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**BABA NEEM KAROLI**

# A WONDER MYSTIC OF NORTHERN INDIA

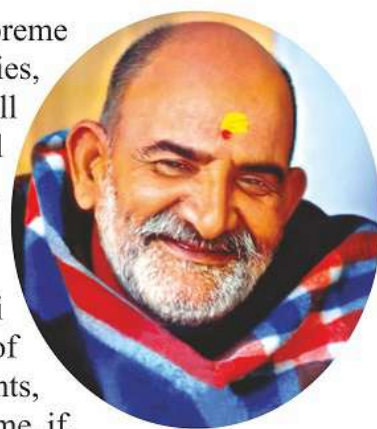
Om Sri Hanumate Namah

Author's- Brahmalin Chidanand Saraswati  
(1916 - 2008)

The Divine Life Society, Ex. President

**H**omage unto the Divine! Worshipful salutations unto the Supreme Almighty Being, the Wonder of wonders, the Beauty of beauties, the Light of lights, the Power of powers, the Eternal Truth of all truths. May His Divine Grace shower upon all and lead all beings unto joy, peace and illumination. May His love, compassion and blessings manifest upon us through His spiritual representatives, namely, the Saints and Holy Men.

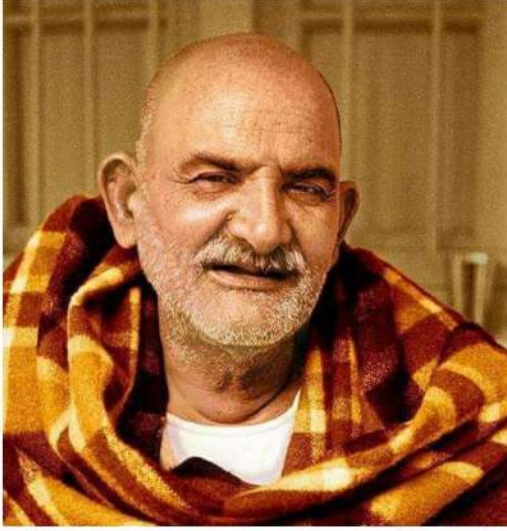
Salutations to the holy memory of worshipful and beloved Sri Baba Neem Karoli—the wonder mystic of Northern India. He is one of the most unique phenomena among the religious fraternity of Saints, Sages and holy Fakirs of Northern India. It would not be a wonder to me, if, as I am sitting and dictating this article on a mildly warm summery afternoon at Jaipur, in Rajasthan, at this moment Babaji is perfectly aware of this fact and knows exactly where I am staying, what words I am dictating, to whom I am dictating them and precisely at what time I am doing this; and this in spite of the fact that revered Baba Neem Karoli is physically no more amongst us and has left his body very recently, just about a couple of years back. Though this statement may seem rather extraordinary and would surprise many of the readers, yet, it is nevertheless true that many of Babaji's close disciples and devotees had personal experience of the fact that revered Babaji seemed to be aware of whatever they had been saying and doing in distant places, far away from him, and Babaji was actually in some other place at that moment. This has convinced most of his closest followers that Sri Baba Neem Karoli was a 'Siddha Purusha' (perfected being) and knower of the past, present as also of the future—Tri kala Jnani.



The last time I had the good fortune of meeting revered Baba Neem Karoliji was in the year of 1973. This was when I visited him at his secluded Ashram at Kainchi near Nainital, U.P., in the Kumaon Hills. I was driving from Almora to Nainital during a tour. It was late evening and, when we arrived at Kainchi, it was dark. The season was autumn and it was beginning to get chill as it was near night-fall. One of our party went ahead to ascertain and find out whether Babaji was in the Ashram. Babaji was present and sent word that he would receive us.

Myself with my companions went down from the road with the help of flash lights and, crossing the little bridge that spans the mountain stream, we entered the Ashram. The entire place was totally deserted and absolute silence prevailed. The Temple Pujari (priest) received us in the courtyard and





conducted us into a little room. The revered Baba Neem Karoli was seated on a cot and was wrapped in a simple blanket. He received me and my party with a very kind and benign look and motioned us to take our seats on the carpet spread near the cot. I knelt down beside the cot and offered my homage, laying my head upon his lap where he had tucked up his foot, being seated cross-legged. Babaji softly said "All right, all right, very good" and signed to me to be seated. One of our tour party, Sri Yogesh Bahuguna, a very idealistic young man and a sincere spiritual seeker, had brought with him 7 or 8 oranges in a little towel. There was an empty basket by the side of Babaji and Sri Yogesh Bahuguna placed these oranges in the basket as an offering. We then sang some Sankirtan and sat in silence for a couple of minutes. Before taking leave after enquiring about

Babaji's health and answering a few queries by him, Babaji started to distribute the fruit as Prasad to us. By this time some other workers and devotees of the Ashram had gathered near the door. Sri Yogeshji was taken aback and was overcome by surprise when he observed that Babaji continued taking oranges from the basket even after he had already given away 8 oranges and went on distributing this Prasad to all the members of our party plus the assembled Ashram Staff and ultimately he had given 18 fruits in all. From where the additional 10 oranges came into the basket is something we could not explain. Perhaps only Babaji knows this.

I first came to hear about revered Baba Neem Karoli in some detail in the early fifties about 23 years ago. It took place this way. Worshipful Gurudev Swami Sivanandaji's Ashram is situated in Tehri-Garhwal district. At that time the District Magistrate was Sri R.K. Trivedi, an able and outstanding officer. He later on became one of the very first Directors of the National Academy of Administration in Mussoorie. Sri R.K. Trivedi's old father used to stay with him at Narendranagar, which is the district headquarters of Tehri-Garhwal. The father was an old man, a very pious and spiritual Sadhaka who had developed a good inner life. He expressed a desire to visit Sivananda Ashram to meet Gurudev. Sri R.K. Trivedi, D.M., had great respect for Sri Gurudev and he gladly brought his old father down from Narendranagar and they met H.H. Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj in his little cottage on the bank of the Ganga. Being General Secretary at that time, I had to conduct the two visitors into revered Gurudev's presence. He asked me to stay on while they were with him and it was then that Mr. Trivedi's father told us that his Guru was Sri Baba Neem Karoliji of Nainital. When requested to tell us something about his Guru, the senior Trivedi narrated many things about Babaji and his experience about him as his disciple. He said, "Swamiji, right at this moment Babaji knows where I am, what I am doing and what exactly I am saying to you. When I meet him next time he will repeat my words to you and tell me that I was here at this time. He knows everything. He is listening to me now."

This is what the old gentleman declared and in this manner did I come to learn these details about Babaji's unusual personality and extraordinary powers. Later on, these statements have been corroborated by certain other of his devotees whom I had the occasion to meet afterwards. Several times close devotees of Baba Neem Karoli have seen him simultaneously at two different places, at





one and the same time. In both places it was not merely a matter of just seeing him but Babaji was very much with them, talking to them and even partaking of some refreshments offered by them.

One particularly unusual thing about Babaji was the manner of his coming and going. He would suddenly walk into your presence unannounced. While leaving, he would take leave and go out and walk along the road and tell people not to follow him. The moment he went out of sight, it was impossible to trace him out even if one ran after him or went in a motor vehicle. It may even be just a hundred yards away where he turns around the bend of a road and was hidden from sight. This was enough. The next moment he was totally untraceable anywhere within a radius of a mile. It is believed that he had done Upasana (worship) of Sri Hanuman and attributed many of his miraculous deeds

to 'Siddhi' (psychic power) through his Upasana.

This may be quite true because it is a well-known fact that Babaji has prompted and supervised the construction of several beautiful and very impressive Hanuman Mandirs. These temples enshrining Sri Hanuman are powerful attractions to innumerable devotees. One such most attractive and impressive Hanuman Mandir is in Lucknow. Sri Hanumanji shrined in Baba Neem Karoli's Ashram at Kainchi is also a centre of worship. In Brindavan also there is a beautiful Hanumanji temple.

Some devotees even say that Babaji had conquered space and that he could be anywhere and in any place he wished within the twinkling of an eye. Also, he was characterised by a total non-attachment to anything on earth. Even as freely blowing wind is unattached to anything he was also unaffected by his environment, even as the pure blowing breeze. However, despite his non-attachment and unaffected attitude he was yet very compassionate to those in trouble or distress. He would not refuse an earnest request. He was all loving kindness to people in trouble and helped them out of their trouble by the influence he had in high circles.

Babaji was very austere in his personal life and moved about with only a blanket around his body. He had great goodwill towards all spiritual institutions. I also feel that he had hidden inner spiritual contact and connection with a number of other spiritual teachers and saints who were his contemporaries. His work was not completely an individual and isolated one. It formed part of a wider work in which many other saints were actively engaged in and were in spiritual co-ordination. Despite his taciturn nature and outer reserve, Babaji was capable of great deal of affection expressed even by a mere gesture or gaze. He gave courage to many a fainting heart and brought solace to countless souls. He endeared himself as a family member in the homes of many of his sincere devotees and true disciples. Thus his passing was felt as a keen personal loss by thousands of his followers.

Babaji's coming into public notice dates back several decades ago in the pre-independence era during the British regime. There is a story in this connection which is a very close parallel to a similar





story connected with another great Siddha Purusha of Southern India, viz., Sri Nityananda Avadhuta hailing from Kerala who later on settled down at Vajreshvari near Bombay. These two incidents are almost identical in their details.

Babaji was once wandering somewhere in Eastern U.P. At one place he passed by a railway station. The train happened to be at halt. He had a fancy to travel some distance by train. He got into a nearby coach and sat in an upper class compartment. After a while the train started and continued its journey. Some time later, a Travelling Ticket Examiner saw this somewhat uncouth, rustic-like person occupying the upper class seat and approached him and asked for his ticket. Babaji just looked up at him once and paid no further attention to his query. He continued to remain silent in contemplation. The Ticket Examiner was annoyed. He demanded to see the ticket. It was those days when most of the railway staff was either British or at least Anglo-Indian. Babaji shook his head and spread out his

empty hands. The Ticket Examiner understood the situation and decided to take action. Soon after, the train stopped for a brief halt at a small way-side station in the country-side. Babaji was ordered to get down. He promptly obeyed, left his seat, got down out of the carriage and walking a few steps along the dusty platform went and stayed under the shade of a tree. He seemed absolutely unconcerned of whatever had happened. He paid no attention to what was going on around him. In a couple of minutes the bell rang, the railway guard blew his whistle and waved the green flag. The engine driver sounded the whistle and started the engine. Nothing happened. The engine did not move and the train continued to stand where it was. After a few minutes the guard got down and walked up to the engine driver to enquire what the trouble was. No trouble could be detected. Everything seemed to be all right. The engine driver checked everything and tried again. No result. More time passed. The Station Master became anxious. Another train which was due to come by was held up at some station up the line. Telegraphic messages started coming. 15 minutes, 20 minutes and then half an hour passed. Anxiety built up. Then a subordinate member of the staff very timidly approached the Station Master and pointing to Babaji sitting under the tree insisted that the whole situation was due to having shown disrespect to the holy man. He suggested that the only way out of the impasse was to approach him and beg his forgiveness and request him to continue his journey without any hindrance. This was conveyed to the guard and the engine driver. At first they vehemently refused to do any such thing but as more time passed, better reason prevailed. They respectfully approached Babaji, saluted him, asked to be excused for their rudeness, requested him to bless the train and invited him to continue his journey. Babaji looked up and glanced at them for a moment and said "All right, Chalo. Hum chalenge, Hum chalenge" ("All right, Go. I shall come along, I shall come along") and got up and re-entered the train. Immediately the engine gave a jerk and the train started to move as though nothing had happened. A little crowd, which had gathered there, in the meanwhile, loudly acclaimed Babaji with awe in their voice. From then onwards no



Railway Officer ever interfered with Babaji's free movement in any train he fancied.

I shall conclude by narrating how Babaji twice visited Sivananda Ashram at Rishikesh after the passing of Gurudev Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj. Quite unexpectedly Babaji turned up, all of a sudden, one day, and walked into the Ashram. Sri Swami Nirmalanandaji, a Gurubhai of mine who had some very unusual experience with Babaji previously, ran up to me and announced his arrival. By the time I stepped out, Babaji was already in my outer verandah upstairs. I bowed down on his feet, took him inside and had him seated upon an Asana. Babaji very kindly made enquiries about the Ashram, of its inmates and our activities. I answered all his questions and he seemed very satisfied and said "Bahut Achha, Bahut Achha." ("Very good, Very good.") I told him that I wished to offer something for him to partake and asked what he would like. He agreed to drink some milk. Hot cow's milk and sugar were brought. He very graciously partook it and in the meantime other residents of the Ashram came up and made their Pranams and took their seat. I introduced them to him. He beamed with pleasure and signified his blessings to all. He expressed his appreciation for the hospital work. Then he continued to stay for some time with us all and then saying that he must be going, he got up and walked away from the room followed by us. When he reached the foot of the steps and came upon the road, he raised his hand in blessing as well as in a gesture motioning us to stop and not to follow him. Then he started walking down the road and was soon out of sight.

A few years later Babaji similarly turned up a second time, just like that, as suddenly out of the blue as it were. This time he did not come upstairs but sat in one of the rooms downstairs and gave Darshan to a number of Ashram Sadhakas and devotees. He gave personal interviews also, to a few seekers. Then he left after a couple of hours and that was the last time he was at the Ashram.

Before Babaji left his body one of the outstanding acts of Grace and Benediction he did was to effect the transformation in the life of an American seeker named Richard Alpert. Well known as one



### **Brahmalin Chidanand Saraswati**

(24 September 1916 – 28 August 2008) was the President of the Divine Life Society, Rishikesh, India. He is known in India as a yogi, sage and spiritual leader. After the death in 1963 of his predecessors, Sivananda Saraswati, who had founded the Society, he succeeded as President of the Divine Life Society.

Chidananda's birth name was Sridhar Rao. He obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree from Loyola College, Chennai. He adopted a life of renunciation in 1936 and in 1943 joined the Sivananda Ashram run by Sivananda Saraswati in Rishikesh. He was appointed the General Secretary of the Divine Life Society in 1948. He was initiated into the sannyasa order by his guru, Sivananda, on 10 July 1949, on the day of Guru Purnima. It was then that he received his monastic name "Chidananda", which means "He who is Consciousness and Bliss." He was elected President of the Divine Life Society in August 1963 after the death of Swami Sivananda.

of the acclaimed leaders of the American drug cult, the former professor of the Harvard University was in a state of moral and spiritual crisis in his life when Babaji mysteriously drew him to himself and cast his glance of Grace upon him. That first Darshan and the benediction worked a miracle in that restless soul and soon transformed him into a teacher now known to thousands of his followers as Baba Ramdas. This fascinating story is narrated in Ramdas' book "Be Here Now", a most interesting and absorbing human document that gives many interesting insights into Baba Neem Karoli and his mystic and wonderful personality. □

This article has been taken from the book published by 'The Divine Life Society' and we do express our sincere gratitude to this society.