
DEATH IS A JOYOUS OCCASION

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Modesty isn't one of my finer qualities. Even at the time when I knew that God was my brother, I wasn't modest about it. At least to myself. I was very, very proud of the fact that it only happened to me. Because in the Catholic school, people talked about God mothers and God fathers, but nobody talked about God brothers. I was the only one who could say, "Well, I have a God brother." [Mani laughs]

I want to talk a couple of things about uh, what we call— dying, when we change one shirt into another, that means one from life to another. And it is very, very painful, very traumatic, not for the person concerned at all, but for the people concerned, the people who were so close to that person. I know it, and for this story you have to understand the background a little, as to how much my mother, Baba's mother, suffered from our little community—neighbors and people around, families who were in Poona, the Iranis, 'because she was *His* mother.' So she would say, "But Merog, you are in Meherabad, but I am in Pune, and anything that they hear, even rumors, false things over there, have repercussions here." Because they would immediately take it out on mother. In a hundred ways. She was a social outcast from amongst the Iranis, the social functions which she used to grace in her beauty and wit and all that stuff.

So, when my eldest brother died at 32 years, he is the one that was older than Baba. But he was adopted by my aunt, my mother's sister, because my mother would not accept this baby, could not, she was so young when she had the first child, about fifteen, that when the child was brought to her she would turn over, you know. So my aunt adopted, my aunt did not have children. So when he died, what happened was what my mother heard, and what was made such a big thing of, and which had repercussions, was that Baba in Meherabad distributed sweets. His elder brother has died, according to the worldly understanding, and his brother, Meher Baba, distributes sweets, which in India we distribute on festive occasions, happy occasions, jolly functions, you know? You have a baby, you distribute sweets, you pass on your examination, you distribute sweets, and here was Baba distributing sweets.

So when my mother came up from Poona, she accosted her son and said, "Merog, did you *have* to do that?" She said, "You know you weren't here, all that they have been—all the Iranis have been saying such things to me because of that. And I also as a mother, I'm hurt. After all he was your brother and you distribute sweets." And Baba said one thing which I remembered and will never forget till I die. He said

Mother, "If you could see Jamshed as I see him now, you would not only distribute the small sweets that Baba had distributed, which are called "peda", but "jalebis", which are bigger. You could distribute bigger sweets because if you could see him as I see him now — see his happiness, see the state, it's not what you think. It is not as —". There was this other incident that Baba Himself told us about, this I remembered, about Jamshed. But this other one also, Baba brought it up and said — I'm sure he also started something, that in future will be, one day it will become a universal thing of how Baba attended to the burial and funeral of a person. Now Baba himself tells us this.

In Meherazad, in His bedroom when we were around, He talks about the toddy shop where He used to help my father, and He talked about this man who used to help a little in the toddy shop sometimes. But he came mostly just to be with Merwanji, that is Baba as He was known then. He was very fond of Merwanji. He had nobody in the world. No family, no son, and a son is a very important thing in India to have, one son at least who will light your funeral pyre, who will see to your funeral and your burial. That is an important thing for that. Now he had nobody, no sons, no children, no wife, no parents, nobody in the world. And he took to Merwanji like a duck takes to water, as we say. It is always around Merwanji. Whenever he would have a chance he would be next to Baba. He was a 'malis walla' which means a masseur. You know one who—so he would make some money from that. Also he made money from, a very little pittance, from awakening every morning, early mornings — the mullas.

[clock chimes]

Ah, see that's right. The Muslim mosques, the mullas stand up on the wall every morning and call out to the people, "Awake, awake to prayer. It's time to wake up." But someone has to wake *them* up so that they could wake the populace. Well Baba's friend, this little one, used to go and wake them up. There also was, at the end of a hard working day, or in the afternoon— Now Baba's telling us all this, he would take, was fond of taking a little opium and put it in his mouth. Standing there, he would go to sleep standing. He would nod, nod, nod. And this is Baba, Baba's doing this, this, this, this. And completely bend over but still straight on his legs. And Baba's talking about him with so much love. And He says, "That man loved me," that is Baba. "And only trusted me." And he put whatever savings he had from his earnings with Baba. "Merwanji, you keep this for me. And *you* see to my funeral. When I die, *you* see to my burial and funeral." Because he was a Muhammedan—they don't cremate, they bury. "You see to my burial." And Merwanji took the money and kept it.

And the time came when that 'malis wallah' died, and Merwanji came, and it was the maddest, merriest, funeral you can imagine. And people thought this was a wedding procession. The ones who were carrying the body, the corpse, they were given a rich feast by Merwanji from that money. And the bier where they carry the body on was well decorated and people were singing. And they had had a merry feast. And they were, I think, taking the body along in a procession and more and

more people were joining the procession, because there was such a happy aura coming from it. You know this is something, this is something, what is it? So in the end the procession was almost stopping, not only impeding, but stopping the traffic. And people had to stop their cars or get down from the tonga — stop their tongas, or get down from their bicycles, just because of this difficult to pass procession. And they would ask, "Whose marriage is it? Whose wedding is it? Whose wedding?" And they were told "Wedding, it's not a wedding, it's a funeral!"

And Baba is showing us, telling us, that *that* is the right way to approach what we call death. It is a joy for the one who has just shed — it's like you put in the laundry when your shirt gets dirty. You want to change you just take it out and put it in the laundry, put on another one. It's as simple as that. It's not *easy*, it's not easy for the ones, feeling is for ourselves, because we miss them. But it's never a going backward. Always a step forward. It's always a progress. It's only a matter of time. We're all going to die. There's never that you can say about anyone that so and so is not going to die. It will always be there. But a particular pattern, we come with a particular pattern when we're born of how long we have to be on this earth before we change our shirt. And that's all there is to it. But we are unaware of that joy, of that progress, of that relief.

Upasni Maharaj used to say that when you die you turn around and say, "My God, I was bound in *that* all this time?" Till of course you get into it again. But it's always — it is a joyous going forward. It's never anything else. And Baba used to — He knows we cannot take it. We cannot understand it. Because even though we understand it, we are human. The heart is there. The separation is there. But this much I know, that when Baba says that His lovers go through anything, no matter what, although we cannot escape, His love is there to help us there. But apart from that, He makes it — it's minimized. Baba's words, "I make a rock into a pebble." One never knows even what suffering that particular soul is safe from in this body, or what further suffering for us is safe by anything happening when at the time when we're not prepared to take it. But some day it will happen. Some day we will learn that going forward by leaving this body and taking on another, it's always a joyous event. Kabir says, "Aren't we queer?", to effect, I'm not saying the words. "Aren't we queer," he says, "as humanity? That when a child is born, and the soul says, "*Oh no, I'm again in bondage? Again in this old world?*", And he cries. First thing a child does is cry. And everybody laughs. [Mani laughs] Child is born! A beautiful boy! Look at this baby girl! And when it dies, when that soul is so happy to be relieved from this body, we cry. It's opposite, the way we do it.