



MOTH & THE FLAME
FACE OF A PROPHET
4

*F*rom 1964 to 1965, life revolved around art and the inner quest. After three years abroad, brother Godfrey turned up at my seventh-floor walk-up studio on New York's Lower Eastside. His eccentric genius manifested in flowing, semi-abstract totemic sculptures; a boyhood apprenticeship with Kwagulth chief Mungo Martin served him well.¹ Godfrey's murals and sculptures were scattered over several continents in coffeehouses, galleries, collectors' homes and museums. Although hopeless with finances, his macho charm, remarkable memory for poetry, and storytelling made him the life of every party. Of a different, more introverted nature, I had struggled to blossom in his shadow, but by now was disenchanted with the superficial art scene. Former wild and egocentric heroes toppled from their pedestals, supplanted now by worthier ones—the past masters of several spiritual traditions, representing the pinnacle of human development. However, it was my brother who unwittingly played a role in my greatest discovery.

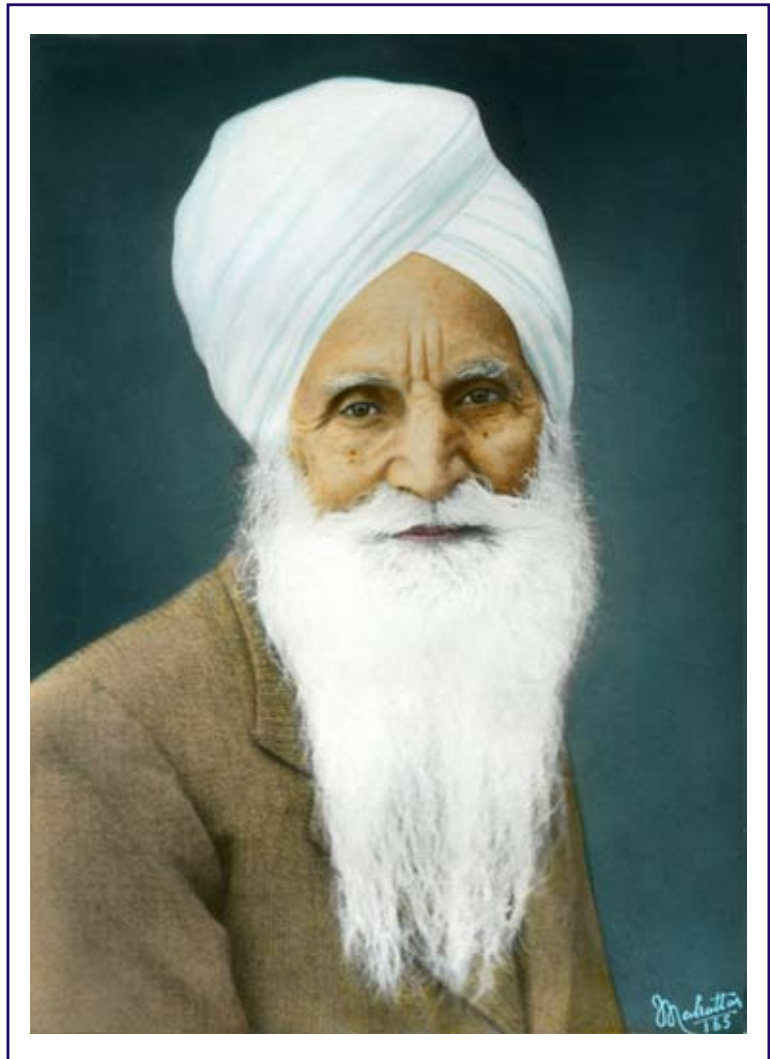
One afternoon Godfrey returned with a large, empty picture portfolio found abandoned in a nearby alley. Neatly printed on the inside were the name and address of Paul Caponegro, one of the city's foremost nature photographers. Coincidentally, Caponegro was being groomed to succeed Willem Nyland of the New York Gurdjieff group. This chance discovery seemed fraught with implications. Apprehending my quarry at the dispersal of the next Gurdjieff meeting, I briefly explained the need to speak privately. Paul laughed and set a time three days hence to meet at his East Side apartment, which turned out to be only a few blocks away from my studio. Inexplicably anxious, I counted the days and the hours and the moments.

When I arrived, Paul disappeared into the kitchen to prepare coffee, allowing me an opportunity to inspect a collection of fascinating images on the walls of his well-appointed place. Among studies of rocks and ferns were photo portraits from a bygone era. Judging by the subjects' looks and attire I

presumed they must have been Eastern mystics. A tiny photograph of an immaculate-looking white-turbaned man with chiselled features and a long, snow-white beard drew my attention like a magnet. His regal yet otherworldly face was the epitome of beauty and serenity.²

While I stood witlessly staring, Paul entered the room and handed me a photograph of a different, yet equally extraordinary stranger.³

In the moments that followed, I stood transfixed before the rugged visage of one who radiated power and compassion, his eyes aglow with an inner bliss. As I held this otherwise inanimate picture, subtle gears began shifting. The boundaries of matter began to dissolve as exhilarating currents seemed to move up my spine. With open eyes the periphery of vision sparkled. It felt like the top of my head was gently opening into a universe of Light. Wave after surging wave of diaphanous luminosity billowed forth from the face in the photograph, yet simultaneously from within my head. The lustrous eyes of the Familiar Stranger were within the center. Once again, I felt loved unconditionally, as I did when first opened to the Light two years earlier. Then, from far away yet very distinctly, ten words formed in my consciousness:



*Hazur Baba Sawan Singh Ji Maharaj
(1858-1948)*



Param Sant Kirpal Singh Ji Maharaj
(1894-1974)

While on his 1963 world tour of North America, a complete stranger walked up to Sant Kirpal Singh and exclaimed, 'Sir! You have the face of a prophet!'

'If God has a face, He must look like this.'

This audio-visual experience was too much for any rational mind to absorb! I was completely undone. Struggling for a point of reference, I broke away and recovered my senses. With the picture cradled in my hands, I walked over to Paul and asked, 'Is he a Sufi?' 'In a way, yes,' he answered with a quizzical smile. 'Is he still living?' I asked with trepidation, as all the great teachers I had so keenly read about were no more of this world. He nodded in affirmation. Relief. 'Tell me more,' I pried, but Paul changed the subject. Still bathing in the afterglow of bewildering transcendence, Paul's words seemed so far away from me. On leaving, he handed me a tattered book, and commented, 'You may find this of interest.' The author was Kirpal Singh (page 31, above).

I took home my threadbare treasure and read through the night, this detailed biography of a little-known nineteenth-century spiritual Adept known simply as Baba Ji (Baba Jaimal Singh). The book was however, far more. Every page opened up new yet ancient possibilities, explaining spirituality as a universal science, devoid of ritual, dogma, or blind belief. The book was a guide, a clear map and a genealogy of *Sant Mat*—or path of the Masters. Nothing he said contradicted the ethical or spiritual teachings of other authentic lineages that I was already familiar with. Levels of mystic experience were explained, affirming my limited excursions yet far transcending them. Kirpal Singh—a living practitioner, spoke eloquently of life's true purpose, while unraveling hidden scriptural meanings and universal mystic teachings throughout the ages. He emphasized the importance of experiencing for ourselves the inner Light and Celestial Sound-current, which is at the core of all great religions and wisdom teachings. I had heard the lower strains of this Sound, but never before realized its true significance:

It was, said Baba Ji, the path most economical in effort and the one most rewarding for reaching back to the Primal Source of all life and light. Its secret lay in the insight that if the soul was to merge back into the point from where it had descended, the way of ascent must be identical with that of descent. The Nameless One, when assuming Name and Form, had projected Itself into Shabd, Naam, Kalma or the Word.

It was this spiritual current whose primary attributes were melody and effulgence that was responsible for all creation...

All sages, in their own different ways, had testified to the working of the Word or Naam Power...

The music and glory of the Word spread through all creation and permeated our being. If only the Atman [i.e. the individual soul] could be contacted with it, it could use this "string from the Nameless Lord" to reach His Door. But the soul in its downward descent had loosened the link and had forgotten its real nature. Acquiring the gross coverings of body and mind, it had lost sight of its native home and identified itself with its prison.⁴

In spite of my peripheral experiences with the Sound and Light of Creation, returning to the Source of it all would require living help:

Baba Ji indefatigably emphasized the necessity of a living Master for success in the field...

The spiritual journey was not a matter of intellectual disquisition. It was a question of practical ascension. Without his enlivening touch the soul could not awaken from its slumber and get attuned to Naam. The Jiva Atman [the embodied soul] was too far lost in the gross material to contact Shabd on its own account. Besides, the inner way was not an easy one and even if the soul could transcend physical consciousness and enter the realms within, it could not proceed very far on its own...

He did not promise spiritual attainment in some future life after death. He gave a taste of it here and now...⁵

As if a bell had been struck, my inner self responded radically. Although he spoke in third person and made no self-claims, his words were redolent with authenticity. The name Kirpal (pronounced *Kirpaul*) began to revolve in my mind like a rosary. Had I at long last found the Guide? On the last page was an address in India. Taking the plunge, I wrote and asked for a blessing on my life, balancing as it was on the cusp of twenty-one.

Poor Paul! I returned to badger him with many a question. He was quick to point out that he wasn't a follower and maintained a healthy skepticism. However, he confided: 'I

attended one of Kirpal Singh's talks on his 1963 world tour, which took place in a large church in Boston. *Something* happened to me then which I have never experienced before or since. But first let me caution you that there are some Adepts from the East who have developed subjective powers which cannot be rationally or objectively evaluated.'

'Please continue,' I asked, barely suppressing my excitement.

'From where I stood at the back of the church, I observed a sphere of bright golden-white Light above his head. This Light pulsed, spreading wave upon wave across the audience. It was the most extraordinary thing I have ever witnessed.'

Paul's non-devotee status made his testimony even more meaningful to me. The puzzle-pieces were falling into place. Meeting the Master in person became my passion. Was I just picking up in this life where I left off in the last?

-
1. The Kwagulth are a First Nations people of the coastal areas of British Columbia, renowned for their woodcarving skills.
 2. Hazur Baba Sawan Singh Ji (1858-1948).
 3. Param Sant Kirpal Singh Ji (1894-1974).
 4. Kirpal Singh, *A Great Saint Baba Jaimal Singh: His Life and Teachings*, (Delhi, India: SK Publications, 1993), p.. 85-86.
 5. *Ibid.*, p. 88.