

WITHOUT THE GURU

How I took my life back after thirty years

by

Michael Finch

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~ MEETING MY LORD ~

I first met my Lord face to face in August 1970.

My 'Lord' was Guru Maharaji, also known as Balyogeshwar, Born Lord of Yogis, guru to millions in India and a handful of disciples in England. And not just an ordinary guru, but the 'Satguru' – the one and only True Guru. And not just an ordinary Satguru, but one who was then only twelve years old, having been Satguru since he was eight.

I had traveled far to meet him, both in distance from London to his home in Dehra Dun, India; and far in time from my beatnik and hippy roots of the mid-1960's; and also far in culture, from my rational, western, independent thinking to being ready to lay down and surrender my life to him, the twelve year old Lord and True Guru of the time.

He was sitting on the verandah of his house, surrounded by his brothers, and about two hundred favored disciples. The most favored were either on the verandah with him, or in the front rows of the crowd sitting cross-legged on the grass facing the verandah. The less favored were in the middle or back of the crowd on the grass. But even those less favored were probably thinking how lucky they were to be in such an intimate setting with him in his own home. For most disciples, the only time they saw their Lord Guru Maharaji was as a tiny figure on a stage talking to an audience of several thousands, even tens or hundreds of thousands.¹

But the most favored of all those disciples present that day was myself, the only western disciple in that small gathering, who had

been specially invited from Delhi, where I was staying, to visit and bow down before the Satguru of the age, and surrender my life to him.

I had been tutored well in advance what to do and how to behave at this first meeting, both by the very few English disciples in London who had themselves been to India and met Guru Maharaji, and also by the Indian disciples in Delhi with whom I had been staying. I had brought with me from England a tape recorder as a gift, since I had heard how fond he was of western gadgets and technology. I also had a piece of special ribbon, which I was to tie round his wrist as a token of my undying loyalty and love. In addition I was to ask for 'holy breath', whereby I would tilt my right ear toward him, and he would blow into it gently, as a sign that he had given me his Divine Grace.

But the supreme act was to bow down and kiss his feet (the 'Lotus Feet' they were called), an outward sign of my resolve to serve him as a devotee, and to humbly beg him to bestow his Grace upon me, then and always, and enlighten me, and take me to the ultimate state a human being can attain, total Freedom, Peace and Love.

But even as I was about to surrender myself to him that afternoon, I still had some remnants of independent and critical thought left. There were questions I still had, and my excitement at this meeting with him was twofold: not only would I obtain the special grace and outward sign of being accepted as a disciple, but also my nagging questions would be answered – such as how can I be certain that he really is the one and only Satguru, True Lord? Since he was the dispeller of darkness and bringer of light, how was it possible for my questions not to be answered in his presence?

When I was beckoned to approach, the crowd parted to let me through, and I went up to the verandah. I smiled at him, not quite sure what to do, with all the contradictory advice I had received tumbling in my mind. He smiled back at me, and I felt an

exhilaration – a wave of a warm, fuzzy feeling – whether coming directly from him, or from the goodwill of the crowd of Indians at seeing a westerner come to the Lotus Feet, or just from my own relief at having made it this far through this treacherous world to the one and only Satguru of the time.

I gave him the tape recorder, which seemed to be of great interest to him. He tried pressing the various buttons at random, and was annoyed that nothing happened. I explained that it did not have any batteries in it, as I mentally reprimanded myself for not inserting the batteries prior to giving it to him. But then, in order to have inserted the batteries myself, I would have had to unwrap the recorder from its original box, and I wanted it quite clear that I was giving him a brand new tape-recorder. So I gently took the recorder back from him, inserted the batteries, and returned it to him, indicating which buttons did what. He went back to pressing the buttons with great intensity, and I was starting to feel a little upstaged by this tape recorder. I was the humble western disciple, who had traveled enormous distances – both mental and physical – to surrender at the Lotus Feet, and yet now this tape recorder was taking center stage, and it seemed that I was important only as the giver of the tape recorder.

So I decided to redress the balance. I took out the ribbon for tying round his wrist, and indicated that I would like to do that. He gave me his wrist, and with a bit of fumbling I managed to tie it round his wrist. He immediately went back to playing with the tape recorder, and I wondered what I should do to move on to the most important event – my kissing his feet and asking for holy breath. Should I just make a dive for the feet and kiss them? Should I ask assertively "Can I kiss your holy Lotus Feet?" Or should I just surrender, and let him dictate what happened and when?

My agitation was clearly showing, and was distracting him from the all-important task of figuring out the tape recorder. So he got up, his bodyguards and close devotees also got up, and without a word he turned to go inside the house. "Ah" I thought, "how

foolish of me. Clearly such an important and sensitive meeting between us has to be in private. I will kiss his feet and ask my questions in the privacy of the inner house, not in front of a crowd of two hundred or so Indian disciples.” So without thinking I got up also, to follow him into the house.

As I reached the door, it slammed shut, just inches from my nose. And I heard the rasping of three bolts clearly being shut – top, middle, bottom. At first I did not understand what had happened. I was quite shocked. I felt rejected and hurt. But at the same time I rationalized it away, saying to myself that he would meet me again, he was the Lord and who was I to question what he did, or how he did it. And of course I had to smile and appear ecstatically happy to the crowd of disciples left outside; after all, I had been the incredibly fortunate one, graced beyond compare with a personal meeting with my Lord and Savior.

But I could not help feeling a little rejected and hurt.

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~ BACK TO THE START ~

With hindsight, my journey to meeting Maharaji started four years previously, when in 1966 I left England at the age of seventeen to spend a year traveling and hitchhiking wherever fate (or the vehicle I was in) would take me.

I spent three months in Athens, and then meandered on to Crete, finally reaching Rhodes. As I progressed, my hair grew longer, my clothes became a little shabbier, and people started calling me ‘beat’ or ‘beatnik’. I was not quite sure what it all meant, but it seemed exciting. I found that I was being accepted by other similar westerners I met, who also had long hair and scruffy clothes. They seemed to have a language all their own, which I gradually picked up, learning to say “Hi Man” to whoever I met.

For this was the tail end of the ‘beat generation’, a twenty-year period ushered in by Jack Kerouac and others, of “beats... bumming and hitchhiking everywhere, ragged, beatific, beautiful in an ugly graceful new way”.² I am not sure if I had a purpose or a life aim back then, but if I did, it was to live like this – ragged certainly, ugly possibly, beautiful and graceful hopefully, but most certainly beatific.

On the short boat trip from Rhodes to Turkey, myself and my companion (a friend from England we called ‘Ambrose’, whose real name was Geoff) met another two beatniks. They said, “How about a smoke?”, and so I rummaged in my backpack for my cigarettes. My cigarettes were met with pitying stares, and I was conscious that I had made some gaffe, that “How about a smoke?”