



# **MEHER BABA COMES TO BRITAIN**

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THIS PAMPHLET HAS BEEN  
PRODUCED ON BEHALF OF  
THE VICE-PRESIDENT AND  
THE COMMITTEE OF THE  
MEHER BABA ASSOCIATION  
TO COMMEMORATE THE 50TH  
ANNIVERSARY OF MEHER  
BABA'S FIRST VISIT TO  
BRITAIN AND THE WEST.



"And did those feet in ancient time  
Walk upon England's mountains green?  
And was the holy lamb of God  
On England's pleasant pastures seen?"

With acknowledgements to *THE PERFECT MASTER* and *THE GOD-MAN*, both by C.B. Purdom; *THE AVATAR* by Jean Adriel; to the issues of *THE GLOW* for Feb 1972 and Feb 1974, produced by Naosherwan Anzar and Freiny Naravala; and to the resources at Meher Baba Oceanic.

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## HOW BABA CAME TO BRITAIN

WHEN MEHER BABA arrived in London on the afternoon of 12 September, 1931, this was not only his first visit to Britain, but his first to any part of the Western world. He brought with him three disciples, Chanji ( F.H.Dadachanji ), his acting secretary, who had already travelled with Baba all over India and to Persia; Rustom ( Rustom K.S.Irani ), whom Baba had sent over to Britain three years earlier to make contacts, and Syed Ali, who had been one of his Prem Ashram boys. The party travelled in the S.S.Rajputana, leaving Karachi on September 1 to arrive ten days later in Marseilles, Baba remaining in his cabin almost throughout the voyage.

Also on board the Rajputana was Mahatma Gandhi, lately released from gaol and on his way to the Round Table Conference which would prove to be so important a milestone on the road to India's independence. Gandhi was then at the height of his prestige; as sole representative of the Congress Party at the London conference, he was in effect the voice of Hindu India. Nine years before this time Baba had foretold that he and Gandhi would meet on this voyage, and in the course of it Gandhi paid several visits to Baba in his cabin.

Waiting to greet Baba when his ship docked at Marseilles on September 11, were two Englishmen, Meredith Starr and Herbert Davy, the brother of Kitty Davy. Waiting also was the crowd of pressmen, photographers, officials and others who had assembled for Gandhi's arrival. Baba came down the gang-way in a salmon-pink turban, loosely-tied, a flowing white robe, and that short

coat of imitation chinchilla fur which is familiar to us from photographs of this time. Meredith Starr and Herbert Davy travelled on with Baba by train, first to Paris and then to London, where they were met at Victoria by Kitty Davy and taken to the Davy family home, 32 Russell Rd., almost opposite Olympia, where Baba spent three nights.

It was here that Margaret Craske, the dancer and dancing instructor who was to become one of his life-long followers, caught her first glimpse of Baba: "He was standing at the foot of the steps leading to the front door.... and he was looking at the house very quietly. He passed in through the door and gave me a smile in passing."



AFTER THREE DAYS in London Baba and his party travelled down by car to Bath, where they stopped briefly, and then on through the West Country to Combe Martin, a village some miles from Ilfracombe on the North Devon coast near which Meredith Starr had established what he called 'The Retreat', a centre for meditation and spiritual exercise.





*Meher Baba and party at East Challacombe - 1932*

This was at East Challacombe, a farm house so remote that visitors had to be met in the main street, otherwise they would never find the way.

"There is a very beautiful view all around over many ranges of gently sloping hills on which sheep and lambs grazed peacefully," wrote one who was present. "The Atlantic Ocean, here called the Bristol Channel, is quite close and accessible by two narrow trails that lead down an 800-foot cliff which rises almost vertically from the sea."

During the ten days Baba spent in 'The Retreat' a pattern of routine was followed. "Baba always gets up very early in the morning,"

Herbert Davy noted. He usually eats his meals alone or with one of his Indian followers. He eats little and sometimes joins us when we are having breakfast. Like a father he watches our appetites."

Mornings at 'The Retreat' were mainly occupied with interviews, and among those who had gathered to meet Baba was C.B.Purdom, a writer whose books would one day be familiar to every Baba-lover. "I had no idea who he was," wrote Purdom, "but as soon as my eyes met his I had the strong impression that I knew him already...my intimacy with him was firmly established and has remained



undisturbed for more than thirty years."

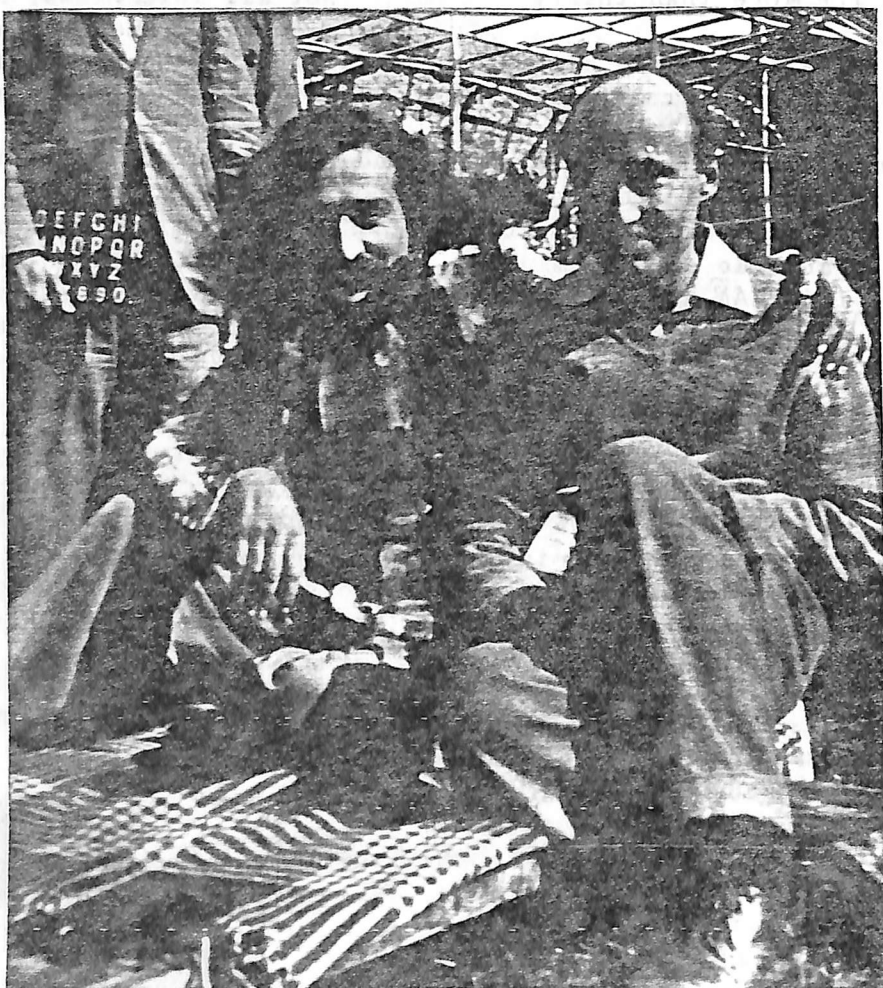
Purdom was at this time editor of *EVERYMAN*, which was a magazine of general, and particularly of literary comment, so that it was courageous of Purdom, immediately after first meeting Baba, to include a long signed article about him in the issue of *EVERYMAN* for September 24.... "He is a Perfect Master because He is united with the Unconscious -- that is with God. He has conscious knowledge of God. He has come to the West, leaving his seclusion in India, to get men and women to turn their minds in these times of great anxiety from the world of material things to the inner world of the spirit, where all problems of the material world are solved. This Perfect Master arrived in England quietly twelve days ago and went to an isolated place in the country where only a few people knew of his presence ...."

## INTERVIEWS WITH BABA

BABA'S METHOD in interviews, Charles Purdom recorded later, appeared to vary little with those who came to see him. "He would look at the visitor and smile. He would ask no questions. Usually he touched the hand or caressed the arm of the visitor, saying on the board, which was read by a disciple, "I like you and will help you." If the visitor had nothing to say, which was frequently so, the interview would end in a minute or two with a smile from Baba. If the visitor had any questions to ask, Baba would answer them on the board. Interviews seldom lasted more than from three to five minutes."

Not all interviews, however, proceeded with such outward calm. It was here at East Challacombe, that Kim Grajera ( at that time Kim Tolhurst ) first met Baba. "I had no notion of what awaited me when, that quiet Devon evening in 1931, I was guided into a tiny cell-like room in the old stone-built farm house, where I saw a still, white-robed figure seated on the bed -- and I saw no more. How I came to be upon my knees, how I came to be weeping as if my heart would break, I don't know. Neither do I know for how long I wept. But with the tears seemed to flow away all the past, till I was spent, in a sense empty, yet filled with lightness and new dawn-fresh life. Somebody led me away, I was soon put to bed and I passed into a dreamless and yet blissful sleep."





*Meher Baba and Meredith Starr*

Quentin Todd, a talented actor who would travel much with Baba and whose humour gave him frequent pleasure, said that before his first meeting with Baba he felt 'as though I were about to undergo a major operation.' But when at last the moment came when he found himself in the same room with Baba, who was sitting, cross-legged, on a bed near the window... "I was so engrossed in looking at this wonderful man for the first time that everything else faded away.

What impressed me most was his rather wild quality, as of something untamed, and his truly remarkable eyes. He smiled, and motioned me to sit beside him. He took my hand and from time to time patted my shoulder. We sat for several minutes in silence and I was aware of a great feeling of love and peace emanating from him; also a curious feeling of recognition came to me, as if I had found a long-lost friend."

IN THE AFTERNOONS Baba would lead the group on a walk up the grassy amphitheatre surrounding the farm house, or along the rough paths which threaded their way down the steep cliffs to the beach. Sometimes he would suggest a game of *Seven Tiles*, in which seven stones are piled on top of one another and the players try in turn to knock them all down with a single throw. Once, while such a game was in progress...."Baba's mood changed. He beckoned a few to follow him and led the way to a rounded stone a little distance apart. It seemed that hundreds of miles away Baba was working with different beings....Tenderness, compassion, radiance and love flowed from him and love flowed towards him. Time and place dissolved, thoughts of tomorrow were brushed aside. It was an extraordinary experience."

What may have lain behind this rare glimpse into Baba's way of working no one can presume to say. But Baba's stay in East Challacombe, lasting from about September 15-25th, coincided with an event of unique significance, though probably only Baba himself was aware that it was taking place. For on September 21 Hazrat Babajan, the Perfect Master who had placed the kiss of enlightenment on Baba's forehead, and 'in less than a millionth of a second made me realise that I am God', laid down her earthly body. While still a youth Baba had been drawn to her 'as steel to a magnet', and when speaking of her he would use the words 'matchless', 'incomparable', often referring to her as 'Emperor'. Babajan's name had also been one of the last he uttered on that evening of July 9, 1925, on which he made use of his earthly voice for the last time. She was actually, he had then explained, one of the causes

for his silence, since he was undertaking this partly because of the burden of spiritual working laid on him by her approaching death, as well as on account of all the disturbances, wars and disasters which were coming upon the world and on India in particular. And now, six years later and thousands of miles away in Poona, Babajan, her work completed, was giving up her bodily existence.



Hazrat Babajan





ONE OTHER ASPECT of Baba's stay at East Challacombe stands out in the memories of those who were present. Baba had brought with him a set of Indian drums, on which he was an expert player, and he would from time to time gather members of the group together to hear both Eastern and Western music, which he himself would sometimes accompany. The Eastern music took the form of *Qawali*, extemporary love songs of the kind Baba was referring to when he once said: "Let us have music. Indian music is all about love," and of the first record then played, he added: "This is a wonderful state of love. The lover is not concerned with the planes and the different states of consciousness. He is only concerned with God and how to love God. He arrives at a state when this love fills his world, and the pangs of separation are so unbearable that he says, "I now want

to forget you ; but the more I try, the more I remember you..."

The music contributed by the Westerners consisted mainly of negro spirituals, some of them on incidents from the Bible story of Jesus, others whose theme was a passionate longing for the heavenly state.

Baba, we know, often worked from the small to the great; that is, he would get up, as it were, a 'model' from which, in course of time, some much vaster development would result. We may possibly, therefore, see in these sessions with a group of followers -- in which Eastern, Western and negro forms of music were brought together and performed to his own rhythmic accompaniment -- a pattern or model for that great tide of popular music which, twenty or thirty years later, would start to sweep across the world.

MEREDITH STARR, who had written "Please, dearest Baba, consider this house as your own," had been expecting Baba to remain at 'The Retreat' for six months or a year, but after ten days Baba ordered a return to London, where he spent a further week at the Davy home in Kensington. During his previous short stay he had visited Kew Gardens -- an area which has since acquired special association for London Baba-lovers -- but now on his return visit he acted almost like a sightseer. He had himself taken to Westminster Abbey, and the Unknown Warrior's Tomb, to the House of Commons, the British Museum, the Zoological Gardens, a Promenade Concert and to one or two theatres. Remarkably, in view of the traditional symbolism of a white horse in connection with the Avatar, one of the shows he visited was WHITE HORSE INN at the Coliseum, and it was here that our Vice-President, Delia De Leon, met Baba for the first time. It was a Saturday night, September 26, 1931, and Baba was in a box with his three disciples and four English people.

"I sat next to Baba, but he took very little notice of me," Delia wrote later. "I was shy and nervous, and felt as if someone had taken a hammer and knocked me on the head. I hardly looked at him; I heard people talking but felt dazed and far away; at the end I put out my hand and took his and looked mutely at him; he nodded his head and I was told that I was to come the next day to Kensington.

During that week I went about like one in a dream; I was stunned with the wonder of Baba, nothing else existed for me. I saw him every day, and from then I had absolute and implicit trust and faith in him; I asked no questions, I wanted nothing from him. I gave my life into his keeping and knew my search was at an end.

Later Delia added to these impressions. "In those early days every time I saw Baba I burst into tears, but some people laughed. Anita Vieillard just roared with laughter, she said, when she saw Baba. But for years I wept every time I looked at Baba because in some way I felt his great crucifixion to come into the body. I never felt Baba didn't speak. I was never conscious of that because he was always speaking to your soul, to your heart."



Others among the earliest English followers to meet Baba at this time were Will and Mary Beckett. Of her first meeting with him, Mary said: "He gave me more, far more, in the space of three minutes than I had gained in thirty years of earnest seeking because I actually experienced the definite gift of grace and divine love that he bestowed, whereas others could only talk about it."

A revealing incident was recorded during Baba's stay with the Davys. One morning Baba sent for Mrs. Davy and asked whether there was anything he could do for her. She explained: "We have a home for aged folk over eighty. I would like you to visit them, but you have no time now." It was already lunch-time, but Baba immediately summoned his secretary Chanji, told Kitty Davy to order a taxi, and with Chanji and Mrs. Davy set off directly for the home.

"How can I understand and love you?" Mrs. Davy asked Baba later in the day.

"When you pray," Baba answered "have my picture before you."

"I have always the picture of Christ," she said.

"Keep looking at the Christ's picture. It is the same," Baba told her.



BABA'S VISIT TO BRITAIN, like everything else he undertook, had been planned thoroughly in advance. Back in 1922 in the period of his Bombay Ashram, Baba had stated: "I shall travel extensively and my spiritual work will necessitate my going to the Western world." Six years later, when he was devoting much of his time to the Prem Ashram school, Baba had sent Rustom to England to try and find some English boys who would join the school. In this Rustom had been unsuccessful, but he had met Meredith Starr who, in the following year, went out to spend six months in India with Baba. Back home at East Challacombe, Starr continued writing to Baba, urging him to come to Britain, until finally, on July 17, 1931, he received a cable from Karachi: "Love calls me to the West. Make preparations."

IN COMPARISON with his great world tour of 1932, when Baba gave press interviews, attended gatherings and parties, issued statements about his work and the state of the world, being received with nation-wide publicity both in Britain and the United States—where he visited New York, Chicago and Hollywood, before going on to China—Baba's 1931 visit has the air almost of a reconnaissance. It was much shorter and in the main he stayed out of the limelight, appearing to be concerned with the making of personal rather than public contacts. But its timing would seem with hindsight, to have been precisely calculated.

During August the date of his sailing was repeatedly being put off, so that he finally left India on September 1, to arrive in London on September 12.

What then was significant about September 1931?





*Baba models for the Prem Ashram boys, the clothes he will wear in the West.*

HISTORIANS and political commentators, looking back over the twentieth century now see 1931 as one of the turning points in world affairs. It was a year of economic collapse and political disillusion, in which cherished hopes for international cooperation, leading to disarmament and peace through the League of Nations, were seen to be illusory. Another world war began to seem inevitable, and men's hearts sank at the prospect of a second so soon after the first, and at all the destruction, death and chaos which loomed ever more ominously from now on. Some politicians, industrialists and journalists indeed found the prospect so appalling that they continued protesting it could never happen right up to the moment when war began.

During the summer of 1931 the consequences of the great Wall Street crash of two years earlier were producing their full, delayed, effect in Europe. In Germany and Austria a complete breakdown of the banking and financial system led to industrial collapse and massive unemployment, thus playing into the hands of the National Socialists -- whose grip on Germany tightened with every fresh calamity -- and of their leader Adolf Hitler. Hitler was not only bent on war, he had actually outlined his plans for it in his book *MEIN KAMPF*. This has been accurately described as a 'blue-print for chaos', but was largely ignored for its lack of literary style and because of the consequences which must follow were it to be taken seriously.

ECONOMIC DISASTER on a similar scale to that in Germany loomed at this moment over Britain too, where the number of unemployed had risen to three million out of a work force far smaller than today's, and with a social system far less able to stand the strain. "What threatened," wrote a historian ( Wm.McElwee, *BRITAIN'S LOCUST YEARS, 1918-40*. Faber & Faber, 1962,p 171 ) was not a mere financial crisis... but a complete commercial collapse which would engulf employed and unemployed in a common ruin." A hastily-formed National Government had presented its 'Economy' Budget on September 10, and its drastic measures were being discussed throughout the country

just as Baba was on his way from Marseilles to London.

As for what was happening at this moment in the world at large, a single example must serve; on September 18 the Japanese moved into Manchuria, following which action peace would not return to the Far East for decades, and perhaps not within the 20th century at all. Wherever men turned their eyes, that process of destruction which, Baba tells us, must inevitably precede construction, was visibly under way.

ON OCTOBER 2 Baba left England for Constantinople, where he stayed nine days, moving on from there to Milan and Genoa, from which port he sailed for New York.



JUST AS EVERY individual's relationship with Baba is unique, so too is every country's. India was his birthplace and lifelong home, and from India came most of his band of close companions. Persia, now Iran, was his family's country of origin, from which he took his name ( Irani ), and his early training in the Zoroastrian religion. In the United States he shed his blood, and established in Myrtle Beach a permanent centre which he hallowed with his presence. Baba created special ties also with Australia, China, Ceylon, France, Italy, Switzerland, Spain, Egypt and other countries. We in Britain can also claim our own special relationship with the God-Man, who chose as a boy to receive a British education, travelled on a British passport, established his Meherabad centre in what had formerly been a British Military camp, and paid a number of visits to our country before and after World War II. Above all, throughout his time on earth, Baba made use of the English language, which has since become virtually a universal language of mankind.

With our own Association, too, Baba's ties have been direct and close. In July 1956 on his last visit to London, when he stayed at the Hotel Rubens, he reorganised the British group, which was then in difficulties, ordering a sum of money to be handed over so that its work could be restarted. Baba himself has also always been our President, and remained so even when, at the time of the New Life, he renounced all other titles and positions.







MEHER BABA  
-AND A MESSAGE FOR THE FUTURE

FOR THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY of  
Baba's first visit to our country,  
Delia De Leon as Vice-President  
has written a message to us all:

"It was a time of great joy to  
welcome the Avatar to these shores  
fifty years ago. Meher Baba set  
our hearts aflame with his  
message of love and truth, and  
the beauty and majesty of his  
presence. He asked us for love  
and obedience, and to hold on to  
his *Vaaman*, as he asks of us today.  
This is an opportunity to rededicate  
ourselves to Him in love, service  
and surrender."

SHALL WE, indeed, rededicate  
ourselves to Baba? And if so, *how*  
shall we do it? How can we, each  
of us, find our way through to Baba  
despite all the demands on our  
energy and time? Shall we start  
by reading - or re-reading - the  
*Discourses*? Written for our help  
and guidance, they cannot fail to  
bring us closer to Him.

WHAT WE DO is a matter for each  
one to decide -- in the light of  
what each of us means when we call  
ourselves Baba-lovers.



*Meher Baba in 1956 - the year of  
his last visit to London.*

