



MOTH & THE FLAME  
ASHRAM VIGNETTES

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After considerable pestering, Dalip Singh, the ashram secretary-treasurer, and distant relative of the Master, eventually allows me the privilege of typing some of the Master's correspondence during breaks in my five to six hours daily meditation schedule. The need to balance contemplation and serviceful action is apparent, as my mind and body rebel against further practice. While Dalip Singh has a reputation for being very strict and abrupt, with me he is most kind. Each evening he presents the ashram's account transaction ledgers to the Master in person who scrutinizes each entry, apparently oblivious to a few of us who might be present and eager to soak up some extra darshan and extemporaneous wisdom.

'During his official career, Master was so careful in his outer behavior,' Dalip Singh shared one day, 'that he would empty the ink from his fountain-pen before leaving government office. He did not consider that ink his own; it belonged to the company.' In my mind's eye, I picture the Master emptying his fountain pen each day, and am staggered by the implications of such integrity in the small things normally taken for granted.

When commissioned to continue the spiritual work of his Master in that same year, Sant Kirpal Singh lived off his modest government pension. Throughout, he never accepted money, food offerings or gifts for his own personal use, with one exception that I know of. Shortly after I arrived in India, an elderly widow dressed in threadbare cloth arrived at the ashram. Working hard and long hours sewing and mending clothes for a pittance, she spent her savings—a few paisas (a paisa is India's smallest coin, worth only a fraction of a cent), the widow bought a packet of sweets, and took the long bus ride from her village to the ashram. Her ruling passion was to offer these sweets to her Guru, wanting nothing else. Hunkering down on the ground at the back of a crowd of several hundred, she became overwhelmed by a sense of unworthiness in the Master's presence and quietly wept. Rising from his wicker chair, Master rushed into the throng and took the bag of sweets from her hands, asking: 'Please dear mother, may I have some?' He ate a piece and returned the rest to her as *parshad*. This further illustrated his omniscience, yet to the casual observer, his action was puzzling.

Adjoining the Master's apartments is a porch, a large airy terrazzo-

floored white room enclosed by screens facing rose gardens on three sides. From early morn till past midnight a never-ending stream of aspirants comes and goes. Master frequently moves between his bedroom-office, an intervening living room and a white wicker chair in the porch, which creaks delightfully whenever he settles into it. There he meets and listens, advises and blesses. Several times throughout each day the Master distributes heaping handfuls of *parshad* to devotees who gather here. Even chipmunks, sparrows and finches flit in and out with parshad that spills to the floor. Parshad means divine grace, freely given without consideration of the beneficiary's effort or virtue. Any food or flower freely given from the hands of a person of realization becomes tangible parshad, if not a catalytic meditation-booster. In the past few weeks I have received such a huge quantity of puffed rice from his hands, I add buffalo milk and eat it like breakfast cereal.

Here on the porch, one gets an intimate glimpse into the Master's mission. I often witness him opening his wallet to those whom fate has dealt a cruel economic blow. Usually the truly needy are too shy to ask for help, but he always seems to know the ones in real need. The Sikh scriptures sometimes refer to the ideal Saint as *Gharib Niwaz*—literally, *Home of the Poor*. I also see the materially wealthy, the politically powerful, and learned scholars humble as dust, all seeking alms of grace from this great equalizer. All sorts come to his door, seeking marriage blessings, names for babies, business blessings, a physical cure, advice on this or that, consolation to the bereaved, comfort for the injured and ill, and to offer thanks for blessings already received. Some seek improvement in meditation, to have doubts resolved, or to ask forgiveness for some dark deed.

***Stigmata and the Buffalo Boy:*** One night on the porch I ask, 'Master, your disciple, Mrs. Gordon Hughes of Kentucky, with whom I have been corresponding, has purportedly received the stigmata or wounds of the crucifixion on her hands and feet, which bleed at Christmas and Easter. I have also read accounts of other stigmatics such as Padre Pio, Saint Francis, and Therese Neumann. How and why is this?'

His answer is most revealing: 'As you think, so you become!' And he continues, 'Once a seeker went to a Master. The Master asked him, "Whom do you love most?" He replied, "I love my buffalo most!" His Master then told him to go into a room and think only about his buffalo. Two days later the Guru returned and told this fellow, "All right, come out of the room now." He answered, "I can't, my horns are too wide for the doorway!"' His face wreathed in smiles and soundless laughter, Master continues: 'But you see, this

degree of identification and concentration is very rare. *As you think, so you become.*'

I venture again: 'How can we be rid of the ever-asserting ego?'

Scrutinizing me with soul-piercing eyes, he replies: 'It is only when you rise above the three planes—physical, astral and causal—and become One with the Controlling Power of the Universe.'

Chaddha Sahib asks, 'Why do you never spare yourself, Maharaj Ji? Why are you ever rushing here and there, giving satsangs, neglecting rest, regardless of the cost to your personal health or comfort?'

'I am simply carrying out the will of my Master,' he replies. 'He has assigned to me certain tasks to accomplish, and as long as even a single breath remains, it is my duty to complete them. How else can I show my face before the Almighty?'

Earlier in the day, a humble devotee wandered about the yard expressing his infectious feelings in a lyric song. It is impossible to translate the subtle tones, rhyme and meter; only one ecstatic phrase I understood:

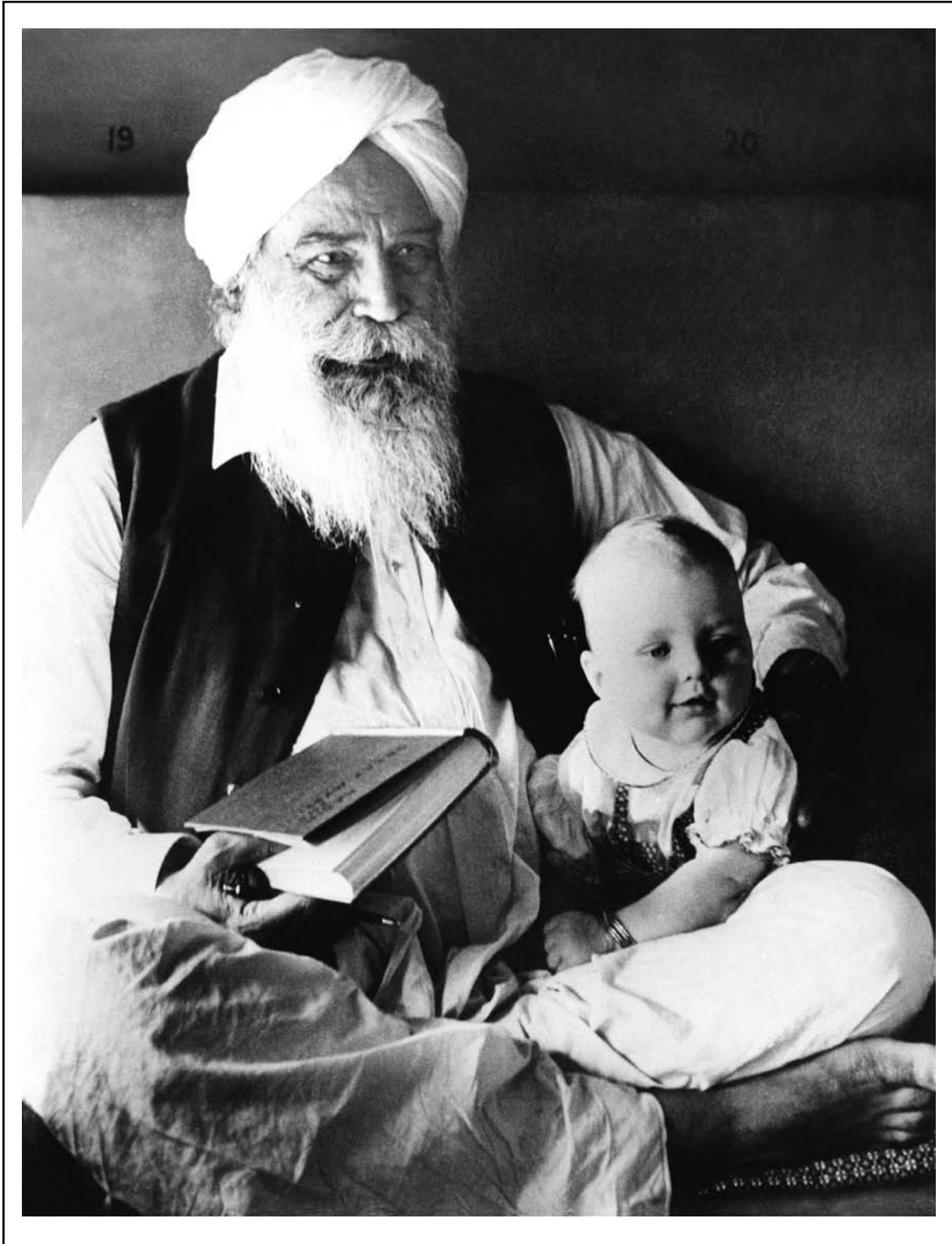
*Doctor Kirpal has entered the hospital of Sawan Shah,  
And the joy of the afflicted knows no bounds.*

Consoling a disciple complaining of increasing deafness, the Master says, 'Why do you worry about it? Deafness is a blessing! You are saved from thirteen percent of the sense impressions, but more than that, you don't have to listen to other people's complaints!'<sup>1</sup>

**Diary, February 12:** Master plays with Mary Howard, an angelic six-month-old baby with golden curls, while her American parents look on adoringly. Two weeks ago Master had coaxed Mary into taking her first steps.

Master holds aloft a bright yellow film canister. From a squatting position Mary reaches, but Master moves it toward himself. She stands, and toddles closer, hands outstretched. He now holds it higher. Only after continuous effort does he give, and rewards her with a touch on the top of her head, and Mary's smile rivals the sun.

Such sweet fun between a Master and disciples is referred to as *leela*—or *divine play*. Everything within these sacred walls is a thinly veiled play of consciousness. Under his expert guidance, our inner Light-child emerges, learns to crawl, walk, reach and fumble for Godhead. Once the Adept's company is reached, he steps back, as if to say *go higher*. If lucky enough to reach the first or second stage of the inner journey, we are exhorted ever onwards to the next!



*Master & Baby Mary*  
1967 - photo by Lala Howard

Instilling a sense of urgency combined with the inculcation of patience and perseverance in the quest for inner realization, a true Master continually nurtures a deepening awareness of the higher Self, drawing us back to the Source. And many are the exquisite moments which hang on the pauses between the words and actions of the fully awakened being, where time stands still. He says:

*Love burns the lover, and devotion burns the one you are devoted to; he has to take care of everything for you when you are devoted. Love seeks happiness for the Beloved, not for the self, mind that...*

*So, devotion seeks blessing from the Beloved, but love seeks to shoulder the burden of the Beloved. And devotion throws the burden on the Beloved! Love gives; love does not require the presence of the Beloved in order to love. One who loves, he loves, that's all...a lover is never alone...The Beloved resides in him. They are one, whether near or far. So devotion asks, and love is silent and sublime, devoid of outward expression. Such is the ideal of love. The best of all I have come to know is love.*

*God is Light and Consciousness, but that Consciousness is now enveloped by matter. You are not matter. You are sparks of Light. Be one with the great conflagration of Light!*

**Ashram Characters:** The colorful cast of ashram characters intrigues me. This is just a partial list, and some appear early or later in my story:

*Ganga Dhar:* He's in charge of tape-recording the Master's discourses, fiddling with the electric cables, batteries and microphones. He and his assistant have humorously been dubbed by Jim Howard as Wire-Das—*Servants of the Wire*. Ganga Dhar organizes large ashram construction crews, and gets them moving with his shouts of 'Chello! Chello!' ('Move! Move!'), so I have nicknamed him *Chello-Das*. He meditates regularly. Jim approaches him today and asks, 'Ganga Dhar, you must have made a lot of progress in meditation,' to which he replies with a humble smile, 'Sahib, I am like a tree without any leaves, and cannot give shade to anyone. And I'm so rooted in the ground, I cannot even whip myself up to God!' *Oh, Ganga—you speak for me...*

*Ram Saroop and Mohan Singh*, respectively, are the drivers of the ashram cars—a 1957 Studebaker Champion station wagon, and a new Ambassador. More about Ram Saroop later on. Mohan, in his thirties, has become my friend, and he is a strong, devoted servant of the Master. Initiated at an early age by Hazur, he lives with his wife at Sawan Ashram. Mohan has had many wonderful and extraordinary experiences with the Masters.

*Gyani Bhagwan Singh*—learned in Sikh scriptural lore, is one highly articulate gentleman, a long-retired Indian Railway official and an

initiate of Hazur since the 1920's. He is on the ashram's managing committee, and serves as general secretary.

*Edna and Stanley Shinerock* have lived at the ashram for several years. Stanley, an accountant, works for the Canadian Embassy, and Edna assists foreign visitors in adjusting to ashram life.

*Gursharan* plays classical Indian bamboo flute—beautifully.

*Ram Ji* is a delightful fellow around my age, who comes from a very poor family. His job is to clean, cook and serve. Each time we pass each other in the hallway, we make a game of the Indian tradition of touching the feet of one's elders, laughing like crazy in our display of mock subservience.

*Ayat*: In his late teens, Ayat also comes from a poor background. Master brought him into his service—cooking, ironing, and cleaning. There would be many millionaires and rulers who would gladly trade places with Ayat, but not the other way around!

*Master Pratap*: He is the Music-Master, whose story comes later.

*Harish and Bimla Chaddha*: The Chaddhas have long resided at the ashram, serving the Mission in various ways. Harish is a newspaper correspondent, editor of the Master's monthly magazine, and author of several publications including the full-length Hindi book, *Pita Poot* (Father and Son)—an account of the Guru-disciple relationship between Hazur and Sant Kirpal Singh. Chaddha is ever ready to expound and pontificate on anything from 'cabbages to kings.'

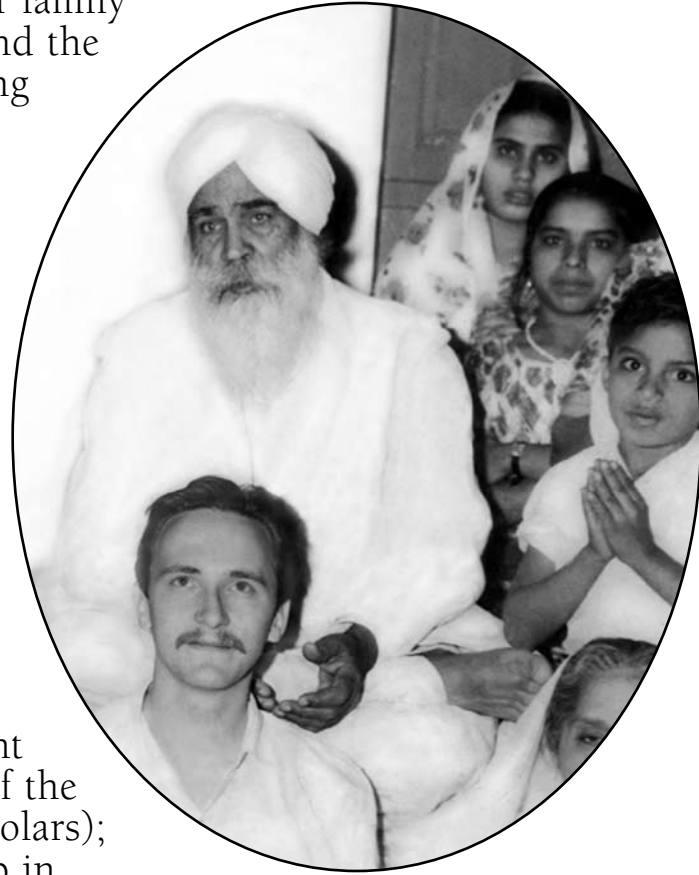
*Princess Narendra Kaur Narendraji*, daughter of the Maharaja of Jhind, came to the Master after her husband—an air force pilot—died in a jet plane crash. Fiercely devotional, she lives in a small house within the ashram with Vera, her teenaged daughter.

*Bibi Hardevi Raja Ram* (a.k.a. 'Tai Ji') is a prominent devotee of Hazur, elderly widow of Raja Ram, and major domo about the ashram. She is mentioned in Dr. Julian Johnson's book, *With A Great Master in India*. She became blind in the late 1930's, but upon Kirpal Singh's intercession to Hazur, she was given back her sight. Before leaving in 1948, Hazur asked Kirpal to look after Tai Ji. A true disciple lives in a condition of complete obedience and surrender to his Master—but such obedience is exceedingly rare.

*Pundit Dhani Ram Sharma*: A retired civil servant, polite, formal and devoted sevadar of both Sawan and Kirpal. Pundit Ji is in charge of book sales and initiation records.

There are hundreds of inspiring disciples from all religions, castes and socioeconomic levels who come regularly to attend the discourses and darshan sessions. Many selflessly serve the Master's mission in

myriad ways, but have regular family life and full-time careers beyond the ashram walls. Some outstanding examples of this whom I have come to know—whose output of service for the Master at the ashram defies comprehension: Mr. Sethi—Master’s main personal secretary; Brij Mohan Sharma—intoxicated devotee and astute businessman; Bhadra Sena—scholar, author and correspondence secretary (whose hen-scratch handwriting I find extremely challenging to decipher); Dr. Vinod Sena (Bhadra’s son)—head of the English Department of Delhi University (and one of the world’s foremost Y.B.Yeats scholars); Darshan Singh, who is high up in India’s civil service; he handles difficult correspondence with impeccably neat handwriting, plus many noble female sevadars whom I only know and address as ‘Bhen-ji’ (sister) or ‘Mata-ji’ (mother).



Soon after arrival—January, 1967

Baba Sawan Singh Ji once commented to Julian Johnson and Kirpal Singh in the 1930’s, that when the Masters come into the world, they bring their own staff with them. Such association is preordained from past lives; they just get transferred from one place to another at the appointed time.

*Love alone is the cementing force  
that binds the Master and the disciple.*

—Kirpal Singh.

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1. According to the Masters, we receive thirteen percent of our sense impressions through the ears (sound), approximately eighty-four percent through the eyes (sight), and the remainder through the nose (smell), tongue (taste), and skin (touch or feeling).

2. From a 1963 tape-recorded intimate session between Kirpal Singh and American disciples.