



Sri Dev Ashish – christened David Beresford – was born in Australia and came to India as a child when his parents, interested in the Krishnamurti movement, sailed to India and initially made their way to the Rishi Valley School. After moving to Pondicherry, they were asked to supervise an Aurobindo Ashram orchard in the Kumaon hills. It was from here that a teenaged David arrived at Mirtola, and made the ashram his life and work.

Handicapped somewhat by dyslexia (undiagnosed during his school years in the 1950s), he overcame the challenge by a combination of exceptional memory, great mechanical and farming aptitude, and a confrontational personality. He also had a deep intuitive side which he revealed to those he trusted but also used to batter people's personality traits in the mode of the Gurdjieffian 'Madame Vanity and Mr Self-Love'.

A fellow pupil, Bill Aitken, remembers that when Dev sometimes sang inside the temple after evening arati one felt his tremendous untrained voice expressing, without words, just a jet of soul sound. Bill also writes of Dev Ashish's love for his collection of cactus: 'For years they looked just like all cactus do, predictably dull and spiky. Then one day a cactus the size of a small football sent out a blazing red flower followed by

many others to create an astounding ball of fire as beautiful as it was unexpected, as though a thousand suns had suddenly shone.’

Not a soft or sentimental man by any means, Dev Ashish was nevertheless deeply devoted to his Guru, Sri Madhava Ashish. During the last stages of Ashishda’s life, Dev tended to him with single-pointed selflessness. He wrote of his Guru’s going:

‘The night before 13th April 1997 (the day that Ashishda passed away), some of us had gathered outside near the sundial, looking up at the comet Hale-Bopp. There is a myth that when a great soul is about to depart from this world a comet appears in the night skies. Whether that is true or not I don’t know, but what I do know is that in November 1965 when Sri Krishna Prem passed away, I went up to the ridge above the temple an hour or so before dawn. In the eastern sky, I saw the tail of a huge comet spreading thinly but brightly up into the middle of the sky with stars twinkling through the mist-like tail. I never saw the head for the sun had begun to rise. Years later I was told that the Comet Ikeya-Seki, one of the brightest comets to light up the sky, disappeared away from the sun.

‘And now, in April 1997, here we were looking in wonder at the Comet Hale-Bopp; later when I read up about it, I found that even NASA called it “unusually bright”. Two comets, at the passing of two men! Is that myth, meaningless fact, synchronicity?

‘I think of it as the universe sending us a “note”, a startling correspondence between an astronomical event and the passing of extraordinary men. Penelope Phipps in her memoir calls Sri Krishna Prem and Sri Madhava Ashish “extraordinary ordinary men” – men who started out as any ordinary human being does but who became

extraordinary men, men free of compulsions, attachments, desires and fears, as they struggled, and found, the meaning of life.'