



Encyclopedia Britannica Entry on Meher Baba

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Meher Baba also called THE AWAKENER, original name Merwan Sheriar Irani (b. Feb 25, 1894, Poona, India - d. Jan 31, 1969, Ahmednagar), spiritual master in Western India with a sizable following both in that country and abroad. Beginning July 10, 1925 he observed silence for the last 44 years of his life, communicating with his disciples at first through an alphabet board but increasingly with gestures. He observed that he had "not come to teach but to awaken", adding that "things that are real are given and received in silence".

He was born into a Zoroastrian family of Persian descent. He was educated in Poona and attended Deccan College there, where at the age of 19 he met an aged Muslim woman, Hazrat Babajan, the first of 5 "perfect masters" (spiritually enlightened or "God-realized" persons) who over the next 7 years helped him find his own spiritual identity. That identity, Meher Baba said, was as the Avatar of this age, interpreting that Vedantic term to mean the periodic incarnation of God in human form. He placed himself among such universal religious figures as Zoroaster, Rama, Krishna, Gautama Buddha, Jesus and Muhammad. "I am the same Ancient One come again in your midst," he told his disciples, declaring that all major religions are revelations of "the One Reality which is God".

Meher Baba's cosmology may be summarized as follows; the goal of life is to realize the absolute oneness of God, from whom the universe emanates as a result of the whim of unconscious divinity to know itself as conscious divinity. In pursuit of consciousness, evolution of forms occurs in seven stages; stone or metal, vegetable, worm, fish, bird, animal and human. Every individualized soul must experience all of these forms in order to gain full consciousness. Once consciousness is attained, the burden of impressions accumulated in these forms prevents the soul from realizing its identity with God. To gain this realization the individual must traverse an inward spiritual path, eliminating all false impressions of individuality and eventuating in the knowledge of "real self" as God.

Meher Baba saw his work as awakening the world through love to a new consciousness of the oneness of all life. To that end he lived a life of selflessness and service which included extensive work with the poor, the physically and mentally ill, and many others, including such tasks as feeding the poor, cleaning the latrines of untouchables, and bathing lepers. He saw a responsibility to give spiritual help to "advanced souls" and travelled throughout the Indian subcontinent to find such persons.

These outward activities Meher Baba saw as indications of the inner transformation of the consciousness that he came to give to the world. He established and later dismantled many institutions of service, which he compared to scaffolding temporarily erected to construct a building that really was within the human heart. He said that a "new humanity" would emerge from his life's work, and that he would bring about an unprecedented release of divine love in the world.

Between 1931 and 1958 he made many visits to the United States and Europe, on one such trip in 1952 establishing the Meher Spiritual Centre at Myrtle Beach, S.C. A similar centre, Avatar's Abode was created at Woombye, Queensland, Australia in 1958.

From the mid-1960s Meher Baba was in seclusion, and during that period several U. S. drug experimenters were drawn to him in a quest for spiritual truth. Through them his admonitions against the non-medical use of psychedelic and other drugs came to the attention of the news media in the U. S. and the West. He warned young people explicitly that "drugs are harmful mentally, physically and spiritually," trying to draw them away from drugs and towards a spiritual life.

Meher Baba never sought to form a sect or proclaim a dogma; he attracted and welcomed many faiths and every social class, with a message emphasizing love and compassion, the elimination of the selfish ego, and the potential of realizing God within themselves. Although his equation of the several manifestations of God was syncretic, he won many followers from sects and denominations that repudiated syncretism, and encouraged those followers to be strong in their original faiths. After his death his followers heeded his wish that they not form an organization, but continue to gather informally and often to discuss and read his works and express through music, poetry and dance, or drama their reflections on his life. His tomb at Meherabad, near Ahmednagar, has become a place of pilgrimage for his followers throughout the world. His books include *Discourses* (5 vol. 1938-43; the earliest dictated on the alphabet board, the others by gestures), *God Speaks; The Theme of Creation and Its Purpose* (1955), and *The Everything and the Nothing* (1963).

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