

Translated from Russian language with help of DeepL

Agni-Baba

Big Lessia has told me about Baba many times. She was introduced to him by an Indian woman. Her name was Padma and she spoke Russian. Every time I came to Pune for a while from Xxxx., Lessia tried to drag me to Baba. She assured me that Baba was an enlightened one.

I had enough from the „enlightened" guru in Xxxx. I came to Pune to take a break from his "enlightenment" without even realizing it.

But this time I gave up.

We drove a couple of hours on a rickshaw motorcycle outside of Pune, to the low mountains and hills densely covered with greenery. There was almost no trace of human habitation and therefore no "signs of civilization", such as piles of rubbish, dirty cellophane bags and rags dancing in the wind.

People were not seen here and there was no signs of human excretion, the otherwise integral part of such secluded corner of nature in these regions. Which means there were no corresponding smells either.

Here, the ancient Indian land breathed health, unfading youth and showed its dazzling face.

No one lived here. Except Agni Baba.

At the very least it looked like that.

Lots of deserted space. Rare for India.

It was clean!

Was untouched and peaceful. Quiet.

The low mountains or the high hills were all covered and entangled with wild herbs. At the foot of the mountains, there was a valley as flat as a Thali dish.

Somewhere were bushes and shreds of sun-yellow grass. Golden grass.

From time to time, there were small trees. Small stones underfoot, hard, dried up earth of red-brown colour. The shoots of green bushes, surrounded by red soil, were intensely green in the sun like emeralds. They were low, round and looked like billiard balls scattered in the field.

For some time, we were walking away from the roadway, deep into this quiet "continent".

The rickshaw-walla (driver), drove a little deeper and left the rickshaw under a small tree and walked by our side.

We came up to some kind of construction. A handmade one.

In "architecture terms", it's a typical slum construction. Made from tin, slate, plywood and something else four walls were built with a roof and an opening, «a door» closed by a hanging piece of fabric. But everything was clean and somehow new without a layer of dust or traces of scratches.

We looked inside - nobody.

The floor in this little temple, or dwelling, was a cleanly wiped bare ground. A podium was built on the opposite side of the door from planks. A pipe was laying on it, a pair of pillows and something like a blanket. On the left, at the foot of the podium, there was a place, about two by two meters, carefully fenced with large round blackened stones. Inside this fenced place, coals were smouldering and there was a thick layer of delicate, silver ashes.



Above the ashes towered leaning against the wall a stone- Shivalinga. A sabre sticking out of the ashes and a trident placed next to it. Both the trident and the sabre were blackened by the ashes and the constant heat.

This is the habitat of Agni Baba.

Under the wall, opposite the fire place, was a double folded mat. Apparently, a visitor's mat. We were waiting for the owner outside.

Someone came who must have been cleaning around this dwelling. By the look he seems a peasant.

It was strange that in the middle of this almost untouched corner of nature, someone with a barbed and hard broom walks around this structure, scrubbing small stones and dust with it. I suspect he did it out of respect for Baba to show his reverence, not out of necessity.

This sweeper and the rickshaw walla had a talk about something in Marathi (the local language) and the rickshaw walla told us that Baba would be back soon.

I was a little sceptical.

All the enthusiasm of Lessia about the enlightened Baba, caused me to smile condescendingly. Lessia called him "Baba", in a Russian manner, and I too began to call him like that at home.

Big Lessia, who came from Odessa, was a cheerful and bright soul. Even naive, but not to confuse it with the word "stupid". The naivety of Lessia was derived from some inner purity. Her wisdom and foresight were based on a desire to see the best in everyone and everything. If "seeing the best" did not work, Lessia knew how to regret and forgive.

She loved singing old romances.

Very emotional, she managed to find a reason to admire almost everything. She had an inexhaustible ocean of energy inside of her. In her bright blue eyes that adorned her nice round face, one could find the splashing sea of Odessa.

In spite of all her grotesque physical size, Lessia was not shapeless. There was a significant difference in volume between her hips and waist, and her face was not disfigured by a double or triple chin. Lessia was beautiful.

Everybody called her "Mom" for her willingness to help, to heal and to feed everyone. She was cosy. At the same time, she was practical and was able to count money and knew how to get it. This blue-eyed blonde with a big ass and impressive breasts, had an amazing intuition and was phenomenal with fortune-telling cards. That's what she did for a living in Pune.

We had to wait for about fifteen minutes. It got hot. There was a tree next to the hut and we piled up in its thin shade.

And there he was, Baba.

His tiny and delicate figure, dressed in bright orange robes, reminded me of the tongue of flame. A special resemblance to the tongue of flame, gave a piece of orange fabric, wrapped around his head like a high cone.

The bright colour of the clothes emphasized the long resinous black beard and moustache.

The face was swarthy, with small but piercing eyes.

I was struck by his big, heavy earrings. It wasn't gold. Maybe it was silver, I'm not sure. But not the earrings themselves, but the way they were protruding into his ears, it was impressive.

The earrings weren't in the earlobes. In auricles of the ears were made large holes and it was there that these massive jewelleries were hanging.

On Baba's neck was a rudraksha-mala, a traditional attribute of the god Shiva and the Shivaists.

Baba smiled and invited us into the house with a gesture.

We sat along the wall on the distributed mat, while Baba sat on the podium, with crossed legs into a lotus position. The rickshaw walla introduced Baba to each of us (except me and Lessia, here we were called Saia and Dima). Baba would smile tenderly, wiggle his head and

sometimes clapping his hands joyfully. Compared with the formidable, fat, tall guru of Xxxx, Baba looked frivolous and childish.

We brought sweets and bananas. Lessia put our presents next to Baba on the podium. Agni Baba looked at our prasad, smiled, called the man who was cleaning around the house with a gesture and handed him everything but the bananas.

Later I learned that everything which was brought to Agni-Baba: sweets, cupcakes, cookies, money, jewellery, warm shawls, clothes, etc., he passed on to his congregation members.

Those who came to this small temple were mostly poor, with many children and Baba supported them with money and everything he could.

Sometimes he physically treated them.

From the bananas we brought, Baba choose one, holding it with his fingers very delicately like a crystal ball and with the fingers of the other hand began to touch the banana.

He somehow internally detached himself from us. With a banana in his hand and half-closed eyes, Baba seemed to be very far away, even though he was sitting beside us. Almost inaudible, he was saying some mantra. It was not for long.

Then his gaze flashed back again, with a little smile. With his thin, swarthy fingers he broke the banana into several parts. He told something in Marathi to the rickshaw walla.

He translated it to us, that this banana is a prasad from Agni Baba.

Everyone here got a piece.

Oh, my gosh, all those prasad's! I've eaten so many of them already!

At the guru from Xxxx the prasad's were abundant, expensive, sometimes from a few dishes, sometimes from exquisite Indian sweets. Other gurus also had fruit, thali, nuts, anything edible. Everything was served on disposable large palm leaf plates and sometimes also large metal plates.

At times it was very tasty, other times - not much ... Prasad is food, embodying the "divine mercy", a symbol of "divine grace". Blessed by a saint or guru, this food is supposed to cleanse us from sins, karmas and diseases. It's a blessing from God.

That's how it was explained to me.

But I did not find anything "divine" or "blessed" in it, even though I expected it to be so. After absorption of prasad, I usually didn't feel any sublime state, no lightness in the soul or special joy and health. Apparently, a prasad is just a custom, an ancient belief. It's just a dinner or lunch with the guru and all the disciples together. In a pleasant company, so to speak. And nothing more.

And here, in this chicken-legged hut, there's the Prasad again.

Tradition is tradition. I'm a polite person, I made namaste and took a piece of banana given to me by Agni Baba.

Under the impression of the unpretentious environment and interior, uncontrollably like lightning a thought flashed through my head: "I hope I don't get any infection from it."

Later, when I remembered this thought, I was ashamed.

Placing the prasad in my mouth, with boredom, I decided that Agni-Baba's earrings were probably the most impressive from this journey. So, I waited patiently for us to go back to Pune.

But eating the banana slice bewitched by Baba, it spilled like wine all over my body.

Extraordinary peace and tranquillity descended upon me. It became incredibly good and peaceful. All the mental and emotional tension I've been torturing myself with for the last months just vanished.

In my head slowly like a pirogue the thought-feeling flowed in: "I arrived"!

It was the first real Prasad in my life.

And Baba was still occasionally clapping his hands and laughing. Not serious at all.

On goodbye, he cleaned each of us with a broom made of peacock feathers and gave us ashes wrapped in newspaper bags. The ashes were from the fire corner where his sabre and the

trident were sticking out. The ashes had to be taken in tiny pinches and eaten, and rubbing them into body places or putting a dot on the third eye.

Lessia, who also works as a masseuse, began to add this ash to her massage oil. She said that people felt special after such a massage...

On one of our visits to Agni Baba, he told us that he would like to initiate us into Agni yoga. By that time, I had already received several different initiations, and to have one more I saw no point.

But Lessia! She was so inspired by it! She wanted it and she whole-heartedly believed in Agni Baba. She wanted to take the initiations with me.

You should know Lessia. She was a real charmer! Her willingness, inspiration and joy were like a storm! Enthusiasm turned her into a girl, even though she was in her forties.

For the initiation orange clothes were needed. We needed to buy them.

Considering my limited material situation, it was out of the question that I would buy an "outfit" that I would never wear again in my life after this initiation.

Without saying anything about it to Lessia I thought that Baba would not initiate me wrongly dressed and everything would resolve by itself. I will attend the ritual of transformation of Lessia in Agni Lessia, will share her joy. And that's it.

We got to Baba's hut early in the morning. From Pune, we left when it was still dark. I don't remember exactly, but it seems that the ritual was to be performed at sunrise.

We brought the necessary flowers and fruit.

Two Sannyasins from the ashram of Osho came with us, they were Australians.

Lessia introduced them to Baba the other day and they also wanted initiation into Agni Yoga. Agni Baba agreed to initiate them, but said the ritual would cost 1000 rupees. When the Australians left, I told Baba that I was giving up to be initiated, it is too expensive.

Baba said (he spoke a little English) that he knows that I do not have money. And in general, he knows from whom to ask.

Later this money went to the treatment of one of the poor Indians visiting Baba.

My non-fire-coloured garments, mandatory at the initiation of Agni Yoga, did not stop Baba. Everyone was initiated.

I don't remember the initiation ritual very well. It was like in the dream.

In the house of Baba was twilight.

Sweet fragrance came from the incense. In the corner where the silhouettes of a trident and a sword were guessing in the lilac smoke clubs, burning through the smoky veil, fiery coals were flashing brightly.

Baba sat me down, began to read mantras and do something around me with flowers and water. Briefly I noticed a few small bowls set in a semicircle near me. One had flowers, the other had water, the third one seemed to be a prasad-sweets... There was something else. It didn't matter to me.

I closed my eyes.

"Om Namah Shivaya!", "Om Shiva!" repeated Baba along with other words, in different versions and combinations.

I felt as he sprinkled my head with fragrant rose petals and they slid down my cheeks, on my knees, on the hands lying on the knees. I think he was spraying me with water, too. He probably gave me a prasad. I can't remember.

It's strange that all that's left in my memory like a transparent, fuzzy watercolour sketch. And no details.

One day me and Saia went to Agni-Baba.

The way was long and we talked the whole journey.

I was telling how everything was organized in the city of Xxxx around that other guru. How Satsang is taking place there....

Everything was placed in an European-American level.

The days when the guru was giving Satsangs in his private single-storey, small house, with breaks for homemade tea and the atmosphere was also homemade, warm, without solemnity and worship, were long gone.

Now, the rich disciples who came have rented a big house for Satsangs.

In the big hall, where the Satsangs were held, there was an air conditioner, and after the Satsangs there was a restaurant. The hall sometimes accommodated more than one hundred fifty people. Everything was civilized, comfortable, clean. The guru also became different...

Now he spoke English into a microphone and everything was recorded on video camera.

During Satsangs, the organizers of all this comfort, were given a permanent place of honour at the feet of the guru. This was considered a blessing and a sign of distinction.

They watched with fanaticism that the guru did not need anything not only on the Satsangs, but also at home.

Books with texts of Satsang talks were published in English and many other languages and later in Russian. The basis of the Satsang organization was the experience of ashram residents from Pune. The same ashram where my beloved Osho used to give darshans.

Former sannyasins arrived here, having brought the experience, almost - professionalism and money. In the beginning, there were a lot of them here in Xxxx. Some stayed, some came, visited and never came back.

All reverence for an "enlightened" guru, known all over the world and called "Zen Master", the guru who himself hinted that he is an incarnation of god Rama, and later god Krishna, could not fail to impress.

It never occurred to me to look inside myself and ask what I really feel and think about all this. I stopped listening and believing in my intuition, my feeling. All this powerful, like a tsunami, a wave of total worship, adoration of the guru, unconditional submission and service to him, dared me, made me doubt my own vision of him and carried me like a chip of wood. Where did it carry me? To hell with it.

Being by nature a non-hypnoable individualist, I somehow ran with the collective herd, insensible of myself.

I guess that's what I wanted.

I guess I had to learn something from it all.

Nothing happens in our lives without our consent. Even if we're not aware of our consent.

But I'll understand all that later. Years from now.

And now, coming up to the place of Agni-Baba residence and making a comparison between him and that guru, I said:

"You know, Saia, Baba, he's very sweet, maybe even enlightened, but he's not a Master."

We came up to Baba's hut. Diving under the heavy piece of fabric replacing the door, we found ourselves right in front of standing Agni Baba.

We made Namaste.

Baba smiled and looked at me gently said: "Sami, I am the Master".

To be continued.....