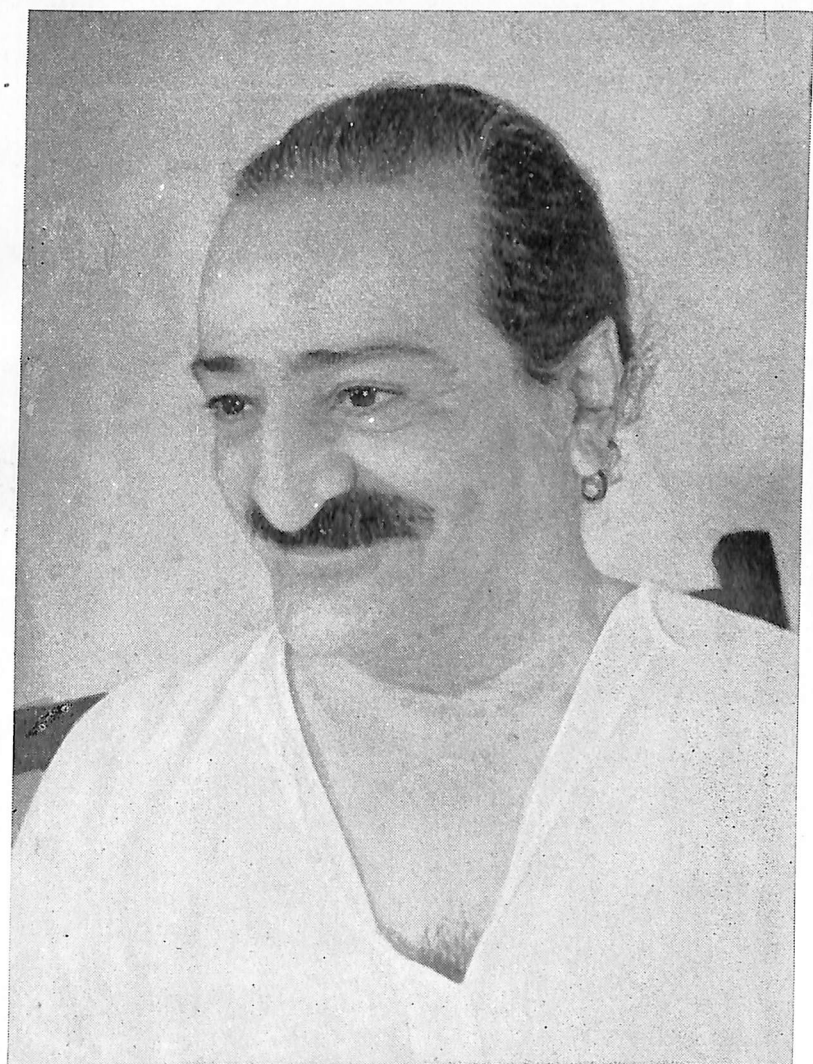


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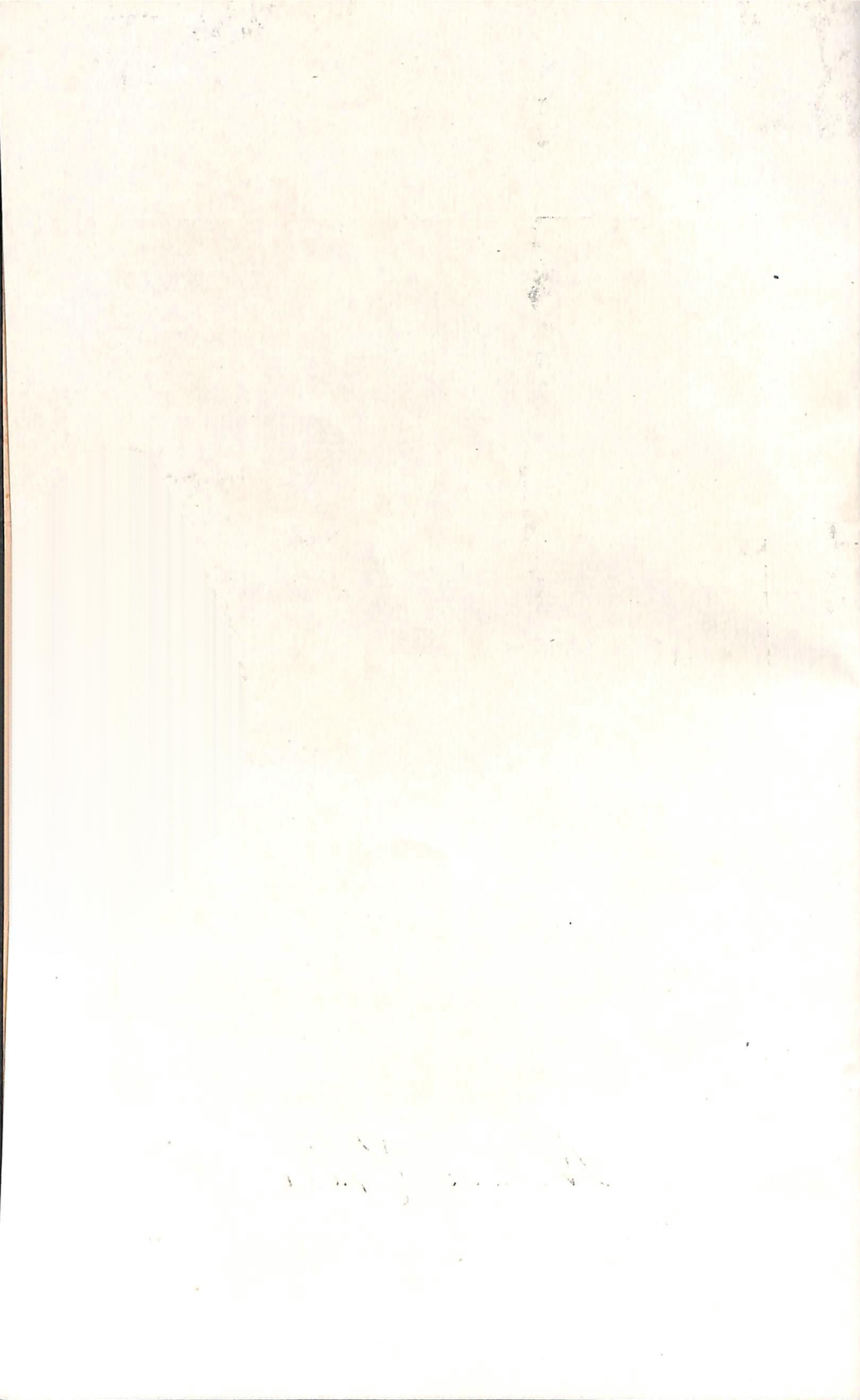
BABĀ'S



Doast Sahas



Meher Baba



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Meher Baba's

Last
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Meher Baba's Last Sahavas

Not even in our dreams did we have an inkling that we would be going for a sahavas on the 1st of February 1969. This last sahavas was the first one in which no previous intimation had been given by Meher Baba or the Mandali (lovers staying with Baba). It was unique in many other respects also.

Some friends told us that the All India Radio had announced the passing away of Avatar Meher Baba that morning. The news could not be believed until we heard the same announcement on the radio at 10-55 a.m. on the 1st. "It must be a mistake," "It just couldn't be" were some of the remarks passed by Baba lovers. One said, "Let us go to Ahmednagar and confirm." The suggestion was unanimously accepted. All dashed to their homes for an extra pair of clothes and then to the station to catch the 12 noon train for Bombay. We reached Bombay after a trip of five hours that seemed like five days. We rang up Nariman Dadachanji. His servant replied, "No one is at home as all have gone to Ahmednagar for Meher Baba's funeral."

Our minds reeled and our hearts cried. We soon entrained for Poona. Catching a bus at 2-30 a.m. from Poona, we speeded towards Ahmednagar. What a different bus ride this was from our previous ones. The joy and the enthusiasm of meeting Baba, of seeing His smiling face and His loving arms outstretched to hold us snugly to His bosom, were not there on this trip.

We reached Ahmednagar at 5-00 a.m. on the 2nd. and rushed to Adi's office (Adi K. Irani, Meher Baba's secretary and disciple). Some of the Mandali were just then leaving for Meherabad. Adi looked as if he had not slept for two

days and nights. He told us crisply, "Don't waste time, go to Meherabad." Soon began the last lap of our journey from Ahmednagar to Meherabad, a distance of six miles on a dusty road. Hardly had our bus stopped at lower Meherabad, when we jumped out and walked quickly crossing the railway track and up the Meherabad hill. The sweet memories of going up the hill with Baba in 1958 came back to our minds very vividly. What fun and joy it had been then with Baba leading while we followed. None of us had been able to catch up with Baba's long and fast strides. Now, we struggled up the hill and went straight to the Tomb.

From a distance the white walls of the Tomb could be seen. We did not wait to loosen our shoe laces but just knocked off our shoes and went in after kneeling at the threshold. What a sight awaited us! How can words express what we saw and felt at that time. We could hear Eruch Jassawala saying, "Why have you come so late?" We did not see him nor did we try for our eyes were glued on a sight we had never contemplated before. Down in the crypt was Beloved Baba lying motionless, covered with a pink sheet and roses around His head and on His body. Only Baba's face down to His ears could be seen. The rest of the body was covered. Gone were His heavenly welcoming smile, His nod, His gestures, His loving look, His fast moving eyes, His rapid finger movements, His loving tender pat, His encompassing embrace, His bewitching kiss, His wit, His face radiating joy, His kind care and attention and gone was His usual love pouring. Only those who have had the felicity of being embraced by Baba can understand the extraordinary feeling of happiness it brought to be there enfolded in love.

His eyes were closed. His face looked a bit pale. His big forehead shone in the fluorescent light burning in the room. His lips were a reddish brown. His eyebrows and nose maintained their shape. He looked as if He were sleeping. His feet were wrapped in a pink sheet. Blocks of

ice were placed on His sides and above His head in the small place left between the crypt wall and the board on which Baba was lying. For several minutes we could not get our eyes off Baba. We then heard Eruch saying from somewhere, "Go down the steps and touch His feet." One after another we went down the five steps that lead to His feet. We sat on the last step and touched His covered feet, now cold and damp instead of their usual warmth.

Baba's words came back to my mind, "When I drop my body, I will remain in all who love me. I can never die. Love me, obey me, and you will find me." We remembered the time Baba had brought us up the hill to His Tomb. He had then said, "When I leave this body, it will have its rest in the Tomb on this hill. After 70 years, this hill will turn into a place of world pilgrimage where lovers of God, philosophers and celebrities will come to pay homage to the Tomb. How fortunate you all are that you are here in my living presence and that you could come up the hill with me." He had also said, "Know well that I am in everyone. I am not just this body. I am the ocean. If you love me intensely, then you will find me everywhere." "I am the God of all Gods. Trust me. I know everything. Don't worry."

Only after we came up the steps from the crypt, did we notice Eruch and a couple of others standing around. We explained that Adi's official telegram to our Meher Baba Centre had not been received until we left Navsari and that we had come because of the All India Radio announcement. Others were waiting for Baba's darshan and so we left the Tomb and walked around it peering through the windows to have a glimpse of our Beloved. From the North window we could see Baba's feet. What we felt on leaving the Tomb is difficult to describe. May be, the pangs of separation were essential for the experience of the bliss of Union.

We busied ourselves talking to other lovers and when we could snatch a few minutes with some one from the Mandali, we did not lose the opportunity. At about 10-00 a. m., Eruch came out of the Tomb and called the lovers who had come from Navsari. We sat down under a tree and heard the long story which is now to follow. What is given below was heard from Eruch and the other members of the Mandali.

On the 19th of November 1968, Beloved Baba asked one of His lovers from the Ahmednagar Meher Baba Centre to cook and send for Him 'Sambhar' (curry) and rice. She did so very lovingly but, after eating only two spoonfuls, Baba said, "I am full!" The Mandali was surprised as Baba would always enjoy food cooked by her. They felt that Baba's health began to go downhill from that day. Eruch said that Baba had sent for the same curry and rice on the 19th of January 1969 and enjoyed the meal very much. He ate it for lunch and again at dinner and practically finished all that had been sent !

On the 3rd. of December 1968, Baba got a muscular spasm while he sat on His toilet seat. This was a muscular contraction which was sudden, rapid and very painful. The Mandali noticed that Baba looked pale. He went off food, not to say that Baba ever ate much. The Mandali would often request Baba to eat well so that His body would sustain the strain of the 1969 darshan. Whenever the darshan was referred to, Baba seemed very unconcerned about it and would remark that giving darshan was not a big thing! He would always emphasize that He would give darshan. Day by day anaemia seemed to be taking a firm grip on Baba. At last, a blood report was called for and the result was shocking. Baba's haemoglobin had dropped to 5 Gms.% (normal 14 Gms.) and His blood urea was 148 mgms % (normal 20 to 40 mgms). When the waste products of metabolism are not excreted from the body by

the kidneys, the blood urea rises. Dr. Grant, a well known physician of Poona was consulted and he could not believe his eyes on seeing the report. A second blood report was called for thinking that there had been a mistake with the first one. This wishful thinking had to be abandoned when the second report came.

Dr. Grant now decided that Baba would need a blood transfusion. The Mandali recalled that a month back when Baba had been told about Eruch's uncle who needed a blood transfusion. Baba had jokingly said, "Why not give me a transfusion!" The Mandali had taken this remark very lightly and had hardly dreamt what Baba was referring to. One of them had even told Baba, "How can the Godman take another man's blood?" Baba had replied, "Why not? The Godman will not change in any way if he takes human blood." When Eruch's uncle had to be given second transfusion, Baba again jokingly asked why He was not being given one. Mysterious are His ways and even though broad as daylight hints were given, no one understood them. Baba was given the first blood transfusion on 15th December 1968 at 7-30 a.m. Dr. Grant had come personally from Poona to attend on Baba.

After the blood transfusion, Baba's blood was again checked. The haemoglobin had risen to 8 Gms% while the urea had gone down to 90 mgm%. Baba was given a second blood transfusion on the 19th of December. (Baba's blood group is AB1, meaning an Universal recipient). Dr. Grant took Baba's E. K. G. and said it was normal. Dr. Goher was kept on her toes day and night attending Baba and so one of the Mandali suggested to Baba to call Hoshang from Navsari. Baba replied, "Not now. He will come on his own at the right time." Eruch suggested calling Dr. R. Ginde from Bombay. Dr. Ginde came to see Baba on the 19th of December. He says, "I saw Beloved Baba again on December 19, 1968, as by then His health had deteriorated further. Beloved Baba had become pale due to

anemia, there was swelling around his feet and ankles. He was unable to sit up. He was getting spasms of His limbs. His blood urea had gone up to 146 Mgm%, Haemoglobin had gone down to 6.5 Gms% (by then He had already been given one packed cell transfusion) still while I was with Him, He sat up for half an hour and soon brightened up, looking almost His usual Self."

When Dr. Hirji of Trichur came to see Baba, he did not see a single spasm. Dr. Hirji suggested that Baba be shifted to Poona and a thorough checkup given. But, Baba said that He would drop His body if He were taken to Poona !

On the 22nd of December, Mehera's birthday was celebrated in the usual manner. About 200 lovers from Bombay had been called for the occasion. On 23rd December Dara, Baba's nephew, and his wife Amrit, daughter of Shatrugna Kumar of Dehradun were blessed at Meherazad. Baba had taken a great interest in this wedding. In fact, Baba had suggested that Amrit would be a very suitable wife for Dara. Adi (junior), Baba's brother, who lives in England, first fixed Dara's wedding in November 1968. Later, he wrote that December would be more convenient for him as his daughter Shirin would then get Christmas holidays from school. Adi suggested 23rd December for the wedding. Though Baba agreed to the postponement of the wedding, He said, "I will have to adjust my work." Baba took part in the functions on both the days. He took interest in both the functions and expressed His satisfaction and happiness after the functions ended.

From 26th December, the spasms increased. Movements would sometimes precipitate a spasm. His haemoglobin remained constant and His blood urea began to come down gradually. Whenever the Mandali talked about the

Poona darshan, Baba would tell them most casually not to worry about it. On some days Baba would get no spasms at all but the feeling of elation on this score was short-lived. Often Baba would tell the Mandali, "The time is very near."

New Year marched in but Baba's health fluctuated like a barometer with His Universal work. On the 9th of January 1969, Adi's (Baba's brother) wife came to see Baba before her departure for England. While talking to Baba about His health, He said, "Don't worry. All will be well by the end of this month."

Till the 12th of January 1969, Baba used to come to the men Mandali room as usual in the mornings and afternoons. After the 12th, Baba never left His room. A few days before the 12th, Padri (his real name is Faredoon Driver but Baba had nicknamed him Padri) came from Meherabad to see Baba. During the course of his conversation with Baba, he casually remarked, "Baba, the Mandali has become old and it is better to close this shop." Baba replied, "No, the shop will now be opened !"

On 30th January, the spasms increased manifold. Even finger movements would precipitate a spasm making it very difficult to read Baba's gestures. Dr. Grant was called from Poona. He felt Baba's health was improving and so asked Baba to take a high protein diet. Baba asked him whether he ate meat and fish. The doctor replied that he had only one meal a day and that he ate a non vegetarian diet. Baba agreed to take the diet suggested by the doctor. Just before Dr. Grant left for Poona, Baba told him, "My time has come." After his departure, the spasms increased !

Baba called Padri from Meherabad to help the Mandali at Meherabad. Several persons had to attend on Baba all day and night as they held His legs tight while a spasm shook His body. The excruciating pain during

each spasm was His crucifixion. Padri arrived in the evening at Meherazad on the 30th of January. Padri had been called for a seven days stay. On his arrival at Meherazad, he went to Baba's room. Baba was lying with His eyes closed on His surgical bed. When He opened His eyes, Bhau Kalchuri told Baba that Padri had arrived. Baba asked Padri to go to his room and said that he would be given day duty. It seems, that after Padri left Meherabad, Mohammed, the only mast at Meherabad asked Sidhuji where Padri had gone. Sidhuji told Mohammed that Padri had been called to Meherazad to assist the Mandali as Baba was not well. On hearing this, Mohammed, who mostly talks in a language understandable to himself alone said, "Tomorrow (31st) Dada (Baba) is coming here and is going to join Gustadji (one of the Mandali who passed away some years back)!"

Baba had asked Adi to phone Dr. Ginde on the 27th. Dr. Ginde writes, "I received a trunk call from brother Adi from Ahmednagar. He asked me to try and be ready as Beloved Baba was likely to call me soon to spend two or three days at Meherazad. Next day, I phoned him back and told Adi that I could be there on Saturday, the 1st February, 1969. However, again on the 29th January I had another call from brother Adi. He said that Beloved Baba had said as to why I could not see the urgency and be with Him on Friday the 31st January, 1969. After arranging for relief for my work, I phoned back and informed that I would leave for Meherazad on Friday early morning to be with Beloved Baba by noon as desired by Him. But, I got another call on Thursday, the 30th January about 9-30 p. m. that I should see Dr. Grant in Poona and discuss Beloved Baba's case with him before proceeding further to Ahmednagar."

Baba asked Aloba (Ali Akbar) to bring a board from the Mandali room on Friday the 31st morning on which the following three couplets of Hafiz were written:

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

"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."

Little did anyone realise the significance of bringing this board until Baba dropped His body. Baba knew how much confusion there would be and how many tongues would wag after He dropped His body and these three couplets seem to clear every doubt.

Bhau Kalchuri, who was constantly near Baba on the last night said that at 9-30 p. m. Baba told him, "I am not this body." At 10-30 p. m. and again at 12-30 a. m. Baba told him, "Don't worry."

At 3-45 a. m. on Friday, 31st January 1969, the following from the Mandali were called to be near Baba : Eruch, Bhau, Pendu (A. R. Irani), Padri and Dr. Goher. All of them nursed Baba with love and tried to relieve Him of His self-imposed suffering. At dawn, the men were relieved by the women Mandali. At 8-00 a. m, Mani, Rano, Francis, Pendu, Bhau, Chhagan, Padri and Eruch took up duty by Baba's bedside.

Baba enquired whether Dr. Ginde had arrived. When informed in the negative, He asked Adi to phone and inform Dr. Grant at Poona that he should not delay Dr. Ginde as he was wanted at Meherazad. That morning, Baba often asked for Dr. Ginde and each time He would gesture a 'G', He would rock with a severe spasm and wince at the unbearable pain. Baba also developed severe pain in His back. Baba had said on 25th

February 1964, "I have suffered much and will have to suffer much more till I break my silence." On another occasion He had said, "I suffer every second of my life untold agony." Had it not been said, "The blood of the lamb washeth away the sins of the world." Baba's greatness lies not in His manifestation but in suffering for the cause of humanity. While working for the spiritual upliftment of humanity, the Avatar has to take upon himself the entire suffering of the world clamouring for its deliverance. This suffering for the world steeped in ignorance becomes the Avatar's crucifixion. Baba's life on earth was a crucifixion at each moment. Baba, referring to His suffering, had told Dr. Donkin on Thursday 30th January, "This is my crucifixion."

Seeing that allopathic medicines seemed to give Baba no relief, Padri gave some biochemic pills for relieving spasms. The drug had to be administered every ten minutes. At 12 noon, Padri gave the fourth dose of his medicine. After this dose, Baba remarked that the pill was not helping Him at all. Baba asked Dr. Goher to stop giving Him injections and even reminded the Mandali, "Do not forget that I am God." Baba had once said, "I am God - God the Beyond and God in human form. I draw you ever closer to me by giving you frequent occasions of my companionship. But familiarity often makes you forget that I am God. I know all what happens and will happen. Whatever happens does not happen without My will. Knowingly I allow things to happen in their natural course."

After Padri gave Baba the fourth dose, Baba for the last time then enquired whether Dr. Ginde had come. He was answered in the negative. Baba gestured, "By this time he should have come, it is getting late." The Mandali were too busy attending to Baba's needs and this statement did not make them suspect anything. Padri asked Eruch

to give Baba the next dose of his medicine after ten minutes.

Before he could leave the room, Baba got a very very severe spasm at 12-15 p. m. He was sitting on His surgical bed with His back and head raised. Baba flexed His arms and closed His mouth tightly. His respiration suddenly stopped. There was no relaxation after the spasm and Baba became motionless. Eruch, using his wits tried to open Baba's mouth. He found that Baba's tongue had fallen back. Eruch put his mouth on Baba's mouth and began to breathe into Baba's lungs forcibly. This mouth to-mouth resuscitation was carried on for nearly thirty minutes. Francis and Bhau relieved him for a short while. Adi was immediately phoned to bring Dr. Brieseman and an oxygen cylinder from the Mission hospital at Ahmednagar. Pendu kept his hand on Baba's pulse. Dr. Goher was busy giving several injections in an attempt to revive Baba.

At about 12-40 p. m., Dr. Ginde arrived followed by Adi and Dr. Brieseman. They brought an oxygen cylinder with them. Eruch had collapsed on the floor out of sheer exhaustion. Dr. Brieseman gave a cardiac massage. He then checked Baba's heart with a stethoscope and passed it on to Dr. Donkin, who, after examining Baba gave it to Dr. Ginde. The three doctors discussed something which the Mandali did not understand. Dr. Ginde checked Baba's eye reflexes. The heart had stopped, the reflexes were gone and life was extinct! Dr. Goher asked whether she could give an intra-cardiac injection. She was permitted but it was too late. He had given His life and made it available to all. Baba had said, "The dropping of the physical body of the Avatar or by the Sadguru is not death, for even while he uses the body he is in no way attached to it and has no sanskaric-link with it. Nor does the dropping of the body in these instances involve the usual survival of the limited individuality or ego-mind, for these are simply non-existent in the Sadguru and Avatar.

The Mandali around Baba now realised that Baba had dropped His physical body. The reaction of the women Mandali was as womanly as it was heart-achingly understandable. They just could not bring themselves to believe that Baba had dropped His body. Mehera came into Baba's room when He choked and had the severe spasm at 12-15 p. m. A hot water bag was brought by the women Mandali for Baba at about 12-20 p. m. The news of Baba dropping His body did not take long to spread to all the inmates at Meherazad. Dr. Brieseman left. The women Mandali shed tears as did Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of Jesus when He breathed His last.

The men Mandali left Baba's room and gathered in Francis' room. They first discussed the wording of the telegram to be sent to all Baba Centres in the world. Finally it was decided; "Avatar Meher Baba dropped His physical body at 12-15 p. m. on 31st January 1969 at Meherazad to live eternally in the hearts of all His lovers. Beloved Baba's body will be interred at Meherabad Arangaon on 1st February at 10-00 a. m. in the Tomb He had ordered to be built long ago."

All minds seemed to have come to a standstill. Dr. Ginde composed the Mandali by saying that Baba is eternal. The women Mandali, particularly Mehera, were greatly shocked and grieved. Dr. Ginde asked the men Mandali not to be sentimental but to become practical. He wrote Baba's death certificate. Eruch, who had by now recovered, recalled that Baba had told him several times, "Wherever my body drops, bring me and put me in the crypt at Meherabad." He had also asked the Mandali to play the record, "Begin the Beguine" after He dropped His body. Eruch had once asked Baba, "Suppose the circumstances are such that we cannot bring your body to the crypt, what shall we do?" Baba had said that in that case (after having tried best for 15 days) His body should be cremated and the ashes brought to Meherabad and put in the crypt.

Dr. Ginde suggested that Baba's body should be removed to Meherabad within six hours. Mehera and the other women Mandali wanted to keep Baba's body at Meherazad. Mani argued with Dr. Ginde, "Baba had once told me that if He goes into coma some day, He would revive after seven days." Dr. Ginde explained that this was not coma, for a person in coma has his heart beating while his respiration and pulse have not stopped. He tried to explain that Baba was not in coma. Mani would not agree with Dr. Ginde's arguments. Someone suggested that Baba's body be kept in the hall at lower Maherabad for three days. Dr. Ginde said that it would be very difficult to remove a decomposed body to the crypt after three days.

Only after Eruch explained that Baba's body must be removed to the Meherabad Tomb as instructed by Baba Himself, all, including the women Mandali agreed to remove Baba's body to the crypt. Mehera and Mani requested Dr. Ginde that Baba's body be kept at Meherazad till 5-00 p. m. Dr. Ginde then suddenly asked, "Where is the crypt? What is the floor made of?" When he was told that the floor was of stone, he quickly said that the stones would have to be removed. Padri was asked to remove the stone floor in the crypt. Padri went to Meherabad and began the task of getting the stone slabs in the crypt removed. The clanging noise of the digging made the Arangaon villagers prick up their ears and they felt something was amiss. They were still ignorant that Baba had dropped His body. The crypt floor was ready by 7-00 p. m.

Chhagan was urgently packed off to Ahmednagar to get a wooden board made on which Baba's body would be kept and then lowered in the crypt. He was to get a cover made for the coffin which would be placed over Baba. Chhagan rushed off and gave urgent orders at Ahmednagar for the cover and the board to be made.

At Meherazad, after the initial shock had been overcome, Baba's surgical bed was straightened out to a

horizontal position. Baba's sadra and underwear were changed. The Mandali quickly decided not to give Baba a bath as He had been averse to bathing and had had no bath for nearly two years! Yet, Baba's body and skin were always fresh and fragrant. Baba's body was wrapped up from His shoulders to His toes in two bed sheets that were on His bed. On the carpet, near Baba's bed, a plastic sheet was placed and over it a quilt. Baba was gently lifted by the Mandali and placed on the quilt. He was again wrapped up in the quilt, plastic and the carpet. A chequered scarf was tied round His head going over His chin.

While the record "Begin the Beguine" was being played several times, Dr. Donkin arrived with an ambulance. Baba was lifted on a stretcher from His room in Meherazad and brought to the men Mandali room. The stretcher was placed on His aluminium bed. The Mandali came one by one and bowed down for the last time in Meherazad.

It was time to say goodbye, though, for Baba, there is no goodbye. Though Baba was leaving them physically, He was not really leaving them for He has said: "If you maintain a tight and lasting grip on my daaman, you will remain with me on the highest of levels or the lowest, wherever I am, wherever I may be....." All were quiet at this parting time. Even the birds seemed to have stopped chirping. The bougainvillea and the jasmine bowers in the garden seemed to be drooping, bidding farewell to their Beloved. The roses must have shriveled for, now, whom would they adorn? But, they were lucky for they were carried daily to Meherabad and placed on His feet by the women Mandali. It was difficult to believe that Baba was leaving after so many years, rich in activity. The Mandali recalled the first day when Baba moved to Meherazad on 20th August 1948. Some Westerners were also present on that day. All enjoyed a good lunch using green banana leaves as plates. Soon Baba was busy with His work. The Mandali recalled

the years they had spent in Meherazad with Baba—His seclusions on the Tembi hill, His mast work with Nilkanth-wala mast and others, His trips all over India in the blue bus, His seclusions in the blue bus, His listening to quawali records on the gramophone, the scenes of human jollity, of pathos and elation when His lovers came to see Him, His attending to all correspondence, playing games of which larisque was His favourite, His night retirement in His room doing intensified internal work and a million other things like giving discourses, celebrating Mehera's birthday, and His eternal wit.

Baba's delightful humour was a distinctive trait in this Advent and it would peep out or burst into flame under most varied conditions. Even on the afternoon of 30th January, He called Kaka Baria and asked him to say, "Sai Baba, Baba Jan, Meher Baba 'Chhe' (is) Bhagwan (God)." After Kaka's last illness in which he was in a semi conscious state for several days due to high blood urea, his speech had been greatly affected. In spite of this, Kaka made an effort to say what he had been asked to. The incorrect pronunciation and the way in which he said it evoked laughter from all, while Baba's face beamed with smiles. Baba would gesture that Kaka helped to lessen His Universal burden a little bit.

Baba had lived in Meherazad from 1948 till He dropped His body on the 31st of January 1969. Azad means free. Meherazad is situated nine miles from Ahmednagar near the village Pimpalgaon at the foot of the Tembi hill. Two cabins had been built on the hill, one on the summit and one on a ledge a little further down. Baba remained in seclusion in the upper cabin. Due to bad weather and great inconvenience, both the cabins were brought down and reassembled in Meherazad within forty eight hours. The house which had originally been a rest house for engineers working on the nearby reservoir was where Baba stayed first with the women Mandali. Another

one storied house was built later on where He and some women Mandali shifted. His room is a large simple one in which He dropped His body. This house stands in a beautiful garden, with a variety of shrubs and shady trees. Giving colour to the whole are the widespreading Gulmohrs, which when in bloom, are a concentrated mass of crimson. The quarters for the men Mandali are rather primitive, consisting of a row of small rooms. Opposite Baba's one storied house is the four room old rest house in which some of Baba's Western lovers stayed when they visited Baba. At present it is used as an office by Mani and Rano. In Meherazad there is also the body of the blue bus in which Baba had travelled all over India in 1938-39 with Elizabeth Patterson driving most of the time. The bus was meant for sixteen but carried twenty six passengers plus untold luggage and so had to be prematurely retired. Now the bus body has been set on an improvised base for Baba to sit in during His seclusion. At present, the surgical bed on which Baba dropped His body has been placed in the blue bus. Meherazad estate covers some five acres and forms an oasis which is an earthly paradise of beauty and colour. It is a place blessed most with the physical presence of Baba. By day, intense but quiet activity continues from dawn to sunset, and at night, peace of such profundity prevails that it surpasses all understanding.

Having lived for so many years in Meherazad, Baba was now leaving. After all had bowed down, the ambulance was dusted and the stretcher carrying Baba was placed inside it on the seat. Eruch and Bhau sat inside the ambulance next to Baba's stretcher. When the ambulance started, all shouted: "Avatar Meher Baba Ki Jai." When the ambulance reached lower Meherabad, Padri sat next to the driver to guide him to the Tomb. At six in the evening, the ambulance slowly climbed the Meherabad hill. Arangaon villagers who had already got suspicious

with the noise of digging in the Tomb, now knew for certain that their Beloved was no longer with them. The news flashed through the village like a forest fire. The ambulance came and stopped just opposite Baba's cabin.

Meherabad means a flourishing land of mercy, kindness and fullness. In April 1923, Meher Baba and a few of His disciples came along the road from Ahmednagar to Dhond. They rested and refreshed themselves from a well about six miles from Ahmednagar. This area where the well stood belonged to Adi's father. When Meher Baba said that He liked the place, Adi's father dedicated the property to Baba's Cause. The ashram consists of a lower and an upper part, the latter being on a small hill. In between the two runs a railway track. A furlong away is Arangaon, a small farming village.

The main building on the hill was originally a disused stone water tank, 40' X 20' X 15' built by the British army during the 1st world war. In it two doors and windows were added later, becoming a centre for training Baba's women devotees in strict seclusion. In the early period, Baba used to descend to the dark floor of the tank for seclusion through one of the windows by means of metal rings set in the wall. He also sat in seclusion in a cavity outside the compound. It was dug at His behest in 1927. Surrounding it were four walls, a door and one window on the East side. The roof was of tin sheets. In 1938 it was roofed over with a dome and is now Baba's Tomb. The inside of the Tomb has been decorated with lovely murals by Helen Dahm of Switzerland. At each of the four corners of the domed roof is a symbol of a great world religion - a cross for Christianity, a crescent for Mohammedanism, a flame for Zoroastrianism, and a temple for Hinduism. This snow-white building bears the inscription over the door, "Mastery in Servitude."

Once, in 1922, someone from Baba's Mandali said, "Let us have a motto." All tried but nobody could coin one

which was acceptable to all who lived with Baba. A dozen suggestions were brought forward but all were rejected. It was Baba who, on the spur of the moment, provided the motto that was at once acclaimed with one voice as the most suitable one, and thus "Mastery in Servitude" was adopted. The fundamental principle of all His teachings is "Love and service to humanity." Mastery in servitude has always been His watchword. None is so great as the one who lives and dies for love and service.

Nearby Baba's Tomb are the tombs of those who were close to Baba in the West and the East : Nonny Gayley, Nadine Tolstoy, Norina Matchabelli, Doulatmai Irani (mother of Mehera) and Baba's parents, on whose tomb reads, "In eternal memory of Meher Baba's parents who are now merged in Baba's Infinity." Other smaller stones bear the names of five faithful dogs who had served Baba; one, named 'Chum', used to keep guard near Baba's door and would not allow even the Mandali to come near.

Outside the Tomb compound was a shed which was the Mast ashram. In a separate room adjoining it, now called Baba's cabin, Baba used to rest at night when He was in Meherabad. This cabin was built in 1935 soon after Baba returned from Mount Abu.

In 1938, an upper floor was added to the tank-building which serves as a dormitory. The tank-building is now used to exhibit Baba's clothes, pictures and other personal things. Rising from the main building is a staircased tower which commands a view of the surrounding countryside. From the tower flies Baba's seven coloured flag. Up the hill were the womens' quarters. Surrounding the ashram is a stone wall about six feet high. At the main entrance is an iron gate. In between the Tomb and Baba's cabin is a row of seven little cells for meditation, each with its own door and a common platform in front, built on the

site where Baba used to sit and play with the Prem ashram boys. Often they would sit there while Baba gave discourses from the East window of the Tomb when He was in seclusion in it.

In lower Meherabad there is a big hall where Baba used to hold meetings and sahavas programmes. A dispensary was built to which the poor from the neighbouring villages came for free treatment. A little beyond were the men's quarters. Next to Baba's room was a weather-bleached teak cage so small that one could not stand up straight inside it. In this Baba spent about a year from July 1925 writing a book which He said was to be published only after He dropped His body. In addition to the dispensary, a hospital, an ashram for boys, a leper asylum, a Mast-home for the God-mad, a Dharamshalla or a free shelter for the migrant poor sprang up. Baba supervised the boys, lepers, and masts and washed their clothes and cleaned their toilets. All these were run free and were open to people irrespective of their caste, creed or class. Water is brought from the well in lower Meherabad to upper Meherabad.

Baba had once said, "The major portion of my Universal work was done on this hill [(Meherabad hill)]. I have selected this spot for my last resting place; when I drop the body, it shall rest here, in my Tomb. I have fasted here for six months. I used to lie down here in the crypt taking only water and coffee, not tea...After I drop my body the physical remains will rest here, and this hill will become an important place of pilgrimage of the world. After 70 years this place will be a place of great privilege and pilgrimage. A big township will grow around here."

When Meher Baba had taken us up the hill in 1955, He had said that His body would come to rest here in the Tomb when He was seventy four years old! One old lover from Navsari at once told Baba that He had said

that He would live to the age of ninety. Baba looked serious, no word was spoken and then He waved away the subject by starting some other conversation.

Baba had then said, "While bowing down at the Tomb, I want you all to remember two things: (1) To love me whole-heartedly. Love does not mean the outward expression. You should love in such a way that you forget yourself in Me, the Beloved. (2) To give happiness to others at the cost of your happiness or comfort."

Peace reigned in the ashram, peace that was beyond understanding. There is nothing approaching the mystical about the ashrams of Meher Baba and nothing ascetic about the makeup of His disciples. One fails to find here the atmosphere generally associated with spiritual ashrams in India. Ashram life in India is generally associated with strict dietary discipline and physical and mental austerities like meditation and yoga practices. Any visitor coming to Baba's ashram will find nothing approaching his preconceived notions of what an ashram should be like. The world is only aware of the few outstanding events and activities in Meher Baba's life. The establishment of ashrams at different places with the concomitant features - the schools, hospitals, mast activities, service of the poor and untouchables and other philanthropic activities, his foreign travels etc. represent some facts and events known to everybody. No one knows the esoteric side of Meher Baba's working during this period. All we understand is that it is done for us at infinite cost and suffering on His part. The ashrams, schools, hospitals etc. have never been the end in itself, but the means to an end, which is the spiritual awakening of mankind. In spite of the almost complete absence of any esoteric formula and teaching, how Meher Baba has gradually and subtly moulded His disciples for a life of renunciation, resignation and selfless service, is a matter the recipients of His grace alone can understand.

Meher Baba does not conform to the external form of any religion, not even the religion of His birth.

To continue the story we had left behind, after the ambulance arrived at Baba's cabin, the stretcher was lifted from it and placed in the cabin just opposite its door. The crypt floor had been dug one foot deep after the stone slabs forming its floor had been removed. Padri announced at 7:00 p. m. that the Tomb was ready.

Amongst shouts of Avatar Meher Baba Ki Jai, Baba's stretcher was lifted from the cabin and taken to the entrance of the Tomb. With head first, Baba was taken inside on the stretcher and placed on the side of the crypt. The wooden board on which Baba was to be placed was first put in the crypt. Baba had once asked the Mandali whether it would be alright if He gave His darshan lying down. The Mandali had not the faintest idea of what Baba really meant by this and so had agreed thinking that His health would not permit Him to sit up for darshan. Baba had asked them to raise His head so that His lovers could see Him from a distance. The true meaning of these words was now understood when the board was being placed in the crypt. Eruch placed three stone slabs that had been removed from the crypt floor under the board where Baba's head would be placed. The board was thus at a slant with Baba's head raised by about four inches.

Baba was lifted with the carpet on which He lay. Amongst loud cheers of Avatar Meher Baba Ki Jai, the carpet was lowered on to the board. Baba now lay in the crypt with His eyes closed, His head to the North and His feet facing the steps that take one down into the crypt. A pillow was placed under Baba's head. The scarf tied round His head and over His ears and chin was rearranged. Baba's hair were gently brushed. The bed sheets wrapped round Baba were made tidy and then

blocks of ice were put in the small space between the board and the crypt wall. The ice surrounded Baba on all sides and yet did not touch His body. A flower garland was put around Baba's head and He now seemed to be sleeping peacefully. Baba, who was never at rest, though always divinely at Rest and who was motion in stillness and peace, was now really resting. A petromax light was initially hung in the Tomb but was later replaced by a fluorescent light, an electric generator being provided by the Vijayawada group. The gramophone record 'Begin the Beguine' was played several times in the Tomb while the inmates of upper Meherabad looked at Beloved Baba drinking as much as they could of His loving presence.

With the news of Baba's return to Meherabad, life was again revived in the quiet colony and activities of various kinds began preparatory to Baba's arrival. The Tomb had to be got ready, water and food for those who were going to come for Baba's darshan and many other details had to be looked into.

There were scores of people waiting for the Tomb door to be opened. They had come to have Baba's last darshan. The women Mandali returned to Meherabad at midnight. Adi was busy sending wires and cables to lovers and Baba Centres in India and abroad. The All India Radio was informed and they announced Baba's passing away at 10:00 p.m. on the 31st. of January. The next day, announcements were being made on the A. I. R. several times during the day. At times, even a short life sketch of Baba was announced. The B. B. C. also announced the passing away of Meher Baba.

In the words of one of the Mandali, "On 13th October 1968, Baba told us that He would give His darshan to all His lovers all over the world from 10th April to 10th June 1969. Considering His physical condition we were apprehensive of His body standing such a strain. But He said, "It will be easy for me to give my lovers my

darshan, so you are not to feel concerned about it. I will give darshan reclining and that will be no strain on my body. It will be different from all previous darshans and it will be the last in silence." The true meaning of these words was understood when Baba lay in the crypt and people began to file in for His darshan.

Many hints were given by Baba about His passing away but these were not understood. Once He had said, "That which is to happen after 21st May 1968, will be something great, something that has never happened before, something that will not happen again for billions and billions of years." He even remarked that the 'something great' would happen all of a sudden, not in developing stages. "People will go about their daily affairs unaware till the moment of its happening."

For His 43rd Silence anniversary on 10th July 1968, the following message was dictated by Baba to His Mandali though it was not released to His lovers. "Divine Father help your beloved son to carry out all your work this year for July of this year will mark the last year of His silence."

Baba had promised His lovers, "Sometime, somewhere, somehow I will meet my old and new Western lovers before I break my silence."

On 30th July 1968 Baba had said, "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."

On 13th October 1968, Baba had said, "I have been saying : Time is near, it is fast approaching, it is close at hand. Today I say : The time has come. Remember this!"

Once Baba had said, "Coming, coming, coming-Came!" He said, "None of you can know what it means." A few days later He added another line, making it : "Coming, coming, coming-came! I am tired of the illusion game."

He had told His Mandali, "Jesus said, 'Father forgive them for they know not what that they do.' I say, 'Father have pity on them for they know not what will happen.'"

Bahu Kalchuri has been doing night duty for Baba since many years. Baba had asked him to compose 'gazals'. Bhau had never done this before and so Baba would often give him tips when he sat near Baba at night time. In fact, Baba would often compose a couplet for Bhau. On the 29th of January, Baba gestured the following couplet to Bhau, "Ab Ji Ke Kya Kareng, Jab Tumhi Chale Gaye." This meant, "What shall we live for now, when you have left us and gone away."

Baba had told Dr. Grant on the 30th of January, "My time has come." On the same day, referring to His suffering, Baba had told Dr. Donkin, "This is my crucifixion."

When Mohammed had been told that Padri had gone to Meherazad on the 30th, he too had hinted that Baba would be coming to Meherabad the next day.

We thus remained deaf to His hints for it was His will that we should not know that He was leaving us physically.

When Mohammed was informed that Baba had dropped His body, he surprisingly said, "Dada gele, Parat yel." He meant, "Baba has gone but will come back."

News had already reached Bombay by the evening of the 31st. Lovers rushed to the station to catch a train or a bus or got into cars and taxies to leave for Meherabad. Some arrived soon after Baba's body had been placed in the Tomb, Padri and Chhagan stayed the whole night in the Tomb on Friday the 31st.

On Saturday, the 1st of February, the shocking news spread the world over. It was unbelievable. Some lovers wondered, "Had there been a mistake?" If it was

a shock for Baba's Mandali, how intense would be its impact on others who were far away. The sudden news was like a strong blow that literally stunned all. Many telegrams and phone calls were sent to Adi but unfortunately, replies were greatly delayed. The small telegraph office at Ahmednagar was busy only with Baba traffic. Those who heard the dreadful news and were destined to come for His final darshan, left their homes immediately. Their love brought them to Baba. They needed no miracles to keep their faith whole and unswerving. Many came without official leave, many without clothes or cash. Only on arrival at Meherabad did they realise that their brush or soap or shaving set or some such thing had been forgotten.

Many came having left their duties in life to participate in Baba's last sahavas in spite of great odds. They came with faith as do millions who seek inner redemption and salvation from illusory life by means of pilgrimage to holy places like the sepulchre. One lover, not knowing where to go from Ahmednagar station, went back to Poona to make definite enquiries! Others got into tongas (horse-drawn carriages), carts, or on cycles and came to see their Beloved. Special State Transport buses were arranged to take the lovers from Ahmednagar to Meherabad.

At Meherabad, the trustees of the Avatar Meher Baba Trust had to wrack their brains to make arrangements for the thousands who were flocking in every day. A makeshift awning - a white cloth stretched over bamboo poles was erected in front of the Tomb which served to give a little shade from the scorching sun. No food was available at first. To get a cup of tea or a biscuit, one would have to go six miles to Ahmednagar by transport which was far from regular.

Chhagan came to the rescue of all by getting vegetable 'Pulav' (rice with vegetables) cooked on Sunday, 2nd February at Ahmednagar and brought to Meherabad. It

was really a blessing for most lovers who had been living only on water and His love. On the 6th of February he got 'puris' and a vegetable cooked which was served to all. Luckily, a small canteen sprang up at lower Meherabad which provided tea and snacks for those who could pay for them.

The hall at lower Meherabad was filled by lovers to bursting point. There was hardly an inch of space to walk on the verandahs around the hall. Not caring for the cold weather, many had baths with cold water in the early hours of the morning. Many had nothing to lie on nor cover themselves with at night. Padri was on his toes trying to provide beddings to the lovers from his meagre supplies.

At nights, those whose hearts poured forth love alone, sat around the Tomb singing or glorifying their Beloved. While, down at the Meherabad hall, clusters of intellectuals would be talking on matters like Baba's silence, His promises, sudden dropping of His body and other things. We, as lovers should not question the ways of a Master. Let us have belief, faith and trust in Him. Let us surrender completely to His will. What do we gain by discussing about how Baba behaves ? Has not Baba often told us that He is beyond our imagination and conception ? Baba has said, "Do not try with your limited mind to understand the significance of my actions, nor try to imitate them. To try to bring every action within the orbit of your understanding is but to understand the limitations of your own understanding !" "At times when I see you confused, I am moved by my compassion and love for you to give an explanation for a particular action of mine. And so it seems that I am defending my actions by giving explanations for them. And thus is shown your weakness and my strength." "But, remember that despite my explaining the significance of my actions, they will

ever remain beyond the range of your knowing. The utter simplicity of my divine game appears to be highly intricate as soon as you try to understand it through your intellect." "If my actions cause confusion it is because of your lack of complete trust. Therefore uproot all doubt and remember well that whatever I do is for the best. All my actions are my divine response born of my divine love." Baba had once said, "I know three things; I am the Avatar in every sense of the word. Whatever I do is the expression of my unbounded love. I suffer infinite agony eternally through your ignorance." "No one can understand my ways. I am beyond your understanding. Only Perfect Masters can know me and my ways." "Those who believe in me, yet feel like questioning my words and actions are weak in their convictions and belief in me." A Perfect Master has said, "Thousands of pundits and crores of intellectuals may argue and analyse, but God's business God alone knows." The true lover says, Whatever you are and whoever you are does not matter so long as my love for you remains for ever. Let us become 'headless and footless' - implicitly obeying Baba. Let us cease to question or doubt His actions. Let us become perfect lovers of Baba who is love personified. Let us live only to make others happy.

Thousands came, men, women and children from everywhere, the near villages, the hill towns, the far cities and from great distances all over India. Women carried babes in their arms and made them touch their heads on the threshold. Little did these babes realise what they received from the Ocean of Love. They came during the day and many at night. They came by cars, taxies, buses and trains. Trains carrying large numbers of lovers stopped at Meherabad to dislodge them. A constant stream of lovers young and old, rich and poor, their vocations and modes of dress as varied in range and expression as their love for Baba. They had journeyed to bow down before

God who has taken human form because of love. And their reward would be according to their love. They came and knelt at the threshold of the Tomb offering what poor gifts of love and service they had with them to their Beloved. Their small gift of love would give a fleeting moment of pleasure to Him. There was but one threshold of the Beloved, and there were thousands of heads to bow down on it in obeisance!

The first amongst the Westerners to arrive was Don Stevens. Later came Dr. Harry Kenmore, Adi junior, Delia de Leon, Rick Chapman, Dr. Allen Cohen, Irwin and Edward Luck, and A. Hasan. Their coming reminded one of the time when the 'three wise men' from the East had come to the stable to see their Lord Jesus two thousand years ago. Now, these wise men from the West came as pilgrims to the East journeying solely in love for the sight of their Beloved. They brought no rich material gifts but they surrendered their all at His holy feet. To see them enter Baba's Tomb, to descend down the steps, sit on the last step and to lovingly touch Baba's feet brought tears in many eyes. Some sat on that step for a long time lost in sweet memories of their being with Baba.

Some became emotional and wept bitterly. An old lover who had taught the boys of the Prem Ashram could hardly stand for he was shaking so much as he sobbed aloud amidst profuse tears that were rapidly rolling down his cheeks in an unbreakable chain. He banged his head against the stone walls of the Tomb and had to be prevented from bashing his head. He was the only one who could control the Prem Ashram boys when they sobbed for Baba. Now, he had lost control over his heart. Baba had told this lover that he would die only after Baba had dropped His body. He cried, "Take me now, take me now." To say that he loved Baba was not enough. He was ready to wash those Beloved feet of Baba with the blood of his heart.

Two girls from Andhra Pradesh came in singing and weeping. They could not help giving vent to the sorrowful throbs of their hearts through soul stirring sobs. They were tears of love. The old and the crippled were brought into the Tomb on chairs lifted by four persons. They could not go down into the crypt but could see Baba from a distance. They too shed tears of love. Some fainted and had to be carried out. Each lover who entered the Tomb would not want to leave and they had to be requested to leave so that others could come inside. Not all were lucky to enter the Tomb. Thousands bowed down only on the door-step and tried to catch a glimpse of their Beloved in the crypt. Before their eyes could accomodate to the darkness in the crypt, they were pushed aside by the volunteers at the door. It was a pity to see many being thus moved away even before they could set their eyes on Baba. But, if they did not see Baba, Baba definitely saw them and accepted their loving bow to Him. He gave them more, far more, in the space of a few seconds than what they had gained in years of earnest seeking, for Baba can bestow Divine Love, whereas others can only talk about it.

"In bygone Advents, it was after the God-Man dropped His body that His faithfuls set out with His message across and over the lands, brought out books on His teachings and life, made pilgrimages to the places where His feet had walked, set up houses of worship in His name and service. In the present Advent, all of this is being done now - all this and much more, while God is among us in the Man-form of Meher Baba."

Many came with flowers and garlands. They knelt reverentially at the threshold and left their love offering there. These were collected at the door of the Tomb. Only roses and garlands made from them were later used to adorn Baba while the other flowers were collected and put into the small cellars adjoining the Tomb. Some came inside and bowed on the landing of the crypt, others went

down the steps to have their final touch of Baba's feet. Others sat on the lowest step leading to the crypt and picked up flowers from Baba's feet. These they would cherish all their lives and also give a petal to those unfortunate ones who could not avail of this last darshan.

Two volunteers remained in the Tomb all the time. One would fan Baba while he sat on the landing of the crypt, the other would be busy collecting flowers at the door, swab the floor with a wet cloth to remove the dust that flew inside in plenty with thousands stamping and bowing at the door. The windows of the Tomb had to be cleared as lovers tried to have a peep of their Beloved. This was necessary to maintain fresh air circulating inside the Tomb. Eau de Cologne was sprinkled lavishly on the floor at hourly intervals to clear the floor of ants, insects, flies and mosquitoes. Baba had always liked lavender and Chanel and so these were sprinkled on Him.

Lovers would want to take turns in fanning Baba so as to remove flies and mosquitoes which invariably came on the clothing of the villagers who entered the Tomb. At first, this was done with a fly swatter, later with a small fan and lastly with a stick on which a scarf had been tied. Their fanning helped to fan the flame of love in their hearts and make it aglow, enabling them to help others in darkness. While fanning Baba, many lovers had wonderful experiences. One felt he saw tears roll down Baba's cheeks; another felt that he saw Baba's eyelid flicker; another said that he saw Baba smile. While they sat there, they were composed with the balm of Baba's healing presence, but when they left the Tomb, tears flowed down their cheeks, purifying tears in which joy and pain strangely mingled.

Mansari, one of the women Mandali living for many years on the Meherabad hill would come regularly to keep aglow a small oil lamp. Thrice a day the doors of the Tomb were closed while Eruch and a couple of other lovers changed the blocks of ice surrounding Baba. It was a

difficult task for Eruch to balance himself on the ice blocks and remove the ones that had melted and were not stable. New blocks were arranged and fitted snugly in all the crevices. Saw dust was sprinkled on the ice blocks. As roses were brought daily in abundance, rose petals were sprinkled on the saw dust covering the ice blocks. The effect was that it appeared Baba was sleeping on a bed of roses.

From the time that Eruch had tried mouth to mouth resuscitation on the 31st, he worked night and day in the Tomb, not caring for food, drink or sleep. He had brought no clothes from Meherazad and hardly had time for a bath. Day and night one could see him in the Tomb consoling some lover, showing some one down into the crypt, taking flowers and putting them on Baba, arranging ice blocks, cleaning saw dust from Baba's clothes, pouring Eau de Cologne or lavender on Baba and doing many other things. For years he has been Baba's mouth piece and had helped Baba greatly during mast tours. The correspondence which he used to attend to daily was colossal. The reward of his love for Baba was Love, and what a reward that is! It is the only cup by the drinking of which the desires of the world vanish. He cares not for salvation, not to be perfect, not to be free. His love for Baba makes him wish that he be born again and again amid all evils of the world, but let him love Baba for love's sake.

After years of constant company with Baba, the separation he feels from Baba may be better imagined than described. Those alone who have known true love can realise what it means to be thus parted from their Beloved for whom they gave up all - mind, body and world and everything they once held dear in life. He lives Baba's words, "Serve him who serves the whole Universe, obey him who commands the whole creation, love him who is love itself, follow him in every walk of life."

Beloved Baba's sheet was not changed but a new one was put daily over the one in which He was wrapped up. Flowers were arranged and changed two or three times a day. Around Baba's head was the scarf tied at Meherazad. Surrounding this a pink piece of cloth was placed round His head, the tail ends of which covered His chest. Roses, made into wonderful garlands woven according to each one's imagination adorned His chest. Roses from Meherazad, so loved by Baba because of the tender care taken by Mehera for them, were placed on His heart by the women Mandali. From the door it seemed Baba was wearing a pink coat and lying on a bed of roses.

As evening approached and it became a little dark inside the crypt, one volunteer would flash a torch light on Baba's face while he sat on the landing above the crypt. The effect was gorgeous. From the door Baba's face seemed to be lighted up with a halo. Baba never liked incense sticks being burnt near Him and so these were avoided inside the Tomb. Just outside the East window on the platform where the Prem Ashram boys used to sit, was kept an urn in which sandalwood was burnt. Many came inside the Tomb and clicked their cameras, both movie and still. Meelan studio of Poona, which has probably taken thousands of photos of Baba by now, came daily to picture Baba from different angles. As a result of these pictures, lovers could see how natural Baba's face looked even though His body remained in the open crypt for seven days.

When Eruch was busy arranging ice blocks around Baba, Dr. Goher went down into the crypt and examined Baba's body for signs of deterioration. Suprisingly, the abdomen did bloat a very little on the first day but after that there were no signs of abdominal distension. Only the skin of the face was visible as it was not wrapped in His bed sheet. It remained smooth, shining and lustrous for all seven days. The face looked natural and Baba seemed

to be sleeping. In fact, when a high ranking Government officer came to see Baba on the sixth day, he spontaneously exclaimed, "He looks as if He is sleeping." In short, changes that should have occurred in a dead body did not occur with Baba's body. When the lovers realised this, there were strong rumours that the body would be kept indefinitely. One person even suggested that a glass coffin be made and this should cover Baba so that Baba's darshan could be had for all times by posterity !

The women Mandali occupied the empty rooms on Meherabad hill. They would come several times each day to see Baba in the Tomb. The long queues of men, women and children would then be temporarily stopped and the Tomb vacated. Mehera and the other women Mandali would then enter the Tomb. To see Mehera walking from her room to the Tomb in a dazed condition and crying was very touching. She would come to the North window of the Tomb and touch her head to the window. She would then bow at the West window. When she arrived at the entrance, someone would remove her slippers. She would stand at the door step as if dazed, with tears rolling down her cheeks, hands raised a little in adoration and completely oblivious of the thousands watching her. She would step inside the Tomb to be followed by the other women Mandali. The doors would then be closed and all we could then hear was sobbing. Just before the door opened for her to come out, Avatar Meher Baba Ki Jai would be shouted by all. She would come out of the door and again turn towards Baba, completely lost in her sorrow. Someone would help her with her slippers. She would bow once, twice and again and again. She would not like to miss a glimpse of Baba for a second. She would take a step and turn back, look at Baba and shed a fresh deluge of tears and then slowly move on. The parting from Baba was an extremely painful one. In her farewell moments we could see how

deeply she was moved. In thoughts or deeds, in stillness or action, alone or in multitudes, she will remain one with her Beloved Baba.

Lovers passed along a big bamboo gangway, inching their way to the feet of their Beloved to lay their heads in love and reverence at His threshold. A continuous stream of people came to the doorstep, bowed on the threshold, looked at Baba, put some flowers and moved away. A loudspeaker broke the heavenly silence of Meherabad hill. Everyone liked to sing a bhajan to His glory, a quawali, recite a poem or the Parvardigar and the Repentance prayers on the microphone. Arangaon villagers would collect at night and sing kirtans or bhajans to the accompaniment of the harmonium, drums and cymbals. These were the villagers with whom Baba had worked so patiently for so many years to raise their consciousness and standard of living. They were here - every man, woman and child to pay their respects to their beloved master and friend.

Baba's greatest miracle is to change the human heart. This He has definitely done in these poor villagers and the world will also some day experience a change in consciousness. He did not come to give to the world a new intellectual explanation of Truth, but awakened the Infinite Life in all. His love, without words and teachings, lit the heart. One who had seen His eyes and smile, knew how irresistable they were; how they opened the heart spontaneously, flooding it with joy that was beyond understanding.

The Westerners were lodged at Ahmednagar where Sarosh Irani and his wife Viloo catered to their needs. They would come each morning and evening and sit inside the Tomb or move around. Dr. Harry Kenmore knew the dimensions and all that the Tomb contained after Eruch had made him feel the walls, taken him round the crypt

on the landing, and down the steps to touch Baba's feet. He would sit on the landing often singing 'Begin the Beguine.' He would daily want a thorough medical report of Baba's 'health' which he would be careful to register on his wire recorder. He would say the Parvardigar prayer and the Repentance prayer when requested to do so. Once, Mehera and the women Mandali came to the Tomb specially to hear him say these prayers.

Each day began and ended with Baba's arti in which all participated. Sometimes, in the evenings, beside the usual arti, one in Marathi would be sung. Very often during the day a lover would enter the Tomb and say the two prayers. Keshav Nigum, the backbone of the Hamirpur Centre though now suffering from Parkinson's disease, would stand in the Tomb and say the "Meher Chalisa" (forty verses written by him in praise of Baba.)

The Tomb was kept open all twenty four hours for seven days but for a couple of hours on two nights. No one can judge how many lovers came for this final sahavas. Each evening Sarosh Irani would apologise on behalf of the trustees of the Avatar Meher Baba Trust for not being able to provide even the bare necessities of life to the lovers. He would then request the lovers to leave Meherabad after having had Baba's darshan so that newcomers could find place for accommodation. As the lovers left, with hearts full of love that Baba had awakened in them, they carried Baba's message of hope for mankind now on the verge of despair in all walks of life. Once an inner contact is established with Baba, the Divine Shepherd feeds His sheep with His love, wherever He is, wherever they are, irrespective of time or space.

Each evening at sunset the electric generator would go into action lighting up about forty fluorescent lights. The normal lighting system had to rely on kerosene lamps. In the dark background, Meherabad hill would seem

brilliantly lit like a fairyland not only by the lights but by the love of His lovers. Passengers from trains and buses passing along the road would watch the feast of love on the hill. They would bow reverentially to the One without a second. Trains would whistle as they passed the hill - the drivers were saluting the Avatar of the Age.

Every morning all would be eager to know Dr. Goher's report about Baba's health. No one could speculate when Baba's body would be interred for the trustees had declared that they would do so on the first signs of decomposition. When the medical report was known, all felt very happy that they could be with their Beloved for one more day. On the third day, there were soft murmurs and whisperings amongst the lovers, "Would there be a resurrection today?" The feeling of expectancy, of seeing Baba rise, walk, and talk sustained the lovers through the day. Then, on the fourth day some were heard saying, "Maybe He will rise today." True resurrection is His act of awakening the sleeping soul from the darkness of ignorance to the experience of Divine Love. Baba's miracle is the resurrection of the heart. The beautiful and divine love which flows from Baba brings about the spiritual resurrection of all who are its recipients. It fills man with immortal sweetness and unbounded joy. Through His love all became resurrected, the living dead became alive. Man will absorb His blessings and His love will permeate all things animate and inanimate.

Some of Baba's old treasures were shown by the Mandali to the lovers. One was an old patched coat, originally black but practically covered with patches of blue and black. Baba had said that this coat was the most sacred of His possessions. He had worn it steadily for eight years from 1921. Referring to the coat, Baba had said, "What it has in it will be revealed after I drop the body. Then, thousands of men and women will come to worship it." Eruch told us that after Baba had stopped wearing

this coat, He used to change His clothes frequently, and then would give them away, but these things (coat, sandals, and a white sadra) Baba would not part with. The white sadra was worn by Baba when He wore the coat. The sandals were very old and Baba discarded them a couple of years after His silence.

And so, day after day passed with fresh lovers coming, shedding tears, bowing to Baba and surrendering their all unto Him. All who came and all who would have wanted to come received His silent benediction and love—the love that alone can save the world. "Things that are real are always given and received in silence" and so they gave their love and received His blessings. The Divine Shepherd fed His sheep in His fold, tending to their spiritual needs and nourishing them with the nectar of Life Eternal that He pours into each.

The eighth day, Friday 7th February, dawned. Lovers were awake from three in the night. This was the last day of the sahasras as Baba's body was to be interred at 12-15 p. m. The trustees had decided on this issue at a meeting. Coincidentally, it was Baba's birthday according to the Zoroastrian calendar. Ladies were dressed in fine clothes and seemed quite gay. By 4-30 a. m., all had collected at the Tomb. Eruch and a few others were busy arranging blocks of ice, changing the covers placed over Baba and rearranging roses in the crypt. It was announced that exactly at 5-00 a. m., Baba's birth time, all should call "Avatar Meher Baba Ki Jai" three times. Eruch said that when Baba was with them physically, He always celebrated His birthday in this simple manner by asking the Mandali to shout "Avatar Meher Baba Ki Jai" at 5-00 a. m.

Mehera, Mani and the women Mandali went inside the Tomb at 4-50 a. m. All stood around the Tomb singing Baba's name, "Sat Chit Ananda Parmananda, Meher Baba Vidyanand." At exactly 5-00 a. m., all joined in three loud

cheers of "Avatar Meher Baba Ki Jai." Soon after the women Mandali had garlanded Baba, the doors of the Tomb were opened and they left. The darshan programme started. On this birthday, the last one in His physical presence, the Mandali recalled the time they used to celebrate Baba's birthday in the early years at Meherabad: The day would start at 4-30 a. m. Baba would be clad in a new white sadra and chappals (sandals). Over the sadra, there was sure to be a new coloured silk coat such as Baba always wore. Before long, however, Baba would take off the new coat and put on His old, patched but comfortable coat. The gramophone would strike up one of Baba's favourite tunes or songs. Then would follow, sung by all, "Happy birthday to You." Baba standing, Mehera would place around His neck a simple garland of flowers from the garden. The traditional fare would be brought to the breakfast table 'Rava' (a sweet preparation made from cream of wheat). Baba would then call everyone to come in turn with her individual plate and He ladled out a lavish portion of 'Rava' giving each a look or a smile. Next, the servants were called to come with their plates. Lastly, Baba would call for a large container in which to put the remainder of the 'Rava', to take down the hill for the men Mandali. In less than five minutes, however, Baba would be restless to be on the move and down the hill to give His prasad to the men, and Baba was not seen till late afternoon. Immediately after His return, he would order lunch to be brought in the traditional fare of rice, dal, curd and spiced vegetables. Baba served Himself and His plate was put aside. All came forward with their plates and were served by Baba. After all were served, Baba would begin to eat and all followed suit. Lunch over, Baba sent all to rest for an hour. Tea time, the bell would ring. All assembled in the refectory and saw Baba standing beside a cake - a gift from one of the devotees from Bombay. Baba would cut the cake, giving each a slice, and to the children an extra large slice.

Soon Baba was off again down the hill accompanied by Masi, the gate-keeper, and she ran beside Him with quick steps as she carried the remainder of the cake on a platter and tried to keep pace with Baba, who, umbrella in hand, led the way. Baba would return up the hill tired but happy, and the day closed with a few spiritual songs on the gramophone. Lastly, arti was performed with lighted camphor, and all sang the song of worship.

How different it was on this day, 7th February 1969. The darshan programme began at 5-00 a. m. Everyone bowed down at the threshold and looked at their Beloved for the last time. Only groupheads and a few others were allowed inside the Tomb. A very few lucky ones got the chance of going down to the crypt and touching Baba. After 7-00 a. m. no one was permitted to enter the Tomb except the two on duty, one at the door and the one fanning Baba. Almost all the women and many men came inside to offer their last services of fanning their Beloved. Each one was given the fan for about two minutes. After dawn there was a tremendous rush. Newspapers in Poona, Ahmednagar and in other areas had announced that today would be the last darshan and that Baba's body would be interred at 12 - 15 p. m., exactly seven days after He dropped His body.

Adi K. Irani, Baba's secretary and disciple for over four decades, came inside the Tomb at about 9-00 a. m. He sat on the landing of the crypt intently gazing at Baba for whom he had given his all. There was not a sacrifice which he had not made in the cause of His Beloved. His money, his lands, his property, his body, mind and heart all had been sacrificed in His love for Baba. Not only this life but millions of lives he would sacrifice at the feet of Baba. He sat there with his elbow on his thigh and his hand supporting his head while he remained unmindful of the rush of lovers at the door. He was lost in the memories of his past with Baba: the hard

work Baba had extracted from him; the fun he had had playing, eating and moving about with Baba; the mast tours on which he had been with Baba; the days when he had heard Baba sing and talk; the days when Baba had taken him on world tours and tours to the West; the days he had spent working, toiling in his office in the cause of Baba. All this and much more came into his mind. Now, he would be deprived of his Beloved's company, His warm embrace and His smile that would remove the fatigue of days. As all these memories came back to him, his eyes were filled with tears which overflowed from a heart that knows real love. One could see him wiping away those love tears every few minutes. Saying farewell to Baba was especially very poignant after spending so many years with Him.

Some lovers who had heard that Baba's body had not yet been interred, rushed to Ahmednagar and came on the last day. An Irani family was one of them. They came inside the Tomb and the flood-gates of their hearts opened and suffused their eyes with tears. These fortunate ones had a chance to see Baba before He was taken away from our physical sight for all times. Baba had once said; "My lovers are fortunate to have God in human form in their presence. Just a glance from me can give you all you need. You will be sitting here without any outward change, but you will become what you really are - you have to wait for that moment. That moment is near and for that you have to love me whole-heartedly ...In Avataric periods, one does not necessarily have to make the inward journeys by stages. If you have the Grace of the Avatar, He just takes you from where you are to where you should be, where God wants you to be."

One cannot help mentioning what happened to Pukar, the 'giant' in appearance and spirit. He had not slept the previous night as the pain of being separated from his Beloved was very intense. Today, he was found sitting at about

7:00 a. m. between two tombs of Baba's near and dear ones. When someone approached him, all of a sudden, he went into action. Giving a loud war cry, he jumped into the air about four feet, fell to the ground and then rolled on the ground down the hill to be checked by a tree about ten feet away. The person who had gone to console Pukar got the fright of his life and ran away thinking that Pukar had probably been bitten by a snake. Some lovers rushed to hold Pukar but he would not allow anyone to come near him. A constant stream of tears moistened the dry earth on which he sat. After half an hour, three lovers from his group went near him to pacify him. They were barely eight feet away from him when, giving a loud cry he sprang in the air holding a big rock and wanting to throw it at the persons who had approached him. Never had they been frightened as on that day and they ran, one of them holding on to his 'dhotie' (a six yard cloth wound round the waist in a fashion never liked by Baba) lest it should slip down! The rumour went round quickly that Pukar had become a mast overnight! Some hours later, Pukar recovered from his melancholic state and came to bow to his Beloved whom he would never see again. Pukar has been utterly devoted and dedicated to Baba in love and service since many years. He wept because he knew he loved Baba and knew how imperfect his love was.

On the last day someone remembered Mohammed, the mast at Meherabad. He was brought to the Tomb by Padri and Sidhuji. Though bent at his waist, having dug 'deesh' all his life, he can stand erect for some time. He stood at the threshold of the Tomb and would not come in even when asked to do so. He said, "Pahile, Pahile" meaning "Seen, seen." He meant he had seen Baba. He then said, "Bus, Bus" meaning "Enough, Enough." He went back with his guardians to his room.

Kekobad, one of the Mandali, was brought on a chair by four strong men. He had broken his hip and so was unable to walk. Baba had said that Kekobad can see Him continuously all day and night in a small flame. Kekobad repeats Baba's name 100,000 times daily since many years !

Once, an old lady, completely bent at right angles at her waist came in. She would put her hand on her forehead to avoid the glare on her eyes so that she could see Baba in the crypt. When asked whether she could see Baba, she just shook her head in the negative. She seemed to have got hypermature cataracts in both eyes ! She was led to the landing of the crypt and only after she had sat down there and a torch light focussed on Baba's face, could she see Him. It was then that Eruch told us that she was Valu, an old and faithful devotee of Baba from the early twenties. She was very dear to Baba and though she could not see Baba well, Baba saw her and acknowledged her long, sincere, unselfish and loving services for the Avatar of the Age. Tears came into her eyes as she remembered the years she had spent with Baba. They were tears of love.

"Who weeps for love, he weeps the best;

Who cries for else, he does but jest."

Thousands came from Ahmednagar and from the nearby villages. All bowed at the threshold, folded their hands and moved on. They left, but the silent inner voice of their loving, aching hearts raised a cry, "When shall we behold that Beloved face again !" Their only solace was Baba's words, "I am always with you, taking care of you; wherever I am, wherever you are, I am with you helping you." Those who came, received His love in silence. Baba has said, "Devotees spend their lifetime savings and even risk life itself in pilgrimages to bow down before God in forms sanctified by tradition, and their

rewards are according to tradition. But you have journeyed to bow down before God who has taken human form because of love and your reward will be according to your love."

At 11-20 a. m., all had taken Baba's darshan. The trustees came in the Tomb and finalised plans. A movie cameraman and his assistant were permitted inside. Exactly at 12-00 noon, Dr. H. Kenmore said the Parvardigar prayer. At 12-15 three loud cheers of Avatar Meher Baba Ki Jai rang out. The doors of the Tomb were temporarily closed and Baba was covered with a clean sheet. Eruch then removed the ice blocks, passing them on to the Mandali who stood around. These, in turn, passed the blocks to the Westerners who stood outside the Tomb. When all the blocks were removed, the pink cloth round His head was changed for the last time. His hair was brushed, the scarf round His head made tidy, dust particles on His face softly wiped away and new roses adorned Him.

Mehera and the women Mandali came for their last darshan. All stood silently around the Tomb. In the pin drop silence, only the loud sobs could be heard of the one who loved the only One as He should be loved. The women Mandali put a garland round Baba and with eyes that betrayed the sorrow in their hearts, they stepped out of the Tomb.

Baba's men Mandali now collected in the Tomb. The coffin lid was passed on by lovers to the door of the Tomb. The lid was brought inside and ropes tied to the four handles on its corners. Just before it was placed over Baba, Eruch went down in the crypt and placed over Beloved Baba's face a very fine scarf given by Mehera. The coffin lid was then lifted by the Mandali standing on the crypt landing. Amongst loud shouts of Avatar Meher Baba Ki Jai the lid was slowly lowered over Baba with

the help of the ropes, hiding Him from our sight for all times. Was Baba now teaching us to see Him not physically but in our hearts ? Many tears were shed as the lid was lowered. Mehera and the women Mandali watched the lid being lowered from the North window. Baba was now taken away from our physical sight but will live in the hearts of His lovers for ever.

After the coffin lid was placed over Baba, the Mandali came out of the Tomb. Mehera and the women Mandali once again went in. Over the lid of the coffin they placed a huge garland of roses. Though Baba was gone physically, He could not go away from their hearts and they now feel His presence all the more.

After Mehera and the others left, flowers were put by the men Mandali on the coffin. Thousands were waiting outside the Tomb. A 'ghamela' (pan) full of earth was then brought inside the Tomb and each of the Mandali put a handful of earth on the coffin very solemnly. The trustees decided that each lover instead of coming inside the Tomb and placing some earth on the coffin, should only touch the earth kept at the threshold and this would then be emptied over the coffin. The long queue began and one after another each one came to the door, touched the earth, bowed and left. When all had had this privilege, the 'ghamela' was picked up and the earth emptied on the coffin. Later, earth was filled in 'ghamelas' and passed from one lover to another and these were emptied very quickly in the crypt. The crypt was soon full to the level of the landing. A stone slab was put between the crypt and the steps leading to it. The steps were even covered with earth. As it was Baba's birthday according to the Zoroastrian calendar, prasad was distributed to all who had come for the last darshan.

At 5-00 p. m. the crypt was full of earth and the Tomb was swept and cleaned. Baba's seven coloured flag

was put on the earth in the crypt. Mehera, Mani and the women Mandali went inside and placed a garland on the flag. Only a few lovers were left at Meherabad by now. Most of them had departed and were on their way home. Very soon the sun could be seen setting on the horizon throwing its rays on the Tomb. The rays lit up the four emblems of the four religions standing at the four corners of the Tomb and the words "Mastery in Servitude" written over the door. Blessed are they who recognised Him as God in human form, loved and surrendered their all unto Him. Meher Baba's last sahavas and the long story of the Ancient One had now come to a close but, it marked the beginning of an endless new story!

Yes, here lay the One who was a master in service for suffering humanity, One who had suffered physically, mentally and spiritually for humanity. He suffered and dropped His body so that we may be saved in His love. There are many who shall always love Baba and cherish His memories till they breathe their last. For those who are united in love, know no separation. Emerson has rightly said: "He to whom God is an ever present Reality, need not count on his company." These, among the millions will love Baba for love's sake. They shall keep the banner of His name ever unfurled and aloft by their unflickering zeal and faith. They will live for Baba and die for Baba. Even after their death, their blood shall write on the sands of time that Meher Baba was God in human form.

J A I B A B A

Declarations of Divinity

BY

MEHER BABA

"I am the Ancient One. Not a leaf has the power to quiver without My wish. I am the one who knows everything about everyone."

"I am the Highest of the High, and want you to love Me not for any spiritual or material gain,...I want you to love Me for Myself, as being God in human form."

"I am in everyone and in everything. I am everywhere and everything. For years you have worshipped Me in the Badrinarayan Temple, worshipping the image of stone. Today you are blessed to have the opportunity of My darshan in this physical form."

"I am the Lord of the Universe and I am the slave of My lovers."

"The universe has come out of Me, and has to come unto Me. This is no idle talk. I say it with the authority of my experience of being the Ancient One."

"I say with my divine authority, I am God in human form, therefore love me."

"And the glory of the suns is the seventh shadow of my real state of Reality. Even a glimpse of this glory is enough for one to lose all consciousness."

"I am the light of the Universe."

"I am the Ancient One and the creation is my shadow; so I know what has happened and will happen before and after millions of years, which is nothing but illusion."

"I am Krishna. I want all of you to love me as Mira loved me."

"I am God, I am in you all. Since eternity I never come and I never go. I am present everywhere."

"I belong to no religion. Every religion belongs to Me. My own personal religion is of My being the Ancient Infinite One and the religion I teach to all is of love for God."

"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, am I found."

"I can say with Divine Authority that I experience eternally, consciously and continually being One with you all, and One in you all. Any worship or obedience to any deity - animate or inanimate - to any Saint, Master, Advanced Soul, or Yogi, eventually comes to me. By offering pure unadulterated love to anyone and to anything you will be loving Me, as I am in everyone and in every thing, and also beyond everything."

"I, too, am old...older than the earth..."

"I am the God of Gods. Have trust in Me. I know everything, don't worry."

"I am Krishna, I am Buddha, I am Christ."

"I am not this physical form. I am the Ocean - the unlimited Ocean of Love. Try to love Me more and more and you will know Me."

"I am not limited by this form. I use it like a garment to make myself visible to you; without it you could not see Me. And I communicate with you through words best fitted to your understanding. If I used the language of My own consciousness, you would not know what I was talking about."

"Don't try to understand me. My depth is unfathomable. Just love Me."

"Though none of you understand me externally in My physical form, I am within you - within everybody - as the Real, Infinite Christ."

"I am God - God the Beyond and God in human form."

"I was Rama, I was Krishna, I was this One, I was that One, and now I am Meher Baba. In this form of flesh and blood I am that same Ancient One who alone is eternally worshipped and ignored, ever remembered and forgotten."

"I am that Ancient One whose past is worshipped and remembered, whose present is ignored and forgotten and whose future (Advent) is anticipated with great fervour and longing."

"I am what I am, whether the world bows down to Me, or whether it turns against Me; it does not matter. It is no one's fault."

"If people call me Messiah, Saviour or Redeemer, it does not affect Me. Terms and names do not matter. What really matters is the state of Christ Consciousness that I eternally enjoy and towards which I shall lead all who come to Me."

"The time has come. I repeat the call and bid all come unto Me."

"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. Unless you start remembering Me from now on, it will be difficult to remember Me when your end approaches. You should start practicing from now on. Even if you take My name only once every day, you will not forget to remember Me in your dying moments."

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