

# *Mass Darshan*

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35 DAYS NOV.-DEC. 1952

*of*

MEHER BABA

*by*

A DISCIPLE

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## MASS DARSHAN

For some years now Baba has not allowed people to come and see him whenever they wished. He has rarely given mass darshan and very seldom individual darshan. On his return to India from the West, therefore, Baba was earnestly requested by his Indian devotees to also be given the opportunity of having his darshan and of realizing their long-cherished hopes of having him in their midst. Responding to their repeated entreaties finally gave his gracious consent to visit some of the places and to give darshan to the masses at those places selected by him.

Thus the 'Mass darshan programme' was chalked out to include places in North, Central and South India.

Beginning from the 18th of November 1952, 35 days were given for his visit to the different places, starting in the North. Altogether Baba gave darshan at no less than 35 distinct places including cities, towns and villages.

As soon as the devotees were informed of Baba's proposed coming to their respective places, the news spread like wild fire, in towns and villages. Their joy knew no bounds, for they felt deeply the privilege accorded them by the beloved Avatar. They were fully conscious that Baba was not making these strenuous journeys just to visit a few select devotees, but that in his Divine love and compassion had agreed to bless their districts, their cities, their towns and villages by his presence.

From the moment they received the news of Baba's coming visit up to the time of his arrival- they were kept extremely busy making preparations for the rousing welcome and extensive programme that they had planned for Baba and his large party of disciples. No detail was too small, no task too big. They extended their efforts with equal zeal to the insignificant details as to the Herculean tasks. The more they planned to ensure the comfort of their loving Master the less it seemed assured; but they worked unceasingly from the fullness of their hearts to welcome the Saviour of the Age.

In India where the caste system and untouchability still prevails, it was wonderful how these men, women and children of all creeds and castes joined together, helped and co-operated with each other in performing the multifarious duties entrusted to them for Baba's reception.

Needless to say that arrangements for Baba's personal comforts were given top priority, however trifling or fantastic they might be. The placing of a door mat in position outside Baba's room was as essential as the construction and completion of the temporary pontoon bridge over the great Jumna River.

This bridge was being built over a portion of the river and was expected to be ready by the time Baba came at the end of December, as otherwise he and his party would have had to wade through knee-deep water on their way to Hamirpur. But Baba's plans were changed and when the people of the place and the supervising engineer were informed of his earlier arrival on the 18th of November, they were, nevertheless, determined to complete the bridge in time.



They set to work at break-neck speed toiling night and day, acquiring strength and energy from their unflagging devotion. The labour of love was well rewarded when the seemingly impossible task was accomplished on the night prior to Baba's arrival; and early the next morning they saw their beloved Baba sitting comfortably in his car, which was the first to cross the bridge.

Wherever Baba went, during the entire tour, the people had made every effort possible to facilitate his arrival and stay. For instance, to make it practicable to get to their villages, the inhabitants had constructed roads through their fields for miles together; for it must be understood that to reach these small villages there was often nothing more than a narrow footpath. In some places forests were cleared; and across the canals that irrigated their fields, earth had been filled in to make an unbroken link.

Thus Baba was able to drive without undue discomfort through fields, across canals, through forests and over hills, across rivers and streams, to distant villages where no car had ever entered before. At the end of such journeys there would invariably be waiting countless thousands of men, women and children, rich and poor, great and small, of all religions and castes merged together and forming a colossal crowd that seemingly engulfed the beautifully decorated platform arranged for Baba, and on which he mounted amidst thundering cheers of '*Hail the Avatar*'.

There were thousands who in all devotion had travelled miles on foot from innumerable smaller villages to the central village where the programme for darshan was

fixed. So great was their yearning that they would wait outside in the throng for hours on end to get a glimpse of Baba.

Many came on foot, some on horses, others in bullock carts, and a few on camels. There was one lover of Baba who came from a distance of 23 miles, covering the whole distance by continuously prostrating himself on the ground, taking no food on the way and observing complete silence. It was a sight to witness his meeting with Baba, and when he performed the *arti* before Baba who was then sitting in the midst of a huge gathering, all were greatly moved. With the singing of the devotional song his whole frame vibrated with the joy of inner love and the ultimate reward of being in the physical presence of his Master. Baba held the man in a close embrace and looked radiantly happy.

Another man ran all the distance of 12 miles to meet Baba. This old villager had been waiting for the last five years for Baba's arrival. So you can imagine his distress when on arriving at the place of darshan to meet his beloved Master, he found that he had reached there just a few minutes too late and that Baba had left by car after giving darshan to the masses there. Without hesitation the old man started running, with the idea of overtaking Baba's car. It was an absurd idea but confident in the knowledge that his Beloved was Omniscient and All-Powerful, he redoubled his efforts.

Regardless of the approaching nightfall the old man kept on, and fantastic as it seemed, his love and faith did achieve the impossible; at the twelfth mile Baba suddenly told the driver to slow down and then to stop the car



Within a few minutes the old man, with raised hands, suddenly emerged out of the darkness and approached the car, completely out of breath. Regaining his breath, he poured out his love for Baba in a few quick sentences, saying that indeed his Master was All-Powerful and Omniscient. Baba blessed this lover and left him overwhelmed by the good fortune of the meeting. When the old man saw the car start, however, he was loth to be parted, and kept running alongside of it until Baba ordered him to return to his village.

One extremely poor old couple in the village of Amarpura, who lived in a hovel far outside the village, were determined to do their share in the welcoming of the Master. The man spent what little he had in having a small raised square built in front of his hut in order to receive Baba. In spite of his wife's doubts of Baba's coming out of his way to there humble dwelling when there were so many better houses in the village itself, and in spite of the fact that they also had not the courage to invite Baba, the old man was sure that his love would draw the Master to him.

The day of the mass darshan in the village being over, Baba and his party—followed as usual by the crowd part of the way—proceeded the next morning to the adjacent town. But instead of taking the usual road Baba insisted to every one's surprise, on taking the little-used path lying almost in the opposite direction. After a time he had the car stopped, and getting down went straight to a mean looking little hut. It was the home of the old couple who could but only sob in their happiness. Baba embraced them both and seated himself on the erected square to be garlanded. He had accepted their hearts' tribute.

It was only after reaching the next village that Baba's men heard the whole story of this love and faith.

( Note:—The people of the village have since then built a small temple on the square where Baba sat to receive the homage of a poor man. )

In the village of Maheva a raised clearing had been made by the villagers and an elaborate hut built on it for Baba, none of their own being considered adequate or good enough to receive so august a personage. As it often happened, Baba suddenly changed his date of arrival and decided to go there earlier. The people worked desperately to complete the hut in time.

One man in particular, a cobbler of the untouchable caste, worked ceaselessly without food or rest, indifferent to the feverish chill he had contracted from the damp and cold. When the hut was finished, therefore, and the red letter day of Baba's arrival had come, he was too ill to move and could not be present at the place of darshan.

On the following morning the man, hearing a distant murmur as of a crowd approaching, staggered to the door and to his incredulity saw Baba and the crowd walking towards his hut. Now in India, it is a custom that even the humblest must have some offering of flowers, fruits or sweets, to welcome a perfect Master. The unhappy man had prepared nothing; he had nothing to offer.

In his agony of mind he ran out, and reaching Baba clasped his feet as he poured out his love. When he protested vehemently and insistently that Baba could



not possibly enter his miserable dwelling, Baba had one of his men lift up and carry the sick man inside; and himself entering the hut sat on the narrow rickety bed beside him, caressing him and saying, "Your love is the most precious offering that you can give."

These outbursts of love were not stray occurrences during the darshan tour, but were every day and every-hour affairs of spontaneous reciprocation of love from whoever came in contact with Baba; not only his devotees but *all* became surcharged with love.

It was a sight to see children of all ages together with their elders, running behind Baba's car, sometimes a solid three miles, to ensure that the car would reach the main road easily after cutting through the temporary roads constructed for the occasion by the villagers. Baba would then try to stem this tide of people from running after the car, as well as those going ahead to direct the way; but the crowd would not be denied the joy of escorting him, and Baba had to submit to their love and exuberance.

During the entire tour from Hamirpur district in the North to Andhra Pradesh in the South, one thing always observed wherever one went was, that amongst the people of every district town and village there was the common factor of unbounded love for their beloved Master, uniting them as only love for God can do. All who saw and approached Baba were no longer themselves. Men forgot their family responsibilities, their daily work and their business. Women neglected their household duties and their children; and young people and children in their turn absented themselves from

colleges and schools to be near Baba. The result of this mass devotion and its consequent reaction was that often offices had to be declared closed for the day; and the principals and headmasters had to close their colleges and schools for the great occasion.

During this great love feast, pangs of so-called hunger and thirst were scarcely felt. The variety of rich and dainty dishes and cold sweet drinks prepared prior to Baba's arrival, were as naught to the great love-food which Baba so lavishly bestowed on all alike. Those who witnessed the unique spectacle of this sea of ardent humanity surrounding Baba, and those who tested the wine of his Divine love, must always carry with them its soul-stirring memory.

At this juncture the relating of certain incidents will not be considered amiss.

At one village Baba was asked that the local orphanage be graced by his presence. Baba agreed to come on the condition that he wash the children's feet and bow down before them. Six or seven boys were then brought before Baba. He explained that it was most imperative that they keep very quiet and not move when he took their darshan. The first boy however, taking fright at the strangeness of the situation and of the encircling crowd, drew back. Whereupon Baba declared that his work was spoiled and that he would now not visit any of the other villages. All were quite put out and begged Baba to revoke his decision. Baba then said that there was one alternative. If by the following morning they brought before him fourteen orphan boys from the other villages, who were all fourteen years of age, he would relent.



Now on his return to the hut which had been erected for his stay, a young boy stopped the car, asking to know where Meher Baba was as he had come to take his darshan. Being asked his age the boy replied, "fourteen." At that Baba looked very happy and said it was a happy augury. He blessed the boy and said that he would some day become a saint.

Needless to say the fourteen boys were found. Baba washed their feet, bowed down to them, and gave them twenty-one rupees each; and thus the incident ended happily.

An amusing incident occurred once when Baba visited a certain school. All the children assembled to take Baba's darshan had filed past, and only a few remained. Baba happened to stroke the cheek of one of these little boys whereupon the others, seeing this, all insisted on filing past again that each might also have his cheek stroked by Baba. Baba was very amused and, of course, had to gratify their wish.

In one of the towns on the programme, Baba had sent a disciple to despatch a telegram. On reaching the telegraph office the disciple was astonished to find all the counters open for business but not a single clerk in sight. After making inquiries from some passers-by he was informed that there was no one in the office because all the employees had gone to the *pandal* for Baba's darshan. On ascertaining the name of the chief clerk, the disciple announced over the microphone installed on the platform, that he was wanted at once at the office; and in this way was able to send off the telegram.



Whenever Baba visited a town or village it was not surprising to find that all things such as sweets, fresh fruits, vegetables and sometimes even dried fruits and nuts, and of course flowers, were out of stock, as thousands of people had bought them for individual offerings to Baba. The result therefore was that whenever Baba's men who were in charge of arrangements wanted to buy any last minute things, they had to return empty handed.

Now to give a better idea of the places Baba visited during the short period of 35 days, it will be best to give a complete list of the names in order of the visits :

1 Hamirpur proper	7 Panwari	13 Amarpura
2 Sumerpur	8 Rath	14 Tola-Khangaram
3 Inghota	9 Nauranga	15 Dhanauri
4 Maudaha	10 Majhwan	16 Bandwa
5 Mahewa	11 Jarakhar	17 Harpalpur
6 Mahoba	12 Dhagwan	

It was in the large town of Hamirpur that the people had, in turns, kept up a night and day vigil with non-stop singing of *bhajans* till the Master, in his loving compassion, should consent to come to their town.

It was also in this district of Hamirpur, in the village of Dhanauri, that every man, woman and child - i. e. the entire population of over 2,000 people, fasted on the 16th of October 1951 for the success of Baba's Manonash work.

From Hamirpur district Baba went to Delhi via Jhansi. At Jhansi he was accorded a stupendous welcome by one of his old devotees. From Delhi Baba and his party travel-

led to Amraoti and to another place 25 miles from Amraoti, called Davargaon. Next they visited Saoner, Angewada, Nagpur, and thence proceeded to Andhra province (the East and West Godavari districts). The different places visited by Baba in Andhra Pradesh were :

1 Talepalligudem	5 Nidadavole	9 Dharmajigudem
2 Pentapadu	6 Kovvur	10 Gondukolunu
3 Pippara	7 Rajahmundry	11 Bezwada
4 Penugonda	8 Eluru	

Baba travelled in an ordinary third class compartment with a group of 25 to 30 of his men mandali. Later when he visited Andhra the number increased to 75.

Not only at all the places in the East and West Godavari districts that Baba actually visited but also whenever the train stopped enroute, the passengers on the train, the railway staff from the stationmaster to the railway porter, the passengers waiting at the station to board the train, and even the police, rushed to Baba's compartment to have his darshan.

It is also necessary now for some idea to be given of the usual routine of a 'darshan programme'.

Before consenting to give mass darshan at the various places, Baba had fixed three items for himself. Accordingly, as soon as he reached one of the main places on the programme he would first go out incognito with only a couple of his men, to find if there were any local masts and saints in order that he might bow down to them.

On his return and before a massed gathering he would wash the feet of seven poor and bow down to them,



touching his forehead to their feet; they were then sent on their way, each having been given 51 rupees.

Only after the completion of these two items would he allow those in charge to take him by car to the central place of darshan. This was invariably a very big open compound covered by a huge canopy large enough to accommodate some thousands of people under its shade. This *pandal* was always gaily decorated with flowers and festoons of bunting, ferns and palm leaves.

General Discription

✓ While on the way Baba's car would be stopped many times by the loving crowds in the streets, in the market squares and on the roadsides, amidst vociferous cheers of *Shri Avatar Meher Baba ki jai*. Then would follow a shower of flowers and very often fruits on Baba's car. Once Baba's car was practically covered with bananas (brought along by the people as offerings) which those of the crowd, unable to reach Baba, had thrown in their desperate desire to contact him, thus seriously impeding its progress. Finally the car would reach its destination and make its way through the approach to the compound, packed on either side by men, women and children. Again there would be cheers, more flowers, and often loud reports from guns fired in honour of Baba's arrival.

✓ It is not surprising that at that time disorder or chaos were not in evidence; for these vast multitudes gathered together were as one—with only one thought, and that of united worship of the One who is All in all.

Baba was usually escorted to the platform by the reception committee. For a minute or two he would stand



facing the masses, while all were requested to be seated. The crowd was divided in orderly fashion into two separate sections; one of men and the other of women and children.

A message of Baba's delivered over the microphone would be relayed to the crowd through innumerable loud-speakers, so placed that all might hear. Baba would then bow down to the crowd collectively and afterwards seat himself on the raised dais especially prepared for him. In the message Baba told them that they should feel neither hurt nor discomfiture at his bowing down to them, as it signified his salutation to their love and faith.

This third item being ended, there would follow an announcement of the programme for the day. This would include welcoming addresses, from the reception committee, from Baba's old devotees, Municipal and Local Board committees, various educational institutions, and from business men as well as members of the bar association.

Can it be wondered if these many speeches were ignored by the multitude when every heart-beat, every thought and every emotion was turned to him whose presence radiated such infinite love, understanding and gentleness? After the addresses, there was usually a song of welcome hailing the Avatar of the age in their town and in their midst. Then Baba's *Arti* would be sung; begun by a few it would soon ring from thousands of throats as all joined in.

As a conclusion Baba would ask one of his devotees to read another message especially prepared for the occasion and for that place.

Then amidst wild cheering, profuse garlanding and varied offerings, Baba's darshan would be made available to all.

For hours on end Baba would be seated, swathed in a profusion of flower garlands as well as garlands of golden cords with multi-coloured embroidered plaques, distributing *prasad* of fruits and sweets to each and all. Every one was given a fruit or a piece of sweet by Baba. It was estimated on many occasions that truck-loads of bananas, car-loads of pears and other fruits were distributed by Baba, patiently and lovingly, one by one, to every individual of the vast congregation.

To control these crowds of tens of thousands intent in their fervour to reach Baba as quickly as possible, voluntary scouts, police officers and constables were kept in attendance. They played their parts lovingly, seeking to serve Baba by endeavouring to keep back the avalanche of men and women, urging them to be patient till their turn should arrive. In the ensuing tussle between love and order, the officers found it necessary now and again to send an S. O. S. to Baba, informing him that the crowd was becoming too eager and would not be controlled. At that Baba would smile and nod his head, and ask someone to announce to the people over the microphone that they should have patience as he would not leave under any circumstances until he had given *prasad* to each and all gathered there. Immediately there would be peace and quiet.

After the programme of darshan and distribution of *prasad*, Baba, escorted amidst loud cheers and fresh showers of flowers, would return to the house prepared



for him, in order to rest. It must be mentioned here that rest, as we understand it, was not for Baba and his close ones. Wherever they stayed, the exuberance of the people still gathered in the compound would cause them to sing *bhajans* and other devotional songs throughout most of the night. And as many gathered at dawn to again have glimpses of Baba, he was always up betimes. For not a single moment of the whole tour did Baba spare himself or his mandali.

(The day after the mass darshan programe Baba would pay visits to the homes of his lovers. The over-flowing love and devotion of these families is something never to be forgotten by those who were present.) Thousands of yards of cloth were spread on the road, and the lanes completely covered with the best of silk and embroidered sarees for Baba to walk upon. From the place where he alighted to the ornamented seat inside the house, Baba and his procession of followers traversed this richly colourful path. This was done at nearly all the places Baba visited.

2 (On entering a home Baba would be welcomed with loud acclamations of *Avatar Bhagwan Meher Baba ki jai* and lavishly garlanded by members of the family and all their neighbours who had gathered there.) They would then perform the '*arti*' and *pūja*. Sitting in the midst of this group Baba would give them spiritual discourses and advice on his board. Some of the group would prostrate themselves before him and some beg to be allowed to kiss his feet. A few would cry while some sobbed loudly, and still others were busy worshipping Baba according to the Indian custom.



3 When Baba visited the homes of his devotees he made no distinction whatever as to caste or creed, high or low status. He went to the houses of the highest officials of the town and to the humblest homes and hovels of cobblers and sweepers (considered untouchable castes amongst the Hindus) as lovingly and spontaneously as if he were one of them.

Baba was also invited by the local saints and sadhus. Even those spiritual men who were considered as sadgurus by the people, prostrated themselves before Baba, paying homage to him with all love and humility and would often weep when in Baba's presence.

One is at a loss to depict in writing the full picture of those 35 days. It was a memorable full length reel of a love drama in reality. The world with all its worries and its responsibilities were completely forgotten and it appeared that the lover indeed lived only for the Beloved. The Beloved, like the queen bee, was surrounded by tens of thousands of bees, ready to love him, obey him, serve him, protect him, and die for him.

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Notes for Westerners :

*ARTI* : A chant sung in praise of the Master while at the same time a round silver tray containing various objects such as burning incense, lighted camphor, and a small brass stand with oil and burning wick, is held and moved in a rotating motion in front of the Master or His image.

*BHAJAN* : A song in praise of God or the Master.

*DARSHAN* : To bow low with folded hands and touch the Master's feet; or to lay one's head on the Master's feet. General meaning; meeting or interview.

*PANDAL* : Huge flat-topped tent, open at the sides, usually colourfully decorated with bunting, ferns, etc.

*PRASAD* : Anything such as fruit or sweet which has been touched by the Master or given by him personally, and as such extremely precious.

*PUJA* Devotional ceremony performed before the Master.

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In Different Poses.*

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