

The "Messiah" of India Coming?

Meher Baba, Holy Man of the Hindu Yogis, Who Hasn't Spoken a Word in Eight Years and Claims He Can Perform Miracles, Will Try to Start a Colony of Mystics in America



Meher Baba, the Indian "Messiah," Discussing His Religion With Disciples by Means of His Alphabet Board, for He Has Taken a Vow Never to Speak a Word.

THE United States is promised a visit from Meher Baba, the famous "holy man" from India, known as the "Messiah," and said to be the inspirer of Mahatma Gandhi.

In India a holy man's fame depends largely on how long he can go without eating, or whether he has lived for years without having spoken any words, or can hold himself upside down on a pole, or remain for many days buried in the ground with only his head showing.

Meher Baba can do many of these tricks, and in addition is supposed to be able to perform miracles. The ignorant and simple-minded natives of India are greatly impressed by "holy men" and it is expected that the credulous-minded in America will also take Meher Baba seriously and chip in liberally when those who are promoting the holy man pass around the hat. But when it comes to performing miracles, men of science or real intelligence will want to be shown.

Meher Baba is credited with many supernatural achievements in his native India. It is seriously stated that when he was crossing the Ghat Mountains in an automobile with a few friends they reached a dangerous corner. Here the mountain road was bordered on the left side by a towering mass of solid rock, and on the right side it was completely unprotected. Below yawned a terrifying precipice with a drop of several thousand feet.

Suddenly the automobile stopped, owing to the stalling of the engine, as they climbed up the steep road. Then it began to slide backwards, to the great alarm of its occupants. The driver applied the brakes, but they failed to act. The auto quickly approached the edge of the cliff and death seemed to be inevitable for all in the car. At this psychological moment Meher Baba touched the side of the auto and lightly snapped his fingers. At once the auto was brought to a standstill by a "miracle," the report goes.

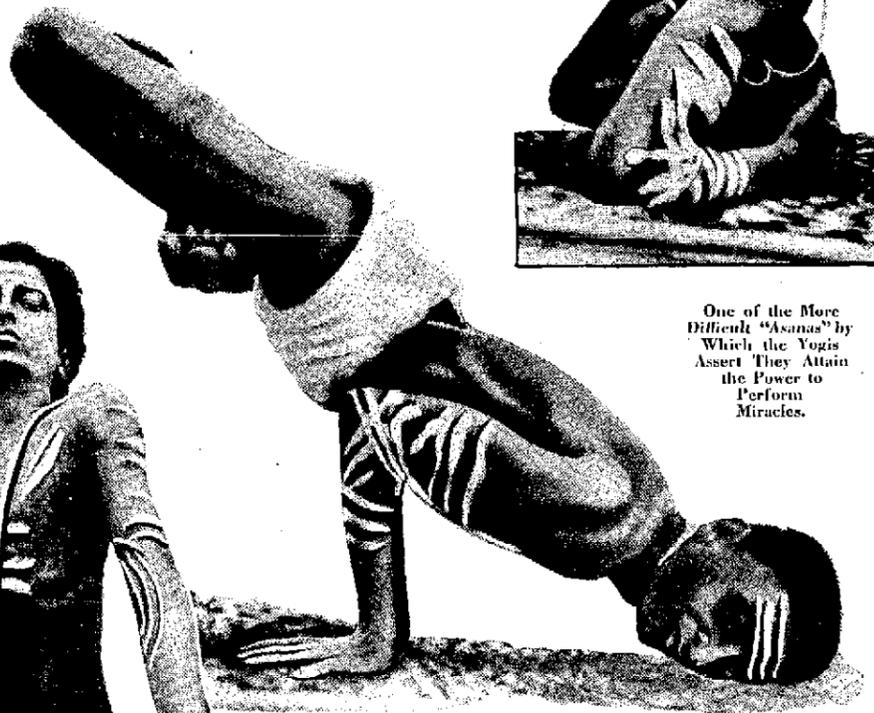
On another occasion, it is related, when Meher Baba had made his headquarters in the little town of Tokar in Western India, it so happened that a great scarcity of rain prevailed in the region. According to local customs the people indulged in various ceremonies, including a tom-tom procession, in order to propitiate the goddess of rain. But their efforts were of no avail. Famine and starvation threatened the whole district.

The headman of the town went to Meher Baba and humbly begged him to use his miraculous powers to bring about some good showers of rain. The holy man said, "It will soon begin to rain now."

Within less than an hour of this,



A Yogi Practicing a Comparatively Simple "Asana," or Holy Posture—Standing on Hands With Legs Off the Ground. This Helps to Fix His Mind on Spiritual Things.



The Head Downward Position Said to Be Very Effective in Purifying the Blood and Checking Worldly Desires.

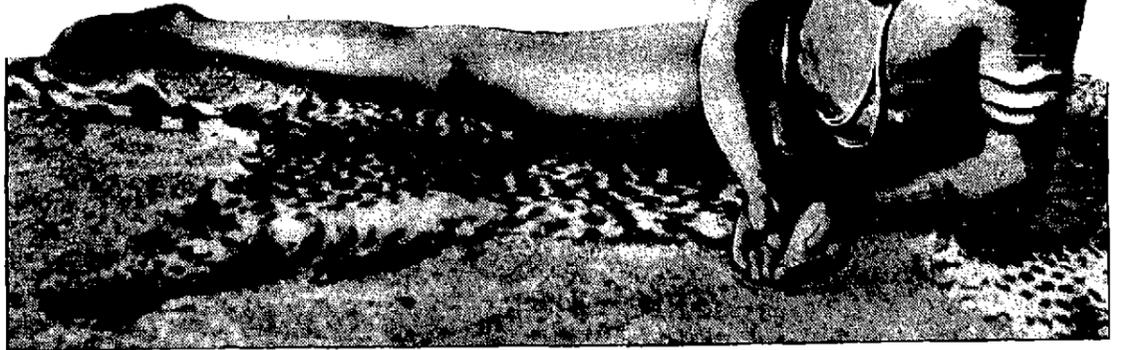


This Holy Man Is Attaining Bodily Purity by Going Without Food—The Less He Eats the More Spiritual He Becomes.

dark clouds began to gather over Tokar and in a few minutes it rained. Thereafter tremendous showers fell for nearly a whole week, to the relief of the population. At last the rain became excessive and threatened a flooding of the town and destruction of the crops. The headman came once more to Meher Baba and begged him to stop the rain. Almost immediately, it is said, the showers came to an end.

Meher Baba was born in 1894 in Poona, India, and was the son of a respectable Parsee family, which means that he is of Persian descent. He is learned in the philosophy of the famous philosopher Zoroaster, but experts in all the higher lines of mysticism in all Oriental countries belong to the same

He abandoned his college course and devoted himself to the study of mysticism and acquiring "Yoga." He traveled all over India visiting the mysterious cave temples of the Himalaya Mountains, the sacred shrines of Benares, and out-of-the-way centers of mysticism in the south. During his wanderings he came into contact with "Yogis," "Rishis" and magicians. Eight years ago he took a vow of silence and has not spoken since, while once he fasted for five-and-a-half months. He communicates with English speaking people by means of a cardboard on which is printed the English alphabet, pointing with his forefinger to the different letters and thus composing words. He has long, silky hair which falls



An Indian Yogi of the Baba's School Practicing a Holy Posture—Stretched Out With His Right Leg Curled Around His Neck, Oftentimes in the Middle of the Street. This, He Thinks, Purifies His Soul.



One of the More Difficult "Asanas" by Which the Yogis Assert They Attain the Power to Perform Miracles.



In This Contortion the Mystic Is Trying to Acquire Control Over Matter.

they must go through a long course of stunts and exercises which impress people very much and are supposed to give them control over matter and enable them to do supernatural things. The Hindu word "Yoga" means union and is defined by the Encyclopedia Britannica as "diversion of the senses from the external world and concentration of thought within."

A famous Indian Yogi named Narsingha Swami, noted for his ability to eat poison, recently came to a tragic end. The Yogi died in a British hospital in Rangoon, Burma, as a result of eating at a public exhibition a handful of crushed glass, a teaspoonful of nitric acid, several times a fatal dose of strychnine, a similar dose of potassium cyanide, and finally, by way of dessert, a spoonful of sulphuric acid.

It was the strychnine, hospital doctors report, that ended the Yogi's career. According to the report, he survived all the other poisons, but for some reason the strychnine acted more strongly than usual. The Yogi, it was said, had been accustomed for several years to make his living by eating in public these same poisons in equal or greater amounts. The real secret of how he did the trick was not revealed.

The reason why the last assortment proved fatal is said by the Yogi's manager to have been the accidental omission on the fatal day of the mental and physical exercises prescribed for experts in Yoga, and which the Yogi was accustomed to carry out before all of his poison-eating feats.

Most statements that Yogis and other Hindu ascetics can perform genuine miracles, such as raising the dead, are found to rest on popular report and not on the evidence of scientific Western witnesses. The superstition of the people is unlimited. Lowell Thomas mentions a remarkable Hindu fakir named Suddhu Bisudhanan Dhan whom

he visited at Puri, and who was widely credited with having the power of raising the dead. A native government official told the American visitor that he saw the fakir bring to life two birds which had been thoroughly strangled and dead four hours.

When Mr. Thomas visited the fakir, he says he saw him take a piece of clean cotton and by focusing the sunlight on it cause it to smell successively of violets, attar of roses and a native scent. Mr. Thomas did not see the fakir raise the dead.

Swallowing fire is reported to be a common accomplishment of the ascetics, but the magician Houdini has shown that this can be done sufficiently well to impress ordinary people by soaking the mouth thoroughly with spirits of sulphur.

Enduring snake bites and swallowing scorpions are other reported Yogi stunts. There is a lack of satisfactory proof that the reptiles had their venom, but in any case magicians have proved that there are several effective ways of protecting the body against snake-bite.

There are 84 principal postures called "asanas," which the Yogi practices in order to obtain complete control of the body and impress the public. They are said to unite the Yogi with the powers controlling the universe and help him to perform miracles. The asanas look difficult and require a special diet. There is an old Hindu saying that it is easier to stand on the sharpened edges of razors than to follow the Yogi discipline.

One of them, known as "sirshasana," consists of reposing head downward as long as possible under the shade of a tree. This is only one of the simpler asanas. It is said to be excellent for the circulation of the veins. Another exercise called nauli consists of moving the muscles of abdomen and stomach independently and overcomes intestinal stasis. There seems to be no doubt that the asanas are first-class stretching exercises.

A posture called vedu-purana consists in lying stretched out on the left side with the right leg curled around the back of the neck in a position which few Americans could assume. One ascetic assumes this position in the middle of a narrow Calcutta street, thus requiring a detour by taxis and other wheeled vehicles that wish to pass.

In one posture the ascetic supports himself entirely on his hands with his legs curled up off the ground. Some Yogis curl their legs behind their backs in such intricate knots that it is hard to tell where they begin and end. Such postures cannot be attained by an ordinary grown person, but it is stated that an American contortionist could accomplish them if he began young.

Resting upon the head and hands with the legs held up in the air calls for an advanced degree of skill. Among the 84 postures, 34 have been credited with much more merit than the rest. The excellence of some of the 34 postures is due to the mental power they are supposed to give. Others are alleged to cure certain physical ills or to check undesirable tendencies through control of nerves and organs.

In India, Yogis have an unwritten right to live and sleep in any spot in the open air which they choose. They are never prosecuted for vagrancy. Meher Baba usually occupies a cave with a wide entrance so that everybody can see him.

The perfect Yogi is said to be able to make himself invisible, to fly through the air, and to possess other unusual accomplishments. It is predicted that this "Messiah" will not try any of these "miracles" in front of the sharp eyes of American scientists.

Meher Baba has no sympathy with modern civilization—he believes man should spend his life in contemplation and spiritual development. The Yogis perform no useful, practical service to mankind. If, down through the ages, everybody had been a Yogi sitting in contemplation of spiritual matters there would have been very little practical progress of mankind; things would be somewhat as they were in cave-man days. Disease, famine and misery would still sweep the world as it did in earlier ages and as, indeed, it does now in India, which is known as the most backward and unenlightened country in the world.