four years that I had insisted on. They were behind me.

That very day I got a brilliant offer from another American company. I was to be its India head. It was a phenomenal job with great compensation.

Looking back, I regret approaching Maharaj for this job. I now know better. I should have left it all in the hands of Maharaj. I should have surrendered to Him and His will. He had a better plan for me. Because of insisting on my plan, I had to go through a miserable four years to end up a wreck. But Guruji pulled me out so quickly that I was back on my feet and soon forgot all about it. That is how loving and caring Guruji Maharaj is for His devotees.

What was the lesson learnt? **Never tell the Guru what you want. Do what you want to do but leave it to Him. Deny yourself the liberty to ask Him for anything; resist the impulse.**

I still pray and seek resolution of a difficult situation, but there has never been any need to mention a specific solution, because I know that Guruji knows about my needs and desires. And how He fulfils them is His problem. I don’t even want to know, and I don’t need to know. Such fulfilment happens under one condition: That we leave everything to Him. How we leave it is our problem. We may not know how to surrender to Guruji, but at least we can take the first step in that direction by not asking.

As the *shabad* sums it, “*Ek takya bharosa tere charna da, hor sabhe dhaaiyaan dheriyaan.*” Roughly translated: All I have is You, my only support, because all my links with others have been demolished. It’s akin to a newly married girl who moves to her in-law’s place in India. She, of necessity, breaks all her previous relationships to step into the new ones.

This is what we do when we truly value a relationship. We let it be the only one. Till such time this feeling arises in us, we’re only paying lip service to Guruji. Heart of hearts, we have many plans just in case it doesn’t work out through Guruji. Always remember, Guruji not only knows what we are saying, but He knows what is going on in our minds. Therefore, such a half-baked effort will be futile. It is either Him or nothing.

If we want to collect clean water in a vessel, we have to ensure that the vessel is clean to start with. The problem is most of us cannot clean our bodies and mental vessels because we barely realize that we are, in a sense, dirty. We have dirtied ourselves with asking, denying, competing, fighting, arguing, waging small wars, and losing out on love. The Guru has to cleanse us. And that is why submission and obedience to Him are so important. If devotees don’t obey, they can never be ready for His blessings.

The result of making myself pure is that no matter what I do—good, bad, ugly—I do it with an awareness that Guruji is watching over me. If devotees have that sense of His presence, they can always draw a line between what they should and shouldn’t do. It is a reality check that one goes through.

Only Guruji knows the level of devotion his *sangat* is immersed in. There are devotees who are completely surrendered souls, and there are devotees who are tracking what is happening during a *satsang*, and have their minds set on what they can take from the Guru. Every time they receive something, they look to check what is unfulfilled. There are devotees who are in a state of surrender; there are others who only seek worldly pleasures. They are at opposite ends. There are those who have faith in their Guru and those who just want materialistic things

from the Guru. There are the needy and there are the trusting types. Differentiate between them the way you want.

There are the ones telling everybody how long they have been coming to Guruji for and how much *sewa* they have done. And then they complain about their pending laundry list. Then there are devotees who say: I don't even know what to ask for. I don't care. For me, I have got my Guru and that's all that matters. He can do whatever He wants to do with me.

Between these extremes, there are grades and levels of connections. Everybody is not on the same page and, therefore, everybody doesn't seem to be getting what they want and their levels of suffering are different. The most important thing is the choice: Do you want to be the person who demands things from Guruji or the person who simply accepts Guruji and asks for nothing?

*"Jo sampati Shiv ravanahi, deenhi diye dus math
Soi sampada vibhishanahi, sakuchi diye Raghunath"*

Translation: Whatever Ravana received from Lord Shiva in exchange for his ten heads, same was bestowed by Lord Ram to Vibhishan hesitatingly)

There are two distinct paths. One is procedural. The rewards are process-centric. They depend upon the chosen process and its compliance with varying results. The other is beyond rituals. All it requires is surrender to the Divine; to our Guruji. He takes care of the rest. The blessings we thus receive are neither conditional nor performance-centric.

We all should somehow find a way to get "blessings ready" like Vibhishan. It is not something which one can easily manoeuvre into. We do not become blessings ready through a process, because there is no process for surrender to Guruji. It happens. It happens because Guruji wants it to happen. Without His approval, we can't even be in His presence, let alone be blessings ready. *"Binu hari kripa milahi nahi santa."*

What is it that makes us blessings ready? To me, being blessings ready is akin to wholehearted acceptance of the ways of the Divine. Acceptance of the all-pervasive balance in this world of duality, where equal and opposite forces are and will always be in dynamic play. If the churning of the great sea (*sagar manthana*) produced *amrit* capable of making living beings immortal, it had to and did indeed produce the poison capable of destroying all life forms. That is the intricate balance of duality the entire cosmos is made out of.

We need positive and negative charges for electricity to flow. However much you may dislike the negative charge, electricity will not flow till both terminals are connected to a load. The positive terminal's voltage is also equal and opposite to the negative terminal's voltage. If you increase the positive charge, the negative charge will also increase proportionally. Similarly, love and hate are bound in balance as are good and bad (or deities and demons, if you want to personalize these). If the scale tips too much towards one side, the universal law of balance equalises it. Be rest assured that somewhere, unknown to us, positivity is being built to counter any evolving negativity, because both forces have to be equal and opposite. If the balance gets disturbed, Guruji intervenes to restore it. That's the law of the Universe. Our happiness and sufferings will also follow this strict law of the spiritual world. The realisation and acceptance that one cannot be cast away in favour of the other will make us blessings ready.

To my understanding, this is how Lord Shiva (Guruji) conducts the affairs of the universe. If you ask for happiness, sorrow will also show up at your door-step, as per the divine law of balance. If you do not want to be unhappy, stop seeking happiness. If you do not wish to lose anything, simply decide to own nothing. All those who had the pleasure of Maharaj's darshan in physical form also had to endure the pain and suffering of Guruji quitting his physical form. It is as simple as that.

Herein lies the difference between *maangne walla* (one who desires) and *maanne walla* (one who simply accepts or believes). Those who desire must shuttle between the *duality* of happiness and sorrow,

while those who believe in Him are simply happy with the *singularity* of being one with Guruji. Whatever Guruji decides to bestow upon the believer as blessings is always enough. There is no flip side to simply being one with Guruji.

How does one transform from *maangne walla* to *maanne walla*? Here is an analogy. Imagine yourself wanting to travel from Mumbai to Chennai. To arrive at Chennai, we must move away from Mumbai. Likewise, we have to move away from being a *mangne walla* (start point) before we become a *Maanne walla* (destination). So, as soon as we stop asking, we start moving gradually towards believing.

And this travel is best done with Maharaj. As one *bhajan* put it, Guruji has made a ship for us to cross the worldly ocean of suffering. (*"Sadde Guru ne jabaj banaya, aao jinhe paar langna."*)

Get on board, sit back and enjoy the ride with Maharaj on His ship. Make no effort, ask for nothing and expect nothing. Travel with the faith that you are on the right ship and moving towards the right destination. As you travel along, Guruji will turn you into not just a believer but an extension of Himself.

It is easier said than done though. But no one said that this journey with the Divine is easy. Indeed, the *shabads* say that doing the *sewa* as directed by the Guru is a bitter pill to swallow, yet it confers true happiness: *"Guru peera ki chakri maha kardi, sukh saar."*

We may be running out of patience and time. We may even feel justified about our needs. We must try not to give in to the temptation to demand solutions from Maharaj. If we persist with our demands in front of Maharaj, chances are Guruji would give us whatever we want, and let us move on with our lives. We may miss the chance of boarding His divine ship. He may not even admit us to His *sangat*.

Those who love Him, love Him regardless of what they get or don't get. This is called unconditional love. The true devotee doesn't love Guruji because He can do things for the devotee. A true devotee just loves Him. That is the essential difference. Believers may suffer, yet get on board to travel with Guruji. Those who pursue their desires

with Guruji may get what they ask for but miss the chance to be one with Guruji.

I once took a close friend of mine to Guruji. He worked for the government and was overdue for his promotion. It was stuck because someone higher up in the hierarchy was not clearing his file. He wondered if I knew someone who could wield some influence. I offered to take him to Guruji. I promised him that with Guruji's blessings, the promotion would just happen. My friend looked at me with disbelief but agreed to come. It was early December 2006.

I introduced him to Guruji, and began to explain his situation. Guruji looked at me and said, "*Are you His lawyer?*" I replied in the negative and stepped back. I should have known better. Guruji never liked middlemen. He doesn't like anybody coming between Him and His devotee, no matter who and no matter what. Guruji blessed my friend and asked him to come to Bade Mandir on December 31, 2006, for the New Year's Eve celebration. Within the next 15 days, the file was cleared and my friend was promoted.

After having been truly blessed, he found multiple reasons to not come to Guruji. I let it be because I was sure that Guruji didn't want my friend to connect to Him. Guruji holds the key to the mind. Without His will, no devotee can reach His Mandir or develop the desire to be with Him. They may get their job done, but that could also be the end of their relationship with Guruji Maharaj.

My take is this: Those who get their job done quickly and then do not show up again—and I know many of them—they are the ones Guruji doesn't want around Him. Their requirements are met and their file is closed. Devotees who happily let Guruji decide on their needs and the timing of their fulfilment are the ones He wants to be with. Guruji may simply like you regardless and want you to come to Him. What will Maharaj do? He may keep your request pending till you develop love for Him.

Let us answer this question again. Imagine we have a choice between having Guruji in our lives along with all the problems versus leading a life without problems and without Guruji, which one will

we choose? Our choice obviously will determine the extent and depth of our relationship. If we want to be with Guruji without seeking anything, if we are ready to put up with every suffering, every pain as long as we have Guruji in our lives, then, we have surrendered. We are in singularity with Guruji. We are His and He is ours. There is nothing that can come between us and Guruji. He will take care and bless us in a way beyond our imagination.

In this external world, where we have a physical presence, we cannot control who comes into our lives and who exits. We have no say in how they treat us and how we respond to them. But our internal space is entirely ours. No one can enter it unless we want them to. This is where we allow people we love and grant them access to our hearts and souls. Sometimes, out of ignorance or greed, we allow wrong people to step in, wreak havoc and walk away, leaving us shattered.

If we leave this internal space exclusively for Guruji, no one else can enter there. There will be just the two of us. There will be a complete lack of chatter. No questions, no answers. Pure happiness that can come only with Guruji in our hearts and souls. By keeping it that way, we won't need anyone else. He'll take care of us and ours without us even asking for it.

A beautiful song from a Bollywood movie precisely expresses the way I feel now about this cosmic embrace between Guruji Maharaj and me. It goes like this:

*“Kuch na kaho kuch bhi na kaho
Kya kehna hai kya sun-na hai
Mujhko pata hai tumko pata hai
Samay ka yeh pal tham sa gaya hai
Aur is pal mein koi nahi hai
Bas ek main boon bas ek tum ho.”*

Translation: “Don't speak anything, don't say a word / what is there to say, what is there to listen to / This moment is frozen in time and there is no one else in it: It's just me and you.”

That's exactly how it should be between Guruji and His devotee. May disciples connect with Guruji in this manner, I pray. In this intensity of love, nothing else should be visible. There is no scope for anyone else to be present between Guruji and His devotee when devotional ardour reaches its highest point.

To conclude, let me just say that being Blessing Ready is in itself a journey. It is very personal and unaffected by where others are. How far have I travelled in this journey? I have no clue. But the good news is that Guruji knows. And that is all that matters!



SATGURU PYARA MERE NAAL HAI: JOURNEYS IN FAITH

IN 2004, MY WIFE, TWO OF MY DAUGHTERS AND I WENT ON A VACATION TO SRI LANKA. We landed in Chennai to catch a flight to Colombo. An hour before the close of the airline counter, we submitted our passports and were issued boarding passes, except Shubha. Exceptionally, her passport required an immigration check. We were directed to the immigration office in the city some 10 km away. We had exactly one hour to get this check done and return to the airline counter. It was improbable to get the documentation done in time, but I trusted Guruji. Shubha and I dashed away to Chennai city, with a prayer on our lips to Maharaj: “Please don’t let one stamp ruin this vacation. Please make it happen.”

Hardly had we got outside the airport that an auto-driver asked us if we were headed for the immigration office in the city. Despite many red lights, the *autowallah* was agile and we reached the office in 20 minutes.

Inside the office, the official concerned wanted to give me the low-down on the regulations. I had only 40 minutes to get back to the airport, so I told him to get on with it. I was given a form, made triplicates at the shops downstairs, and filled them up. Another 10 minutes gone. Next, hundred rupees had to be deposited in a bank about half a kilometre away. Mentally remonstrating to Maharaj at the bureaucratic hindrances, I left my daughter at the office and ran to the bank. The deposit was made in a jiffy, and I ran back. Another 15 minutes gone. I got back the passport and we came out of the office to find the auto waiting for us.

There were barely 10 minutes left for us to get back to the airport, factoring in minutes frittered away in the inescapable minutiae of interactions between autos, offices, banks and airport officials. We didn’t get a single red light. Within five-seven minutes, I saw the Airport Authority of India signboard looming before us. Incredulous,

I asked my daughter if we were near the airport already. We could see aircraft; we were there. We rushed inside.

Just in time? Not really. At the airline counter, the manager was asking the girl manning the desk to close as it was already time. But as he said this, he saw Shubha and me rushing in. He confirmed our identities with my wife, asked the girl to reopen the counter, check the baggage and get us in. What was miraculous was that it had taken us 20 minutes to go to the immigration office and less than 10 minutes to come back. I still cannot believe it happened. Who else could have made it happen but Maharaj!

For Guruji, time and space are immaterial. He is omnipresent. He can position you anywhere, anytime. He doesn't let his devotees down.

In Sri Lanka, we stayed at a hotel in a remote place. Flipping open a travel brochure, we learnt that this place was quite close to where the demon king Ravana had held Devi Sita captive. We were right next to the *Ashoka Vatika*.

We saw the spot where one of the beautiful episodes (*Sundar Kand*) of Lord Hanuman's visit to Devi Sita was enacted, after which he burnt down the golden city of Lanka. The landscape matched the description in the *Ramayana*. Part of the soil was blackened as if still smarting; part of it, a metre away, was normal. Water was flowing in the middle of the garden. Guruji had turned our vacation into a pilgrimage!

Guruji loves the idea of His *sangat* enjoying and doing well in life. To come to Him, we would dress as if going to a function. That would make Him really happy. He is like a mother who finds joy in her children's happiness.

It was also customary for devotees to take Guruji's permission before they went out of country. We would seek His permission if we could go to a certain place. Usually, He would smile and give His blessings. That was the way for me as well. He'd often say "*aish kar*" or some other words full of blessings. After joining the American firm in 2005, I had to go to the USA. It was going to be the first of my many

visits to the USA. I came to Gururji with great excitement for taking His permission. He looked pleased, I could make out.

He looked at me and, after a pause, asked me to bring two bottles of Vitamin E tablets. I couldn't believe that Gururji was asking me to do something personally. I was elated, but I only folded my hands and acknowledged the order with "Ji Gururji". As I was walking away, Gururji added that the tablets had to be of the latest date of manufacture. I turned back, folded my hands, and acknowledged with "Ji Gururji". I was on seventh heaven that Maharaj was making me do something for Him. Obviously, this was His way to bless me.

Though it was official work that took me to the USA, getting the Vitamin E tablets became the predominant task. When I landed in Washington DC, an American colleague came to receive me and wanted us to get to work right away. I forestalled him, telling him that I needed to buy two bottles of Vitamin E tablets of the latest date of manufacture. He said, "Sure, but why?" I told Him that it was way more important than anything else. We went to a medical shop and picked up these bottles.

It turned out to be a great trip. I learnt how the organization worked, made many friends, understood the functions of the workplace, and returned. On the coming Saturday, my regular day of going for darshan, I had the Vitamin E bottles with me. I walked up to Gururji and presented the bottles to Him. Maharaj briefly inspected the bottles and inquired if they indeed bore the latest date of manufacture. I could simply nod in affirmation. He then asked me to put them in His room.

This was unbelievable. I couldn't believe what I just heard. Nobody went inside Gururji's room without His permission but it was going to be my day to receive this exceptional blessing. Since I used to sit by that door during *darshans*, I was familiar with the beautiful fragrance that emanated from it. I opened the door, went inside and I was in heaven. The aura of that place, the elegance, the simplicity, and beauty were unbelievable. I was supposed to just leave the tablets there and step out. But I lingered, sitting with my back to the wall, facing Gururji's

bed—just taking it all in with deep breaths. I was absorbing the very air which Maharaj breathed. Worried that I would be found out for being greedy, I bowed out reluctantly (as if I had taken something that was not my due) and quietly sat in my corner place. It felt so special!

Guruji made all of us feel equally special and unique. We are essentially nothing, not even a speck of dust in the cosmic vastness. For the God of Gods to make us feel wanted, that, too, with a personal touch, was amazing. Guruji made His *sangat* feel as if they were the only ones for Him.

Guruji is on call all the time, for each and every one of His *sangat*, and that is why He insists upon us connecting with Him directly, not collectively. Please don't connect to Him as a member of a group. That includes social media groups as well. There are no firsts among *sangat* either. Have a one-to-one connection with nobody in between.

I got another chance to go to the USA, and again sought Guruji's blessings. My wife was standing behind me as I was speaking. Guruji looked at her, then at me and asked if I had taken her to the USA. Before I could respond, my wife said, complainingly, that I had never taken her with me to the USA. I went red in the face. I mumbled the excuse that this was a business trip, but He wouldn't take no for an answer. Guruji looked at me and said, "Why don't you take her?" I said I would. Guruji then looked at my wife and said, "He will take you this time."

The trip was for a short duration and there were many things to take care of and, to be honest, I did not take Guruji's words seriously. I did not take her. I came back and when I was in Maharaj's presence, the first thing Guruji asked me was: "Did you take her with you?" I had no excuse, and before I could say something, my wife told Him that I had not. Guruji firmly directed me to do so the next time. He then turned to my wife and told her that I would definitely take her to the USA next time.

The next trip occurred only after Guruji's *mahasamadhi*. Though the visit involved only a two-day stay abroad, I took my wife along with me. We travelled together, and came back to His presence—this time in

front of His *samadhi* at Bade Mandir. With teary eyes and folded hands, I told Guruji: “Maharaj, I have taken my aunty to the USA.” I had the feeling that Guruji was happy I had complied with His *bukam*.

This is true that Guruji Maharaj has taken *mahasamadhi*. But, very rightfully, the *sangat* continues to connect and interact with Him just like they used to do before *mahasamadhi*; with a living Guru. That is because He *is* very much present. We never refer to Him in the past tense. We never garland His swaroop. He is forever, and our relationship—the divine, sacrosanct relationship of Guru and chela—is permanent too. It is timeless. It is devoid of everything else that you see, because what you see is not the reality. It is a perception of reality. The soul-to-soul connection with Maharaj is the only reality.

How Maharaj blesses us is difficult to comprehend. Today when I look back, two of my daughters are in the USA and I feel this is linked with Guruji’s command to take my wife to that country. He saw our entire karmic context and unlocked its doors so that we can have the best possible life. A happy woman at home is an imperative part of that unlocking process.

While on marital relationships, this experience added to my personal understanding which is derived from our scriptures: Wherever a woman is respected and worshipped, that is where the gods live.⁶ Wherever they are not respected, all actions result in failure. You must keep your spouse, your aunty, ahead of you to ensure a smooth flow of blessings from Guruji Maharaj.

I vividly recall watching some members of the *sangat* requesting Maharaj to bless their lockets with His swaroop on them. Of course, Maharaj happily obliged them. In December 2006, we too got two gold lockets made and presented them to Guruji to bless them before

⁶ The moral precept is from the Manusmriti: यत्र नार्यस्तु पूज्यन्ते, रमन्ते तत्र देवताः । यत्रैतास्तु न पूज्यन्ते सर्वास्तत्राफलाः क्रियाः ॥ II षोचन्ति जामयो यत्र विनश्यत्याषु तत्कुलम् । न षोचन्ति तु यत्रैता वर्धन्ते तद्धि सर्वदा ॥ The family in which women (such as mother, wife, sister, daughter etc.) are sorrowful that family meets its destruction soon, while the family in which they do not grieve is always prosperous.

wearing. Maharaj took the lockets in His hand and asked whom these were for. I replied that one was for me and the other for my son-in-law. Maharaj immediately asked - “What about aunty?”

I was stumped. I should have known better. How could I even think of receiving blessings ahead of my wife? Embarrassed and at a complete loss of words, I could only look down and keep quiet. There was no excuse. Nevertheless, Maharaj blessed the lockets and handed them back to me. We returned home and decided not to wear them till additional lockets for my wife and daughters were also blessed by Guruji. That took a while. It was only by April 2007 that we could organise four more lockets identical to the two blessed earlier by Maharaj. I took them to Guruji and received His blessings. Then the entire family wore them together!

Let me get back to our USA connection. I believe Guruji wanted the USA to be part of our future plans. For this association to be a blessed one, my going there alone wasn't good enough; my wife had to be a part of that association. We had to be blessed together as a couple.

I know my wife loves to travel and see places. That makes her really happy. I also know that whatever makes her happy, also makes Guruji happy. When Maharaj is happy, we receive his immense blessings.

On a few trips to the USA, my wife and I have had telling experiences of Guruji's protection. Returning back from one such trip, I felt heavy vibrations coming from the left wing of the aircraft as it was taxiing out of Newark airport. The aircraft was stopped, attended to, serviced, and we travelled comfortably thereafter. I was not worried. I knew that I was in the lap of my Guru. He always holds me like a mother.

On another occasion, as we were about to take off in an Airbus 320, the plane's electricals powered down. This was a complete shutdown. The thought came to mind that had this happened just a few minutes later, we'd have had a dead aircraft in the air. Sometime later, power was restored. Everything was checked, and the plane made flight-ready. The aircraft flew like a hawk. Again, I was protected—as was everybody else—since I was in the lap of my Guru, not just sitting in the aircraft.

On a recent trip in the year 2020, we had to stay put in the USA for five months because of Covid restrictions. We took one of the earliest flights back that we could. On the ground at Newark, the aircraft's systems stopped functioning, needing a complete system reboot. As you would do for a desktop computer. That took two and a half hours. We took off and headed into extremely rough weather, something that I hadn't experienced in a long time even though I travel a lot. My wife was with me and we looked at each other and all I told her was, "Your children are well-settled and we are in the arms of our Guru. Let's just go to sleep. We will see if we wake up—great; if we don't, great!" Normally, she and I don't sleep well on flights. That day eight hours of horrible weather could not keep us awake. We slept and when we woke up, we were near Afghanistan, less than an hour and a half away from landing in Delhi. I looked at her and said, "Here we are. We don't fly in an aircraft; we travel in our Guruji's lap. He just holds us tight in his arms and takes us from place A to place B." Of course, we were also unvaccinated and exposed ourselves to fellow travellers in air and on ground at Newark and New Delhi. No problems.

The shabad "*Satgura pyara mere naal hai*" encapsulates my belief. The shabad is a commitment from Guruji Himself. It means that loving Guruji is always with me. It leaves no room for discussion or argumentation. If this is something we can keep in our hearts once and for all, then we have nothing else to think, talk or care about. We do not have to ask, we have to simply believe in Maharaj. It's not a question of our praying to Him to be with us. That would, in my opinion, be a mistake. We have to believe that He is with us; in fact, we insist He is with us.

Guruji has shown many times, in times of need and even in ordinary times that He keeps a watch over us. During the *satsangs* at Empire Estate, for example, many devotees would want to continue basking in His presence. They'd not want to leave because being with Guruji was an addiction. He made us feel high. I, too, would try and prolong my stay at Empire Estate as much as I could. I'd hang around even after *langar* and *aagya*, and try to sneak back into a place where

I thought Guruji wouldn't see me. It never worked though. I would try to hide behind the pillar that stood on the side of the entrance to the Empire Estate ground hall. From there, there was no clear line of sight to Guruji. One or the other *sevak*s would announce that Gurgaon *sangat* had been given permission to go home. Yet I'd pretend that this instruction was not for me. I'd go behind that pillar and try to sit down. Even before I could bend my knees, I'd hear: "Commander, go home". I wouldn't even look towards Maharaj, just fold my hands and slip out, pretending this never happened. I tried this manoeuvre twice and gave up. It didn't work.

Guruji keeps His eyes on us. Guruji had given us four photographs after my praying to him quietly (as narrated in an earlier chapter). Each was with a member of the family. During our Sri Lanka visit, our youngest daughter Ila had kept the *swaroop* in her purse. Back at home, after the trip we slept early. The next morning, we saw her run out of her room, out of the main door, shrieking, and come back inside even before we could intervene. It was around 9 am. We wanted to know what happened when we met for breakfast. She told us that the night before she had thrown the papers from her purse into the dust bin. Unwittingly, Guruji's *swaroop* had also got thrown out. The rest of the piled-up waste had gone into the bin on top, which my wife kept outside to be picked up by society staff.

Three amazing things happened: That morning, the pick-up man did not come at his usual time of 8 am. He did not arrive till my daughter had realized what she had done. Also, though she had dumped the waste at the bottom of the bin, she found Guruji's *swaroop* right at the top. She did not have to search for it. And the third thing? The garbage man was approaching the place as she was picking up the *swaroop* from the bin. Another few seconds, and the *swaroop* would have gone with the waste. If that had happened, we would not have been able to forgive ourselves ever. It didn't, because Guruji wouldn't let it happen.

Guruji's *swaroops* are a manifestation of His presence. We had been given two larger *swaroops* that we had brought home. Once my uncle

came from Meerut to visit us. He had Guruji's darshan and he wanted a *swaroop*. My wife had kept one of the big *swaroops* under a newspaper in the shelf. She decided to take it out and give it to him. It had a yellow turmeric sacred mark (*pithya*) on it.

Back in Meerut, my uncle gave the *swaroop* to be set in a frame. A few days later, he called me to say that the person who was framing the *swaroop* had lost it. We were now doubly sad: We had given away His *swaroop* that was blessed for us and now that had been lost. We thought to ourselves that it wasn't time for our relative to have Guruji's *swaroops*, which were after all given by Guruji Himself.

Many months later, it was Diwali, and we were cleaning the entire house. It was time for the newspaper on the shelf to be replaced. As my wife lifted the newspaper, she found the same *swaroop* present. It had the identical yellow turmeric mark. She came rushing to tell me. We called up my uncle to reassure him that the *swaroop* was back with us.

Such is our Guruji's grace. Do we even realise who we are talking about?

We are ordinary human beings full of imperfections and prone to making mistakes. But He does not let His devotees fall from His grace. If need be, our ear will be twisted, and we will be given hard lessons a couple of times, but it will be done with a mother's touch. Our mistakes will be corrected lovingly and caringly. Guruji's universe is reformative, not punitive.

Guruji is ours. He is with us all the time. He is holding our hand. All we have to do is trust Him. If we trust Guruji is ours, then Guruji is ours. If we don't, Guruji is not ours. Our belief and trust in Guruji is the key to our connection with Maharaj.

Believe in Him, believe in your prayers and He is all yours.



MAHARAJ'S SEWA – THE RITES OF PASSAGE

THE PATH TO SEWA WAS SLOW AND STEADY.

As newish devotees, our role during the *satsang* was to come, have chai, *halwa prasad*, *langar*, receive His blessings and, as per His *aagya*, go home, only to be back again for another visit. To some devotees Guruji gave the heavenly chance of pressing His feet. My earnest desire was to do so, too. I used to wonder if I would ever get this opportunity. I did not have the courage to initiate this on my own or ask Him. One day, I devised a method: Instead of simply bowing my head and touching His feet for *aagya*, I thought I would hold on to His feet and press them a few times before getting up. It was a good plan. I never told anyone about it.

On the next available Saturday, I implemented this devotional ruse. As I bowed forward, I held His Lotus Feet and pressed them gently five to six times. No reaction from Maharaj. He simply let it be. My hands got His fragrance in the process. That day, devotees wanted to smell my hands because they knew they smelt of Guruji. I avoided washing and cleaning my hands and took care to see that they did not get dirty. I also did not shake hands with anyone for as long as I could avoid it. My happiness knew no bounds. The ruse had worked!

I did the same thing on my next visit and was emboldened as Guruji did nothing to stop me. Initially, I'd press His feet three or four times, and seeing that He was implicitly allowing it, the frequency doubled. Of course, He knew what was happening just that He had allowed me this liberty. As the time came to take my leave during the next darshan, I again pressed his feet. This time a little longer than usual. He looked at me in a half pleasant, half scolding manner and told me to move on. His words were: "*Oye, ho gaya, chal bas.*" I quickly withdrew my hands and disappeared because I didn't want this blessing to stop. During the next visit, Maharaj was sitting with both His feet on the ground, but when my turn came and I closed my eyes, bent forward

and felt around for His feet, they were not there. I looked up to find that Maharaj had folded His feet on the seat and was looking at me, indicating that I better carry on. This was repeated on the next visit. When this happened the third time, I prayed to Him as I was coming into the queue. I vowed to be disciplined if I was allowed to press His feet just a bit. I told Guruji I could not survive without this, but that I would not be greedy. As my turn came to bow, Maharaj had both His legs up, but He lowered one on the ground so that I could hold on to it for a few seconds. It was unbelievable!

That is the kind of interaction devotees have with Maharaj and that's the way He listens to them. He will smile and allow you to express your devotion. After that, whenever I got a chance, every now and then, I'd press His feet for some time. My hands would always come back redolent with His fragrance.

Similarly, when we used to get *halwa* prasad, He would drop prasad from a height of maybe four to five inches. His hands would never touch the devotees' except on occasion. I really desired that contact. On one occasion, I brought my hands forward and prayed mentally that He put the *prasad* on my hand and not simply drop it. Wish granted! He not only put the *prasad* on my hand but also gently pressed down on my hands from the top. It was wonderful that my prayer was granted. Clearly, there was, and continues to be, this beautiful yet subtle two-way connection between Maharaj and me.

With time, this greed for 'more' disappeared to a very large extent. I have been quite content with this connection and the blessings that came my way. Though whatever came was phenomenal and always delivered an out-of-the-world experience.

The desire for *sewa* never leaves earnest devotees. By *sewa*, we generally refer to the opportunity to do anything related to Guruji. Orally, physically, emotionally, mentally and any other way, it is a *sewa*. Anything done for the glory of Maharaj is *sewa*. But this understanding of *sewa* develops over time. I, too, had an earnest desire to do *sewa*, which was fanned during one visit to Bade Mandir, where I saw a senior *sewak* washing vegetables. I requested him to allow me to help out too,

but received a definite no. I couldn't participate in a *sewa* until Guruji gave His own *bukm*, he rightly added. I was dejected. I took myself to a corner and I cried. I petitioned Maharaj: I was His child; could I not even wash vegetables? Was this something so big that I was not allowed to do it? The day passed, but the entreaty stayed in my heart.

Once you have *bhakti*, that is devotional ardour, He listens to you. My prayer was answered during Maharaj's birthday celebrations. I came a bit early to Bade Mandir with my wife. I left her in the main hall and went to the area in front of the kitchen, again looking for an opportunity to do *sewa*. Apparently, I was the only one in that area at that moment. One of the cooks or, maybe, the cook's assistant spotted me. He had a knife in his hand. It had a cloth wrapped around at its end to work as a makeshift hilt. He asked me to come in and pointed to a huge pile of tomatoes that required dicing. The cook gave me the knife, saying the tomatoes were to go in the salad being prepared, and that I should dice them quickly. I was taken aback by what sounded like a direct order. Not long ago, I hadn't been allowed to wash vegetables and here, I was being asked to cut tomatoes—a whole lot of them. Wasting no time, I sat down for the task. I was at it for a long time, and to tell the truth, my hands got really tired. When my wife stepped out for *langar*, I was still at it. She later told me that Guruji had given her a huge grin as she went past Him and she wondered why. I told her that He made me chop vegetables today and that I would never ever complain about *sewa* again.

That was the first proper *sewa* that I was awarded in the Mandir. The *sewa* I got next was to serve vegetables to the *sangat* during *langar* at Bade Mandir. It came about when I approached Langar sewa coordinator who asked me how long I had been coming to Guruji. Once I said two years, he simply allowed me to serve the dishes to the *sangat*. From that day on, this *sewa* became a regular feature. I could relate to myself as a *sewak* from that point on.

My involvement in these tasks increased incrementally, from *langar* distribution to coordination. Guruji picked me and prepared me for *sewa*. Doing *sewa* brought its own joy. Just before one big function in

Bade Mandir, Guruji asked seven or eight of us to go to Bade Mandir to clean its premises. We cleaned the Mandir from one end to another. As we were ready to leave for home in the evening, we got a message from Guruji to stay back in the Mandir for the night. We stayed back and spent the night doing *satsang*, sharing experiences, and sleeping a little. Next morning, we came to know that Guruji would be coming to the Mandir. I felt maybe He would inspect what we had done. This made me a little nervous.

Guruji came to Bade Mandir around 11 am. He was dressed in sport shoes, white trousers, and a half-sleeve shirt. He had brought *parathas* for us. Guruji was visibly very pleased with our sewa and that made our day. He then began picking up items from the main Durbar hall to distribute them amongst us, the *sewaks*. One particular item, a brass flower vase, caught my fancy and I mentally addressed Guruji, saying I wanted that and nothing else. I stepped out and went towards the kitchen area to distance myself from anything else He might give. Next, I saw Bawa Uncle walking up to me with that very flower vase in his hand, saying that Guruji had given it for me. This is what happens when you have a loving Guru who has taken you in His care.

In 2004, sometime in the second half of the year, Guruji asked General Kapur uncle to organize a *satsang* at *Kler* Farm. It was meant only for military personnel, or *faujis*. Guruji said that He would invite whomsoever else He chose. The date was fixed for December 26, 2004. General Kapur Uncle put together a team that included Vijay Pushkarna Uncle, Wing Commander Anil Arora Uncle, Commander Vimal Nagpal Uncle, myself and a few other devotees. General Kapur Uncle was our leader in every possible way and guided us admirably. The entire *satsang* was an amazing experience. There was a moment during the *satsang* that remains especially vivid. This was when General Kapur Uncle introduced us to Guruji with words to the effect that we were Guruji's *fauj* and we would execute whatever He ordered to perfection with full dedication. Guruji smiled, looked at us and nodded approvingly. Our day was made. That was the very day when a Tsunami hit far eastern countries, including Indonesia and Thailand.

Many amongst those present had cancelled their planned vacation to these countries to be at this *satsang*. It was clear that this date for the *satsang* was chosen by Maharaj to keep His devotees out of harm's way.



GURUJI'S LOTUS FEET BLESS GURGAON

A MILESTONE MOMENT AWAITED US IN 2006.

It was sometime towards the end of the year 2005 that I felt this urge to request Guruji Maharaj to come to Gurgaon and bless His *sangat* there. I did not have the courage to openly request Him. So, I spoke to Singla Uncle, who told me that Guruji accepted invitations to devotees' houses, and if I invited Him, He may come. I thought that Guruji could come to Jal Vayu Towers, where I lived. It had a community centre where we could welcome Him. Singla Uncle advised me to request Guruji. Nervous to the bones, I rehearsed my dialogues over and over again to ensure I would make the plea without fumbling.

Finally, gathering courage, I went up to Maharaj and managed to speak a single sentence: "Guruji, please Gurgaon *mein charan dalo*." (Please deign to bring your Lotus Feet to Gurgaon.) He pretty much dismissed me from His presence with a desultory wave of His hand. I was disheartened. I went back to Singla Uncle and he advised me to plead my case again after sometime. So I did, but Maharaj ignored the plea completely. Still, it was an improvement in that I wasn't dismissed.

Few more months passed before I made the request again. On this occasion, Guruji acknowledged the request and said '*dassange*', a promise to let me know. Later, Guruji spoke to Singla Uncle and sought his views on the matter. Singla Uncle responded affirmatively and Guruji asked for me. Since it was not a Saturday, I was not at Empire Estate; I was in a club having dinner with my wife and daughters when I got this call from Singla Uncle. I told Uncle where I was and that it would take me 20 minutes to get down to Guruji's. Uncle spoke to Maharaj, who said I didn't have to come.

Guruji instead told General Kapur about it, but didn't mention any date for the visit. Subsequently, the team assembled again under the leadership of General Kapur Uncle, as for the Kler Farm *satsang* and began the planning. The date we got was January 28, 2006. And

it was going to be a public function. You can imagine our excitement. We checked out many venues. Finally, Mehta Uncle, a senior devotee, secured Library Park, next to the Huda Gymkhana Club, as the venue for this public function. It was also very close to the Delhi–Jaipur highway. Guruji approved the venue and also directed that the *satsang* should begin by 11 in the morning.

Guruji also asked me to prepare an invitation card to be distributed amongst the *sangat*. I went to my office, got hold of a ream of yellow A4-size papers, put the material on the computer and took the prints. No jazzy stuff. I then went to Maharaj, showed Him the draft and received his approval. Invitations were printed at the office and distributed, in accordance with Maharaj’s directions. I felt He liked the idea of printed invites. Subsequently, I was asked to repeat this *sewa* for the Maha Shivratri function that was due a month or so later. I again printed the invites and took them to Maharaj. He looked at them approvingly, again asked my name and what I did. I repeated the exact thing that I had said to Him in 2001—that is, I had retired as a commander from the Navy.

He looked at me and said: “*Tennu Gurgaon di sangat da commander banaya. Sangat nu ekkatha kar.*” (I make you commander of the Gurgaon *sangat*. Gather the *sangat* there.)

I was overwhelmed. Such is the grace of Guruji Maharaj. When it was time for the Baisakhi function, He asked me to get a similar invitation printed again.

Remember how, in 2005, Maharaj didn’t want me to do any job, asking me to be in His *sewa* instead? When I insisted, He gave me the job and gave me only four years. The benevolent Guruji then made me Commander in 2006 and blessed me with a lifelong *sewa* of connecting *sangat*. In the process, blessing me with extended life in His *sewa*.

Back to Guruji’s visit to Gurgaon. Guruji also sent us to different places in Gurgaon with invitations in hand. Occasionally, we would get funny looks from people at whose doorsteps we landed as strangers. We went to all kinds of places, but none of the people looked like they were going to come. We focused on doing our *sewa* and moved on.

There was no aspect of the *satsang* which was not directly controlled or dictated by Maharaj. Guruji told us that no one from Delhi could attend the *satsang* which was meant to be only for those based in Gurgaon. He was specifically going to bless the *sangat* that lived in Gurgaon. Anybody from outside Gurgaon was going to be invited by Guruji Himself. Guruji told us the number of *sangat* we should be prepared for. Guruji even told us what to keep for *langar - tandoori roti, langar vali dal, aloo vadi, chutney* and *gajar ka halwa*.

Colonel Joshi Uncle, who was coordinating with me, also advised us what we needed to offer Guruji: salted cashew nuts, almonds, dry apricots, coconut water, and sweet lime juice. I was excited with the thought that it was going to be my *sewa* for my Guruji. I had prayed to Maharaj for this *sewa* and so it was. Joshi Uncle spoke directly to me and told me to organize these things.

It was easy. We procured everything and were ready. Except for the sweet lime juice!

The day before the event, we went around looking for a juicer but couldn't find one in the whole of Gurgaon. We then decided to go for a manual juicing machine; we couldn't get that either. So many shops and they didn't have a simple juicer? By late evening, we were fully tired. At that point, I got a call from Colonel Joshi telling me that the juice must be extracted by hand. Guruji does not like juice from mixers, he told me. No wonder the juicers disappeared from the markets! I thanked him for this timely input.

My wife decided to hand-squeeze the sweet lime; a litre of juice had to be extracted by hand. It was not easy for my wife, causing a lot of pain in the elbows and the arms. She prayed to Guruji mentally: "Guruji, *bahut mehnat lagi hai, pura pina, please*." (This was hard work; please drink the juice fully.) The juice was put in a freezer along with a kilo of ice. The reason was we knew Guruji would like it not just chilled, he'd want it at nearly freezing temperature. More about it little later.

We received detailed instructions from Guruji on how to go about doing the *aarti*, as well. The *Diya* had to be brought from

Madan Uncle's place, but the *aarti* had to be prepped by my wife—Commander Aunty. To decide who would offer the *aarti*, we opted for a lottery system. We asked those who wanted to offer the devotional light to Guruji to write their names on a slip and put it in a box. A young child was then asked to take out nine slips. My wife had missed a chance to do *aarti* at Kler Farm function. She didn't want to miss the opportunity this time, but her name didn't show up. I could feel her disappointment, but couldn't offer her any privileges. In her own way, she silently complained to Maharaj that this was not fair.

A setback occurred long before the *satsang*. General Kapur was hospitalised with severe pneumonia. Even as we worried about his health, the responsibility for the function came to me. However, Guruji bore us out of all difficult situations.

For instance, when we had inspected the grounds of the venue, we were wearing shoes and none of us realized that the place was full of thorns. The venue was a good 100-meter walk from the shoe stand, where the *sangat* would drop off their footwear. How could the *sangat* walk on the thorn-filled land? The day before the event, a devotee suggested we use a red carpet from the point of entry to the carpeted arena where the *sangat* would sit down. We did so, without realising that Guruji had covered us for every single thing. We were only going through the motions of *sewa*. We became aware of the presence of thorns on the day of the *satsang* when the *sangat* moved from their sitting area to the *langar* hall over a meter-long patch of land left uncovered. We quickly covered it with a carpet so that the barefoot *sangat* could move between the two areas.

Maharaj's arrival time was 11 o'clock. We were there on time, but as the time for Guruji's arrival came near, we looked around to find very few devotees. We panicked. Guruji Maharaj was going to be there soon, and we would have nothing to show for our effort. We tried to request Colonel Joshi to see if he could delay Guruji's departure from Empire Estate. He told me that Guruji had already left. But Guruji got the news, as it were, and took some time to reach the *satsang*—even

though there was no traffic on the roads at all. Around 200 people were at the venue when Guruji arrived.

Overjoyed beyond words, we welcomed Maharaj. General Kapur led the simple felicitation. He had jumped out of his ICU bed at the hospital against medical advice for the *satsang*. As soon as Guruji occupied His asana, the *sangat* began pouring in. We could not recognize most of the devotees. I had been organising monthly *satsang* in Gurgaon for a few years, also going to Empire Estate, but I had never seen most of these devotees from Gurgaon. Unknown to us, they were the Guru's *sangat* and He had invited them in His own way. The place got filled quickly and completely.

The *satsang* was being carried along by Guruji's grace, when we suddenly realised that it was hot. It was January but the sun was out. We panicked and ran around knowing that Guruji must be feeling hot in the open. Fortunately, Vimal Nagpal Uncle was able to organise a fan quickly.

The next jolt came when Col Joshi Uncle came to us, rightly wondering where Guruji would retire to and sit down to have *langar* in privacy. My heart froze because we had not planned for any such enclosure. I exclaimed that we had missed that. No one had told us, but we should have thought about it on our own. Col Joshi Uncle went to Maharaj and told Him about it. Guess what Maharaj did! He decided to have the *langar* in the open in front of His *sangat*. He, in fact, had the meal seated on His asana. Normally, He would hardly eat. That day, I still remember, Maharaj holding that small plate and finishing it along with the *gajar ka halwa*. He was so kind, so gracious. He accepted everything that was served to Him with love, it didn't matter what it was, how much, and how it was presented.

As for the *aarti*, everyone who was supposed to offer it to Guruji lined up on the stage towards Maharaj's left. There were a few women devotees, including my wife, watching from a distance. Their names had not come up via the lottery. All the ladies who were on the stage finished their *aarti* quickly, and Guruji beckoned the other women devotees who were standing farther away to come to offer

aarti. Commander Aunty, along with few others, who had missed a chance through the lottery, could also gratefully offer their lamps of love to Maharaj. Their prayers were answered. As always, Guruji had acknowledged the heartfelt emotions of those who loved Him.

That was what happened with the sweet lime juice as well. My wife had been guarding it till Maharaj would drink it. Normally, Maharaj wouldn't take more than maybe a glass. That day, he fully consumed the juice. The omniscient Guru knew the words my wife had spoken in her heart. His love is such that He could not say no. He would not break her heart. He drank nearly all of the juice, handing over part of the last glass to General Kapur uncle. As prayed by Commander Aunty, the juice was finished right up to the last drop. The flask we used to store that juice in still carries a hint of the fragrance that was there in 2006. In fact, when we hold our annual *satsang* in Gurgaon to honour that wonderful occasion as also to remind the *sangat* and ourselves of our continuing good fortune, we make a point to use that flask at least once to serve *chai prasad* to the *sewaks*. No matter what you add to it, the original flavour stays.

Guruji was very pleased on the *satsang* day. He told General Kapur that He had blessed Gurgaon and the Gurgaon *sangat*. Uncle nodded in assent to Guruji's words, but Guruji asked Him to make a public announcement to this effect. General Kapur used the microphone to broadcast His blessings to His beloved devotees: "All who can see Him and all who cannot see Him, all those who are here and all those who are not here, each one of them has been blessed."

At last, it was time for Maharaj to leave and we had the opportunity to stand in front of Maharaj with General Kapur Uncle again leading us. We bowed in front of Him. As He got up to leave, I trailed behind Him, unable to accompany Him from the asana to the car simply because my emotions got for the better of me. I cried as much in relief as much from the fact that I just didn't want Him to leave.

There was another emotional moment for me that blessed day. I had lost my mother in 1999. On that day in Gurgaon, I saw a lady who looked just like my mother. I craved for her blessings but couldn't

just walk up to her. Fortunately, another elderly female devotee from our *sangat*, whom I knew well, came and sat next to her. I now had an excuse. As I bowed to touch the elderly devotee's feet, my mother's lookalike put both her hands on my head on her own accord, without fuss. And I quietly used another hand to touch her feet, got up and walked away. I believe Guruji made me connect with my mother in a subtle way without anybody coming to know about it.

Since the year 2008, a *satsang* has been held every year at Gurgaon to mark and honour Maharaj's visit and to renew Guruji's blessings. Those of us who organise this annual *satsang* at Gurgaon on December 25 each year, can share many instances of His divine intercession. That blessed day is forever etched in the memory of each and every member of the *sangat* who was present there on January 28, 2006.

A red-letter day indeed.



THE CONNECTION

TAKING 'BLESSING READINESS' TO THE NEXT LEVEL TRAVELS A DISTINCT PATH.

DEVOTEES USED TO INVITE GURUJI TO MAJOR EVENTS SO THAT THESE WERE BLESSED with His divine presence and all auspiciousness attended upon them. When their children were to be married, devotees would give the first invitation to Maharaj and present extra cards so that Guruji could distribute to the *sangat* at His discretion.

It took a while before I also received an invite for a different sort of travel - to attend a wedding by a fellow devotee in Hoshiarpur, Punjab. I was excited. I planned to travel first to the wedding, then pay my respects at the Jalandhar Mandir, stay the night in that town, and thereafter return to Delhi.

Although the card must have been given to many, I was the first of the *sangat* to reach the wedding venue. To my surprise, the attendees looked at me all agog, as they knew I had come from Delhi and had been sent by Maharaj. They began saying that Guruji had come. I looked around to see if Maharaj had really arrived but no, they were jubilant at having me there on His behalf, hugging me, and treating me like royalty. Everything was first offered to me. I received a welcome that has never been repeated. It dawned on me then that I was part of Guru's *sangat* and was representing my Guru at this function. Being alone gave me that added sense of responsibility.

After a while, I saw another devotee from Delhi, Shiv Uncle, who had also come there with his daughter. We began sharing our *satsang* and talked about Guruji and forgot about everything else. Shiv Uncle had planned to leave Hoshiarpur by 2 pm by bus to be able to catch a train to Delhi from Ludhiana. We got engrossed in doing *satsang*, and at some point, I got concerned that he would miss his train. I reminded Shiv uncle that he might miss his two o'clock bus; to which, he made a telling statement of faith: Getting to Delhi was not his but Guruji's concern. It was Guruji who would make sure he got to the train, and

he was going to complete the *satsang*. That kind of trust in Guruji was something I was witnessing for the first time.

When Shiv Uncle started from the venue, he was already behind schedule by 15 minutes. I offered that he accompany me to Jalandhar where I had a room booked. We could return to Delhi together the day after. He refused, saying that he had to return that very day.

I went to Jalandhar, as planned, visited Mandir and returned to Gurgaon the next day. When I next met Shiv uncle, I asked him about his return journey. He told me that on his way back from Hoshiarpur, the bus had a flat tyre delaying him further. The driver briefly inspected the tyre twice but pressed on at slow speed without replacing the flat tyre. Then the bus dropped him a few km away from the Ludhiana railway station forcing him to make a dash by an auto rickshaw.

By now he was well past the scheduled departure time of his train. Shiv Uncle picked up his daughter in his arms and ran on to the platform. He saw the train moving towards Delhi. But the train came to a halt, with his coach right in front him. He entered the coach and had barely occupied his seat, the train lunged forward. The feeling was as if the engine, held back against its will by some external force, was released as soon as Uncle occupied in his seat. Shiv Uncle remembers to this date, the pressure he felt on his chest when the train took off like a rocket.

Coincidence? No way. The train could not have departed without Shiv Uncle. Maharaj wouldn't let it go without his devotee.

The faith Shiv Uncle displayed in Guruji that day taught me a huge lesson: I realised that if I leave everything in Guruji's hand, then Guruji will take care of everything. If I don't, then he won't. It is as simple as that. So, just have faith and let it be.

This point was brought home again a little later. My father had a prostate enlargement problem due to which he had trouble passing urine. Doctors suspected prostate cancer. For the first time, I requested him to come to Guruji Maharaj. I hadn't told him earlier, because I wasn't sure if he would agree or, worse, say something unacceptable. So, with folded hands, I pleaded him to come with me to Guruji and take His blessings, which would heal him.

He agreed and I took him to Guruji. Guruji even spoke to him. He had *langar* and did so a few more times when he came to Guruji. Guruji blessed him and, of course, his reports turned out to be negative for cancer. He was operated on for the enlargement and everything was fine.

Sometime later, a holy man came to Ghaziabad and, unknown to me, my father visited him to seek his blessings as well. Soon enough, the problem reoccurred. When he spoke to me about it, I was upset yet helpless. When father had already been to Guruji and received His blessings, where was the need to go anywhere else? This time, his report turned out positive. I believe Guruji had stopped the malignancy in its track, but leaving Guruji and going elsewhere, unblocked it. My father had to be operated upon, and that led to major health issues. He endured the suffering for a while, eventually succumbing to its consequences. All I could ask him was - why?

Whosoever you want to have faith in, entrust yourself to that one alone. Everything will be fine. This is the reason Guruji said just have faith in one form of the Divine. Choose carefully though because this choice will decide where you are headed. You will go wherever your Guru takes you.

This point is also highlighted in the *Bhagvad Gita*. It occurs during a conversation between Lord Krishna and his disciple, Arjuna. Krishna tells Arjuna: “You will get to whomsoever you worship. Those who worship me, come to me. But those who worship multiple gods, get nowhere.”⁷

⁷ *Bhagvad Gita*, Chapter 9, verses 22 to 25: *Ananyāś cintayanto mām ye janāḥ paryupāsate, teṣāṁ nityābhiyuktānāṁ yogakṣemaṁ vahnīmyaham* (9.22): If you resort to Me, it shall be My duty to take care of you. I shall provide you with all your requirements, and I shall also see that what you have been provided with is secure. This is a compassionate statement. Not only will we be given what we want, but that which is given will be protected, safeguarded.

9.23: *Ye’pyanyadevatābhaktā yajante śraddhayānvitāḥ, tepi mām eva kaunteya yajanty avidhipūrvakam* (9.23). What about those who worship minor gods? They also get their fruits... that the fruits they get will have a beginning and an end. They worship the Supreme Being unconsciously, through limited concepts of lesser divinities. They do not know what they are actually worshipping.

9.24: *Ahaṁ hi sarvayajñānāṁ bhoktā ca prabhuḥ eva cana tu mām abhijananti tattvenatas cyavanti* : “I am the Lord of all the fruits of sacrifices, I am the enjoyer of all these offerings made in the sacrifices, and I am also the impeller to the action of the performance of sacrifice; but people do not know I am that.”

Choose wisely. But once you have chosen, have blind faith. There is no point in choosing somebody and wondering if you made the right choice or whether you need a second opinion. People who go here, there and everywhere, find no succour. So, that lesson was learnt by me from my father's case, albeit the hard way.

On the next occasion, I got an invitation for a wedding in Punjab, something I always looked forward to, I was not alone. Four of us—Wing Commander Anil Arora, Commander Vimal Nagpal, Vijay Pushkarna and myself,—travelled together to Punjab. Travelling would take up a major portion of our time, so we could have at best two to three hours for the function. Ten o' clock had to be the cut-off time at night. I used to monitor that exit time, since I was the elder in the group. That arrangement worked very well on all but one such visit. More on that little later.

On this trip to Punjab, we first decided to call on Air Marshal Anil Chopra (Air Commodore at that time), commanding the Air Force Station at Halwara and a blessed devotee of Guruji Maharaj. With Guruji's blessings, Chopra uncle had recovered from a near-fatal case of hepatitis in a very short time. Later, Chopra Uncle had asked Guruji the reason for his almost instant recovery and complete cure. There were many others who had been around much longer and still waiting. Guruji had simply replied: "When I looked at you, I immediately knew that you were ready for blessings. So, I could bless you immediately." Guruji loves all his devotees and showers his blessings equally. It is our level of "Blessing Readiness" that decides how much and how quickly we are able to absorb. There, Guruji blessed us with His presence through His unique fragrance.

9.25: *Yānti devavrata devān Pitṛn yānti pitṛvratāḥ Yānti madyājñinopi mām:* If you worship gods like Indra, Varuna, Mitra, you will go to them. If you worship the forefathers, pitris, you will go to them. If you worship demons, you will go to demons.... Those who worship Me in truth—'in truth'—not as I appear, but as I really am in Myself, if one can contemplate on Me as I really am in Myself, as the eternal principle not involved in perishable names and forms, if they can resort to Me by meditating on Me in this way, they shall be really blessed, and they shall not return to a mortal coil.

—Swami Krishnananda's Commentary on the Bhagvad Gita, accessible at https://www.swami-krishnananda.org/bgita/bgita_28.html

From Halwara, we thought of visiting Dugri, Guruji's birthplace, which was not far. There was a challenge though. No one from the *sangat* could go to Dugri without Guruji's express permission first and we had none. We just folded our hands, closed our eyes, and said: "Maharaj, we want to visit Dugri, please grant us aagya."

Permission taken, we then headed to Dugri. We knew no one there as it was our first visit. Yet, on arrival, we were received by Ashwini Uncle. He was there to receive us under instruction from Maharaj. He was asked to receive us and show us around. In fact, Guruji had given Ashwini Uncle a complete schedule of our "planned" visit to Dugri. We had prayed to Guruji only an hour before, but He had instructed Ashwini Uncle well in advance. Who therefore had put it in our minds that we go to Dugri? Of course, Maharaj himself!

Ashwini Uncle had travelled from Chandigarh to Dugri and we followed his schedule at Guruji's sacred birthplace. The Mandir in Dugri was under construction. We met village elders and learnt much about the childhood years of Maharaj. We saw places where Maharaj had done tapasya and the place where he was born. The first time is always so special. We clicked invaluable photographs. Then, we went to Malerkotla, had *langar*, and headed back to the marriage function.

This was the first time we were travelling together. It was important that we depart on time for over eight hours of return journey by car to Gurgaon. Being the elder in the group, I was concerned. I proposed that we depart at 10 pm from the venue but found myself to be the only one prepared to depart by 10 pm. A few minutes before 10 pm, I came back to our vehicle, rested my back against it, and prayed to Guruji. "Guruji, we must leave by 10 to reach back by 6 in the morning." Almost on cue, there was an announcement that Guruji has instructed his *sangat* from Delhi to depart by 10 pm. Guru's orders were sacrosanct and could not be defied and we departed by 10. After that, our departure from *sangat* functions was always at 10 o'clock.

Maharaj comes to know what you are thinking, he also comes to know what you are going to think subsequently. I am now pretty sure that the thought in our mind that we should be visiting Dugri was put

in by Maharaj. He wanted us to go there. When I returned on Saturday, I bowed to Guruji and as I stood up, Guruji smiled and asked, “Pind gaya si?” (You went to the village?). I could only muster a grateful nod. He knew it all along. He had planned it for us. We felt so blessed.

One of the last invitations that we got from Guruji Maharaj was for a function in the month of July 2007. We were specifically told by Maharaj to take our wives along. Before we could attend that function, Maharaj had taken mahasamadhi. On all earlier occasions, we had gone without our wives. We were yet to fully reconcile to Guruji’s sudden departure. I promised myself to keep quiet in case our stay extended beyond 10 pm.

Guruji was, of course, still in charge. To my surprise, the hostess announced about ten minutes before 10 pm that the *sangat* from Delhi should depart at 10 pm. It was just astounding. It’s not just a question of the big things in our lives. Guruji lovingly controls every small detail of our lives.

The constant theme that I keep reverting to is that we are never far away from the Guru’s mind. He is always thinking about us and looking at ways to improve our lives in the best possible way. “Guru jaisa nahi ko dev:” (There is no Divine like Guruji). However, His blessings work best when devotee’s connection is direct, exclusive and one to one. Blessing readiness follows.





First Blessed Swaroop received from Guruji Maharaj. (Satsang at page 11)



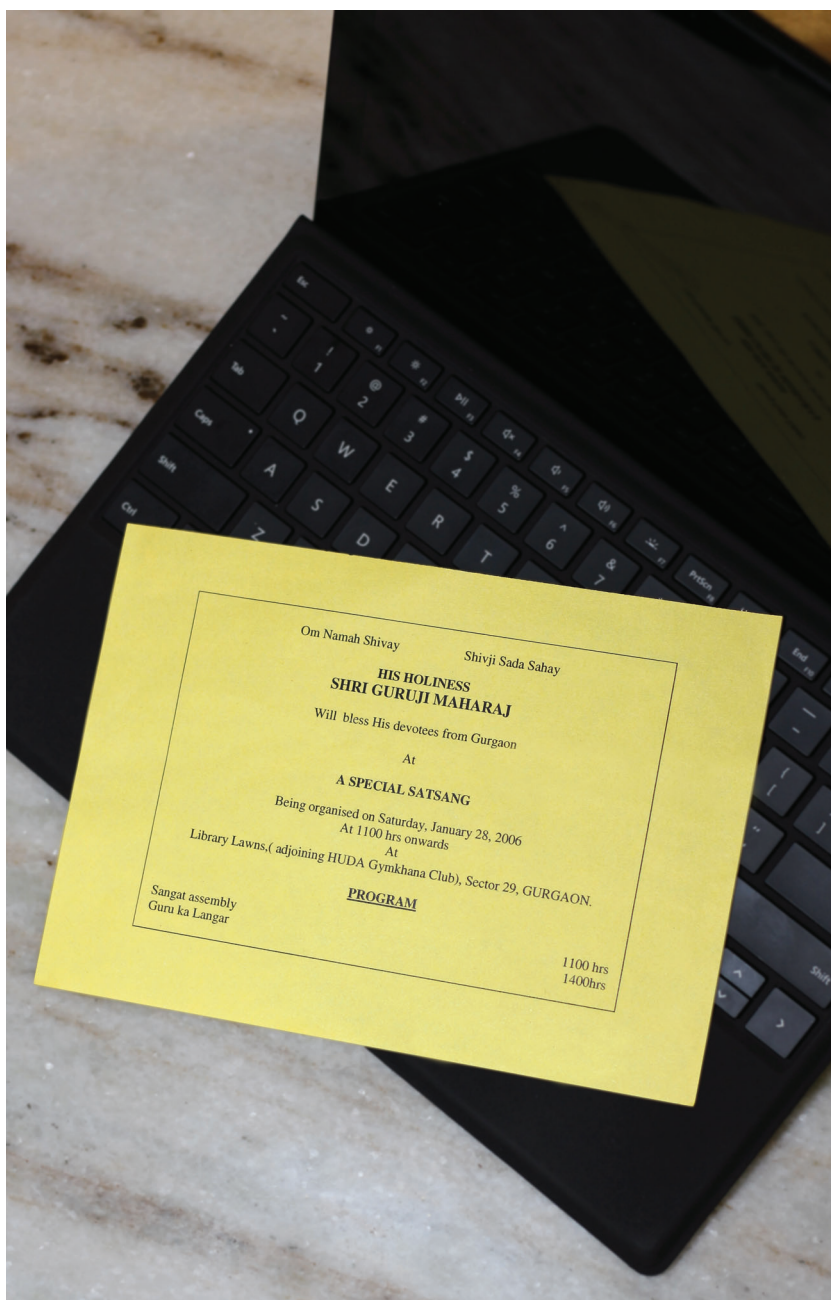
One of the lockets blessed by Guruji Maharaj, (Satsang at page 44)



Flower vase given by Guruji Maharaj at Bade Mandir. (Satsang at page 52)



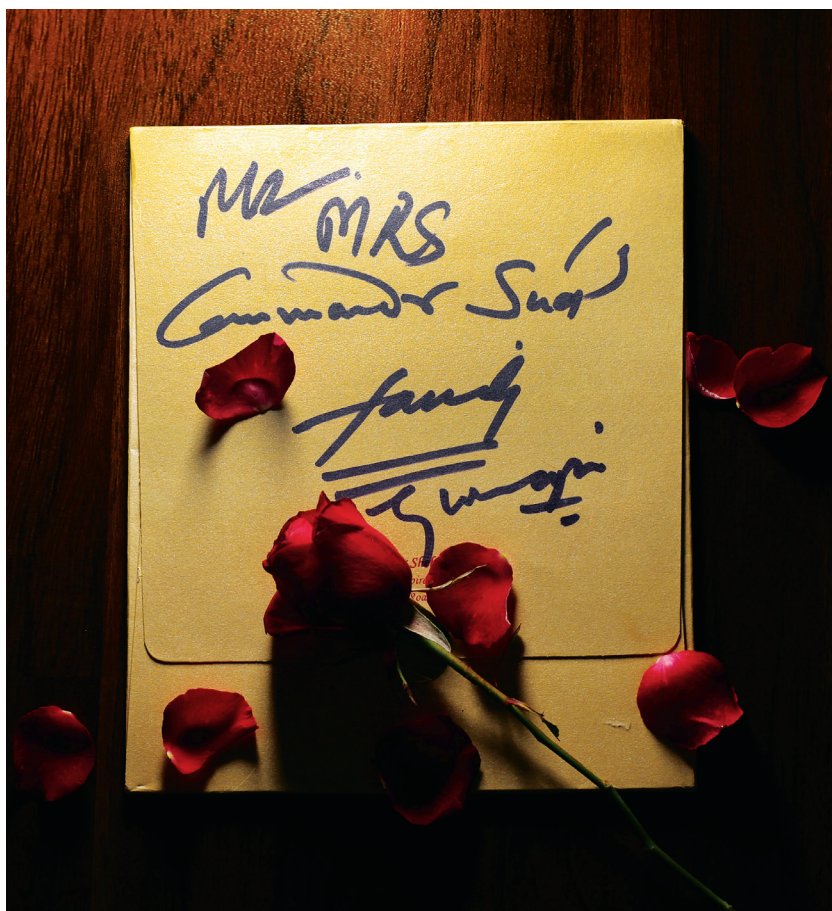
Guruji Maharaj at Gurgaon Satsang on 28 January 2006. (Satsang at page 54)



Invite for Guruji's Gurgaon Visit. (Satsang at page 55)



Invitation card to attend Marriage from Guruji Maharaj. (Satsang at page 61)



Invitation card to attend Marriage from Guruji Maharaj. (Satsang at page 61)



Swaroop from Guruji's Calendar for Year 2007. (Satsang at page 92)

...AND YOU SHALL BECOME GURUJI'S OWN

“EK TAKYA BHAROSA TERE CHARNA DA HOR SABHE DHAAIYAAN DHERIYAAN”: I trust you alone; I have demolished every other support, base, faith, theory or system. I worship you alone.

This shabad engraved itself on my mind and ensured I choose one—Guruji. You choose one and then worship Him or her. As Krishna said to Arjuna in the *Gita*, which is the purest form of dialogue between God and a human being, you become who you worship.

This is an amazing philosophy: If we worship properly, then we move into the same domain as the entity we decided to worship. That means all the virtues of the entity you worship will come into you. Arjuna would become an extension of Krishna, as his identity gets dissolved in Krishna and no difference remains between the two.

In some *shabads* that were played at Mandir, the consequences of vacillating in worship were clearly laid out. If we worship an assemblage of deities, then either we become nothing or we get to nowhere. Vitrally, our loyalty is also compromised and becomes questionable. Whom do we really have faith in? Who do we really love?

One shabad explains that a calf always goes to its own mother, who provides for and protects him. If this young and vulnerable calf goes to another, mistaking it for the mother cow, all that it gets is a strong kick. It loses out on nurturing and protection. It is left to fend for itself. Similarly, if we don't stick to one Guru, our Guruji, we are deprived of wholesome protection and spiritual guidance. We also remain endlessly confused about our sense of direction. Like I said earlier, when we want to go to Bombay, we sit on a train that takes us to Bombay. If we keep jumping trains that are moving in different directions to different destinations, where will we end up? We will be in a rabbit hole like Alice in Wonderland. There are grave risks if we make a wrong choice.

How do we choose our Guru? How do we know who is the right Guru? This is where the law of attraction comes into play. We will attract a Guru meant for us and our designated Guru will attract us.

To a large extent, this will happen naturally as long as we do not get in our designated Guru's way. We don't need to do anything. We let it be making no effort to specifically choose one. Eventually, on our own, we will get to the right Guru. As much as we are seeking a Guru, the Guru is desperately seeking us. As long as we do not do anything actively silly, we will get to the Guru we are destined for and that is the best thing that can happen to us. Our destiny will make it happen.

But how do we not do anything? By ensuring that we do not apply our mind. Guruji used to say this, as the *sangat* knows: "*Leave your intelligence along with your shoes at the shoe stand.*" The mind is a hindrance in connecting with the Divine. The Divine is beyond the function of our brains. If we continuously use our brains, we will have huge difficulty in connecting with Him. What is the essential characteristic of our mind? It teaches us how to differentiate and judge with reference to the unique psychological background we have.

Essentially, the mind takes its identity from its unique psychological set-up—or the tendencies we call *sanskaras*—and then looks out at the external world. Its chief function is to compare. Comparison is the end result of our use of intelligence.

An old TV ad for a washing powder was founded on this deep-rooted attribute. Its tag line was 'why is his shirt whiter than mine?' In the process our mind is being tempted to compare and switch to another washing powder.

This application of mind does not stop even when devotees come to Guruji. Devotees are tempted to interact amongst *sangat* to compare their blessings. Once they come to know the process other *sangat* follow to receive specific blessings, their mind immediately kicks in and they decide to imitate with the belief -"If this ritual has worked for him, it must work for me, too."

The mind has forced the devotee to take the initiative, but he has made the mistake of defining his connection with Guruji based on another devotee's experience. Clearly his focus is not on Guruji; his focus is on the processes being followed by others. To him, a result-oriented ritual is any day better and preferable compared to the endless

wait to become blessings ready. He enters into a bargain with the fountainhead of spirituality and inevitably ends up cutting the very legs of his own faith. His mind keeps comparing and walking in other *sangat's* footsteps rather than letting his own connection with Gururji to evolve.

This is how the mind functions. It compares. It compares different Gurus and wants to go to the one who, in the mind's assessment, is most likely to fulfil his desires faster, responds quicker and is, overall, better for one's ego. It's like switching doctors and the treatment protocol in the middle of a health crisis. The end result is that the patient's health is severely compromised and he would be worse off than before.

This comparison is endless.

If we are not careful, we can end up going around in circles as devotees. Our minds will make us wander between Gurus and rituals. Chances are that such devotees may become superstitious and fearful. They may become narrow-minded and vociferous believers, but their minds will never let them develop genuine trust in Gururji.

Another thing that drives a devotee here and there is his fear. The desire to have what he doesn't have and fear of losing what he already has—which is one and the same thing. Every fear is a modification of the fear of death. You want to live forever in spite of knowing that in this whole universe, everybody has eventually died. Death is the fundamental truth of existence. Everybody dies. The bravest, the biggest, the most powerful, the saints, the do-gooders and the not-so do-gooders, animals, insects, plants, everybody has to die. As a Buddhist axiom has it:

The end of accumulation is dispersion.

The end of building is ruin.

The end of meeting is parting.

The end of birth is death.⁸

⁸ *Wake up to your life: Discovering the Buddhist path of attention*, p. 104, by Ken McLeod

But we want to find ways to extend our ownership and our identity. The fear of losing wealth, of falling sick, of losing relationships, of losing respect, of losing love is a unitary fear manifesting in different reactions. This fear gives huge impetus to our mental chatter. Put simply, most of us don't like what we have, desire what others have while also hanging on to what we have. This desire constantly drives us, and it becomes our default thought process. When we come across a Guru, our mind immediately goes into overdrive, first evaluating the Guru, followed by the submission of a never-ending list of all our needs and desires. Guruji can give us what is asked for as long as it is beneficial for us. In fact, when we meet the Divine in the form of our Guru, all that He says to us is: *"Don't ask me for anything, accept me as I am and I will accept you as you are."* As Guruji Maharaj said: *"Guru kolon manngo naa, Guru nu manno."*

This is easier said than done though. Most of the people come to Guruji looking for solutions to the problems they faced. That is the sole purpose. When they are told that there is no need to communicate their problems with Guruji, it is hard to believe. Many would simply walk away in search for someone else who could listen to their problems and meet their expectations. But the lucky ones hang around long enough to realise that with Guruji Maharaj, the Divine Shiva-Brahm, we need to simply commune not communicate. We need to just tune in. The rest follows. Those who are able to commune with him, tune in, became His sangat. They became His devotees while the rest remain part of the crowd.

Guruji's *sangat* quickly figures out that Guruji does not want anything from them in return. He is not seeking any benefits; this is no trade. Otherwise, He too could ask about their troubles, indicate remedies, quickly make a tidy profit and pack them off on their way. But Guruji isn't asking them because—here is the crucial difference—He is the Divine in human form. He is beyond the illusion of the material world. As a matter of fact, He is the creator of this illusion. Guruji doesn't need to be told, He knows what is good for His *sangat* and when and how it has to be given to them without their karma

getting in the way. When He blesses His *sangat*, it is not as a result of their activities or penances. It is out of His own kindness and grandeur that He gives. If Guruji gives them a better-paying job, for instance, He has bequeathed it to them. It's not a loan, they don't have to repay it like a karmic debt. And they don't have to do anything in return. If Guruji is blessing them, He is not restructuring the karmic debt. If He cures an ailment, it is not that the same disease will come years later or in the next life. If He fixes it, He fixes it forever. For that to happen, a devotee must follow the basic rule: Accept the Guru unconditionally.

There is no need to devise rituals to get from Guruji what is wanted. One must let it be and rather, like a witness, observe what Guruji does to his/her life.

Guruji has promised us that if we hand over the reins of our chariot to Him, He will lead it straight. When Krishna became Arjun's charioteer in the war of the Mahabharata, He himself took control of the life of his disciple. We also have a chariot; we live in that chariot. It consists of the body, its senses, intelligence, I-sense, and other psychological coverings⁹. That chariot needs to be driven through the right path, to the right place. For that Guruji would like us to hand over control of our chariot to Him.

How difficult can it possibly be? What is it that is required to build that trust in Guruji that we let go of the control? What will it take for us to simply say to Guruji: "Guruji this is not my life, this is yours now. Go ahead, do exactly what you want to do with it." Fortunately, our Guruji Maharaj isn't interested in preaching theories surrounding the spiritual world. He is a practical Guru. He simply makes us listen and watch the changes that have already happened to the lives of His devotees who successfully handed over the control of their lives to Him. For this purpose alone, He established the tradition of sharing of experiences, the *satsangs*, amongst His *sangat*. The more we listen, the more we trust. The

⁹ According to the yogis, the human being is composed not of just a single physical body, but of five sheaths, or koshas. These are, from grosser to subtler energies, the annamaya, the pranamaya, manonmaya, vijnanmaya, and anandmaya koshas.

—Atma is distinct from the Pancha Koshas, article by Swami Sivananda at https://www.sivanandaonline.org/?cmd=displaysection§ion_id=748

more we trust, the more we cede control. The more we cede control, the more we become blessings ready. The more we become blessings ready, the more we get blessed. The more we get blessed, more we trust. This eventually leads us to cede complete control to Guruji. A state of complete surrender. In that state, we are blessings ready, in commune with Guruji without any need to communicate with Guruji at all. A surrendered soul exists within Guruji and Guruji exists within that soul.

There is just one aspect to keep in mind. A surrender with conditions is really not a surrender. A partial surrender is also not a surrender. It is either complete or not at all. This is brought out in the incident related to Draupadi's rescue by Lord Krishna in *Mahabharata*.

Here is the story in short. The five Pandavas had a common wife, Draupadi, who they lost to their hundred cousins, the Kauravas, in a fixed game of dice. One of the Kauravas began to disrobe Draupadi, unravelling her sari. She prayed to Krishna to rescue her.

Krishna was watching the scene from afar, along with his wife Rukmini. "Your sister is calling out to you for help, she is alone there, why don't you help her?" His wife pleaded. Krishna told her to watch more attentively. "Draupadi is still holding on to her sari with one hand. She's calling out to me as an additional, optional resource. She hasn't fully surrendered to me. She still thinks she can handle it," Krishna pointed out. As the very last wrap of her sari was tugged at, Draupadi let go, folded her hand in prayer and said to Krishna: "If you want your sister to be disrobed and humiliated, then have it your way." It was then that her surrender was complete and she ceded complete control to Krishna. At that point she became "Blessing Ready." Instantly, her sari gained yards after yards of immeasurable length, and her honour was preserved.

We can't have dual control over our chariots, our lives. There is no point in acting as Draupadi initially did and complain that Guruji didn't help. You first let go and then observe.

That brings us to another question. How do we realise that we have let go? That we have surrendered? That we have started believing in Guruji completely? The law of nature says that we cannot be at opposite extremes at the same time. Likewise we cannot be *maanne*

wala and *maangne wala* both at the same time. We can either demand or we can surrender. It is a journey which may start as *maangne walla* but it must conclude as *mannne walla*.

To start with, let us try not to ask. We try not to give in to the temptation of asking anything. If required, let us fight with our ego internally. Let us refuse to be the ones who ask. We will gradually move to the other extreme of belief and surrender. We will progress to being 'Blessings Ready'.

A combination of surrender to Guruji, acceptance of the circumstances and belief in Guruji's promise will make a devotee "Blessings Ready".

But how will this unfold?

Here is my two cents worth. First, deny yourself the right to desire, and complain. Listen to the *satsangs* of other *sangat*. Hope that just like in case of other *sangat*, Guruji's blessings are headed your way, too. But do not ask. Resist the temptation. This is crucial. You may not have faith, but have hope. Have hope in the face of adversity. With time, Guruji will take care of you just like he has done for millions.

May be, you will go through some upheaval, or have some troubles along the way, but by not asking, you automatically and gradually cede control to Guruji. With time, the realisation will happen on its own. As soon as you realise that He knows, the issue will be solved for good. This realisation will bring you a little closer to accepting Him. Not asking will become a lot easier.

Slowly, you will graduate.

From "I will not ask" to "I do not need to ask."

From "I do not need to ask" to "I am happy with whatever Guruji gives".

From "I am happy with whatever Guruji gives" to "I am happy being with Guruji".

At this point, the Surrender is complete. In short, you eventually realise that Guruji is all that you ever wanted in the first place. You also realise that Guruji does for you what He does out of sheer love for you.

It all started with you deciding to not to ask Guruji for anything.

I have this Divine Guru in my life, what else do I want? As soon as this feeling dawns, everything becomes simple. He has the control. Your life will not fall apart because the reins are in his hands! You will go along a better road because He is leading you on. You will reach your destination. As soon as you stop asking, the floodgates of blessings open because now you have become “Blessings Ready.”

Jo Hari Jappe, So Hari Hoya: The one who worships God becomes God. And the one who becomes God, doesn’t need to ask. He is in a position to just will it to happen and it happens, because his will is one with the Divine.

As the *shabad* has it: *Jo mange thakur apne se, soyi soyi deve*: Whatever I ask from my Master, He provides. The words “*apne se*” are important. That means, this disciple claims the Guru as his own. He has established that eternal tie of first-hand kinship with the Guru. Then the second line is even more wonderful: “*Nanak das mukh se jo bole, eehaa oohaa sach hove.*” Once such an identity has been established, whatever the devotee prophesizes happens! This means that by accepting your Guru, by connecting to your Guru, by surrendering to Him and by worshipping your Guru, you are well on the path to be a part of His existence. You lose your false and temporary identity and from someone who came like a beggar to His door, you actually become the Grand Giver yourselves. So, when Guruji says, *Mango nahi, manno*, he means if you accept me unconditionally, you will not have any need to ask.

The devotee not only entrusts himself to the Guru, but he also goes beyond prayer. A devotee can beseech the Guru to be with him, but the devotee who realises his one-ness with the Guru affirms that the Guru is with Him all the time: *Guru ang sang sada hai nale*. Such a disciple leaves the Guru with no choice because the devotee is coming from the standpoint of truth. And the Guru is Truth. So how can such a disciple be denied?

When Lord Krishna says, those who *worship* me, they come to me, the word worship is still here. There is a worshipper and an object of worship. Arjun, the disciple, asks Krishna, the best way of connecting to

Him and getting His blessings. The answer, translated for our context, is: “Those who do rituals and spend their time in understanding the ways of God, and those who indulge in processes, they sometimes get to me. But it is easy for those who go about doing their routine work even as they remember me all the time.”¹⁰ They get to me without any difficulty.”

Guruji wants us to walk the middle path. We are neither to become home-renouncing ascetics nor be men of the world. We have to stay balanced and become a *rasik vairagi*; that is, a person who is detached from the world even as he fulfils all his roles in it. His guideline for achieving this is built around a wholesome family, where a husband takes care of the wife, the wife takes care of the husband, and they together take care of their children. They also love, respect and trust each other, being responsible for one another and among themselves. This enables Guruji to be easily present with the family and bless them.

The best form of *sewa* is to remember God while engaged in life. As The Autobiography of a Yogi says: A true man is he who dwells in righteousness among his fellow men, who buys and sells, yet is never for a single instant forgetful of God!



¹⁰ Chapter 8, verse 7 of the Gita: *Tasmāt sarveṣu kālēṣu mām anusmara yudhya ca, mayyarpitamanobuddhir mām evaiśyasyasaṁśayaḥ*: “Therefore, I tell you: be constantly devoted to Me day in and day out, and engage yourself in your prescribed duty.” The word *yudhya* is used here, which means ‘fight’. In the particular historical context of the Mahabharata, the instruction was: “Resort yourself to Me, surrender yourself to Me, completely rely on Me, and then fight.” It applies to any kind of fight. The confrontation that we feel in our life, the opposition that we have to face, the duties that we have to perform, the obligations which are incumbent upon us are actually the *yuddha*, the war in which we are engaged in this big battlefield of God’s creation. “Resorting to Me completely, engage yourself in this duty that is incumbent upon you.”

—Commentary on the *Bhagvad Gita*, by Swami Krishnananda

GURUJI – THE AMAZING SHIVA!

GURUJI, IN SPITE OF BEING LORD SHIVA HIMSELF, ALWAYS KEPT HIS CONNECTION WITH HIS SANGAT VERY SIMPLE.

In a way though, it was nice. For, if He had not interacted like a human, we would have not been able to approach Him so easily. If He had let us know of His true self, a relationship with Him would have become unimaginable for a lesser mortal like me. He was our Guru and also our Father; the head of the family; the ever-loving Mother. We could go in front of Him and cry. We could laugh. He would cut jokes and we would enjoy those. He would appear visibly upset and we would get scared. By coming down to our level, He made it possible for us to relate with Him. Now we know better, principally because the new *sangat* has shown us and taught us all the while that Lord Shiva Himself sat on that *asana*.

Of course, there were inklings of who He was. Once a devotee who had been a childhood friend of Guruji spent an evening with me. He told me an amazing story of Guruji's early student years.

They were giving an exam together in class. A boy stopped writing, as there was no ink in his fountain pen. A very young Guruji looked at him, asked for his pen, blew at it and the pen started writing again. The teacher saw what had transpired and suspected the kids were trying to exchange information. He asked them what they were talking about. Guruji told the teacher exactly what had happened. The teacher straightaway took Guruji to the Principal, who gave Guruji another pen and asked him to fill it up. Guruji did just that—to his considerable astonishment.

My takeaway is that our Guruji did not acquire these capabilities through some kind of *sadhana* or *tapasya*. He was born Divine. He was an avatar, a descent of Godhead into a human body. He did not become enlightened or attained self-realization. He is forever Shiva.

Few personal instances of His divinity happened with my wife and

me. These are instances we can only term supernatural, as way beyond the scope of human understanding. We are privy to instances that make the laws of physics look foolish and appear to defy the known theory of time and space. Instances that mocked at the foundation of all natural laws— “cause must come before effect.”

Devotees would come to know, as time went by, that Guruji could manifest *prasad* out of thin air. He would get *prasad* for His *sangat* from *Sach Khand*—the highest abode of divinity. I came across devotees who had the great fortune of partaking of this *prasad* and shared that experience to us as a *satsang*. I would often yearn for this blessing from Guruji Maharaj myself.

One night as I was sleeping, I had Maharaj’s darshan. He gave me a sweet, likely a *barfi*. He was sitting on a chair, with a table in front. He told me to take the *barfi*, but not to finish it completely and to keep it for later. He instructed me about when that *prasad* would be used.

Though it was not a Saturday, I still decided to visit Empire Estate the next day and have Guruji’s *darshan*. My wife was content with her Saturday routine and decided to give it a pass. A few other devotees agreed to accompany me. We were all in the Mandir on that day. Half-way through a shabad, the music stopped. Somebody whispered in my ear that Maharaj was going to distribute divine *prasad*. I had goosebumps! My dream was about to come true. Guruji’s hands were folded, a little above His forehead, and then out of nowhere, a sweet appeared in His hands. It was a small *peda*. There were around 250 devotees present that day. Colonel Joshi Uncle told the *sangat* seated in the rear, which included me, to go to the first floor and wait. Very reluctantly, I moved to the first floor, thinking that the little quantity of *prasad* would be finished much before my turn.

That thought made me sad. I wanted to stay back. I wanted the divine *prasad*. The previous night’s dream was still fresh in my mind. I sat there with Grewal Uncle seated by my side. I made my apprehension known to him: That I was fortunate enough to be present when divine *prasad* was being produced, but it would be over by the time my turn came. That was not fair. He pressed my shoulder and said that if even

the whole of Delhi showed up, the *prasad* would still not finish. I would get it, he proclaimed.

Minutes later, the *sangat* from the first floor was called down and we queued up. I saw an old devotee beside Guruji, holding the *prasad* carefully on a white handkerchief spread over his hands. When my turn came, Maharaj gave me a substantial amount of *prasad*. I'm sure if everybody had that much *prasad*, it would have been finished among the first twenty devotees. But the entire *sangat* had that *prasad* and half of it still remained. That portion was given to the devotee holding the divine *prasad* in his hands. He was asked to take it home as His blessing.

Partaking the *Sach Khand prasad* was not like eating anything else. As soon as it was on the tongue, its effects were felt all over the body. As I put it in my mouth, it instantly reached and cooled my entire body. The *prasad* was full of fragrance. I had a little and, as advised by Grewal Uncle, took home the rest. I remembered my dream, shared a bit within the family and kept the rest as instructed. Even all these years since, it continues to be the most precious benediction we have at home. I await Maharaj's instructions for what to do with it.

It is a truism for us devotees that anybody who gets Maharaj's divine *prasad* is blessed. My doubts, if any, were dispelled by Grewal Uncle. Those days we always found ourselves sitting together on the first floor, where the old *sangat* sat while the new ones got an opportunity to be seated in front of Maharaj. On one occasion, Maharaj was seated on the cabinet next to the kitchen in His informal attire as we both arrived one after the other. I bowed my head, received His blessings and took my place on the first floor. Grewal Uncle also came up and sat next to me. Grewal Uncle told me, "Commander, Guruji has blessed you."

He told me what had just happened. Guruji had said: "*Tere dost ka kalyan kar ditta.*" (I have blessed your friend.) He didn't understand the reference to the friend, so he asked Guruji, "*Keda dost, Guruji?*" Guruji said, "*O tera dost—Commander.*" Could there be a bigger blessing for me than this? With His continued blessings, I have become a better and improved version of my earlier self in every possible way. I

can't take any credit for being who I am and doing what I do. We, the *sangat*, are Guruji's blessings on display. On our own, we are good for nothing.

For Him to bring about such transformation is only possible because He is Shiva, the Lord who can rewrite destiny.

The production of the *sach khand prasad* is but one example of His divinity. What my wife experienced at Bade Mandir on another occasion was literally out of this world. Her experience, difficult to grasp at the time it happened, clearly shows how His divinity is everywhere, acting in several dimensions, different realms, all at the same time.

Nobody ever gets elevated spiritually without an element of suffering. It is essential. If we are not suffering, we are getting nowhere. When we are enjoying life, when we are enjoying the physical world, we are essentially spending money from our bank account. But when we suffer, we put money back in our bank account. That is why only a poor, weak or sick person is in a position to bless others. Likewise, the elderly who are suffering the physical infirmity that time brings also acquire the ability to bless. When we take care of them, we receive their blessings. Our parents can bless us, our elders can bless us because they too have endured suffering. The rich and famous can't bless us. Remember, a blessing is something which one can only give if one has it. Suffering empowers us. With suffering our karmic bank account swells and that can be shared with others. Never look at suffering unwelcomingly.

Occasionally, it is the suffering, present or impending, that opens the door of Guruji's Durbar for us. If we suffer even as Guruji's *sangat*, be rest assured, that it is a part of Guruji's plan to get us rid of our karmas and make us a worthy *sangat*. Guruji and we are in this process together. We suffer but a fraction of our dues while Guruji takes on the remaining majority of the suffering upon Himself. All this while, He won't leave our hand, no matter what He has to do, what He has to endure and how much time it takes. He will make us Blessings Ready. For some, this whole process may take just a minute, for others it may

take a hundred lifetimes. But happen it will. And in this journey of life and beyond, the Guru is forever going to hold our hand. The following experience of my wife will clarify this point further.

It was the festive and joyous occasion of Guruji's birthday in 2004. My wife was inside the hall, while I was attending to my *sewa*, conducted in front of the kitchen. From inside the hall, up to 50 devotees were being taken outside for *langar* at a time, so that more could be ushered into Guruji's presence. Suddenly, the kitchen paused serving *langar* temporarily. Simultaneously, a large number of devotees landed from Punjab and entered the hall.

Because of this rush of devotees, my wife found herself stuck right in front of Guruji, unable to move in either direction. *Sewaks* asked devotees to sit down where they were. My wife couldn't dare sit right next to Guruji Maharaj. Guruji looked at her and told her to sit down right there. Guruji Himself removed his *juttis*, and sat cross-legged on the *asana*, thus creating additional space for her to sit comfortably. As she sat, she was pushed further towards Guruji by the devotees from behind. Guruji's sacred *juttis* touched her right knee—she was so close to Maharaj. Great blessing! As the kitchen began serving *langar* after a while, she had to get up and go. She felt excruciating pain in the right knee, just where the *juttis* had touched her. She later told me that it was the worst kind of pain she had ever felt in her life. Way more than what she had to bear during childbirth.

One would rightly think that because she was so close to Guruji and had inadvertently touched Guruji's *juttis*, there could have been no bigger blessing. As she exited the main hall for *langar*, she found herself in a different world. *Langar* wasn't being served here. Fully-bearded devotees clad in white were simply floating in the air as they moved around chatting or singing happily to themselves. My wife was disoriented, in pain, sweating profusely and crying.

Resting her head against a wall, my wife began looking for me. She approached one devotee who appeared familiar and asked him to look for me and convey that she was sick and in urgent need of medical attention. She wanted me to take her home immediately. This devotee

completely ignored her. Then, she approached another devotee, but he also ignored her. She tried to grab his hand to stop him physically, but her hand passed through him as if he was made up of smoke. She could not touch or grab him. Completely dejected, my wife dragged herself to the wall next to the kitchen and stood there crying.

She thought she was dead because the people were phantasmal. She cried anew as she realised she had not bid farewell to the children and she couldn't go back. She was very angry with me for not being there to help her when she needed me the most. Even when I am doing *sewa*, I regularly come around to inquire about her well-being. That day, too, I tried but could not spot her. I even asked around for her but devotees couldn't tell me of her whereabouts. It was as if she had vanished into thin air. We later figured out that my wife and I were in front of the kitchen at the same time, but *she was in a different realm*.

My wife saw a bearded person hand her some *langar*. She saw only his beard and his feet, which reminded her of Guruji. She protested that she was in pain and didn't want to eat anything but ended up with the plate in her hand anyway. She noticed that the *langar* was not food as we knew it, but a charcoal-coloured substance. This person disappeared after giving her the plate. Realising that His feet resembled those of Guruji's, she somehow persuaded herself to eat whatever that *langar* was. And then the *langar* plate vanished from her hand. She felt like vomiting but did not want to do so in front of the kitchen area and thought of going to the washroom but was unable to walk. Yet, as she thought about going to the washroom, she was there. She vomited some black substance—Guruji only knows what it was.

Immediately after, she found herself back in the 'normal' plane of things. The washroom was as it used to be. The whole area where she had this experience had been snowy white, with everybody in white clothes. It had now dematerialised and she was 'back' in the Mandir.

She came out of the washroom and the pain was gone. She walked but was sweating from head to toe. She came looking for me and sat on the steps leading to the main Durbar hall. At around 2 am, I finally found her there. She looked sick and miserable. I got really scared.

At that moment all that she wanted was to go home. I explained that I could not take her home without Guruji's permission. I, like other devotees, had the conviction that we were always safe inside the Mandir. She protested, but I reiterated that we would go home only after receiving Guruji's permission. Even though I did not know what she had been through, I knew she was safe inside the Mandir with Guruji. She protested that Guruji would hold me back for another hour, while she would be suffering. I went inside and Guruji instantly granted me permission. He obviously knew.

We drove back home. My wife woke me up the next morning with a cup of tea and my reaction was to ask her to rest. She said there was nothing wrong with her, and that she was fine and pain-free. She told me what had happened yet I was none the wiser.

We have always wondered what this experience meant. We had known that Guruji said His other world is white, so I believed she had gone to Guruji's afterlife world and came back. We could only make some sense of this experience after we heard a devotional shabad that elaborated on how *satsangs* are significant. This shabad's key line is, "*Aisi lal tujh bin kaun kare /garib nawaz gosaiyaan mera maathe chhatr dhare.*"

The *vyakha*, or explication, of this shabad tells how the King of Mandi became a follower of Shri Guru Arjan Dev ji Maharaj and would visit Him for *darshans* and *satsangs*. One day, at the camp of the Guru Maharaj, he heard a devotee hymning a verse which said that what had been decreed could not be overwritten. The King asked Guru Maharaj if no alteration or mending of destiny was possible. If we had to go through the effects of karma, what was the point of *satsangs*? Guru Maharaj deferred answering him that day and the king went back to his palace.

That night, the king had a dream. He saw that he had become a sweeper in his next life and died in poverty, leaving behind his wife and children.

The next day, Guru Maharaj took him for a ride on horseback to a village. The villagers reacted with amazement and some indignation at

the king's presence. A sweeper who looked just like the king and was of the same age had passed away the day before. They were annoyed that now he was traipsing about in royal robes instead of taking care of his family. His wife and children also couldn't accept him as king.

The king maintained he was the King of Mandi even though he felt sorry for the plight of the family; the villagers insisted he was the recently deceased sweeper. The Guru stood apart smiling and when the problem came to him for resolution, he asked the villagers to dig up the sweeper's grave. If a body was found, it would quite conclusively prove the sweeper was dead and that this was not a masquerade. And so it was. The body of the sweeper was indeed found in the grave.

As Guru Maharaj and his royal follower rode back, the king again wanted to know the benefit of attending a *satsang*. Guru Maharaj told him that he had just experienced the benefits. Guru Maharaj explained that in the life to come, the king had to be born as a lowly sweeper and live up to 35 years, getting married, having children, and passing his days in penury. But because he had come to the Satguru or *Purna Guru*, one entire lifecycle of his misery-causing karmas had been washed away through a single dream. The karmas had to be borne but through the supreme grace of the Satguru, those karmas were made to give their fruits in a dimension where suffering was made unreal.

As Guruji also used to say: "*Shool ko sui bana diya.*" That is, the terrible suffering was lessened to as little as a needle jab's worth of pain.

We understood that my wife had also gone through an experience in a dimension where Guruji had converted and truncated her suffering to just a few hours of pain and travel to His other abode. Such is our Guruji. There is nothing beyond Him and can never be. As Shiva, he enjoys complete freedom. There is none that can thwart His will. He obeys no human strictures related to social mores or conduct; He only adopts these to please and bless His devotees. Witness Shiva's marriage to Mother Parvati, where he dropped his ascetic dress code for that of a groom. Similarly, Guruji, too, flouted the conventional norms of attire associated with saints.

Even small incidents show His over-lordship of all the *lokas*, all the different dimensions of existence.

During a major function at Bade Mandir, there was a sudden influx of *sangat*, requiring additional *langar* preparations. I was asked to go and procure some wheat flour. It was one o'clock at night; all the shops had closed. Accompanied by another senior sevak, I went looking for wheat flour.

When the Guru gives a *sewa*, the Guru also creates a situation where that *sewa* is indeed fulfilled. This is the beauty of faith. We stopped at a small house where an elderly lady was sleeping outside on a cot. With folded hands, we addressed her as grandma and simply asked her for flour. She told us to pick up two bags from inside her home. We were complete strangers and didn't even have money to pay her at that time. We told her we would settle the payment the day after, and she said that was okay, and we were back at the *satsang* in ten minutes.

This *satsang* may on the face of it appear trivial. But behind the successful completion of this *sewa* is the Guru's large and overpowering presence, always reminding us that He is with us. We do not need anyone else in our life. He is all that we need. All we have to do is have faith in Him. We did not question even for a second that we would not find wheat flour at that odd hour. I am sure that grandma also received Guruji's blessings that day.

Similarly, during a Diwali night at Empire Estate, Guruji Maharaj decided to distribute sweets to the *sangat* as *prasad*. He asked the *sewaks* to get hold of some *mithai*. The *sewaks* who went for the Guru-inspired errand found a single shop open (again late at night), and they emptied it of *mithai* and brought it all back. I had not gone out with the *sewaks* then, and I remember Guruji, just to make sure that everybody got the same *prasad*, mixed all the *mithai* together with His hands. Everybody got everything and that too in the huge quantity that was a pointer to His boundless generosity. Maharaj always gave us a lot to eat. The other thing he gave us in heaps was His grace.

That Guruji is Lord Shiva should now be evident. One of the foremost characteristics of Shiva is His compassion: His love is such

that he takes other's sufferings upon himself. There is no better example of this than Lord Shiva drinking the poison, or *Halabala*, that came up from the churning of the ocean lest it kills all creation. All the gods drank up the Amrut, or nectar of immortality. As the supreme yogi, He keeps the poison in His throat, not allowing it to come down to his belly—where all the worlds reside. Ever since he has been known as Neelkantha, or the blue-throated one. All Shiva *lingas* have a vessel atop them from which water drops to soothe the heat of the tapas Lord Shiva undertakes to neutralise the poison.

The readiness and ease with which Guruji took His devotees' problems upon himself are legendary. Just like Lord Shiva consumed the poison, Maharaj drew away the poisons of our life. And this is not a theoretical or philosophical position. Each day, Maharaj would suffer on account of accepting sufferings of His sangat upon Himself. A devotee asked him once, why Guruji had to suffer. By way of answer, He asked the devotee a counter-question: What did she do? This lady was a politician. She said she took care of the people of her constituency. Guruji told her that taking care of His devotees was His job. This is God's job, this is the job of the Guru: To alleviate his *sangat* of their pain, suffering and their problems. In fact, even devotees come to partake of the Shiva *tattva* when they are compassionate and ready to help others or try and ease their suffering.

There is another parallel between Guruji and Lord Shiva. Shiva is the consummate yogi, he is in *samadhi* even when he is in the world. He does not need a separate time or dimension to be meditative. Resultantly, his body is of pure light. And it also generates heat. Devotees should know that the kitchen cabinet, a shelf space outside the kitchen, on which Guruji sat informally, was affected similarly. The intense heat of Guruji's aura blackened the varnish; it was there for all to see.

Another sign of the divine Guru: No matter what the weather, Guruji would take a freezing iced sweet lemon drink (as related in the chapter on him coming to Gurgaon in January).

Once Maa Parvati asked Lord Shiva, how is He to be pleased? He said he was not easily pleased with *yagyas*, rituals, and exoteric acts.

He simply wants love and devotion. Give him that and Bhole Nath becomes the beloved of His devotees. Same is the case with Guruji. He took his devotees away from all hypocrisy (*pakhand*) and only wanted sincerity of action and devotional longing. As Shiva, Guruji ignores the deficiencies of His devotees and stands by them. He blesses everybody no matter who they are and what their standing is. He doesn't pick and choose; He grants them refuge at His feet. The overriding qualification is their love for Him.

His stories are many, He Himself is Infinite—as our scriptures say: “*Hari ananta, Hari katha ananta.*” Don't try to understand Guruji, just be happy. When you have Guruji in your life, there is no need for you to compare destinies with anybody else. As far as the *sangat* is concerned, they are here with Guruji and they will always be with Guruji. Guruji used to say that “my *sangat* is with me here in this earthly world and with me in afterlife as well.” Who else can give us this assurance but God himself? We are not going to be lost ever. We will always be with our beloved Guruji. Stay blessed as always. Be with Maharaj and always live under the umbrella of His blessings.



BLESSINGS ALWAYS: 'I AM NOT LEAVING MY SANGAT'

IT WAS A NORMAL DAY. I WAS HEADING OFF FOR A ROUND OF GOLF IN THE MORNING sometime before 6 o'clock when I got a call from Singla Uncle. Guruji was not well, he told me, adding that the Gurgaon *sangat* should pray for Him.

All kinds of thoughts overwhelmed my mind: "Guruji is our Lord and Master. He takes care of us. We are because of Him. He is not well and we are supposed to pray for Him?" It somehow didn't add up. The reversal implicit in the situation made me think it was some kind of a test Guruji had thrown at us.

I came home and sent a message to the Gurgaon *sangat* via SMS. Each devotee, I later came to know, quietly did *jaap*. This continued for around half an hour to forty-five minutes. I got another phone call and was told that there was no need for the *jaap* to continue anymore. I thought maybe the test was over. I sent a message to devotees, effectively saying, "All is well, please stop praying."

After some time, I got another call, this time from a close friend and devotee, who just said: "Bhaiji, Guruji is gone." Before I could latch on to the meaning, he added that Guruji was no more. I was standing next to the kitchen with my wife. I turned to her and repeated the words. She rushed to me, held me in a tight hug, and said, "What will happen to us?" Numbed to the bones, all I could mumble was, "I have no idea."

It was life's worst moment. Everything was lost. I was unable to come to terms with what I had been told. Then I got a follow-up message that Maharaj is at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences. I rushed there. Already word had spread and *sangat* had started gathering there. There was no need to ask anyone. Their faces said it all. I remember Guruji's *sangat* scattered around outside, in tears. Everyone was trying hard to come to terms with what had just happened. The whole complex was full of His fragrance. Not just

the room, not just the corridor, the whole institute was full of His fragrance.

As if in a trance, I walked towards the ICU. Nobody was there and as I was standing there—lost—one uncle came out of the ICU and asked me if I wanted to have Guruji's darshan one last time. I went inside. Guruji was on a hospital bed; I held His feet, which were sockless, with both my hands and put my head on them for one last time.

At Empire Estate, Guruji had always worn socks, and I had wondered if I would ever get a chance to hold His feet when they were not clad in socks. I had thought that such a blessed moment would never come. At the very last moment, Maharaj had fulfilled this cherished desire too. But it came with so much sorrow. We all hoped Guruji would get up; that this was His *leela*. We thought that He loved His *sangat* so much He would not leave them. Looking back, He never did.

I had His last darshan in the physical form on May 26, 2007, the Saturday before May 31. Devotees were taking *aagya* to go home and I must have been eighth or ninth in the line with as many devotees behind me. Guruji leaned to the left, looked at me and said: "Commander, go home!" I would have loved to touch His feet, but because of His *aagya*, I bowed from a distance, did not even gaze at Him, and walked away with absolutely no idea of what Maharaj had planned for Himself and His *sangat*.

For quite some time during the preceding months, we had heard talks about Guruji's plans to go. In fact, in May 2007, He told a number of *sangat* that He was here only up to the end of the month. I, like most others, assumed that Guruji would perhaps move to Punjab, where He was known to be very happy and relaxed. That was clearly not the case when He was in Delhi. I shared my thoughts with my wife. That we would not be able to see Him every Saturday. Instead we would go to Punjab at least once a month. My wife agreed.

I also remember how Guruji had responded to a couple who came to Guruji towards the very end of May. Guruji asked them if this was

their first visit and they said yes. They were late in coming to Him, He pronounced, He was going. The *sangat* around Him asked Him where He was going, but he didn't answer the question. Later, it all added up.

The memory of Guruji leaning to the side, looking at me and ordering me to go home is still indelibly etched on my mind. I regret that I could never get to touch His feet and press them as I was wont to do, but I am happy that He called out my name. Now, I ask myself why I hadn't looked up for that one eye contact at what was going to be our last moment together. This habit of keeping my eyes low and not looking at Maharaj had cost me dear, so to say. This, and not resting my head on His feet one last time, haunts me to date. I asked Guruji why He had not allowed it even as I consoled myself with the thought that He called me out, saying "Commander."

For quite some time, the devotees grieved.

For my wife, Guruji came in her dream on May 30, 2007. She saw Guruji seated in the centre of the hall, not on His asana, but in the very clothes He wore on the very last day. She wanted to sit next to Guruji, instead He asked her to go outside. She was not happy and then Guruji told her again, "You go out and do *sewa*. The people who are sitting with me here are sick." She reluctantly went out.

Maharaj had gone—and gone without warning. In the starkness of our grief, we felt a huge void. Our world had literally collapsed. There was an unvoiced feeling that this was the end of our beautiful association. Slowly, our perception changed. His fragrance never left us and could be felt at the Mandir, in the lawns, in the surrounding environs even more intensely than ever before. Every gust of the wind would bring it back to reassure us of His presence. It was unforgettable. At Bade Mandir, my wife met a lady devotee, Paul Auntie, who grabbed her and gave her a tight hug, crying and wondering what would happen to her family now that Guruji was gone. We were like young kids, whose mother had left them suddenly, all helpless.

That night my wife dreamt she was at a *satsang*. Guruji appeared from behind a curtain which was close to His My wife looked at Him

and exclaimed, “Guruji, you are here?” Guruji said, “Then what? You guys are thinking I’m gone? I’m here. I have not gone anywhere else. And that Paul Aunty, she was crying. She doesn’t know that I am here. You go and tell her that I am here. I’m not going anywhere. I’m not leaving my *sangat*.” It was much later that my wife met Paul Aunty. She told her what Guruji had proclaimed.

Very slowly, devotees realised that Maharaj had not left them. Yes, He just didn’t look and feel the way He used to at that time. But the intensity of His presence, everything about Him has multiplied manifold. Slowly, the *sangat* began to feel normal again. Most devotees got His darshan in their dreams. The devotees who joined the *sangat* later began getting blessed at a rate that was phenomenal. Some old devotees, like me, even wondered why they never had that kind of instantaneous deliverance into faith and kinship with Guruji.

In private conversations, the new *sangat* often tells us that we, the old *sangat*, have been very lucky to have seen Guruji in physical form. That indeed is true, but the old *sangat* had connected with Guruji’s physical presence and become much attached to it. When this presence was lost, it was as if we had lost one of our parents. The realism of His physicality is not something that can be made up for as long as we are operating via our physical body. For most of us, the opportunity of being near Him, to be in the same room breathing the very air He breathed, to be able to touch His feet, to be able to listen to His voice, to have Him look at us with love and grace—is extremely hard to let go. In a certain sense, we, the old *sangat*, live with this sense of loss. The new *sangat* has always connected to the Divine, to Lord Shiva, without having these memories to grapple with.

Though his leap into the beyond took us by surprise, in retrospect, it is clear that Guruji had planned it well in advance.

First, around year 2005, when I was taking His leave, Maharaj told me to write down my *satsang* and hand it over to Sumit Jethra Uncle. I did not know what it was meant for, but I dutifully complied. Very soon, we realised that a *granth* was being compiled with experiences of *sangat* Guruji had chosen to be included. The *satsangs* were

compiled into a book, titled “Light of Divinity”, which came out on Guruji’s birthday in year 2007. It is His abiding blessing for all of us and future generations of devotees. But this was very unusual because, mentioning Maharaj in print or electronic media was not permitted till then.

Second, His exhortation to us to bring more devotees to him to bless had a significance. An announcement was made that Guruji wanted to bless even more *sangat*, and we should get new *sangat* to connect with Guruji. We should do *satsangs*, and bring people to Maharaj so that He could bless them. He wanted to bless as many as He could.

As old *sangat*, we found that Empire Estate was getting crowded with devotees, and we were getting edged out. New devotees took up the ground-floor hall where Guruji sat and old devotees were sent to the first floor, depriving them of darshan, and were asked to come infrequently. As more and more people came in, the old devotees were squeezed out. An incentive was given to them: They could come more than once if they were accompanied by a new *sangat*. We would strive to get a hold of people, share our *satsangs* and have them come to Guruji, enticing them with an offer of an “out of the world” *langar*.

Finally, the third indication was a yearly calendar that was distributed to the *sangat* for the very first time. Rashmi Singh Aunty had been requesting Guruji Maharaj to permit her to print calendars for the *sangat* every year since 2002 onwards. Guruji never gave His permission all those years and that was that. Early in the year 2007, one day in Empire Estate, she got four identical swaroops of Guruji and requested Maharaj to sign each of them on the front. Guruji happily obliged by signing all of them with “Blessings Always Guruji”. She later used one of these four signed swaroops to print two calendars for her personal use and brought these to Maharaj for His blessings.

Guruji Maharaj was very pleased with the way the calendars had turned out. He then sought Rashmi Singh Aunty’s opinion about printing them in large numbers for distribution amongst His *sangat*.

Exactly what aunty had been unsuccessfully requesting since the past five years! She got the Calendars printed and for the first time they were distributed amongst the sangat on Shivratri day, strictly one per family. Moreover, the calendar distribution continued up to perhaps April–May 2007. We know now that Maharaj’s change of mind was clearly not a coincidence. He planned it. The widely used iconic signatures, “*Blessings Always Guruji*”, that are so popular amongst sangat these days, belong to that very calendar of 2007.

On the one hand, we do not have Guruji in his physical form with us today. On the other, we continue to feel His presence around us all the time. Additionally, we have His *sangat*, His beautiful memories and this *sewa* of sharing our divine moments with Guruji with those who came to Guruji’s *sharan* later.

Guruji is still here. His aura is here. His blessings are here. They haven’t gone. Guruji did not hold our hand to let go of it. Once we realised this, the pain slowly eased off. It took a long time, but it eased off.

His physical presence has gone, but He continues to live in our hearts and holds the reins of our chariots in His divine hands. That alone keeps us going on the right path. That is indeed a huge blessing and the only thing that matters. An episode in the Mahabharata illustrates this the best.

When the Great War was over with the Pandavas emerging victorious, Krishna asked Arjuna to dismount from his chariot first. Arjuna, out of sheer arrogance, he had won the war after all, felt his charioteer should get off first and then help the victorious warrior dismount. He conveyed as much to Krishna. The Lord demurred, saying that today Arjuna would have to get off first, this time being an exception. He reluctantly complied and then Krishna alighted from the chariot—which immediately went up in flames. It was gutted and reduced to ashes. Krishna then explained to Arjuna that Arjuna’s chariot had long been reduced to ashes such was the severity of the attacks it had come under. The weapons that had assailed it were formidable. As long as He was sitting on it, the Lord explained, it held

together. If He had alighted from the chariot first, Arjuna would also have met the fate of the chariot.¹¹

This story holds a mirror before us. Our body is the chariot and we reside in it. As long as Gururji is also sitting on this chariot, this chariot holds together. The struggles we have faced would have reduced us to nothing, but since Gururji is controlling, guiding and protecting it, the chariot behaves normally and stays on track. Just don't let the Guru dismount your chariot and you will be okay. He is here by your side, the ultimate supreme power.

My feeling is that Gururji Maharaj left his physical form only to move and live inside our hearts permanently. Thus ensuring He is never away from His *sangat* even for a moment. Always holding the reigns of our chariot.

We are so fortunate. My wife and I often ask ourselves how different our life has become since we took refuge in Gururji's Lotus Feet. How our quality of life has become immeasurably better; how happiness has come to our very doors; how we have become prosperous, healthy, and socially respected; how our children are doing well. All out of the sheer power of His grace. Had we not come to His door, our lives would have languished, stale and damp, hurting and hurtful, in some dark corner. Every single time we ask ourselves this question, no matter how

¹¹ Sanjaya said to Dhritarashtra: "...Keshava addressed the wielder of *gandiva*, saying, 'Take down thy *gandiva* as also the two inexhaustible quivers. I shall dismount after you, O best of the Bharatas. Get yourself down, for this is for your good, O sinless one.' Pandu's brave son Dhananjaya did as he was directed. The intelligent Krishna, abandoning the reins of the steeds, then dismounted from the chariot. After the high-souled Lord of all creatures had dismounted from that vehicle, the celestial *vanara* [that is, Hanumanji] that topped the mantle of Arjuna's vehicle, disappeared. The top of the vehicle, which had been burnt earlier by the celestial weapons of Drona and Karna, blazed forth and turned to ashes, O king, without any visible fire having been in sight. Indeed, the car of Dhananjaya, with its quick pairs of steeds, yoke, and shaft, fell down. Beholding the destroyed vehicle, O lord, the sons of Pandu became filled with wonder, and Arjuna, O king, having saluted Krishna and bowed to him and with folded hands said: 'O Govinda, O divine one, for what reason has this car been consumed by fire? What has happened before our eyes. O thou of mighty arms, if you think that I can listen to it without harm, then tell me everything.' Vasudeva said, 'That chariot, O Arjuna, had been consumed by diverse kinds of weapons. It was because I had sat upon it during battle that it did not fall into pieces, O scorcher of foes. Previously consumed by the energy of *brahmastra*, it has been reduced to ashes upon my abandoning it after you attained your aims!'

—*The Mahabharata* of Krishna-Dwaipayana Vyasa, translated by Kisari Mohan Ganguli, Shalya Parva

we are situated in life at that moment, we find that He is blessing us. His fragrance always comes to us. It reassuringly tells us: “My children, I am here.”

He is the one who keeps us going. Does that mean we do not have any problems and issues to resolve? Far from it. We face challenges on a daily basis and fight our way through. Having said that, there is a difference between then and now. We now have the very reassuring and benign presence of Maharaj in and around us. That allows us to face with confidence whatever destiny throws at us.



HOW HIS GRACE MAKES LIGHT OF KARMA

IT IS A TRUISM WITH DEVOTEES THAT GURUJI TAKES CARE OF 90 PERCENT OF THEIR karma. A meagre 10 percent is left to handle, and we find even that hard to handle. Still, the Guru makes that karmic ride easy to bear. Say, you are fated to eat a kilo of red chilli. The punishment must be borne. If your Guru is with you, then he will add one spoon of chilli to a dish of chilli *paneer* (spicy cottage cheese) every day and have you eat it with *naan*! Thus, the Guru makes your karma palatable.

Devotees wonder why, as puppets in the hand of the Divine, they accumulate karma? How is it that we become responsible for actions purportedly initiated, controlled and executed by the Divine? Saint Tulsi Das also wrote as much in *Ramcharitmanas*:-

“Hoi soi jo ram rachi rakha, ka kari tarak badhavahin Sakha:

Translation:- Everything happens as per the will of Ram, there is nothing to be gained by deliberating on it.”

As usual, Guruji always simplified complex matters. In a late-night chat with General Kaput, Guruji asked him what he knew of various religions, and the General admitted to knowing very little because he was a military man. Guruji reassured him and then rapidly recited divine axioms from the major religions and asked him what he had understood. When the General could only shrug in helplessness, Guruji told him not to worry if he knew nothing because it did not matter. Guruji then summarised the essentials. That all religions are one and the same. God is one, and all are his children. Thus, if we are able to do good for someone, we should go ahead and do it. It is ok and acceptable if we can't. Just make sure that we do not cause harm to anyone, that we do not become the reason for another's sorrow. We should not be responsible for anyone's tears, pain, or suffering. As long as a person helps others when possible and does no harm to

anyone, then that's all one needs to know about religion.¹² Of course, one should set apart time to connect with the Divine creator to express gratitude for all the blessings received.

There is no better discourse on karma than that of the *Gita*. The *Gita* is the story of two brotherly clans, the five Pandavas and their hundred cousins, the Kauravas, led by Duryodhana, fighting for the kingdom. It is seen as the battle between the good and the evil. Lord Krishna stands on the side of good with the Pandavas. His army is with the Kauravas. At the commencement of the battle, Arjuna refuses to fight. This episode that sets up the discourse of the *Gita* is known as the *Vishada* Yoga of Arjuna.

When Arjuna sees his cousins ranked against him on the field of battle, he is dismayed and objects that those he is fighting against are his family. He turns to Krishna, who has taken up the key role of his charioteer, and says he doesn't want to kill his brothers, uncles, grandfathers, and teachers; he won't wage war against those to whom he has ties by blood. So, saying, Arjuna sits disconsolately in the chariot, keeping aside his famous bow, the Gandiva. Krishna, who is also Arjuna's Guru, has to prepare a reluctant disciple to go to war. And this war is not just Arjuna's alone, this is a struggle of our own lives, too.

Krishna has several strategic replies ready. First, he tells Arjuna that this war is his to fight because as a prince of the royal line, a kshatriya, a warrior, it is his duty to fight. Second, *adharma* requires a retort. His kingdom has been wrongfully usurped and, despite efforts at reconciliation, denied to his brothers. Third, the Kauravas have aggressively challenged them and as the warrior par excellence of the Pandavas, he has to take up arms. The joys of heaven await the warrior whether he fights from the losing side or the winning.

Arjuna counters by saying that he does not want the rewards of doing his duty. He doesn't want heaven nor does he want the kingdom.

¹² This incident is recounted in General Kapur's *satsang* in *Light of Divinity*.

He does not want to have the blood of his own kin on his hands: That is his justification.

Krishna tells Arjuna that he only appears to have a choice. In reality, he doesn't. The Divine, has already drawn the entire shape of the scenario. The battle will happen; Arjuna will fight. All that remains for Arjuna is to choose why he wants to fight and the state of mind he enters the battle with. If he thinks he will be fighting his relatives and will incur sin and bad karma for killing them, then, says Krishna, he will indeed be killing his relatives and will accumulate sin. If he thinks he will be doing his duty, the duty of a *Kshatriya* to protect his people and his kingdom from an unjust leadership or an incursion, then he will be doing his duty and be rewarded appropriately for fulfilling his duty.

Krishna then shows him yet another angle of approach. Arjuna can accept this battle as the Divine will. Then all he will be doing is obeying the orders of the Divine. He will not be fighting for good, for vanquishing evil or for performing his righteous duty. He will just be submitting himself to the will of the Divine as represented in the words, the *hukm*, of the Lord.

The beauty is that in such obedience Arjun will not be fighting for rewards. So, he would escape the noose of karma, which becomes binding only when one is entangled in its supposed fruits.

Krishna then shows him that the war Arjuna is thinking of not participating in has already happened. Not only does the disciple have no choice, but he has already participated in it. With this vision that the Lord's grace gives him, Arjuna comes to terms with what is his destiny.

What he was expected to do had already happened, as far as the Divine was concerned. Arjuna was neither the killer nor the defender. Both, the killers and the killed, were two sides of the same coin of Divine *leela*. In each individual warrior, it was the Divine that had fought, lost and won. Arjuna thus realised that he was not the doer. The Divine within was the agency of all action. For Arjuna, it was Krishna all the way—just as for us, it should be Guruji all the way.

We have nothing to do with karma, it does not even touch our hands, provided we realize that the Guruji is working through us. We are not the doers. Guruji is.

Basically, we accumulate karma, good or bad, not because of what we do, but because of our identification with what we do and the intention with which we perform our actions. An apparently excellent cause with an evil motive cannot lead to good karma. The burden of karma is subtle to determine, but interest in doer-ship can and will give you the burden of karma.

Suppose there is a saint who is sworn to telling the truth. He is meditating in the forest when an animal walks past him. Minutes later, a hunter goes past asking if his prey had crossed by. The saint now has the choice of telling the truth and condemning the animal to death or lying to save a life. The intention is most important. If the saint wanted to save a life, then telling a lie would not matter. His telling the truth would have made him responsible for the killing of an innocent animal. Do you think in that situation, being truthful would have added to his account of virtues?

Karma is like the clothes we wear, while our body represents the soul. The quality of the clothes identifies us as a person for everybody else. If I wear nice clothes, I am identified as a nice person. If I wear dirty clothes, I am not identified as a nice person. If I wear body-hugging clothes, they feel like an integral part of my body. I will be identified with them closely and they will become an extended part of my body. If I wear them loosely, then this problem does not arise because I will feel detached from my clothes. Whenever I want, I can remove my dress and put it away. So, the key is to wear our karma like loose clothes. We are wearing them, yet we are not carrying them with us, they are not an extension of our body.

That feeling comes when we stop identifying ourselves with what we do as compared to what we feel inside. We will only start feeling more when our Guruji will reside inside us. That will happen when we cede control to Him. We will still go about doing our karma, still carrying our karma like wearing loose clothes, because that is every

human being's lot, but we will not be defined by our karma. We will be defined by our Guru. That is why the Lord said that we should give up everything before coming to Him.

Have you wondered how surrender can happen? We start by disowning our karma. Simply saying, I am not the one who does these things. It's my Guruji who makes me do them. The moment we take away our authority on what we do, we stop doing it. From *we doing it* to *it happening to us* is a very subtle line that divides the two—and that line is sketched by what you think. If we think ourselves as doers, then these are our karma. Then we will be held accountable for them. If we think we are doing our duty, and we do it well, we get a reward. But if we think we do nothing, because all that is being done is being controlled by Guruji, then we actually do nothing at all. We will not be held accountable for what happens through ourselves.

The same action can lead to punishment or reward, depending on how you associate yourself with it. A doctor conducts surgery on a patient and, in the process, the patient dies. But you cannot accuse the doctor of killing that person, can you? He was trying to save the patient's life, but he couldn't. If the same doctor knew that he was not good enough to treat this patient and still decided to undertake the surgery with the knowledge of his limitations, he would be held accountable. So, the same karma can have different attributes and lead to different results. In our case, we can simply leave all of this—doer-ship, intentions, thoughts, and the action itself—to Guruji, so that all our karmas become an offering to Him. Be my actions good, bad, or ugly, I don't care. My Guru is the boss. I don't know what He makes me do because I do nothing. Whatever I do is because of what my Guruji makes me do. That thought is surrender.

Read again what Lord Krishna said to Arjun: "Give up everything and come to me." We too should give up all other supports and reach out for Guru's support only. As the *shabad* beautifully puts it:

*Ek takya bharosa tere charna dabor sabhe dhaaiyaan
dberiyaan.*

(I have let go of all other supports. In fact, Guruji is my only support. All the rest are at best time-bound and illusory).

Surrender means that I have done all I could do and now I have taken refuge at Guruji's Lotus Feet. I have done away with every other support in my life. I have come to Guruji with no back-up. I have no one else to go to. Now, my Guru knows that if He does not take care of me, then I am done. For me, there is no alternative to Guruji. I go where my Guruji takes me; I am where my Guruji is at any given time. And Guruji is my destiny.

We all are like the bogeys in a train. They are tied behind the engine and they go wherever the engine takes them. Bogies don't have the luxury to choose where to go. They can choose the engine. Of course, if they get hooked to the wrong engine, they would reach the wrong destination.

Briefly: What is important is our intention. What happens in our life is controlled by a supreme power. That Divine in us does what He does. If we think we are doing it, then we are doing it and we will either pay for it or be rewarded for it. If we think we are simply obeying a Divine order, then we will have nothing to do whatsoever with actions and their consequences. It is as simple as that.

That is why inner purity is important. No matter what we do, we do it with a clean heart. Guruji emphasised this when he quoted the ancient maxim which says, *Man changa to nalke mein Ganga*. If your heart is pure, then even tap water becomes as pure as the water from the sacred Ganga.

Don't associate yourself with your actions. Offer each action to the Lord or Guru every time, saying, "As you wish; let your will prevail"

Lord Krishna has outlined a simple tactic by which we can do away with the consequences of karma. But what about karma which has already been committed? This world of ours and our destiny (or *prarabdha*) is a by-product of karma. A simple couplet from

Ramcharitmanas of Saint Tulsi Das, puts it brilliantly:

*“Karma pradhan vishwa rachi rakha /
Jo jehi karehi so tas phal chakha.”*

As we sow, so shall we reap. The seeds we put in the land will grow into fruits. We cannot plant a cactus and expect mangoes.

As the *Manas* hints, this earthly world is where our karmas come due and have to be settled. Our accounts get settled in the physical world because actions takes place in a physical setting. After our dues are settled here, we progress quickly in the spiritual world.

In the military, each promotion must precede a tough and demanding tenure on the battlefield, face to face with the enemy. Our excellent performance in peace postings will matter little if the front-line tenure ends up in a fiasco. Our performance matters the most when own life as well as the life of those we command is at grave risk.

This earthly existence of ours is akin to a posting on the frontline. Our motivation in coming here is to settle our accounts as much as we can, do better, improve, get closer to our chosen *ishta* or Guru. We have volunteered to come down here to make things right, not to repeat mistakes, and then promised to return once our karmas are accounted for and settled. Our performance in this physical plane will decide if we get a promotion or demotion in the spiritual world, a peace posting, so to say.

On our own, it is a near-impossible task with the great risk of ending up worse off than before. One comes to settle karmas but ends up accumulating more. The lucky ones are those who are taken into refuge by a Guru who is capable of taking on their karmas. He helps his devotee navigate the minefield in the warzone all the while holding his hand. He first makes His devotee *blessings ready*, by settling his earthly accounts and then blesses him. This process of becoming blessings ready will include enduring some pain and suffering under Guruji's guidance and watchful protection. The extent of the suffering of

course depends on the devotee's karmic backlog. On that account even the best of the best are on a bit of a sticky wicket.

Each one of us volunteers to this field posting for a single purpose: To get rid of the karmic load. But once one is born in this world, one forgets all the promises made to the Lord. There's a *shabad* that Guruji made us listen to at Empire Estate many times. The essence of it was that "you have forgotten all the tall promises you made to the Lord or the Guru. While in the womb, you promised you were going to take His name, sing His praises, purify yourself, and do all the right things. And look at you now. You are in a mess; you have forgotten all that."

Thankfully, we have Guruji. He will not let us make mistakes. If He sends us out on field posting, He will make sure we don't do silly things. This is exactly what Shri Krishna told Arjuna when the disciple asked Him, "Lord what happens to your disciples, your devotees when they deviate from the right path and make mistakes? Do they fall out of grace? What do you do with them?" Lord Krishna tells Arjuna that He does not let His devotees fall from grace.¹³

A true Guru is ready to pay back for the disciple's karma from His own account. When Guruji suffers for us, He is paying from his own account for everything that we have done because we are bankrupt. He settles our account. It's like having a line of credit from our Guru's account to our account. No matter how much is spent, it will be replenished, as long as we are a devotee in a state of surrender to the Guru. Having said that, we also need to take responsibility for our subsequent deeds. Guruji takes so much on Himself because He cannot bear to see us suffering. Our Guruji is the Supreme Lord, the Divine Light, and He holds our hand through thick and thin. He will ensure that our karmic account is settled as per His plan and not in accordance with our efforts. All we need to do is to hand over control to Him.

¹³ Bhagvad Gita, Chapter 9, verse 31: *kṣhipraṁ bhavati dharmātmā śaśvach-*chhāntiṁ nigachchhati kaunteya pratijānīhi na me bhaktaḥ praṇaśhyati*. Quickly they become virtuous, and attain lasting peace. O son of Kunti, declare it boldly that no devotee of Mine is ever lost.*

– <https://www.holy-bhagavad-gita.org/chapter/9/verse/31>

How do we settle our karmic account? Good karma is like money deposited in a bank account while bad karma is like a debt. Imagine that every time we do something good, our deposit goes up and every time we make a mistake, we spend the money we have. We may end up spending so much money that there is not only zero balance in the account, but we actually owe the bank. That is where the problem arises. It has to be paid back. The account has to be settled. This settlement of karmic debt is chiefly done through suffering.

Even people come in our life to settle their own karmic dues as much as we enter their lives to settle ours. Only the Guru enters our lives to settle our karmic account, not His. He enters our lives to make us blessings ready for spirituality.

Another way of cancelling karmic debt is by creating a huge positive balance through selfless *sewa*. For example, if we serve the elderly and lessen their sufferings, we will receive their blessings. Their suffering has given them the capacity to bless us. Similarly, a suffering poor can bless us too. Ability to bless stays only with those who endure sufferings. A mother's blessings are more valuable because her suffering is usually more than that of a father. That is why mothers are held in great reverence in our lives. In a way, being a woman itself involves so much suffering. A woman in our life, when loved, respected and cared for, has a unique ability to make us blessings ready.

One of the simplest ways to accumulate good karma and pay off our bad karma, is to respect, love, and take care of women in our lives, be it our mother, our wife, our sister, our daughter, our neighbour or women in our *sangat*. Guruji used to say that He blessed 'aunties' first, because a lady devotee always thinks of her entire family. Male devotees think of themselves first. A father thinks that if he is blessed, he can take care of the family. A mother believes her children, her husband, her parents and in-laws should be blessed first, that her suffering is secondary.

Since we have come to life already with so much karmic debt, it is important to not add more to it by asking Guruji to meet our demands. If we do not ask Guruji for anything, then we don't

need to account for anything that we may receive as blessings. Guruji will fulfil a need or beneficial desire through His blessings even if we don't ask for it. If we seek a reward even for our good karma or *sewa*, the fruit will be limited and perishable. A blessing is permanent.

A *shabad*, Guruji made us listen to, explains this point. A pious person did *tapasya*, or penance, for one hundred years. The Divine was happy and spoke to the *tapasvi*, offering a boon. The *tapasvi* straightaway demanded a reward for his hundred-year penance. The Divine counselled him to think again: "Do you want the reward for your penance or do you want my blessings?" The deluded *tapasvi* insisted on the reward. The Divine was about to grant it when the stone on which the ascetic had been sitting all this while acquired a human form and spoke up. It demanded that the *tapasvi* first settle its dues for letting him sit on itself for one hundred years!

Remember, every fruit we earn is not solely due to our efforts; there are many individuals and conditions that play their parts to make it happen. The *tapasvi* quickly realised his folly and settled for the Divine blessings. Because if he had to settle all the accounts he owed out of his penance, there would be little left for him. As a disciple, we have to let Guruji handle all our matters. For that we have to give up self-interested action and not ask the Guru. If the Guru is happy, He will simply give us His blessing—and that energy will manifest as whatever we may need.

Therefore, all we have to do is to be with the Guru, let the Divine in us connect to the Guru and let it be.

During my formative years, I received most of my spiritual understanding from my own namesake uncle, Shri Raj Kumar Sharma ji. A highly evolved and awakened soul, he was my father's age and we shared an informal Guru-*shishya* connection. Whenever I was back home on vacation, we would be together for hours, discussing the great lore of spirituality as passed down by our sages. This association lasted for over two decades and formed the backbone of my limited experience with the Divine. One day, he shared his complete learning

of the Divine in one sentence. He told me that after a lifetime going through the scriptures, sitting with spiritual Gurus and meditating, he finally understood one thing: There was no need to go through this process in the first place because there was really nothing to understand. He had to finally surrender to the Divine, something he could have done a long time ago, right at the beginning. His only advice to me was to stop running around seeking knowledge and understanding of the Divine. There was nothing to understand, but everything to experience. Just surrender to the supreme and let Him take care of everything. It will happen when it has to happen.

And he was so right. The Divine happened to me when I was called by Guruji Maharaj to His Divine Presence on February 18, 2001. With that, my mind's quest for knowledge ended and my soul's experience with the Divine began.

Guruji advised his devotees to hand over the reins of their horse to Him and He would always guide it straight. The horse is our intellect, our mind, the vehicle of our body. If we give this control to Guruji, we will think straight, act straight and we will not accumulate any negative karma. As a result, we would become "blessings ready" and qualified to board His ship, travelling out of *samsara* to reach Him. In a short invocatory verse, the *Brhadarnayaka Upanishad* gives voice to the devotee's aspiration for this journey:

Asato ma sadgamya

Tamaso ma jyotirgamaya

Mrtyor ma amritamgayama.

"Take us from untruth to Truth, from darkness to light, and from the bondage of mortality to our eternal freedom." That is, devotion takes us from ignorance (*agyan*) to knowledge (*gyan*) and from separation from Guruji (a state of duality) to merger with Guruji (the singularity), whence we become a part of Him.¹⁴

¹⁴ For fuller meanings, see <https://www.amritapuri.org/3731/asatoma.aum>

Karma controls one's position in this endless cycle of life birth and rebirth, hell and heaven. A surrender to the Guru pulls devotee out of this cycle and accords him a permanent place at the Guru's Lotus Feet, in perpetuity. May we all be with Guruji Maharaj always. He will never let go of us. Have trust and let Him drive our chariot and we will be just fine.



THE VEILED PLAY OF ILLUSIONS

AS NARRATED IN EARLIER CHAPTERS, I WAS IN THE DLF CITY CLUB IN GURGAON HAVING DINNER WITH my family when I got this call from Singla Uncle, saying that Guruji wanted to talk to me about the public *satsang* to be organised at Gurgaon. I told him I was at the club and would be rushing to Empire Estate immediately. Singla Uncle dutifully reported this to Guruji, who instructed me not to come; he would speak to General Kapur, who happened to be at Empire Estate at that time. Guruji conveyed to him His desire to visit Gurgaon to bless the *sangat* there.

As per General Kapur Uncle, he stepped out of Empire Estate and met me outside where he, in turn, told me of Guruji's desire to visit Gurgaon and instructed me to prepare for this public function. But I was not at Empire Estate, I was at City Club having dinner! How did General Kapur meet me at Empire Estate?

For a long time, I thought General Kapur Uncle might have got the facts mixed up. But I let it be because it did not make a difference.

Then, there was this devotee couple at Empire Estate, a curly-haired lady and her rather slim husband, who we would see regularly on Saturdays. This lady came to Bade Mandir and, years later, joined my wife in the *sewa* of cleaning utensils. My wife immediately recognised her and began talking about those days in Empire Estate. The lady appeared lost for words. She could not relate to what my wife was telling her because she claimed to have come to Guruji only in 2012 and never saw Maharaj in physical form at Empire Estate. It was my wife's turn to be surprised. If this couple was not there, then who had we been seeing at Empire Estate on Saturday all those years?

Also, when we had our vacation in Sri Lanka, we had to struggle to get my daughter into the flight from Chennai to Colombo. We had one hour to go from the airport to the city, get her passport appropriately

stamped and return to the airport. The time available was improbable for the task. We trusted Guruji and decided to go ahead. While in Chennai, completing the formalities, we were far behind time. However, our trip from Chennai to the airport took little time and—bang!—we were at the airport in a whisker, as if teleported there. We always took such blessings for granted, thanked Guruji and moved on gratefully.

And finally, my wife's unforgettable experience of crossing over to the other dimension when she happened to sit close to Guruji's asana at Bade Mandir and His *juttis* touched her knee.

All these incidents, narrated elsewhere in this book, were beyond my comprehension. I always hoped that someday Maharaj would let me have a basic understanding of these occurrences. Then I read the *Shiva Purana*, where I came upon the tale of Rishi Narada's conquest of Kamadeva—as the Rishi choose to see it.

It so happened that Rishi Narada had chosen to sit in *tapasya* at the very place where Lord Shiva had, in a different *kalpa* (or aeon), annihilated the lord of all desire, Kama. The chief of the gods, Indra, tried to dislodge Narada from *tapasya* through Kama but failed. Rishi Narada thought he had defeated Kama, not knowing that he was sitting in an environment where all desire had been burnt to ashes by Lord Shiva. He claimed victory over Kama for himself and went to Lord Brahma to boast of his endeavour. The Creator advised him to keep this tale to himself and specifically warned him not to reveal it to Lord Shiva. But the Rishi was possessed by his ego and went and told Lord Shiva. Lord Shiva, too, appreciated his prowess, but requested him not to say a word of the event in front of Lord Vishnu.

Narada was getting gamed here, I believe. Maybe by not telling him to go to Vishnu, his ego was being provoked into doing exactly that. Narada heard the advice and immediately set forth for *Vaikuntha*, where his *ishta* resided. Lord Vishnu heard him out and realised that his devotee had come under the sway of his ego and of doer-ship. As the Rishi's chosen *ishta*, Lord Vishnu couldn't let it pass, because

sooner or later the ego was going to give Narada a hard fall. Narada had to be cured.

Lord Vishnu makes Kamadeva, against whom Narada thought he had secured victory, to be the means of Narada's chastisement. As a gratified Narada departs, Lord Vishnu creates an illusion, a new world kingdom, specifically for Narada. In his journey out of *Vaikuntha*, Narada steps into this bewitching world: A kingdom where a beautiful princess is holding the ritual of *swayam-var*, where she'd decide on her husband. Mighty warrior kings have come to win her hand. She is so beautiful that Narada, an ascetic, is besotted. He rushes back to Lord Vishnu, knowing his desire could be granted if the Lord agrees to give him a portion of His own glamorous looks. "If I win that princess, I will be happy for life," he tells Vishnu. Lord Vishnu immediately agrees and Sage Narada becomes resplendent with lustre. However, there is a catch. Narada does not get the Lord's beautiful looks, but the face of a monkey instead. He sits among the warriors in his beautiful robes not suspecting for a minute that he looks hideous. And, of course, he is rejected as a suitor.

A distraught Narada wonders why. He happens to look at his face in reflection, and realises that he has been played. He rushes out of the assembly, angry and upset with Lord Vishnu. He curses Vishnu to suffer from the very pangs of unrequited love that he so recently had—which becomes the seed for Vishnu's avatar as Lord Ram and his parting from Devi Sita.

After he curses Vishnu, the veil of *maya* is lifted. Narada immediately becomes remorseful. He realises what he has done and that he was not above the snares of *Kama* after all. He is deeply repentant and seeks the Lord's forgiveness. His ego is gone.

What struck me here was that just like what Lord Vishnu did for Narada, Guruji Maharaj could also create an illusion that was specifically meant for each one of His devotee. We call this illusion *maya*. There can be, and perhaps there is, an illusion specific for each one of us. The world, as we perceive it, is specific to each one of us. Each one of us lives inside our own stories. My world may have you in

it, but it is not your world. Your world may have me in it, but it is not my world. Thus, all the versions of a single incident could be right. That is, both, General Kapur and myself, could be right in the way we perceived our versions of a common situation.

Similarly, the devotees who we thought were at Empire Estate for years but who denied that they had been there at that time, they were present at Empire Estate in my illusion, while Empire Estate was not present in theirs. All of us simply have our illusions as the base for our egos, and we foolishly argue about them. Each one of us needs to be cured of our ego and that is achieved when it is exposed for the empty thing it is.

Instead, what we end up doing is running around for people, asking them for a way out of the maze. Since they too are bound in their own illusion, what they offer is at best another illusory solution. And that usually does not work because the solution is not adapted to the circumstances of our karma and the *maya* we face. So, instead of coming out of *maya*, we may end up being a part of someone else's *maya*.

One way out of *maya* is to try to come out of it ourselves. This is extremely hard. For illusion is not perceived as such because the very tools that report about it are part of it. Our senses, our brain, our intellect are not outside the illusion, but participants in it. Imagine trying to see the real through tools which are unreal. We will never get it right. Also, while we are in the illusion, everything that we do, think and desire becomes part of our body of karma. It adds up; it does not go away.

Assuming we do realise that we are wrapped up in *maya*. We also realise that this world is made up of our mind and our desires. To get out of the clutches of *maya*, the easiest thing to do is for us to subscribe to any number of processes that have been already codified in various religions of the world. We can, for example, recite esoteric mantras, tell beads crores of times, undertake fasts, knock ourselves out doing yogic postures and meditate till the days and nights run into one another. We can also deny ourselves pleasure, be abstemious, take

up complex rituals. Will we get out of *maya*? Maybe! All the while we have to be very careful that the proposed solutions are not taking us into yet another illusion.

The other way out is Guruji. After all, Maharaj chose to walk into our illusion, into our world, in the form that He has chosen. It is for us to wake up with the aid of His grace and presence. He can pull us out of this illusion in a flash or leave us running around like mad, searching for a solution, chasing people, chasing processes, chasing rituals, and ending up nowhere. There is just one condition that comes into play for the Guru's grace to work on us. We have to be "Blessings Ready". Guruji's grace will work in proportion to our blessing readiness. If we accept Him unquestionably, unconditionally, without a doubt as the Lord Almighty in the form of Guruji, His grace will work on us with rapidity.

When we accept Him as our Guru, then He will, of course, make this illusion of ours comfortable, manageable, and palatable because this illusion is our *Karma Kshetra* specifically created for us. Then when our accounts are settled, He will pull us out of this illusion or *maya* at His own discretion.

The problem is that though we need a Guru to get out of *maya*, we cannot find the Guru on our own. As Saint Tulsi Das has said, "*Bin bari kripa mile nahin santa.*" Without the grace of God, saints do not come in our life. Once the Guru comes into our lives, He takes us out of the whirlpool of *maya* and *samsara* with His own hand. As the *shabad* says it, *Banh pakad guru kaadtia soee uttar paar*. Grasping His devotee by the arm, the Guru carries him over the ocean of suffering.

In that case, how does one meet up with his Guru?

The answer lies in becoming one like Lord Nandi, the Bull that stands in patient wait outside Lord Shiva's temple. Lord Nandi, whose four feet symbolise the four pillars of dharma: austerity, cleanliness, truthfulness, and kindness.

We have to imbibe these characteristics in our life. Then we have to wait alertly since one of Lord Nandi's ears is erect, signifying alertness. In case Nandi is called he is ready to go inside; he won't be found sleeping.

But he is not expecting that call. He is simply waiting, not expecting. He has full trust that Lord Shiva will come, and that is why he can be without expectation.

Likewise, we have to be alert without expecting a call from our designated Guru. Even expecting Him to call is like asking Him, even this is an intrusion into the all-knowing space of His ever-giving love.

When we are in this state of blessing readiness, our designated Guru will find us. He will come to us. When we have our Guru, we have to just be in His presence, absorb that aura and relish it. Enjoy His fragrance and be alert. Don't say anything, don't ask for anything and don't expect anything. The day we are perfectly tranquil in love, we will be no different than the Guru himself. We will be like Lord Nandi.

As far as our Guruji is concerned, an invite to His *satsang* is a call from Guruji. Without His *aagya*, this invite will not come and if it does come, we will not accept it. When we get one, we have to be grateful and accept Him unconditionally.

While we are in this illusion, we do our work but shouldn't spend too much time trying to improve the quality of the illusion. No matter how nice the dream is, it's still a dream. If we do not want to add to the clutches of this illusion, the golden rule is don't ask Guruji for anything, just accept him.

Message: We have to just accept Guruji unconditionally and stop arguing in our minds about right and wrong, good and bad, etcetera. That is why Guruji asked us to leave our intellect (*buddhi*) at the shoe stand before we entered His presence. Because with the Guru in charge, there is no role for our discerning faculty or *buddhi*. It is this mind which is forcing us to relish or hate this illusion. It is our mind which attracts us to this illusion, telling us this is all we have and showing us ways to improve this experience, implicating us further in the false vision of the world. At the core of our intellect resides the ego. This ego stands between us and our Guru. It will not let us surrender. So, we have to let it go. If we don't, Guruji will of course get us rid of it.

We have to find and firm up our own connection with Maharaj, devote ourselves to this much personalised connection with Him and

soak in the bliss. Gururji will never leave us, so there is no point in asking Him to hold on to us. He will do it as a matter of course, as a function of who He is. It is enough for us to imagine ourselves perpetually in his *sharan*.

When we talk about our Gururji Maharaj, how can we not talk about Gururji Maharaj as Lord Shiva, the supreme power that creates, sustains and destroys this universe only to start this process all over again? For thousands of years, our rishis have talked about the existence of this supreme power and named it Brahm, the only reality. Between Brahm, the Creator, and the creation, including us, there exists this veil of *Maya*, or the illusory power of the Godhead. This veil of *Maya* obscures our vision and does not let us see reality.

By the way, modern Quantum mechanics completely subscribes to this concept acknowledging what was written by our Rishis centuries ago. Without dwelling deep on this subject let me simply state that reality of our universe is physical (sagun, akaar) only when observed. When not observed and only meditated upon, same universe is a wave function (nirgun, nirakaar), riding an omnipresent wave function called Brahm. And of course there is no free will in terms of what, where and why!

According to the *Shiva Purana*, Lord Shiva has five functions. These are creation (*shrishti*), preservation (*sthithi*), dissolution (*sambhara*), granting of liberation (*anugraha*) as well as concealment (*tirobhava*).¹⁵ Shiva actuates *maya* to cover us up in illusion, as part of His functions.

¹⁵ *Sarga* is the creation of the world; *Stbithi* is its maintenance; *Sambhara* is the annihilation; *Tirobhava* is the removal and concealment; Liberation (from the cycle of birth and death) is the blessing. These five are my activities but are carried on by others silently as in the case of the statue at the portal; the first four activities concern the evolution of the world and the fifth one is the cause of salvation. All these constitute my prerogatives. These activities are observed in the five elements by devotees: *Sarga* (creation) in the Earth, *Stbithi* (maintenance) in the waters, *Sambhara* (annihilation) in the fire, *Tirobhava* (concealment) in the wind and *Anugraha* (liberation, the blessed state) in the firmament. Everything is created by the Earth; everything flourishes by virtue of the waters; everything is urged by the fire, everything is removed by the wind and everything is blessed by the firmament. Thus, intelligent men must know the same. To look after these five-fold activities I have five faces, four in the four quarters and the fifth in the middle.

—Chapter 10, *The Evanescence of Siva, Shiva Purana*, edited by Prof J. L. Shastri

The functions also show us the link between Brahm and Shiva. Shiva is indeed the Brahm. If Shiva has imposed this *maya* upon us, He has also put in place a mechanism by which we can overcome this *maya* and realise the reality beyond. Lord Shiva does it by appearing in front of us in the form of a Guru. As a Guru, He enlivens His grace to grant us liberation (*anugraha*) through a devotional union called *bhakti*. Our Guruji Maharaj is Lord Shiva's appearance in front of his devotees in our times.

Mother Parvati herself puts up the question related to the world and our place in it before Lord Shiva: "O Lord, what is the essence of the world?" Lord Shiva replies: "*Kahun Uma sun anubhav apna, sat hari bhajan, jagat sab sapna.*" My experience is this, the Lord says: God's name is real; everything else is unreal. It is just like a dream. Whether the tale be sad or happy, whether it has rich characters or poor sufferers, it always has a beginning and an end. Because it is so changeable, it cannot be true. There are no two versions of Truth. The truth has no beginning and no end. The truth is ever existent.



SHIVA PURANA FOR THE MODERN TIMES

TO UNDERSTAND GURUJI MAHARAJ, WE NEED TO TRY AND FATHOM LORD SHIVA IN HIS full glory.

In *Sanatan Dharma*, *Vedas* are considered the purest form of knowledge delivered by the *Brahm* Himself. The process to apply this knowledge in our lives is explained in the *Upanishads*, documented by the enlightened *Rishis*. The *Upanishads*, in a way, interpret the knowledge contained in the *Vedas*. The stories of people who practically applied this knowledge to their lives is given in the *Puranas* in the form of individual *satsangs*. Between these three sets of scriptures, there is pure knowledge, applied knowledge and the practical experiences.

Let me draw an analogy here. There is electric charge like one sees in the clouds. This is pure science like the *Vedas*. The process which allows the harnessing of this electric charge in the form of electricity is called applied science like the *Upanishads*. Finally, the stories of people who practically used this electricity to their benefit are like the *satsangs* in the *Puranas*.

What is the *Shiva Purana*?

It is a compendium of *satsangs* or sharings that seek to glorify Lord Shiva by recounting how Lord Shiva bestowed his grace on his devotees over many epochs. By the same logic, The Light of Divinity, containing the experiences of Guruji's devotees, is very much a modern-day *Purana*, too!

Let us start with an example. The very first *satsang* that the *Shiv Purana* enumerates, tells a reader how Lord Shiva's name is enough for salvation through the experience of a Brahmin who led a sinful life and became a demon after his death. His widow kept to the true and narrow path for some time, then became debauched, was remorseful, heard the *Shiva Purana* being recited at a temple—and was saved from the just punishment of her sins after death. Instead, she was brought up to the service of Lord Shiva and Mother Parvati. One day, when she

inquired about her husband, she learnt that her husband had taken a demonic rebirth. She petitioned Mother Parvati to rescue her husband and was told that her husband would have to listen to the *Shiva Purana* for his salvation. The demon, who was unwilling to listen and difficult to catch hold of, was tied to a tree and the *Shiv Purana* was recited in front of him. That involuntary listening was enough for his evil deeds to be expiated.

In today's times, we are also doing *satsangs* through sharing the blessings of our Guruji. The characters have changed and so has time, but the overall theme of redemption through the grace of the holy name, through the intercession of Guruji, remains the same. Never take *satsangs* lightly. They are not only conduits of grace for the listeners and speakers, but they also clear the path for all devotees to be at the Lotus Feet of Guruji, Lord Shiva himself. Attending a *satsang* is not a casual affair. It is not about passing time or building our personal network. It is not about eating to our fill; it is certainly not about socialising. *Satsangs* are our road to salvation. It's a path to be with Guruji himself, at His Lotus Feet. *Satsangs* can make a difference to our lives, present and future, right up to eternity.

The attendees of the Shiva Purana *satsangs* are all the gods. They are pictured in glory. Their dresses, their makeup, their jewellery, their residences, even their vehicles are seriously cool: Indira has an elephant and Lord Vishnu has the Garuda, the king of birds. In contrast, Lord Shiva has but a slow-moving bull for His vehicle. He is shown to be the grand Yogi, the ascetic who wears a garland of skulls, has an elephant skin for his upper garment, is smeared with ash, and often goes into a deep meditational trance, or *samadhi*. He has no house of His own but a cave on the solitary hill of Kailash, even as his devotee Kubera is the treasurer of wealth.

Once Mother Parvati tried to ensure the couple could have a regular house for themselves and got one built. That residence, too, ended up with their demonic devotee, Ravana, while Lord Shiva and Mother Parvati themselves continued to live in a forest. Still, Shiva is the God of Gods. He runs the universe!

The Divine is under no imperative to conform to human mores of beauty, ugliness or morality. On the occasion of His marriage with Mother Parvati, Lord Shiva arrived wearing the crescent moon as a crown on His matted hair, with the Ganga rappelling down His locks and ashes smeared all over His body. The groom's party was no better. Seeing His form, the bridesmaids fainted. Lord Shiva became resplendent when His devotees prayed to Him to take up a form that was more appropriate to the matter at hand—that is, his wedding to Lady Uma. And He did that to please his devotees. Did Guruji not tell us the same thing? He said that He was appearing before us in a human form only to allow mortals like us to survive His majesty. His original form would be like connecting a ten thousand-volt electric source (Him) to ordinary domestic bulbs (us). Even if we ardently wanted to, we could not bear the charge of His being.

Remember the *Bhagvad Gita* episode when Arjun needed divine eyes to be able to see Lord Krishna in His *viraat swaroop*? As it is, devotees couldn't look at Guruji even in His human form without dropping their eyes. His aura was so intense. He used to say that his lovable *sangat* looked like insects in the palm of His hands.

So, appearances are deceptive. Appearance does not guarantee greatness and greatness is not a slave to appearance. The beauty of the soul is more important than physical beauty, which is only skin deep. Nothing exemplifies it more than Lord Shiva Himself.

Just because Guruji appeared in front of us as a human, that didn't make Him human. That we could be in the same room as Him, share our lives with Him, is a testimony to His noble and loving greatness.

Another vital learning the *Shiva Purana* provides is about love. Not only does the *Purana* have a myriad of tales about how Lord Shiva graces His devotees, how He fights their enemies, how He protects them, how He nourishes them but also how He gives them spiritual counsel and guidance. Lord Shiva with Goddess Parvati also represents the ideal divine couple, Shiva–Shakti, forever united. They are essentially one, even representationally, as *Ardhanarishwara*, a half each of the same unitary being. Their difference is in the form not in the essence.

In the *Shiv Purana*, Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati are represented in a state of the highest level of conjugal love. The Divine Couple are first seen as Lord Shiva and Goddess Sati. The Great Goddess's father is Daksha Prajapati, who is the lord of the *praja*, a divine king. Goddess Sati is born as his daughter via the intercession of Brahma, the Creator, who wants to see the world multiply. As the divine creatrix, she is *mula prakriti*, and takes physical form only to satisfy the desires of Brahma and Daksha.¹⁶ She marries Lord Shiva.

King Daksha does not maintain good relations with his son-in-law. He sees Lord Shiva as an ascetic, someone who does not belong to the same rank as the gods. He performs a big *yagya*, but does not invite Lord Shiva or Goddess Sati to it. When Goddess Sati learns of the *yagya*, she desires to attend it because she is naturally attached to her maternal family. Lord Shiva counsels her that it is better not to go to any place uninvited. But when she is unable to restrain herself, Lord Shiva, her husband, chooses to let her exercise her choice.

At the *yagya*, Goddess Sati finds that no seat has been kept aside for Him. She is so stung by her father's hidden brutality, connivance and his insulting behaviour, that she commits suicide by consuming herself in the inner yogic fire. Her loyalty and love to Lord Shiva are unassailable. Her name is a byword for conjugal loyalty and honoured in the word *Sativrata*.

When Lord Shiva is told of what has happened, he is implacable. He orders His army, led by the formidable Virbhadrā, to march

¹⁶ In the Purana, here is how Mother Sati responds to Daksha's prayers and tapasya:

Subservient to your devotion, O Daksha, I, the Great Goddess, shall be born of your wife as your daughter. There is no doubt in this. O sinless one, I shall perform a penance strenuously and shall become Siva's wife, after I have secured a boon from Him to that effect. Otherwise, there is no chance of the fulfilment of the object. The lord is free from all aberrations. He is the full incarnation of Sadashiva, worthy of being served by Brahma and Vishnu. I am His slave forever, His beloved in every birth (incarnation). Shiva who manifests Himself in many forms is indeed my master. It was by His favour that He manifested through the eyebrows of Brahma. I too shall incarnate by His favour and at His bidding... But O Prajapati, you have to take a vow. It is a precondition. I shall tell you. It is true, never false, please understand: If in future you were to be less respectful to me I will cast off my body. I shall withdraw myself to my soul or take to another form. It is true.

—Rudra Samhita, *The Shiva Purana*, volume 1, edited by Prof. J.L. Shastri

to Daksha's palace and destroy the *yagya*. Virbhadra, who is Lord Shiva's anger made manifest, lays waste to the sacrificial altar and its tools. The attending gods are insulted and defeated. Virbhadra himself fights with Lord Vishnu, who is forced to retire to His *loka*, with the realisation that the commander of Lord Shiva's army is undefeatable.

Subsequently, a thrilling narrative ends with Daksha being forgiven and the Gods' bodies being restored.

Lord Shiva Himself is inconsolable. He does not let go of the body of Mother Sati. Their bond is primal and eternal. He wanders the worlds with Her body in His hands; He is wounded and insane. Lord Vishnu, who has the job of preserving the Universe, realises this state of affairs cannot go on any longer. He intercedes with His weapon, the *Sudarshan Chakra*, using it to cut the sanctified body of Goddess Sati into pieces. These pieces fall on the earth as great boons and are worshipped in the form of *Shakti Peeths* of the Mother to date. Once Goddess Sati's body leaves his hands, Lord Shiva realises it is all gone. He restrains Himself as of yore and resumes his role as God of the Gods. Through this *satsang*, the divine couple sets a beautiful example of marital love and loyalty in front of us to follow in our own lives.

Guruji Maharaj always insisted that devotee couples come to him together. He insisted that our first and foremost responsibility is towards our family. He also said that taking care of family is the best form of *Guru Sewa*! Guruji's *sewa* at the cost of family responsibilities would not earn His approval.

However, the narrative does not end here. Shiva and Shakti are the parents of the world; without one or the other the world cannot exist. So, Mother Sati is reborn as Devi Parvati to remarry Lord Shiva. She undergoes a long and arduous penance to win His hand. Lord Shiva tests her devotion. He sends the seven wise sages, the *Saptarishis*, to her hermitage. Their task is to dissuade her from attempting such an inconceivable aim: marriage to Lord Shiva, who destroyed Kama. They try their best, but Devi Parvati is determined. She tells the sages that she knows who in essence Shiva is and their clever arguments will not

trick her. Lord Shiva is impressed by what the Rishis tell Him, but decides to confirm it for Himself.

He goes to Devi Parvati in the guise of a Brahmin. He asks her attendant friend Jaya about the aim of Devi Parvati's penance. Jaya tells Him the whole story, at which the Brahmin exclaims that He would like to listen to it from Devi Parvati directly. Lord Shiva does not like middlemen between Him and His devotees. Neither does Gururji Maharaj. Both insist on a direct connection with their devotees. Devi Parvati reveals that the aim of her penance is to marry Lord Shiva, at which the Brahmin makes several disparaging remarks about His character. Devi Parvati is furious. She decides to remove herself from the presence of this fraud of an ascetic and to take her own life. At that moment, Lord Shiva comes to His own form. Devi Parvati's quest is granted.

Such is the love of this incomparable couple. Their divine *leela* teaches us many lessons: That wife and husband be unswervingly loyal to each other, that they trust and respect each other and that they not allow any trespass into their love. Notice how Lord Shiva respects and trusts Goddess Sati enough to let her make her own decision, even though He is aware of the calamity that is to follow. He lets her have her way. Even though He discusses the option of staying put and not going to her father's house for the ceremonial yagya, He does not foist His decision on her. He does not lose his cool or become disappointed. That comes later. For that moment, He handles it calmly and responsibly. In the process, Lord Shiva also sets an example for all husbands to adopt and follow.

The *Shiva Purana* has other stories that also exemplify the power of a woman's devotion towards her husband.

There is the tale of Shankhachuda and Tulsi, who marry each other out of love at the behest of Lord Brahma. Shankhachuda was Sudama, the beloved friend of Krishna, who was cursed by Radha to be born as a demon because of trespassing into their chamber. He is an asura king, but because of his devotion to Lord Vishnu, he is virtuous, powerful and just. He wins over the Earth and the devas, who, as always, want their thrones back.

They appeal to Lord Brahma and Lord Vishnu, who send them to Lord Shiva who, in turn, sends them to Rudra, his own manifestation. Lord Vishnu cannot kill Shankhachuda, for he is a devotee of Lord Krishna. The demon has been granted an impenetrable armour of Krishna as a boon by Brahma. Shankhachuda has another boon: He cannot be defeated as long as his wife, Tulsi, is true and loyal to him.

He faces the armies of Rudra fearlessly. Prince Kartikeya finds him unconquerable and indeed dies—only to be born again at the touch of Rudra's hands. Virbhadrā cannot wound him, so finally, Mother Kali herself takes to the battlefield. The Mother fires mantric missile after missile at him. He effortlessly answers them with weapons of his own and with occult mastery. She decides to kill him with an unvanquishable weapon—but is forestalled from doing so by a divine voice. Now, Rudra has to enter the battlefield¹⁷. Even He cannot kill him for the conditions for his death have not been met. He, therefore, asks Lord Hari to take away Shankhachuda's Krishna *kavacha* as well as to approach Tulsi.

Soon after, an old Brahmin mendicant approaches Shankhachuda. He asks for the armour of Krishna and the noble demon gives it to him, though he knows it puts his life in peril. Then, Lord Hari goes to Tulsi in the guise of her husband and seduces her. This is the fruit of Tulsi's penance for Lord Vishnu in another time. When she realises Hari is not her husband, she curses him to become a stone as he had been hard-hearted. Robbed of his two defences, Shankhachuda dies by Lord Shiva's *trishul* in the battlefield.

A momentous story, teaching us how noble a man can become, how protected and triumphant he can be, only if his woman stands by his side. A just man truly loving and truly loved does not fall from

¹⁷ Shiva's laughter echoed through the worlds as he made fine war with his powerful adversary. He beat out secret, incomprehensible rhythms on his *damru*; he twanged the Pinaka's string in joy when Shankhachuda attacked him with hazy *astras*, billowing like clouds from his sky ship. He blew on his hunting horn so both armies cowered and Nandin bellowed to shame the demon's trumpeting elephants. Then, in delight, Shiva clapped his hands and the quarters shook, the earth cringed and every previous noise from the resounding field was dwarfed.

—*Siva Purana, The ancient book of Siva*, by Ramesh Menon

grace. A husband, thus, must love and respect his wife and she must do the same. The power of devotion is incomprehensible.

The *Shiva Purana* narrates another incident, which later becomes the seed for the Shiva-Sati disunion. Lord Rama and Lakshmana are moving around in the forest searching for Devi Sita, when Lord Shiva and Goddess Sati pass by. Lord Shiva folds his hands and pays respect to Lord Rama. That makes Goddess Sati curious: How is it that the Lord of the Lords is bowing to a humble man? Lord Shiva corrects her misperception. He tells her that the bowman she has seen is Lord Rama, the avatar of Vishnu, who is His Lord, which is why He was praying to Him. She wonders how that can be. How can her husband worship someone He Himself created?

Lord Shiva tells her that it is He who had given the responsibility of running the Universe to Lord Vishnu. As His devotee, Lord Vishnu carries out the assigned task with such phenomenal devotion, without seeking anything in return, that a delighted Lord Shiva decides to make Him foremost among the Gods. He asked the Gods to worship Him and worshipped Lord Vishnu Himself. Essentially, Lord Shiva gave Lord Vishnu His power of attorney. That is what devotion and selfless sewa towards Guruji can do if a devotee, like Lord Vishnu, does not ask for anything. “*Guru kolo manggo na, Guru nu manno.*”

Goddess Sati doesn't easily trust this tale and decides to test Lord Rama. Unfortunately, in a moment of forgetfulness, she goes before Lord Rama as Sita. Lord Rama sees through the disguise immediately and greets her respectfully as Goddess Sati while also inquiring about Lord Shiva. Goddess Sati is now convinced and goes back to Lord Shiva with regret and remorse. However, the damage is done. Lord Shiva comes to know of her doing and He mentally relinquishes her. This event then ties up to Daksha's *yagya*, Goddess Sati's devotional sacrifice, the eventual destruction of the altar and the extreme forgiveness Lord Shiva extends to Daksha.

These are but a few *satsangs* from the legends defining the *Shiva Purana*. There are many, many more. Guruji urged devotees to read the *Shiva Purana*. He asked that it be given five complete readings, telling

devotees that it could only then be understood. Careful readers would note that the *Shiv Purana* self-subscribes to the view that five readings be given. The *Shiv Purana* is also a way of approaching Lord Shiva, and a means for Him to grant us His benediction and protection. It is a way of doing *jaap yoga*, too, because it gets us to remember Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati.

Lord Shiva will not let His devotees suffer loss. He couldn't care less about whom a devotee is fighting or how great his trouble is. It is the same with Guruji Maharaj. He goes out of His way to take care of His devotees. Lord Shiva and Guruji are one and the same. Like Lord Shiva, Guruji is ever-present, continuing to take the poison out of our lives, giving us a better future even as He purifies us so that we can become "Blessings Ready" for His devotional manifestation in our own lives.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My first thank-you goes to the spirit of devotion that inspired this book. However, since my devotion is, in turn, inspired by Guruji Maharaj, my foremost thanks has to go to Guruji Maharaj—now and forever.

I then thank my wife, Kamlesh, for encouraging me in this endeavour, recounting our time with Guruji Maharaj in minute detail and for being the vital part of my life's journey. I couldn't have made it so far without her love, care, and support. I also thank my lovely daughters, Jaya, Shubha, and Ila for all the love and support they have given me.

Next, I am grateful to General Kapoor's family, Colonel Joshi uncle, R P Singla uncle, Rashmi Singh Aunty and all others mentioned in the book, for giving me their approval to cite them and their *satsangs*. I also express my gratitude to all my friends in the *sangat* without whom this book couldn't have been completed.

I also take this opportunity to make a special mention of Mukul Agarwal uncle for his unstinted support and encouragement right from inception to the publication of this book.

A lot of what appears in this book as my own understanding, has been derived from the teachings of great Gurus, saints, learned writers, *sangat* and my family elders. I am grateful to all of them for their quiet contributions in making me who I am today.

Finally, from the bottom of my heart, I thank all those unidentified *sewadaars* who made it possible for me to connect with Guruji and receive His blessings through their *satsangs* and memorabilia I have received over the years.

Jai Guruji.



About the author...

Raj Kumar Sharma or “Commander Uncle” as lovingly known to Guruji’s sangat, hails from a small town situated in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. He is a loving husband to Kamlesh, a caring wife, a father to three amazing daughters, an IIT alumnus, and a retired Indian Navy Commander. After leaving the Indian Navy, Raj worked for several multinational firms and traveled the world (reluctantly, as he hates flying) in doing so.

Raj came into Guruji Maharaj’s presence on 18 February 2001 and immediately found his calling—being under Guruji’s refuge and giving up the spheres of his life in Guruji’s hands. With this book, Raj has shared his personal journey from his time spent with Guruji’s physical and eternal forms—it is a collection of his learning of being Guruji’s sangat. The book flows like a story, which is perfect because Raj has been known to be a passionate storyteller...perhaps Guruji noted that too!

This book is not for sale.

