



MOTH & THE FLAME
RISHIKESH & HARDWAR

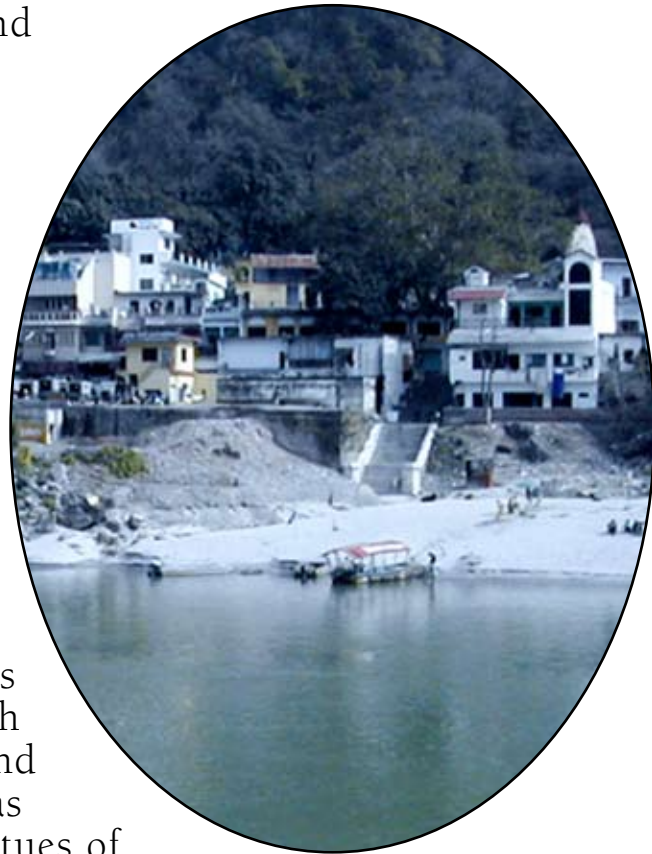
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*When my mind became as pure & limpid
as the waters of the Ganges,
God ran after me, crying, "O Kabir! O Kabir!"*

Diary, June, '67: 'Please make yourself ready. We leave for Hardwar and Rishikesh tomorrow morning!' Master announces. Currents of joy and soaring expectation fill me. Since my teens when I first read Brunton's Search in Secret India, and Yogananda's Autobiography, I had inwardly longed for those sacred haunts where rishis and yogis of yore pursued divine knowledge with singular zeal.

Setting forth at the crack of dawn, our cars parallel the mighty Ganga upriver, and arrive at Hardwar by noon. This ancient religious city teems with ochre-robed swamis, pundits and pious pilgrims. Incense, mantras and temple bells fill the air; statues of Ganesha, the elephant-headed god; Shivaji, the blue-throated Himalayan yogi-deva; Sheshnag, the thousand-headed serpent representing the support of the physical plane; Lakshmi, the many-armed goddess of prosperity; Durga, riding her tiger; avatars Rama and Krishna, Hanuman the monkey hero king—all invite devotees to worship. Vast stoneworks and marble terraces, endless stairs and ornate shrines line the river, where crowds perform ablutions, offering water eastward to the souls of departed ancestors.

Absorbing this remarkable spectacle, one is reminded of Guru Nanak's Hardwar visit 450 years earlier. After observing similar rituals, Nanak began scooping water in his hands, throwing it to the West in the opposite direction. A large crowd gathered, and



their priest spokesman demanded an explanation. The great teacher replied, 'Oh, I'm watering my fields in the Punjab.' They chided him, 'That's ridiculous. How is it possible for you to water your fields five hundred miles away?' Nanak replied, 'If your offerings can reach the souls of those long departed, surely this same water will reach my fields in the Punjab!' By Nanak's simple example and highly charged presence, his audience realized the ineffectiveness of outer rituals, and the process of their awakening began.

For centuries—and even to this day—pilgrims held the belief that a bath in the holy Ganga will wash all sins away. Kabir in his time reminded pilgrims that if the fish which spends its entire life in the Ganges does not lose its bad odor, how can man even think that by such an ablution his soul will be cleansed? Investiture of miraculous properties to physical objects is the common practice of the priesthood and the simple-minded. Kabir, Nanak and other divine mystics speak of an inner purifying water, found only in Daswan Dwar, the third spiritual region: when the soul reaches this stage and bathes in its nectarous waters, the karmas and sins collected from innumerable lifetimes are cleansed. Thus purified and uncovered, soul radiates with a brightness exceeding twelve suns. She (soul is often referred to in the feminine) then may proceed to the higher spiritual regions in the company of the Guide.

A white bridge spans the wide river over which we cross to the uninhabited side where Ganga Mayi (Mother Ganges) flows clear, swift and cold from the Himalayas down to the vast Gangetic plains. As life-provider for India's millions, Ganga is indeed a mother-sustainer. While immersing my feet in the cold currents, Master sits nearby in sidh-aasan beneath a towering neem tree, giving darshan to several sadhu-renunciates. Above and beyond the hodgepodge of temples and ashrams on the opposite shore, jungled foothills stretch into the bluish distance. I ponder the possibility of having lived here before.

Master shares a glimpse of his earlier life: 'I came to Hardwar more than thirty-five years ago, to meditate in solitude on this very bank. Then Haridwar consisted of only a few temples and ashrams, and people were afraid to cross the river to this side [now a beautiful park]. It was then all jungle, infested with snakes and scorpions—but they never bit or harmed me. I found it a good place for meditation. Now Hardwar is commercialized and noise-some.' He walks to the river's edge, recounting times when he would swim and allow the current to carry him several kilometers downstream.

Between Hardwar and the smaller, less commercialized village of Rishikesh upriver, our car slowly passes more ashrams and temples. Milling crowds of sadhu-mendicants of all ages, male and female, some with long matted hair, prayer malas, shiva-tridents and ash-besmeared bodies, beg for alms. Some sadhus engage in incredibly austere forms of yoga. Various sects are delineated by yellow, orange, white or red robes. Some have shaven heads, some are bearded, some have white forehead markings, some red, some are learned and renowned scholars. Some are genuine; most are engaged in elementary stages of yoga. Some are shameless pretenders and crooks, preying on the unsuspecting.

From the front seat, Master shares more of his own history:

‘In 1948, I went to Uttarkashi, up-river from Rishikesh, and invited all hermits and sadhus from their retreats. When they gathered together I asked, “Brothers, who can give experience of Light?” Only one man came forward who had that competency. He could give inner Light to others but his method was to concentrate on the flame of a candle. After one or two years of practice others would begin to see the light inside. You people are given Light the very first day.”

Raghuvacharya: We drive to an embankment high over the Ganga, stopping at the Darshana Mahavidyalaya Ashram and Sanskrit School, founded by the venerable scholar and sage, Sri Raghuvacharya. We descend a flight of steep stone steps to a cluster of whitewashed buildings overhanging the sparkling river. When the 111 year-old Raghuvacharya emerges from a door, we have the rare opportunity to witness an authentic Yogiraj,¹ and a Saint, meet and embrace.

Master has also come for the sake of Mangat Ram’s widow, to be present at the immersion of her husband’s ashes. A Pundit leads a procession to the riverbank where Vedic rites are performed, prayers intoned and ashes poured upon the water. A few hundred yards upstream is the rock upon which the Master practised intense meditation for several months in 1948.

Three of us escape the sweltering heat and swim in the slower, deeper waters of the river, despite crocodile warnings. As I swim to the far side, I turn and see Master watching from the cliff.

In a large room of Raghuvacharya’s hermitage, we eat, then rest on the smooth cool floor. The supine but lordly one is a few feet away, attention totally withdrawn and absorbed in the inner spiritual regions. All breathing, all movement of his body slows until entirely

still, like a marble carving, and remains so for the next 20 minutes. At this sight I am chilled and alarmed. I whisper my anxiety to my friend Brij Mohan. 'Dear brother; not to worry,' he assures. 'This is usual course for Maharaj Ji. He will return after a while. You don't know these things. This is his mystery.' *It's a mystery I'd dearly love to know!*

Yogishwar, an Englishwoman and disciple of the late Swami Sivananda, is my afternoon guide to Rishikesh. She has short-cropped silver hair and is dressed in orange renunciate's robes. I ask how she came to be here.

Yogishwar answers, 'In 1963, I was practicing sadhana [spiritual discipline] in London under the guidance of my guru, Swami Sivananda. One night I entered a deep meditative state, and within brilliant spiritual Light a great Master appeared, with incomparable beauty and power. He was in the Sikh form with long white beard and high turban. Next, another being of Light appeared. The first Master gave me detailed directions to go to such and such a place in London and meet the Living Master. I had no idea who these beings were but having learned to trust my inner direction, I went to the indicated place and met Sant Kirpal Singh for the first time (then on his world tour and in London). He informed me that Swami Sivananda had just left the body that day. Naturally, this news came as a great shock!

'When I was shown a photograph of Baba Sawan Singh Ji, I recognized him as the great Master who had first appeared in my vision. I was initiated that very morning by Sant Kirpal Singh. Again Sawan Singh appeared; this time revealing much more of his transcendental immanence. And again Master Kirpal appeared. Hazur then said to me directly, "Kirpal Singh is my Spiritual Son. He will take care of you."'

I ask, 'Why have you continued to wear the saffron robes and shave your head like a renunciate, when that is not our Path?'

Yogishwar explains, 'I have taken life-long vows of renunciation under the instructions of my guru Sivananda whom I continue to honor and love, but my spiritual salvation and passport through the higher planes is in my relationship with Master and his Sant Mat lineage. Master Kirpal is my spiritual Father, and is fully aware of my aspirations and attachment to Swami Sivananda. He respects my unique relationship to the Divine.'

After putting me in my place, Yogishwar invites me to Sivananda Ashram, a stone's throw down-river on the opposite side of the road

from Raghuvacharya's hermitage. She points out a universal worship temple and Sivananda's samadh (tomb). We peer inside the door of a decrepit cell where Yogishwar had spent years in yogic practice. She jokes about the rats and bugs who kept her company, stating that spartan Sawan Ashram is pure luxury by comparison.

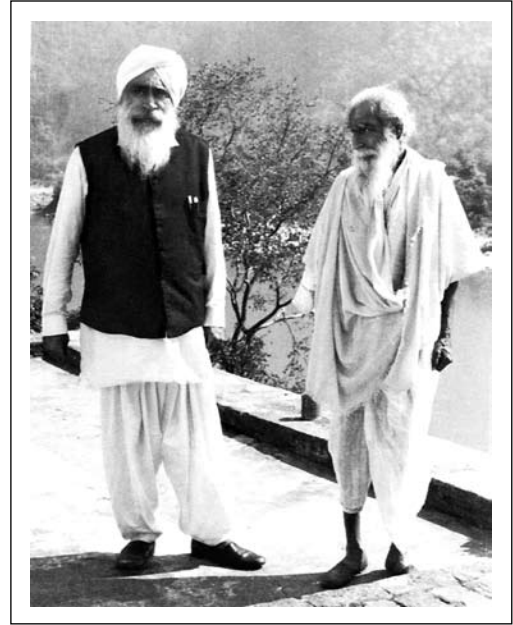
When we return, we find Raghuvacharya and Master up (just as Brij Mohan had promised) and talking. The sprightly Yogiraj is in an effusive mood: "Before meeting Maharaj Ji in 1948, I had, by rigorous practice of Patanjali's Asthanga Yoga, traversed beyond the six chakras and inner stages up to Sahasrar—the Thousand Petalled Lotus of Light. Sahasrar is headquarters of the astral plane and the final stage of most forms of yoga. Other Yoga systems and their practitioners are unaware of the existence of anything beyond Brahm—the causal world, or second stage. Since meeting Master, he showered grace on this soul, taking it beyond what is possible through yoga."

The venerable sage continues, 'Twelve years ago, I became very ill and died. When *surat* (attention) withdrew from my lifeless body into higher planes, I saw Hazur, and before him was Maharaj Kirpal requesting Hazur to extend my life another fifteen years, as he wanted more work from me! Hazur nodded his head in acceptance, and thus I am here today!'

We move to the stone courtyard outside, directly overlooking the shimmering river. Raghuvacharya asks to see Master's right palm—which he indifferently extends while looking into the eyes of each of us, and not without a twinkle of humor. After careful examination, Raghuvacharya becomes animated, hopping from one foot to the next like an excited adolescent. Speaking aloud in a deep, booming voice and tracing his index finger along the Master's palm he exclaims, 'Never have I seen such a palm! Come, see for yourselves!' All surge forward to see Master's flawless, deeply-lined palm. In rich tones, Raghuvacharya declares, 'Not even Rama and Krishna had such a hand. You have the hands which belong to God! Whomsoever beholds such a palm is blessed!' In vain he stoops to touch the Master's feet, but is restrained by him.

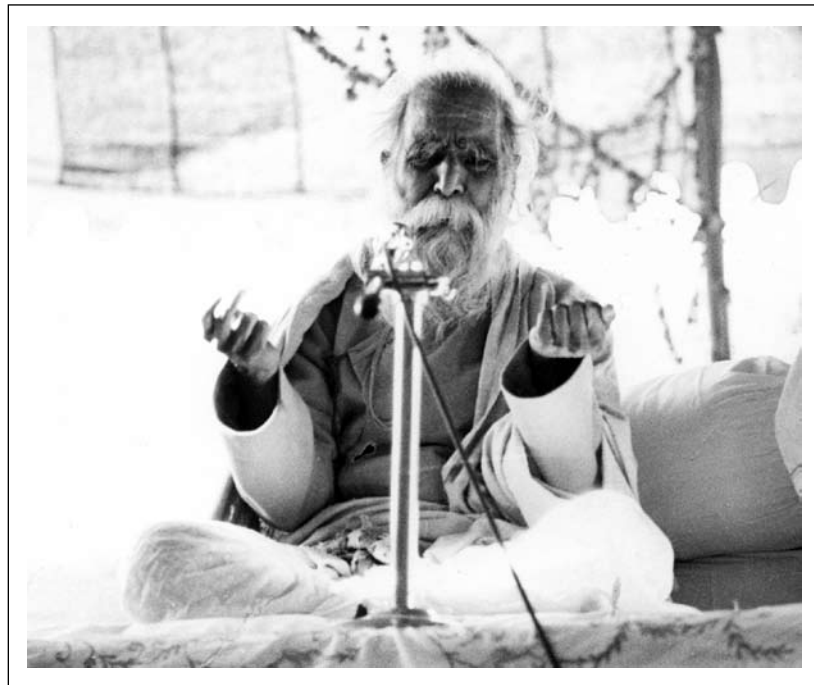
'Maharaj!' Raghuvacharya implores, 'stay with me; rest a while in my hermitage! Six months here will rejuvenate your body and add years to your precious life!' But Master gently laughs and demurs. He has no luxury of time, for the flock he has demands nurturing and the ones yet to gather beckon; the harvest is rich, and laborers, few.

I had studied Chiero's scientific system of palmistry prior to my coming to this path and my irrepressible curiosity wants to see what Raghuvacharya's palm reveals. The venerable yogi proffers his hand. I'm pleased just to hold his hand in mine, and do not seriously analyze it. Physically, Raghuvacharya stands 5' 6", about 140 lb. with deep-set eyes under betel brows. His beard is white and his sparse long hair is swept back and tied in a knot. Possessed of humor, wisdom, and ojas—the power which accrues from long celibacy—Raghuvacharya radiates a veritable halo of light.



Sant Kirpal Singh & Sri Raghuvacharya -

The illumined Raghuvacharya passed away in 1971 at the age of 113. His body was discovered sitting upright in a full lotus meditation posture. Sant Kirpal Singh Ji drove up to Rishikesh to personally ignite his funeral pyre and consign his ashes to the river.



Yogiraj Raghuvacharya (1858 - 1971)

1 Yogiraj translates as 'King of Yogis.'