

AVATAR MEHER BABA TRUST

ARCHIVES AND MUSEUM PROJECT

C I R C U L A R N U M B E R T H R E E

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J *AI BELOVED MEHER BABA* to you all, Baba's dear ones in the East and West from Avatar Meher Baba P.P.C.Trust Archives and Museum Committee. As you know, because of the love-gifts of Baba lovers worldwide, we were able to break ground for the Archives, Museum & Research Building at Meherabad on May 1st this year. If you were to stroll around Meherabad Hill, so blessed by the Avatar's footprints, you would see that the excavation for the building to preserve Baba's precious items is complete, and the foundation that is now being worked on is nestling in the side of Baba's sacred Hill, near the site where Baba, seated on a white donkey, was photographed with his beloved Mehera beside Him in the 1930's. You would also see that the steel reinforcing of the framework of the building is coming up, and you would hear the sound of the 'tink-tink' of steel on stone as masons, hard at work, shape grey stones for the plinth.

Although Baba lovers wished the mandali a restful summer, this year Beloved Baba planned it otherwise for us. Amidst extensive repair work on different buildings in Meherazad, at the request of some members of the Archives Committee, we also began delving into our memories of the past with Baba. The purpose was for the mandali to record on tape the history of the buildings of Meherabad and Meherazad, and the Baba items they contain. Through these recordings, we hope the daily, personal details of the human side of Beloved Baba, the God-man, have been captured. These interviews of us mandali are continuing to be recorded as time and health permit, and the transcription of the audio tapes is ongoing.

This 'history-taking' precipitated an unexpected emergency conservation project. When Dr. Goher talked about Baba's health and medical care, she brought out Baba's x-rays, taken from His first car accident in 1952 up to 1968, and found that, although housed with care, they were in varying stages of deterioration and in danger of becoming unreadable. With the help of Sheriar Foundation's technical expertise, a specialized conservator in the States was recommended, and the 136 x-rays (including Mehera's and Mani's) were hand-carried to him. Later some others already in the States were added. Through the loving generosity of Baba

lovers in the medical and health-related professions and other Baba lovers, these x-rays have now been archivally copied and will eventually be stored in freezers at Meherabad and another site for safety, thus preserving these irreplaceable images which record some of the physical suffering Beloved Baba underwent in His man-form.

During the time Beloved Avatar Meher Baba was in our midst, the work He did, the darshan programmes He gave, His vitality, His love, His very presence, were overwhelming, much larger than life. So it was impossible to think of a life without Him; no, never without Him, but without His physical form. This time of His being on earth was, as Mani called it, Act 1 in His Divine Game. After Baba dropped His body, all His close mandali found it almost impossible to pick up the threads of life and feel our way out of the darkness of despair and pain. For us women mandali, willing ourselves to be useful, and thinking of what would console Mehera, looking through Baba's articles helped a great deal. Just to touch His clothes was to feel His closeness, especially for Mehera. She would very willingly be involved in the work, but often we noticed her sitting motionless, a sadra or a coat in her lap, in deep reverie, silent tears running down her cheeks. This phase of the Avatar's Advent Mani referred to as the start of Act 2, when the mandali were pushed onto the stage.

After Mehera joined Beloved Baba, Mani sometimes used to say, "Act 2 is now nearly over," and now that Mani too has gone to Him, it seems that the start of Act 3 is closer at hand.

More than anyone else, it was Mani who gave the initial push, officially, to the conservation project which is now under way. Keeping Baba's treasures as lovingly, carefully, and professionally as possible was a top priority for her, so much so that she was moved to voice her wishes on the subject in a letter written June 9th and 10th, 1996, two days before she was admitted to the hospital in Poona for her final stay. Writing this letter when she was so ill required great effort on her part, and it turned out to be her last letter as Chairman of the Trust. It was in reply to a request for guidance on the part of an American Baba lover, who found herself responsible for some precious items of Baba's, that had been in the care of a long-standing Baba lover who had recently died. The following is an excerpt from Mani's letter:

As Baba made it clear that Meherabad would become a place of world pilgrimage, we are building at the root, Meherabad, a repository for Baba's personal items to be stored and preserved until the time when they may be shared with the countries of the world which will be awakened to Meher Baba. Recalling His words, "the whole world will come to know and love Me," it becomes our

responsibility to ensure that in the future all countries around the world will be able to have a personal item of Beloved Baba's to conserve and share.

As the USA seems to have an abundance of His precious things when compared to other parts of the world yet to be awakened to Him, we are advising individual Baba lovers in the USA who ask our advice to help right the balance by giving or bequeathing such personal Baba items to the Avatar Meher Baba Trust for preservation and sharing with the world in time.

Although the letter makes special mention of the USA, the responsibility for providing for the future care of Baba-treasures rests with all those who are entrusted with the privilege of caring for something of His, wherever they may be. Not long after writing this letter, while still in the hospital, Mani even asked her own family in Poona to give certain Baba treasures of theirs to the Trust for future sharing with the world. She felt, as we do, that Baba treasures are Baba's, and the Baba community are but their fortunate caretakers.

So now it is our desire to impress upon all Baba lovers who have Baba-items the enormity of the responsibility you bear for safeguarding His things. This responsibility is both to preserve them with great care while they are in your keeping, and to select heirs for them that will be equally responsible in the future. We would like to think that these treasures will always remain in the hands of people who will both savour the remembrance of Beloved Baba through them, and who will also understand their continuing need for special care. If you are doubtful about the continuity of their future safety and sharing after you are gone, we earnestly request you to consider leaving Baba-items to the Trust (through a deed of gift or bequest in your will) as Mani suggested in her letter, to ensure their museum-quality conservation and accessibility for future generations throughout the world.

In the meantime, we ask each of you to take the appropriate measures to safeguard whatever item is in your custody. To help you, we have compiled a list of simple steps in a separate write up entitled "Tips for Preserving Your Precious Baba Treasures." Many items may already be old and fragile, and in need of immediate attention. Even things that may not appear fragile are deteriorating, and much can be done to slow the deterioration and prolong their life significantly.

As detailed in "Tips," the primary hazards come from handling, sunlight, artificial light, extremes of temperature and humidity, mold, dust, pests, and acid-exuding papers or containers, and, of course, Father Time. For further information, you may contact this

committee, c/o A.M.B.P.P.C.Trust, or Dot Lesnik, who is helping the Trust with this preservation work. Dot's address is 265 Briarcliffe Acres, Myrtle Beach, S.C. 29572, U.S.A., tel. 803-272-6868, or e-mail dlesnik@aol.com.

When we speak of Baba-treasures, we mean any personal item of Baba's (such as hair or nails, a handkerchief, or sadra), or any object bearing His signature, or anything touched by Him. All these need to be attended to from the viewpoint of conservation.

In another category, so do Baba's and the mandali's letters, telegrams and other documents which directly portray Baba's relationship with His lovers and His attention to the tiniest details of their lives. As well as Baba's beautiful image in photos and films, and the mandali's stories that you have recorded on film, videotape and audiotape. All these, we feel, need to be copied and preserved for Baba lovers to come. Since these items can be duplicated, we ask that you consider ensuring that the Trust Archives has a high quality copy (or the original, if you feel so prompted). If you are able to arrange this, please have it hand carried (not mailed) to India by a reliable Baba-pilgrim. If you have any difficulty in duplicating the item, do let us know. And please write down and send us any information relevant to the item to shed light on its historic content.

As time passes, and as the light of Meher Baba's Divinity illuminates the world, naturally the memory of His humanity will need to be nurtured. In centuries to come, the things that Meher Baba touched or used or wore, the pictures of Him, the letters He wrote, and other articles bearing the personal imprint of His humanity, will serve as tangible links to help people remember His life as Man more intimately, just as they helped Mehera so much to feel His eternal closeness. To preserve these treasures for as long as possible is one of the duties unfolding before us now, as we prepare for the opening of Act 3, the age of His lovers. So it is essential that this work, begun by the mandali, be on a firm footing, so that after we are no more, it may continue in the same spirit.

A V A T A R M E H E R B A B A K I J A I ! !

Meheru

Meheru R. Irani, Bhau Kalchuri, and the members of the Avatar Meher Baba Trust
Archives and Museum Committee.

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