



AVATAR MEHER BABA

*His Life,
His Message
and His
Followers*

*by Ray
Kerkhove*



AVATAR MEHER BABA

His Life, His Message and His Followers

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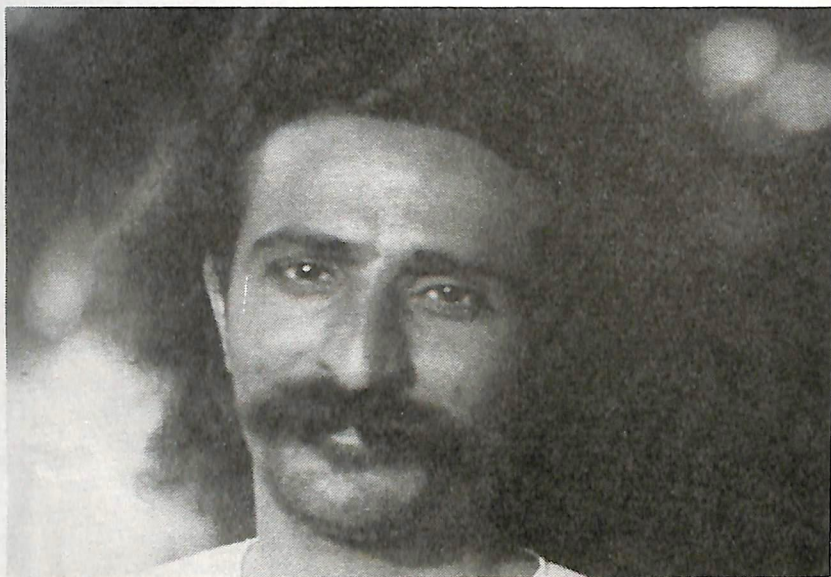
- Pg. 1, para. 1, line 4: for 'tumultous' read 'tumultuous.'
- Pg. 8, para. 3, line 1: for 'perculiar' read 'peculiar.'
- P.15, 1st photograph caption: for 'in cognito' read 'incognito'.
- Pg. 16, para. 1, line 3: for 'He even joined' read 'He even led.'
- Pg. 19, para. 3, line 8: for 'who' read 'whom.'
- Pg. 21, para. 4, line 1: for 'has come' read 'have come.'
- Pg. 42, para. 2, line 2: for 'heor she' read 'he or she.'
- Pg. 57: photograph of Avatar's Abode should be reversed.
- Pg. 61, line 5: for 'libruary' read 'library.'
- Pg. 61, line 6: for 'Wamsley' read 'Walmsley'
and for 'computing/formatting facilities'
read 'computing facilities and formatting.'



The Concept of Avatar

Meher Baba stated : *"I am the Avatar in every sense of the word."* Avatar is a Sanskrit term, meaning "Descent of God" - the direct Incarnation of God into human form. In other words, God becomes man. This is an event which is believed to occur during tumultuous phases of human history, roughly every 700 or 1400 years.

Meher Baba viewed universal religious figures such as Krishna, Buddha, Jesus, and Muhammed as *Advents* of one and the same Avatar. According to him, the Avatar adopts a form and approach best suited to the time, which accounts for apparent differences between Advents.



Meher Baba in Toka 1928

Meher Baba's Status



Why Meher Baba Calls Himself the Avatar

As Baba himself observed:

"When I say that I am the Avatar, there are a few who feel happy, some who feel shocked, and many who hearing me claim this, would take me for a hypocrite, a fraud, a supreme egotist - or just mad."

Even so, Meher Baba says that to state otherwise would be to deny the truth:

"For a truly great man, who knows himself to be truly great, to deny his greatness would be to belittle what he indubitably is, for whereas modesty is the basis of guise, true greatness is free from camouflage.... When the Greatest of all says, 'I am the Greatest', it is but a spontaneous expression of an infallible truth."

He also asserted that from the perspective of God, each and every one is the Avatar:

"If I were to say every one of you is an Avatar, a few would be tickled, and many would consider it blasphemy or a joke. The fact that God - being One, Indivisible and equally in us all, we can be nought else but One, is too much for the duality-conscious mind to accept."

"I tell you with my Divine authority, that you and I are not 'we', but One. You unconsciously feel my Avatarhood within you; I consciously feel in you what each of you feel. Thus everyone of you is Avatar, in the sense that everyone and everything is Everyone and Everything, at the same time, and for all times."



Acceptance and Rejection of Meher Baba's Avatarhood

According to Meher Baba, only *God-realised* (spiritually perfect) souls are in the position to verify a person's claim to *Avatarhood*. For this reason, he cared little if his stance was ridiculed. Regardless of what anyone took him to be, he rendered love and assistance to all.

Meher Baba never expected people to mechanically accept his status. He considered it the right of persons serious about following *any* Master to rigorously test that Master's credentials. Consequently, those who regard Meher Baba as the Avatar do not do so as a matter of dogma, but on the grounds of either :

- * having tested his powers or qualities;
- * having been repeatedly struck by his apparent perfection (in meeting, living with, or hearing about him);
- * having undergone profound emotional or mystical experiences concerning him; or
- * having been deeply affected by a string of "coincidences" surrounding their interest in him.



Ancestry and Parents (c.1850-1894)



Baba's parents and siblings. Meher Baba (then Merwan) is on the far left.

Iranian Roots

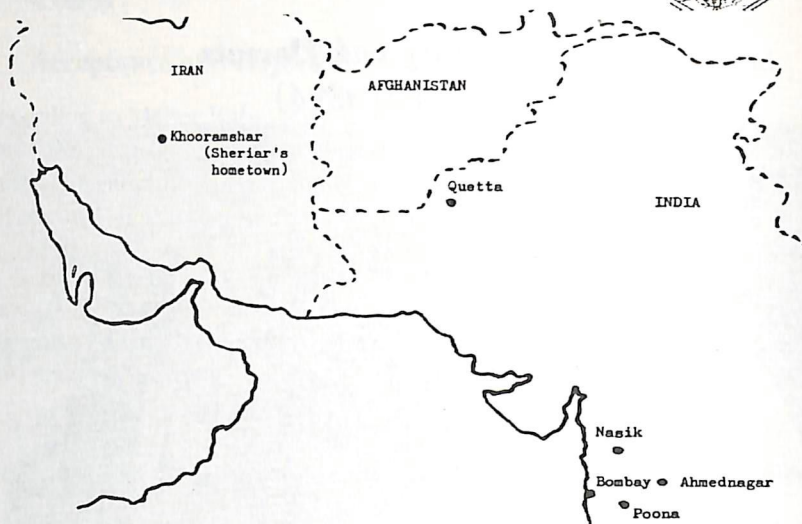
Iran - famed for poets, kings and mystics - was the homeland of Meher Baba's family. That family (the Iranis) were part of a religious minority which was being persecuted in Iran at the time: followers of a very ancient Persian religion, Zoroastrianism.

The Quest of Baba's Father

Into this unusual setting was born Baba's father, Sheriar. Sheriar was an extraordinary man. As a boy, he worked with his father (Meher Baba's grandfather) maintaining a Zoroastrian *tower of silence* (a type of cemetery) in Iran. At the tender age of 12, he was filled with a burning desire to experience God. This drove him to abandon his home. From that time on - and well into his 30's - Sheriar wandered around Iran and India in search of God.

Chanting God's name wherever he travelled, Sheriar encountered numerous hardships and performed severe austerities. He sought out *Sufis* (Moslem mystics), with whom he journeyed.

Meher Baba's Life



In spite of his passionate efforts, Sheriar had little success. He started to despair. After nearly completing a severe fast and vigil, he sat by a river, despondent, when he felt God spoke to him, saying:

"He Whom you seek, He Whom you wish to see, His attainment is not destined for you. Your son, it is your son who will attain it, and through your son - you!"

In response to this message, Sheriar travelled to his sister in India. He settled in Pune : taking up work, marrying a young woman called Shireen, and raising a family.

The Prelude to Baba's Birth

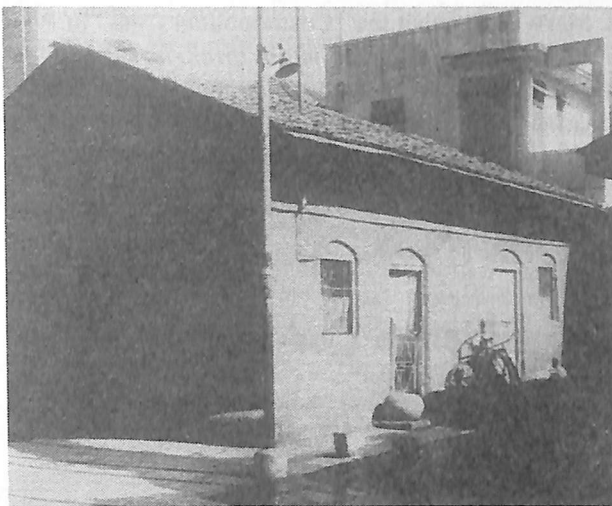
Shireen was a very practical person, normally disinterested in spiritual phenomena. Nevertheless, as Baba's birth approached, and into his infancy, she found herself having remarkable dreams and visions.

In one, a sun-like person was being pulled along in a chariot, riveting the attention of joyous crowds. In another, a vast sea of people looked expectantly towards her. Shireen also dreamt that a goddess emerged from the family well, worshipping and demanding her infant son.





Childhood and Youth (1894-1913)



'Pumpkin House': Baba's childhood home.

Merwan's Birth and Childhood

As dawn broke on 25 February 1894, Shireen painlessly gave birth to Merwan (Persian: "Sun-like") Irani - the future Meher Baba. Sheriar sensed that this was the child of whom the voice had spoken.

The baby was unusually attractive. Many people felt drawn to visit him often, sometimes going to great lengths to do so.

Extraordinary incidents surround Merwan's childhood, but mostly he is remembered as a kind-hearted, devout boy - a natural leader who excelled in sports and literature.



The young Merwan



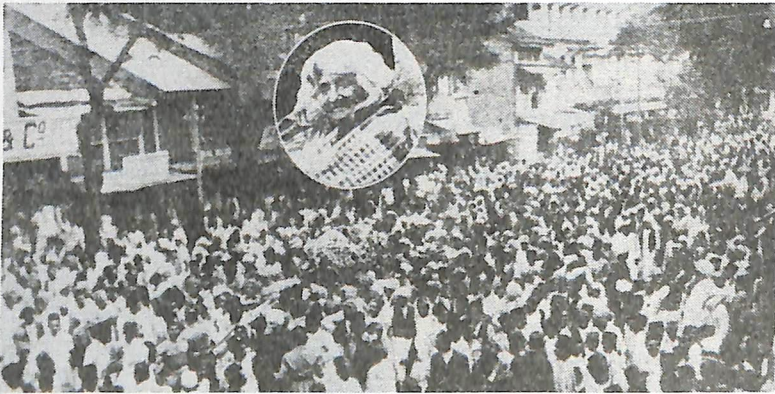
Teenage Years

At sixteen, Merwan founded the "Cosmopolitan Club" in Poona. The Club's motto was "*love all and maintain brotherhood and unity*". It raised money for the disadvantaged, blending castes and creeds in innocent pastimes. Merwan was also winning acclaim through his spiritual poetry, some of which had been published in district newspapers



Transition to God-man (1913-1921)

Babajan: The Sufi Master



Babajan's funeral in Poona.

An ancient Moslem lady called Babajan lived under a tree on Poona's streets. She was widely revered as a spiritual Master. The teenage Merwan was drawn to her. He sometimes ran errands for her. Soon he began to neglect his studies and spend more and more time with Babajan.

One day in 1914, Merwan was taking leave of the old Sufi when she kissed him on the forehead. Merwan was overwhelmed with bliss. On returning home, he fell into an unconscious state.



Spiritual 'Coma'

Merwan's life changed forever after this. For the next nine months he neither ate nor slept. He simply stared vacantly into space, unresponsive. If his body was made to sit, walk or stand, it just persisted doing so until someone changed his posture.

Deeply troubled by Merwan's condition, Shireen spent a fortune on doctors, but medical treatment had no effect. At best, the youth acted like an automaton. It took seven years before Merwan returned fully to "normal" human functioning.

Baba later told others that this peculiar state was due to his becoming unconscious of all material existence. He was "drowned" in the inconceivable bliss and peace of *God-Realisation* (permanent Oneness with God).

Painful Return to Human Consciousness

Few understood. Even friends and family thought Merwan had lost his mind. Particularly, they could not fathom the severe activities he now performed: sudden, long walks and runs; round-the-clock work; secretly dashing his head against the floor or through windows.

Merwan later explained that this behaviour eased the unbelievable torment the Avatar experiences in returning to human consciousness and shouldering the universe's suffering.

Despite such immense experiences pulsing through him, Merwan submitted to his mother's pleas for him to find work.



Merwan in 1918. He wore a turban to disguise his head wound.



Thus these years (his twenties) saw him sporadically engaged as a tutor, running a theatre company, or serving in his father's shop.

However, Merwan had no interest in establishing a worldly career. He gave his earnings to passing beggars. He fed his meals to dogs. Even sleep and dress now meant nothing to him.

Hindu and Moslem Masters

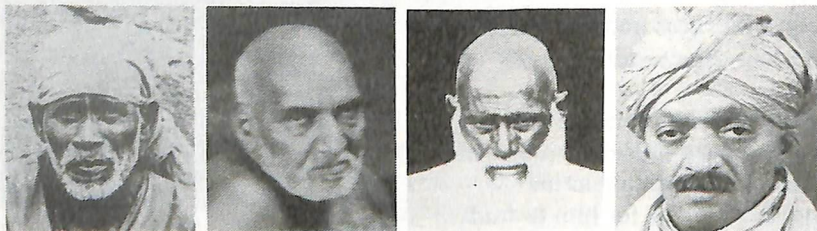
Merwan was now spending considerable time with saints and Hindu and Moslem Masters - especially Babajan, Upasni Maharaj, Narayan Maharaj, Tajuddin Baba, and Sai Baba of Shirdi.

These five are widely-known in India, each having a large following. Sai Baba of Shirdi remains one of the most revered figures of modern India, and Upasni Maharaj was acknowledged as his main successor. Meher Baba describes the five as *Perfect Masters*: God-realised souls who had returned to ordinary consciousness to help humanity.

The five helped Merwan know and take up his position as Avatar. Babajan and Upasni were the most directly involved in this.

The Masters informed people of Merwan's status, and sent followers to him. For instance, Sai Baba addressed Merwan as *Parvardigar* (God Almighty) and Narayan said: "*He is Perfect Man.*" Babajan would repeatedly kiss Merwan's photograph and remind visitors that "*my son*" (Merwan) would "*shake the world.*" Upasni Maharaj similarly worshipped Merwan's photograph, advising Merwan's friends:

*"All of you take heed of what I tell you: Merwan is the Avatar..
Now hold onto his feet, not with one hand, but with both hands."*



Four of Baba's Masters: Sai, Upasni, Tajuddin and Narayan.

Meher Baba's Life



For his part, Merwan proved an exceptional disciple. No one was so dedicated to, or so dearly loved by, Babajan and Upasni. Such was his intoxication with their presence that he habitually neglected his basic needs. By the end of this phase, his clothes were vermin-ridden rags, and his body quite emaciated.

Merwan spent much of his waking time conducting devotions and programs in his Masters' honour, or serving them in some fashion. At night, he happily slept on the bare ground near them. It was Merwan who organised the publishing and distribution of Upasni's writings and it was he who built the first Upasni temple. The funding and building of Babajan's tomb-shrine was also chiefly his work.



Merwan during his time with Upasni, outside his father's shop.



Early Years: Service and Labour (1921-1931)



Meher Baba at early Meherabad.



'Compassionate Father'

People were gravitating towards Merwan. Some friends were so impressed by his character that they titled him *Meher Baba* ("Compassionate Father") - the name by which he was henceforth known.

The First Followers

In 1921, after six months of close association with Upasni, Merwan assumed his life's mission. He was considerably younger than many of his followers (twenty-seven), but already a widely revered spiritual authority.



Playing music outside his thatched hut.

Upasni had turned over disciples to him. Local fishermen, athletes, professional and business people were being drawn into his orbit.

At first, Baba established himself at a small thatched hut near Poona. This was the first of many bases wherein Baba and his followers spent their days and nights singing and playing devotional music; taking daunting walks (even to Iran); enjoying sports (particularly cricket) and holding spiritual discussions.

Thereby, the early disciples were bound into constant companionship with their Master. For many decades to come, most of them continued living with him in complete obedience.



Hard Labour at Meherabad

Meher Baba frequently moved base, but in May 1923, on a journey out of Bombay, he expressed particular delight over an area near Ahmednagar. That spot eventually became the main centre of his work: Meherabad.

Here, at an abandoned army barracks surrounded by thorny semi-desert, Baba initiated a stricter discipline for his disciples: complete celibacy, little sleep or food, long journeys, and much hard labour: clearing and building.



At early Meherabad.

Meanwhile, Baba often fasted or stayed in seclusion. He said he did this for the benefit of his disciples. At one stage, he resided in his future crypt, living on a ration of just half a flask of cocoa. Another time, he concealed himself in a box-like structure for long hours to write a book, unpublished to this day. He usually slept no more than a couple of hours, on the bare floor of a verandah - wrapped in a blanket.

Despite such austerities, extraordinary energy characterised Meher Baba's early years. Waking before anyone else, he sang and danced in the dawn, and roused the others to their duties. He himself ground the group's daily grain, and spent long hours roaming the surrounding hills or tending to the poor and ill.

Free Services

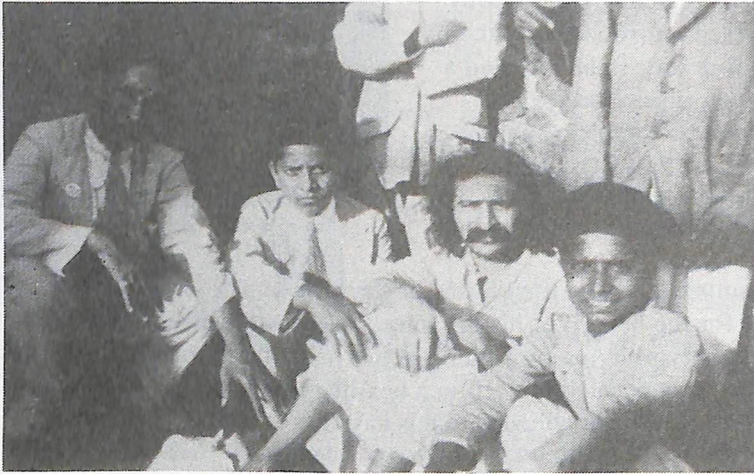
Baba's feverish building project raised free facilities for the disadvantaged populace: a hospital, dispensary, schools and resthouse. Within these, Baba taught, fed, bathed residents, and even cleaned latrines.



Conditions were very basic, yet Baba constantly surrendered essentials: rationing soap; stopping the use of tea. The money thus saved was used for various families or individuals whose plight had come to Baba's attention.

The Drama of Baba's Schools

From time to time, Meher Baba entertained local 'untouchable' children with games. He taught them devotional songs. This culminated in his opening a school which allowed children from all castes and faiths to study together.



Meher Baba sitting with boys he taught.

Additionally, Baba began a unique boarding school wherein he himself taught teenage boys about spirituality. It was called the *Prem* (Love) *Ashram*.

These schools excited interest and uproar. Various parents, objecting to the mixing of castes and creeds, withdrew their children. Some accused Baba of "bewitching" the boys. Certainly students and teachers reported profound mystical experiences. At times, entire classes broke into spontaneous weeping.



Lifelong Silence



Meher Baba at the time he declared his silence.

10 July 1925: Meher Baba came out of his hut, but did not speak. For the rest of his life- another 44 years - he never uttered a word. He also stopped writing, simply pointing to letters on an English alphabet board when he wished to communicate.

Why? Meher Baba gave many reasons. He 'said' he took on universal suffering through silence; that he "speaks" more eloquently through silence; that "*things which are Real are given and received in silence*" and that :

"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."





"Love Calls Me to the West": World Travels (1931 - 1937)



Arriving inognito in Europe.

Mysterious Traveller



En route from France to India

Between his mid-thirties and early forties, Meher Baba's journeying became global: embracing the Middle East, Europe, the USA, and the Far East. He brought his message to the West for the first time, but not in the manner of a typical Indian *guru*. Instead of giving public lectures or founding ashrams, he usually avoided publicity, spending his time with small groups of genuinely interested people and quietly meeting families in their homes.



Sometimes he entered swirling city crowds, standing there, anonymously. He donned local clothes: an Italian suit, a French beret... Baba visited great shrines and churches. He even joined followers in outings to beaches, theatres, cafes, and galleries. Often he left such venues almost as soon as he arrived, explaining: *"All this activity of mine, you observe outwardly, but what I do inwardly, you can never know."*

Mixed Response of the West

Baba's arrival in the West made front page news and aroused some wild speculation, especially whilst Mahatma Gandhi was interested in him. Gandhi had sought out Baba several times and asked advice on spiritual and political matters.

The media's usual attitude to Baba's presence was indifference and ridicule, although sympathetic articles also appeared. Some writers gave vent to slander and lewd



Meher Baba in Los Angeles.



In Zurich (Switzerland), with a follower's nieces.

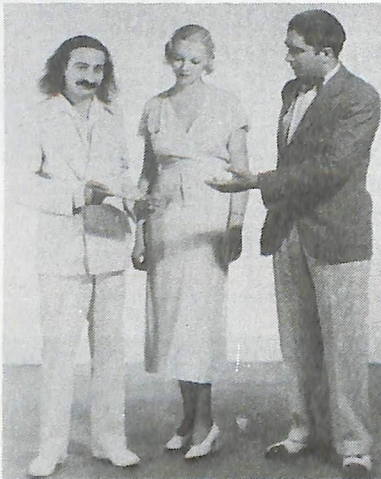


insinuation. Meher Baba refused to react to the publicity, whether good or bad. He forbade his followers to write in his defence.

Many Americans and Europeans had only to glance at Baba before they broke into tears and dedicated their lives to him. Celebrities such as Nadine Tolstoy, Princess Matchabelli and inventor Thomas Watson became ardent followers upon first contact.

Thus a small party of Western disciples emerged, who had joyous, close interactions with this controversial "*Indian Messiah*". Meher Baba treated them to outings, picnics and innocent games - all of which flowed naturally into spiritual lessons.

Film Projects



In Hollywood with actress Virginia Bruce and a businessman

During this phase, Meher Baba visited Hollywood. He personally met many famous actors, screen writers, producers and directors, and visited major studios. Meher Baba believed that the film industry had great spiritual potential. He envisaged his own film projects, on which some contacts worked.

'Spiritual Agents'

Also during this phase, people appeared and disappeared, tapping out a "message" before Baba; making "idle" conversation - but mostly gazing

into Meher Baba's eyes. These odd exchanges seemed meaningful and intentional for both parties, but utterly baffled his followers. Meher Baba explained that the strangers were his "spiritual agents", doing work on other planes of consciousness. Sometimes Baba sent disciples to distant places such as Warsaw and China to contact these 'agents'.



Meher Baba's Life



Indian Travels and Contacting the God-mad (1937-1949)

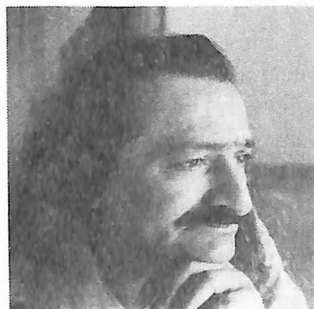
Indian Focus



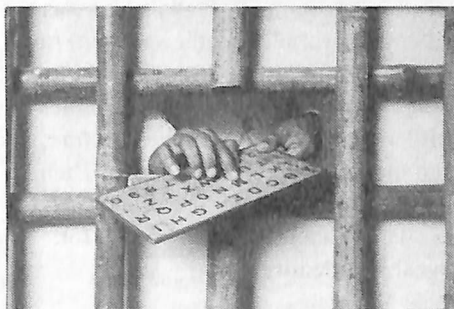
Travelling in Delhi, 1939.

Turbulent times erupted at this point : India's Independence struggle; World War II; the Indo-Pakistani War of Partition; the spread of totalitarian regimes. Meher Baba's trips to the West ceased.

Instead, Baba's activity turned inward: to seclusions and work in his homeland. He said he thereby controlled developments both at home and abroad. Certainly relentless movement and unusual occurrences characterised these years.



Seclusion, 1941.



Communicating from seclusion.

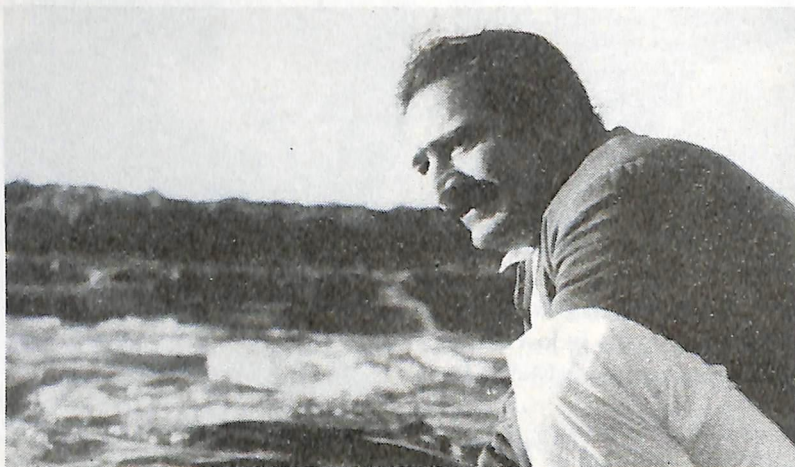
Meher Baba's Life



Meher Baba's pattern now was to arrive - unannounced and in disguise - at places of pilgrimage; city slums; jungles; mountains; obscure villages - in fact, anywhere that anyone was secretly and earnestly seeking God or God's help. In this manner, he individually contacted and bowed to hundreds of thousands of spiritual seekers, sick, elderly and needy people.

Harrowing Journeys of Loving Service

The excursions were no holiday. Usually Baba's group journeyed in rough, cramped conditions, by any and every available means.



Narmada River, Jabalpur (1938).

Meher Baba kept the pace so frantic that for days to weeks on end, he and his party ate or slept little. Adequate clothes were equally a novelty. Many times, Baba's bed was the shade of a tree or perhaps a railway platform. Weathering rain, mud, flood, snow and scorching sun, the group plodded onwards - often to contact a single individual. Meher Baba would direct his disciples down alleyways of villages neither he nor they had visited before, and go immediately to someone who they had never met before. Then he would render the very assistance that person had - unknown to others - sought, in precisely the manner he or she had prayed for. After this, he left. Never did he reveal his identity.



Acknowledgement

As Meher Baba predicted, various yogis and holy men now became vocal about his status. Although he passed by disguised, they would point him out to surrounding crowds, and proclaim his Divine status to all within hearing :

“No one fully knows the limits of your greatness... You have the power to flood and destroy the whole world... You are the spiritual authority of the time” (*Pir Fazl Shah*).

“Meher Baba has within him the whole world... He is the Master of everyone... He is in this world, that which is above it, and below it... He is in everyone... in one glance he sees the entire continent of India” (*Bhorwala Baba of Bhor*).

“Here no one knows you; I have seen you and recognised you as the true Avatar of Vishnu... My life's desire is fulfilled...Hail God Vishnu!” (*A Panchgani adept*).

When such acknowledgment occurred, Baba carefully slipped away, to avoid the public attention.

Work with the 'God-intoxicated'

Throughout the Indian sub-continent live special souls Meher Baba identified as “*God-mad*” or “*God-intoxicated*”. These persons are so enraptured by their spiritual experiences that they are virtually unconscious of their bodies. Often they inhabit open fields, latrines and slums - oblivious of discomfort. Despite their abnormal mannerisms, the ‘God-mad’ are widely revered by Indians for their unspoken yet sensed love for God. Some have numerous devotees and attendant carers.



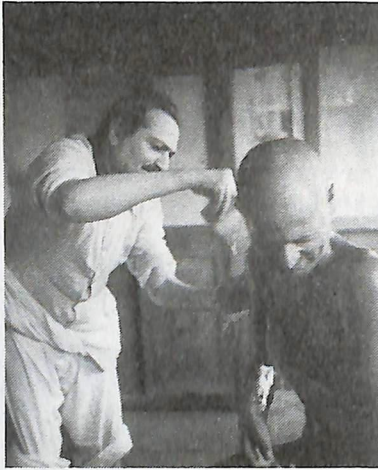
Baba hugging the God-intoxicated man, Muhammed.

Meher Baba's Life



Especially during these years, Baba contacted thousands of “*God-intoxicated*” men and women. He went to great lengths to locate and care for these and ordinary mentally-ill persons, fulfilling their slightest whim. This was no mean feat, for many ‘God-mad’ were by nature abusive and uncooperative. Meher Baba indicated that his work with

these people was reciprocal: *“I help them, and knowingly or unknowingly, they help me.”*



Washing one of the ‘God-mad’.

Meher Baba established six centres in India wherein he fed and worked with the “God-mad”. Despite their general dissociation from mundane reality, some ‘God-intoxicated’ made revealing comments on Meher Baba’s status:

“You are Allah (God); you have brought forth the creation, and once in a thousand years you come down to see the play of what you have created.”

“The Lord Krishna and his gopis (devotees) has come!”





The New Life Phase (1949-1952)



Begging at Benares

The New Life

Meher Baba's fervent pace did not slacken as he entered his late fifties. Rather, he began a demanding lifestyle, which he termed "*the New Life*". He described it as follows:

"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, anger, greed and lust; and who, to accomplish 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 honour 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 the reality of Manifestation, and yet do not expect any spiritual or material reward; who do not let go of 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."



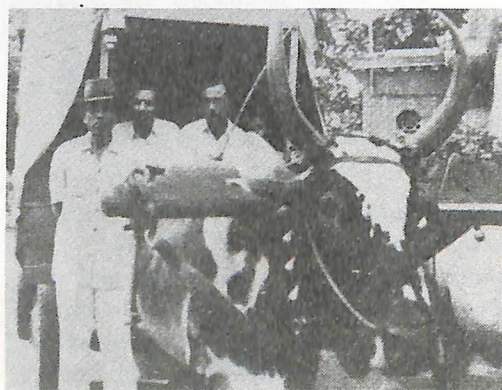
Establishments Closed Down

To accomplish the new phase, all establishments and services that had grown up around Meher Baba were closed down. Most belongings were given away or sold. Some close followers were instructed to find work elsewhere. Nevertheless, Baba carefully ensured that everyone - including the vast 'zoo' of pets that had accrued - received good new homes and alternative sources of income.

Living Hopeless and Helpless

The New Life meant being "*hopeless and helpless*". Every day was a penniless fresh start. No food was kept from the previous day. Those with him were not permitted to depend on anyone or anything - including Baba himself. He was now merely the group's "*elder brother*", although he remained in authority.

The Companions' Gypsy Wanderings



The bullock-drawn caravan used in the New Life travels.

Baba and a handful of '*companions*' (as they were called) became homeless wanderers, travelling mostly on foot. Baba's movements and identity were kept secret, and for a time, a colourful assortment of animals accompanied them, giving the effect of a small circus.

Over two years the companions lived like this. Journeying widely, they depended on door-to-door begging, and the receipt of spontaneous, often unasked for, gifts. Strangers provided food and shelter, without knowing to whom they gave. This occurred promptly, and fitted needs so precisely that the Companions considered it evidence of Meher Baba's omnipotence.



Apparent Vagabonds

Difficulties were the flavour of the New life, especially as Baba seemed intent on meandering through regions savaged by the Indo-Pakistani War. There were dramas, deprivations and near-catastrophes. Baba was sometimes abused and elbowed. Occasionally, part of the Companions' meagre belongings were stolen. More than once, the group looked so rough and weary that they were arrested as suspected rebels.





The Fiery Free Life and After (1952-1959)



Travelling in Andhra

New Phases and 'Householder' Life



Walking 'Bhooti' at Meherazad

At 58 years of age, Meher Baba ended the New Life to begin a sequence of short phases that he saw as perfectly blending spiritual and 'ordinary' life. Meherazad (outside Ahmednagar) gradually became the base for these phases, the first being the 'fiery free life'.

In contrast to the austerity of Meherabad, Meherazad eventually had gardens and even a small collection of novels and music that Baba enjoyed. Baba now seemed to follow a more quiet, "ordinary householder" lifestyle with his closest disciples.



Accidents and Ailments

Throughout Baba's life, sudden, often inexplicable illnesses afflicted him. From now on, these became more prominent. The slightly reduced pace of the *"Fiery Free Life"* reflects this.

Particularly severe were the effects of two car accidents in which Baba and some disciples were very badly injured. Physical complications arose, placing Meher Baba in pain for years. Often he was unable to walk without assistance, yet he never uttered so much as a groan.

Doctors were unable to remedy the problems. According to Baba, the infirmities served a higher purpose: to *"break the back of the machine age."*



Being assisted in walking, at Myrtle Beach, USA

Westward Again

On crutches or in a carrying-chair, Meher Baba continued to respond to followers' yearnings to see him. He made tours within India and again travelled to Europe and the United States. In both India and the West, centres had been created for him by his followers. He now visited these. Baba also journeyed to Australia for the first time.



Sufism Reoriented, Vedantism Reoriented

In both the US and Australia, the heads of Sufi Orders were so impressed with Meher Baba that they became his followers, along with many of their members. Baba consequently had the Sufi Charter re-oriented to focus on his message. A similar reorienting was enacted for Vedantic Hinduism.

Declaration of Avatarhood and Growing Acclaim

Only now did Meher Baba publicly and repeatedly proclaim his Avatarhood. Previously he had conceded this only to small groups.

The numbers of people interested in Baba rose significantly. 100,000 to 150,000 came to see Baba at some places. Gatherings had to be organised simply to deal with the multitudes who wished to see him. This popularity meant much more time was now spent answering mail, or addressing the requests.

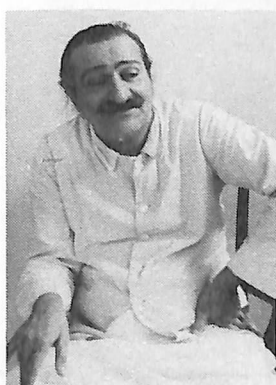
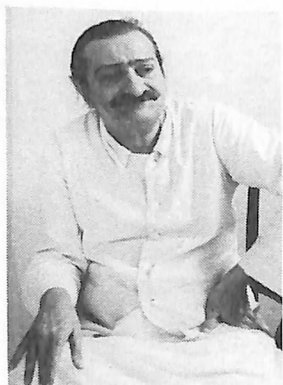
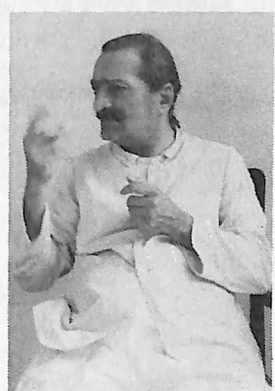
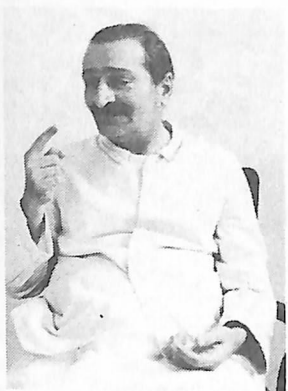
Despite such swelling numbers of followers, Meher Baba often personally saw, met with or otherwise lovingly assisted every one. Embracing, joking, teasing and encouraging, he mingled freely with his devotees, abiding with them for days - even weeks - at a stretch. He would sit on their level, eat with them and bow to them, 'saying':

"Not as man to man, but as God to God, I bow down to you so as to save you the trouble of bowing down to me."

Silent Gestures, Silent Books

Over the years, the dance of Baba's fingers traced out sequences of letters until the meaning was clear. In this painstaking fashion, Baba's writings were dictated. With a suitcase for a desk, or typing on their laps in trains, various disciples then transcribed these "words" into articles and books during their rare free moments.

Meher Baba's Life



Meher Baba gesturing

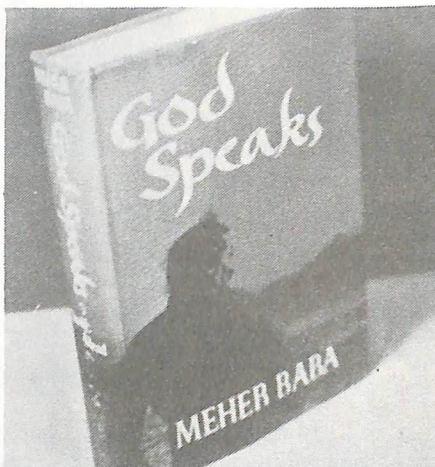
Meher Baba's Life



After 1954, the process became more difficult because Meher Baba abandoned his alphabet board in order to intensify his silence. Thereafter, he communicated solely through his own system of gestures and hand signs, which had evolved over decades.

Despite such apparent obstacles, it was now - more than before - that Meher Baba encouraged the publishing of his words. *God Speaks*, *Discourses*, and *Life at Its Best*

appeared in their current form, as did various reports and journals of his disciples (e.g. *Listen Humanity*; *Journey with God*; *The Awakener*).



Baba's 'God Speaks'.





Gatherings and Seclusion (1959-1968)



Sitting amongst Western followers.

Exclusion and Inner Contact

The long years of tireless activity and physical strain were finally taking their toll on Meher Baba's body. He suffered increasing infirmity. Seclusion deepened to the point of being "exclusion", as he put it. Visitors were discouraged. At times, even written contact was suspended.

A decade before, Baba had indicated:

"It was only to establish the internal connections that the external contacts have been maintained till now. The time has come for being bound in the chain of internal connections. Hence, external contact is no longer necessary."

He also stated that the "inner contact" he was working on through his "exclusion" would render to humanity his greatest assistance of all.



Messages, Visits and 'Viewings'



With a child.

Despite his seclusion, Meher Baba continued to respond to his followers: dictating numerous telegrams, warnings, clarifications and various important messages.

Occasionally he attended functions or visited institutes such as a workshop for the blind and a women's rescue home.

Baba sometimes allowed groups who wished to see him to visit for short periods. Such events - being now rare - were much cherished by his followers.

Thousands would take up the opportunity, travelling great distances for the privilege of a mere word, glance or touch.

As before, Baba often allowed these "viewings" to continue for days without his taking any break, but now he was physically unable to stand or walk for any length of time. No longer able to "bow to his followers' love for him", he would, he said, permit his followers "to bow to his love" for them.



At a Guruprasad 'viewing', Poona.



The East-West Gathering



The East-West Gathering.

Amongst these gatherings, the *East-West Gathering* (1962) proved especially significant. It was one of the first occasions in which large numbers of Eastern and Western devotees were brought together in India before an Indian teacher, let alone before the Avatar.

The Anti-Drug Message and Western Youth

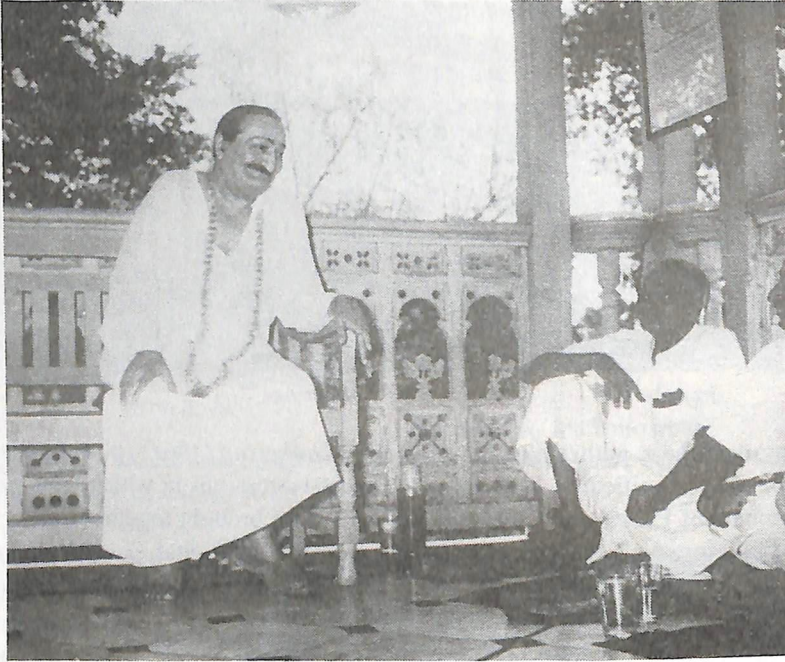
During the 1960's, as Meher Baba predicted, the West stirred with genuine interest in all things spiritual. Unfortunately, this was accompanied by much experimental drug-use. Hallucinogenic drugs were being touted as a 'quick' path to spiritual insight.

In 1965, a few young Americans, in their passionate quest for spiritual truth, had hitch-hiked and wandered all the way to Baba's residence. Despite his seclusion, Baba met them and answered their questions, explaining the true nature of drug experiences. He emphasised: "*If God can be found through the medium of any drug, God is not worthy of being God.*" Meher Baba requested the spreading of his accompanying message throughout the West.

Meher Baba's Life



Subsequently, Meher Baba became one of most well-known and popular spiritual figures among Western youth of the 1960's and 1970's. Several prominent rock stars referred to Meher Baba in their music, which aroused further interest.

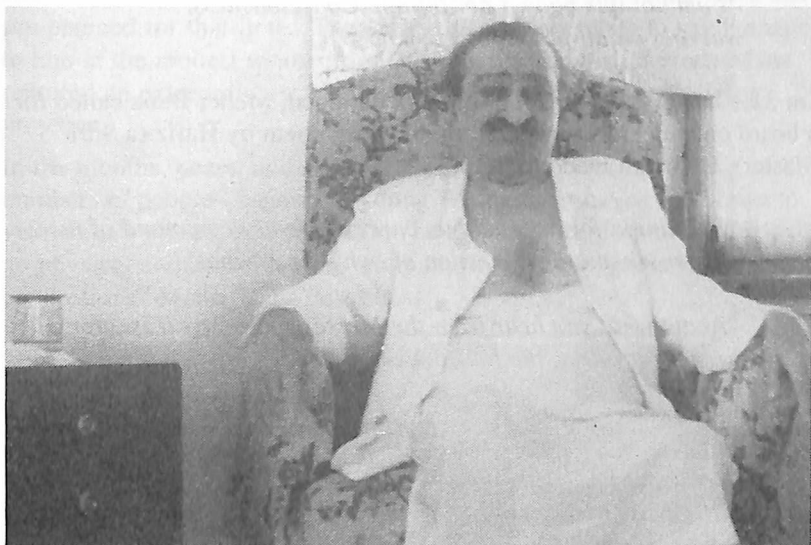


Meher Baba in 1966.





The Final Year: Completion (1968-1969)



Meherabad, 1968

Hints and Failing Health

In July 1968, Avatar Meher Baba declared his work completed "100% to my satisfaction." Subsequently, he dropped hints: "*The Time has come. Remember this*" and:

*"Coming, Coming, Coming, Came;
I am tired of this Illusion game."*

Meher Baba's health deteriorated. He was diagnosed as suffering severe anaemia.

Physical Passing

On 30 January 1969, violent spasms overtook Baba's body, the cause of which could not be determined. He referred to these as his "*Crucifixion*", and signed: "*My Time has come.*"



Nevertheless, right up until his actual physical demise, Baba remained fully lucid and in charge, demonstrating his words:

*"I am not this body. I am Infinite Consciousness,
working on all planes of existence."*

On 31st January 1969, as the spasms continued, Meher Baba called for a board on which was printed the following poem by Hafiz (a Sufi Master). He had it read out to the disciples:

*"Befitting a fortunate slave, carry out every command of the
Master without any question of 'why' and 'what'."*

*"About what you hear from the Master, never say it is wrong,
because my dear, the fault lies in your own incapacity to
understand him."*

*"I am a slave of
the Master who
has released me
from ignorance.
Whatever my
Master does is of
the highest
benefit to all
concerned."*

Finally, Baba joked about all the medicines he was taking and told his doctor: *"Do not forget that I am God."*

Minutes later, in a final spasm, Meher Baba's body expired. Many followers reported unusual occurrences at the time of Baba's physical demise.



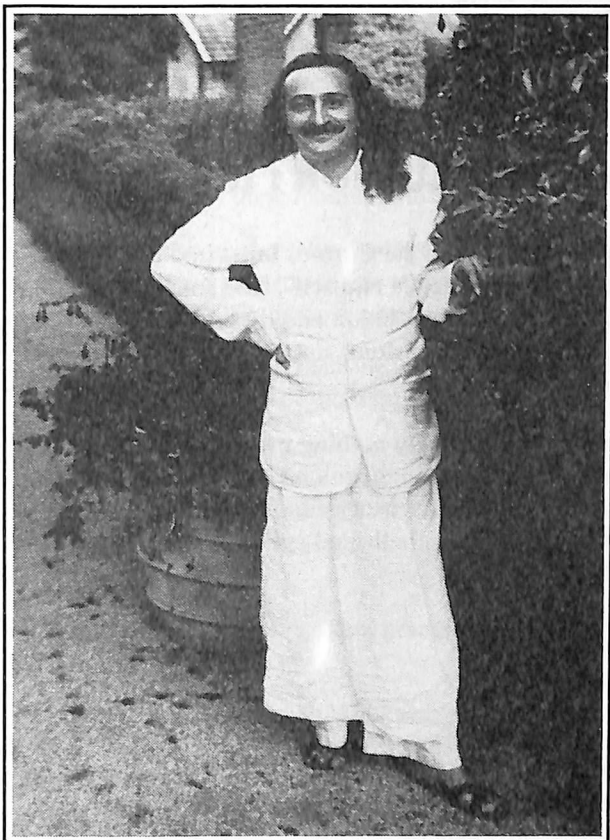
Meher Baba's body in his crypt.



Aftermath

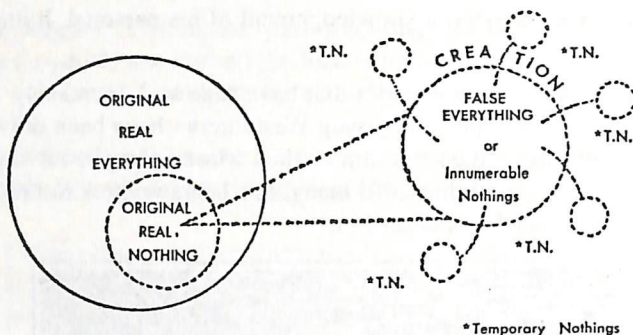
Between May and June of 1969, several hundred devotees from many countries came to Poona to participate in the program Meher Baba had pre-planned for that time. They also visited Meherabad to pay homage to him at the modest tomb-shrine wherein his body is interred. Many reported an extraordinary acknowledgement of his personal, living presence.

In the months, years, and decades that have followed, increasing numbers of people - especially young Westerners - have been drawn to visit Baba's places, and accept him as their Master, despite having had no physical contact with him. To many, this bears witness to the "inner connections" Meher Baba describes.





Meher Baba's books **GOD SPEAKS** and **THE EVERYTHING AND THE NOTHING** offer detailed descriptions of his cosmology, including diagrams such as those used here.



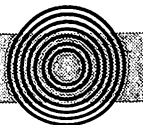
The emanation of creation

REALITY AND ILLUSION : THE DIVINE GAME

According to Meher Baba, the Cosmos burst into existence out of God's *whim* to know and experience Himself. God found infinite ways to do this through the constant evolution and dissolution of worlds, universes, life-forms and spiritual states. Consequently, phenomena became infinite.

Thus everything is ultimately nothing more than God's "*shadow*" - a *play* of forms or stages through which God seeks to gradually know Himself. In this sense, all sensory and mental phenomena (our body, planets, and even heavens, hells and spiritual states) are just illusory and passing.





THE SOUL'S JOURNEY : FROM EVOLUTION TO INVOLUTION

Meher Baba describes each soul as originally “unconsciously *unconscious*” God, gradually becoming less “unconscious God” and more self-aware as it evolves upwards.

This *spiritual evolution* occurs over millions of years, on numerous planets. The soul starts with a gas form and *evolves* up through mineral, plant, invertebrate, bird and mammal forms, culminating in human form.

Incarnation as a human completes the soul's journey of self-awareness. By this stage, subtle and mental bodies have entirely formed, and the soul has individualised consciousness - i.e., a focus: a strong sense of 'I'.

However, simultaneously, a *false ego* (a false identification of one's self with one's body and mind) has been created, through all the impressions and desires which accrue from so many pre-human lives.

Consequently, the soul is still not free. Instead, it is launched on a vast round of *human reincarnations*, which continue for as long as the soul is bewitched by the possibilities offered by these rebirths in the cosmic *illusion*.

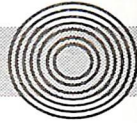
Fortunately, the experience of alternating states of pain and pleasure, and a growing sense of futility and impermanence, eventually tires the soul of illusion's endless games. At this point, *involution* begins.

Involution is the process of the soul realising its Divinity, through sudden or sequential progress inwards. This occurs along *Seven Planes of Consciousness*.

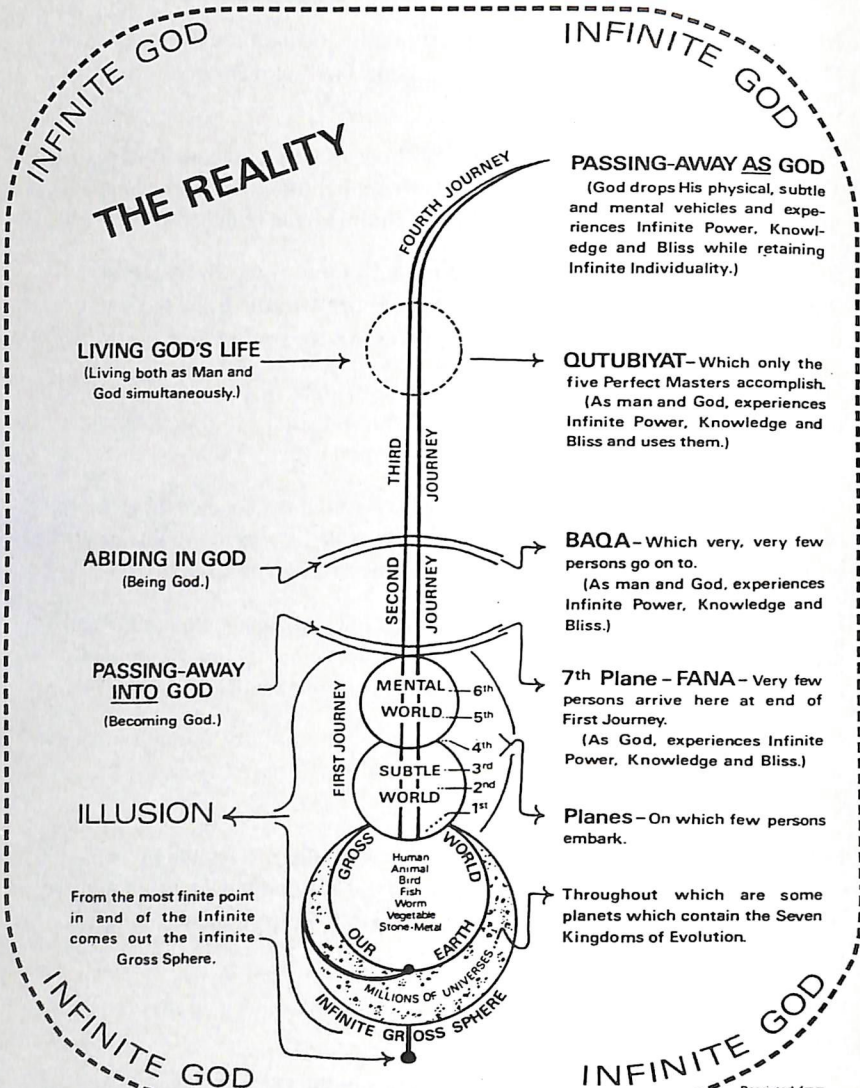
Each of the *Seven Planes* has specific, increasingly spectacular powers, enchantments, “heavens” and experiences. The attainment of each of these states is such an overwhelming experience that the aspirant may believe he or she is God.

Consequently, *Involution* is normally a slow process. A soul may reincarnate many lifetimes on one Plane alone.

According to Baba, *Involution* ultimately culminates in an “about face” he calls *God-realisation*. In God-realisation, the soul is forever freed from illusion and totally merges with Truth (God). Thereafter, it lives eternally in everything, and experiences unending, unimaginable bliss and freedom.

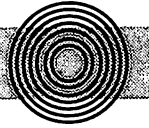


THE FOUR JOURNEYS



Executed under the direction of Meher Baba

Reprinted from
"The Everything and the Nothing,"
published by Meher House Publications, Australia

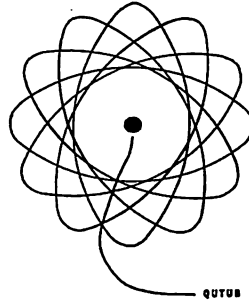


THE SPIRITUAL HIERARCHY

According to Meher Baba, there exists a hierarchy in charge of the cosmos. It is composed of several thousand advanced souls stationed on various *Planes*. Each one spiritually “governs” particular cities, regions, nations, planets etc.

Above all this, at any particular time, there will be 56 God-realised souls. Five of these head the Cosmos.

These five are *Perfect Masters*: humans who have become God but have returned to full and perfect human consciousness in order to serve humanity. “Membership” of the Five Perfect Masters changes as various ones depart their bodies, but at any one time there are always only five.



The Qutub (Perfect Master) as pivot of the universe

One or two centuries after the *Avatar* drops his physical body Perfect Masters become known and prominent. Until that time, the Avatar *Himself* is in direct control of the cosmos, and Perfect Masters keep their identities hidden.

Thereafter - and until the next *Avataric Advent* - Perfect Masters maintain the spiritual impetus- even initiating new faiths. For example, according to Meher Baba, figures such as Mahavira, Lao Tzu, Nanak and the Bab (the respective founders of Jainism, Taoism, Sikhism and Baha’i) were all *Perfect Masters*, who began their movements just before, or long after, an *Avataric Advent*.





THE FUNCTION OF THE AVATAR

The most important “player” in the Divine Game is the *Avatar*: the God-Man, the Messiah, the Prophet. In nature, the Avatar is similar to Perfect Masters, except that Perfect Masters are humans who have become God, whereas the Avatar is God Himself, periodically brought down into human form.

The Avatar is simultaneously fully Divine and perfectly human. He is the eternal, ever-present Saviour of all creatures: His powers, influence and presence are unlimited and universal, and He is the quickest, safest path to Godhood. At whim, he can grant innumerable souls liberation.

GOD'S GRACE AND THE HEM OF THE GOD-MAN'S GARMENT

A final major concept of Meher Baba is that God-realisation can never be “earned”. It is always due to the intercession of *God's Grace*. The Avatar stated that Godhood is normally transmitted from Master to



Baba gesturing to the hem of his garment.

Meher Baba's Message 1: Key Concepts



disciple as a “*gift*”. This is why it is essential to “*hold fast to the hem (of my garment)*” - ie., maintain one’s spiritual “link” with the Master (Meher Baba) through ever-increasing association with Him, whether physical or mental.

Meher Baba held that God’s Grace can only descend on the disciple who has so fully surrendered to the Master that he or she is not even conscious of having surrendered. Godhood can only manifest in the disciple who no longer seeks anything for himself or herself - whether material or spiritual - save to better please the Master.





Neither Teaching nor Practice

Meher Baba offers no set techniques or doctrines. He said: *"I have not come to teach but to awaken"* and : *"approach to Truth is individual."* Consequently, this chapter is at best only an outline of some emphases of Meher Baba.

Meher Baba asks us to seek spiritual growth through everyday living: *"the art of right adjustment to others.. (which) involves self-forgetfulness and love."* Followers do not normally engage in practices such as yoga, chanting, meditation, or theological debate.



The Path of Love

According to Meher Baba, the Avataric message in every age has been: *"Love God and become God."* He viewed love as an immensely transformative force:

"Love is dynamic in action and contagious in effect. Pure love is matchless in majesty, it has no parallel in power and there is no darkness it cannot dispel."



"Love is essentially self-communicative; those who do not have it catch it from those who have it. Those who receive love from others cannot be its recipients without giving a response which, in itself, is the nature of love. True love is unconquerable and irresistible. It goes on gathering power and spreading until eventually it transforms everyone it touches."

Meher Baba claimed love alone expands one's very being:

Meher Baba's Message 11: His Methods



"To love one soul is like adding its life to your own; your life is, as it were, multiplied and you virtually live in two centres. If you love the whole world, you vicariously live in the whole world."

Within everyday living, Meher Baba's followers apply these observations by expressing, as best as they are able, unconditional love:

"A constant wish to love and be loving, and a non-calculating will to sacrifice in every walk of life, high and low, big and small, between home and office, states and cities, countries and continents."

A Lover-Beloved relationship with God, with its depth of longing for *Union* with the Beloved, and its painful awareness of separation, is especially emphasised by Meher Baba. He explained that although the soul is in reality God, it must experience God as separate ("the Beloved") in order to realise God through 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."

This "game" of love is essential for achieving God-realisation:

"Pure love is the beginning and end of everything. When only one desire remains, Love manifests in full glory, because only in the Divine Beloved is love Infinite Purity. When Lover and Beloved are One, that is the end and the beginning."





Effacing Ego through Surrender and Obedience

Affirming most spiritual traditions, Meher Baba considered annihilation of egoism the greatest dilemma facing aspirants. He observed that an aspirant's own efforts at diminishing ego simply end up feeding it:

"..attempts by the ego to secure its own extinction may be compared with the attempt of a man to stand on his own shoulders... All that it does to bring about self-annihilation only adds to its existence, for it flourishes on the very efforts directed against it."

Worse, this form of egoism is much more subtle and can go unnoticed by the aspirant, producing what Meher Baba calls:

"spiritual monomania...spiritual pride, intolerance, prejudice, smugness, ambition and holier-than-thouness 'Good' deeds and experiences are also products of desire, and therefore karmically no less binding..... the 'good' is generally robed in a garment of self-esteem and becomes a burr of righteousness that bores itself ever deeper into man's consciousness."

Meher Baba's answer to this problem is obedience and surrender to the wishes of the Avatar:

"..in order to escape this cosmic illusion, and to realise and attain the Supreme Reality, we must abide by the following: first and foremost, our complete surrender to the God-man, in Whom God reveals Himself in His full Glory, His Infinite Power, His unfathomable Knowledge, His inexpressible Bliss, and His eternal Existence."

"When you do what the Master says, the responsibility falls on Him, the one you obey, even when you obey unwillingly."

The Avatar is worth obeying because he is *egoless*. Having no self other than the *real Self* (which is also the aspirants' real, inner being), the Avatar is able to reflect back to aspirants their own ideal (Divine) *Self* and provide the exact discipline they need to realise that Self.



"*Mastery in Servitude*" was therefore the motto of Meher Baba and his early disciples. It epitomised the total *surrender* (akin to slavery) required of a true disciple. Baba often told stories illustrating ideal Master-disciple relations. He repeatedly stated that willing obedience to the God-man is the "*highest form of love*" and the quickest road to Godhood.



Remembrance

When a soul is absorbed in loving, serving, remembering and pleasing the Avatar, Meher Baba assures us that the person's false ego and problems soon disappear:

"Think of Me more and more, and all your worries will disappear into the nothing they really are."

"The best is just to remember Me and forget everything else, leaving everything to Me."

Meher Baba placed particular importance on remembering him at the time of one's death:

"I say with My Divine Authority to each and all that whosoever takes My name at the time of breathing his last comes to Me: so do not forget to remember Me in your last moments."

According to Meher Baba, remembrance can begin with repeating his name; gazing at his image; making pilgrimages to places associated with him; hearing or reading stories about him; and doing whatever else helps one focus on him (writing, painting, singing about him). By flooding mind and heart with associations of Meher Baba by such



means, one soon reaches a point where remembrance is constant, automatic and internal.

Thereafter, everything - no matter how trivial- will remind one of the God-man. This process dissolves the false ego. It can no longer find anything within or outside of itself which is not the Avatar.



Selfless Service

Baba said *"real happiness lies in making others happy."* He indicated that in order to realise God, one needs to *"wear one's self out"* in service to others. In fact, he said we only *"start learning to love God"* through loving those whom we *"cannot love"*.

To achieve this, our service needs to be without thought of self or results:

"Always think of helping, and not of results. Never worry about results, because 'selfless service' means trying to help others, not even thinking 'I am doing this or that'. Always work with your heart for the best, and don't worry."

For Meher Baba, "service" can be almost anything. It simply means doing *the same things differently* - ie. with greater care, empathy, forgiveness and awareness that He is in everyone and everything :

"To love God in the most practical way is to love our fellow beings."

"If we feel for others in the same way as we feel for our own dear ones, we are loving 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 suffering of others and feel happy in the happiness of others, we are loving God."

"If, instead of worrying over our own misfortunes, we think ourselves 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 and feel that the greatest act of devotion and worship to God is not to hurt or harm any of His beings, we are loving God."

Meher Baba nevertheless emphasised that service has various levels. Fulfilling people's material needs is good, but a higher service is the provision of creative and intellectual needs. Higher still is the provision of spiritual understanding: *"because it includes the right perspective to all human problems and promotes their solution."*



*Life is a Jest:
"Don't Worry, Be Happy!"*

This saying, now popular in general society, was adopted from Meher Baba. Over the decades, he repeatedly told his followers :

"Do your best. Then, don't worry; be happy. I will help you." To Baba, the tendency to worry is one of the great obstacles to spiritual progress.

By contrast, being cheerful under all circumstances is a Divine quality which assists others.



Meher Baba enjoying a joke.



Meher Baba claimed that a simple smile, aimed at lifting a “drooping heart” could be more beneficial than a grand act of charity.

This is because life, once it is truly understood, is just a game: “*really a mighty joke.*” Meher Baba called the universe itself “*the jest on my chest.*” Throughout his life, he encouraged humour and innocent merriment. Joke-telling, games and sports were amongst Baba’s activities.

Followers of Baba strive to laugh at themselves and the predicaments in which they find themselves. Their gatherings are often characterised by games and light-hearted fun.



Ethics: Responsibility within Flexibility

Meher Baba declared his “wish” that his lovers try to observe the following :

- “1. *Do not shirk your responsibilities.*
2. *Attend faithfully to your worldly duties but always keep at the back of your minds that all this is Baba’s.*
3. *When you feel happy, think ‘Baba wants me to be happy’. When you suffer, think: ‘Baba wants me to suffer.’*
4. *Be resigned to every situation and think honestly and sincerely: ‘Baba has placed me in this situation.’*
5. *With the understanding that Baba is in everyone, try to help and serve others.”*

Many devotees of Meher Baba attempt to follow this and some other instructions Baba gave to those who endeavour to love him :

- “1. *No drugs except under medical supervision.*
2. *No sexual relations outside marriage.*



3. *No association with other spiritual masters or gurus.*

4. *No dishonesty."*

This is not to imply that Meher Baba formulated rigid, "dry as dust" morals. Rather, he himself stated:

"However wicked an action may seem to be, it should not be judged on the basis of the world's standards, but purely on the underlying motives. This is the spiritual view ...however shocking or absurd it may seem to the worldly-minded."

Indeed, Meher Baba held that "good" and "evil" only seem to exist from the perspective of persons bound by illusion or ignorance. Equally, he explained that people's negative traits are often dormant, such that a person who is slowly overcoming a vast range of "failings" may be making greater progress than a person who, through limited experience or a cloistered existence, appears to never err.

Devotees of Meher Baba generally display a tolerant, open-minded, flexible approach towards others. They endeavour to read "Baba's will" or "lessons from Baba" into whatever transpires in life - "good" or "bad". Furthermore, no one is ever excluded from Meher Baba's compassion for failing to live up to the ideal.



Living an "Ordinary Life"

Finally, Meher Baba wanted people to :

"Be pure and simple, and love all, because all are One. Live a sincere life; be natural and be honest with yourself."

He preferred his followers to live unpretentiously, avoiding distinctive titles, dress or diet. For him, the highest spiritual achievement was not something demonstrative but rather the ability to be perfectly human: *"spirituality must make a man more human."*





NUMBERS AND DISTRIBUTION

The Absence of Tallies

The number of "*Baba lovers*" (as some call themselves) is indeterminable. Currently, the global figure has been placed at everything from "*hundreds of thousands*" up to "*one million*" or so.

Meher Baba contacted large numbers of people, but they do not necessarily associate with each other. Neither do followers recognise a firm dividing line between themselves and "non-believers". They claim it impossible to know whether anyone is actually a Baba lover or not, because such love might not manifest outwardly at all. A Christian or Buddhist might be a better "Baba lover" in the real sense than many of his so-called followers. It is felt that only Baba can judge anyone's spiritual connection with him.

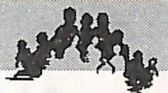
Followers accept that even people living at Baba centres or assisting with functions will manifest a wide variety of commitment, and that statistics on "Baba followers" can not be ascertained in "real" terms.

Followers within India

Of the outwardly committed, India has the majority. At the very least, 200,000 Indians are known to view Meher Baba as their Master. Although there are groups throughout India, following is strongest in Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh. Entire villages and towns in such regions are devoted to Meher Baba.

American and Australian Followers

Outside of India, the USA. has the largest allegiance: at least 10,000. Australia ranks next: several hundred regular followers. Additionally, in both countries, Meher Baba's influence has been very extensive on persons and movements within "Alternative" and "New Age" circles.



Interest in the World Generally

Many hundreds of regular followers can also be found throughout Europe - especially in England and France. Finally, there is a scattering of Baba lovers around the globe, especially since the collapse of the Communist bloc.



ORGANISATION OF FOLLOWERS

Absence of Hierarchy

Meher Baba stated that he did not come to establish a religion. Therefore, his followers have avoided organising structures, hierarchies or memberships.

Status of Disciples and Other Close Followers

Meher Baba's surviving close disciples and other long-standing followers hold a certain informal status in the movement on account of their long association with Meher Baba. Though they make no claims to spiritual authority, they are often sought out by lovers who seek more information about Meher Baba and how to follow him.



Some close disciples, 1930's.



Trusts and Foundations

The only bodies exerting any organising or authoritative role within the movement (from the viewpoint of some) are the Meher Baba Trusts and Foundations. A few of these were directly sanctioned by Meher Baba.

Trusts and Foundations exist to maintain and finance centres dedicated to Meher Baba (see below). Sometimes they also oversee or finance functions held there, occasional projects (publishing, charitable ventures), and help provide necessities for close followers or staff residing at centres kept in his name.

Each Trust and Foundation is autonomous. Each consists of persons nominated either by Baba, his disciples, or by existing members. They have no authority over followers except in as much as they decide the type of behaviour permissible at Baba centres or within their sphere of activity.

Projects in Meher Baba's Name

By no means do Trusts and Foundations account for all work done in Meher Baba's name. Many books, tapes, and charitable projects are launched independently by interested parties. Similarly, labour at centres is often a voluntary contribution by various lovers.

Groups and Communities of Followers

Any group of people interested in Meher Baba is entirely informal, unstructured, autonomous and unmonitored. Groups appear, dissolve and change locality in accord with local interest or followers' changes of residence. Many 'Baba lovers' are never part of any group.

Meetings occur regularly or sporadically at any available home, hall or public place. From one function to the next, a group is led by anyone who cares to do so.

Meher Baba favoured community life and social interaction. Consequently, informal communities have sprung up around many Baba centres. These may include people who do not follow Meher Baba.





PRACTICES AND LIFESTYLE

No Distinctive Customs

Lovers of Meher Baba maintain no special diets, customs, practices or lifestyles. They come from all races, creeds and backgrounds, but - in accordance to Meher Baba's wish - follow the laws, traditions and, if required or inclined, the religion of their native land. Devotees' relationship with Meher Baba would be best described as personal. The only distinguishing trait in their homes is perhaps the presence of photographs and books of Meher Baba.

Expressing Spirituality in All Facets of Life

Meher Baba wanted people to *live* his message rather than preach it:

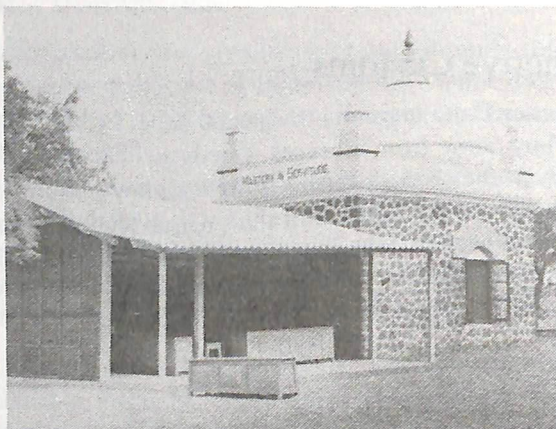
"Live such a life of love, sacrifice, forgiveness and tolerance that others will love Me. If, instead of doing the real work of love, you start organised propaganda for me, it is absurd. I need no propaganda or publicity. I do not want publicity or propaganda, but I do want love and honesty. If you cannot live the life of love and honesty, you should stop working for me."

In fact, Meher Baba wanted spirituality expressed through all facets of life. Many "Baba lovers" are active in creative, charitable and therapeutic ventures within the general community for this reason.

Also, many of them write or recite poems, draw or paint, compose music, write articles and books, or perform dramas and dances on the theme of Meher Baba or his message.

Pilgrimage

Meher Baba did not prescribe pilgrimage. On the other hand, he did emphasise the usefulness of visiting places associated with him. He indicated that his Samadhi (tomb-shrine) at Meherabad is of great spiritual benefit to all. Many followers of Meher Baba try to visit this tomb-shrine as often as possible.



The tomb-shrine of Meher Baba

Group Activities

Occasionally, lovers who feel inclined will meet for shared meals, discussion, readings, music, jokes, films, games, sports, outings, or skits- generally orientated around Baba topics or important days in Meher Baba's life. Individuals or groups might also recite prayers that were dictated by Meher Baba, or sing devotional songs if they are interested.



SPECIAL DAYS

Many Baba lovers celebrate events in Meher Baba's life. They organise special functions or festivities for such occasions. The most common of these are listed here:

Amartithi (31 January)

Meaning "Immortal Day", this is the date of Meher Baba's physical passing. Indian pilgrimages to Meherabad and Meherazad reach their zenith during Amartithi, swelling to many tens of thousands. Hundreds also arrive from the West. Some people observe silence at noon to mark the time Baba physically died.



Baba's Birthday (25 February)

Meher Baba's birthday is celebrated by local gatherings at 5 am. (Baba's hour of birth) and by joining in various forms of birthday entertainment. A birthday cake is often shared.

Silence Day (10 July)

During his lifetime, Meher Baba asked followers to observe silence for 24 hours to commemorate the day he stopped speaking. This practice continues.

Mehera's Birthday (22 December)

Some Baba lovers- especially women- like to gather this day to drink tea and share stories of the great love Mehera had for Meher Baba. Baba called Mehera, who was his closest female disciple, "*the purest soul in the universe*". He especially honoured her on this day.



Mehera in 1976.

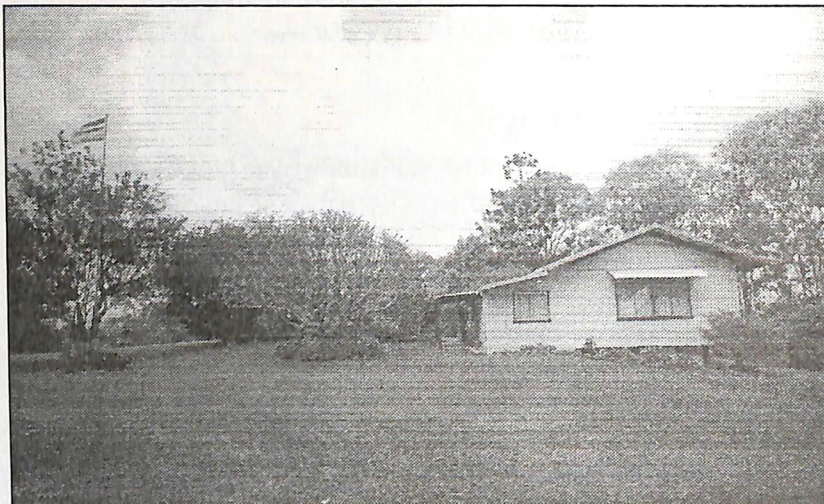
Local Anniversaries

At some Baba centres, the grandest festivities of all celebrate the anniversary of Meher Baba's visit to the area. Large numbers attend and a full program of music, drama, games, talks, and films is offered.





CENTRES DEDICATED TO MEHER BABA



A 'Baba Centre': Avatar's Abode

The Heart as the only True Centre

Meher Baba stated that all religious buildings and statues are empty except for the love brought there by Masters, saints and devotees. During Baba's lifetime and subsequently, many buildings were certainly constructed or used for his cause, or to focus efforts to live for him, but they are not temples or ashrams.

Meher Baba always stressed that his only centre is within each individual ;

"If, instead of erecting churches.....temples and mosques, people were to establish a house for Beloved God in their hearts, my work will have been done."

"Let each 'Baba lover", wherever he or she may be, be a 'Baba centre' personified, radiating the eternal message of love divine."



The Nature and Use of Centres

Consequently, whatever “centres” exist are merely followers’ homes kept in Baba’s memory, or sets of buildings on a property (sometimes buildings he visited). In most of these, items Baba used can be viewed; literature and films on Meher Baba are available; and there is usually a room wherein visitors can sit to quietly focus on him. Many centres also provide accommodation for followers and sincerely interested persons.

Such ‘Baba centres’ are pivotal to many follower’s social activities and festivities. They supply a means of inspiring, networking and informing ‘Baba lovers’ and outsiders alike.

Major ‘Baba Centres’

Hundreds of centres dedicated to Meher Baba exist. They are especially numerous in India and the United States. Four of particular importance are listed here:

Meherabad

About five miles south of Ahmednagar (inland from Bombay), this place is the focus of international pilgrimage. It contains Meher Baba’s tomb-shrine, a large number of buildings - mostly associated with the earlier decades of Baba’s work, the graves of disciples, and a range of pilgrim accommodation and charitable establishments. Major festivities are held here, and many Baba lovers work or live in the vicinity.

Meherazad

Nine miles north of Ahmednagar, Meherazad was Meher Baba’s home for the last twenty years of his life, and is now the private residence of his close disciples. The complex features buildings, gardens and vehicles pertaining mostly to Baba’s later phases. Of special interest is Baba’s Room. Seclusion Hill, where Baba did much work, rises behind Meherazad. Meherazad is the usual place for Baba lovers to meet Baba’s disciples.



Meher Spiritual Centre (Myrtle Beach)

Situated in Myrtle Beach (South Carolina, USA), Meher Baba described this as his "*home in the West*". The property comprises 500 acres of forests, lakes, beach, gardens and numerous cabins for pilgrims. Founded in 1943, the center's purpose - as designated by Baba - is "*rest, meditation and the renewal of spiritual life.*" Meher Baba stayed at and visited various buildings and spots within the property several times during the 1950's.

Avatar's Abode (Kiel Mountain/ Woombye)

On a sub-tropical hill in Woombye (Queensland, Australia), this 100-acre property was identified by Meher Baba as his other main centre and as a future "*place of world pilgrimage.*" It has a few buildings and areas visited by Meher Baba during his 1958 stay, the focus of these being his room. The site features forest walks, gardens, a reception centre/ library and some pilgrim accommodation.

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