

MĀYĀ
AND
MUKTI



Vishnudevānand

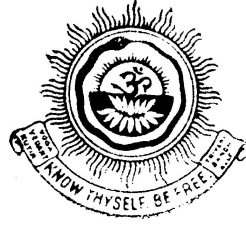
[Title Page]

MĀYĀ AND MUKTI

DELUSION AND LIBERATION

By

Swami Vishnudevanand Saraswati



Yoga Vedanta Kutir

Triveni Bandh, Daraganj
Allahabad, U.P., India

[Colophon]

Published by
Swami Shantanand Saraswati
Handiya Baba Yogalaya

Triveni Bandh, Daraganj
Allahabad, U.P., India

First Edition: 14 January, 1989,
the Opening Date of
the Kumbha Mela at Prayag
and the Eighty-Fifth Birthday
of the Author.

All Rights Reserved by the Author.

Price: India: Three Rupees
Elsewhere: One Dollar (USA)

Printed at: Kitab Mahal (W. D.) Pvt. Ltd., 22, S. N. Marg, Allahabad.

[p. i]

INTRODUCTION

In *Māyā and Mukti*, literally 'Delusion and Liberation', Swami Vishnudevanand, my revered Guru, examines some of the least tractable problems of Hindu Philosophy. The fate of the body, composed of the elements, seems determined by natural law. The inner being seems inseparably bound to the body. How is liberation possible if the inner being is not free?

The story begins with a heated argument between an astrologer and a yogi which revolves about their differences concerning determinism and free will. They appeal to Lord *Viṣṇu* who designs an experiment to resolve their dispute. Determinism and free will each prove valid in its own domain. As long as the inner being lives under the sway of *māyā* and misidentifies itself with the body, it is bound to the cycle of birth and death. Once the misperceptions of *māyā* are penetrated, the inner being is seen to be ever free. Although in Lord *Viṣṇu*'s experiment the catastrophic prediction of a great assembly of astrologers is technically fulfilled, a yogi manages to rearrange the situation so that the prediction is of no consequence.

The first portion of the story outlines the means to pierce *māyā* and attain *mukti*. Yet if the inner being is inherently free, why does it fall prey to *māyā*? This problem defies explanation; students of yoga often are warned that if they spend their time trying to grasp the origin of *māyā* they will never succeed in its

[p. ii]

eradication. The second portion of the story, while not settling this problem, shows *māyā* to be an inscrutable consequence of existence itself.

This story, formulated over a span of many years, is truly the fruit of a lifetime of spiritual wisdom. The argument between the yogi and the astrologer is based on a conversation between Swami Vishnudevanand's Guru, Yogiraj Handiya Baba, and an astrologer which occurred in 1947 and which Swami Vishnudevanand later included in his biography of his Guru.¹ When I met him in 1976 he showed me a draft of this story and in 1978 presented me with an expanded version. The present version is based upon the 1978 manuscript and further conversations with him. Just as the interplay of *māyā* and *mukti* is eternal, this story may never seem complete, but as it is, may it inspire earnest seekers to dedicate themselves completely to the unfathomable truth.

Paramānanda

1. Swami Vishnudevanand Saraswati, *Yogiraj Handiya Baba*. Allahabad: Yoga Vedanta Kutir, (Hindi) 1954, 1969, 1981, (English) 1977.

[p. 1]

MĀYĀ AND MUKTI

I. THE DISPUTE.

The Almighty Lord Viṣṇu sits upon the golden throne of eternal truth. The throne is adorned with the brilliant diamonds of grace, love, sincerity, peace, power and purity, and decked with brilliantly coloured flowers and sweet-smelling amaranths. An ever-pleasant atmosphere pervades the effulgent bliss of Heaven; the nectar of immortality flows throughout the celestial sea of Paradise.

Before the divine throne, faithful devotees, men and women alike, come to sing of God's glory and to pray to the All-Merciful Lord Viṣṇu for eternal peace everywhere and everlasting happiness for all time. After finishing their heart-felt prayers, they prostrate before the Omniscient Lord and depart in a state of bliss.

Suddenly, an astrologer and a yogi, embroiled in a fierce dispute, enter the divine court. The astrologer is tidily dressed in white and has an air of dignity about him. He seems to be an erudite pundit and a well-respected leader of his community. The yogi, clad in only a loincloth, displays the serenity that comes from years of solitary and ascetic living. Each was asserting his superiority to the other.

ASTROLOGER: You, dear yogi, are far beneath me. You renounced family life and abandoned society because of your

[p. 2]

own weakness. You are cowardly, ignorant and totally unfit to live in this world. A man's roots are in his family. After he has fulfilled his obligations to his family and to society, he may then pursue yoga, if he has the inclination and the capability.

YOGI: Mr. Astrologer, if you can truly make correct predictions, then why do you still encounter difficulties in your own life? With knowledge of the future, you should never suffer any misfortune. Rather, with a heedful mind, you should be leading a more peaceful life than anyone else. Yet I find your mind filled with the same thoughts, worries and desires as others. The knowledge you obtain through astrology must be inadequate or untrustworthy, for it doesn't leave you contented with your life.

You'll find me to be perfectly satisfied with the experience, faith and knowledge attained through the practice of yoga. The path of yoga leads to Self-Knowledge, which is realized directly, without any medium, and is beyond any doubt. With this absolute knowledge, I'm contented and peaceful. My life is superior to yours; yoga is the highest of endeavours.

Before disputing this, please tell something about your discipline. Explain the nature of astrology and the benefits of its study. Is it exact, or is it inherently uncertain? Speak calmly and clearly.

ASTROLOGER: Astrology is an art of prescience. A skilled astrologer can foretell an event of someone's life by observing the positions of the stars and the planets, and computing the astrological numbers that influence human affairs. It is an accurate science of prediction. From the date and exact time of someone's birth, we can calculate his destiny. We can

[p. 3]

predict the fortunes of anyone with regard to profit and loss, happiness and misery, fame and ignominy, and every other matter. Please say something about yoga. What are its benefits?

YOGI: I know of astrology's capacity for prediction. It's a fine art, no doubt, but I'll tell of the highest art. Through it, I've become acquainted with the secret of life and death; it has freed me from doubt and misery forever. In a nutshell, I tell you that mastery of the mind is yoga. When the mind is perfectly controlled you may behold the superconscious mind, the real controller, the inner Self, which is one and the same with the Supreme Being.

You must have heard the story of *Sāvitrī* and *Satyavān*. *Sāvitrī* chose *Satyavān* to be her husband and was about to marry him but the renowned astrologer *Nārada Muni* predicted that *Satyavān* would die within a year. *Sāvitrī*'s father warned her of this and tried to dissuade her from the marriage, but her resolve was firm and the marriage took place. *Sāvitrī* cared for her husband with the utmost of devotion, but a year later *Satyavān* died as predicted. Through the power of her virtue, faith and unyielding effort, *Sāvitrī* was able to snatch her husband from the clutch of death and bring him back to life.

Your art is an excellent one, no doubt, but do you know how to evade misfortune? Who's responsible for calamities? If by God's order, something catastrophic were to happen to someone and if God were solely responsible for it, it would easily be understood as God's whim and bias. This, however, is not the case. In truth, everyone is responsible for his own destiny and this destiny accrues to him because of his

[p. 4]

thoughts, words and deeds.

I wish to acquaint you with yoga, an exact science, superior to yours. Controlling the activity of the mind is yoga. Conquest of the mind is the means to attain freedom from the mind and the senses, and mastery over destiny.

Come, let's appeal to the Omniscient Lord. His verdict will resolve our dispute. Most people fail to apply their intelligence to solve the problems of their lives. They live in a world of their imagination and engage in senseless activity. They lead lives of confusion and frustration. We shouldn't quarrel interminably with each other. Let's go before the Lord to settle our differences.

The pair approach the divine throne.

BOTH (*in unison*): Glory, Glory be to Lord *Viṣṇu*. Glory to the Omniscient Lord *Viṣṇu*. Praised be the Omnipotent Lord *Viṣṇu*.

O Dearest, All-Knowing Lord, O Beloved God, kindly cast Thy gracious glance upon us and judge our case. O Lord, Redeemer of the Fallen, mercifully rescue us from our intractable dispute. Please tell us who is superior, the astrologer or the yogi. We are anxious for a final verdict. Please hear our case.

LORD *VIṢṆU*: Calm down; have patience; be at peace. Rest assured; I'll judge your case. What you ask is no child's play. It's not a theoretical matter but an empirical one which can be settled by experiment alone. This will require much time; return to the world of mortals and wait. I shall take birth in that world and perform the crucial test.

In any case, don't quarrel any longer for quarreling isn't a

[p. 5]

sign of wisdom. The wise shouldn't ever fight over trifling matters but should be simple, humble and peaceful, and should teach love for all and contempt for none. Go now. Live in peace and await my verdict.

The astrologer and the yogi prostrate before the Lord. Then they return to their terrestrial abodes to await the result of the Lord's experiment.

II. THE BIRTH.

After a few years, Lord *Viṣṇu* took birth in a royal family. He ascended to the throne and became King Anant Dev. His was a large kingdom encompassing mountains, jungles, deserts, rivers and vast tracts of cultivated land. The kingdom was renowned both for its wealth and for the wisdom of its rule.

For many years, the King was childless. As he grew older, he expressed the wish to have a son with greater and greater urgency and, for this end, performed more and more elaborate rituals and sacrifices. At last, when he was well-advanced in age, King Anant Dev was blessed with a son. At the auspicious moment, the King looked at the face of the newborn infant. When he saw that the tiny Prince was healthy, he overflowed with joy. The royal court filled with cheer and glistened with delight.

The King told his Prime Minister to broadcast the news of the Prince's birth throughout the kingdom. He ordered the palace attendants to distribute money, clothes and food to the Brahmins, the pundits, the *sādhus*, holy men, and the poor. He instructed doctors to distribute free medicine to the ill. He

[p. 6]

granted amnesty to all prisoners and released them from the jails. The auspicious news spread from city to city, from village to village, to every corner of the land. The news was announced by the blare of loudspeakers; the news was announced to the beat of drums. A tidal wave of joy swept the land. The celebrations of the Prince's birth lasted a month. All offices, shops and factories were closed. Festivals were held in every village. The rich helped the poor to celebrate the auspicious occasion.

Then the King told his officials to summon all skilled astrologers to the palace to cast the horoscope of the newborn Prince. Messengers notified the astrologers within the kingdom and emissaries went to invite renowned astrologers from throughout the world. The most eminent astrologers assembled at the court. They prepared horoscopes and rejoiced at the lavish rewards they received from the King. The horoscopes were cast with the utmost care and precision; the astrologers were unanimous at every point. They gave the name 'Anu Kumar' to the Prince. Everything in the Prince's horoscope was favourable up to the age of twenty years, seven months and fifteen days. Then, at noon, a thunderbolt was to come down upon the head of the Prince and then he would be dead. Upon hearing this, King Anant Dev swooned. When he regained consciousness he cried with grief and ordered that the prediction be kept secret. He forbade the astrologers to reveal the horoscope and he himself kept silent. No longer could the King sleep. Day and night, he tried to devise a plan to foil the horrendous prediction.

[p. 7]

III. CHILDHOOD.

When Prince Anu Kumar was five years old, King Anant Dev arranged a marriage for him with a beautiful little Princess named Maya Devi. Their wedding was elaborate and all were invited to the sumptuous feast. When the ceremony was over, the bride didn't come to live in the palace but returned instead to her own family to await maturity.

To educate the Prince, the King appointed skilled tutors for all subjects, physical, intellectual and spiritual alike. Champion athletes trained him in many sports. To learn the exercises of yoga, both the *āsanas*, the postures and the *śaṭkarmas*, the purification practices, the Prince stayed several months in the ashram of a master yogi. Through the study of Sanskrit he absorbed the spiritual teachings of India's ancient sages and seers. Although he loved to read about the lives of yogis and saints, reading the *Upaniṣads* was his favourite pastime. He mastered *āyurveda*, the ancient science of health and longevity. Thus he knew the different qualities of the food he ate and understood the causes of diseases. He concluded that pure thoughts and pure, *sāttvika* food make men healthy, peaceful and cheerful, and that ignorance of the attributes of food causes men to become unhealthy. Since he ate sparingly, he was never ill or lethargic. In addition, he studied hygiene and human anatomy, history and geography, and mastered many other arts and sciences. Within a few years, Prince Anu Kumar was truly a pundit. From his birth, he was endowed with exceptional sincerity, purity and honesty, and had a sympathetic understanding of the common man as well.

[p.8]

IV. THE PILGRIMAGE.

When the Prince turned thirteen, the King decided to leave his kingdom to embark on a pilgrimage with the Prince. He gave the Prime Minister full authority to manage the affairs of state. On an auspicious day, he and his son left the palace. They went from holy place to holy place in search of an accomplished yogi who could tell him how to save the Prince. He reached holy Benares, met many pundits and *sādhus* and inquired, "Is there any way to avoid this horrendous death?" None of them were able to give a satisfactory answer. He proceeded to Prayag and to Ayodhya. Wherever he went he asked the same question. He travelled to holy Vrindavan and Mathura, to holy Haridwar and Rishikesh. He met hundreds of *sādhus* of every order and sect, and practitioners of yoga of every sort, but none could tell him how to safeguard his son. The King went on, moving nearer and nearer to the Himalayas, from hill to hill, from cave to cave, in search of a perfected yogi who might foil the prediction.

Then someone told him that some great yogis were living in the South of India and that he should continue his search there. The King took the Prince and travelled south, visiting Rameshwaram, Kanya Kumari, Madurai, Srirangam, Tiruchirapalli and many other holy places. He did meet yogis but none of them could do as he desired. Then a yogi advised him to go to the *Kāmākṣa Devī* temple in Assam where resourceful *tāntrika* yogis might be found. He proceeded to this temple near the city of Gauhati. There he was told to look for a yogi who lived deep in the forest. After many days of search he met Chand Kapali, a famous *tāntrika* yogi. Chand Kapali

[p. 9]

said he could do nothing but assured the King that there was a *siddha* yogi living by Mount Kailash who could safeguard the Prince. The King and the Prince again travelled toward the Himalayas. On the way to Mount Kailash their only stop was a visit to the temple at Badrinath.

V. THE INSTRUCTION.

The further they went, the colder it became. As they neared Mount Kailash they heard of an ancient, renowned yogi, Swami Sarva Siddha Mahamuni. They searched and found him in a tunnel-like cave beneath a snow-capped peak. He was seated not far from the door, with eyes closed in deep meditation. The King and the Prince humbly approached the Yogi and with deep devotion, prostrated themselves before him. After an hour, Siddha Mahamuni opened his lotus-like eyes and breathed with an attitude of deep serenity. The King placed some fruit and some flowers at his holy feet. After a profound silence, the King began to tell his woeful tale. He told how the astrologers had made their dire prediction, how he had wandered from holy place to holy place, how he had asked every holy man if there were a way to nullify the forecast, and how he had finally come to the cave. He began to weep and begged the Yogi to protect his son.

The earnestness and sincerity shown by the King pleased Siddha Mahamuni who tried to console him about his son. With folded hands, the King kept pleading, insisting that the Yogi save the Prince from death. Finally the Yogi told the King, "Grieve no longer. There's a way to escape from every worldly predicament. I shall teach yoga to your son. Through the

[p. 10]

power of yoga, he shall be saved."

The King's face lit with elation and he vowed to follow Siddha Mahamuni's instructions. The Prince was sixteen years old; the proper age, in the words of the Yogi, for beginning spiritual training. For the Prince's practice, the Yogi selected a beautiful isolated little meadow on the south side of a mountain. It was chilly at night, but it received sunlight throughout the day; nearby there was a hot spring. The King provided the Prince with everything he would need during his training.

Every day, the Yogi came by to instruct the Prince who practiced with enthusiasm. Since childhood, he had been acquainted with the *āsanas* and the *śaṭkarmas*; he rapidly acquired proficiency in yoga. First, to fortify his body and insure his good health in the rigorous climate, the Yogi gave him further instruction in the *āsanas*. Then he taught him *prāṇāyāma*, control of the breath and the vital energies, concentration and meditation. The Prince had endless patience and perseverance. He led a strictly disciplined life and practiced regularly, with utmost devotion to God and unfaltering obedience to his Guru. After a few months, he had perfected the spiritual practices prescribed by the Yogi. Step by step, he ascended to the higher levels of yoga. He attained the ability to meditate continuously for three hours without moving his body

or straying from the object of meditation. As the Prince's mind and *prāṇas*, the vital energies, were gradually brought under control, he progressed to even higher levels of spiritual power.

After weeks and weeks of deep meditation, his mind

[p. 11]

began to be absorbed in the object of meditation. This absorption was a preliminary *samādhi*, the transcendental state. As the meditation intensified, the *kuṇḍalinī*, the power dormant at the base of the spine, awakened. The Prince felt as if he had a weightless body and were floating through the air. In this state, he didn't feel at all uneasy but was comfortable and relaxed. He meditated with extraordinary zeal and became further absorbed in the object of meditation. When he reached the threshold of complete absorption, he saw a brilliant flash of light and felt himself propelled upward by the mysterious *kuṇḍalinī*, the unfathomable power, awakened by his unyielding faith, earnest desire, fervent practice and the heat of *prāṇāyāma*. He heard many inner sounds on his way to the *sāhasrāra cakra*, the nerve centre at the crown of the head. Finally he found himself immersed in a boundless ocean of illumination. He had entered the transcendental state in which the ordinary mind ceases to exist and the superconscious mind alone remains. External perception vanished. His intellect ceased to function. Divine awareness alone remained. He forgot his earthly name, relationships and environs in that blissful state. Ultimately he entered *savikalpa samādhi*, the sublime fruit of his persistent effort.

His Guru, Siddha Mahamuni, scrutinized his practice and encouraged him to proceed further. *Samādhi* is a state of supersensory perception and higher knowledge. There are many grades of *samādhi* and *nirvikalpa samādhi* is the highest. Using the proper methods of *prāṇāyāma* and meditation, the Prince practiced tirelessly, with heart and soul. After two years, he entered the supreme state, *nirvikalpa samādhi*, the state beyond space and time, beyond sensory perception and the

[p. 12]

conscious mind. In it exist neither worldly phenomena nor mind-stuff. Language is incapable of expressing it. All the happiness and pleasure of the whole universe is unequal to its bliss. It is a state of beatitude and of the highest intuitive perception. Through it, the true Self is realized. In it are no dualities but only an indescribable, incomprehensible unity. It is the state of the unification of the individual soul with the Supreme Being. It is the ultimate destination, the end point of the journey of the soul. In this state the Prince attained knowledge of *Brahman*, the supreme wisdom of mankind. In *nirvikalpa samādhi* there is no longer any question of birth and death.

Prince Anu Kumar became a liberated being, free from all worldly bondage. He enjoyed the divine delight of freedom from the world of birth and death. He knew of both the illusory nature of the world and the felicity of divinity. Language is inherently imperfect and is inadequate for

expressing the transcendental facts of *samādhi*, which are knowable only through direct realization. The spiritual reality is the background of physical and mental phenomena, but unenlightened people fail to understand this. As a man born blind cannot comprehend the beauty of a rainbow, as a barren woman cannot comprehend the feeling of pregnancy, so an unrealized soul cannot imagine the delightfulness of divinity. When the Prince returned to the earthly plane, he brought new knowledge and new life. He knew that worldly phenomena were farcical and remained unattached to mundane affairs. He acted dispassionately and lived in the world like a lotus in water.

Gradually the Prince increased the duration of his stays in *samādhi*. He gained the power to maintain *samādhi* for days

[p. 13]

without food, water or even breathing. In this way, he became the perfect master of his mind. In time he developed the power to remain in *samādhi* for months or even years, depending on his will. At any time, he could halt the functioning of his body and separate himself from it.

VI. THE THUNDERBOLT.

The Prince was nearing twenty. Siddha Mahamuni remembered the astrologers' prediction and discussed measures to safeguard the Prince with the King. According to the Yogi's instructions, the King had a tunnel, a hundred feet long, dug at the base of a gigantic mountain, with a little room at its end where the Prince might remain in *samādhi* for an extended time. When the Prince reached twenty years and six months, everything was ready. Only one month and fifteen days remained before the ominous date. Prince Anu Kumar prostrated before his respected father, King Anant Dev, and before his venerable Guru, Swami Sarva Siddha Mahamuni, and received their blessings. He entered the cave where, in the inner room, he was to remain in *samādhi* for three months. The mouth of the cave was walled with heavy boulders and sealed with cement.

After the cement was set, the King and the Yogi went to stay on a hillside, some distance from the cave. Only a fortnight remained before the fated day. It was July, the time of monsoon; most of the days were cloudy and rainy. On the predicted morning the sky was dark and gloomy. Flashes of lightning illuminated the sky and thunder echoed from the mountains. The King turned pale and his face twisted with

[p. 14]

anxiety. Over and over he mumbled to himself, "What will become of my only son?" He began to repeat the name of God but the thought, "A thunderbolt will strike at noon", seemed to dominate his mind. His heart pounded within his chest. As time went on he began sobbing

more and more. As the King displayed his fits of fear, the Yogi remained calm and confident. He was certain that no harm would befall the Prince.

In mid-morning, a moist wind began to blow. Soon rain was falling. Lightning flashed between the clouds. As midday approached, the storm intensified. Powerful winds agitated the clouds which blackened the sky. Precisely at noon, with blinding light, a great thunderbolt came down upon the peak above the cave. It struck with the might of an earthquake and shattered the summit. Wide fissures led down almost to the cave.

The effects of the thunderbolt reached the Prince. His hair flew out and tremors shook his body but this mere touching did no harm. The Prince was in *nirvikalpa samādhi*; the individual soul was one with the Supreme Being, outside the realm of space and time, beyond the limits of mind and speech, free from the chains of birth and death. From the onset of his *samādhi*, there had been neither respiration nor any other bodily function. There was neither perception nor even a perceiver. Alone was that superconsciousness which transcends both mind and body. Although the body showed none of the usual signs of life, it did not display any symptom of decay or death.

The storm raged with violence throughout the afternoon but ended abruptly during the night. The next morning, the King

[p. 15]

and the Yogi set out to see the condition of the cave. The mountaintop was split in two. Great avalanches of stone and earth had swept its flanks. The terrain was barely recognizable. With much difficulty, they reached the entrance to the cave. Although there were some small cracks above its door, the cave appeared to be secure. Still the King seemed uneasy. They went to the nearest village where the King hired a crew of labourers and sent them to open the cave at once. After three days, the entrance was cleared. The King and the Yogi entered the inner room where they saw the body of the Prince sitting exactly as before, unchanged, unmoved, unharmed. The King emerged from the cave with an expression of relief and calmly awaited the day when the *samādhi* was to end.

On the appointed day, Siddha Mahamuni revived the Prince. He gently massaged the Prince's body with lukewarm mustard oil until it regained its warmth. At first the Prince looked like a statue. Then he began to breathe slowly and gradually he opened his eyes. Spoon by spoon, the Yogi fed him tepid milk. Soon he began to smile and look natural. The yogi gave the King instructions for caring for the Prince and told them to return to their kingdom. A short time later, Siddha Mahamuni disappeared, leaving them alone. The King scoured the region but could not find the Yogi. Even so, the King was content. Through the power of yoga the dreadful thunderbolt, predicted by the astrologers, had produced no ill effect. With the Prince now safe and yoga's supremacy demonstrated, the King Anant Dev's mission in the world was complete.

[p. 16]

VII. THE RETURN. Cigarette burn

The King and the Prince slowly travelled southward. They stopped at Kedarnath, Gangotri, and the other places of pilgrimage among the Himalayas. Wherever they went, wherever they stopped, the Prince would enter *samādhi*, sometimes for a few hours, sometimes for a few days, sometimes for weeks. The King would stay in the company of *sādhus* and holy men, and would pass his time in discussions of spiritual matters with them. In this way, they moved from holy place to holy place until they finally reached Rishikesh. From there the King sent a message to his Prime Minister to come at once to meet them and to bring Maya Devi, his daughter-in-law as well. The Prince declared that he would enter *samādhi* for the next six months.

When the message reached the palace, the Prime Minister set out hastily with Maya Devi who had grown to be an exceptionally charming and beautiful, extremely intelligent and knowledgeable, young woman. They reached Rishikesh only a month after the message summoning them had been dispatched. The King informed the Prime Minister that he intended to abdicate the throne and spend his remaining days on earth living peacefully among the Himalayas. The Prime Minister was also aging. The holy atmosphere of the Himalayan region moved him so deeply that he asked the King for permission to resign and not return to the kingdom. So the King and the Prime Minister decided to leave the affairs of state in the hands of Maya Devi until the Prince returned from *samādhi* and was ready to rule. After telling her how to care for the Prince and informing her of the date when his *samādhi*

[p. 17]

was to end, the King took his Prime Minister and walked north to the Himalayas where he completed his sojourn on earth.

At once, Maya Devi made arrangements to transport the Prince's body back to the kingdom. She had an especially secure palanquin constructed so the Prince could be carried without disturbing his *samādhi* and employed many strong bearers to move him from place to place. When they reached the palace, she had the Prince seated upon the throne and placed a continuous guard around him to insure that no one would do anything that might interfere with his *samādhi*.

Finally the date arrived for the end of the Prince's *samādhi*. The royal court was sumptuously decorated. Many learned Brahmins were summoned to the palace for chanting *mantras* from the *Vedas*. With instructions from the Brahmins, Maya Devi tried to rouse her husband from *samādhi* in many different ways but without success, for the Brahmin priests did not know the way to wake a yogi from *samādhi*. She persisted in trying whatever was suggested until finally,

as she was massaging his body with sandalwood oil, he began to awaken. The Prince began to breathe slowly. He opened his eyes like a newborn baby. Gradually different parts of his body began to move. The whole court was permeated by his peacefulness and serenity. The priests resumed the chanting of the *Vedas*. They approached the Prince, sprinkled him with Ganges water, placed garlands of flowers around his neck and smeared sandalwood paste upon his forehead.

Then the Prince was crowned. One by one the royalty bowed before the new King and made offerings of flowers and fruit. The public celebration of the coronation began. Food and

[p. 18]

clothing was distributed to the Brahmins, the *sādhus* and the poor. Great festivals were held throughout the land. The court crowded with people seeking to get a glimpse of the new King.

During his frequent practice of *samādhi* King Anu Kumar had imbibed the nectar of divinity. He passed his days like a man inebriated with divinity. Queen Maya Devi would feed him herself. He had no cause to speak with anyone else. One day while King Anu Kumar was sitting on the throne with half-open eyes and a smiling face, Queen Maya Devi was feeding him with her own hands. Though he was hardly eating anything, he was pleased by her tenderness and care. Finally he asked her, "Who are you? Why do you serve me so lovingly?"

"My dear Lord, my name is Maya Devi. You were married to me by your father during your childhood. Then you went with your father on an extended pilgrimage. You practiced yoga in the Himalayas and learned to enter into *samādhi*. While you were absorbed in *samādhi* your father, who had decided to pass his remaining days in the Himalayas, summoned me and had me bring you here, to this palace. He left the kingdom in my hands until you are ready to exercise your authority."

King Anu Kumar looked about as if he were living in a dream. Once more he turned to Maya Devi and inquired, "Tell me all about this kingdom."

"This kingdom cannot really be understood through verbal explanations", she replied. "Only through personal observation can it be known." On an auspicious day, the royal couple slipped unnoticed from the palace for a tour of the kingdom.

[p. 19]

VIII. THE KINGDOM.

First, the King and the Queen walked through the capital city. They toured the central bazaar which was full of people running hither and thither, each intent on his own business. In

mid-afternoon they peeked into a large shop where a wealthy merchant was seated, engrossed in his accounts.

A maidservant entered from the rear of the shop and called to him, "Sethji, your food is ready. Come, take a bath and have a meal."

"Just a little while... I'll be ready soon... when I finish tallying my assets."

The servant left but the King and Queen continued to observe him through the door of the shop. After an hour, the servant came again to call the merchant and received the same reply.

The King whispered to the Queen, "Who's this man? Why won't he eat when food is ready?"

"He's a wealthy merchant, worth about two million rupees. His whole life revolves about his business. His only goal in life is accumulating money."

"He seems to have little peace or happiness but much tension and anxiety."

"The rich never have time to consider the true aim of life. If they were to stop and reflect, even for a moment, they would be diverted from their materialistic objectives. They value nothing but fame and property. Why don't you speak with him

[p. 20]

and ask about his behaviour."

The King and the Queen entered the shop and approached the merchant who failed to notice them until the King inquired, "Excuse me for interrupting you, but why don't you eat on time? Your food is getting cold; your dutiful servant is calling you."

"You don't understand what I'm doing. If I don't keep my accounts accurate, I risk great losses... This is none of your business. Please, leave at once."

"How much money would you have to earn before feeling satisfied enough to maintain regular hours of working, eating and resting?"

"If I work hard for a few more years and my ventures are successful, I should be worth five million. With that much I'd be content to lead an easier life."

King Anu Kumar whispered to Queen Maya Devi, who handed the merchant exactly that sum. The merchant gleefully counted it, stuffed it into his safe and left to have his meal, promising all the while that he would henceforth lead a regulated life.

The King and Queen wandered through many parts of the city, rich and poor alike. As they were passing through one of the poorest sections they heard a furor. "What's happening?" the King asked the Queen.

"It's only a quarrel between husband and wife. The others are all neighbours who've come to watch."

The King and the Queen squeezed their way through the

[p. 21]

onlookers and asked what the trouble was.

"I work all day long to maintain our household. I always serve my husband faithfully but he never buys me any jewelry or pretty saris. Instead he treats me like a slave. Whenever I try to reason with him he beats me."

"I labour all day long to maintain my wife and family, but when I return home food is never ready. Some days she adds too much salt and others, no salt at all. If I try to explain this to her, or to make any suggestion, however reasonable, she starts screaming at me. No man can tolerate a woman like this."

The King told the couple to have love and respect for each other. He signalled to Queen Maya Devi, who handed them some fine saris and precious bracelets. They glanced at each other lovingly, laughed and entered their home.

The King and the Queen went further. Soon they were out of the city, travelling through villages and cultivated fields. Before long, they heard a great commotion. Men of two neighbouring villages were fighting with each other. They approached and saw that a knobby little tree along the village boundary was the cause of the dispute.

"My father planted this tree. I have the right to cut it any time I wish. I need some firewood and have no money to purchase any", shouted a man from one village.

"The tree grew there by itself. It's directly on the boundary so nobody has the right to cut it without our consent. It provides much-needed shade. We won't allow it to be cut", screamed a man from the other.

[p. 22]

The King looked first at the worthless tree and then at the combatants. Blood was already streaming from some of their faces. "Brothers, is it sensible to shed blood over such a trifling matter? Neighbours should be friendly and should settle their disagreements peaceably."

The King conferred with Queen Maya Devi who within a few minutes arranged to have two ox-carts of firewood brought to the spot. "Use these to fuel your fires. Extinguish your tempers. Let this tree stand as a symbol of peace and brotherhood between your villages." The men from both villages embraced each other and returned to their homes.

The King and the Queen went further. Soon they reached a wide river and saw an ashram on the opposite bank. They asked the ferryman to let them off near the ashram and walked to the gate. Inside students were lying about, some sleeping, others chatting idly.

"Why aren't you engaged in your studies? Where's your teacher?"

"Our Guru is out collecting funds to complete the new kitchen he's constructing for us."

The King noticed a half-completed structure toward the rear of the ashram. From the students he learned that their Guru had gone to the homes of some wealthy patrons. He and the Queen left to search for the Guru. Not far from the ashram they encountered a rotund man in orange robes, returning with some small donations in his pocket.

The King bowed to him with great respect and then began, "Swamiji, the students at your ashram are frittering away their

[p. 23]

time. Couldn't you spend more time supervising them and seeing that they maintain a disciplined life?"

"You fail to realize the worldly responsibilities that accrue to the head of an ashram. I alone must see that everyone at the ashram is clothed and fed. The present kitchen is woefully inadequate. It's far too small and its roof leaks during heavy rains. Improper and irregular eating affects the mind adversely. During the rainy season, meals are invariably late. Once the new kitchen is complete the ashram will function smoothly."

The King asked how much money was needed to build the kitchen. He whispered to Queen Maya Devi who handed the Swami that much and more to pay for furnishings, utensils and other accessories.

The Swami folded his hands, looked up toward the sky and cried, "Now by the Grace of God, the money I was struggling to accumulate has suddenly come, all at once. Thank the Lord for now I'm free to devote myself fully to instructing my disciples."

The King and the Queen continued along their way. While they were resting in the shade of a tree, two men, a Hindu and a Muslim, came by. Each of the two began their own form of worship but before long, they were exchanging insults.

"You're an idolater, a fool, a worshipper of stone."

"You're a beef-eater who cannot see that God is present in every living being."

As they reached the verge of trading blows the King interrupted them. "All forms of worship are directed to the same

[p. 24]

God. Men of different religions shouldn't fight with each other but should respect each other's forms of worship. I order that on this spot, side by side, a Hindu Temple and a Mosque be erected as a monument to religious tolerance."

The men were overjoyed and embraced before departing. The King consulted with Queen Maya Devi who arranged for the construction to begin.

The King and the Queen travelled throughout the kingdom and observed every aspect of its life. Wherever they went they found men ruled by desire, dispute and frustration. Nowhere did they find men living in peace or contentment. Everyone was too involved in his own petty affairs to reflect upon the cause of his difficulties and suffering. As best he could, the King tried to satisfy his subjects by supplying the objects they desired. He settled disputes by giving both sides whatever they wished. Eventually he saw the futility of this and said to the Queen, "Everywhere I go I see men suffering because of their own greed or desire. It makes little difference if they're rich or poor, young or old, men or women. Anyone attracted to the external world is bound to misery. Let us return now to the palace."

On the return journey they retraced their steps. They passed the place where the Hindu and the Muslim had been fighting. A beautiful temple and an exquisite mosque stood side by side, but insults were flying back and forth across the boundary wall. They looked into the ashram. The kitchen was complete, but still the students were idle. When they asked for the Swami, they learned that he was off collecting funds for a veranda. They passed the tree where the villagers had been fighting. It

[p. 25]

was standing peacefully enough but further along the village demarcation, they saw the villagers fighting over water rights. They entered the capital and walked through the poor section. The woman was wearing her fine bracelets, but screaming at her husband for earrings. At the central bazaar, they looked into the same shop. It was mid-afternoon and the maidservant was

calling the merchant to have his meal, but the merchant was busy at his accounts, trying to earn ten million.

When they entered the palace the King announced, "The world is full of misery. I had peacefully entered *samādhi* amid the spiritual bliss of the Himalayas and found myself awakened in this palace. I have travelled throughout this kingdom and have observed men in every walk of life, but all are ruled by their desires. The gratification of these desires leads only to greater desires. I won't remain here any longer. My dear Queen Maya Devi, I thank you for your loving and devoted care. I leave this kingdom in your hands.

IX. LIBERATION.

Anu Kumar left the palace and travelled north toward the Himalayas. As he approached the Ganges River, he happened to meet a gentle Saint who was explaining the eternal truth of *Vedānta*, the philosophy of the *Upaniṣads*, to a small circle of listeners.

"There is one infinite superconsciousness, the all-pervading silent witness of all activity in the universe. It is beyond space and time... It is greater than the greatest... subtler than the subtlest... 'Tat tvam asi', 'You are That'. You

[p. 26]

are not this mortal body; you are not this restless mind. In reality, you are identical with that superconsciousness... Realize this and attain eternal peace and unfading bliss."

The Saint spoke not from book-learning but from personal experience and realization attained through intense spiritual meditation. He gave many specific and practical suggestions to his audience and implored them to devote themselves to spiritual living. Above all, he emphasized the value of leading a restrained life. Anu Kumar was pleased by this Saint and his teachings. The Saint was truly a realized being, the embodiment of peace, bliss and wisdom. The Saint invited Anu Kumar to spend the night in his hut. He asked Anu Kumar to share his simple meal and unrolled a straw mat for Anu Kumar to sleep upon.

During his travels, Anu Kumar had begun rising in the middle of the night to practice *samādhi* for a few hours undisturbed. He had been able to do so unobserved, but this time, he couldn't escape the notice of the Saint. The next morning, the Saint questioned him about himself and elicited the story of his past.

The Saint begged Anu Kumar to remain with him. Together they imparted the teachings of yoga and *Vedānta* to their visitors. For most who came, progress was slow. While in the presence of the Saint and Anu Kumar, they would become inspired toward spirituality, but on returning to their homes, they would become engrossed once more in worldly affairs. Anu Kumar admired

the patience of the Saint who would repeat the same points again and again to people rarely able to implement them. For most, liberation would take many

[p. 27]

lifetimes and would be the culmination of innumerable minute steps leading closer to the goal.

Not all visitors were interested in elevating themselves. Some came merely to argue and display their own sagacity. One day a young pundit arrogantly challenged the Saint to match his knowledge of astrology and palmistry. The Saint made no reply to him. He began examining the palms of people in attendance and telling them facts about themselves.

Finally he reached where the Saint and Anu Kumar were seated. "Both of you have long life lines", he ventured to predict. He held the Saint's hand and traced a pronounced line across the palm. Then he took Anu Kumar's hand in his, but recoiled with shock.

"The lines on this palm are barely visible", he stammered. "I would certainly have predicted this man to have been dead at twenty, but I see him radiating with vitality."

The Saint waited a minute and then replied, "The perception of duality is the cause of bondage. As long as a man's mind fills with pairs of opposites, pleasure and pain, good and evil, life and death, his destiny is controlled. When his mind is free of thought, he no longer is a prisoner of fate."

"The man you see before you is a yogi. Through long and dedicated practice, he annihilated his thoughts and entered *nirvikalpa samādhi*, the supreme state of perfect unity transcending all distinctions including life and death. Though he continues dwelling in his body, he is unattached to it and can separate himself from concern with it at any time. Is a liberated being controlled by stars or creases of the palm?"

[p. 28]

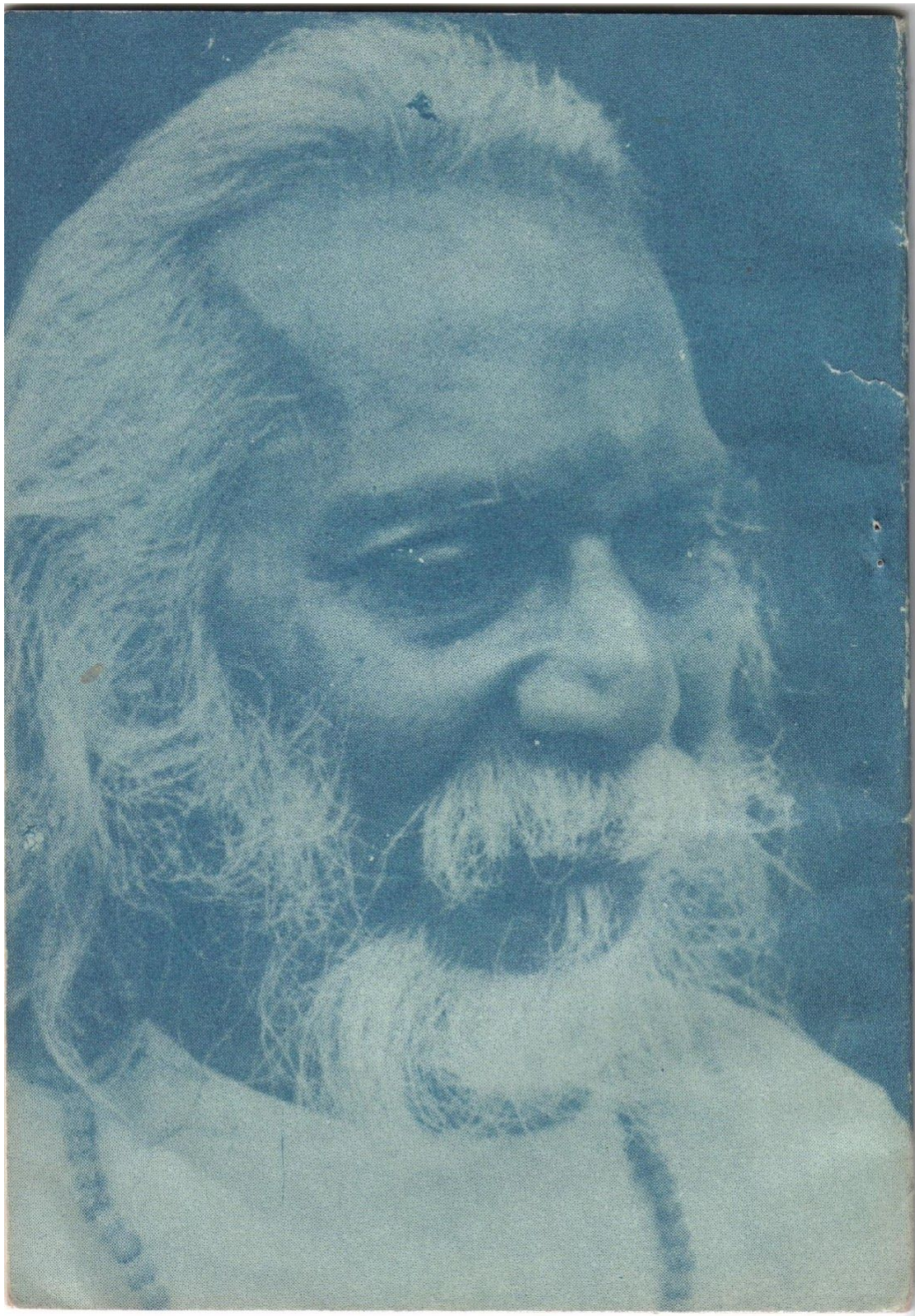
The young pundit prostrated before Anu Kumar. "Teach me to control my mind. Take me as your disciple."

"Are you willing to dedicate yourself wholly to this goal and nothing else?"

He agreed and came to live with Anu Kumar and the Saint. With great enthusiasm he quickly mastered the physical exercises of yoga, but his inborn tendencies of egotism and conceit invariably distracted his mind from its object of meditation. Yet his determination was strong. He persisted in his efforts for many years and eventually entered *samādhi*. By then two more young men had become disciples of Anu Kumar and were learning yoga from him.

One day the Saint, who had passed a hundred years, peacefully left his body. The following year, Anu Kumar took his disciples on a journey through the Himalayas. As they walked from Haridwar and Rishikesh to Badrinath and Kedarnath, Anu Kumar showed his disciples the places he had visited in his youth. They travelled further and entered the Kailash region. Anu Kumar showed his disciples the meadow where he had learned yoga from Swami Sarva Siddha Mahamuni. He brought them to the cave that his father had dug for his *samādhi* during the great thunderstorm. Its entrance had become obscured by vegetation but its interior was unchanged. There he gave his disciples their final instruction for entering *nirvikalpa samādhi*. He sent them down from the Himalayas but remained behind to enter eternal *samādhi*.

HARIH OM TAT SAT



Transcribed by Tejasānanda.

GoddessDevotion.com