

## *Baba's Mahasamadhi*

Baba returned from Kashmir late in the evening of Sunday, the 26th of September. Those devotees who were visiting the ashram from Mumbai who were about to return home, were asked by Baba to make sure they came back to the ashram the following weekend.

As the week unfolded, Baba was particularly open in expressing appreciation to the devotees who came up to meet him during *darshan*. Old-time devotees curiously and suddenly “just showed up” after long absences, saying simply that they had a strong urge to visit Baba. Some of Baba’s close disciples had been scheduled to be away from the ashram the coming Saturday and Sunday, but he urged them to remain. In any number of ways, Baba gave inklings and not-so-subtle hints that something of great significance would be occurring the next Saturday and Sunday.

Finally, Saturday, the 2nd of October arrived. The moon would be full that night. It started as would any other day—Baba followed his usual daily routine. For a number of months, a small group of disciples had been gathering in his bedroom to chant *mantras* with him during the evening arati. Baba would go to the cowshed and return by about 6:30 p.m., at which time the chants would start. That day Baba returned earlier and not everyone had arrived. When he asked why they were late, one person told Baba that actually he was a little early that day.

“No, I’m not early,” Baba replied, “*arati* has already started, can’t you hear it?” Baba did not say this in an irritated manner. He appeared to be in a good mood. Baba then went into his apartment. After a few minutes, he called everyone in and the group chant began.

The hymns were usually chanted in a slow and deliberate tone, but this time however, Baba started the chant at a very

fast pace, and with greater enthusiasm. Throughout the chant, Baba looked around the room at the participants more than usual casting affectionate glances to all present.

After the chant ended, Baba gave each and every one *prasad*. He then politely asked them to leave as quickly as possible. During Baba's meal that evening, his attendant recalled that he had asked him to play the tape of a particular hymn over and over again. He then wrote down a few lines of the song saying that they had deep meaning. The verse was:

*I see You wherever I look, my Beloved;  
Wherever my eyes turn  
They face the mirror of my own heart.*

The evening was still early. Ashramites gathered in the courtyard to chant *Om Namō Bhagavate Nityanandaya*. The chant was followed by a video about the Guru-disciple relationship entitled *The Perfect Mirror* which was created by the ashram's video department. About halfway through the video, Baba himself came out to watch part of it with everyone. After awhile, he went back inside. Later devotees would see the significance of this video: at its conclusion, Baba describes his own Guru's *mahasamadhi*.

After Baba left the courtyard, he went to Swami Chidvilasananda's room who was resting there due to a severe backache. She would later report Baba reminisced about his own life most of the time during what turned out to be his last visit with her.

Shortly after he left Swami Chidvilasananda's quarters, Baba returned to his own room. At about 9:30 p.m., Baba rang his bell to call his attendant. His attendant rushed to his room, but Baba only inquired of him what he was doing. After asking for a few things, Baba casually mentioned that he had a little discomfort in his chest. The attendant promptly called Baba's nurse. When the nurse arrived, Baba told her he had experienced

some chest pain that day, perhaps due to his having climbed up and down so many stairs. She asked him if he was having any pain at the moment and he said, “No, its almost gone.”

The nurse and attendant sat with Baba for sometime until he gave them a signal to leave. They left his bedroom and went into an adjoining room where they stayed until about 10:50 p.m.. His attendant looked in on him a number of times, and when he found him to be soundly asleep, both the attendant and the nurse returned to their respective rooms.

Just a few minutes after 11 p.m., Baba’s bell rang again. Baba’s attendant again rushed into his room. The attendant recalled that at first he thought Baba was in a deep sleep. He said that he looked very beautiful and calm. However when he called out to him, Baba didn’t respond. He immediately called the nurse. When she arrived, she said Baba was lying on his side and looked peaceful. She called out to him but there was no response. She then turned him on to his back. As she did so, she heard a slight rattling sound similar to snoring. Although his eyes were not quite open, she noticed that his eyes were rolled up and back in his head. At that moment, the nurse said that she knew Baba was gone. It was the autumnal full-moon night of October 2, 1982.

Swami Muktananda was clearly and unmistakably aware of the time and manner of his release from the mortal coil. After a lifetime of awakening others to the experience of Self, Baba’s Higher Self could now merge back into the formless cosmic stream of All-Consciousness.

Within moments, a number of Baba’s close disciples entered his bedroom. Baba’s body was given a ritual bath and dressed in fresh clothing. As is the custom for yogis, his body was then placed on his meditation seat in the lotus posture. This having been accomplished, Baba’s room was opened to devotees so that they might have one last *darshan* of his physical body.

As devotees walked past his body, Baba looked more like he was sitting peacefully in meditation than had taken his

*mahasamadhi*. So natural in fact that many expected him to open his eyes at any moment.

Since Baba had already given instructions the previous year to tear down his old room and prepare it for his burial site, it was now just a matter of breaking through the temporary floor and exposing the burial pit.

Throughout the night, news of his *mahasamadhi* went out by telephone and telex to the many centers around the world. As Sunday morning dawned, thousands of devotees had already reached the ashram to pay their last respects to “the guru’s Guru.” In death as in life, true to his teachings, the ceremonies honoring his departure proceeded with great love, dignity, order and cooperation.

For the next two days, an untold number of devotees and well-wishers passed through Baba’s room to pay their homage. Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, leading exponent of Transcendental Meditation, honored Baba by sending his representatives to chant *vedic* hymns near Baba’s body. On Monday night,



Baba’s *mahasamadhi* - the procession to Ganeshpuri (1982)

Mahamandaleshwar Swami Brahmanandaji arrived from Hardwar to officiate Baba's burial—although the overwhelming number of Hindus cremate their loved ones, the body of a Siddha, which continues to radiate spiritual emanations even after death, is more often buried instead of being cremated, thereby becoming a place of pilgrimage for posterity.

At 6:30 a.m. the next morning, final rites began with a ritual bathing of Baba's body with water from the sacred *Ganges River*. His body was at that point anointed with the *panchamrit*, the five nectars—milk, ghee, sugar etc., and then rinsed with water. After fresh clothing was put on, Baba's body was transported to Ganeshpuri for its final earthly *darshan* of his Guru's *samadhi* shrine. The main road was lined with ardent devotees all the way to the town of Ganeshpuri, all chanting "*Om Namō Bhagavate Nityanandaya*." This was the same chant with which devotees of Nityananda bade him his final farewell when he took mahasamadhi in 1961. But upon the return of the procession back to Baba's ashram, the chant spontaneously changed to "*Om Namō Bhagavate Muktanandaya*."

The ceremony concluded around 11:30 a.m. when Baba's body was placed in its final resting place and covered with layers of sandalwood, camphor, sacred ash, salt and earth. The body of the great Siddha had left us, but the all-conscious Self that inhabited that body was still alive, for how can God die?

Great yogis, Siddhas and saints come to know of their impending departure from this world months and even years before the actual event. This was the case with Swami Muktananda, as he had given a number of hints to close disciples beforehand.

Over a year earlier, while still in America, Baba sent a message to a few of his Ganeshpuri trustees to knock down the walls of his original room where Bhagavan Nityananda had him installed in 1956 and to dig a burial pit underneath it.

A few months before his *mahasamadhi*, Baba one day



Baba's samadhi site shortly after burial

casually said, "He (Nityananda) told me to sit there, and I will be sitting there until the end of time." Baba's announcement and installation of his two successors in May of 1982 was also an indication that Baba knew he would be leaving soon.

A further indication that Baba was aware of his approaching departure occurred fifteen days before his trip to Kashmir when he called an unexpected—and what one trustee referred to as an "extra-ordinary"—meeting of ashram trustees. One such trustee who was at the meeting was Mr. Nagpal who said that Baba told them he was happy with everything that had been going on so far and that now there was only about two or three percent of the work left to be completed. He then dropped a bombshell: Baba clearly said it would soon be time to inter him in the burial site.

When Baba uttered this, a number of trustees began to cry. Baba told them, "Don't cry," hugged each one of them, and then said, "Don't ever think of me as having passed away....

don't cry when it is time to put me into the ground, because we never pass away....”

Another trustee, who at the time was General Secretary of the Ganeshpuri Ashram shared more with the author about this historic trustee meeting, and what led up to it.

As he was the ashram secretary, it was his duty to officially announce the meeting and to record all of the proceedings. When Baba asked him to call the meeting, the secretary asked Baba what was the purpose of the meeting. Baba, however, was hesitant to tell him, but the secretary persisted in his inquiry until finally Baba revealed his intention that he was about to leave his body.

Upon hearing this reply, the trustee was stunned. It took him a few minutes to compose himself. On the one hand, he was a devotee who was overwhelmed by the startling news. On the other hand, he was the ashram's General Secretary and was fully cognizant of his professional duties and the decorum he would have to uphold in his role as Secretary. This meant that even though his heart might be breaking inside, outwardly he could not surrender to his emotions. He understood the importance of the announcement and wanted to record the information in the most dignified and accurate way. Baba then began narrating the precise manner in which he wished his body interred, as well as the exact location.

There were about six trustees present at the meeting. Baba asked the Secretary to brief the members as to the intention of the meeting. As he did so, the other trustees were stunned and overwhelmed with emotion. Seeing their reaction, Baba comforted them but reminded them that although death was a reality of life, a true Guru remains in the hearts of his devotees. He told them Gurus also come and go in death, but the influence of even long past ancient sages are still present because their spiritual transmission is passed on from generation to generation. “This is the Eternal Truth and an integral part of the Indian tradition,” Baba told them.



India is a country from which many great spiritual masters have taken birth. Like Swami Vivekananda and Ram Tirtha before him, Muktananda brought spiritual awakening to the West in order to transmit the universal experience of spirituality. From his first World Tour in 1970 until his last in 1981, Muktananda spread this ancient wisdom to many souls. He taught that in order to be happy one did not have to give up anything but had to simply add meditation into their daily life in order to uncover the Self. Baba taught his devotees to see God in everyone and to show respect and love to all. Just before leaving on his second World Tour in 1974, he wrote in a message to the world: “Mother, father, society, nation, Guru, God. These are all worthy of reverence.”

It is interesting that several milestones in Baba’s life occurred on historically auspicious dates, i.e., Baba was born on the same full-moon day as the Buddha. He passed away on the birth anniversary of the modern day father of India, Mahatma Gandhi. He was initiated by Bhagavan Nityananda on August 15, 1947, India’s Independence Day from British rule. In his own life, Baba exemplified the spiritual realization of the Buddha and expressed both the compassion and principled resolve of Mahatma Gandhi. He embodied the spirit of freedom not only from external oppression, but from the tyranny of the ego.

Baba should not be remembered as one who only preached philosophy. He was a rare, realized being who could by his touch awaken the latent spiritual energy within, thereby giving a person a direct experience of his inner divinity. Indeed, he had the gift of transforming fools into wise men. What could be a greater gift to humanity?