Haidakhan Babaji
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'Truth, Simplicity and Love'

"I am a nobody and nothing. I am only like a mirror in which you can see yourself." Babaji was a great nobody and a vast nothing whose spirit lives in the thoughts and prayers of his many devotees worldwide. As with many modern-day sages known nearly world-wide, theories vary with regard to his authenticity. Many claim he was the legendary ageless Babaji of eminent Himalayan fame. Others call him an Avatar of Lord Siva. Some contend he was but one of five recognized forms of the "Maha Avatara Babaji." Most simply see him as a great yogi, one of many. Those who met Babaji or lived with him in his Indian ashram tell of magical, mystical experiences in his presence. Their intriguing stories depict a delightfully unpredictable guru who treasured the spiritual transformation of his devotees above all other miracles, yet came to be known for his feats of mystical magic, performed "to serve every living thing in the universe." Antagonists caused him little concern, for his dedication to selflessness at the expense of selfishness left little ego to wound. In the end the mystical metamorphosis of his devotees became the legacy of his efficacy. Now - in response to one of his last requests - some of these devotees have come West to spread his message of "Truth, Simplicity and Love."

The Haidakhan Samaj is active around the world. Although there are many centers and ashrams in India and Europe, there are only three in the USA, in Hawaii, Nebraska and Colorado. Each is independent. Of the three, two were begun by devotees of Babaji in an individual response to his personal request. The one in Crestone, Colorado, is different. It was founded in 1986 not by an individual but by the Haidakhan Samaj of America (HSA), a national association formed in 1979 under the guidance of Haidakhan Babaji. Here, at this 46-acre center near the town of Crestone at the base of Colorado's beautiful, 14,000-foot Sangre de Cristo mountain range in an area sacred to native Americans, the Divine Mother Temple was inaugurated on July 2, 1989, with the three-day installation of the murthi of Haidakhandesvari Ma.

The Philosophy

Babaji's message stressed service in adherence to Sanatoria Dharma (The eternal path).

"The Sanatana Dharma is the king of all religions," asserts Babaji. "Sanatana Dharma is like an ocean. Other dharmas are like rivers. Eventually, they all merge."

Today, Babaji's USA devotees strive to "follow the eternal path" by providing regular temple services, as well as teaching programs and discourses aimed at developing "a rapport with other groups of similar principles." Additionally, they publish spiritual literature through their publishing company. The Spanish Creek Press, and provide charitable donations and services for a number of social concerns including care for the homeless and AIDS victims.

In North America, Babaji's devotees are few, but they are serious. Permanent residents at the ashram/centers practice celibacy and work tirelessly in commitment to an ideal of selflessness. Such pursuits comprise the totality of their sadhana (spiritual practice). As Babaji put it: "Fulfilling your duty is the highest accomplishment, higher than penance and the rest."

When HINDUISM TODAY spoke with Rhade Shyam, the director for the Crestone center, the words "faith," "work" and "service" were repeated time and time again in his description of the ashram routine. While Babaji was alive, Rhade Shyam recorded as many of Babaji's rare verbal renderings as he could. Now, these quotes along with numerous testimonial experiences are being compiled into a 400-page book titled I Am Harmony.

"Like many things that Babaji did, you are not sure where it leads until you get there," says Radhe Shyam. "His basic teaching was work. So, we do what we do partly because we love it, but mainly because he told us to."

Babaji told his devotees to create ashrams wherever they went and to follow the routine established in his Haidakhan Vishwa Mahadham (his ashram/home in India). Although many of these practices were Hindu, Babaji did not require his devotees to break off previous religious affiliations. Radhe Shyam says that Babaji did not "press Hindu forms of worship on people of other faiths." If a person asked to be taught Hindu rituals or beliefs, Babaji usually sent them to someone else for training. Of himself, Babaji said: "I have come to guide humanity to a higher path. I do not belong to any particular religion, but I respect them all. I seek the elevation of all mankind." Babaji also did not like any sort of religious proselytization.

Babaji was - by his own definition - a humanist. He said: "My message to all of you is that the most important thing in the world is humanitarianism, or humanism. For this, you should sacrifice all self-comfort. Our motto is 'work is worship."'

Babaji's Method

Babaji emphasizes the importance of the guru/disciple relationship in his teaching. Yet, even to his closest disciples he gave very little verbal instruction. Devotees claim he often taught "mind to mind."

"Babaji was known generally as a silent teacher - one who taught mostly by example and by promoting learning experiences for those who sought his guidance," writes Radhe Shyam in a transcript for his book on Babaji. "In silence, he transmitted an essential energy that can be perceived and used as a guide for finding a corresponding energy within the individual. Infrequently, he taught by oral communication."

New students were often confounded by Babaji's informality, but those who stayed attested to its efficacy and fault only themselves for shortcomings. Close disciples were sustained by a dynamic and powerful faith in the guru's grace.

"The path of God-Realization is a most difficult one," said Babaji. "Few are those who will walk it. It is as difficult as walking on the edge of a razor. The grace of the guru is everything. No knowledge is possible without the guru," practicing truth,

simplicity and love." He asserted that by concentrating on these three principles, one could gain control over mind, body and emotions and attain spiritual insight. Yet, he cautioned that discovering truth, simplicity and love requires discipline.

"Nothing can be achieved without discipline," said Babaji. "You should have the strong discipline of a soldier. Be a soldier of God, and act with courage and discipline."

At the Vishwa Mahadham (near Haldwani in Andra Pradesh, India), ashram residents get up at 4:00AM and bath in the river. All attend arati (a very simple puja and many learn to perform it. There are constantly a variety of Hindu ceremonies going on, and when he was alive, Babaji would invite people to participate in daily yagna (fire ceremony) which he performed at dawn outside his room.

Radhe Shyam says that Babaji gave a lot of darshan (spiritual and/or physical sight) in the earlier years. In later years, however, he stressed karma yoga as more Westerners came in. He said the Indian was better able to understand the idea of benefiting from the simple darshan of a holy man.

Many concepts fundamental to Hinduism did not need to be explained, according to Radhe Shyam. Reincarnation, for instance, was something that Babaji almost never talked about but didn't have to, because it "just came to be understood." Babaji was always teaching through his example.

"His whole life was a teaching, because he lived what he taught," says Radhe Shyam. "Even the schedule and style of life at the [Indian] ashram were established and maintained by Babaji to help people break old patterns of living and establish new patterns with a new focus on God. Babaji insisted that those who stayed in his presence make spiritual progress. Once he decided what problem area a devotee needed to work on first, he would manage a series of lessons or experiences the individual needed. The first encounter with a problem area generally would be subtle. If that failed to put the lesson across, the devotee got a stronger experience - more obvious, harder to ignore. It might cause physical pain or mental anguish - just as in life outside the ashram, but on a faster schedule."

When asked what son of day-to-day sadhana (spiritual practice) devotees performed in the ashram, Radhe Shyam replied, "Babaji told us to do karma yoga constantly and perform japa with it. In and through all of this was the teaching that all of creation is one vast manifestation of the Divine."

Babaji taught householders almost exclusively. "In this Kali Yuga," he said, "almost no one has the strength to remain celibate. Although this is the best condition, marriage is better than undisciplined relations. Union between a man and woman with love can bring peace and help in spiritual practice."

Who is Babaji?

Most of Babaji's followers believe that he is a direct manifestation of God Siva who, like Christ in the Christian tradition, was "one with God at the time of Creation." Many of Babaji's own statements, according to his followers, seem to support this view.

Radhe Shyam asserts that Babaji is indeed commonly revered as a manifestation of Siva in India. Yet, he further clarifies that there is also a belief in India that Siva assumes human would not be considered the only one. However, most Saivites reject the notion of incarnations of God.

Radhe Shyam elaborates: "The traditions of Babaji, as Haidakhan Baba, focus on his coming - again and again throughout human history - as a manifestation of Siva in a human form to teach and guide mankind on the path to universal harmony and to God-Realization. There are some people who suggest that Babaji may have developed, as other souls are believed to grow, through countless births and experiences, into union with the divine (several thousand years ago) and then embraced the duty of returning to human form to teach. There is also the common belief that, like Siva who has five faces, Maha Avatara Babaji has five forms, and Haidakhan Babaji is but one of these."

Shakti

With all of this talk about Siva, HINDUISM TODAY was naturally curious why Haidakhandesvari Ma was installed at the Divine Mother Temple in Colorado. Radhe Shyam explained that Haidakhandeswari is the Shakti of Haidakhan Baba or his "feminine aspect."

"We always worship the shakti of God as the Divine Mother - the loving, caring, creative, nurturing, supportive, protective, tender character of God," says Radhe Shyam. "Shakti has many meanings. It's literal translation is energy or power. Shakti is also the Sanskrit word used to identify the female aspects of God or the Gods. God represents that pure quality. The Shakti is the quality of action in creation." Radhe Shyam says Babaji instructed his devotees that when he left, Haidakhandesvari Ma would give his devotees guidance.

Devotees arriving from all parts of the USA and as far away as Sweden to help with the final construction and consecration of the Divine Mother Temple of Baca in Colorado, testify that Haidakhandesvari Ma made her presence known in her own special way. Following the all-night chanting of "Haidakhandeswari Dayo Karo Ma, Kripa Karo Ma" several dedicated devotees saw a radiant, light green illumination emanating from the Deity. Others saw tears flowing down the face of the murthi, a soft white light filling the inner sanctum or the face of Babaji lightly superimposed upon that of the deity. Many people experienced "healing energies" of upliftment. Several Catholic Hispanic women from Alamosa, one hour's drive away, arrived asking to "see the new Madonna." They worshipped and then looked for candles to offer - as they do in worshiping the Madonna at a church. In a quick-thinking ecumenical gesture, devotees assured the ladies candles would be available next time.

Devotees remember Haidakhan Babaji in apparent contradictions of perplexity and insight, mystery and fulfillment and love. Perhaps they were and continue to be paradoxically motivated by an absence of final conclusions in his teachings. While he was alive they were spurred on by his example and a chemistry of trust, faith and awe. Perhaps it is the continued struggle to understand Baba that drives them forward in their conquest of karma. He inspired devotees to face themselves and instilled in them the ability to know not - and thereby the possibility of knowing all.

For further information please contact American Haidakhan Samaj, Dr. Daniel Dixon, 324 - 15th Avenue East, Seattle, WA 98112.