

MEHER BABA THE AWAKENER

Second Edition (1993)

By

Charles Haynes

An Avatar Meher Baba Trust eBook

June 2011

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MEHER BABA, THE AWAKENER

Charles Haynes

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Second Edition, 1993

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Printed in the United States of America.

Cover Design: Keith Sheridan Associates, Inc.

ISBN 0-9624472-1-8

Published by

THE AVATAR FOUNDATION, INC.
P.O. Box 1367 N. Myrtle Beach, S.C. 29598-1367

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Meher Baba's men and women mandali for the insight and inspiration that made this book possible. I am especially grateful to Eruch Jessawala for his loving help and encouragement.

Since he first proposed this book in 1986, Ken Coleman has worked tirelessly and selflessly on every aspect of the project. Jeff Wolverton and David Carter made many valuable suggestions that greatly strengthened the book. David also spent many hours checking the references and proofing the text. Robert Love helped in many ways, great and small, throughout the project. Marsha Forman graciously assisted in the final stages of production.

Though it has been much revised, much of the original manuscript was written for my doctoral dissertation at Emory University. I owe much to John Fenton and Jack Boozer for their guidance and support during that time and throughout my academic career.

Elizabeth Patterson, a disciple of Meher Baba, first introduced me to him more than thirty years ago. Her life of service will always stand as a living example of Meher Baba's love in action. This book is dedicated to her.

Charles Haynes

Throughout this book, with the exception of the Supplement, ***Meher Baba's words appear in italics.*** All of the material in the Supplement was given by Meher Baba.

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Meherabad, 1927-28

Introduction

"I have come not to teach but to awaken."

Meher Baba

The starting point for any discussion of Meher Baba is his declaration that he is the Avatar, the manifestation of God in human form who comes age after age to awaken all life to the love of God. Because it is accompanied by a life of extraordinary beauty and love, this declaration calls each of us to open the ears of our hearts and to listen with great care.

If we are to listen properly, we should keep in mind that Meher Baba intended for his real message to be given not in words, but through an inner experience awakened by love. We are thus challenged to look beyond words and explanations to the real work of Baba as the Avatar. To that end, I offer as little interpretation as possible in the pages that follow and invite the reader to encounter Meher Baba directly with nothing in between.

The sole aim of this book is to aid the listening of the heart by allowing Meher Baba's awakening of love to speak for itself. The reader should know, however, that the perspective I bring to this effort has been shaped by more than thirty years of close association with Meher Baba and his intimate disciples. From the time I first met him in 1958 to the present day, Baba has been at the center of my life.

It may also be helpful to state at the outset Meher Baba's assertion that God is the only Reality, the true Self of every finite self. It follows, then, that the work of the Avatar is to be understood as the story of God awakening the divine Reality within each of us through love.

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For nearly fifty years Meher Baba worked to accomplish this awakening of love. Vital and active, Baba traveled widely, met thousands of people, and served, among others, the sick, the poor, and the mentally disturbed. Through it all, he reminded those around him that his activities were only to be taken as outer signs of the inner work that the Avatar had come to do.

Baba's awakening of love springs from silence, for he did not utter a word for the last forty-four years of his life. When he found it necessary to use words, he gave explanations and statements indirectly through hand gestures and by spelling them out on a board with the letters of the alphabet painted on it. He kept silence, he said, in order to break his silence by speaking the Word of God within every heart.

A few months before his physical death in 1969, Baba told his close disciples that his work was now complete and the results would unfold in time. Now, some twenty years later, thousands of people have come to love him, accepting him as the Avatar of our age. Their relationship with Meher Baba is direct and personal despite his physical absence.

Though Baba stressed that his work of awakening is deeply intimate and personal, it also has universal ramifications. He indicated that the divine love he came to release will transform consciousness, inaugurating an era of oneness. In Baba's words, dictated from his silence:

I have come to sow the seed of love in your hearts so that in spite of all superficial diversity which your life in illusion must experience and endure, the feeling of Oneness through love is brought about amongst all nations, creeds, sects and castes of the world.

In this new humanity, Meher Baba promised that the world will awaken to the unity of all life in the midst of diversity. It follows, therefore, that Baba did not wish to found a separate religion or prescribe a new creed, but rather to renew the Truth that is at the core of all faiths:

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I am not come to establish any cult, society or organization; nor even to establish a new religion. The religion that I shall give teaches the Knowledge of the One behind the many. The book that I shall make people read is the book of the heart that holds the key to the mystery of life. I shall bring about a happy blending of the head and the heart. I shall revitalize all religions and cults, and bring them together like beads on one string.

The dynamics of Meher Baba's awakening of love are the central focus of all that follows. We begin in chapter one with the story of the cosmos, the divine theme, given by Baba from his silence. Here the reader is provided a framework for understanding the ways of the Avatar, insofar as they can be grasped by the mind. Chapter two tells the life story of Meher Baba in light of his declaration that he is the Awakener of divine love. The remaining two chapters explore Baba's work of awakening in its two fundamental dimensions: the universal transformation of consciousness, and the personal relationship of the lover and the Beloved.

One final note: the reader is asked to keep in mind that an awakening of love is, by its very nature, an individual experience that must come from deep within each person. There are as many approaches to God as there are individual souls. My only task here is to provide hints and clues so that each seeker of God may find his or her own way to the Truth, a way that is illuminated not by words but by love alone. As Meher Baba has said:

Love has to spring spontaneously from within; it is in no way amenable to any form of inner or outer force. Love and coercion can never go together; but while love cannot be forced upon anyone, it can be awakened through love itself.

Charles Haynes
February 1989



Nasik, 1936

Chapter 1

The Divine Theme

Once when asked "Have you a scripture, a Bible, a Koran, an inspired book?," Avatar Meher Baba replied: "No, I awaken. I am an awakener." The true message awaited by the world, he said, is an inner experience of divine love, not another explanation given in words:

Today the urgent need of mankind is not sects or organized religions, but Love. Divine love will conquer hate and fear. It will not depend upon other justifications, but will justify itself.

I have come to awaken in man this divine love. It will restore to him the unfathomable richness of his own eternal being and will solve all of his problems.¹

When Meher Baba did give explanations, it was only to point beyond words to the inner transformation brought about through love. As if to underscore the limitations of words, he "spoke" from oral silence, reminding us that his real "speaking" must be heard by the ears of the heart.

Keeping before us this vital distinction between words of explanation and the real work of divine love, we explore in this chapter the divine theme of creation as described by Baba. The understanding gained by this exploration is offered by Baba only to aid the seeker in stilling the mind and thereby clearing the way for the heart to hear the Avatar's Word of love when he speaks it.

The Story of Consciousness

For Meher Baba, the Avatar's work of awakening is always part of the larger story of awakening constantly taking place throughout the universe. The central theme of the story is love, evolving from very rudimentary beginnings and ultimately culminating in universal or divine love. Seen in terms of consciousness, the awakening is a movement in Ultimate Reality, God, from a state of unconscious divinity to one of conscious divinity. This movement in consciousness is described by Baba in metaphorical language as a journey through the multifarious experiences of the illusory universe in which God ultimately awakens to Himself.

In telling the story of consciousness Meher Baba "spoke" as one who had absolute knowledge of the workings of the universe; he appealed to no scripture or authority other than his own experience of God. He did not, however, consider his explanations to be without precedent; he saw his words as contemporary revelations of ancient truths.

Baba's story of how Reality comes to know Itself through the experience of the phenomenal universe may be likened to a "map of consciousness" that serves to guide one's thinking about the journey of consciousness. Baba's description of the spiritual journey and the ultimate goal of union with God, is like a map to a traveler. No matter how much one memorizes the map, learning the routes and places along the way, it is no substitute for the actual journey. To believe in God and the path to Him cannot in any way replace the actual experiences leading to Realization. Unlike many existing explanations of the spiritual journey, Baba places special emphasis on the "consciousness" acquired during the course of the journey to Infinite Consciousness.

How does God come to know His own Self? We begin the overview of the journey by noting that, according to Meher Baba, there is only one Reality, God, and all living things are ultimately expressions of the Absolute Oneness that is God. We can, however, speak of differences of consciousness within

God, represented by all forms in creation and originating in what Baba termed the "Beyond the Beyond" state of God. There is only one Reality, which may be called the Oversoul (Paramatma), that is only apparently differentiated in creation. The development of consciousness that results from this differentiation is what Baba described as the purpose of the universe:

*The sole purpose of creation is for the soul to enjoy the infinite state of the Oversoul consciously. Although the soul eternally exists in and with the Oversoul in an inviolable unity, it cannot be conscious of this unity independently of creation, which is within the limitations of time. It must therefore evolve consciousness before it can realize its true status and nature as being identical with the infinite Oversoul, which is one without a second.*²

According to Baba, what we term the individualized soul (atma) is in relationship with and at the same time identical to the Oversoul. To elucidate this paradox Baba employed the ocean-drop metaphor:

*Before the world of forms and duality came into existence, there was nothing but God, i.e., an indivisible and boundless ocean of Power, Knowledge and Bliss. But this ocean was unconscious of itself. Picture to yourself this ocean as absolutely still and calm, unconscious of its Power, Knowledge and Bliss and unconscious that it is the ocean. The billions of drops which are in the ocean do not have any consciousness; they do not know that they are drops nor that they are in the ocean nor that they are a part of the ocean.*³

Here we are asked to imagine God as the infinite ocean, the all-inclusive, all-absorbing Reality. And, in the countless drops within the ocean, we can imagine ourselves latently present in the beautiful, mysterious ocean, unconscious of our true nature.

Latent within the Original Ocean, or God, before consciousness sprang into existence, was the Divine Lahar,

defined by Baba as the "so-called whim" of God to know Himself. At some "point" beyond reason and description before the existence of time and space—the Lahar of God expressed itself:

*The unitarian Beyond is an indivisible and indescribable infinity. It seeks to know itself. It is of no use to ask why it does so. To attempt to give a reason for this is to be involved in further questions and thus to start an unending chain of reasons for reasons, reasons for these reasons and so on ad infinitum. The plain truth about this initial urge to know itself is best called a whim (Lahar). A whim is not a whim if it can be explained or rationalized. And just as no one may usefully ask why it arises, so no one may ask when it arises. "When" implies a time series with past, present and future. All these are absent in the eternal Beyond. So let us call this initial urge to know a "whim." You may call this an explanation if you like or you may call it an affirmation of its inherent inexplicability.*⁴

Baba then has us imagine the beginningless beginning, when the Lahar (urge to know) first emerged from God:

*A puff of wind then stirred the tranquil uniformity of this ocean, and immense waves, countless drops of water, and innumerable bubbles appeared from out of the uniformity of the limitless, infinite ocean. The puff of wind that set the ocean into commotion may be compared to the impulse of the infinite, original urge-to-know originating with the infinite, original whim of God, surging in God to know Himself through His infinite God State...*⁵

This "disturbance" stirs the ocean and every drop within the ocean. Note that there are no divisions in the ocean, yet the image of drops presents the idea of latent individuality:

Thus Paramatma [Oversoul] in His infinitely unconscious state ... being urged to know Himself, simultaneously bestirs the tranquil poise of every atma [soul] in

Paramatma [Oversoul] with an urge to know itself. This could only be understood when Paramatma is compared to an infinite ocean and the atmas to the drops of that infinite ocean. But it must also be well noted that every drop of the ocean, when in the ocean, is ocean itself, until the drops inherit individuality through bubble formations over the surface of the ocean.

The ocean-drop metaphor is given to help us grasp the meaning of individual existence. Individual drops may be viewed as separate centers of consciousness, each undertaking a "journey" back to the ocean. But drops in the ocean are not unique in themselves; as drops they are identical to one another, and they are identical to the ocean itself. The ultimate goal is not individuality, but rather the individual experience of conscious oneness with the ocean.

Bestowal of individuality by the Lahar of God creates the illusion of separation:

When this urge makes the still water move, there immediately spring up numerous bubbles or forms around the drops; and it is these bubbles which give individuality to the drops. The bubbles do not and cannot ... separate the drop from the ocean; they merely give to these drops a feeling of separateness or limited individuality.⁷

The drop-bubble experiences itself to be separate from the ocean and asserts its separative existence as a drop. Rather than identifying itself as the Ocean, the soul (drop-soul) begins its journey in consciousness by identifying with countless forms, beginning with the stone form, evolving through plant and animal forms, and ultimately attaining the human form after eons and eons of time. These forms correspond to the many levels of ascending consciousness (layers of bubbles). While such identification allows for an ever-evolving development of consciousness, it also creates a false notion of separateness, the ego, which eventually must be overcome before there is the complete liberation of the soul, for in the conscious experience of God there can be no separateness.

Drawing further on the language of the metaphor, Baba termed the false identification of the drop-soul with its many forms the "bubble of ignorance." Ignorance, in this instance, is not merely a state of unknowing; it is an experience of separative existence which is inextricably linked with ever-expanding consciousness. Once gained, consciousness continues to identify itself with the forms acquired during its development. The drop, so to speak, believes itself to be a bubble when in reality it is the ocean itself. In this sense, ignorance may be said to be a turning away of God from Himself for the sake of consciousness. And, as the image of a bubble on the surface of the ocean suggests, the separation is only apparent and temporary.

The drop-soul remains in ignorance as long as it identifies with its separative existence as a bubble ("I am stone," "I am animal," "I am human," etc.). Only the ocean is real, lasting and unchanging. When the bubble bursts for the last time and the drop returns to the ocean, real "knowledge" is gained:

A drop in an ocean is not separate from the ocean. It is a bubble over the drop that gives it an appearance of separateness, but when the bubble bursts the drop is not, and the indivisible ocean is. When the bubble of ignorance bursts the self realizes its oneness with the indivisible Self.⁸

In the beginningless beginning the drop in the ocean did not know itself to be either a drop or the ocean. Through apparent separation as a bubble the drop experiences itself to be an individual drop until consciousness is fully attained and redirected toward its reality as the Ocean itself. Then the drop falls back into the ocean, no longer experiencing separative existence ("I am a drop"), but knowing itself to be one with the ocean ("I am the ocean"). Just as the individual drop in the ocean experiences itself to be one with the ocean, so the individual soul knows itself to be one with the Oversoul.

The ocean-drop metaphor was used by Baba to direct our attention to his description of God-realization as a return to the Source of our being. It is, however, a return with a difference:

If salvation means reverting to the original state of the Ocean, then all the trammels and travails of the bubble (individual soul) through the long and laborious stages of evolution have been to no purpose.⁹

The difference is that consciousness is gained, and this achievement gives meaning and value to the entire divine drama of Self-discovery. Thus the Lahar set in motion what we call creation, which is best understood as God's lila, the divine play of Self-discovery. God initially allows Himself to be limited in order to ultimately experience Himself as unlimited.

The ocean-drop metaphor as used by Baba offers a very specific picture of the relationship between God and the individual. God is One, and our notions of individuality are false as long as they are rooted in our separative existence. Nevertheless, the final realization of God, the "I am God" state, is an individual experience which puts an end to all previous states of false identity:

Thus, when each individual drop sheds its false awareness of being other than the Ocean, it proclaims itself as the Infinite Indivisible Ocean. At the instant its falseness, its very own falseness is removed, the drop asserts its Infinite Individuality.¹⁰

The Original Question ("Who am I"), according to Baba, continually seeks the "Original Answer" ("I am God"), but in the process the Original Question receives innumerable false answers provided by the illusory forms of evolution (I am stone, I am man, etc.) before the Original Answer is experienced. Baba said:

Due to His own infinite whim God acquires the consciousness of His reality and realizes His infinite, eternal unlimited Self to experience His unbounded, unlimited and infinite trio-nature [infinite knowledge, power, bliss: sat-chit-ananda].¹¹

The Journey of Consciousness

The process of acquiring consciousness was likened by Baba to a journey which every soul (atma) must undergo and complete. The journey is said to have three basic stages: evolution, reincarnation and involution.

Evolution, as explained by Baba, is the first stage of the journey, the "descent" of the soul from the original sound-sleep state of God into creation. In evolution, consciousness gradually evolves through successive identification with stone, metal, vegetable, worm, reptile, fish, bird, animal and ultimately human forms. This process parallels in some respects Darwinian theories, though it is a fundamentally different explanation of evolution: evolution in Baba's view is necessitated by the development of consciousness. Thus form follows consciousness and not, as in Darwin's theory, the other way around.

The full flower of evolution is achieved in the human form when full consciousness is attained. Then commences the second stage of the journey, reincarnation, during which the soul lives out the impressions (sanskaras*) gained in evolution and acquires new impressions by experiencing the countless varieties of human life. The old and new impressions, both of which create a veil over consciousness, gradually wear away, revealing an increasingly clearer experience of God; that is, the soul wearies of the world and is ready to begin the third phase of the journey, involution, which may be seen as the "ascent" back to God. Let us look at each stage of the journey more closely.

In evolution, consciousness expands by associating with increasingly more complex forms. The impressions gathered in each form push consciousness forward to the next higher form:

* "Impressions" or "sanskaras" may be defined as accumulated imprints of experiences acquired by each soul in the journey of consciousness.

Owing to the arising of the bubble, the drop-soul which was completely unconscious is invested with individuality (or a feeling of separateness) as well as with very slight consciousness. This consciousness, which has sprung up in the drop-soul, is not of itself nor of the ocean; but it is of the bubble or the form, which in itself is nothing. This imperfect bubble at this stage is represented by the form of a stone. After some time, this bubble or form bursts and there springs up in its place another bubble or form. Now, when a bubble bursts, two things happen: (1) there is an increase in consciousness and (2) there is a twist or consolidation of impressions or sanskaras accumulated during the life of the previous bubble....the drop-soul is still conscious only of this new bubble or form and not of itself nor of the ocean.¹²

Form after form arises as consciousness expands and seeks the next most appropriate form for expression. The impressions gathered in the stone form compel the emergence of a higher form, metal, and the impressions gathered in the metal form compel the emergence of a still higher form and so forth.

As each individualized soul journeys through evolution it gathers more and more impressions, and these impressions create the various forms necessary for the development of consciousness. "To view things in their right perspective," Baba indicated, "we have to see all forms, including human forms, as evolved for the fulfillment of the one eternal divine life." The urge-to-know goes forward as consciousness moves through the rudimentary stone and metal forms in which energy is dormant, to the more advanced vegetable forms:

In the vegetable kingdom, consciousness realizes itself as half animate and half inanimate. The increased consciousness of the vegetable-form asserts its existence in the gross world through an upright or erect stand. The vegetable forms have to take the help of some other things such as earth or rock for maintaining an erect position. They can

*neither stand by themselves nor move voluntarily from place to place since they are rooted in one spot.*¹³

Not only does the soul experience ever-increasingly complex physical impressions, but also impressions having to do with energy and mind:

*Emergence of a still more developed form of consciousness becomes possible when the Absolute seeks manifestation through the instinctive life of insects, birds and animals, which are aware of their bodies and respective surroundings, which develop a sense of self-protection, and aim at establishing mastery over their environment. In the higher animals, mind or thought appears, but its working is limited by such instincts as those of self-protection and the care and preservation of the young. So even in animals, consciousness has not its full development, with the result that it is unable to serve the purpose of the Absolute to attain self-illumination.*¹⁴

These emerging impressions of energy and mind comprise what Baba termed the subtle and mental bodies. The subtle body consists of all impressions having to do with energy and the mental body of all impressions having to do with instinct, intellect, emotions and desires.

The soul is thus said to associate with three bodies simultaneously: gross, subtle and mental. Though the soul may associate and disassociate with countless physical or gross forms, it can never separate itself (until God-realization) from its subtle and mental bodies. It is these latter two bodies that supply the soul with the continuity of consciousness that runs through its entire journey. Consequently, it may be said that there is only one life in the journey, though there are innumerable births and deaths in gross forms. Each of these gross forms is necessary for the experiencing of impressions as consciousness evolves.

The subtle and mental bodies become the centers for assimilation of the complex impressions garnered in evolution. The fullest expression of all three bodies is possible in

the human form, the crown of evolution. The taking of the human form, therefore, completes the evolutionary stage of the journey. There is no need for the development of a higher physical form once full consciousness is attained as exhibited in the self-consciousness of the human being. However, though it has full consciousness, in the human form the soul remains unaware of its true nature.

The impressions of evolution veil the soul from its true identity as God causing it to associate itself with countless human forms. The consciousness of the soul continues to identify itself with the world of illusion, where consciousness was gained. This is the second stage of the journey, called by Baba reincarnation:

The soul with full consciousness is still unconscious of its original infinite state because of the unwanted (though necessary) burden of the gross impressions of the human-form from which the consciousness of the soul dissociates as that form drops dead. These impressions, of the human-form now dead, still cling to the full consciousness gained; and, as usual, the consciousness of the soul centralizes itself in these gross impressions of the human-form just dropped.¹⁵

Once the human form is attained the resulting self-identity is rooted in the impressions acquired during evolution. The soul attempts to eliminate these impressions through the experience of opposite impressions (pleasure/pain, good/bad, etc.), and this in turn gives rise to new impressions. Baba described the cycle this way:

In trying to unburden consciousness of these impressions, the gross consciousness of the soul tends the soul to experience and exhaust these impressions through innumerable opposite experiences taken through a series of reincarnations. In this process of reincarnation the consciousness of the soul, while trying to liberate itself from the burden of impressions, gets still further entangled at every stage of reincarnation. When a complete balance of... opposite impressions is just about to

be attained, it is just then disturbed by the consciousness of the soul associating itself with the next new human-form. Absence of this association would otherwise have neutralized the effect of the impressions by an equal balance of respective opposite experiences and would thus have liberated the consciousness of the soul from all impressions of opposites.¹⁶

In seeking to achieve a balance, impressions create ever-new impressions in a seemingly unending round of births and deaths. Thus the soul repeatedly alternates between the many opposites of existence (e.g., male/female) striving for that final balance necessary for the liberation of consciousness from the burden of impressions.

The process of working out the gross, subtle and mental impressions of the soul is governed by the universal law of karma. Baba has explained that karma is the spiritual law of cause and effect in which the experience of every impression creates the demand for the experience of its opposite. The heavy load of impressions acquired in evolution becomes a considerable karmic burden in the human form.

The karma of each soul consists of the repository of accumulated impressions which are organized around a central identity or ego. In evolution, as consciousness begins to differentiate and take on individuality, an organizing principle emerges so that each soul has an axis or center for the assimilation of impressions. This organizing principle is called the ego:

Human consciousness would be no more than a repository of the accumulated imprints of varied experiences did it not also contain the principle of ego-centered integration in the attempt to organize and understand experience. The process implies the capacity to hold different experiences together as parts of a unity and the capacity to evaluate them by mutual relation. The integration of the opposites of experience is a condition of emancipating consciousness from the thralldom of compulsions and repulsions which tend to dominate consciousness irrespective of valuation; and the early attempts

*at securing such integration are made through the formation of the ego as its center.*¹⁷

The ego is the "I" or false notion of individuality which pervades both the conscious and subconscious mind of the reincarnating individual. In evolution and in the initial stages of reincarnation the ego functions as the necessary integrating and stabilizing factor for consciousness. But the continued identification of consciousness with the ego prevents the soul from directing consciousness towards its true Self. Because consciousness is gained in illusion, it remains, through the ego, deeply and falsely attached to illusion as "real."

The nature of the ego symbolizes the plight of human existence: consciousness rooted in a false idea of self. On a cosmic scale this false valuation is called maya, that power which causes the world of forms to appear as real. On a personal level maya is the principle of ignorance which is exemplified by ego-centered consciousness.

In the reincarnating individual, the ignorance of the ego is far more than an intellectual misunderstanding; it is a fundamentally incorrect orientation of the human mind. Once needed for the development of consciousness, the ego now is the source of suffering. The life of the ego becomes a prison for the infinite consciousness of the true Self.

Ultimately the ego weakens through endless expression of itself in many lifetimes of experience, finally disappearing completely in full Self or God-realization:

The ego is implemented by desires of varied types. Failure to fulfill desires is a failure of the ego. Success in attaining desired objects is a success of the ego. Through fulfilled desires as well as through unfulfilled ones, the ego is accentuated. The ego can even feed upon a comparative lull in the surging of desires and assert its separative tendency through feeling that it is desireless. When there is a real cessation of all desires, however, there is a cessation of the desire to assert separateness in any form. Therefore real freedom from all desires brings about the end of the ego.

*The ego is made of variegated desires, and the destroying of these desires amounts to the destruction of the ego.*¹⁸

Until the goal is reached, the separative existence of the ego is affirmed by expressions of craving, hate, anger, fear and jealousy. The misery caused by the desires and emotions of the ego arises from the fact that the life of the ego feeds on impressions, especially those which tend to strengthen the feeling of separateness:

*Every thought, feeling or action that springs from the idea of exclusive or separative existence binds the soul. All experiences—small or great—and all aspirations—good or bad—create a load of impressions and nourish the sense of the "I."*¹⁹

Ultimately, the only antidote to the separative existence of the ego is divine love. Love alone breaks through the barriers of the ego-mind, awakening the soul to its true nature as one with God. Through an ever-deepening experience of real love, the soul gradually frees itself from the suffering caused by bondage to the desires of the ego. (More about the role of divine love later.)

Meher Baba emphasized that all human suffering is rooted in the false idea of self perpetuated by the ego-mind. Attachment to the world of illusion or maya and craving for that which is impermanent, chains the individual to the limitations of illusory existence:

*Man does not seek suffering, but it comes to him as an inevitable outcome of the very manner in which he seeks happiness. He seeks happiness through the fulfillment of his desires, but such fulfillment is never an assured thing. Hence in the pursuit of desires, man is also unavoidably preparing for the suffering from their nonfulfillment. The same tree of desires bears two kinds of fruit: one sweet, which is pleasure, and one bitter, which is suffering. If this tree is allowed to flourish it cannot be made to yield just one kind of fruit.*²⁰

The life of the ego is bound by karmic determination. Every experience is binding and generates impressions that must be worked out at some future time. Through our actions we determine the shape of our future:

*The pleasure and pain experienced in life on earth, the successes or failures that attend it, the attainments and obstacles with which it is strewn, the friends and foes who appear in it—all are determined by the karma of past lives.*²¹

The operation of karma is the moral law of the universe, holding each individual accountable for his or her actions. It follows, then, that the fabric of the universe has an inherent rationality, and the law of karma is not an oppressive law, but the self-created condition of responsibility.

Tied to the karmic wheel, each individualized soul moves through countless lifetimes spending past impressions and, in the process, accumulating new ones. Eventually, however, the impressions are loosened as the individual begins to tire of the endless round of births and deaths. The aspirant is overcome by a profound dissatisfaction with illusory existence, and is thus ready for the spiritual path:

*As the fish out of water longs for water, the aspirant who has perceived the goal longs for God. In truth, the longing to return to the source is present in each being from the time it gets separated from the source by the veil of ignorance; but the longing is unconscious till the aspirant enters the Path.*²²

This vital inward turn inaugurates the last stage of the journey of consciousness, called by Baba "involution". Just as in evolution when impressions are wound tightly around what emerges as the ego, so in involution the impressions are unwound as the soul gradually ceases to identify with the gross, subtle and mental bodies:

During this process of unwinding, the sanskaras [impressions] become fainter and fainter; and at the same time, the consciousness of the drop-soul gets directed more

*and more towards itself; and thus, the drop-soul passes through the subtle and mental planes till all the sanskaras disappear completely, enabling it to become conscious of itself as the ocean.*²³

The inward turning of involution is marked by the experience of seven levels or planes of consciousness. The first three planes, Baba explained, are of the subtle world (world of energy), the fourth links the subtle and mental, and the fifth and sixth are of the mental world. The experience of the seventh plane is God-realization. Advanced souls (saints, yogis, walis) are those who are on the higher planes of consciousness and, consequently, they have a more direct experience of God.

Traversing the planes results in the diminishment of ego-life and an ever-increasing awareness of divine love as the aspirant breaks away from identification with the false idea of self rooted in the gross, subtle and mental worlds:

*The soul has to emancipate itself gradually from the illusion of being finite by liberating itself from the bondage of sanskaras and knowing itself to be different from its bodies—gross, subtle and mental. It thus annihilates the false ego (that is, the illusion that "I am the gross body," "I am the subtle body" or "I am the mental body"). While the soul thus frees itself from its illusion, it still retains full consciousness, which now results in Self-knowledge and realization of the Truth. Escaping through the cosmic Illusion and realizing with full consciousness its identity with the infinite Oversoul is the goal of the long journey of the Soul.*²⁴

There are, of course, many approaches to the spiritual path, and many ways to attain the Ultimate Reality. All approaches, however, have as their common goal the effacement of the limited ego. All practices, austerities, meditations and strivings are for the sole purpose of eliminating the false self, thus freeing the soul from the bondage of ego-desires. This freedom is the ultimate aim and goal of all life in creation.

Through the various practices and with the aid of genuine masters, the aspirant may travel far through the planes of consciousness. Finally, however, Baba has said that the journey cannot be completed without the intervention of a God-realized master. No matter how far the aspirant may travel without the aid of a Perfect Master, even to the sixth plane, the final step of entering the seventh plane requires the touch of one who has already completed the journey. The enormity of the final adjustment in the process of ego elimination is such that the soul must receive help, the divine grace of a Perfect Master or the Avatar.

With God-realization the journey of consciousness comes to an end; the drop-soul falls back into the ocean to experience with full consciousness the "I am God" state. Because it is beyond the ego-mind, and therefore radically different from all other states of consciousness, God-realization defies description. What can be said is that the soul at last discovers its true nature:

After the attainment of God-realization, the soul discovers that it has always been the Infinite Reality, and that its looking upon itself as finite during the period of evolution and spiritual advancement was an illusion. The soul also finds that the infinite knowledge and bliss that it enjoys have been latent in the Infinite Reality from the beginning of time and that they became manifest at the moment of realization. Thus the God-realized person does not become different from what he was before realization. He remains what he was; the only difference that realization makes in him is that while previously he did not consciously know his true nature, he now knows it. He knows that he has never been anything other than what he now knows himself to be, and that he has been through a process of self-discovery.²⁵

According to Baba, not all souls leave their bodies immediately after God-realization. Some remain in the gross body and experience a constant state of infinite bliss, wholly unaware of the world. Others, called Sadgurus or Perfect

Masters, remain in the body and are simultaneously conscious of God and the illusory universe. There are always five living Perfect Masters on earth. They continually experience the state of God (infinite power, knowledge, and bliss). They may be viewed as the presence of God in the world, and, as such, they are a source of unending aid to all those who remain in bondage:

The Sadguru knows himself to be infinite and beyond all forms. He remains conscious of the creation without being caught in it. The falseness of the phenomenal world consists in its not being understood as an illusory expression of the Infinite Spirit. Ignorance consists in taking the form as the thing. The Sadguru is conscious of the true nature of God, as well as of the true nature of creation without consciousness of duality, because for him creation is the changing shadow of God. The Sadguru, therefore, remains conscious of creation without loss of God-consciousness. He continues to work in the world of forms for the furtherance of the primary purpose of creation, which is to create self-knowledge or God-realization in every Soul.²⁶

Meher Baba referred to many spiritual teachers from various traditions as Perfect Masters including Rumi and Hafiz from Persia, Ramakrishna, Tukaram, and Kabir from India, Milarepa from Tibet and Francis of Assisi.

The Divine Romance

For Meher Baba, the best way for the heart to grasp the meaning of the soul's journey is to view it as a divine romance in which the lover (soul) seeks union with the Beloved (Oversoul).

God as Infinite Love first delimits himself in the forms of creation and then recovers his infinity through the different stages of creation. All the stages of God's experience as a

*Lover culminate in his experiencing himself as the sole Beloved. The sojourn of the soul is a divine romance in which the Lover, who in the beginning is conscious of emptiness, frustration, superficiality and the chains of bondage, attains an increasingly fuller expression of Love and finally merges into the unity of the Lover and the Beloved in the supreme and eternal Truth of God as Infinite Love.*²⁷

God's lila, then, is a love-drama that comes into existence so that divine love may be consciously expressed and experienced. The romance begins with the Lahar, the stirring of the Ocean of Love to experience Itself as love. The urge-to-know is the urge-to-love:

*God is love. And love must love. And to love there must be a Beloved. But since God is Existence infinite and eternal there is no one for Him to love but Himself. And in order to love Himself He must imagine Himself as the Beloved whom He as the Lover imagines He loves.*²⁸

This apparent separation caused by the Lahar gives meaning to all life in existence:

*It is for the sake of Love that the universe sprang into existence, and for the sake of Love that it is kept going. God descends into the realm of illusion because the apparent duality of the Beloved and the Lover is contributory to his conscious enjoyment of his own divinity. Although the entire world of duality is but an illusion, it has come into being for a significant purpose.*²⁹

The impersonal images of the ocean-drop language come to life in the more personal images of the lover-Beloved metaphor. Love as expressed in duality is defined by Baba in the broadest possible terms:

*Life and love are inseparable. Where there is life, there is love. Even the most rudimentary consciousness is ever trying to burst its limitations and to experience unity with others.*³⁰

Love is the foundation of all life, the universal magnetism, as it were, holding the cosmos together. The movement of consciousness as it strives to achieve unity or wholeness is a movement of love.

The reflection of this movement toward oneness may be seen on all levels of consciousness:

At the inorganic stage, it [love] is expressed in the form of cohesion or attraction. It is the natural affinity that keeps things together and draws them to each other. The gravitational pull exercised by the heavenly bodies upon each other is an expression of love. At the organic state, love becomes self-illuminated and self-appreciative, even from the amoebae to the most evolved human beings.³¹

When consciousness becomes full in the human form, love becomes a self-conscious activity with possibilities for complete expression. Baba distinguished between lower and higher stages of human love, measured by the relative degree of ego entanglement. In the lower stages love is self-centered and possessive as in infatuation and lust; the object of love is obscured by ego-craving. As the soul advances spiritually, the lower forms of love give way to higher expressions in which the object of desire is appreciated more for itself and not merely for the gratification it may give.

The diminishment of ego involvement is seen as the road to higher love. This may be understood as the way to ever greater detachment in the sense that it is nonattachment of the false self to the world of illusion or maya. According to Baba, however, this nonattachment does not mean lack of concern for suffering humanity. On the contrary, only one who has begun to be free of ego-attachment can begin to offer real service and love to others.

All human love inevitably contains elements of both lower and higher expressions of love. Eventually, our love must be purified through the aid of a Perfect Master or the Avatar who, having realized God, is the embodiment of divine love:

*Human love is so tethered by limiting conditions that the spontaneous appearance of pure love from within becomes impossible....When pure love is first received as a gift from the Master, it is lodged in the consciousness of the aspirant as the seed in a favorable soil, and in the course of time the seed develops into a plant, then into the full-grown tree.*³²

Once awakened by love, the aspirant as the lover becomes more and more conscious of a longing for union with the divine Beloved. This longing leads to self-forgetfulness in remembrance of the Beloved, a process during which the ego gets consumed in the flame of love. We will return to this theme in more depth later.

The goal of all life and the fulfillment of all love is divine love, the conscious realization of God. This love is qualitatively different from all expressions of love in creation, including the highest forms of human love:

*Even the highest type of human love is subject to the limitations of the individual nature, which persists until the seventh plane; but Divine Love arises after the disappearance of the individual mind and is free from the trammels of individual nature. In human love, the duality of the lover and the Beloved persists; but in Divine Love, the lover and the Beloved are one. At this stage, the aspirant has stepped out of the domain of duality and become one with God—for Divine Love is God. When the lover and the Beloved are one, that is the end and the beginning.*³³

Apparent separation, therefore, is the necessary condition preparing the way for the conscious realization of love, the state of absolute oneness. Or, to put it another way, God's love for Himself in duality eventually results in the non-dual state of God's conscious enjoyment of His nature as divine love. This final state is incomparably greater than all other states of love; it is pure love.

In Meher Baba's divine theme, the metaphor of the divine romance indicates the meaningfulness of the universe.

Duality is pictured as resulting from the urge of the divine whim to experience love, the essence of Ultimate Reality. The original separation gives rise to the seemingly infinite variety of forms striving on all levels of consciousness towards a greater and more complete realization of love, the unifying principle of all life. The suffering of the universe is rooted in this separative existence, described by Baba as the pain of the lover longing for the beloved. "The entire creation," he said, "is a game of love or 'lila' which God enjoys at His own cost." In the end, Baba assured us, all that we must suffer and endure in this divine romance is infinitely worthwhile:

When true love is awakened in the aspirant, it leads him to the realization of God and opens up the unlimited field of lasting and unfading happiness. The happiness of God-realization is the goal of all creation. It is not possible for a person to have the slightest idea of that inexpressible happiness without actually having the experience of Godhood. The idea that the worldly have of suffering or happiness is entirely limited. The real happiness that comes through realizing God is worth all the physical and mental suffering in the universe. Then all suffering is as if it had never been.³⁴

The Avatar

We come now to the Avatar, the fullest expression of divine love in God's divine drama (lila). Since this is who Meher Baba declared himself to be, it is essential that we take careful note of the God-man's role in the story of consciousness.

To grasp how Baba used the term "Avatar" we must again begin at the beginning and recall the Lahar of God. When the divine urge-to-know first manifested itself, infinite consciousness ("Is-ness"; "I am God" state) and infinite unconsciousness ("Other-ness") simultaneously emerged, inaugurating the journey from unconscious divinity to conscious divinity. The first soul to complete this journey of consciousness

through evolution, reincarnation and involution realized infinite consciousness. As the first to realize God, Baba explained, this soul functioned from that time forward as the Avatar:

The Avatar was the first individual soul to emerge from the evolutionary and involutionary process ... and He is the only Avatar who has ever manifested or will ever manifest. Through Him God first completed the journey from unconscious divinity to conscious divinity, first unconsciously became man in order consciously to become God. Through Him, periodically, God consciously becomes man for the liberation of mankind.³⁵

According to Baba, the first soul to realize God had a unique experience resulting in the Avataric or Christ-conscious state within God. In this state God remains eternally conscious of everything in illusion, and from this state God periodically becomes a human being for the benefit of all in creation. Though every soul eventually realizes God, only this "first" soul functions as the God-man or Avatar. And only the Avatar returns to the world; after death all other God-realized souls merge in the divine Reality forever. The Avatar maintains a conscious working link with creation for 100-200 years after leaving his physical form, though the Avatar's love and mercy are always available to help seekers of God.

From the point of view of the human intellect these distinctions appear to indicate some sort of division within Ultimate Reality. According to Baba, however, in God's Being there are no divisions though it can be said that there are various states and functions of consciousness within the One Reality. One such state, Avataric or Christ consciousness, emerged when the first soul realized God. For descriptive purposes, it may be said that the states of God function differently and the Avatar is one such function. It is thus eternally part of the cosmic lila for God to "return" to the illusion by taking human form:

The Avatar is always one and the same because God is always one and the same. This eternally one and the same Avatar repeats His manifestation from time to time in different

*cycles. He adopts different human forms and different names, coming to different places to reveal truth in different clothing and different languages. This He does to raise humanity from the pit of ignorance and help free it from the bondage of delusion.*³⁶

In the Avatar, God becomes fully human; infinite consciousness chooses to limit Itself as a finite human being. The process of limitation begins with the birth of the Avatar. It is, Baba has said, always a normal birth and the Avatar comes into the world veiled to his true identity. At the right moment, his veil is removed:

*The veil with which the Avatar descends in the human form is placed upon him by the five Perfect Masters who bring him down from his formless being. In the Avataric periods, the five masters always put this veil upon the infinite consciousness of the Avatar, because if he were to be brought without such a veil into the world of forms, the existing balance between reality and illusion would be profoundly disturbed. However, when the five masters think that the moment is ripe, they remove this veil which they have placed on the Avataric consciousness. From that moment the Avatar consciously starts his role as the Avatar.*³⁷

To live as a human being the Avatar must take on a personality and a pattern of life in order to carry out his mission. According to Baba, special impressions are given the Avatar by himself, and the unfolding of these impressions constitutes the life of the God-man in the world. In this way, the Avatar voluntarily limits himself and his work becomes subject to the laws of time, space and causality.

The self-imposed limitations of the Avatar in no way alter his true nature as being one with God, no more than the limitations of any soul disturb its essential unity of being. The Avatar willingly returns to the world of illusion to awaken God in those who remain bound by ignorance. All the while he retains the awareness that the creation is illusory, and God

alone is real. This act of compassion enables the Avatar to give a spiritual push or transformation to souls at every level of consciousness. As he is one with God, the Avatar is consciously alert to the needs of all animate and inanimate things. Consequently, he works not only for the benefit of humanity, but also for the benefit of souls still in evolution:

It would be more appropriate to say that the Avatar is God and that God becomes man for all mankind and simultaneously God also becomes a sparrow for all sparrows in Creation, an ant for all ants in creation ... etc., for each and everything that is in creation.

When the five Sadgurus effect the presentation of the Divinity of God into Illusion, this Divinity pervades the Illusion in effect and presents Itself in innumerable varieties of forms—gross, subtle and mental. Consequently in Avataric periods God mingles with mankind as man and with the world of ants as an ant, etc. But the man of the world cannot perceive this and hence simply says that God has become man and remains satisfied with this understanding in his own world of mankind.³⁸

As the periodic advent of the Avatar must be carried out on every level of consciousness, Baba asserted that it is necessary for God to consciously involve himself in the workings of the universe. In the sphere of human consciousness, which is all we can say much about, the actions of the Avatar are said by Baba to have universal ramifications because he is consciously one with all life:

At each moment in time He is able to fulfill singly and together the innumerable aspects of His universal duty because His actions are in no way constrained by time and distance and the here and now of the senses. While engaged in any particular action on the gross plane He is simultaneously working on all the inner planes.³⁹

The actions of the Avatar are transformative; they create new possibilities for the further development of consciousness.

The outward example of the Avatar is only the visible sign of his work; the inner changes he brings about are his real work. Yet this inner work must be accomplished by taking a physical form so that God can fully identify with the consciousness he has come to change. For these reasons he must work on the gross plane:

*Unlike the actions of ordinary men, the Avatar's every action on the gross plane brings about numberless and far-reaching results on the different planes of consciousness. His working on the inner planes is effortless and continues of itself, but because of the very nature of grossness His work on the gross plane entails great exertion.*⁴⁰

The God-man, then, becomes human by fully identifying with the finitude of human existence, an identification which causes the Avatar to take on suffering. The suffering of God for humanity is thus inherent in the lila as the highest expression of the nature of divine love.

Speaking of himself as the Avatar, Baba described the God-man's suffering this way:

*As the eternal Redeemer of humanity, I am at the junction of Reality and Illusion, simultaneously experiencing the infinite Bliss of Reality and the suffering of Illusion.*⁴¹

From this statement it follows that the Avatar suffers because he experiences himself to be eternally free in himself, and at the same time, eternally bound in those still in ignorance. In critical periods of history (the history of consciousness), the suffering of God becomes a necessity for the further movement of consciousness into what humanity calls a new age. Baba explained how the Avatar can be God-realized and yet suffer as a human being:

This is because God incarnates as Man and goes through universal suffering and helplessness in order to emancipate mankind from its ignorance of suffering and helplessness. If the Avatar were to use His Infinite Power, how could He

*experience helplessness? If the Avatar were to use His Infinite Bliss, how could He suffer? He therefore does not use either His Infinite Bliss or His Infinite Power. Such is His Infinite Love and Compassion for His Creation! Jesus Christ, Who had Infinite Power, let Himself become helpless and suffered the humiliation of letting the people spit on Him and jeer at Him. He suffered crucifixion on the cross, but did not help Himself with the Power and Bliss that were His.*⁴²

The Avatar is also fully human in the sense that physically he is subject to illness and pain, and spiritually he allows himself to become identified with the suffering of the world. His suffering is said by Baba to be redemptive inasmuch as the Avatar takes upon himself the suffering of the world. The Avatar does not alter the world's karma, except in extraordinary circumstances, nor does he take the karma of the world on himself, his suffering is the suffering of the world that results from the world's karma. In this sense, he enables the world to pass through destructive and critical periods and enter into a new era with a changed level of consciousness.

According to Meher Baba, every seven hundred to fourteen hundred years, God takes human form as the Avatar. Called by many names—Zoroaster, Rama, Krishna, Buddha, Jesus, Mohammed—he is the same Ancient One who comes again and again:

The Avatar appears in different forms, under different names, at different times, in different parts of the world. As His appearance always coincides with the spiritual regeneration of man, the period immediately preceding His manifestation is always one in which humanity suffers from the pangs of the approaching rebirth. Man seems more than ever enslaved by desire, more than ever driven by greed, held by fear, swept by anger. The strong dominate the weak; the rich oppress the poor; large masses of people are exploited for the benefit of the few who are in power. The individual, who finds no peace or rest, seeks to forget himself in excitement. Immorality increases, crime flourishes, religion is

ridiculed. Corruption spreads throughout the social order. Class and national hatreds are aroused and fostered. Wars break out. Humanity grows desperate. There seems to be no possibility of stemming the tide of destruction.

At this moment the Avatar appears. Being the total manifestation of God in human form, He is like a gauge against which man can measure what he is and what he may become. He tries the standard of human values by interpreting them in terms of divinely human life.⁴³

In spite of the fact that the teachings he gives and the circumstances of his life vary greatly from advent to advent, Baba asserted that the primary mission of the Avatar, to release divine love in the world, is always the same:

In those who contact Him, He awakens a love that consumes all selfish desires in the flame of the one desire to serve Him. Those who consecrate their lives to Him gradually become identified with Him in consciousness. Little by little their humanity is absorbed into His divinity, and they become free.⁴⁴

In answering questions about the differences between the Avatars Baba explained that it is necessary for the Avatar to adapt to the time and place in which he appears. Thus his work is oriented to the particular needs of the world in each age, and his message is couched in language that can be understood by the prevailing attitudes and cultures to which it is given. Baba repeatedly stated that these differences are not essential, and that underlying them all is the same message of divine love. The next three chapters will explore the nature of this message of love in our own age as expressed by the life and work of Avatar Meher Baba.



Meher Baba in Alwar, Rajasthan, February 8, 1938



*Meher Baba bathing a leper in Pandharpur,
November 7, 1954*

Chapter 2

The Life Story

Everything in the life and work of Meher Baba must be seen and understood in light of his declaration that he is the Avatar of this age. The life of the Avatar is always, in Baba's words, a "divinely human example" that demonstrates the "possibility of a divine life for all humanity." In the Avatar's actions, concepts of love and service become living realities, giving new hope and inspiration to suffering humanity.

As the living embodiment of the truth that he brings, the Avatar has a transforming impact on all life. According to Baba, because the Avatar is one with all living things, his actions reverberate on every plane of consciousness:

*An ordinary physical action of the Avatar releases immense forces in the inner planes and so becomes the starting point for a chain of working, the repercussions and overtone, of which are manifest at all levels and are universal in range and effect.*¹

Meher Baba's declaration of Avatarhood, then, causes him to be measured by the highest of standards. This is exactly as Baba would wish, for he did not come to give a new creed or to establish a new religion; he intended for his life itself to speak his message of divine love. *"You have asked for and been given enough words," he said, "it is now time to live them."*²

Meher Baba described his life as the Avatar as having four distinct periods:

*The role, which God has willed for me, has had several phases. The pre-realization ordinary state, the old life state of realized Divinity, the new life state of perfect humility and intensive seeking of God as Truth through the achievement of manonash ... and the tripartite Free Life ...The consuming of freedom and bindings ... means that there is a complete blending of the God-state and the man-state...*³

Seen as a whole, these four periods of Baba's life, veiled youth, realized divinity, seeker of God and God-man, describe the work of awakening undertaken by Meher Baba as the Avatar.

Veiled Youth (1894-1921)

Merwan Sheriar Irani, who came to be called Meher Baba, lived his youth unaware of his identity as the Avatar. As noted in chapter one, Baba explained that a veil is always placed on the Avatar until the time is right for him to begin his work.

The veiling and unveiling of the Avatar occurs when God takes human form at critical junctures in history, periods when a new awakening of divine love is desperately needed. Divine Reality periodically subjects itself to the limitations of duality out of love for those souls still enmeshed in the world of maya. With every advent, a profound revolution in consciousness is inaugurated: God acts directly to awaken love by identifying with and working through the laws of the universe. In short, God becoming human is that outpouring of love that eventually enables all living things to realize God.

With the birth of the Avatar, the existing balance between Reality and illusion is not disturbed because God takes form within the laws of the universe and not in some unnatural way. The Avatar takes on certain impressions which are the basis for the human personality needed for his work in the world. These impressions are given, not produced;

they are not of the limited ego-mind. God enters the world in human form with human impressions, but the Avatar is never bound by the limitations of the ego.

Meher Baba explained that his birth as Merwan Sheriar Irani on February 25, 1894 was a natural event. Raised in Poona, India, to Zoroastrian parents, as a child Merwan remained unaware of his true identity. During this period, he developed the human personality that would later become part of his work as the Avatar. The parentage, childhood and youth of the Avatar shape the human side of God, enabling the God-man to establish an intimate relationship with humanity.

Merwan's personality, therefore, was not incidental to the work of the Avatar; it was an essential part of that work. After his unveiling, Merwan retained many of the traits that marked his youth: compassion for the welfare of others, a mischievous sense of humor, an enthusiasm for games and a love of poetry and music. He was a natural leader, admired by his peers and teachers alike.

The unveiling that awoke Merwan to his true nature began suddenly and unexpectedly, interrupting his normal life as a student at Deccan College in Poona. One day, while cycling home from college, he had a dramatic encounter with an old Muslim woman known as Hazrat Babajan, accepted by many as a Perfect Master. Baba later described the moment this way:

*Babajan called me one day as I was cycling past her tree; she kissed me on the forehead, and for nine months, God knows, I was in that state to which very, very few go. I had no consciousness of my body, or anything else. I roamed about taking no food. My mother thought I was mad, and called the doctor. My father understood, but said nothing. The doctors could not do anything ...I took no food but tea, which my elder brother Jamshed, who loved me very much, gave me.*⁴

The process of Merwan's unveiling lasted from Babajan's kiss in 1914 until the end of 1921. During this period, five

masters, Hazrat Babajan, Sai Baba, Upasni Maharaj, Tajuddin Baba and Narayan Maharaj worked with Merwan to make him aware of his Avatarhood.

Who were these five masters? According to Meher Baba, there are always five Perfect Masters or Sadgurus in the world. The Perfect Master is an individual soul who achieves God-realization and simultaneously retains consciousness of the world in order to help others. As individuals who have achieved God-realization, these Sadgurus represent the conscious presence of the divine in the world at all times. When one leaves his or her body to merge in God, another individual becomes a Perfect Master.

When God takes human form as the Avatar, it is the function of the five Perfect Masters of that age to unveil him when the moment is right. For Merwan, this unveiling process, beginning with his encounter with Babajan, awakened him simultaneously to infinite bliss and immeasurable agony. Years later, Baba explained that the experience of infinite consciousness limiting itself within the realm of finite consciousness entails great suffering:

*Although the infinite bliss I experienced in my superconscious state remained continuous, as it is now, I suffered agonies in returning towards normal consciousness of illusion... In reality there is no suffering as such—only infinite bliss. Although suffering is illusory, still, within the realm of illusion, it is suffering... My reality, although untouched by illusion, remained connected with illusion. That is why I suffered incalculable spiritual agonies.*⁵

The suffering of unveiling was so great that Merwan attempted to relieve it by banging his head on the stone floor of his room. For long periods, he refused to eat or drink. After the kiss of Babajan, he was inwardly drawn to contact four other Perfect Masters, the most significant of whom were Sai Baba of Shirdi and Upasni Maharaj of Sakori. On seeing Merwan for the first time, Sai Baba looked at him and shouted "Parvardigar" which means "preserver and protector of all."

Immediately following this encounter, Merwan went to Upasni Maharaj who was living nearby:

When I came near enough to him, Maharaj greeted me, so to speak, with a stone which he threw at me with great force. It struck me on my forehead exactly where Babajan had kissed me, hitting with such force that it drew blood. The mark of that injury is still on my forehead. But that blow from Maharaj was the stroke of dnyan (...divine knowledge).

Figuratively, Maharaj had started to rouse me from "sound sleep." But in sound sleep man is unconscious, while I, being superconscious, was wide awake in sound sleep. With that stroke, Maharaj had begun to help me return to ordinary consciousness of the realm of illusion.

6

During the next seven years, under Upasni Maharaj's care, Merwan was brought down to complete awareness of the "world of duality" while retaining consciousness of his divinity. At the end of this period, in December of 1921, Upasni declared that Merwan was the Avatar, saying: "This boy will move the world. Humanity at large will be benefited at his hands."

In 1922 Merwan Sheriar Irani began his mission as the Avatar. Though he retained the human attributes of Merwan, he now experienced himself as one born to live the divinely human life of the God-man. Many who encountered him during this period, including former schoolmates and friends, witnessed a profound transformation in Merwan that inspired them to leave everything and follow him. One of these early disciples later recalled Merwan at this pivotal juncture:

He was fair, but looked tanned with the tremendous force of having to contain the fire of Absoluteness of God in the limitedness of human nature. He was sharp, quick, forthright and vibrant. His eyes were penetrating and aglow with divine fire. His body was lean and wiry, but strong and active. There was an air of deep drunkenness of spirit—the

intoxication which was ever conscious, that flashed out in his lightning words of knowledge and wisdom and acts of deep, affectionate and tender love. The selflessness that pervaded his doings and words was simple and unsophisticated. Inwardly, he seemed to live as God for God's work; and outwardly, he lived as man for all men except for himself. ⁷

Realized Divinity (1921-1949)

Deeply touched by his loving ways, the first disciples of Merwan began to call him "Meher Baba" meaning "Compassionate One" or "Compassionate Father." They accepted him as one who had realized God. Gradually, those around Baba began to see him as not only God-realized, but also as the Avatar of the age. Although Baba's circle of disciples had long known him as the Avatar, it was not until the 1950s that Meher Baba publicly declared his Avatarhood. Their understanding of "Avatar" was gained through many years of witnessing Baba in action. For those who love Meher Baba, all of the roles he assumed during the course of his nearly seventy-five years— veiled youth, realized Master, seeker of God, and God-man—combine to reveal God becoming human as the Avatar.

From 1921 until 1949, Meher Baba took on the role of the God-realized Master. We can gain insights into his work of "awakening" by examining a number of significant aspects of his life during this period: gathering of disciples; silent communication; acts of service; world travel; and contact with the God-intoxicated.

Meher Baba called those who lived close to him his mandali, a Sanskrit word meaning a group or company. Living near Baba required strict obedience including, in the early years, a list of orders concerning work, diet and even play and exercise. The men and women Baba drew to him were from a variety of religious and social backgrounds. Though allowed to

follow the practices of their respective faiths, the mandali were expected to live in close harmony and cooperation with people of all religions. Everyone was required to work hard, often at a job in the world as well as in the ashram with Baba. They joined with Baba in providing services for the sick, the poor and others in need.

For Baba, the gathering of the mandali was the gathering of what he called "the circle." Baba explained that the Avatar is always surrounded by a circle of disciples who have deep past connections with him. Because the Avatar works for the benefit of all people, the circle is representative of many personality types which are useful instruments in his universal work. Consciousness being fundamentally one, the Avatar's work with a few affects all.

In July of 1925, Meher Baba told the mandali that he would remain silent for a period of time. On July 9th he gave instructions concerning the school, hospital and thriving colony that had grown up around the ashram. He ended by telling them, *"Think of others more than of yourselves; use up your bodies in service. This is absolutely necessary if you want to realize God."*⁸ After going over a few points pertaining to the life of the ashram, he retired to his room for the night. He remained orally silent for the rest of his life.

In the first months of the silence Baba wrote on a chalk slate and used gestures to convey his words. Soon the slate was replaced by a wooden board with the letters of the English alphabet painted on it. Pointing to the letters, Baba rapidly spelled out what he wished to say. In 1954, Baba ceased to use even the alphabet board and relied solely on hand gestures.

Meher Baba's silence extended to writing as well. In 1927, he stopped writing except to sign his name (M.S. Irani). All writings published under his name were dictated through the alphabet board and gestures. The one book written prior to 1927 by Baba's own hand has not been read by anyone, and its present whereabouts is unknown.

By not communicating orally, Baba would have us focus more on what he did than what he said. *"If my silence cannot*

*speak," he said, "of what avail would be speeches made by the tongue?"*⁹ He indicated that his silence was not to be taken as a spiritual vow or discipline, but rather as part of his universal work of transforming consciousness, a subject dealt with in greater detail in chapter three.

Silence did not inhibit Meher Baba's extremely active life, a fact that constantly amazed those around him. One of the mandali describes Baba's actions in silence this way:

Many men have remained silent for even a lifetime but under special conditions of solitude and seclusion, taking no part in worldly affairs. But who except God Almighty could engage in all the activities he [Baba] had taken part in: the detailed supervision of the ashram and the colony surrounding it, bathing the boys and washing their clothes, writing a book, grinding flour, giving darshan to tens of thousands, and interviews to hundreds, as well as dictating more discourses than the previous year when he was speaking, dispensing justice and healing the villagers' quarrels, helping the untouchables to stand up as human beings, playing cricket and football and other boys' games; and in the midst of all this, assuming anger, displeasure, joviality, seriousness, mirth, pity and sorrow without once being heard to utter a sound.¹⁰

Meher Baba's activities in the 1920s centered around institutions of service he established at Meherabad, his headquarters for many years and now the site of his tomb-shrine. At various times there were schools for students of different ages, castes and nationalities, facilities for the mentally ill, free hospitals and dispensaries for the poor and a special prem (love) ashram school for training a number of young boys in the spiritual life.

Baba often indicated that, as the Avatar, he worked on the problems of the many through direct contact with the few. Since the Avatar is consciously one with all life, every act of the Avatar may be seen as transforming for all living things. To take one poignant example: Baba worked universally to

break down the caste system by personally bathing the untouchable boys attending his school and cleaning their latrines. When a number of Brahmins (who are forbidden by caste practice to come in contact with untouchables) came for Baba's blessing, he had them join in the work saying, "*I am bathing untouchable boys. It is no use thus having darshan (blessing) unless you are prepared to do the work I do.*" ¹¹

The primary aim of Baba's work was not to establish institutions of service, though such institutions have been founded in his name. The Avatar's service aims to liberate the individual from the enslavement of illusion. This, Baba explained, is true selfless service:

Those who are inspired by the spirit of selfless service are quick to render unto humanity all possible help through the provision of the necessities of life like clothes and shelter, food and medicine, education and other amenities of civilization... All these types of service are great and good; but from the ultimate point of view, the help which secures Spiritual Freedom for humanity, surpasses them all; and it is insuperable in importance... Regardless of whether a man is wealthy or poor, highly educated or illiterate, the only real help is to give him the perfect hope that everyone has a really equal opportunity to achieve everlasting freedom from all bindings. There is no gift greater than the gift of spiritual freedom and there is no task more important than that of helping others to attain it... ¹²

Meher Baba's many acts of service, therefore, were meant to awaken humanity, individually and collectively, to spiritual freedom. For this work of awakening he needed no permanent institution or organization. The institutions he did establish he compared to the scaffolding temporarily erected in order to construct the real building that must be built in the consciousness of humanity. Once the inner change has been accomplished, the scaffolding is dismantled. For this reason, Baba frequently opened and closed various ashrams and places of service. He meant them only as outward aids to the actual inner work he came to accomplish.

During the 1930s, Baba traveled throughout the world, visiting Europe, North America, China, Africa and the Middle East. On most of these trips, he would travel incognito, silently "laying cables" for his work. At times he consented to meet with those who expressed an interest in him, including members of the press. On occasion, he would issue a public statement such as the following:

*I am not come to establish any cult, society or organization; nor even to establish a new religion. The religion that I shall give teaches the Knowledge of the One behind the many. The book that I shall make people read is the book of the heart that holds the key to the mystery of life. I shall bring about a happy blending of the head and the heart. I shall revitalize all religions and cults, and bring them together like beads on one string.*¹³

Meher Baba indicated that he traveled in order to carry out his inner work of awakening. He gave no importance to founding any organization in his name, and he advocated no particular method of spiritual practice. Most of the press stories about him were favorable, but when unfavorable or sensational reports appeared in newspapers, he did not respond nor was he disturbed. He moved about as one who had a particular timetable, requiring him to visit certain places and people at appointed times known only to him.

A good number of those Baba contacted during his visits to the West became his lifelong disciples. Many who met him felt an immediate familiarity and warmth. The following report typifies the responses of many:

My most outstanding impression of the first meeting is one of peering into bottomless pools of infinite love and tenderness, as my eyes met his. My heart pounded with tremendous excitement and for a while I could not speak. I felt that in an inexplicable way he was the reason for my very existence; that I had never really lived until this moment; that he was deeply familiar and precious to me, even as I was no stranger and very dear to him.¹⁴

Those traveling with Meher Baba came to realize that all of his external activities were crucial for his inner work. In many places he simply wished to work by silently walking through crowds as the following account of Baba in Shanghai suggests:

Immediately we had tea, Baba said that he wished to go round the city and mix with the Chinese crowds. I had very little experience of Baba's ways and was still rather awkward in his presence. I took them along the Bund, and from the French settlement by tram through the British to the war-stricken districts near the North station, thinking it would interest them. Not at all. There were not enough people. We took a tram back and saw Nanking Road, the now brightly lit Chinese stores... The streets were densely packed with long-gowned clerks and short-coated coolies... Baba was delighted ...¹⁵

In other places Baba wished to contact those he called his agents, advanced souls who, unknown to the world, silently worked for him in every part of the globe. Though they had not met him physically, Baba stated that these agents recognized him as the Avatar and received internal instructions from him. One of many examples of this contact between Baba and his agents took place in New Mexico in 1934:

Baba has explained that this is one of the very rare direct agents; he is the direct agent of America. In 1934, when Baba and a few of his disciples were on their way to California, the train stopped at Albuquerque for a short time. Baba spelt out the word "Indian" on the palm of his hand, and went with Ruano away from the station into a small street near by. At a street corner they noticed two American Indians; one was selling bows and arrows, and he walked away as soon as Baba approached. The other, a tall, impressive figure with a red band tied round his head, stayed where he was, and for a few moments Baba and he stood facing one another, each looking intently into the other's eyes. Baba then abruptly walked back to the station.¹⁶

Meher Baba once summarized the work of awakening accomplished through agents and travels this way:

*His [the Avatar's]...work is executed for the good of humanity by the means of his spiritual body and Divine will—on the spiritual and the subtle planes directly, or through the intermediary of His agents. The exterior work is accomplished through His physical body by personal contact with individuals. By passing through different countries He turns their minds towards spirituality; He enhances their progression towards the subtle planes and from these towards the spiritual [mental] planes.*¹⁷

The esoteric aspect of Baba's work as Avatar is nowhere better highlighted than in his work with the God-intoxicated or masts (pronounced "must"). For many of his seventy-four years Baba searched for, contacted and worked intensely with these highly peculiar individuals. The statistics alone are staggering: from 1941 until 1946, the years of his most extensive mast "tours" in India, Baba personally contacted some 20,000 people while traveling altogether over 75,000 miles.

So important was this mast work in Baba's life, we must be clear on just who or what a mast is. The term mast was coined by Baba from the Sufi term "mast-allah" which may be translated to mean "one who is overpowered by God or God-intoxicated." The masts are very advanced souls, stationed on the higher planes of consciousness. Because they have become absorbed in the experience of bliss or divine love, a "spiritual push" is needed by the Avatar to move them forward on the path.

Seen on the streets of India, these masts are to most observers indistinguishable from mad-men. In Baba's view, however, these strange men and women are not only sane, but they are more sane than people with so-called "normal" consciousness. Masts, according to Baba, deviate for a number of reasons from the usual development in the spiritual search. Their deviation is pronounced because they have not received

direct guidance from a spiritual master. For this reason a mast takes to "unconventional patterns of life." Baba outlined what then happens:

The result is that the person often lands himself into confusing side-tracks and by-paths, and sometimes into regressive channels of life. Once the average pattern of life is surrendered, it makes room for infinite varieties of self-created and provisional patterns of life and action. These patterns may deviate considerably from normality, and the ways of life that follow from such patterns may even seem to be insane, to the extent to which they deviate from the average mode of life. But they do not necessarily mean real insanity, or even retrogression on the path of inner search.

*Such a person is often, in his own individual way, in earnest search of God, or Truth, as the unfailing inward directive power. In and through his waywardness, there is a logic of his own; and all his idiosyncrasies and aberrations can be understood only if they are viewed in the light of the inner motive power... They are sincerely and wholeheartedly devoted to Truth as it comes to them; they are divinely mad in search of eternal values. They have decided to take stakes in their desire to realize God. Such persons are not mad in the ordinary sense; they are desperately in love with God, and are known as Masts.*¹⁸

"Ordinary" insanity, as defined by Baba, is the inability to adjust to the world; God-madness is the refusal to do so. The mast in his "madness" is closer to the divine Reality, and in this sense, is actually more sane than others. Baba has said that the closer one gets to stilling the mind, the nearer one is to God-realization. Masts, having slowed down the working of the mind through their absorption in God, are close to the God-state. This point was summarized by Baba this way:

*Mind stopped is God.
Mind working is man.
Mind slowed down is mast.
Mind working fast is mad.*¹⁹

In his typology of spiritually advanced souls, and particularly in his understanding of masts, Baba challenged accepted notions of spirituality. In *The Wayfarers*, a detailed account of Baba's work with the masts, Dr. William Donkin put it bluntly:

Are these ragged and eccentric men and women spiritually advanced, who pass their lives in filth and squalor; who talk nonsense; who often roam about naked; who may abuse others and strike them; who do no worldly work; who smoke, drink tea, and chew pan and tobacco in unnatural quantities; who have, it seems, perverted tastes in anything and everything—are we to believe that these people are closer to God than intelligent, cultured, civilized, normal men and women?

20

Baba answered with an emphatic "yes":

*Compared with the ordinary man of the world, the mast may seem to have less balance of mind; but is important to remember that the average man himself has not really any balance of mind. The average man of the world has only an appearance of balance, because he can often effect a provisional adjustment between the warring elements in his mind... This working compromise enables the average man to bring his outward behavior into conformity with the established conventions of society; and because he fits into the average pattern of responses and reactions, he gives the appearance of balance... The mast is seeking a higher and a more lasting balance of mind, that would be securely based upon true values. He has taken in his own hands the task of intelligent psychic readjustment and new experimentation. This task is very different from the theoretical manipulation of ideas. It involves the courage to face oneself with unfailing honesty of purpose. It involves also the necessary intense ardour for bringing about the practical overhauling of the contents of the mind. The spiritual yearning for lasting Truth brings about in masts a complete unsettlement of the working balance of compromise that is characteristic of the average man of the world.*²¹

Though the mast has attained a certain spiritual advancement, he or she has done so without proper guidance. Baba did not, therefore, endorse the path taken by masts for those who seek to enter the spiritual path. As we will see further in chapter four, Baba encouraged love for God in and through a practical life in the world. While affirming and praising the intense love for God found in the masts, Baba worked hard to focus and channel their love for the benefit of others. Baba exempted no one, not even those who have achieved great heights spiritually, from helping the world through love and service. With the help of the Avatar or a Perfect Master the mast can continue to advance spiritually through a reintegration into the affairs of the world:

*The Master has a direct and unerring insight into the exact working of the minds of masts. He knows the true genesis and the nature of the unusual mental state in which the mast has landed himself... He gives masts effective guidance and a spiritual push, and he facilitates their onward march on the path, so that they become more and more fit as vehicles for the expression of the Divine Will... When masts receive the right sort of help from a Perfect Master, they emerge into a supra-normal state of new integration and harmony... The mast states have in them an immense potentiality for contacting and releasing divinity, with an ever-increasing thoroughness and fullness, but they need to be delicately handled by one who has attained spiritual perfection.*²²

To awaken the masts to their responsibility to love and serve others, Baba worked with them in various ways. Several of the mandali were expert "mast-finders" who would scour remote areas of India for masts. Frequently Baba would then visit these places, making his inner contact through an external meeting. The mast might also be brought to a special mast community or ashram established by Baba for that purpose. In the ashram setting, Baba saw personally to the needs of masts, washing, feeding and shaving them. It should be noted

that Baba also worked with other advanced souls, the poor and those he termed "the ordinary mad" during these mast trips and at his ashrams.

Masts are not easy to locate, nor are they easily coaxed into abandoning the comfort of their situation (physical and spiritual) for an unsettling jolt from the Avatar. Often they avoid or even fear such an encounter—a difficulty that constantly plagued Baba and his men. This was always complicated by the fact that Baba insisted on remaining incognito during much of the mast work. To make matters even more difficult, Baba had everyone, including himself, give in to every whim of the mast in order to create the right atmosphere and conditions for the inner work.

In spite of the trials and tribulations of mast work, Baba appeared to be happiest when with them. He called them his special children, and he loved them deeply. As the following description suggests, no effort was too great in the work to contact each mast:

And in the evening, after a shave, a bath, a meal, and a few hours of rest, you see Baba join the mandali, and you listen to the witty and fascinating review of the tour just completed. It is now that you hear of the incredible hardships; of the sleepless nights; of the tedious vigils in trains, tongas, and bullock carts; of the rides upon camels, ponies, and asses (and once, to cross a river, of a ride upon an elephant!); of the treks on foot over leagues of dust or mud; of the vicissitudes of rain and sun, cold and heat—in short, you hear something at least of what Baba and his men went through, and of the qualities and oddities of the best of the masts whom they met, word pictures of the brief encounters between Baba and these strange, God-intoxicated souls.

*And when the mandali who went with him add their tribute of description, you hear how, throughout all these hardships, Baba remained the freshest of all, and how, after each contact with a really good mast, he seemed particularly radiant, as if some great work had been achieved, or some heavy burden lifted.*²³

Though Baba made extraordinary efforts to keep his identity hidden, he was invariably recognized by the masts. Baba's meetings with the masts provide a unique record of reaction to him through direct encounter. It appears that the masts saw something in Meher Baba that not even the mandali could see. Their vision of Baba sprung from something other than familiarity with his life and teachings (of which they knew nothing). It is worth quoting a few examples recorded by Dr. Donkin:

Azim Khan Baba: When Baba contacted him, he (Azim Khan Baba) said, "You are Allah; you have brought forth the creation, and once in [a] thousand years you come down to see the play of what you have created."

Dada Mian: Chhagan tried to bring this mast to Baba in Jubbulpore. He refused to come, and said, "He (Baba) is the Emperor, how can I come?"

Gulab Baba: When Baba entered the room Gulab Baba told Kaka, pointing to Baba, "He (Baba) is God Himself, and you have tricked me." A few moments later, when Baba asked Gulab Baba to sit beside him, he protested, "I am not fit to sit beside him."²⁴

Of the inner work Baba accomplished with the masts, little can be said. In particular cases it is possible to measure outward change in behavior, though the inner changes are difficult to comprehend. Mohammed, one of Baba's favorite masts, is an example of outward change:

No one would maintain that the Mohammed of today is normal, but there is, nevertheless, a radical change in his behaviour. In the old days, his explosive and irritable temperament gave one a feeling that he was wrestling with some inner problem, and that when you tore him away from his preoccupation with this problem, he became so confused that he burst into an uncontrollable tantrum... Every day when Baba came, it was as if a brilliant flame were kindled in the depths of Mohammed's being, that for a moment lit up the dark and tangled ways, and slowly these fleeting

moments of inner radiance have grown more and more sustained, so that Mohammed today is, for the most part, a harmonious and agreeable inmate of the ashram. He now radiates something unusual and charming, he has a perspicacity that misses little of what goes on in the ashram, and he adopts a kind of avuncular interest in everyone's welfare.²⁵

While aiding the masts spiritually, Meher Baba was simultaneously enlisting these strange, but beautiful souls in the Avatar's universal work. The mast, once awakened by the Avatar, breaks out of the self-sufficiency of his state and becomes a channel of love and service for the benefit of the world:

*The Master knows all the stages of the journey, with its traps, dangers, and opportunities for speedy advancement. He gives masts effective guidance and a spiritual push, and he facilitates their onward march on the path, so that they become more and more fit as vehicles for the expression of the Divine Will. They become more efficient agents for the promotion of God's plan on earth.*²⁶

Seeker of God (1949-1952)

In 1949 Meher Baba's life as the Awakener took a significant turn as he entered into a period he called "the New Life." He declared that it was now necessary for him to live a life of helplessness and hopelessness as an ordinary seeker of God. All ashrams were disbanded and all but a handful of the mandali were dispersed. The New Life became a dramatic example of Baba's assertion that in the Avatar, God must become fully human in order that humanity can once again seek God. For Baba this required that the One who is sought become the one who seeks, thereby clearing a new path in consciousness for others to follow.

Not surprisingly, those connected with Meher Baba were startled by his sudden new course. They were told that Baba

would soon be leaving and that they might never see him again. In announcing this, Baba warned that he was serious about this New Life, and that they must be prepared for a complete change:

All of the proceeds from the sale of my properties are to be used in paying off promised sums and to provide for the immediate needs of those whom I have myself made to depend upon me. Nothing is required for me and those who will go with me. The question about spiritual benefits does not arise... Do not get misled on account of my apparently eccentric habits up to now. For example, I have definitely decided to give up Meherazad in October; yet I have given instructions to Padri to fix the lighting as early as he can. That is because of my custom of maintaining an old order of things up to the moment that I start upon anything new. It may be madness, it may be method, but that has been my habit. Now I am also going to put an end to my habits and customs. Therefore when I say the 'end' it will mean nothing but an end. Do not remain any more under the impression that it will be otherwise. I want to be absolutely free from everything and everybody. There will be no compromise now about anything. I am becoming ghutt (hardened), naffat (callous) and penniless. Remember the proverb Nanga-se-Khuda bhi darta hai (even God is afraid of the 'naked').²⁷

All those who loved Meher Baba were given the opportunity to join him in the New Life. Several plans were developed by Baba that provided various alternatives of living the life Baba envisioned. A small number of people were given the choice of saying yes to a list of very stringent conditions and thereby were permitted to accompany Baba personally. These companions were to share directly in Baba's daily work by becoming helpless and hopeless with him. This meant that they were to give up everything, relying only on God in all circumstances.

The companions were prohibited from approaching Baba

as a God-realized Master. No homage could be paid Baba and no spiritual help could be sought from him. At the same time, the companions had to agree to obey Baba wholeheartedly as the "elder brother" or chief companion.

Those who said yes to the conditions and were selected by Baba agreed to take full responsibility before God for whatever might happen to them. Baba insisted that in this New Life he would not be responsible for their spiritual or material welfare as he had been in the past. Baba also emphasized that there would be no spiritual gain or benefit for those who chose to accompany him. One hundred percent cheerfulness was expected of all companions; moods would not be allowed. Baba summarized the trials of the New Life by saying in part:

*It is not merely a question of hardships and difficulties such as those encountered in past trips. The most difficult thing now is the need to control emotions and feelings and to have absolute readiness for split-second obedience to whatever I ask you to do or not to do. I do not expect anyone of you to be free from your respective reactions of good or bad impulses such as anger, displeasure, likes and dislikes, but I expect you not to give any direct or indirect expression to feelings and reactions. I shall be free in every way and you will be bound in every respect. I shall live amongst you as one of you like a brother. I may even fall at your feet and ask you to spit upon me. That is why I have been saying that the conditions will be such that very few would remain with me to the end.*²⁸

On October 16, 1949, Baba and twenty companions set out on what was to be an extraordinary journey across India. The change in Baba's work was made apparent by the prayer he uttered to initiate the New Life:

*May God help Baba to definitely make this step, which he is taking to give up everything and to go away, irrevocable, so that from 16 October when he enters the new life, there will be no turning back.*²⁹

One of the mandali wrote:

This was the first prayer for help ever before heard from Baba to God during the past twenty-eight years, and the mandali [were] so taken aback and confused that no one could think of saying, Amen! ³⁰

Baba did indeed become a companion in the New Life. All who left with him joined together to share the work of sweeping, cleaning, washing and cooking. Everyone, including Baba, had his or her duties. No thought was given to spiritual life or religious discussions. Spontaneous living in the present moment was emphasized. During certain periods of the New Life, Baba and his companions had to beg for their food, walk great distances (totaling thousands of miles) in severe weather and with little sleep. There were times when they had no place to sleep but in the open. Whatever the circumstances, all were required to remain cheerful and detached. Indeed, many who were unable to do so were instructed to return to their homes and responsibilities in the world, but to continue living the New Life of relying solely upon God.

Under Baba's direction, one of the companions, Dr. Ghani, wrote a song to express the spirit of the New Life:

Listen to the silent words of Meher Baba
The life of all lovers of God is in these words.
You who are serious to follow the New Life
Will renounce your ephemeral existence.

We leave taken to this life in which we rely only upon God;
Our will is strengthened by our oath.
We merrily sing the song of hopelessness;
We invite all calamities and difficulties.

We neither wail over lost hopes, nor complain about
Promises.
Or covet honor, or shun disgrace.
Backbiting is ended and we do not fear anyone;
This is the tenor of our New Life.

No confusion in the mind now; neither are any ties left;
Pride, anger, lust and greed are sloughed off.
No religion for any of us, nor care for physical and mental
Aims.
The Sheikh and the Brahmin are now in the same boat.

There is for us all no small or great.
Neither disciple, master, nor Godhood exist.
Brotherliness is the link,
And our common enjoyment of suffering.

This world or the next, hell or heaven, we are no longer
concerned with.
Shaktis and siddhis, occultism and miracles, we are no
Longer plagued with.
All false impressions have been purged from the mind;
Now we live in the active present.

Dear ones, take seriously the words of Baba.
'Although now I am on the same level with you,
Yet all orders from me, good, bad, or extraordinary,
You should carry out immediately, leaving the result to God.

'Even if the heavens fall,
Do not let go the hand of Truth;
Let despair and disappointment ravage and destroy
the garden of your life;
You beautify it by contentment and self-sufficiency.

'Even though your heart be cut to bits, let a smile be on
your lips.
Here I divulge to you a truth:
Hidden in your empty hands is treasure untold;
Your beggarly life is the envy of kings.

'God exists indeed, and true are the Prophets,
Every cycle has an Avatar, and every moment a wali.
For us, however, it is only hopelessness and helplessness,
How else can I describe to you what our New Life is?' ³¹

An important aspect of the New Life was the contact Baba made with masts, sadhus and the poor. In his role of "servant" Baba sought out thousands of these individuals so that he could wash their feet, bow down to them and give them a gift of money. During this work Baba was referred to, by his mandali, as "elder brother" and the name "Meher Baba" was not mentioned.

Meher Baba's New Life wanderings as a seeker of God culminated in a four-month period he called "manonash" or the annihilation of the ego-mind. In this manonash phase Baba indicated that he had taken the journey to God to its ultimate conclusion. Just as the New Life cut a new path to God in human consciousness, so manonash opened the way for realization of God by future seekers.

While the full implications of Baba's efforts to transform consciousness are hidden to us and will only become known in time, it is clear that in the New Life and manonash Baba worked to chart fresh avenues for spiritual life. The New Life and manonash are living symbols of the inner work Baba has said that all must eventually do: renounce the life of the ego for the new life of loving God and finding God as one's true Self.

In the companionship of the New Life, marked by one hundred percent honesty, cheerfulness, love for one another and total reliance upon God, Baba laid the groundwork for the new humanity he said that he had come to bring as the Avatar. He created the conditions for inner renunciation, a way of life that helps seekers of God to be in the world but not of it. And he promised that the New Life he established in consciousness will be available for all time:

This New Life is endless, and even after my physical death it will be kept alive by those who live the life of complete renunciation of falsehood, lies, hatred, anger, greed and lust; and who, to accomplish all this, do no lustful actions, do no harm to anyone, do no backbiting, do not seek material possessions or power, who accept no homage, neither

covet honor nor shun disgrace, and fear no one and nothing; by those who rely wholly and solely on God, and who love God purely for the sake of loving; who believe in the lovers of God and in the reality of Manifestation, and yet do not expect any spiritual or material reward; who do not let go the hand of Truth, and who, without being upset by calamities, bravely and wholeheartedly face all hardships with one hundred per cent cheerfulness, and give no importance to caste, creed and religious ceremonies.

*This New Life will live by itself eternally, even if there is no one to live it.*³²

Having now lived both the life of a God-realized Master and of an ordinary seeker of God, Meher Baba emerged from the New Life to declare publicly that he was the God-man, the Avatar of the Age.

The God-Man (1952-1969)

The last phase of Meher Baba's life as the Avatar was characterized by an unprecedented release of love that inspired many thousands of followers to strive in a very practical way to express the highest love in their everyday lives. He entered into what he termed the "Free Life"—the give and take of love without obligation or condition. He made clear to all who approached him that he was the Avatar, the living Christ, who has come only for the sake of love. In an important message, given to his lovers in 1953, Baba explained his role as the "Highest of the High" and stated how he wished to be understood by those who love him:

I declare to all of you who approach me, and to those of you who desire to approach me, accepting me as the Highest of the High, that you must never come with the desire in your heart which craves for wealth and worldly gain, but only with the fervent longing to give your all—body, mind and possessions—with all their attachments. Seek me not

to extricate you from your predicaments, but find me in order to surrender yourself wholeheartedly to my Will. Cling to me not for worldly happiness and short-lived comforts, but adhere to me, through thick and thin, sacrificing your own happiness and comforts at my feet. Let my happiness be your cheer and my comfort your rest. Do not ask me to bless you with a good job, but desire to serve me more diligently and honestly without expectation of reward. Never beg of me to save your life or the lives of your dear ones, but beg of me to accept you and permit you to lay down your life for me. Never expect me to cure you of your bodily afflictions, but beseech me to cure you of your ignorance. Never stretch out your hands to receive anything from me, but hold them high in praise of me whom you have approached as the Highest of the High. ³³

In the Free Life, Meher Baba made himself available to many thousands of people, in the East and in the West, who came seeking his blessing. He indicated that this outer contact, even when very brief, was part of his inner awakening, planting the seed of love in each heart. He stressed repeatedly that he had not come to give them words or messages, but rather to awaken them to the love of the Avatar in their midst:

I want you to feel that I am one of you and that is why I am now sitting here on the ground with you all. I am on the level of each one of you. Whether poor, rich, small, big, I am like each of you, but I am approachable only to those who love me.

Only those who can lose themselves in my love will find themselves in me. This is not an idle talk, but an authoritative statement that eternally I have been, and will be, always the slave of my lovers. ³⁴

During this period Baba made three trips to the United States staying at the Meher Spiritual Center in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, a place he called his "home in the West." In Australia, he resided at Avatar's Abode in Woombye,

Queensland. He indicated that both these centers would one day become places of world pilgrimage.

The release of love during Baba's Free Life was also given through his suffering. Baba had often stated that the manifestation of the Avatar's love necessitates that he share in the suffering of the world. In the 1940s he spoke to the mandali of a "personal disaster" that would befall him and said that he would have to spill his blood in the East and in the West before he left his body.

Baba's outer suffering took the form of two automobile "accidents," one in the United States (1952) and one in India (1956). The American accident occurred in the middle of the U.S. while Baba was being driven across the country. The entire left side of his body, from head to foot, sustained injury. The accident in Satara, India was also serious, causing damage to Baba's right side, again from head to foot. In both accidents mandali members were also hurt, and there was one fatality.

Meher Baba explained that his physical suffering was part of the Avatar's universal suffering, for the Avatar must suffer for "one and all beings and things" as part of his love for the world. "You are Bliss itself," he remarked on one occasion, "to make you aware of it, I come amongst you and suffer infinite agony."

The last period of Meher Baba's physical life was marked by an urgency to complete his work as the Avatar. For the purposes of this universal work he entered into what might be called a deeper silence. In 1954 he gave up the alphabet board and began to rely solely on hand gestures when he wished to communicate with words. Seclusions, which had always been a feature of his work, became more frequent. When Baba's lovers around the world expressed alarm at the closing of external contact, Baba issued a statement through one of the mandali. It read in part:

There is no reason at all for any of you to worry. Baba was, Baba is, and Baba will also be eternally existent. Severance of external relations does not mean the termination of internal links. It was only for establishing the internal

connection that the external contacts had been maintained until now. The time has now come for being bound in the chain of internal connections. Hence, external contact is no longer necessary. It is possible to establish the internal link by obeying Baba's orders. I give you all my blessings for strengthening these internal links.

*I am always with you and I am not away from you. I was, am, and will remain eternally with you and it is for promoting this realization that I have severed external contact. This will enable all persons to realize Truth by being bound to each other with internal links.*³⁵

For Baba, seclusion was not isolation, just as silence was not simply ceasing to speak. In seclusion Baba worked with great energy and urgency to finish what he repeatedly termed his universal work. His followers all over the world were often asked to participate in this work by carrying out specific instructions, frequently involving maintaining silence or remembrance of God's name. Though he rarely explained much about this work in seclusion, it clearly had to do with his mission to awaken. In a 1968 message to his lovers, Baba indicated the significance of his work in seclusion:

*None can have the least idea of the immensity of the work that I am doing in this seclusion. The only hint I can give is that compared with the work I do in seclusion all the important work of the world put together is completely insignificant. Although for me the burden of my work is crushing, the result of my work will be intensely felt by all people in the world.*³⁶

The strain of Baba's last seclusion in 1968 took a tremendous toll on his health. Nevertheless, he was pleased with the results, saying: "My work is done. It is completed 100% to my satisfaction. The result of this work will also be 100% and will manifest from the end of September."³⁷ That was November 1968. In January 1969 Meher Baba "dropped his physical body."

In the last few months of his life, Baba suffered as he had not suffered before. "This is my crucifixion," he told the mandali. The doctors could do nothing as they had a difficult time reaching a definite diagnosis. According to Baba, his condition had "no medical grounds at all; it is due purely to the strain of my work." Severe spasms shook his body in the last days. At 12 noon on January 31st, he joked with the mandali about all the medicine he had been given and the little effect it had. At 12:15 a great spasm shook his body, his pulse rate fell to nothing, and breathing ceased.

Meher Baba's body was carried from Meherazad, his home during the last period of his life, to Meherabad some seventeen miles away. There his body was placed in a crypt, in keeping with the instructions Baba had given many years before. For seven days Baba's body remained uncovered so that thousands of his lovers could have a last glimpse of him.*

Today the tomb-shrine at Meherabad is a place of pilgrimage where thousands of people from every part of the world come to pay homage to the one they accept as the Avatar of this age.

* It is interesting to note that during these seven days newspapers reported an unprecedented occurrence at the Kaaba in Mecca, the holy shrine designated by Muhammad as the destination of pilgrimage (hajj). Rains flooded the Kaaba, making the traditional circumambulation of the holy shrine impossible. Muhammad, Meher Baba said, was the last appearance of the Avatar before Baba



Meher Baba's tomb, Meherabad, India.



Meher Baba feeding a mast in Bangalore, 1939

Chapter 3

The Universal Work

Meher Baba described his life as the universal work of the Avatar, the unfolding of the divine plan for this age. In all that he did, Baba pointed to a transformation of consciousness that would be brought about through the awakening of divine love in the world.

The question naturally arises, how did Meher Baba intend for his silence, his many acts of service, the periods of seclusion, and his physical suffering to usher in a "New Humanity"? While a full answer to this question may only emerge in time, a partial understanding can be gathered from Baba's actions, his own statements and from those who knew him best.

Speaking in Silence

For Meher Baba, silence is a direct form of communication. "Things that are real," he said, "are given and received in silence." He indicated that it is only by coming in silence that the God-man can be heard in the twentieth century:

I have come not to teach but to awaken. Understand therefore that I lay down no precepts.

Throughout eternity I have laid down principles and precepts, but mankind has ignored them. Man's inability to live God's words makes the Avatar's teaching a mockery. Instead of practicing the compassion He taught, man has waged

crusades in His name. Instead of living the humility, purity and truth of His words, man has given way to hatred, greed and violence.

*Because man has been deaf to the principles and precepts laid down by God in the past, in this present Avataric Form I observe Silence.*¹

From this and similar statements, one may conclude that Meher Baba kept silence in order to speak. Through silence the Avatar speaks in at least two significant ways. First, his silence points away from reliance on mere words, calling humanity to awaken to the voice of God within. And second, his silence reminds humanity that the actions of the Avatar speak a divinely human example that is more eloquent than speeches given by the tongue.

The silence of the Avatar has another even more significant dimension as well: Meher Baba often indicated that he would "break" his silence by speaking the "Word" in every heart, thereby giving a spiritual push forward to all living things:

*When I break My Silence, the impact of My Love will be universal and all life in creation will know, feel and receive of it. It will help every individual to break himself free from his own bondage in his own way. I am the Divine Beloved who loves you more than you can ever love yourself. The breaking of My Silence will help you to help yourself in knowing your real Self.*²

In tones reminiscent of Jesus' proclamation of the coming Kingdom, Baba conveyed an urgency in his statements about the breaking of his silence. He repeatedly linked the giving of the Word with the release of divine love he had come to accomplish:

I have come to sow the seed of love in your hearts so that, in spite of all superficial diversity which your life in illusion must experience and endure, the feeling of oneness, through love, is brought about amongst all the nations, creeds, sects and castes of the world.

In order to bring this about, I am preparing to break My Silence. When I break My Silence it will not be to fill your ears with spiritual lectures. I shall speak only One Word, and this Word will penetrate the hearts of all men and make even the sinner feel that he is meant to be a saint, while the saint will know that God is in the sinner as much as He is in himself.

*When I speak that Word, I shall lay the foundation for that which is to take place during the next seven hundred years.*³

We know, however, that Meher Baba uttered no audible "word" before he dropped his body. In light of this fact, what can be said about his promise to break his silence? Has the silence been broken? Is there some "event" still to occur? Just as Christians still debate what Jesus meant by the arrival of the Kingdom, so it may not be possible to give a definitive answer about the mystery surrounding Meher Baba's silence. Nevertheless, one can explore the meaning and significance of Baba's promise to give the Word by examining his own statements and actions.

Let us first take note of what Meher Baba means by the "Word" that he will give from his silence. According to Baba, all forms and sounds are from the "primal sound" (Brahm-Nad) that produced the universe. Thus God's "speaking" brought forth the universe, and, in our own time, God's "speaking" as the Avatar will bring about a universal awakening:

*Because all forms and words are from this Primal Sound or Original Word and are continuously connected with It and have their life from It, when It is uttered by Me It will reverberate in all people and creatures and all will know that I have broken My silence and have uttered that Sound or Word.*⁴

Did Baba intend for the speaking of the Word to be equated with uttering an oral sound? Clearly not, as the following incident illustrates:

I was once told by Ramjoo that years ago Baba informed some of the mandali that he proposed to speak, and brought

a number of them to a distant place, which they reached after days of strenuous walking. When they arrived he made each stand around him at a distance of fifty feet or more with their backs to him, he standing in the centre; at the clapping of his hands they were to turn to him and he would speak. He clapped his hands, they turned, but heard nothing. He smiled and beckoned them to him. Why had he not spoken? they asked. He said, 'Do you not know I am always speaking?'⁵

The giving of the Word was meant by Baba to be a speaking in the heart, awakening us to the voice of God that is always speaking within every living thing. To his lovers, Baba put it this way:

*It is not through words that I give what I have to give. In the silence of your perfect surrender, my love which is always silent can flow to you—to be yours always to keep and to share with those who seek me. When the Word of my Love breaks out of its silence and speaks in your hearts, telling you who I really am, you will know that that is the Real Word you have always been longing to hear.*⁶

It might be said, therefore, that Meher Baba's external silence symbolized his work of creating internal silence in each heart. By working to silence the ego-mind, the Avatar makes it possible for the human heart to hear once again the inner speaking of the divine voice:

*External silence helps the inner silence and only in internal silence is Baba found, in profound inner silence. I am never silent. I speak eternally. The voice that is heard deep within the soul is my voice.*⁷

Meher Baba's promise to "break" his silence was a promise to reconnect humanity to God who dwells within. God is always present, Baba explained, always speaking the Word of love. But the modern predicament is that humanity has lost the ability to know and feel the constant presence of God. We have been cut off from the source of divine love, from our true Self.

The divine Word given from silence, Meher Baba declared, can only be heard by the ears of the heart. To open our hearts, the Avatar must work to still our ego-minds. Then, and only then, are we able to hear the Word when he speaks it. "Drown all sound in my silence," he said, "to hear my Word of words."

Has Meher Baba given the Word? Or is there some event still to come that will signal his public manifestation? Many who love Baba feel that he is giving the Word. That is to say, all that he accomplished in his physical life is now reverberating in hearts everywhere and will continue to gather force with each passing year. As evidence that this is so, some of Baba's mandali cite the thousands of people who have come to love Baba after his physical death as examples of the Word "breaking out of its silence." This, they believe, is the beginning of the universal awakening of divine love by Meher Baba as the Avatar.

Mastery in Servitude

Meher Baba's life of love and service was symbolic of the inner work of awakening he came to accomplish. Baba has explained that every action of the Avatar, who is one with all, has a profound impact on all life.

As a rule each action of an ordinary person is motivated by a solitary aim serving a solitary purpose; it can hit only one target at a time and bring about one specific result. But with the Avatar, He being the Centre of each one, any single action of His on the gross plane brings about a network of diverse results for people and objects everywhere.⁸

According to Baba, God periodically brings about a forward movement of consciousness by personal participation in the world as the Avatar. His every action has a universal impact. When, for example, Baba cared for the untouchable boys and cleaned their latrines, he indicated that he was

working in human consciousness to break down the caste system. For Baba, his many hours bowing down to the feet of the poor and lepers, distributing cloth and grain, were not simply acts of charity benefiting a few; they were acts initiating inner changes that will eventually benefit the poor and helpless everywhere. Similarly, gathering disciples from many races and religions, and travels throughout the world, symbolize the inner transformations that characterize the Avatar's universal work.

From this perspective, Baba's simplest action could be interpreted to be of great import for the world. This can be illustrated by citing an incident that occurred during Baba's 1952 visit to Meher Spiritual Center in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. On the day Baba opened the Center to the public, a large number of people came from the town to meet him, entering the room individually or in family groups and then leaving by another door. The mandali present noticed that whenever a black person or family entered the room, Baba, in an unusual gesture, stood and walked across the room to greet them. Baba did not explain this or similar gestures, but many around him felt that this action was an outer sign of Baba's inner work on behalf of American blacks, work that has been manifested in the American civil rights movement.

Baba indicated that by working with a few representative people, he was working for large segments of the world's population. For this reason, it was crucial for him to have around him people of diverse personality types, nationalities, races and religions. He brought together, for example, Eastern and Western women to live in his ashram. As one observer has expressed it, he appeared to be working through these women to reshape the role of women for the future:

He was sowing the seeds of a unity between East and West. He was stressing the importance of woman for the coming age; and he was helping to develop a pattern of what kind of woman she would be—one in whom the talent, the energy and practical capacity of the Westerners would be blended with the devotion and spirituality of the women mandali.⁹

In whatever he did, whether in the midst of intense activity or in deep seclusion, Meher Baba appeared to have a specific timetable and a definite plan for his work. As noted earlier, he frequently arranged to be taken incognito to places where large numbers of people congregated in order to move silently through the crowds. Often he went out of his way, at times traveling great distances, to visit a specific spot or contact a particular individual unknown to all save Baba.

There are countless stories about Meher Baba illustrating how his apparently random actions or sudden changes in plans turn out to be a part of some inner purpose. Typical of these accounts is an incident that occurred in Hamirpur during Baba's first visit to that remote district in India. After Baba agreed to visit Hamirpur, the people prepared for his coming by building roads and bridges so that his car could reach the rural villages. While walking through one such village along the route carefully prepared for him by his hosts, Baba suddenly halted and asked to be taken another way. At first his hosts objected, pointing out the many preparations along the planned route. Baba insisted, however, and began to lead the crowd to a remote area of the village. There he found and embraced an old couple who had faithfully readied their hut for days in order to make it worthy to receive the Avatar. Although mocked by their neighbors and told that Baba would come nowhere near their hut, they had steadfastly maintained that he would find them. Overjoyed, they had Baba as a guest in their simple hut that had been so lovingly prepared for him.

Agents and Masts

Meher Baba was aided in his universal work by those he called his "agents," advanced souls with a history of past connections with the Avatar. We know little about these agents as Baba rarely indicated who they were and said little about the exact nature of their role in his work of awakening. According

to Baba, these agents, although unknown and hidden, carry out the directives of the Avatar. When asked how they knew that they were working for him, Baba replied:

*Only those who are on the 4th, 5th, 6th and 7th planes, and who are conscious of me, know under and for whom they are working physically, and this knowledge they have through the medium of their subtle and mental bodies... For example, while I am sitting here, my agents are working in India, Persia, Africa and so on. This very moment, they see my subtle body, all at the same time, in the different planes...*¹⁰

On rare occasions, the mandali glimpsed a direct contact between Baba and one of his agents:

One day, when in Zurich ...Baba said suddenly that he must reach Marseilles before midnight the following day, since he had a spiritual appointment there. As soon as the party arrived in Marseilles Baba asked to be taken to the city park, and, when he came to a particular part of it, he began walking to and fro on a gravel path with Norina and Elizabeth on either side of him. Norina and Elizabeth [two of the women mandali] both noticed that, on the other side of a small lawn, there was a young man sitting on a park seat. Baba eventually took a loop round the lawn and walked straight past the young man who, as Baba passed, stood up and bowed his head in a reverential way to Baba. Baba then walked off, explaining that the man was one of his agents.¹¹

As we discussed in the last chapter, masts also play a key role in the universal work of the Avatar. Living in filthy surroundings, and behaving in unpredictable and seemingly insane ways, the masts were, in Baba's eyes, pure and indispensable channels for his universal work. One of the mandali described the usefulness of the masts this way:

The lila of God (Divinity in full play) is primarily concerned with the spread of His purity and love for the benefit of the world as a whole. For the expression and manifestation of His infinite power, bliss, knowledge, light, and love, God

needs the purest mental channels. And the purest minds are those of the masts, who, having drowned themselves in their love for God, have gone beyond lust, anger, greed, avarice, and all other weaknesses that invariably stick round the mind of every man, in greater or lesser amounts, and in one shape or another, until man is awakened to his true nature and to his real life.¹²

Baba's work with a particular mast, therefore, went far beyond aiding the mast's spiritual growth; masts assisted Baba with his work of awakening:

*Because of his being stationed on the inner planes, which are free from the limitations and handicaps of the gross world, a mast can be, and often is, in contact with a far greater number of souls than is possible for an ordinary person. Mast mind is a nucleus of conscious formations, with innumerable and far-reaching links. A mast can therefore be a more effective agent for spiritual work than the most able persons of the gross world. The mast mind is also often used directly by the Master as a medium for sending his spiritual help to different parts of the world.*¹³

Meher Baba spent many hours alone with the masts, allowing no one to disturb this work. In the ashram, he often washed and shaved them, going to great lengths to see that each mast was cared for meticulously. It was noted that Baba was especially happy when with the masts, some of whom he called "the gems on my crown." The masts, too, loved him very much, sometimes responding only to him.

We have only hints about the inner dynamics of Baba's work with the masts. One indication of how they helped him in his work is an incident involving Chatti Baba, a mast who lived at Meherabad with Baba in the 1940s. Although he did not read and appeared outwardly to be oblivious of world events, Chatti Baba began one day to tell the mandali caring for him that the people of Europe were suffering greatly. One of the mandali relates what happened next:

On the night of 9th June, 1940, Chatti Baba became suddenly violent, noisy, and abusive, and emerged in a state of disorder and frenzy from his little room. He went directly to Baba's room and declared that his house had been utterly destroyed, and that he had come for shelter to Baba. If that remark were literal it made no sense at all, since his little room was as it always had been, small and bare, but neat and whole, a place where he was usually happy to sit alone for hours. Baba at once gave orders for the two to be left alone together, and Chatti Baba for some hours was heard chattering and expostulating with Baba. Eventually he became quiet and spent the rest of the night alone with Baba.¹⁴

The next day Baba, in a rare comment on the significance of mast behavior, told the mandali that Chatti Baba had a spiritual connection with France and had felt very deeply the fate of the French people. It was, of course, during that period that the German armies overran France, entering Paris on June 13.

Seclusion Work

Throughout his life, Meher Baba alternated periods of intense activity with times of deep seclusion. These seclusions would vary in length from a matter of days to months, and even years at the end of his life. As with silence and fasting, Baba did not go into seclusion as a personal exercise or discipline. He explained that his seclusions were a necessary part of the universal work of awakening:

*I am really the only one who is not in seclusion. It is the rest of humanity that is in seclusion; I have come to enable it [humanity] to emerge into Eternal Freedom.*¹⁵

Baba's seclusions usually took place in a small space and were often accompanied by a fast. The atmosphere around the

seclusion area was invariably highly charged. At times, for reasons known only to Baba, a mast was needed for seclusion work. Another incident involving Chatti Baba reveals something of the intensity of Baba's times in seclusion:

Baba has never, as far as I know, explained why, when he sits with a mast, he insists upon the rigid exclusion of anyone else. It is, however, possible, from an experience related by Eruch during this period of Chatti Baba's stay at Bangalore, that there is a tangible, physical danger in interrupting him at such a time...

The two were closeted in silence in Baba's room for about two hours, and at the end of that period, Eruch, hearing Baba's movements to open the door, got up and released the clasp from the outside. Chatti Baba then emerged, and brushed past him on his way to his own room. As he went past, Eruch tells how he felt a palpable and excruciating shock pass through his body, similar, he says, to an electric shock.¹⁶

Every seclusion was planned with care as to timing, location and scope. The mandali had to be on constant guard to prevent intrusion and to maintain silence near the seclusion site. During some of his seclusions, Baba asked his lovers to share in the work by spending a period of time in silence, prayer, meditation or fasting.

The exact nature of seclusion work, like the universal work itself, cannot be known beyond Baba's own indication that he worked during these periods on all levels of consciousness. He suggested that the results of his seclusions would unfold in the future. In 1932, for example, Baba made one of his few comments about the nature of a seclusion. After spending twenty-four hours in a cave associated with St. Francis of Assisi in Italy, Baba stated:

*A meeting was held... when all the Saints and Masters from the sixth and seventh planes of consciousness saw me and we mapped out the spiritual destiny of the world for the next two thousand years.*¹⁷

During some of his seclusions Baba continued to direct other aspects of his work, sometimes "speaking" through a small window in his room. As previously noted, seclusions were frequently accompanied by prolonged fasts:

At the time of his Meher Ashram activities in 1927-28, Baba lived on a little milk and a few cups of milkless weak tea for 5 1/2 months. In the midst of this prolonged fast, Baba remained for 69 days in the crypt-like double room, built one upon the other on the Meherabad Hill which now is known as his future tomb. He used to retire in the six feet deep, four feet wide and six feet long underground crypt during the nights and supervised the Meher Ashram activities throughout the day time from a window of the room built above and all round the crypt. During the seclusion of 69 days, he also lived on plain water for 28 days.¹⁸

Momentous changes in Baba's life were often marked by a seclusion period. The New Life, for example, was preceded by a forty-day seclusion in 1949 and during his last years in the late 1960s, Baba entered a prolonged seclusion declaring that he had to finish his universal work. This final seclusion took a great toll on his health:

*The strain of that 18 months' Work in seclusion was tremendous. I used to sit alone in my room for some hours each day while complete silence was imposed on the mandali and no one of them was permitted to enter the room, during those hours every day. The strain was not in the work itself although I was working on all planes of consciousness, but in keeping my link with the gross plane. To keep this link I had to continuously hammer my right thigh with my fist.*¹⁹

At the end of these days in seclusion, the mandali would find Baba drained and wet with perspiration. When he ended this seclusion, he announced that his work was complete. Soon thereafter he left his physical body.

The true scope and significance of the universal work Meher Baba accomplished in seclusion is known only to him.

Baba himself was unconcerned with explanations of his seclusion, focusing only on completing the work he had come to do. About the inner work of the Avatar, little more may be said:

*To those who wish to know about my activities I can only say that as far as my inner life and internal activities are concerned, only God and those who are one with God can know and understand... From the beginningless beginning to the present day I Am What I Am, irrespective of praise or universal opposition, and will remain so to the endless end.*²⁰

Universal Suffering

The necessity for God, the Infinite Reality, to suffer the limitations of finite existence is an important theme of Meher Baba's life and work. Chapter one explored how God, the real Self in all living things, must first experience separative existence in the world of maya before attaining God-realization. Thus it is that the individualized soul must journey through evolution, reincarnation and involution in order to realize its true nature as God.

There is also, as we have seen, the personal aspect of God that is eternally conscious of the universe and directs its affairs. Periodically, when suffering in the world reaches its height, God comes as the Avatar, voluntarily suffering the limitations of human life in order to awaken Himself in every finite self. The advent of God as a human being is always a direct and powerful expression of divine love in action.

"The Avatar," Baba said, "suffers for one and all beings and things." He comes not to alter the karma or destiny of the world, but rather to take on the burden of suffering that results from the world's karma. By so doing, the Avatar draws humanity back from the brink of destruction and enables the world to enter a new age. The Avatar's suffering results in a tremendous release of divine love and gives consciousness a dramatic push forward.

On a very personal level, by taking our suffering on Himself, God as the Avatar is truly "God with us," aiding us in our hour of greatest need. The example of the God-man sharing the pain and joy of human existence serves to awaken humanity once again to the reality of the divine Beloved who, Baba has said, is "nearer to us than our own breath."

Meher Baba's life as the Avatar is replete with examples of his suffering, outwardly manifested in illness and the two automobile accidents discussed in chapter two. According to Baba, this suffering was a visible sign of the burden of his universal work of transforming consciousness.

Baba allowed doctors to attend him, but he repeatedly reminded them that there was little they could do as his suffering was an essential part of his work. The doctors around him often expressed frustration in trying to treat him and alleviate his pain. Symptoms would appear and disappear inexplicably, baffling even the specialists called in by the mandali. Not long before Baba's passing, when tests revealed serious medical problems, Baba's sister and close disciple, Mani Irani, wrote to the West:

Baba says that the pressure of His universal burden reflects upon His body; and as the strain of His work in Seclusion was severe, the effect on His body is consequently severe—but though the effect is human the cause is divine, and it is therefore in His hands. We get fleeting glimpses of this, at moments when unaccountably He looks more well and glowing than one in the pink of health. Indeed, in the light of recent tests made, the doctors are much puzzled and amazed by certain favorable factors that are contrary to all rules of medical science! ²¹

Though the mandali accepted Baba's suffering as a necessary part of his work, they nevertheless found it difficult to witness the constant pain that marked the last two decades of his life:

Baba tells us that He is both God and Man. Seeing Him undergo sickness and accidents and suffering, are stark

reminders that He is Man, that He has said: "I have taken on the form of Man to take on the suffering of man." And when, tending to His body to the utmost of our ability, we feel over-anxious or worried, He reminds us: "Don't forget I am God. I know all. Simply do as I say." We bow to His Will.²²

Meher Baba made it clear that his suffering was necessary for the completion of his universal work—the speaking of the Word within every heart. A day before he dropped his body, he said, "All this, all that I have been through all along, has been a preparation for the Word—for just the One Word!" And with a quizzical smile He added, "Just imagine!"²³

To awaken the world, therefore, requires of the Avatar great suffering. This is the very definition of "Meher Baba"—the One who through compassion suffers with and for all living things.

The New Humanity

What is the nature and scope of the "transformation of consciousness" hinted at in the universal work of Meher Baba, the Awakener? What may the world expect from the many years of service and suffering, from the wanderings of the New Life, from the hidden drama of seclusion work? Meher Baba promised nothing less than a new era marked by unprecedented spiritual change:

*As in all great critical periods of human history, humanity is now going through the agonizing travail of spiritual rebirth. Great forces of destruction are afoot and seem to be dominant at the moment, but constructive and creative forces that will redeem humanity are also being released through several channels. Although the working of these forces of light is chiefly silent, they are eventually bound to bring about those transformations that will make the further spiritual advance of humanity safe and steady. It is all a part of the divine plan, which is to give to the hungry and weary world a fresh dispensation of the eternal and only Truth.*²⁴

We are, according to Baba, at the end of one age and on the threshold of a new way of life called by Baba "the New Humanity." The present age is an age characterized by accentuation of separative existence, but this age of "manyness" is drawing to a close:

*In the illusory beginning of Time, there was no such state of mess in illusion as there is today. When the evolution of consciousness began, there was oneness, in spite of the diversity in illusion. With the growth of consciousness, manyness also went on increasing, until now it is about to overlap the limit. Like the wave that reaches its crest, this height of manyness will dissolve itself and bring about the beginning of oneness in illusion. Suffering at its height will cause the destruction of this climax of manyness in illusion.*²⁵

*The large mass of humanity is caught up in the clutches of separative and assertive tendencies. For one who is overpowered by the spectacle of these fetters of humanity, there is bound to be nothing but unrelieved despair about its future. One must look deeper into the realities of the day if one is to get a correct perspective on the present distress of humanity. The real possibilities of the New Humanity are hidden to those who look only at the surface of the world situation, but they exist and only need the spark of spiritual understanding to come into full play and effect. The forces of lust, hate, and greed produce incalculable suffering and chaos. However, the one redeeming feature about human nature is that even in the midst of disruptive forces there invariably exists some form of love.*²⁶

In these and other messages, Meher Baba stressed that the destruction of the consciousness of separative existence and the emergence of the New Humanity will only be brought about through a release of divine love. And this love will inaugurate a new era characterized by an experience of oneness. By "oneness" Baba did not mean a concept or principle of faith, but rather a living spiritual reality brought about by divine action:

*To affirm religious faiths, to establish societies, or to hold conferences will never bring about the feeling of unity and oneness in the life of mankind, now completely absorbed in the manyness of illusion. Unity in the midst of diversity can be made to be felt only by touching the very core of the heart. That is the work for which I have come.*²⁷

Baba's vision of a New Humanity is of a world awakened to the oneness of life. Such an awareness will bring about profound changes in human societies. *"In the light of the truth of the unity of all life," Baba said, "cooperative and harmonious action becomes natural and inevitable."*²⁸ Self-interest will give way to self-giving love in economic and political relationships. And science will work cooperatively with religion:

*The New Humanity that emerges from the travail of the present struggle and suffering will not ignore science or its practical attainments. It is a mistake to look upon science as anti-spiritual. Science is a help or hindrance to spirituality according to the use to which it is put. Just as true art expresses spirituality, science, when properly handled, can be the expression and fulfillment of the spirit. Scientific truths concerning the physical body and its life in the gross world can become mediums for the soul to know itself; but to serve this purpose they must be properly fitted into larger spiritual understanding. This includes a steady perception of true and lasting values. In the absence of such spiritual understanding, scientific truths and attainments are liable to be used for mutual destruction and for a life that will tend to strengthen the chains that bind the spirit. All-sided progress of humanity can be assured only if science and religion proceed hand in hand.*²⁹

This age of oneness will be the culmination of Meher Baba's universal work. Once when asked what his awakening would do to the world, Baba gestured to signify that he was holding the world in his hand. Slowly he turned the "globe" one hundred and eighty degrees. "Upside-down, Baba?" someone asked. "No", Baba gestured, pointing up, "rightside-up!"

While Baba envisioned the New Humanity as a dramatic advance in consciousness, he did not see it as a permanent condition of life on earth. Each new era, no matter how spiritually uplifting the changes it brings, is finally only another cycle in the world of maya. And each new age is inevitably accompanied by a new set of challenges for human consciousness to overcome.

The new age of oneness may bring an era of peace and unity to the world, but all such collective changes in consciousness are cyclical in nature and therefore temporary. The only lasting change, according to Baba, is the realization of God by the individual soul. All else that happens in the world of time and space has no lasting value except as a part of God's divine drama of Self-discovery:

*For man to have a glimpse of lasting happiness he has first to realize that God, being in all, knows all; that God alone acts and reacts through all; that God, in the guise of countless animate and inanimate entities, experiences the innumerable varied phenomena of suffering and happiness, and that God Himself undergoes all these illusory happenings. Thus, it is God who has brought suffering in human experience to its height, and God alone who will efface this illusory suffering and bring the illusory happiness to its height.*³⁰

Ages may come and go as humanity experiences an endless variety of conditions, but ultimately, the real and lasting impact of the Avatar's universal work is always best reflected in the change he awakens within individual hearts:

It is my God-ordained work to awaken humanity to the inviolable unity and inalienable divinity of all life. Know that you are in essence eternal, and heirs to infinite knowledge, bliss and power. In order to enjoy your unlimited state, all that is necessary is to shed your ignorance which makes you feel that you are separate from the rest of life. The separative ego or "I" can disappear only through divine love, which will be my gift to mankind.

Let those who harken to my call prepare themselves to render real service to mankind. Let them make it conscious

of its oneness, irrespective of the apparent divisions of class, sect or creed. I do not attach importance to beliefs or dogmas. It is not what you believe but what you are that will ultimately count.

The Truth which I want you to share with me is not a matter of opinion or belief but of direct experience which knows no contradiction, and which will make you realize that nothing in this world is worth being greedy about, and that there need not be any hatred, jealousy or fear. Then, and only then, will man launch himself upon the safe voyage of unending creativity and unfading happiness which knows no decay or fear; he will have transcended the duality of "I" and "you," "mine" and "thine³¹."



Ahmednagar, September 26, 1954

Chapter 4

The Awakening of the Heart

The Avatar's universal work is most clearly and personally seen in the love he awakens in those who encounter him. Love alone reveals him as the divine Beloved, the true Self, who dwells within every individual. That is why Meher Baba declared himself to be the One who can only be discovered by the heart:

I am the one so many seek and so few find. No amount of intellect can fathom me. No amount of austerity can attain me. Only when one loves me and loses one's self in me, I am found.¹

When he awakens the heart the Avatar discloses himself as The Beloved who inwardly guides and sustains the lover of God. The lover then enters the path of love to begin a deep and abiding relationship with the divine Beloved.

The Path of Love

Our exploration of the Avatar's awakening of the heart begins with Meher Baba's description of the universe as a divine love story:

We thus have God as infinite love, first limiting Himself in the forms of creation and then recovering His infinity

*through the different stages of creation. ALL the stages of God's experience of being a finite lover ultimately culminate in His experiencing Himself as the sole Beloved.*²

The turning point in this cosmic love drama occurs when the individual soul is prepared, after many lifetimes, to begin the spiritual path. The final stage of the journey "home" is most direct and beautiful when illumined by love:

*Love comprehends the different advantages belonging to the other paths leading to emancipation and is the most effective Path. It is characterized by self-sacrifice and happiness. Its uniqueness lies in the fact that in whole-hearted offering to the Beloved there is no diversion of psychic energy, and concentration is complete. In love the physical, vital and mental energies are made available for the cause of the Beloved and become dynamic power.*³

The first thing to note about Meher Baba's path of love is that it is, in one sense, a path of no path at all! The lover, absorbed in the beauty and wonder of the Beloved, gives no thought to the various stages of the spiritual path. The planes of consciousness and the experiences that accompany being stationed on these planes become irrelevant to the pilgrim focused on the love of the Beloved. One of Baba's close companions illustrates this state of mind using an image he gathered from Baba:

We are here now at Meherazad where Meher Baba lived. So this is His seat and many have been permitted to come here on a visit. And because of the opportunity which had been given them, these lovers of Meher Baba were anxious with thoughts about when they would see Him, or be embraced by Him and similar thoughts about Him to the exclusion of all other thoughts.

Now, there is a long approach road from the bus stop to Meherazad and along that road there are many sights. There are a great variety of trees, many huts, many shepherds and cowherds and other similar sights to behold. But

in their eagerness to be in His arms, did these lovers take notice of any of these sights? If you had asked them, "Did you notice that particular cherry tree alongside the road?" they would have said, "No. Is that so, is there a cherry tree? I haven't seen it!"

"You were passing right alongside of it, how could you have missed it?"

And the reply would have been, "We were not even aware we were walking on the road, much less paying attention to a cherry tree on the side. All our attention was fixed on the destination to which we were headed." In other words, the path was following them.⁴

Only in retrospect, then, does the lover of God notice the "spiritual path." Having finally arrived at the threshold of the Beloved, the lover recognizes that there was indeed a path that led to the goal of all longing.

The longing of the heart that inspires the individual to traverse the "path of no path" is a gift of love from the Beloved. This gift is bestowed upon the aspirant who is ready, after eons of separation, to begin the final journey toward union:

*Beloved and Lover implies separation. And separation creates longing; and longing causes search. And the wider and the more intense the search the greater the separation and the more terrible the longing.*⁵

Referring to a well-known Persian love story, Baba once suggested how longing drives the lover to complete remembrance of the Beloved:

*Majnu loved Leila. This was pure Love, not physical, not intellectual, but spiritual Love. He saw Leila in everything and everywhere. He never thought of eating, drinking, sleeping, without thinking of her, and all the time he wanted her happiness. He would have gladly seen her married to another if he knew that would make her happy, and die for her husband if he thought she would be happy in that. At last it led him to me—no thought of self, but of the beloved, every second and continually.*⁶

Such intense longing for the Beloved leads to intimate companionship. The lover is led into such companionship by the loving care of the Beloved. At first, like a parent with a child, the Beloved gives the lover special attention, coaxing the lover to come ever-closer in the Beloved's embrace. Special treatment, however, eventually gives way to true companionship.

Typical of this transformation was the experience of one of Baba's early Western disciples who lived with Baba for many years. When he first arrived, he received extra attention and comforts not given to the other resident mandali. After a short period, he recorded the following in his diary:

I get the impression that he [Baba] no longer takes the trouble to be extra nice to me, to flatter me, but treats me much more like the other mandali, which is really a big compliment; for to work for Baba and not to be praised or thanked is the best.⁷

The companions become, in the deepest sense, the hands and feet of the Beloved. Their wholehearted love and obedience shapes them into true instruments for his work in the world. Such companionship is the beginning of the end of the divine love story. After finally entering the close circle of the Beloved, the companion-lover lives only for the sake of love. At this stage the false self is continually, in Baba's words, "dying by loving." Union with the Beloved is now inevitable; only the timing is left to be discovered.

The most essential mark of a companion of the Beloved is the capacity to love for the sake of love alone. Such love, attained only after much training in the ways of love, is the ultimate ideal of all genuine spirituality. In the early days of their lives with Meher Baba, some of the men and women around him had thoughts of their spiritual status and their nearness to God-realization. For a time Baba humored this preoccupation, but gradually he weaned them from it through the lessons of daily life in his presence:

In India, bit by bit the ego gave in; selfconsciousness, inferiority, obstinacy, likes and dislikes, all went in our effort to please and obey Baba...

Baba's ways of eliminating the ego were both skillful and subtle, but they did rapidly cut down both prejudice and pride. To quote Baba, "The spiritual benefit accruing to an aspirant on the path approaching a Spiritual Master is in direct proportion to the weakening or elimination of the ego." And so Baba might frequently ask you to do just those things which your nature revolted against, but never gave you the reason why. At first, we were rarely given occupations which we had done before joining the ashram but rather chores that we would have avoided doing in the outside world, or which we disliked intensely. Said one who set to work in the kitchen, "I did not come to peel potatoes—I can do this at home. I came to be with Baba!" Did we think we had come to sit with Baba all day, to meditate, discuss spiritual subjects, read philosophical books, escape the problems and monotony of daily life? If such was our vision, Baba through His own example showed us that this was not His way of life. "All work is My work," He said. Baba was so intensely practical and I feel it was a help to Baba if those around Him were practical too.

For the most part, life for all in the Meherabad ashram was on the practical side, but there were times, usually corresponding to periods of Baba's special work, when He gave us periods of combined fasting, silence and meditation... As the motive for these spiritual exercises, Baba placed emphasis always on worship or on helping Him in His universal work, never on any spiritual benefit that might accrue to us individually. There was to be no attachment to the results, at least not consciously. Rarely did Baba discuss one's own spiritual progress except in group sessions when ethical behavior in terms of forbearance, love and self-control came up.⁸

Final union with the Beloved is only possible when all desires, including the desire for God-realization, are transcended. *"Even the craving for union with the Beloved creates*

bindings," Baba explained. *"Therefore do not bother about separation or union; just love and love all the more."*⁹ Love alone liberates the soul from all desire.

Thus Meher Baba as the Beloved might be called the great "taker." He repeatedly stressed that to prepare the ground for true love, the Beloved must take away all ego attachments:

*Know you all that if I am the Highest of the High, my role demands that I strip you of all your possessions and wants, consume all your desires and make you desireless rather than satisfy your desires. Sadhus, saints, yogis and walis can give you what you want; but I take away your wants and free you from attachments and liberate you from the bondage of ignorance. I am the One to take, not the One to give what you want or as you want.*¹⁰

The Beloved takes everything that is false in order to give the only real gift, the gift of divine love.

The true lover-companion is the one who loves only for the sake of love. Such is the absorption of this state that the lover anticipates the needs of the Beloved. This love eventually reaches so great a height that the Beloved falls in love with the lover—the lover becomes the beloved of the Beloved!

Meher Baba indicated that the companion of the Avatar who most clearly exemplifies this height of love is his closest woman disciple. In this advent, she is Mehera: as Sita was to Rama, Radha to Krishna, Mary to Jesus, so Mehera is to Meher Baba. This closest of companions symbolizes the highest and purest expression of love between the lover and the Beloved. She is shaped by the Avatar to be the lover who comes closest to loving him as he should be loved.

From the time in the 1920s when Mehera Irani and her mother came to live in Meher Baba's ashram, it was apparent that Baba had chosen her to play a unique role in his circle of disciples. As a counterpart to Baba, the perfect Beloved, Mehera was trained and shaped to be the perfect lover of God, thereby giving the world a fresh example of the divine love

story that animates the universe. Mehera's absolute purity, constant remembrance of the Beloved and wholehearted efforts to please him, reflect her role as the beloved of the Beloved, and inspire all who seek to become true lovers of the Avatar.

Though at the height of love the lover longs only to please the Beloved and gives no thought to God-realization, the time inevitably comes when love culminates in union. The lover may even resist the prospect of union, wishing only to remain with the Beloved as companion and servant. But like a ripened fruit that must eventually drop from the tree, the lover becomes so ripened by love that union follows. *"All the stages of God's experience of being a finite lover ultimately culminate in His experiencing Himself as the sole Beloved."*¹¹

Knowledge of the Heart

How is the heart of the spiritual aspirant awakened to the discovery of the true Beloved? Meher Baba indicated that when the moment is right the Beloved will find the lover. When that happens, an encounter with the divine Beloved will evoke feelings of familiarity and a sense of inner recognition. The following description, given in the 1930s, typifies accounts of first meetings with Meher Baba:

I was so engrossed at looking at this wonderful man for the first time that everything else faded away. What impressed me most was the rather wild quality, as of something untamed, and his truly remarkable eyes. He smiled, and motioned me to sit beside him. He took my hand and from time to time patted my shoulder. We sat for several minutes in silence and I was aware of a great feeling of love and peace emanating from him; also a curious feeling of recognition came to me, as if I had found a long lost friend.¹²

These profound experiences of "recognition" have continued to be reported even by those who have come to love Meher

Baba since he left his physical body. Baba himself explained that such recognition was rooted in many lifetimes of connection with him and constitutes a knowledge of the heart that is present under layers of impressions:

As a rule an introduction is required between people who do not know one another. Such introduction is not felt to be necessary when there is a give and take of love between persons, for hearts need no introduction. An amity can be felt between strangers, a feeling of having known one another before. This feeling is because of their connections in previous lives.

*No one requires an introduction to me, for no one is a stranger to me. However, I am a stranger to most, and those coming and remaining in my presence do not do so without introduction. As a matter of fact, they have come with many introductions—for many times in previous lives have they been introduced to me and have gone away and forgotten me and met me again. All these introductions are their introduction to me this time.*¹³

Intuitive knowledge of the Avatar is always rooted in a deep experience of his love. While the Avatar's message and life may be expressed and embodied in various guises each time he comes, the quality and nature of his love is readily apparent to the waiting heart.

Thus, when the moment is right, the Avatar as the Beloved awakens the lover to the inner knowledge of the Beloved's identity. In this way, as the following story indicates, it may be said that it is always love that draws the lover to the Beloved and love alone that keeps the lover with the Beloved.

A woman who first met Baba on one of his visits to the West found him to be loving and friendly, but she did not initially experience him as the divine Beloved. A few days following her first meeting with him, she awoke in the middle of the night thinking that her name had been called. Once

awake she noticed a beautiful fragrance of jasmine in her room. Then she slept, falling into a very deep sleep. At dawn she awoke and began to weep tears of great joy, although she was not sure why she was weeping. She went directly to where Baba was staying. Soon he entered the large room where she and hundreds of others were awaiting his arrival. He was carried in a lift chair due to the injuries suffered in the second automobile accident. The woman relates what happened next in these words:

Upon entering, he had the chair stopped by my seat. There was no interpreter with him. He simply gestured, "Did you sleep well, Jane?" Of course I had slept like a baby, but wakened at dawn weeping, but with joy. Then Baba went on. At the close of the program, after many discourses, I heard only this, Adi, one of Baba's mandali, speaking for Baba: "Only in deep soundless sleep does the soul return to God. And so it will be when you reach the end of the journey; only then you will be aware. You will see me. You will know me as the true Beloved." Upon leaving the room, again he had the chair stopped by my seat. He made the same gesture, leaning down, looking directly into my eyes: "Did you sleep well, Jane? Now do you understand?" I cried out silently, from my heart: "But it's you!" And Baba responded, in the inner voice, very clearly: "Yes, Jane, it is I." He had shown me the young Christ, very beautiful, the One I had always tried to pray to. He was utterly familiar, especially his beautiful eyes. I had a glimpse of his divinity that made everything disappear. There was only his beautiful face. The deep impact was there, the recognition. And it is as clear today, clearer, than then.¹⁴

Once he is recognized by the heart, the Beloved inspires within the lover an intense longing to love and obey the Beloved:

The love the aspirant has for the Master is the response evoked by the love of the Master. Love for the Master becomes a central element in the life of the aspirant; because

*he knows the Master to be an embodiment of the infinite God, all his thoughts and aspirations are centered upon the Master. All other streams of love join this great river of love and disappear in it.*¹⁵

The Beloved confirms and deepens the inner recognition of divine love by revealing to the lover that everything in the lover's heart is known to the Beloved. This knowledge is not to be mistaken for a collection of facts about the lover, but is rather the full knowledge of the heart that can only be known by the One who is one with our true Self.

Meher Baba went to great lengths to assure his lovers that he knows their every heartbeat. He became the companion, removing the distance between lover and Beloved. Through games, music and humor, as well as through the challenges of difficult work, he offered those around him the intimacy of a deep love relationship.

Baba instilled in his lovers the conviction that he is always within them, guiding them constantly and responding to the cries of their hearts. The following story is one of countless events in Baba's life that reveal the great lengths he would go to awaken his presence in the lover's heart:

At one town, Masulipatnam, Baba gave his darshan [personal blessing] to thousands of people from morning until late in the evening. Later, Baba proceeded in the car to the house of one of his close followers, but instead of going inside he entered a lane inhabited by poor hutment dwellers. Baba began turning down one lane and then the next, as if he knew the way to some predetermined destination. The men mandali followed of course, and behind them were many of the townspeople.

Baba walked on, not indicating where he was headed, until finally he came to a poor hut near the seashore. There was only a single kerosene lamp inside, so it was very dark, but all could see the outline of an old man standing in the doorway. Baba indicated that he wanted to go inside, and requested the old man to come and sit near him for five

minutes alone. Baba was absolutely quiet when he sat down, yet his fingers were moving rapidly. After remaining there for five minutes, absorbed in his work, he left.

The mandali found out later that the old man belonged to the lowest caste; he was a Harijan or Untouchable. Since the caste system was strictly enforced in Andhra at that time, the old man had not gone to Baba's public darshan program because there were higher caste Hindus in attendance. Before Baba had arrived at his hut, the man had been thinking sadly, "How unfortunate I am! God has come, and he is giving darshan. Most of the people are there, but I can't even have a glimpse of him! Oh, if I could but see him!"

God not only heard this poor Untouchable's prayer, he also answered it and came to his very own house! The man was so elated when Baba requested he sit near him inside that he could not utter a single word. He was dumfounded with no words to express his gratitude for his good fortune in having Baba there.¹⁶

Time and again, Meher Baba's actions drive home the point that the Beloved anticipates every need of the lover's heart. How this was so was not always immediately apparent to those around Baba. As the next story illustrates, what appeared to be unpredictable or confusing behavior would sometimes take on meaning only after the passage of many years:

One morning, while one of the mandali was reading a letter to Baba from a Bombay lover, Baba interrupted and asked if the letter was from a particular lover. "No," the disciple replied, "this letter is from another fellow. Baba, you are thinking of someone else." More of the letter was read, and again Baba stopped him asking if he was sure that it wasn't from a particular fellow Baba had in mind. "No, Baba," the disciple said more emphatically this time, "the man you are thinking of is temporarily stationed in a place far away. This letter is from someone else entirely." After this happened yet a third time, the disciple thought with some irritation: "If he is the Avatar, how can he not remember that particular person? How can there be this mix-up?"

After finishing the letter, the disciple had a sudden thought. "Baba," he said, "now that you have mentioned that fellow who has been stationed far away, it comes to me that very soon is his birthday." Baba looked surprised and pleased. "*Cable him,*" Baba said, "*send him my love and blessings and tell him that I am thinking of him.*" The disciple sent the cable, and then forgot the incident and the confusion he had felt.

Years later, after Baba dropped the body, the rest of the story came out. One day the lover who had been stationed far away came to Meherazad to see the mandali. Prodded to relate what he had been doing, the man explained how he had been transferred to a remote area. He was there for a couple of years far from towns and cities. Without his family, he became very lonely. "If you must know," he said, "I fell into deep despair. I felt as though no one remembered me. One year, on my birthday, I was feeling particularly depressed. I even began to doubt that Baba loved me or remembered me. I felt suicidal. As I was thinking these thoughts, the doorbell rang and there was the postman with a cable. He waited because in that remote area if it is good news they hope for a tip, and if it is bad news they commiserate and leave. But the postman was confused because I was joyous and crying at the same time! It was a cable from my Beloved reminding me that he was thinking of me and that he loved me."

The disciple concludes the story by saying that those near Baba came to realize that the Beloved appears to be "not knowing," but know well that he knows everything. The Beloved is always alert to the hearts of his lovers.¹⁷

Love, Obedience and Surrender

Once awakened in the heart, the gift of love inspires the lover to grow ever-closer to the divine Beloved. As love deepens, it is transformed first into obedience and then, finally, into complete surrender:

*Love is a gift from God to man.
Obedience is a gift from Master to man.
Surrender is a gift from man to Master.*

*One who loves desires the will of the Beloved.
One who obeys does the will of the Beloved.
One who surrenders knows nothing but the will of the Beloved.*

*Love seeks union with the Beloved.
Obedience seeks the pleasure of the Beloved.
Surrender seeks nothing.*

*One who loves is the lover of the Beloved.
One who obeys is the beloved of the Beloved.
One who surrenders has no existence other than the Beloved.*

*Greater than love is obedience.
Greater than obedience is surrender.
All three arise out of, and remain contained in, the ocean of divine Love.¹⁸*

The inner journey of the lover from love to surrender is marked by an ever-greater capacity to obey the Beloved, who is the true Self of the lover. As the Avatar, Meher Baba acts both as the inner guide and the ultimate goal of this love-journey. It is the love of the Avatar in his role as divine Beloved that awakens the aspirant to the dynamic of the spiritual life.

Throughout his life, Meher Baba constantly trained his lovers in the ways of obedience. Everything that happens, he said, is the will of God. Thus it is the work of the Master to help the aspirant become more and more in tune with God's will through obedience:

The beginning of real love is obedience, and the highest aspect of this love, which surpasses that of love itself, is that which culminates in perfect obedience to and supreme resignation to the Will and the Wish of the Beloved. In this love are embodied all the yogas known to saints and seekers.¹⁹

Obedience gradually opens the lover to the realization that the desires of the ego are totally empty and the life of the ego is ultimately false: God alone is real, and all else is illusion. As this awareness deepens, the lover begins to let go of what is unreal and hold on ever more tightly to the reality of the Beloved who is the true Self. This "letting go" through love is what Baba termed surrender.

In the early days of his work, as we have seen, Baba offered outward guidance for every aspect of his lovers' daily lives. Through the orders he gave and the difficult circumstances that arose in trying to carry out those orders, Baba shaped the mandali in obedience, and inspired them to surrender all to the will of God. The following example, taken from the days of Baba's first ashram in the 1920s, summarizes the challenges of eliminating the ego through true obedience:

Occasionally the members of the Ashram were ordered to fast for a day or two. But this did not exempt them from work. On the contrary, their work was increased. At other times they were ordered by Baba to find hundreds of blind and lame beggars and bring them to Manzil-E-Meem [Baba's ashram] for the purpose of feeding and clothing them. Since beggars are plentiful all over India, this seemed an easy order to fulfill. But Baba did not want the able-bodied ones—only those who were disabled. This made their task more difficult. It was often further complicated by the fact that the disciples—who were restricted to eight pie (five cents) a day—would find themselves at the other end of the city without the necessary money for transportation home. To persuade the mendicants to follow them to a strange house—where, they assured them, they would be bountifully fed and newly clothed—and at the same time to borrow money from them for carfare, was another of those experiences which tested both their ingenuity and fortitude! ²⁰

Meher Baba's training of his lovers in obedience and surrender took a different, more inward, direction during the last two decades of his physical life. Beginning with the New Life

in 1949, Baba began to give fewer external orders to his lovers. His seclusions lengthened, and by the 1960s many restrictions had been placed on the outward contact his lovers could have with him.

Naturally, many wondered how Baba would continue to train and guide his lovers without external contact. When asked about this he replied that all of his "external" work was to establish internal links with his lovers and with all living things. Once the internal link is established, there is no longer any need for external ties. He indicated that from seclusion he was completing the real work of inner awakening:

My (real) work is different. It is not my work to travel continuously and hold darshan programs simply to allow people to bow down at my feet. It is not my work to give discourses, to perform miracles, or to attract crowds to me. I do not come for this. I come for all. I come to awaken all... You have no idea what I am really doing. The more you stretch a bow, the greater the distance the arrow will fly and the harder it will hit the target. I am in seclusion now, yes, but I am drawing back my bow farther and farther so that when I release the arrow of my love, it will strike deep and wound the hearts of all.²¹

In the last years of his physical life, Meher Baba repeatedly indicated that he would henceforth guide his lovers from within. He stressed that the real "Baba" would be awakened within all who approached him with love, whether or not they had seen him physically. When, on one occasion, a disciple mentioned how great his lovers were and how they longed to be with him, Baba replied:

Yes, you are right... My lovers are really great. But what do you mean by this? You have been with me for so many years, yet you still don't understand what I am doing for them? If they come to me, what will they see? This physical form. This is nothing.

Then he made the sign for his seclusion work, hitting his thigh with his fist, and continued, *This is the real thing I*

*am giving them, and you will witness with your own eyes what will happen to those who have not seen me physically. Though they have not seen me physically, they are with me and I am working for them. They are present here.*²²

Today, some twenty years after Meher Baba left the physical body, his lovers feel deeply the results of his work in seclusion. They experience him as the Inner Guide who has been awakened within the heart. The training in obedience and surrender is felt to be given still, but now it takes place in the "ashram" of daily life.

To hear and follow the inner guidance of the Beloved now that the Avatar is not in the body, the lover must learn the ways of the Beloved. In the example of the Avatar's life, the lover discovers how the Beloved acts, and how the Beloved would have the lover act. Other clues about the ways of the Beloved are found in the places where Meher Baba lived, and by contact with those who lived with him. Much about his ways is also revealed in his messages and discourses, words that provide a framework for the spiritual life and point to the truth that he brings.

In discovering the ways of the Beloved, the lover is not seeking a set of rigid rules or external practices. The lover strives to act for the sake of love alone by seeking the pleasure of the Beloved in every thought, word and deed. Baba once gave a simple guide to pleasing the Beloved in daily life:

*Think of things that you will not hesitate to think in my presence; speak words that you will not hesitate to speak in my presence; and do things that you will not hesitate to do in my presence.*²³

Remembrance

Meher Baba repeatedly stressed that a life of love, obedience, and surrender must be nurtured by remembrance of the Beloved. Such remembrance, when practiced wholeheartedly,

is essential to a flourishing relationship between the lover and the Beloved:

*Complete identification of the Master with the spiritual ideal is responsible for removing such barriers as might exist between the aspirant and the Master. This gives rise to the release of unrestrained love for the Master and leads to the meditation of the heart, which consists in constant thinking about the Master with an uninterrupted flow of limitless love. Such love annihilates the illusion of separateness, which seems to divide the aspirant from the Master; and it has in it a spontaneity that is virtually without parallel in other forms of meditation. In its final stages, meditation of the heart is accompanied by unbounded joy and utter forgetfulness of self.*²⁴

True meditation of the heart must be focused on a Master who is God-realized. Remembrance of such a Master, who is the real Self in every finite self, alerts the lover to the presence of Beloved God deep within. *"I am nearer to you than your own breath,"* said Meher Baba. *"Remember Me and I am with you and My love will guide you."*²⁵

Baba explained that remembrance is not mere repetition of the Beloved's name; it must be wholehearted:

*Just as when we breathe we do not pay attention to our breathing, and in sound sleep it is automatic and our constant companion, and still we do not pay attention to it, so Baba is there all the time and therefore you don't feel Him. Although I am "taking" my own name continuously, I have come to hear it repeated by my lovers, and even though I were deaf, I would hear it if you repeated it only once with all your heart in it.*²⁶

Wholehearted remembrance opens the aspirant to the Master's work of ego-elimination. Absorbed by remembrance of the Beloved, the lover gradually forgets the limited self. This "forgetfulness" creates the best conditions for surrendering the desires of the ego-mind. Consciousness begins to free

itself from the bonds of impressions that have for so long ruled the life of the individual soul. Thus love for the Beloved can, in Baba's words, *"Burn all your desires and longings and kindle the one and only desire and longing—union with the Divine Beloved... To be worthy of the Divine gift of this love, let all your thoughts, words and deeds be controlled by the constant remembrance of God."*²⁷

Remembrance of the Beloved is offered by Meher Baba as an avenue for ending the seemingly endless cycle of accumulating fresh impressions (sanskaras) in lifetime after lifetime. The central predicament of the aspirant is that every action creates new bindings:

*It is, therefore, most necessary for the aspirant to keep free from the idea "I do this, and I do that." This does not mean to keep clear of all activity through fear of developing this form of the ego. He may have to take to the life of action to wear out the ego that he has developed. So he is caught up in the dilemma that if he keeps inactive he does nothing toward breaking through the prison of his ego-life, and if he takes to a life of action, he is faced with the possibility of his ego being transferred to these new acts.*²⁸

The way out of this ego-bind, according to Baba, is for the lover to remember the Beloved constantly, thereby "replacing" the ego with the Beloved as the center of consciousness. Such remembrance creates what Baba called the "provisional ego":

*Before beginning anything, the aspirant thinks it is not he who is doing it but the Master who is getting it done through him; and after doing it he does not claim the results of action or enjoy them, but offers them to the Master. By so training his mind he creates a new ego which, though provisional, is able to become a source of confidence, enthusiasm and energy. This new ego is spiritually harmless, since it derives its life from the Master and since, when the time comes, it can be thrown away.*²⁹

With the Beloved as the provisional ego, the lover accumulates fewer new impressions and becomes more and more centered in the Beloved, who is the true Self. In this way, remembrance of the Beloved is a gradual ego death:

The less you think of yourself and the more you think of Baba, the sooner the ego goes and Baba remains. When you—"ego"—go away entirely, I am one with you. So bit by bit, you have to go... So better think of me when you eat, sleep, see or hear. Enjoy all, don't discard anything, but think it is Baba—Baba who enjoys, Baba who is eating. It is Baba sleeping soundly and when you wake up, remember it is Baba getting up! Keep this one thought constantly with you.³⁰

Meher Baba made it clear that to remember the Beloved leads to a gradual awakening of the true Self. Though such an awakening results in forgetfulness of the ego-self, it is in no way an avoidance of the ego conflicts experienced in daily life. On the contrary, by focusing on the Beloved, the lover is opened to the Master's work of ego-elimination. One who lived with Baba explains the dynamics of this process:

At Meherabad, it was very necessary at first that Baba supervise every activity in the ashram because, although we all loved Baba, still with our very different nationalities and different ages, life, as I have said, did not always run smoothly. Baba, of course, did not expect all would go smoothly with such assertive egos. Had He wanted continual peace, He would have selected very different types. We all had too many sanskaras, more than even we suspected while we were still out in the world. Loosening up the ego must have been for Baba not unlike extracting a tooth, painful to the patient, but most satisfying to the dentist! And as Baba saw the ego slowly disintegrating under His ceaseless drilling, there He would be, ready to fill the void with His Love and presence...

There were often arguments, discussions or clashes of opinion regarding how things should be done. We were fussy

over food; Indian food was too spicy, English food too insipid... To Baba, dislikes were as significant as likes. *"Both,"* He said, *"are desires of the ego, and hence both have to go."*

...It was, however, just these daily happenings that afforded Baba His opportunity to work up a crisis of ego-elimination and bring us a step further on the Path toward God, through control, obedience, and a mind concentrated on Him. *"Any time a person's thoughts turn truly to Me, I am truly with them,"* He told us.³¹

In life with Baba then and now, remembrance of the Beloved requires the lover to confront the hard work of destroying the false self. The Beloved, once awake in the heart, directs the timing and circumstances of ego-elimination. He must eventually bring all of the complexities of the ego's desires to the surface to be faced and worked out.

It might be said, then, that remembrance immerses the lover in the process of ego-destruction, sometimes causing the lover to experience an intensification of lust, greed, anger and other ego-centered impressions. Fortunately, remembrance also awakens a deep love relationship with the Beloved. The love of the Beloved sustains the lover as the many layers of impressions are painfully stripped away.

Remembrance also serves in a very practical way to help the lover cope with the many desires and conflicts that are brought into the conscious mind by the work of ego-elimination. The name of the Beloved becomes a form of protection and a source of strength:

*...when you feel angry or have lustful thoughts, remember Baba at once. Let Baba's name serve as a net around you so that your thoughts, like mosquitoes, may keep buzzing around you and yet not sting you.*³²

Such wholehearted remembrance of the name enables the lover to confront thoughts and desires without necessarily putting them into action. The name of the Beloved remembered in the heart brings the lover's true Self into play, and

allows the lover to deal calmly and bravely with the challenges of life.

It is important to point out that while remembrance of the Beloved leads to detachment from the world and self-forgetfulness, remembrance does not mean forgetfulness of others. On the contrary, as the ego diminishes through remembrance, the lover becomes increasingly aware of the Beloved who dwells in every living thing. This awareness begins to break the back of the ego's ingrained habit of relating to others, even helping others, out of selfish motives. Gradually the lover is inspired to help others by serving the Beloved in all:

*The only Real Knowledge is the knowledge that God is the inner dweller in good people and so-called bad, in saint and so-called sinner. This knowledge requires you to help all equally as circumstances demand, without expectation of reward, and when compelled to take part in a dispute, to act without the slightest trace of enmity or hatred; to try to make others happy with brotherly or sisterly feeling for each one; to harm no one in thought, word, or deed, not even those who harm you.*³³

Concern for others that is rooted in awareness of the God within each one becomes yet another vehicle for diminishing the ego:

*"The more you remember others with kindness and generosity, the more you forget yourself, and when you completely forget yourself, you find God."*³⁴

Baba emphasized that remembering others must always be grounded in remembrance of God. Otherwise the ego easily takes over. He cautioned that service undertaken with selfish motives has no spiritual value and may actually result in harm to the one served. Consequently Baba calls upon the lover to serve with no thought of personal gain, and to guard against ego-entanglement by remembering always that it is the Beloved who is being served:

*I am the Ancient One, the one residing in every heart. Therefore, love others, make others happy, serve others even at discomfort to yourself this is to love me.*³⁵

The Awakener

All that has been written here about the awakening of the heart can only point to the transformation Meher Baba came to bring about in the world. His work of awakening is not a concept; it is an experience that must take place deep within each individual. His real message does not consist of words or explanations; it is a silent movement of love within the human heart. The work of Meher Baba will only be fulfilled when there is a genuine change of heart:

In the spiritual path, these messages and addresses mean nothing. Without actual experience, all philosophical statements are idle talk and all the ceremonial phenomenon is further addition to the existing illusion.

If, instead of erecting Churches, Fire-temples, Mandirs and Mosques, people were to establish the house of God in their hearts for their Beloved God, my work will have been done.

If, instead of performing ceremonies and rituals mechanically as age-old customs, people were to serve their fellow-beings with the selflessness of love, taking God to be equally residing in one and all, and that by so serving others they are serving God, my work will have been fulfilled.

*I give you all my blessings so that, if not all, some of you, few of you or one of you, could love God honestly and find me in everyone and everything.*³⁶

The results of Meher Baba's work of awakening can never be measured by the recognition he receives or the organizations established in his name. That is not how Baba wished to be known or remembered. He can only be known through love. It was love that drew Meher Baba's first disciples to him, and it is for the sake of love alone that his lovers remain with him.

Today there are many who feel that his Word of love is breaking out of its Silence, bringing long-awaited relief to a suffering world. Thousands of people throughout the world are now responding to his inner call, their hearts touched by

his love. Their living experience of Meher Baba reminds us that the real story of the Awakener is at its very beginning. It will be told in the lives of those who love him, and in the New Humanity that he promised to the world. In this advent, and each time he comes, the Avatar's story is a love story that ultimately speaks for itself:

*True love is unconquerable and irresistible. It goes on gathering power and spreading itself until eventually it transforms everyone it touches. Humanity will attain a new mode of being and life through the free and unhampered interplay of pure love from heart to heart.*³⁷

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Supplement



Narbada River, Jabalpur, December, 1938

Meher Baba's Universal Message

I have come not to teach but to awaken. Understand therefore that I lay down no precepts.

Throughout eternity I have laid down principles and precepts, but mankind has ignored them. Man's inability to live God's words makes the Avatar's teaching a mockery. Instead of practising the compassion He taught, man has waged crusades in His name. Instead of living the humility, purity and truth of His words, man has given way to hatred, greed and violence.

Because man has been deaf to the principles and precepts laid down by God in the past, in this present Avataric Form I observe Silence. You have asked for and been given enough words—it is now time to live them. To get nearer and nearer to God you have to get further and further away from "I", "my", "me" and "mine". You have not to renounce anything but your own self. It is as simple as that, though found to be almost impossible. It is possible for you to renounce your limited self by my Grace. I have come to release that Grace.

I repeat, I lay down no precepts. When I release the tide of Truth which I have come to give, men's daily lives will be the living precept. The words I have not spoken will come to life in them.

I veil myself from man by his own curtain of ignorance, and manifest my Glory to a few. My present Avataric Form is the last Incarnation of this cycle of time, hence my Manifestation will be the greatest. When I break my Silence, the impact of my Love will be universal and all life in creation will know, feel and receive of it. It will help every individual to break himself free from his own bondage in his own way. I am the Divine Beloved who loves you more than you can ever love yourself. The breaking of my Silence will help you to help yourself in knowing your real Self.

All this world confusion and chaos was inevitable and no one is to blame. What had to happen has happened; and what has to happen will happen. There was and is no way out except through my coming in your midst. I had to come, and I have come. I am the Ancient One.

The Avatar

Consciously or unconsciously, every living creature seeks one thing. In the lower forms of life and in less advanced human beings, the quest is unconscious; in advanced human beings, it is conscious. The object of the quest is called by many names—happiness, peace, freedom, truth, love, perfection, Self-realization, God-realization, union with God. Essentially, it is a search for all of these, but in a special way. Everyone has moments of happiness, glimpses of truth, fleeting experiences of union with God; what they want is to make them permanent. They want to establish an abiding reality in the midst of constant change.

This is a natural desire, based fundamentally on a memory dim or clear as the evolution of the individual soul may be low or high of its essential unity with God. For every living thing is a partial manifestation of God, conditioned only by its lack of knowledge of its own true nature. The whole of evolution, in fact, is an evolution from unconscious divinity to conscious divinity, in which God Himself, essentially eternal and unchangeable, assumes an infinite variety of forms, enjoys an infinite variety of experiences, and transcends an infinite variety of self-imposed limitations. Evolution from the standpoint of the Creator is a divine sport, in which the Unconditioned tests the infinitude of His absolute knowledge, power, and bliss in the midst of all conditions. But evolution from the standpoint of the creature, with its limited knowledge, limited power, limited capacity for enjoying bliss, is an epic of alternating rest and struggle, joy and sorrow, love and hate—until in the perfected person, God balances the pairs of opposites, and duality is transcended. Then creature and Creator recognize themselves as one; changelessness is established in the midst of change; eternity is experienced in the midst of time. God knows Himself as God, unchangeable in essence, infinite in manifestation, ever experiencing the supreme bliss of Self-realization in continually fresh awareness

of Himself by Himself. This Realization must and does take place only in the midst of life; for it is only in the midst of life that limitation can be experienced and transcended, and that subsequent freedom from limitation can be enjoyed. This freedom from limitation assumes three forms.

Most God-realized souls leave the body at once and forever, and remain eternally merged in the unmanifest aspect of God. They are conscious only of the bliss of Union. Creation no longer exists for them. Their constant round of births and deaths is ended. This is known as Moksha (ordinary Mukti), or Liberation.

Some God-realized souls retain the body for a time; but their consciousness is merged completely in the unmanifest aspect of God, and they are therefore not conscious either of their bodies or of creation. They experience constantly the infinite bliss, power, and knowledge of God; but they cannot consciously use them in creation or help others to attain Liberation. Nevertheless, their presence on earth is like a focal point for the concentration and radiation of the infinite power, knowledge, and bliss of God; and those who approach them, serve them, and worship them are spiritually benefited by contact with them. These souls are called Majzoobs-e-Kamil; and this particular type of Liberation is called Videh Mukti, or liberation with the body.

A few God-realized souls keep the body, yet are conscious of themselves as God in both His unmanifest and His manifest aspects. They know themselves both as the unchangeable divine Essence and as its infinitely varied manifestation. They experience themselves as God apart from creation; as God the Creator, Preserver, and Destroyer of the whole of creation. These souls experience constantly the absolute peace, the infinite knowledge, power, and bliss of God. They enjoy to the full the divine sport of creation. They know themselves as God in everything; therefore they are able to help everything spiritually and thus help other souls realize God, either as Majzoobs-e-Kamil, Paramhansas, Jivanmuktas—or even Sadgurus, as they themselves are called.

There are fifty-six God-realized souls in the world at all times. They are always one in consciousness. They are always different in function. For the most part, they live and work apart from and unknown to the general public; but five, who act in a sense as a directing body, always work in public and attain public prominence and importance. These are known as Sadgurus, or Perfect Masters. In Avataric periods the Avatar, as the Supreme Sadguru, takes His place as the head of this body and of the spiritual hierarchy as a whole.

Avataric periods are like the springtide of creation. They bring a new release of power, a new awakening of consciousness, a new experience of life—not merely for a few, but for all. Qualities of energy and awareness, which had been used and enjoyed by only a few advanced souls, are made available for all humanity. Life, as a whole, is stepped up to a higher level of consciousness, is geared to a new rate of energy. The transition from sensation to reason was one such step; the transition from reason to intuition will be another.

This new influx of the creative impulse manifests, through the medium of a divine personality, an incarnation of God in a special sense—the Avatar. The Avatar was the first individual soul to emerge from the evolutionary and involutionary process as a Sadguru, and He is the only Avatar who has ever manifested or will ever manifest. Through Him God first completed the journey from unconscious divinity to conscious divinity, first unconsciously became man in order consciously to become God. Through Him, periodically, God consciously becomes man for the liberation of mankind.

The Avatar appears in different forms, under different names, at different times, in different parts of the world. As his appearance always coincides with the spiritual regeneration of man, the period immediately preceding His manifestation is always one in which humanity suffers from the pangs of the approaching rebirth. Man seems more than ever enslaved by desire, more than ever driven by greed, held by fear, swept by anger. The strong dominate the weak; the rich oppress the poor; large masses of people are exploited for the benefit of the

few who are in power. The individual, who finds no peace or rest, seeks to forget himself in excitement. Immorality increases, crime flourishes, religion is ridiculed. Corruption spreads throughout the social order. Class and national hatreds are aroused and fostered. Wars break out. Humanity grows desperate. There seems to be no possibility of stemming the tide of destruction.

At this moment the Avatar appears. Being the total manifestation of God in human form, He is like a gauge against which man can measure what he is and what he may become. He trues the standard of human values by interpreting them in terms of divinely human life.

He is interested in everything but not concerned about anything. The slightest mishap may command His sympathy; the greatest tragedy will not upset Him. He is beyond the alternations of pain and pleasure, desire and satisfaction, rest and struggle, life and death. To Him they are equally illusions that He has transcended, but by which others are bound, and from which He has come to free them. He uses every circumstance as a means to lead others toward Realization.

He knows that individuals do not cease to exist when they die and therefore is not concerned over death. He knows that destruction must precede construction, that out of suffering is born peace and bliss, that out of struggle comes liberation from the bonds of action. He is only concerned about concern.

In those who contact Him, He awakens a love that consumes all selfish desires in the flame of the one desire to serve Him. Those who consecrate their lives to Him gradually become identified with Him in consciousness. Little by little their humanity is absorbed into His divinity, and they become free. Those who are closest to him are known as His Circle.

Every Sadguru has an intimate Circle of twelve disciples who, at the point of Realization, are made equal to the Sadguru himself, though they may differ from him in function and authority. In Avataric periods the Avatar has a Circle of ten concentric Circles with a total of 122 disciples, all of whom experience Realization and work for the Liberation of others.

The work of the Avatar and His disciples is not only for contemporary humanity but for posterity as well. The unfoldment of life and consciousness for the whole Avataric cycle, which had been mapped out in the creative world before the Avatar took form, is endorsed and fixed in the formative and material worlds during the Avatar's life on earth.

The Avatar awakens contemporary humanity to a realization of its true spiritual nature, gives Liberation to those who are ready, and quickens the life of the spirit in His time. For posterity is left the stimulating power of His divinely human example—of the nobility of a life supremely lived, of a love unmingled with desire, of a power unused except for others, of a peace untroubled by ambition, of a knowledge undimmed by illusion. He has demonstrated the possibility of a divine life for all humanity, of a heavenly life on earth. Those who have the necessary courage and integrity can follow when they will.

Those who are spiritually awake have been aware for some time that the world is at present in the midst of a period such as always precedes Avataric manifestations. Even unawakened men and women are becoming aware of it now. From their darkness they are reaching out for light; in their sorrow they are longing for comfort; from the midst of the strife into which they have found themselves plunged, they are praying for peace and deliverance.

For the moment they must be patient. The wave of destruction must rise still higher, must spread still further. But when, from the depths of his heart, man desires something more lasting than wealth and something more real than material power, the wave will recede. Then peace will come, joy will come, light will come.

The breaking of my silence—the signal for my public manifestation—is not far off. I bring the greatest treasure it is possible for man to receive—a treasure that includes all other treasures, that will endure forever, that increases when shared with others. Be ready to receive it.

The Master's Prayer

This prayer was dictated by Meher Baba, and during the 21 days of Baba's Special Work (the 13th of August to the 2nd of September, 1953) it was recited every day by one of the Mandali in Baba's presence. The Gujarati translation of the Prayer was also read out by another of the Mandali.

O Parvardigar, the Preserver and Protector of all!
You are without Beginning, and without End;
Non-dual, beyond comparison; and none can measure You.
You are without color, without expression, without form and
without attributes.
You are unlimited and unfathomable, beyond imagination and
conception; eternal and imperishable.
You are indivisible; and none can see You but with eyes divine.
You always were, You always are, and You always will be;
You are everywhere, You are in everything; and You are also
beyond everywhere and beyond everything.
You are in the firmament and in the depths. You are manifest
and unmanifest, on all planes, and beyond all planes.
You are in the three worlds, and also beyond the three worlds.
You are imperceptible and independent.
You are the Creator, the Lord of Lords, the Knower of all
minds and hearts; You are omnipotent and omnipresent.
You are Knowledge Infinite, Power Infinite, and Bliss Infinite.
You are the ocean of Knowledge, All-Knowing, Infinitely-
Knowing; the Knower of the past, the present and the
future; and You are Knowledge itself.
You are all-merciful and eternally benevolent.
You are the Soul of souls, the One with infinite attributes.
You are the trinity of Truth, Knowledge and Bliss.
You are the Source of Truth, the Ocean of Love.
You are the Ancient One, the Highest of the High; You are
Prabhu and Parameshwar; You are the Beyond-God,
and the Beyond-Beyond God also; You are Parabrahma;
Allah; Elahi; Yezdan; Ahuramazda; and God the Beloved.
You are named Ezad, the Only One worthy of worship.

How To Love God

If, instead of seeing faults in others, we look within ourselves, we are loving God.

If, instead of robbing others to help ourselves, we rob ourselves to help others, we are loving God.

If we suffer in the sufferings of others and feel happy in the happiness of others, we are loving God.

If, instead of worrying over our own misfortunes, we think of ourselves as more fortunate than many, many others, we are loving God.

If we endure our lot with patience and contentment, accepting it as His will, we are loving God.

If we understand that the greatest act of devotion towards God is not to harm any of His beings, we are loving God.

To love God as He ought to be loved we must live for God and die for God, knowing that the goal of all life is to love God and find Him as our own self.

The Seven Realities

Meher Baba gives no importance to creed, dogma, caste systems, and the performance of religious ceremonies and rites, but to the UNDERSTANDING of the following seven Realities:

1. The only **Real Existence** is that of the One and only God; who is the Self in every (finite) self.
2. The only **Real Love** is the Love for this Infinity (God), which arouses an intense longing to see, know, and become one with its Truth (God).
3. The only **Real Sacrifice** is that in which, in pursuance of this Love, all things, body, mind, position, welfare, and even life itself are sacrificed.
4. The only **Real Renunciation** is that which abandons, even in the midst of worldly duties, all selfish thoughts and desires
5. The only **Real Knowledge** is the Knowledge that God is the inner dweller in good people and so-called bad, in saint and so-called sinner. This Knowledge requires you to help all equally as circumstances demand, without expectation of reward, and when compelled to take part in a dispute, to act without the slightest trace of enmity or hatred; to try to make others happy with brotherly or sisterly feeling for each one; to harm no one in thought, word, or deed, not even those who harm you.
6. The only **Real Control** is the discipline of the senses from indulgence in low desires, which alone ensures absolute purity of character.
7. The only **Real Surrender** is that in which the poise is undisturbed by any adverse circumstance, and the individual, amidst every kind of hardship, is resigned with perfect calm to the will of God.

The Highest of The High

On the morning of September 7, 1953, the anniversary of Zoroaster's birth, Meher Baba gave the following message:

Consciously or unconsciously, directly or indirectly, each and every creature, each and every human being—in one form or the other—strives to assert individuality. But when eventually man consciously experiences that he is Infinite, Eternal and Indivisible, then he is fully conscious of his individuality as God, and as such experiences Infinite Knowledge, Infinite Power and Infinite Bliss. Thus Man becomes God, and is recognized as a Perfect Master, Sadguru, or Kutub. To worship this Man is to worship God.

When God manifests on earth in the form of man and reveals His Divinity to mankind, He is recognized as the Avatar—the Messiah—the Prophet. Thus God becomes Man.

And so Infinite God, age after age, throughout all cycles, wills through His Infinite Mercy to effect His presence amidst mankind by stooping down to human level in the human form, but His physical presence amidst mankind not being apprehended, He is looked upon as an ordinary man of the world. When He asserts, however, His Divinity on earth by proclaiming Himself the Avatar of the age, He is worshiped by some who accept Him as God; and glorified by a few who know him as God on Earth. But it invariably falls to the lot of the rest of humanity to condemn Him, while He is physically in their midst.

Thus it is that God as man, proclaiming Himself as the Avatar, suffers Himself to be persecuted and tortured, to be humiliated and condemned by humanity for whose sake His Infinite Love has made him stoop so low, in order that humanity, by its very act of condemning God's manifestation in the form of Avatar should, however, indirectly, assert the existence of God in His Infinite Eternal state.

The Avatar is always one and the same, because God is always One and the Same, the Eternal, Indivisible, Infinite One, who manifests Himself in the form of man as the Avatar, as the Messiah, as the Prophet, as the Ancient One—the Highest of the High. This Eternally One and the Same Avatar repeats His manifestation from time to time, in different cycles, adopting different human forms and different names, in different places, to reveal Truth in different garbs and different languages, in order to raise humanity from the pit of ignorance and help free it from the bondage of delusions.

Of the most recognized and much worshiped manifestations of God as Avatar, that of Zoroaster is the earliest—having been before Ram, Krishna, Buddha, Jesus and Mohammed. Thousands of years ago, he gave to the world the essence of Truth in the form of three fundamental precepts, Good Thoughts, Good Words, and Good Deeds. These precepts were and are constantly unfolded to humanity in one form or another, directly or indirectly in every cycle, by the Avatar of the Age, as he leads humanity imperceptibly towards the Truth. To put these precepts of Good Thoughts, Good Words and Good Deeds into practice is not as easily done as it would appear, though it is not impossible. But to live up to these precepts honestly and literally is as apparently impossible as it is to practice a living death in the midst of life.

In the world there are countless sadhus, mahatmas, mahapurushas, saints, yogis and walis, though the number of genuine ones is very, very limited. The few genuine ones are, according to their spiritual status, in a category of their own, which is neither on a level with the ordinary human being nor on a level with the state of the Highest of the High.

I am neither a mahatma nor a mahapurush, neither a sadhu nor a saint, neither a yogi or a wali. Those who approach me with the desire to gain wealth or to retain their possessions, those who seek through me relief from distress and suffering, those who ask my help to fulfill and satisfy mundane desires, to them I once again declare that, as I am not a sadhu, a saint or a mahatma, mahapurush or yogi, to

seek these things through me is but to court utter disappointment, though only apparently; for eventually this disappointment is itself invariably instrumental in bringing about the complete transformation of mundane wants and desires.

The sadhus, saints, yogis, walis and such others who are on the *via media*, can and do perform miracles and satisfy the transient material needs of individuals who approach them for help and relief.

The question therefore arises that if I am not a sadhu, not a saint, not a yogi, not a mahapurusha, nor a wali, then what am I? The natural assumption would be that I am either just an ordinary human being, or I am the Highest of the High. But one thing I say definitely, and that is that I can never be included amongst those having the intermediary status of the real sadhus, saints, yogis and such others.

Now, if I am just an ordinary man, my capabilities and powers are limited—I am no better or different from an ordinary human being. If people take me as such then they should not expect any supernatural help from me in the form of miracles or spiritual guidance; and to approach me to fulfill their desires would also be absolutely futile.

On the other hand, if I am beyond the level of an ordinary human being, and much beyond the level of saints and yogis then I must be the Highest of the High. In which case, to judge me with your human intellect and limited mind and to approach me with mundane desires would not only be the height of folly but sheer ignorance as well; because no amount of intellectual gymnastics could ever understand my ways or judge my Infinite State.

If I am the Highest of the High my Will is Law, my Wish governs the Law, and my Love sustains the Universe. Whatever your apparent calamities and transient sufferings, they are but the outcome of my Love for the ultimate good. Therefore, to approach me for deliverance from your predicaments, to expect me to satisfy your worldly desires, would be asking me to do the impossible—to undo what I have already ordained.

If you truly and in all faith accept your Baba as the Highest of the High, it behooves you to lay down your life at His feet, rather than to crave the fulfillment of your desires. Not your one life but your millions of lives would be but a small sacrifice to place at the feet of One such as Baba, who is the Highest of the High; for Baba's unbounded love is the only sure and unfailing guide to lead you safely through the innumerable blind alleys of your transient life.

They cannot obligate me, who, surrendering their all (body, mind, possessions)—which perforce they must discard one day—surrender with a motive; surrender because they understand that to gain the everlasting treasure of Bliss they must relinquish ephemeral possessions. This desire for greater gain is still clinging behind their surrender, and as such the surrender cannot be complete.

Know you all that if I am the Highest of the High, my role demands that I strip you of all your possessions and wants, consume all your desires and make you desireless rather than satisfy your desires. Sadhus, saints, yogis and walis can give you what you want; but I take away your wants and free you from attachments and liberate you from the bondage of ignorance. I am the One to take, not the One to give, what you want or as you want.

Mere intellectuals can never understand me through their intellect. If I am the Highest of the High, it becomes impossible for the intellect to gauge me nor is it possible for my ways to be fathomed by the limited human mind.

I am not to be attained by those who, loving me, stand reverentially by in rapt admiration. I am not for those who ridicule me and point at me with contempt. To have a crowd of tens of millions flocking around me is not what I am for. I am for the selected few, who, scattered amongst the crowd, silently and unostentatiously surrender their all—body, mind and possessions—to me. I am still more for those who, after surrendering their all, never give another thought to their surrender. They are all mine who are prepared to renounce even the very thought of their renunciation and who, keeping constant vigil

in the midst of intense activity, await their turn to lay down their lives for the cause of Truth at a glance or sign from me. Those who have indomitable courage to face willingly and cheerfully the worst calamities, who have unshakable faith in me, eager to fulfill my slightest wish at the cost of their happiness and comfort, they indeed, truly love me.

From my point of view, far more blessed is the atheist who confidently discharges his worldly responsibilities, accepting them as his honorable duty, than the man who presumes he is a devout believer in God, yet shirks the responsibilities apportioned to him through Divine Law and runs after sadhus, saints and yogis, seeking relief from the suffering which ultimately would have pronounced his eternal Liberation.

To have one eye glued on the enchanting pleasures of the flesh and with the other expect to see a spark of Eternal Bliss is not only impossible but the height of hypocrisy.

I cannot expect you to understand all at once what I want you to know. It is for me to awaken you from time to time throughout the ages, sowing the seed in your limited minds, which must in due course and with proper heed and care on your part, germinate, flourish and bear the fruit of that True Knowledge which is inherently yours to gain.

If on the other hand, led by your ignorance, you persist in going your own way, none can stop you in your choice of progress; for that too is progress which, however slow and painful, eventually and after innumerable incarnations, is bound to make you realize that which I want you to know now. To save yourself from further entanglement in the maze of delusion and self-created suffering which owes its magnitude to the extent of your ignorance of the true Goal, awake now. Pay heed and strive for Freedom by experiencing ignorance in its true perspective. Be honest with yourself and God. One may fool the world and one's neighbors, but one can never escape from the knowledge of the Omniscient—such is the Divine Law.

I declare to all of you who approach me, and to those of you who desire to approach me, accepting me as the Highest

of the High, that you must never come with the desire in your heart which craves for wealth and worldly gain, but only with the fervent longing to give your all—body, mind and possessions—with all their attachments. Seek me not in order to extricate you from your predicaments, but find me in order to surrender yourself wholeheartedly to my Will. Cling to me not for worldly happiness and short-lived comforts, but adhere to me, through thick and thin, sacrificing your own happiness and comforts at my feet. Let my happiness be your cheer and my comforts your rest. Do not ask me to bless you with a good job, but desire to serve me more diligently and honestly without expectation of reward. Never beg of me to save your life or the lives of your dear ones, but beg of me to accept you and permit you to lay down your lives for me. Never expect me to cure you of your bodily afflictions but beseech me to cure you of your Ignorance. Never stretch out your hands to receive anything from me, but hold them high in praise of me whom you have approached as the Highest of the High.

If I am the Highest of the High, nothing is then impossible to me; and though I do not perform miracles to satisfy individual needs—the satisfaction of which would result in entangling the individual more and more into the net of ephemeral existence—yet time and again at certain periods I manifest the Infinite Power in the form of miracles, but only for the spiritual upliftment and benefit of humanity and all creatures.

However, miraculous experiences have often been experienced by individuals who love me and have unswerving faith in me, and these have been attributed to my nazar or Grace on them. But I want all to know that it does not befit my lovers to attribute such individual miraculous experiences to my state of the Highest of the High. If I am the Highest of the High I am above these illusory plays of maya in the course of the Divine Law. Therefore, whatever miraculous experiences are experienced by my lovers who recognize me as such, or by those who love me unknowingly through other channels, they are but the outcome of their own firm faith in me. Their unshakable faith often superceding the course of the play of

maya gives them those experiences which they call miracles. Such experiences derived through firm Faith eventually do good and do not entangle the individuals who experience them into further and greater bindings of Illusion.

If I am the Highest of the High, then a wish of my Universal Will is sufficient to give, in an instant, God-realization to one and all, and thus free every creature in creation from the shackles of Ignorance. But blessed is Knowledge that is gained through the experience of Ignorance, in accordance with the Divine Law. This Knowledge is made possible for you to attain in the midst of ignorance by the guidance of Perfect Masters and surrenderance to the Highest of the High.

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