

*Gangotri*  
JOURNEY TO THE SOURCE

A Spiritual Memoir

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## And Then There Were Two

S wami Muktananda, my beloved “Baba,” had actually passed away three years earlier, in October of 1982. I vividly remember the phone call from my friend Hesh, another devotee: “There’s news from India. Baba died last night.”

In yogic lore, the death of a master is a joyful rather than a sad event, and is known as *mahasamadhi*, the “great oneness.” Since the master is no longer limited by the confines of a body he is totally free to roam the universe in service of his devotees, and is thus even more powerful. He hasn’t died; he has *left his body*. He has “taken *mahasamadhi*.”

It’s traditional to pay lavish tribute to a master when he dies, often in the form of chanting his name for extended periods. Hesh informed me that the chant had already begun at all of Baba’s ashrams, and was to last a month.

There was a Siddha Yoga ashram in Manhattan, about an hour away, and I decided to go there immediately and join the chant. I was *so* sad. My 12-year-old son, Lionel, who had met Baba a couple of times, said he wanted to come with me. It was about 9 p.m. and I told him he was very welcome to come, but that there was no telling when we might get back. He didn’t care.

We went to the chant, stayed a few hours, and got home shortly before dawn. At the ashram it didn’t seem to me that any-

one was particularly joyful. In fact, some people were practically choking on the words to the chant. I know *I* was.



With Baba's death the leadership of Siddha Yoga had been instantly passed to his two successors. These successors had been hand-picked by Baba, and were actually brother and sister. Their names were Swami Nityananda, the brother (nickname: *Gurudev*), and Swami Chidvilasananda, the sister (nickname: *Gurumayi*).

These two young swamis had been formally installed by Baba as gurus in a gigantic ceremony held in India in May of 1982, a few months prior to Baba's passing, an event that had triggered apprehension in many of the devotees: *Does he know he's going to die soon?* Maybe he did.

In any event Baba had said that the installation ceremony marked his retirement as guru, and that we were now to follow his new successors. No one took him very seriously because as long as he was around he would always be *the man*. As Gurumayi said, "He can't just stop guru-ing!"

Nevertheless he did actually fade more into the background, and the two new gurus, "the kids," began to lead all the programs. They traveled a lot, sometimes together, sometimes separately, and were each honored and respected as gurus wherever they went. Most devotees found it at least a bit confusing to now relate to two gurus rather than one, and many developed a preference for one or the other, but all in all it was taken pretty much in stride by the Siddha Yoga community.

For our trip to the Ganeshpuri ashram in October 1985 we learned that both gurus would be there.

## Give It Away

I knew no one in Siddha Yoga who didn't want, at least at some point, to visit the Ganeshpuri ashram. It was, after all, the "main" ashram, the one established by Baba himself in the hometown of his own revered guru, Bhagavan Nityananda. It was the world headquarters of Siddha Yoga and was said, by those who had been there, to be a spiritual paradise. Within its walls, transformation was assured.

I certainly wanted to go. The awakening I had experienced when Baba came into my life had always felt mysteriously exotic to me, a quality that struck me as somehow having its roots in India. So for me this trip was not about sightseeing; it was a return to the *source*, a pilgrimage.

And what better time to go than October, when the mahasamadhi celebration would be in full swing? It was the third anniversary of Baba's death and was thus an extremely auspicious time to visit. Yes, it would be crowded, but the festivities would be magnificent, and would feature, among other things, a week-long *saptah* (chant) in Baba's honor.

Anne was very happy that we were going, but would never have suggested the trip on her own. Don was just rolling with the punches.

