

**The Divine Humanity
of
Meher Baba
Volume III**

By Bill Lepage

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The Divine Humanity
of
Meher Baba

Volume III

Bill Le Page

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Dedication

To
Beloved Avatar Meher Baba,
God-Man, Perfect Man.

What is all beauty in the world?
The image, like quivering boughs reflected in a stream,
Of that eternal Orchard which abides
Unwithered in the hearts of Perfect Men.
- Jalalu'l-Din Rumi

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Meherwan Jessawala Remembers

My first clear memory of Beloved Baba was during His visit to Nagpur in December 1937. He stayed three days, and held a number of Darshan programs in the great hall of the house, including a large public one in the evening of the 27th. I recall Him on that occasion looking slim and splendid in a fine silk coat with His hair flowing. He was seated on a sofa at the end of the hall surrounded by the family and the mandali. On either side of the hall people sat, leaving a clear space in the middle for others to approach Him and take darshan. Thousands did so. One who came with hundreds of his followers was the very well known saint Tukdoji Maharaj. Before all he bowed down to Baba.

Tukdoji's arrival at this time was noted by Norina, seated near Baba. 'Look Baba, a drunkard has come to see You.' Baba replied, 'He has drunk the wine of love.' Indeed he walked with the rolling gait like one who is intoxicated. In her account of this program, Norina writes about him thus: A remarkable individual suddenly enters the hall. Huge in stature, young, powerful in appearance, and loud in manners, this man seems to be well known, as many cheer at his coming. When he laughs his mouth opens like a huge crevice in crude dark earth. But visible in his expression is the inner divine child that makes his eyes glow with joy unfathomable.

After sitting for short while at Baba's feet, Tukdoji moved to the musicians, and, playing a little drum called a Khanjri, in his great voice he sang bhajans of love for the Lord.

Another who came for darshan was the wife of a prominent judge. She was a follower of some guru, and she had had a vivid dream in which her guru told her to go to Nagpur and take the darshan of the Kalki Avatar who was there. When she came before Baba she shouted, Kalki Avatar! Kalki Avatar! and after throwing herself at His feet, exclaimed, 'The object of my life is fulfilled today! I have had the darshan of the Kalki Avatar! (Kalki or Kalkin is the name for the White Horse Avatar, the Divine Incarnation for this present Kali Yuga.) This woman was like a

mastani, intoxicated, totally carried away by her experience. But she became somewhat of a nuisance, intruding in the house and exhorting Mama (Gaimai) 'Kalki Avatar is in your house, don't eat anything while He is here. Fast!' At the same time, Beloved Baba. was telling Mama 'to eat well, be healthy and fresh' in the midst of all chores she had to do for Him.

One of the swamis, Bhaskareshwar Ananda, of the Ramakrishna Ashram, also came to this darshan program. He came full of questions, but, in Beloved Baba's presence, he completely forgot what he wanted to ask, and sat quietly by Baba, tears flowing from his eyes. He internally received the. answers to his questions, and his heart over-flowed with love. On leaving he remarked, 'I have had Ramakrishna's darshan today!'

We had contact with, and would visit from time to time the Ramakrishna Ashram located some distance out of the city. The Swamis and their followers lived in a very simple fashion, barely maintaining themselves giving free homeopathy treatment in the name of their Lord and Master Ramakrishna with telling effect. Eruch would drive the family there, and on one occasion, as we arrived and opened the car door, a Great Dane appeared it seemed from nowhere, and attached himself to Eruch.

He then promptly jumped into the car through the open door. Eruch got him out, but throughout the visit the dog stayed with the car. After the visit, despite Eruch's efforts to discourage him, the dog then followed the car for miles back to Mary Lodge. Eruch knew Papa would not accept another pet dog.

Sure enough that was Behramshaw's reaction, and he promptly drove the dog some twenty miles out of Nagpur, and left him there, assuming that the dog would not find his way back to the house. But that is exactly what happened.

In due time he appeared again at the gate, .and this time Papa. did not have the heart to drive him away. Thus he stayed and became very much a part of the household. The moment Arti was begun, no matter where the dog was on the extensive property, the dog would hear and come bounding to the house, there to sit on his haunches and 'sing' with the family in their Arti.

When Beloved Baba called the whole family to Him in 1938, He directed Eruch to bring with them only the geese of all the animals and birds that they had at the time. I do not remember what happened to the rest of the animals and birds.

But I do remember the play that was enacted at Meherabad some two or three months after our arrival. It was the story of an Hindu king of ancient times, Raja Gopichand, and it was performed, with enormous difficulty, by the mostly mad men and a few masts who had been brought from the Rahuri Ashram to Meherabad. (For more details of this move, see 'The Wayfarers' by William Donkin.)

The mandali, particularly Pleader, to whom Baba had given over-all charge for the play, had incredible trouble in coaching these men to perform it. But Baba must have had some deep spiritual work connected with it, because of His request for the enactment of the play, and the continuing interest He took in its fulfillment. I remember that in the middle of the performance, one actor 'escaped' and ran off the stage, and had to be brought back by the mandali, who hovered continually at the back of the stage in case such things happened.

The story is an account of the awakening of the Raja to a spiritual life. Papa took me as a child of perhaps nine or ten years of age, to see the film of the story.

It was so moving that I wept throughout the film and although I tried to hide my tears, Papa, who never showed emotion, asked if I was ill and wanted to leave the theatre, but I pleaded to remain. 'Papa, I am really enjoying the film. Let me see it' (In those days we had wonderful films, films that depicted spiritual values and ideals touching the hearts and minds of adults and children alike. But now there is an almost total deterioration of the entertainment world, and this is helping to bring people into great unhappiness and misery. Of course it is Beloved Baba's doing, churning up the very fabric of life, in order to hasten an awakening of the whole world to a life of true love and brotherhood.)

It is recorded that Raja Gopichand early in life was living in utter opulence and comfort with 1600 queens attending upon him, and that he was oblivious to any other way of life. There is a song depicting these 1600 queens pouring water over him in his bath, and emphasizing his early thoughtless way of extreme leisure.

But his mother was deeply spiritual, and viewed this life of her son with great dismay. One day, sitting on the balcony overlooking the palace bath, and observing the bathing ritual of Gopichand, she became so distressed that she spontaneously wept, and a tear fell on his shoulder. The story goes that he felt that tear, and he looked up and saw his mother weeping. He was in turn deeply moved, and, troubled, rushed up to where she was seated. He anxiously asked, 'Mother, why do you weep so? Are you not happy in my happiness?' And she answered, 'No, son, this is not the way life should be lived.'

The story then goes on, a long story, detailing the way two Perfect Masters brought him through the seemingly impenetrable barrier of maya, and made him a great saint.

* * *

I have related before of the marked change I experienced when we joined Baba at Meherabad. From a quite luxurious home in Nagpur, I was in a basic Dharmashala, the bedding roll on the floor with room only for a small trunk containing one set of spare clothes and a few other such things. It was a very simple life no doubt, but also very beautiful and exciting. Masaji, the old man of the mandali, took a great liking to me, and gave me a warm attentive friendliness that was not always present with the other, always busy, mandali. I remember him as very strong despite his age, very loveable with a big moustache. Because of his fondness for me, he once offered me some sweets that had been given him by Baba. Just as he was doing so, Baba came by and saw this, and really flared up, 'You obviously do not respect My prasad, that you just give it away! Do you think I do not look after this child?! Have you decided to become his great benefactor or something?!' With Masaji very crestfallen and muttering 'Baba. I'm so sorry', Baba

continued in front of me, to give him a right royal dressing-down. And Baba could be extremely cutting if He decided to do so. I was so embarrassed by all this, and poor Masaji so distressed that he had upset Baba.

Mind you, Masaji also had a nasty temper, but after flaring up, he would then genuinely forget everything. This happened, for example, when Banumasi decided herself that Masaji, despite being an expert cook, was using too much of one ingredient, and removed some of it without his knowledge. The special dish was, as a result, a disaster, and Masaji, furious, had to be prevented from hammering her with the large spoon that he used for stirring his big pots! It was another of the typical little incidents that occurred in the ashram.

Gustadji too was a very genial personality, full of good humour, plump with red full cheeks and a very innocent sunny expression. He had a sweet tooth and weakness for ice cream, cream and other dairy products. He was ordered by Baba not to do any work, and this gave rise to another little incident that I remember. Papa, Gustadji and myself were travelling in a car in a mountainous area, and we were stopped by boulders on the road that mischief-makers had placed there. Papa said, 'Gustadji, please get out and remove those stones.' But Gustadji answered in his sign language, 'That is not my job.' So Papa, used to being in charge, was greatly huffed, but had perforce to get out and do it himself, grumbling about 'the good-for-nothing people in the Ashram, not wanting to do any work.' Gustadji, simply obeying Baba's order, remained quite unmoved, and, although somewhat embarrassed, sat back and enjoyed the scene. To do no work whatsoever and in silence was in fact far more difficult than to be over-loaded with work.

Dadi, my cousin, was also with me in the Ashram, and he was much more bold and out-spoken than I ever was. One day he appeared before Beloved Baba looking cross, and Baba said 'Oh, what's on your mind?' He then began to complain, 'Baba, there are two oldies who are eating all the cream from the milk, and we are left with just watery milk for breakfast!'

Baba responded with concern, 'Who are these oldies!?' Dadi then pointed to Masaji and Gustadji. Being cream lovers, they would skim off the cream early in the morning. So Baba called them to Him, and gave them a good scolding in front of Dadi, 'How dare you do that to this child. From now on he and Meherwan must be given all the cream.' I was completely embarrassed by all this, and stood with my head down.

Later Gustadji taught me his unique sign language, and on the long Blue Bus tours, we had many very lively conversations. I enjoyed too the challenge of following his system. He was very witty, and I recall him later telling Baba his very weird dreams in a humorous way.

After the earlier Blue Bus tours, late 1938 into 1939, we were at Bangalore for some time. A short time after we arrived, Sam and Dadi's father wrote that he wanted the two boys to return home immediately. Sam came to know of this letter, and began to express his unhappiness to leave in no uncertain terms. He was at the time a very unrestrained child and abused his father roundly for 'being a swine and depriving us from being with Baba!' As he was doing so, Baba came in, and the others tried to silence Sam. But Baba gestured, 'No, let him say what he wants to - now Sam, what's up, why are you so upset?' 'Baba, I don't want to go back.' Then Baba consoled him in His inimitable way, and at the same time saying that he must listen to his elders. Thus He coaxed the two boys to return to school in Bombay.

The house where we stayed in Bangalore, called The Links because it overlooked a golf links, was a large, square, white house. We were in a large hall on the ground floor, and Baba stayed in the front room of two side rooms. Each morning as Baba came out of His room to visit Mehera and Mani on the first floor, I would greet Him by bowing down to His feet and He would then embrace me. I was permitted to do this probably because of my age. I stayed in the women's ashram until I was 14 years of age, and although of course I saw Mehera and she would speak to me, I was always reticent with her and never touched her. In fact I held back and was reticent with all the women, although they too would speak with me, and ones like Mani would play games with me.

Even after Baba dropped the body, we remained reticent and hesitant in freely approaching the women particularly Mehera, not like the Baba lovers who have come in recent years. While I was still young Baba ordered me to never touch a woman

I was put into school in Bangalore, but early in the morning, on Baba's order, Margaret gave me physical exercises to strengthen my rather weak constitution - another little example of His attention to every minute aspect of Ashram life and its inhabitants.

A part of the feature of life in those days, were the plays that Baba would ask the women mandali to conceive and perform. Mani was the main person in creating these plays, but would also help others to create them. Despite my great reluctance, she once cleverly persuaded me to take part in one of her plays by posing a question 'would I not do so even to please Baba?'. She assured me that she had given me a simple part, so simple I could not possibly get stage fright. Mani was to be a rich Nawab, and I was to be her servant. Again I protested, but she pointed out that all I had to do was to pick up a tray of tea enter on the stage when she said 'boy get the tea', and take it to her with a sort of respectable gesture. I could then leave the stage. Reluctantly I agreed, and I was given special permission to be on the first floor of the women's quarters for this one occasion.

When the time came and I entered on the improvised stage dressed as a bearer, Baba was clearly amused at my appearance. This made me even more nervous, and so when I picked up the tray of teacups, the whole thing shook, the cups rattled and tea splashed everywhere. Then, instead of putting the tray before Mani, I put it before Baba, with Mani improvising and saying 'Boy not there - here!' All sorts of disasters happened with that tray of tea, and Baba was getting more and more amused by it all. Mani shouted again, 'Boy, you foolish fellow, come this side - you have to serve the tea to me!' Such mishaps delighted Him even more than the play, and when He really enjoyed something, it was a sight to see.

His face would flush with colour and He would shake with mirth. He would become even more beautiful, yet still with no sound of laughter. This would also bring out the best in everyone in their earnest desire to please Him. And there were often such funny incidents.

Another incident I remember was with Naja dressed as an old Parsi. She had big sideburns and a moustache of white cotton, and she was sitting reading the newspaper as old Parsis do. Suddenly one of the sideburns slipped, and Naja raised the paper to hide her face and what was happening. Baba promptly signals someone to tell Naja to lower the paper, and she shouts in Gujarati, 'Baba, my sideburns are falling down!' But Baba insists and there was Naja with one sideburn down and by this time also a part of her moustache, and Baba and all the spectators were doubling up with laughter. All these mishaps would please Him all the more.

Again it was this unfathomable combination of absolute Humanness and absolute Godhood that made this beloved Meher Baba so impossibly endearing and humbling. It was my birthday, and while I am at school Beloved Baba asked my mother what special food would I like to have. My mother said, 'Baba, he likes plain dhal and rice.' 'Are you spinning Me a tale? - nobody could have plain dhal and rice as their best dish!' 'All right Baba, You ask him.' So He instructed Mani to speak to me on returning from school, before I could meet my mother, and ask what was my favourite dish. When Mani subsequently reported to Baba that I indeed liked plain dhal and rice best, Baba gestured wonderingly, 'Oh, what insipid taste the lad has!' So that birthday we had plain dhal and rice as a birthday feast! And when Baba dished out the food, which He would do in the old days, it was always huge helpings and it would be a job to eat it all - which of course we would always do.

As usual Baba had animals, one sort or another, with Him at Bangalore. There was in fact quite a large collection, rabbits, deer, monkeys, parrots, mynas were some of them, and among them two pigs, Nati and Gati. These were fed so much that they became huge. They were male and female and they then had a large litter. When Baba's work with them was finished, He had

them given to a good household on the firm understanding that they be allowed to die naturally. There were also three dogs, all cared for by Elizabeth. Two were wild dogs named Jingo and Bingo, and the other was a good dog called Foundy. The two wild ones were tied at the foot of the staircase in the house, and, except when they were fed by Elizabeth, they made a great rumpus all day long. Norina did not love dogs like Elizabeth, and she particularly did not like these wild ones. So as soon as Elizabeth was out of sight, she would beat them with rolled up newspaper to keep them quiet. While doing this and if Elizabeth suddenly came, Norina would immediately pat them with the paper and coo lovingly, 'my sweet darlings.' She was a superb actress, and the way she was able to switch roles to fool Elizabeth, was a delight to observe. Elizabeth never became aware of what Norina was doing to her animals in her absence.

During our stay Baba took us all on a little expedition to a place called Hassan, and from there to several old places of historical interest. Papa was with us then, and his car had a front seat, and another in the rear that was called a 'dicky' seat. A lid could be opened in the back of the car, and a seat became visible. Viewed from the side, the car with this back lid open, resembled a cocked pistol, and this became Baba's nickname for Papa from that time. Indeed Papa was very fiery like a pistol. I traveled with Papa and Gustadji. There were three other children among the party, Mehru, Naggu and Sarwar travelling with the women in the Blue Bus. At Hassan we stayed at a dak bungalow that had in the grounds a huge tamarind tree. It was in season and many ripe fruits had fallen to the ground. They were however forbidden food, because Baba did not like us to eat sour things in case we developed sore throats.

But we children all loved this fruit, and looking carefully around that no-one was watching, we all except Naggu who was not with us at the time, had a good feast, spitting out the seeds, and then continued to play. We came to know however that we had been observed, and of course that meant Baba would hear. To avoid telling a lie, we decided to wash out our mouths to remove any smell of the fruit, and when asked say vaguely that we ate a

little and then spat it out. We thought vague answers might save us. In due course we were summoned before Baba, and He was in a stern mood. This at once set us trembling. We were lined up before Him, and He asked Sarwar first, 'Did you eat the fruit?' and instead of our prepared answer, she said, 'No Baba.' Mehru said, 'Baba, we ate a little.' I said, 'Yes Baba, I ate a little and spat some out.' thinking that I did spit out the seeds.

Baba nodded and called for a stick. An umbrella was given to Him, and He gave a whack over the head to Sarwar, Mehru got a whack on the hand, and so did I. Then He said to Sarwar, 'Did you eat?' and receiving once again a negative answer, gave her another whack, and another, gesturing, 'Say the truth, - did you eat?' Eventually she said, 'Yes Baba.' That was the only time I got a whack from Baba. The whack did not hurt one bit, but causing Him displeasure and the remorse of having said a half-truth to this all-knowing Beloved one, caused me one of the deepest hurts ever even as a small child. Such is the impact of the God-man's Love, I must say, even upon the innocent heart of a child and the spontaneous response It evokes within one and all in creation.

At another time Baba took us to Mysore, the Capital of the then Mysore State. We were lodged in an old palace, and from there Baba took us to a place where we could see the procession of richly decorated and bejeweled elephants led by the Maharaja of Mysore. This was a great annual occasion to celebrate the victory of Avatar Ram over Ravana, a victory of good over evil. The Maharaja's palace was covered in lights, and Baba also took us to the Brindawan gardens and fountains, which were decorated with numerous different types of colored lights especially for the celebration. It was altogether an unforgettable sight, a fairy land, a paradise. It was a famous occasion and the crowds were immense, and so Beloved Baba wanted to be with those crowds to do His work.

It was in the palace where we stayed that another memorable incident took place. My two sisters rose at 3 am to heat the water for Baba's bath at 4am. This was done on kerosene stoves, and Eruch had kept there a container of kerosene for them.

They duly filled the pressure stove, but no matter how they tried to light it, it would not do so. When they pumped, instead of a flame, just a little jet of liquid appeared. In their efforts to light, time passed, and Baba became restless, 'Where is My hot water?' Then they confessed, 'Baba, we cannot light the stove.' Baba was by now thoroughly upset, 'Are you both nitwits, that you can't light a stove?! Call Eruch!' When Eruch examined the stove he found water in it, not kerosene, and so eventually Baba got His bath. It was later discovered that Khorshed, going to the toilet in the middle of the night, had thought the kerosene pot was a water pot, and had used it accordingly, filling it again with water after her toilet visit! My sisters had then used the water pot thinking it was kerosene. Khorshed not only got a 'firing' from Baba for her carelessness, but she also stank of kerosene!

Another incident occurred in Bangalore, which was both rather humorous and also instructive. Katie and my sister Manu, were each, on alternative days, given the job of cooking for the women's ashram. There were some 30 to 40 women, so my mother and aunt, Gulamasi, assisted, and also Kitty, but the brunt of the cooking was carried by Manu and Katie. At the same time my other sister Mehru was given the duty of attending to Baba's personal work, such as washing His clothes and cleaning His room. One day Baba suddenly came to Manu whilst she was cooking, held her, and said, 'Do you feel anything that I have given all My personal work to your sister Mehru, and you have to do this kitchen work? At first Manu was so taken aback by this unexpected and foreign thought that she did not know what to say, but then she composed herself and answered, 'No Baba, whatever You give is Your order, and I feel that what I do here will please You most, and I am very happy about that. I did not even think about not being given any personal work.'

Baba seemed to be extremely pleased with this reply. And it is true that whatever Baba gave us was more than good enough for us. But there were some inmates in the ashram in those days who would feel upset that they did not get some particular work such as Baba's personal work. Although Baba knew what was in each mind, He would still want each to speak out when He asked.

During this time the food in the ashram was extremely bland, very strict vegetarian with the only spices used being salt and pepper and very little garlic or ginger. One day, Baba's mother came to stay, and liking as she did, good, tasty food, she quickly became fed up with a daily routine of bland meals. As a result, she said to Manu, 'I'm fed up with this food and I would like some nice spicy patiya.' This is a sort of vegetable sauce made with good spices. It is not only delicious but also has a good aroma. Manu agreed happily and wholeheartedly, and somehow got the extra ingredients and took the prepared dish on a tray to Shireenmai. She was eagerly awaiting her, and exclaimed as she arrived, 'Ah I smell something good today after many days!' Manu replied, 'Yes, Mother, I'm sure you will enjoy it, and I've done it for you most happily.' Shireenmai impatiently removed the lid, and was about to take the first morsel, when Baba suddenly entered the room. In doing so He made a noise and everyone turned towards Him.

'I smell something unusual today. What has been cooked?' 'Baba, Mother asked me to prepare patiya for her.' 'What! By whose order did you do this!?' 'Don't you know that My mother is not well, and that you should not have done this. Let Me see what you have prepared.' He then tasted a little, and exclaimed, 'You have prepared this spicy dish for her! Have you no sense in your head!' With this He caught hold of Manu's collar, and banged her head against the wall with a loud thud. This really alarmed Shireenmai, and she shouted, 'Merog, leave the girl alone. It is I who ordered the dish. I was sick of the usual food.' 'Mother, you are not well, and the doctors advised you not to eat such spicy food.'

'Also it is My order that there should not be any spices in the ashram.' Baba then continued to berate Manu, 'Have you no care for My mother! You are the one who will kill her. Don't you know what you are doing!'

At this point He went back to the dish, saying, 'Let Me see how it is.' He then proceeded to take one morsel after another, saying, 'No Mother, this is not good for you. You should not have such food.' and in the process finished the dish entirely! Shireenmai, outspoken as usual, being her prerogative as the Lord's

mother, retorted, 'If You had asked me, I would have had some prepared for You also - do You have to come and eat mine!' But it was a violation of the ashram's orders, and Baba came just in time and in such a natural way, to save her from that little violation, unmindful of protestations from His mother.

* * *

We left Bangalore to return to Meherabad in April of 1940 - the height of summer, and Baba ordered that no one was to have water until we reached our first stop. Then when we did in late afternoon in blazing heat, we were allowed one glass of water only. My whole throat was parched, but my aunt was very careful that no more water should be given.

The journey continued, and as I described in an earlier book, at one point the Blue bus became bogged, and then later, on reaching one of the most dangerous mountain ranges in India, it was found that the lights of the bus would not work. The night was pitch black with no moon, and the surrounding forest added to the darkness. The road climbed with many hairpin bends, and the driver had to steer with Kaka and another person perched on each mudguard holding small flashlights. The bus was absolutely packed tight with women and luggage, everyone calling fervently on Baba, aware that a mistake could mean a drop of hundreds of feet, and to add to the atmosphere was the incessant crying of Mehru's little infant brother Jangu. Kaka, tense enough already, became even more exasperated with the noise and the crying, and pleaded for someone to stop the child. Fortunately each woman in the bus was required to have a flashlight, because each one did not last long on that slow journey. Finally with all the flashlights exhausted level ground was reached, and Kaka would venture no further.

At that point Donkin arrived, sent back by Baba, and he, checking the wiring, found that the wire beneath the bus leading to the head lights, had been snapped. With this fixed, the lights were restored and the journey continued. We finally reached the destination, Jog Falls, late at night, everyone exhausted with the journey and particularly with its high tension and danger.

Yet Baba's greeting was, 'You are all so late! Now quickly get ready to see the Falls as I have arranged.' So everyone, not at all in the mood for sight-seeing, had to prepare themselves and sit on a large carpet on the verandah of the dak bungalow, overlooking the river and Falls. These huge Falls were spectacular, especially at night, when it was arranged for large balls of straw to be lit and thrown over the Falls. These created a beautiful illumination of them.

Everything was settled and about to start, when someone came to tell Baba that through over-sight He had been directed to the second class bungalow, and that the first class had been reserved for His party. Besides this the view was much better at the first class dak bungalow, rather than at the present second class one. So with all half-asleep, Baba ordered the carpet to be rolled up, their luggage back into the bus, and all to move to the higher bungalow. Then the carpet was duly unrolled again, and we all settled down to watch the show. And it was a remarkable show. But it was most doubtful if everyone was in the mood to really enjoy it. The time was past midnight when we finally unrolled our bedding, and with nothing to eat, settled down for a few hours sleep before an early start in the morning.

On a much earlier occasion I remember having witnessed an incident that really shocked me. I was very small in stature, very shy and withdrawn, and that is probably why I was permitted to stay with the women mandali. From that time while I was with them, it seemed to me that the nature of women was such that disagreement was bound to be there: and there certainly were disagreements that I witnessed then. But the one that particularly shocked me occurred in Mandla.

Baba had called everyone to Him. When He did so, everyone had to immediately stop whatever activity they were doing, bring their little stools, and sit in front of Him. On this occasion Baba was in a sofa chair, and Mehera was by His side. Suddenly one of the Western women came into the room, put her head on Baba's feet, and began to sob in loud, deep sobs. Baba just sat there unmoved. Then a few moments later, another Western woman came and began to beat the one bowing at His feet. She did so with her two fists, and her blows were such that I could hear

the thuds on the woman's back. I was absolutely shaken by the intensity of the atmosphere in the room, but Baba continued to sit unmoved. I wondered how the kneeling woman could bear the heavy blows. At the same time, the assailant, a large woman, was muttering something unintelligible. After quite some time the attack subsided, and Baba gestured for the kneeling woman to rise.

Then He embraced her, and next the assailant, and finally ordered them to embrace each other. This they then did, so warmly that it was another shock for me. The whole scene had completely changed, and Beloved Baba had done nothing but watch. Everyone else too were rock silent during the entire episode.

It was not a pleasant time for me, yet it was also deeply moving to see how Baba brought out the hidden passions in people, and then, as the Ocean, absorb it all, leaving the participants totally calm. Only in the court of the Avatar or of a Perfect Master would it be possible for the worst of sinners and the best of saints to live together, and only in their courts could such scenes occur. The Avatar or Perfect Master is like the ocean capable of accommodating and absorbing everything within itself.

It was also at Mandla that we had lighter incidents such as boating excursions on the river. The river winds through towering marble cliffs, and then falls so abruptly and deep that it creates a perpetual mist. That is why it is known as Dhuva Dhar or Misty Falls. The area is called Marble Rocks, of which some are of pure blue marble and some a dazzling white in the sunlight, and in the niches of the rocks were hornet nests about three feet by four feet with huge hornets in them. Baba told us to be sure to see these hornets.

There was also moonlight excursions on the river, and my mother told me that on one occasion she was observing Baba and Mehera in another boat with the moonlight shining behind them, and she was reminded of Rama and Sita leaving in a boat having been exiled to the forest, and the boatman giving them a free ride across the river. She was, she said, deeply moved with the scene. Beloved Baba, not missing anything, later casually asked her if she liked the boat ride, and after her 'yes Baba', asked if she had

any special memory of it. 'Yes Baba. seeing You and Mehera in the boat in the moonlight, I felt as if we were reliving the scene of Rama and Sita in the boat that took place so many thousand years ago.' Baba was very happy with her response.

* * *

We continued on our journey from Jog Falls towards the coast and from there to Meherabad. At a place called Amboli, on the way to Karwar, a boy was brought to Baba as part of the ongoing search for the perfect boy. Baba liked him, and with the parents consent, the boy joined us for the rest of the journey to Meherabad. He was older than me, from a typical Goanese Christian family, almost illiterate, but naturally bright and intelligent. He had never even seen a timepiece, and I taught him how to read the clock, and other simple, basic tasks. Sometimes Baba would pass by as I did this, and He would show His pleasure with my efforts. After reaching Meherabad, Baba asked Sarosh to train him as a cinema operator, and he remained with Sarosh for many years as a good operator. Speaking of the search for the perfect boy, I remember at Guruprasad, Baidul was suddenly directed by Baba to go to Bombay to search for such a boy, and He made a casual remark that even if a boy has the face of a moon, but the palms of his hands sweat, do not bring him.

At Karwar we stayed in a nice hotel, and as Baba wished to remain incognito at such times, we were to call Him Babusi, a name I think suggested by Nadine Tolstoy, and not disclose His identity. But of course the waiters were naturally drawn to Him, and when one asked me, 'who is this gentleman you are traveling with? I just happened to blurt out, 'He is God. His name is Meher Baba.' The next day that waiter with his family came for Baba's darshan. Afterwards Baba asked who had revealed His identity, and eventually I was caught. Baba tweaked my ear and said did I not know that nobody should know His name? But He did not punish me further because of my innocence at the time.

In Belgaum on this same journey, Elizabeth said to Baba, 'It is so hot Baba, can we have a treat of ice cream?' Baba replied

that everyone should have ice cream, but after having it, every one must have garlic chutney. The sight now of Elizabeth's face was something to see, because she detested garlic. But it had to be done, and after the ice cream, everyone without exception had some garlic chutney. Baba said this was necessary to make sure no-one got a sore throat.

Eventually we reached Ahmednagar, I think mid-afternoon, and immediately we were taken to Sarosh's cinema and shown two films, one being The Wizard of Oz. Everything depended on His work, and sometimes He would sit through the film, sometimes half-way, and sometimes He would in Sarosh's cinema, ask for a change of films. There we were all dusty and weary from the journey, yet straight into a theatre.

After the films, we stayed three days at Happy Valley, about three miles north of what is now Meherazad, so named by the British. This was at the time a heavily wooded area with a number of little waterfalls. The dak bungalow in which we stayed had a number of descending floors each opening out with a wonderful view of the valley. Baba took us for walks in the evening, and held some programs and darshans.

From Happy Valley we returned to Meherabad. After a few days stay there, Baba sent the family including Eruch back to Bangalore, and for myself and Sarwar back to school. Baba had Eruch rent a nice small cottage for us, and we were there over the period 1940 to '42. He called us from time to time, during vacations. Once was at a nice place on the sea-shore, Calicut. One day, while there, Baba called me into His room and said, 'Now when I clap you must start smiling, and when I clap again, you must become serious. Can you do that?' 'Yes Baba, I can do that.' So He clapped and I smiled, He clapped again and I became serious with Baba saying, 'Now try to do it better!' and repeating the whole thing. He seemed happy and very appreciative of my efforts. Beloved Baba would sometimes play such funny little games.

Another favourite game was where He would clasp the fingers of one hand, point all the fingers of the other hand towards

the clasped fist, and then alternate with the other hand in very quick succession. He would then ask me to repeat it. I would get all mixed up, which caused Him great amusement. Thus He became child-like with children, and thoroughly enjoyed being with them and they with Him.

From Calicut Baba took us to Jaipur where we stayed in a large bungalow. It was there that I saw for the first time Baba flying a kite. Mani held the large spool with long handles as Baba's assistant while He was actually flying it. The first few feet of string attached to the kite has powdered glass glued to it which is called 'manja', and with this, 'dog fights' would take place with fliers of other kites, each trying to cut the opponent's string. The game required great skill. On this occasion, a boy outside the compound noticed Baba's kite, and engaged it in battle. All was going well, until the strings, at the crucial point, became entangled and Mani had to release the thread rapidly, to avoid Baba's kite being cut. She failed to do so, with Baba disappointed, saying, 'Look now what you have done! You didn't do it right and we have lost the kite!' I looked over the wall, and I could see the boy happily pulling it down. In the process Baba's little finger got cut by the 'manja' and I think Mehera rushed to bandage it to avoid bleeding.

It was here in Jaipur that the message 'Seven Realities' were read out for the first time to us seated in the compound. Everyone was very deeply moved, but being a child I did not grasp the sublime beauty of it at the time. On another occasion, with Mani reading the board, Baba was giving us a very interesting discourse and Kitty suddenly rushed in with a shopping list, 'Baba, this is my shopping list.' including repair to a shoe which she held in one hand, quite oblivious, as was her usual wont, to the immediate situation. Baba stopped the discourse saying, 'From the heights she has brought Me down to the level of marketing manager, and now My mood has changed.' Amidst cries from others, 'Oh Kitty, look what you have done!', Baba stopped the discourse, but it may have been that Baba used the interruption as an excuse to stop because He wanted to. My mother has said that Baba was always on Kitty's side, protecting her from the consequences of her absent-minded actions.

She was often the butt of jokes and ridicule, but she never took it to heart, and would always remain friendly and even laugh at her own mistakes, which really endeared her to one and all of the ashram.

It was during our time in Bangalore that Baba had His last physical meeting with His Master Upasni Maharaj at Dahigaon. After the meeting He drove straight to our cottage in Bangalore. Baba was expected by about 10 pm, and we made all necessary arrangements and then anxiously awaited His arrival. In the wait I and Sarwar (Baidul's little daughter) fell asleep, and when He came He said not to wake us. He was then with the family the whole night but only the one night. No one but we two slept. I have been told that Beloved Baba was in a very good mood, saying among many things, 'That day is a great day, the entire charge of the universe is now with Me. I took His darshan. Avatar or not, He was My Master. He lifted Me with both hands, embraced Me heartily and wept like a child. He talked for half-an-hour and then as I went to leave, He said to wait for another five minutes, because we would not meet again. Then he told Me, 'Now Merwan, You have all the work and powers of the great Sat Purushs, the five Perfect Masters. They are all focused in You. I leave everything to You.'

So we stayed on in Bangalore month after month using just a few items of clothing, and with all the luggage packed and ready for us to respond at twenty-four hour's notice to Baba's call. For a long time there was no call. Papa was with Baba at Dehra Dun, and the war seemed to come very close to the Indian border, and reaching a critical stage. There was a rumour that Bangalore would be bombarded and there was virtually panic in the city. Then suddenly we received a telegram from Baba to come to Dehra Dun, and we quickly began the long journey. Because of wartime restrictions we encountered great difficulties. At Secunderabad we were stranded for three days unable to get a connecting train for the north, and because of blackouts during the night, we had to stay in the Station Waiting Room with all our luggage. Yet despite the difficulties Eruch made our stay very enjoyable with his happy disposition, and in making sure that we

had good food and drink. Eventually we reached Delhi, and arrived there with the city blacked-out. I am not sure when, but at some point our entire luggage was lost, and all we had was our handbags, the clothes on our backs, and a few rupees to cover travelling expenses.

We finally arrived at Dehra Dun mid-morning. We came to the house where Baba was staying, and the gate-keeper - I think Soonamasi - went inside to inform Baba of our arrival. Baba responded, 'How is it that they have come? Who asked them to come here?'

On being told the news that we had received His telegram, He apparently became really annoyed and said to tell us in no uncertain terms 'to go back.' It seems He said, 'I never asked them to come. They have violated My order and come here. Tell them to go back!' As we stood at the gate confused and not knowing where to go, Baba sent further word to send us to Him. We approached with anxiety not knowing what was in store for us next. Baba was clearly thoroughly displeased, and frowning asked again, 'How is it that you are here?' Mother replied that we had received a telegram, and Baba promptly asked, 'Who sent the telegram?' Mother did not know what to say. Baba continued, 'You have broken My order. I do not want you here on My chest. Go back. Where is your luggage?' 'Baba, we have lost everything.' 'So this means you have very literally come on My chest!' He made it very clear that we were unwelcome.

There was nothing further we could do and we all turned back and made our way out the compound gate, not knowing where to go. As we did so Mani came panting towards us and saying that Baba had called us to Him. We stood crestfallen before Him very quietly, and after a while, Baba then said, 'All right, since you have come, you might as well stay.' It was a typically natural way Baba might respond to situations, and we felt hurt, not for ourselves, but for having displeased Him. Eruch has said that Papa, anxious over the war situation and the family not being with him, had had the audacity to send the telegram in Baba's name. And yet possibly it was all a part of His plan, and that His work in Bangalore was winding up. Later Adi Snr. and his office were also

moved from Bangalore to Ahmednagar. Anyway we were delighted to be back with Baba, while unhappy over the manner of the reunion. In time we forgot the difficult journey, and Baba allowed us to borrow some clothes, but otherwise we had nothing for several months, not even combs for our hair. I remember dear Mani giving me her pink shirt out of her own scarce wardrobe - my only change from the one on my back!

Again I was put into school, and again Baba put me into the next higher grade so that I caught up with my studies after the loss in time traveling. I had to be given help from one mandali member or another to achieve this, and I had a very strict timetable for study, set by Eruch and approved by Baba. From morning to evening, every hour, it was study, study, study. Eventually I became bored and fed-up, and I was determined to revolt. I decided to take a difficult problem for solving as an excuse to go to see Eruch who stayed some distance away in the mandali's quarters, and tell him I must have more time for play and recreation. So I was just getting my little bicycle to go to Eruch, and there sitting on the verandah of the house was Baba. He said, 'Hey, where are you off to?' 'Baba, I have a problem for Eruch to solve.' 'Is that so,' and gestured to Vishnu who was with Him to solve it for me. So my revolt was short-lived. It always seemed to happen so naturally that Baba should always be present with such situations, and yet it was also a source of wonderment for the mind.

While in Dehra Dun, Baba took us all in the evening to see a film. It was the only time we did so. We walked the long distance from the ashram to the theatre at Baba's usual fast pace. The women had difficulty keeping up with Baba, but He insisted on them doing so, and remaining together. The film was 'Citizen Kane', and somewhat unusual for a serious film, Baba sat through to the end. We then walked back in the night. I hear now that this film has become one of the classics of old time movies.

In Dehra Dun I was given one of my first personal duties, that of accompanying Baba from the women's residence to the men's ashram. If it was sunny then I endeavored to hold the umbrella over His head. This was very difficult because of my small height, and the distance was about a mile. Baba continued to walk

at a fast pace, and while I tried very hard to hold the umbrella high with one hand fully stretched, and with the other hand clutching His extra scarves and alphabet board, at the same time keep up with Him, many times one of the spoke ends would bump His head. I felt my inability to avoid this happening, but He did not seem to mind, giving me a chance to serve Him to the best of my ability.

I also remember Beloved Baba being in seclusion for extended periods in Dehra Dun, and when this was so, He gave strict orders that everyone was to be in their rooms and not make the slightest sound or disturbance. I think it was the first day of one seclusion period, and my aunt decided that now was a good time to examine her alarm clock which had not been working for quite awhile. I assisted her and very quietly we began to undo the screws. As soon as we did that the alarm, a Big Ben type, went off thunderously. No matter how we fiddled, it wouldn't stop, and it was only after a number of pillows were placed one on top of another on the clock that the noise was muffled to a faint sound. Finally the spring of the clock finished of its own accord. Later came the firing from Baba, 'Even on the first day, you could not obey this small order of Mine, and it caused such great disturbance for Me.' We tried to explain what had happened, and after some stern words from Baba, we were admonished to be very careful in the future.

During the period in Dehra Dun Baba took us for a stay at Rikhikesh, some fifty miles or so from Dehra Dun. Rikhikesh is also known as Rishikesh - the abode of Rishis. It was in the height of summer with few tourists, the river flowing swiftly from the melting snows of the Himalayan mountains, and Rikhikesh all in all was very beautiful, serene and peaceful. Rikhikesh and the ashram where we were to stay was on the other side of the river, and we crossed in large boats as no vehicular crossing existed then. The ashram was high on the bank of the river, and there were about a hundred steps leading up from the river to the ashram. A strong memory from there is the period that Baba set for meditation between four and five in the afternoon. Being mid-summer the rocks on which we were told to sit for the meditation were not only

very hot but there were also many ants crawling around. These often crawled over us and into our clothing and underwear, and this and the heat of the day made it extremely difficult to concentrate. I'm sure we all just waited for the bell that signaled the end of the meditation, although being young I did not mind the conditions so much.

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From Dehra Dun we moved to Lonavala by train, and it was during the journey that I witnessed a disturbing incident. We were all in a compartment when Baba suddenly became very pale, unable to lift His hands and feet. His eyes were open, but He appeared totally drained of blood and as if He was passing away. He lay there helpless, unable to move and totally limp. It was to put it mildly, scary. There was great hustle and bustle, and then, I think, Rano who was given charge of medical First-Aid, administered a few drops of a medicine called 'Coramine' to revive Baba. Within a few minutes Baba recovered. I understand that during times of great internal working, Baba would suffer such spells.

We disembarked and stayed in Lonavala for some months in a huge estate with acres and acres of natural forest and on the edge, a stream. When Baba was with us, He would take us for long walks in the evenings through the woods to that stream and also to a big lake that I remember. There were also some open areas, and here He would play games with us - particularly Gilly Danda. This is a game in which a small stick pointed at both ends is hit with a big stick to make the small stick bounce up in the air, and is then hit again. If the gilly was caught by the opposing team then that person was out, and this continues until all are caught, and the other team can, as it were, bat. If the gilly was not caught then the distance that the stick traveled would then be measured by the big stick, as for example '100 sticks', and that would become a part of the score for that team. The highest score of course won. The two teams were captained by Baba and Mani, and there was great fun and rivalry between the two with Mani always trying unsuccessfully to beat Baba.

When Baba batted He would hit the little gilly a great distance with no one able to catch it. He would then declare that the distance was '500 sticks'. Mani would respond, 'No way, Baba, that is no more than 100 sticks!' So Baba would say, 'All right, let's count'.

He would move so swiftly with the zig-zag movements that it was most difficult to count accurately, and in addition He would at times hold the stick back half-way in order to increase the count or somehow even hold the stick back completely and so count twice. He would then finish with a flourish on about 600 sticks, and Mani would shout, 'Baba, You are cheating! This is not the way to count. Let's do it again!' But somehow she was never able to catch Him. The whole game was as a result great fun. Baba Himself would be fully absorbed in the game, and He expected everyone to be likewise, and try their utmost to win.

There were again periods of seclusion interspersed with periods of intense mast activity by Baba in Lonavala. At certain times, during very strict seclusions, He ordered that no-one should see Him as he moved around the ashram. When it was announced that Baba was coming from His bungalow to go to the women's or to the men's bungalows, everyone had to shut themselves into their rooms. No-one was to even try to see His face, and there is no doubt that this was very hard on the inmates. Sometimes He would see only Mehera and Mani, perhaps one or two others, and whoever He might call for His work. I was allowed to see Him because I accompanied Him to the men's bungalow, and to carry His food and water from the women's to His bungalow. Although it was tiring for me to carry the food and water the distance, I was not allowed to rest them on the road, but had to proceed straight to His room.

At another time Baba directed that as He left visiting Mehera in the evening, everyone was to come out of their rooms and return His wave as He looked and waved to each. Because I was with Him, I did not think there was need for me to obey and wave with the others. But Baba, attentive to every little detail, looked at me and asked why I was not waving as directed. Then of course I did. Such a little incident, yet it is still fresh in my mind,

thinking of His omniscient attention. Also, even in the midst of very strict seclusions Baba might use some pretext or another to call my mother and sisters and upbraid them for some lapse or other, afterwards embracing them and then dismiss them! Perhaps the summons was to give them a good firing, which would make the others in the ashram happy and not jealous as would happen otherwise. And at the time the family would not realize they were excuses Baba created that they may see Him after, for them, a long 'dry' period of no contact. He was as always a truly loving master psychologist, and it was only much later that my mother realized with tears in her eyes the reason for those occasions.

The best example of this ploy of Baba's was early in the family's stay with Him. My mother would relate this episode with great feeling. She was the cook for the ashram and for some months, she did not see Baba at all. Then Baba called her to Him. He looked very serious, and He began gesturing in a very grave and studied manner. 'Do you know what a privilege you have now?' 'Yes Baba, You have allowed me the privilege of cooking for You.' 'Do you know how precious this body is for the whole universe?' 'Yes Baba, I realize that.' 'So don't you think you must take the greatest care in preparing food for Me?' 'Yes Baba I put my heart and soul in the preparation, and I trust You like it.' Baba continued, 'Yes I do like your food. But I hear the very grave piece of news that you have a bad habit of putting sugar in every dish. Is this true?' Mother said she began to feel uneasy, 'Yes Baba I do that.' 'Do you realize what you are doing? Suppose I get diabetes, and this means My body dies? Do you realize the consequences of being careless with My person?' Baba became very serious and harsh, 'How dare you do such things! Don't you have any sense?'

Mother was by now very upset, 'Baba, I'm so sorry - I thought it would give a little more taste to the food.' 'But then what about My health?' 'Baba I am so very sorry that I have done this. I will never do it again. I swear! It never dawned on me that it would be harmful to Your health.' 'But how is it that you didn't realize this without Me having to tell you? You should have thought of this. I'm very displeased with you for such carelessness on your part. I don't think you really care about My well-being.

Tell Me that you will never do this again.' 'Baba I swear I'll never put sugar in Your food again!' 'But why did you do it!?' Mother said that this tirade went on for about half-an-hour, with Baba repeatedly asking why she did it, and she tearfully repeating that she would never do it. again. 'Baba I swear with my life that I'll never touch sugar again!' She was really flabbergasted that Baba was prolonging the exchange for so long.

But more was to come. Baba then called for Eruch, saying, 'I want to fire her in front of Eruch.' When he came Baba said, 'Your mother has been putting sugar in My food. Is this a habit with her?' 'Yes Baba she does have that habit. She even puts it in scrambled eggs and I always tell her not to.' Thus Eruch sided with Baba, and then encouraged by this, the other women present (who had told Baba of her cooking methods in the first place) chimed in, 'Baba we tell her and she does not listen. It is good that You are telling her.' The women were in fact quite pleased with this roasting of a new member in the ashram. Finally Baba asks again, 'Swear again that you will not put sugar in the food.' Mother replied, 'Baba I swear, I swear, I swear in Your name not to do that again!' This is repeated a few more times and then she is dismissed with the parting remark, 'All right you can go. I'm displeased with you. Your food is tasty but I did not know you were adding poison to it.'

She was just going out the door when she was called back in, and she wondered what was in store for her now. Baba said, 'Keep preparing the food just as you have been doing. I like it very much.' Mother was nonplussed, not knowing what Baba was now implying, and she responded, 'Baba yes I will not put sugar in the food.' But Baba continued, 'Do you hear what I am saying? Do exactly as you have been doing now. Do not listen to anyone else.' This was too much for her, and she completely broke down weeping. Baba said, 'I am most happy with what you are doing, and most touched with your great feeling and concern for Me. Do not take to heart what has happened, and just go on doing what you've been doing. I like your food the most.' This produced a hushed silence throughout the room. Baba then gave her a big comforting embrace, and she left the room quite dazed. Baba

seemed to have stirred her innermost feelings and evoked a surge of loving response from the depths of her heart as only He can do!

The whole episode appeared to have been brought about to please the other women in their complaint, but in reality it was used to give Gaimai much time with Him, to see His face, and be in His presence after a long period, in addition to the shake-up within.

Lonavala being quite close to Bombay, fresh fish could be brought there by train. Fish was not permitted in the ashram, but for some reason Baba called for a very small parcel of fried pomfrit, one of the best fish available in India. We all including Baba relished the tiny morsel we were given, and Baba decided to call for Kaka Baria in Bombay to bring two large parcels of the fish. Not only was the thought of more fish pleasing to everyone, but especially that it would mean being given out as Baba's prasad. Two big baskets of fried pomfreits duly arrived, and everyone lined up with their plates to be given a whole piece each by Baba Himself. We just started to eat, when Baba noticed that Irene Billo was not present. I do not know why but Irene was always called 'Irene' in the ashram. Baba said to me to go and see where Irene was. I put aside my plate, and rushed off to her room. There I found her sulking in a corner. She did often get a little moody. I said, 'Irene, Baba wants you.' When she did not answer, I became a bit anxious, 'Irene, Baba wants you, come quickly.' I was conscious that Baba's mood might change if she did not obey quickly. I rushed back to Baba, and said, 'Baba, I told her and she is coming.'

Baba waited with a piece of fish in His hand. When she did not appear and He began to be annoyed, the festive atmosphere started to evaporate. Baba then sent someone else to call her. Again after some delay, Irene did appear with a sullen, puffed face and no plate. Baba had by now become more and more irritated. He gestured to her to come to Him, and after some hesitation, she finally did so. Baba said, 'Where is your plate?' She did not answer, and Baba picked up a plate and tossed a piece of fish on it, saying, 'Why did you not come when I called? I am very displeased with you.' With that He gave the plate to her, and

pushed her away, almost causing her to fall. Baba was obviously thoroughly upset, the atmosphere had changed and an easy enjoyment of the fish for all present had disappeared. Irene retreated again to her room crying and sullen.

In the beginning Naja had taken her fish to her room, and had as a result missed the whole episode involving Irene. She now came back into the room, and seeing pieces of fish still in the baskets, in a funny way possibly to hide some hesitation, asked Baba if she could please have another piece. Baba, still fuming over Irene, responded, 'You want another piece? Come close.' and when she did so, He rubbed the fish in her face, saying, 'You want another piece?! Take it and eat!'. Poor Naja's face was all smeared with fish oil and masala. She had the misfortune to come to Baba at the wrong time.

Baba later went to Irene's room, and no doubt smoothed out the situation as He always did. In the evening Baba, with us all, had two servant girls carry the two baskets with the remaining fish to a section of jungle at the bottom of the large estate, and dumped it all there. That was the end of our feast of fish, and although the loss was felt, there was no ill-will towards Irene, because everyone in the ashram had had fluctuating moods to some degree at some time or other.

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Some time I think in December 1942, Baba held a very large and important meeting at Meherabad. I was still with the women in upper Meherabad, and we could observe the great activity which was taking place in lower Meherabad, but that was all, and whatever was said and done during the meeting was highly confidential and not to be divulged to anyone. A few days after this meeting Baba asked us to live in Poona for about fifteen days and that He would then call us to be with Him again. Thus we moved to Bindra House, Poona, but that 'fifteen days or so' became forty-seven years before we were with Him permanently at Meherabad.

Throughout the stay in Lonavala I did not attend school, although Eruch gave me lessons so that I did not fall behind in my

studies. In Poona I attended one of the best schools at the time, and to it each day I rode the small cycle which had been given me in Dehra Dun for the same purpose. The route took me past Babajan's Tomb, and following my mother's firm instruction, I would get off the bicycle and bow in reverence. But I never entered the Tomb because Baba had given orders that the family was not to visit any saints or shrines. This order was given after the family had seen Babajan about a year or two before my birth. Mother used to relate the experiences of that visit, and it was clear that she had a strong connection with Babajan. (The first part of that visit when the family went to see Her sitting under the tree that later became a part of Her shrine, has been recorded in Volume 1 of this series.)

That first part of their time with Babajan had been conducted amidst a milling crowd and in intense heat, and after the contact, Papa decreed that they should go to the coolness of Bund Gardens and have a relaxing picnic there away from the crowds. Papa bought all sorts of good food in the market, and they eventually settled down under the trees in the gardens. They were just about to begin eating when they hear a great noise, and then in the distance see Babajan coming towards them in a tonga followed by numerous tongas of devotees. Papa exploded, 'Oh no, not this Woman again!' My aunt remonstrated, 'You shouldn't refer to Her like that. Don't be disrespectful.' Babajan came straight to where the family were seated, and as She did so, various venders rushed forward offering Her hot tea and naan. Babajan said, 'My children here are hungry. Give them the tea and bread.'

So all the good food that Papa had brought had to be put aside, and Papa was given the naan to break into pieces. This bread is rather leathery and Papa grumbled as he broke it, 'Why do we have to eat this leathery stuff?' My aunt hushed him, 'This is Babajan's prasad. We should eat it with reverence, and certainly not grumble about it.' At the same time Babajan was saying to Papa, 'I am your Creator and you are cursing Me!?' My aunt continued to chastise Papa, 'Go and ask forgiveness of Her.' But Papa replied, 'Why should I? I have not approached this old Woman and I have not cursed Her. Why is She saying I have cursed Her?' He continued to grumble, and my aunt continued to

urge him to go and seek Her forgiveness. Eventually he did go, bow down to Her and ask for forgiveness.

We arrived in Poona early January and Baba's mother passed away in the evening of February 25th 1943. My mother, aunt and sisters tended to her in hospital after she had suffered a brain haemorrhage and stroke, and then finally at the fag end of her life tended at Baba House. The day she passed away mother and aunt were with her, and at the time of passing mother later said she saw a blinding light and rays of golden light coming from Shireen's nostrils. It was so dazzling and actually very frightening that she could not bear the sight. She gripped my aunt's hand and cried out, 'Do you see what I am seeing!?' But my aunt replied, 'No. What is wrong?' At that point Shireen passed away. Baba was notified at Panchgani, and He came immediately, and said, 'It was most fortunate that she died before My eyes fell on her. Otherwise her life would have been prolonged and therefore her suffering would have also continued.' In life Shireen's great worry was that no-one would attend her funeral because of the antagonism of the local Parsi community to Meher Baba. But the place where the body was kept had never been so full of people as it was for her funeral service. There were really big crowds and amidst them, all the mandali.

To console us when He sent us away, Baba said that He would often visit us in Poona. So even a few days after our arrival, He came with about thirty women mandali and stayed for three days. Because we had no furniture, all the women could be accommodated in the large hall/living room. Baba stayed in the garage which we had made nice and clean, and Papa, Eruch and other men mandali stayed in a large borrowed military tent pitched in our compound. All in all it was quite a crowd for the small house but it was a very joyous time with programs of music, singing and dance. Other Poona Baba lovers also came for the programs.

For some time we did not unpack and really settle in, thinking and hoping that Beloved Baba would shortly call us to Him again. Eventually with goading by Papa who wanted us to stay in Poona in the first place, and persuading Baba to instruct us,

we settled down, unpacked and acquired some basic furniture. It was a very simple life with no frills and luxuries and as always disciplined, but enlivened with frequent visits by Baba as He set out on Mast tours, and by His return after them. In 1940's these were frequent. Sometimes we would be notified of His arrival, and other times it would be sudden and we would have a wild but happy scramble to prepare food and hot water for Him. He and those with Him would eat well, bathe and thus be fresh and ready for the strenuous days ahead. Their return would be another matter. They would arrive haggard, unshaven, exhausted and hungry with their clothes dirty and stuck with sweat. But then after the food and baths was the best part: Baba would get Eruch to recount the tour experiences. As you can imagine the account was alive and vivid with the experiences so fresh in their minds. They were truly absorbing narrations, and it is a great pity that they could not have been recorded by any of us at the time.

In between those tours Baba would send Eruch to stay with us for a few days, and that was wonderful for us too. Apart from his always supportive company and many stories, he also took us occasionally to a good film. That was a treat. However for Eruch the visits were also a trial. Papa would take the opportunity to unburden all his grievances on to poor Eruch, who would stand for hours at the doorway of Papa's room listening to him. Eruch hoped by standing that it might shorten the tirade. But nothing seemed to stop him complaining, and he lay on his bed giving the long list of the troubles he faced looking after the family without Eruch's help. It was also of course an excuse by Papa to have Eruch's sole attention and presence for a time. Papa also enjoyed Baba's company but he would not show it, nor any reaction when Baba came for the night and occupied Papa's bed forcing him to share a room with his sons.

It seems that the topic of ghosts and ghost stories came up at Meherazad in those early years, and Eruch said, 'Oh Baba, I don't believe in ghosts and their activities. People invent those stories.' At the time Baba just nodded His head, 'Ah so you don't believe in ghosts. Some people do not believe and that's all right. It is of no concern.' The matter appeared to be completely



*Meherwan Jessawala with his brother Eruch at Samadhi,
Meherabad*

dropped. Later Eruch was with us at Bindra House, and he received a telegram from Baba to come to Him immediately. Eruch promptly put on his clothes, took the next train to Ahmednagar and came to Meherazad. Baba asked him about a few minor things, and then said that he should stay the night, keep watch for Him and return the next day. That night Baba retired and lay on His bed in, I think Pendu's cabin, and directed that Eruch sleep on the floor alongside the bed. Eruch as usual slept soundly. He was always able to promptly fall asleep soundly, and yet with the slightest disturbance, he would be instantly awake and alert. It was for him a most useful characteristic in his life with Baba.

On this occasion he was in sound sleep when he felt a choking sensation as if someone was trying to throttle him and at the same time he was trying to throw it off. Eventually after a great

struggle he became free, and now with his eyes open he saw Baba sitting on the edge of His bed watching him and enjoying what He was seeing. 'What happened to you?' 'Baba I felt somebody choking me.' 'It was a ghost molesting you. It has been around here, and I wanted you to have the experience, the taste, of a ghost in this encounter. Now you realize there are ghosts.' Eruch said in relating the incident that the struggle was so great that he was covered in sweat and panting hard when he awoke.

To ensure that Baba was not pestered by ghosts as He worked, a night watchman who remained awake was always near Baba. Baba was insistent that the watchman kept awake and alert, and thus ensuring that ghosts did not trouble Him. To sit absolutely still, awake and alert for hours at night was, according to the mandali, one of the most difficult tasks they had to undertake for Him.

It was raining heavily on India's Independence Day August 15th 1947. Baba was at Bindra House during one of His periodic visits, and He insisted that Papa, who was most unhappy to see the departure of the British, go to the market, buy the new national flag and hoist it on the verandah. Papa grumbled to Baba, 'These natives have no knowledge of administration. I don't like 'this' and 'that'. I don't wish to celebrate.' Thus he went on, and Baba was not happy with his attitude, 'No you must celebrate the occasion.' Baba heard that Perinmai at Baba House was also not happy with the transition of power, and He went there and made Perinmai too hoist a flag. (Baba, as we all know, when He met Gandhiji on board Rajputana on their way to London, had promised Gandhiji independence for India, and that had come about.)

During this time Korshed, married to Eruch but living from the day of marriage as brother and sister, was staying with us at Bindra House as directed by Baba. Because of this Baba called my mother and Manu to be with Him in Hyderabad. Mother had not been well for some time and she developed a very severe form of asthma. She told me that the reason for the asthma was because she had neglected one little instruction of Baba's, and that was not to drink cold water soon after kitchen work. On one occasion she



Meher Baba at Eruch's Marriage

had finished cooking on a very hot day. She was perspiring and she drank a lot of cold water. Whatever be the case she suffered greatly with the asthma, and in those days good medicines were not available in India. She became skin and bones, unable to sleep for many nights in a row panting for breath, and finally she was in such a critical state that she might well have passed away. But at that point Baba called her to stay with Him in a beautiful home given for His use by a Nawab. It had a swimming pool and all sorts of modern amenities. She stayed there for some time.

Baba called for a new medicine from America which had just come on the market. He fed Mumma the pills with His own hands, and the asthmatic attacks quickly subsided. She recovered completely, and what was strange no trace of the asthma was left. Normally there is no cure for asthma, and although later if she had a cold she might get severe bronchitis, there was still no vestige of asthma.

Agnes Baron and Meher Mount

Agnes Baron, Beloved Baba's 'watchdog of Meher Mount', was born in 1907. Little is known of her early life, except that she left home at 16 after a falling-out with her family in California, attended Antioch College in Ohio, and studied among other things mathematics, but graduating in 1928 with a sociology degree. Antioch College was founded in 1852 by a social reformer, and even today is still known as a 'boot camp for revolution.' It proved the ideal place for the fiercely independent reformist Agnes, who hated injustice, and whose motto could have been said to be 'to hell with anyone who can not handle the untarnished truth.' Mentors for Agnes at the college were the College president and later the sociology professor, Manmatha Chatterjee, who introduced her to Far Eastern philosophy and culture. She was described as a very able student.

(Chatterjee, who became in time a close friend of Agnes, was very respectful of spiritual Masters but also very wary of them and their ability to change one's life. He persistently rejected Agnes' efforts to persuade him to meet Baba, but finally, in San Francisco in 1956, Agnes, you could say, bullied him into meeting Baba at the Holiday Inn. Baba Himself came to where Agnes and Chatterjee were sitting, and taking Chatterjee's hand between His, escorted him alone into His room. Agnes said that Chatterjee went in erect, almost military in bearing, and after half an hour, came out almost doubled up, barely conscious and muttering, 'I had to come. It had to happen!' She learnt later that soon after that meeting with Baba, Chatterjee became paralyzed on the left side and died shortly afterwards. The doctors were unable to diagnose the cause for the paralysis, one thinking that it may have been due to 'a shock of some sort.')

Between 1929 and 1938, Agnes worked as a foreign correspondent in the Balkans, Greece, Spain and Lisbon. It seems that she also acted at times as an advisor on economic issues to the government of one or more of the Balkan states. Fluent in eleven languages, she reported without fear Hitler's reign of terror, not

hesitating to do so in defiance of her editors. In the early stages of the war, she stood beside Greek radicals as they fought advancing German troops. She intervened on behalf of the Jewish refugees fleeing to Portugal, and through Eleanor Roosevelt, had an appointment with the president to discuss immigration quotas, but the war for the United States started that day, and the appointment was cancelled. On her return to the United States, she was advised by her old professor to return to California, and write about the social injustice and suffering she had witnessed abroad. This she did in 1945, retiring to a place near Los Angeles recommended by a group of writers including Gerald Heard, Aldous Huxley and Christopher Isherwood with whom she made contact.

This place was a newly established Vedanta temple. She has said that she enjoyed very much living the meditative life of a nun there, but refused initiation because she did not respect the Swami sufficiently. She knew that a deep rapport was essential for acceptance of one's spiritual Master. She stayed for about two years, before leaving in disgust with all spiritual teachers. Still needing somewhere to stay, the Vedantists suggested that she try about two miles along the road, a place with some cottages and run by Jean 'somebody' and Alexander 'somebody'. It turned out to be the New Life Centre, Meher Baba's first centre in the West, and 'the Jean' became Jean Adriel, and 'the Alexander' became Alexander Markey. This proved to be the first outward sign of the string pulling Agnes to her beloved Baba. She did not even like the people she met at the Centre, and the name of their 'teacher' Meher Baba, aroused no interest in her. As she said to them, 'I just would like one of the cottages.' She stayed there awhile, and though she did not seek contact with the centre people, somehow she kept meeting Jean, who would not stop immediately telling her more of Meher Baba, despite Agnes' barely contained annoyance.

Then one day she announced to Agnes that she too was a writer, and would she please read this script - more or less thrusting the manuscript into her hands. Agnes accepted her fate, thinking that she would stay up late in the night, read it quickly and return it in the morning. The manuscript was the original text for the book that became as 'Avatar'. She impatiently read the first

half which was all about Jean and, as she said later, all the nonsense that seemed to be her life then. But when she began to read the second half, her attention became riveted more and more on Meher Baba, His life and His message, and her excitement and conviction of His validity grew with the hours. By morning she was on fire, as it were, with a constant mental theme, 'Is He for real?' 'Is this Meher Baba for REAL?!', and with that she rushed down the hill to Jean's cottage, woke her up, and, beside herself with excitement, asked, 'Is this Meher Baba for real? Is He? Tell me!' And then she was quite irritated by Jean sweetly and calmly replying, 'Yes, my dear, He is.'

Agnes still did not particularly like Jean, - but in her conviction now that the manuscript must be published, she agreed to edit it, provided that she could erase 'all the sloppy terminology'. Jean was certainly not impressed with this blunt assessment of her writing, but nonetheless agreed to the editing.

After some time Jean told Agnes that Meher Baba had sent a message asking her to find a place for Him at least two hours travel from the city. Jean and Alexander wished to sell the New Life Center and buy another property, and this message from Baba related to that. All this meant little to Agnes, but when Jean announced that she and Alexander were going for a drive to search for such a place, and would she like to come with them, Agnes found herself saying 'yes'. They drove for about two hours, and every so often one or other would point to some place, and say, 'There's Baba's place.' At one point as they traveled along the highway through the Ojai Valley, they apparently looked up towards the surrounding mountain peaks, and saw at the top of the range what seemed a crown of trees and light shining through them, and they all exclaimed again as though in joke, 'There's a place for Baba!' They went further, and then on the return journey, Agnes suggested that they drive up to the place where they saw the crown of light.

The ascending road was at the time a narrow, 'one-horse' dirt road, and although the distance was only three miles, it seemed then to be twenty. Finally the road turned left, and they were confronted with a big wooden gate. The corner of a cottage could

be seen, but Jean was not at all impressed saying that Baba intended to stay six months, and therefore many buildings would be needed. Agnes, just there for the ride, and not in the least interested in buying for Meher Baba or for anyone else, casually got out of the car and jumped the gate, with cries from the others, 'You can't do that - you are trespassing! And in any case, you are wasting our time, there are not many buildings.' But Agnes, why she was so prompted she does not know, said, 'No, there will be another building, and behind that, another one, there will be plenty of buildings!'. And sure enough, there proved to be one building after another, a small cottage, then a bigger one and a further one beyond that. Apart from the buildings there was also a beautiful orchard, a vineyard and landscaped grounds.

The others then joined Agnes, but although they too were highly impressed, they protested that the property was such that purchase would certainly be out of the question. Again, not understanding why she was doing it, she persuaded Jean to, at least, ring the owner and find out the price. Reluctantly she did so, and the owner, a millionaire in Los Angeles, was very surprised to be approached, because she had not yet even put it openly on the market. The price was given, and it was decided that with the sale of the New Life property, they could pay it off over a period. A down-payment was made, and Jean began the preparation to move to the property and live there. Agnes, at this point, decided to seek other accommodation, but was approached by Jean to accompany her and assist her on the new property, that was then named Meher Mount. Agnes protested that she was not committed to Meher Baba, and was not interested in living a life dedicated to Him. With persuasion she agreed on the basis that she would be 'the outdoors man' and that she did not have to commit to Meher Baba or to any ideas that Jean might have. As it happened Agnes was the first person to move to Meher Mount while the others were still preparing their departure.

Agnes continued with her writings, worked on her outside duties, and kept as much as possible to herself. It was now mid-1948, and Jean announced that she was giving up the life on Meher Mount and would go to India, saying, 'I have a letter from

Baba that I can come.' She then went on, stating that she had 'put one over Him', that she had written earlier that she wanted to come to India, and that after He had sent the message, 'No, you are not to come,' she wrote again saying that she might commit suicide if He did not call her. She declared that she now intended to spend the rest of her life in India, and die in India. Before departing, she told the Baba lovers then living on Meher Mount to leave the property, but asked Agnes to stay. When Agnes questioned Jean, she asked that Agnes simply stay on until she was able to ask Baba what He wanted done with the property, and that would be in perhaps a month or two. Jean arrived in India mid-July and returned to California early October 1948, and on leaving, Baba told her not to go back to, or have anything to do with Meher Mount. She returned initially to Hollywood, and then she unexpectedly came to Meher Mount to announce that she intended selling the place, and asked Agnes to stay until it was sold.

A sale did take place to a man apparently professing interest in Baba, but it seems he was only interested in building a large hotel and pursuing his 'psychic' activities and connections there. Agnes typically reacted strongly to any likelihood of lying and cheating, and for the first time, wrote to Baba giving the whole story as she saw it. Although she had still not accepted Baba as God in human form, having been fooled twice by various gurus, she found herself writing that she would, if He wanted Meher Mount, keep it for Him through 'hellfire and damnation.' Then she signed and sent off the letter. Later, with hindsight of course, she realized how Beloved Baba was pulling her in 'like a little fish on a string.' Baba sent back a very straight message that He appreciated very much her letter, that He loved her very much, and that Agnes should by all means keep Meher Mount. At that point Agnes totally accepted that the property was Baba's, and she managed over the years to successfully avoid development by the new owner, to the extent that he accused her of black magic under Meher Baba's influence! Finally she wrote a strong letter to him, saying that once and for all the property was Baba's and not his, and that he should in effect disappear! He did fade into the background, but retained ownership for about six years, until, verbally dominated

by Agnes in a telephone conversation, he agreed to sell to another man, John Cook.

There is certainly no doubt whatsoever that dear Agnes kept her promise to Beloved Baba despite extremely difficult personal situations, at times extreme shortage of money, and much physical hardship. Her combative and strong-willed nature stood her in good stead many times over the years. Still Beloved Baba's hand was there throughout, and in this instance it took the form of John Cook. He was a wealthy Englishman who had met Baba during the Thirties in Europe, and who loved Him. He paid off the mortgage and provided some money each month for Agnes herself, and so for another roughly six years, she had no financial burden.

In the midst of these years, Agnes finally met her beloved Baba on the 26th of April 1952, during Baba's visit to the Myrtle Beach Centre. Baba had agreed to visit Meher Mount after His stay at the Centre, and wished to see 'Agni' (His Sanskrit nickname for Agnes, meaning 'fire'.) to discuss plans for this visit. She met Baba in the Lagoon Cabin, and she later spoke of the meeting:

There are no words to describe it. It was fantastic. All my doubts flew out the window. The first thing Baba did was to open His arms and put my head on His shoulder. Something out of this world happens to you when Baba puts His arms around you. It's indescribable. What I saw sitting on the couch, and what I felt was sitting on the couch, were two different things. Without any more rationalizing, I accepted Him one hundred percent. Afterwards, I was consciously watching Him to see if He was going to make any mistakes, but deep down I had already accepted Him.

I realized later on, watching Him over the years, that Baba practiced what all great teachers preached: you must be one-pointed. Forget the past and the future and be concentrated in the present. I realized that Baba practiced that to the hundredth degree. No matter what He was doing - whether He was patting a dog or giving spiritual advice or saving the universe - whatever He did, He did with the same concentration. It was fantastic! When He was talking to you, you felt that same concentration. That to me was proof of His greatness, regardless of anything else.

In the interview, Margaret Craske acted as interpreter. Baba gestured, 'First of all, I want Agni to know that only Agni, God and Baba know what she has gone through in these six years to hold Meher Mount for Me.'

Agnes looked surprised, having completely forgotten all her problems simply by being in His presence, and said, 'It was no trouble, Baba, no trouble at all.' Then she added, 'Baba, do You know I almost got killed coming here?'

Baba clapped His hands and gestured, 'Wonderful, wonderful!'

Expecting commiseration, Agnes looked puzzled and described the close brush with death she had experienced while driving with another woman to Myrtle Beach in a bad rainstorm. Baba replied, 'When Maya does her worst, God has to do His best to work harder.'

The planned ten-day stay at Meher Mount was discussed in detail, with Baba repeatedly telling her, 'Now do not go to any trouble.'

'Trouble!' Agnes said, 'I've been waiting all these years for You to come. Everything has been painted and scrubbed.'

'No, no,' gestured Baba, 'I can sleep under the trees or on the floor. Do not go to any trouble.'

Agnes later said, 'Baba's bigness is in His little humble gestures. Who else would accept any conditions whatsoever? Others coming to Meher Mount expected to be waited on. That is what impressed me more than anything else, His consideration in all little things. Time after time after time I would see that. It just wins you over completely.'

He is so big that He dares to be small, and comes down to our level. And in His presence I was like a baby of six months, I could not function logically, all my problems about money vanished, and in fact everything became wiped out, whether He was Avatar or not, all that existed was BABA.' Baba called in Donkin and Adi and instructed them, 'I want you to drive out ahead to California with Nilu, Gustadji and Meherji to help Agnes prepare for My visit.'

'But Baba, it is all ready. Everything has been done.'

Nevertheless, Baba had His own reasons and stated that the mandali were to drive straight there from Myrtle Beach, not stopping along the way, and await His arrival. He ordered Agnes to leave the following day and return to Meher Mount, which she did.

Beloved Baba did not of course visit Meher Mount in 1952, and on His journey there, suffering, roughly in the middle of the U.S.A, as He had predicted, the first of His two major car accidents.

To return to the earlier account of the current owner, John Cook, after some six years he suddenly demanded his money back or be given complete charge of Meher Mount and its development. Apparently because of drugs, and subsequent ill health, he had become mentally unbalanced. With this threat, Agnes proposed that they together write to Baba, and that if He said that John should have it, then she would totally accept His wish, and walk out. But without her knowledge, John Cook wrote to Baba, describing her as not spiritual enough to be in charge of the property, making all sorts of ridiculous assertions. Baba's answer, as Agnes learnt later through Adi Snr., was that He loved Agnes dearly, that He trusted her implicitly, and that she was to stay on the property. John Cook also must have received the same message, because he and his wife abruptly left the property in anger.

Then followed a further period for Agnes of financial and legal uncertainty, let down by some people of promised help, and attempts by others to obtain the property for reasons other than Baba's Cause. One example was the renowned Indian spiritualist Jiddu Krishnamurti who tried to convince her to give him the land, but she refused on the grounds of his teachings. On the surface dear Agnes played her part and fought hard for her beloved Baba's property, and her wholehearted work reflected the love she obviously had for Baba: but of course behind the scene was Beloved Baba's guiding hand fulfilling the destiny of Meher Mount to remain absolutely a place of love and service in His

Cause. So, apparently miraculously, with each drama the property would be saved at the eleventh hour from being lost. At one time, she grew and sold strawberries to pay the mortgage installment. She did not hesitate to work twenty-hour days. When asked why she did not marry, she replied that she was always too busy, and in any case, she was looking for the perfect person, and when she found Him, He was already taken!

Before the final drama with John Cook, Baba did visit Meher Mount. Agnes was with Baba during His visit to the Myrtle Beach Centre in 1956, and He spoke with her on a number of occasions on the matter of Meher Mount. Baba had wished that she and John Cook could have been present with Him to discuss Meher Mount, but Agnes had no idea where John was. With Agnes Baba expressed the wish repeatedly that John have nothing further to do with the property. Baba gestured that John was 'mad', and that he must be completely dissociated from the property, and must never come to it again. Agnes could not recall having seen Baba so displeased as He was during this meeting. Agnes remained confused over what course of action to take, and in expressing this to Baba, He said, 'Whatever you do, do not use coercion.' As it happened, it was not until 1959 that John's connection with Meher Mount was finally broken.

In the early hours of the 2nd of August 1956, Agnes drove Baba and the mandali in her station wagon the eighty-five miles from Los Angeles to Meher Mount. On the way Baba admired the rich agricultural land, interested in everything about it, asking 'what's this ... what's that?' and then asked many questions about Meher Mount, such as, 'What is being grown? How is the land irrigated? Are there orchards?' (As Agnes later commented, 'I was really impressed in that simple activity of the journey, realizing that it was natural, that nothing escaped Him, the tiniest detail, He was 'right there' 100 % in the present, and I felt with happiness and joy that He enjoyed the trip very much. It was fantastic for me.) On arrival He told her, 'I love Meher Mount very much and feel happy here.' Agnes pointed to her part-collie, part-greyhound dog, Kali, saying to Baba, 'Baba, here is the spirit of Meher Mount,' and as Kali brought her nose up to Baba, He

gently patted her. On His departure later that day, He patted again and gestured then that she would be a human being next life time.

The following is an account of the day on Meher Mount by Filis Fredricks:

The steep hill of Meher Mount was shrouded in mist as our bus climbed tortuously upward, and when we stepped out we saw, instead of the celebrated view over the Ojai valley, only a rolling sea of fog. Baba called us all in the 'Baba Room' of the guest house, and told us that next to Myrtle Beach Center He liked this place best.

He went on, 'This land is very old and I have been here before. I would like to spend a night here, but there is no time.' As we filed out of the room, Baba, in a playful mood, pushed out Ben Hayman and Margaret Craske. A short while later, while we were all exploring the lovely rose garden, the sulphur-water swimming pool, the enormous red oaks dotting the hilly golden fields, Baba appeared on the vine-covered porch with Elizabeth's red scarf wound round His head like a Sikh turban. We were all amused, and Baba seemed relaxed and happy. He began to call this one and that one for some 'special' attention, and then saying to one group how fortunate they were to be with Him so closely. In India, even those who were ready to give their lives for Him, have to file past Him to see Him, with only time for a glance or a touch from Him, before someone pushes them from behind.

After lunch several new people arrived, but no press - which pleased Baba. Then once again we were called in together. Baba was seated in a large chair and was in a jolly mood. He called for Dana Field, saying that he loved Baba so much that he had given up his diet for the trip. Baba queried, 'What did you eat? Dried fruits?' 'Different things Baba. I think the bread was specially baked for You, and the fruit home-grown.' 'What about your nuts that you always want to have?'

Some of us began to smile, for Dana was noted for his health food - living on dried fruits and nuts, and carrying them about in his pockets.

'Wonderful,' Dana replied.

'Fruits!' Baba smiled ruefully. 'From childhood I have never liked fruits, nor milk. Whenever I have to fast, I'll fast on water, but not on milk. When I go on mast tours sometimes for as long as three days, I don't get the food I like, so the mandali ask Me to take some milk or fruits, but I'd rather go hungry and just live on water.'

Eruch added, 'Sometimes Baba is on fast without water. He won't take anything, even water.'

The Master continued, gesturing towards the bowl of fruits at His side, 'Dana has told Me Baba You should eat grapes, it's good for Your health. And today, as soon as I entered this room I found fruits here,' gesturing towards the bowl of fruit by His chair, 'So I ate a whole bunch of grapes. Among other things, plums were here. And now listen!'

Baba patted His tummy, and we all heard the rumbles, and burst into laughter with Him. He continued, tapping the top of His head, saying, 'I bear the whole universe on My head, but this is a sort of additional crucifixion, because this food does not agree with Me.'

Dana added to the hilarity by saying, 'One man's medicine is another man's poison.'

'I want you all to close your eyes for five minutes. Do not think of anything, just think of Baba.'

Obediently we all sat still and closed our eyes in meditation. Then we distinctly heard Baba's tummy rumbling. We all burst out laughing. The laughter increased when Dana said, 'I'll stop eating them myself.' Baba, with a delighted smile, said through Eruch, 'This afternoon you all have a chance to laugh and feel relaxed. Baba also has a chance to relax here for five minutes. You had no chance in New York, at Myrtle Beach little chance, in Los Angeles none. But here today we feel relaxed, happy.'

'I come down to your level so that we can laugh and be free together, but don't forget at the same time that I am the Highest of the High. Dana?'

'I will not recommend grapes any more, Baba!'

'Dana loves Me very much, he is working very hard that others can love Me, but he lives on dried fruits..... ' Baba then asked Fred Winterfelt about his prophecy that it would clear. 'I need Your help, Baba,' Fred replied.

Gesturing towards the outdoors, Baba said, 'Now go out and see the view and try to love Baba through nature. This is due to My love ... this whole creation, this nature, all the beauty you see, all came our of Me... '

We all tumbled outside and lo, the whole sky began rapidly to clear and one could see for hundreds of miles the beautiful rolling hills below. Each meditated in their own way on the incredible view and Baba's last words.

Shortly afterwards Baba called a few back into His room.

Ivy Duce tells us, 'He was pacing up and down and looked at us solemnly, snapped His fingers and said, 'I have made My decision!' As we stood there wondering what this momentous decision was, He said, 'When I come back in 700 years, there'll be no more grapes on earth and maybe that will help the liquor problem too!'

I started to say I didn't like meat either, when Sparky interrupted, 'Don't bring that up or we won't have any steaks!' Meanwhile Marion Florsheim gave Baba a large round stone, saying it was an alligator egg from her husband Mickey, to show Baba there really were alligators in that Gator lake at Myrtle Beach. Baba took the stone with a comic look, as if to say, 'What is this for?', then rubbed it over His tummy as if it were a cure for this 'grape trouble' of His! It was the most droll scene I've ever witnessed. To top it all, Baba called again for Dana, saying He thought it ought go in the Chronicle that there would be no grapes after 700 years. When Dana came in (the perfect foil and straight man) Baba told him to put it down in the Chronicle. Then he said, 'On second thought, though, don't put it in the Chronicle: let them guess why there are no grapes!'

Agnes then took Baba on a tour of the land. Everyone followed, panting to keep pace with Baba's movements. He also often changed directions so swiftly that they and the man holding

the umbrella over Him, had great difficulty keeping up with Him. He was very particular to be shown all the boundary lines and fence-posts, asking where the north-south and east-west lines were. On the top point of Meher Mount is a huge Live Oak tree which will always be called 'Baba's tree'. As they walked across the open field towards the tree, she said, 'Baba, I have always felt that this tree (pointing) is Your tree.' Baba then motioned all to stay outside the great canopy of branches of the tree, and by Himself sat for a short time on a bed of dry leaves beneath an overhanging limb. His eyes shone and He gestured that He was happy. Then He rose swiftly and led the group back down the dusty trail. Kali, Agnes' dog followed close behind Baba. (In later years Agnes would tease newcomers to the property by saying, 'I am going to test your spiritual sensitivity. Tell me where you sense Baba sat beneath this tree.' Almost invariably they would point to the broad gray trunk of the tree, shaped like the back of a large chair, and Agnes would smile in a mischievous way, and say, 'No, that is where you would sit, feeling the need of the comfort and safety of the trunk! Baba did not need that. He sat here! And pointed to the spot where He sat about seven feet from the trunk.)

(The great fire of 1985 which swept across the mountain on the anniversary of the first day of Baba's New Life, completely destroyed all the buildings on Meher Mount, all Agnes' Baba memorabilia including the car in which she drove Him. Baba's tree was also so damaged that it was thought it would die. But it recovered slowly, and now is as large, green and beautiful as ever.)

Again they all gathered with Baba in the 'Baba-room', and among other discussion, and following a comment by Baba, Eruch said, 'Sometimes, all of a sudden, Baba appears very lighthearted, very happy, and He makes us feel very happy at the same time. He mixes with the children, He plays with them, runs about like a child, and He appears to be very, very happy. Suddenly, there is a change in Baba's mood. He appears to us very tired and very sick, as if something has happened to Him. Yet, there is nothing that we can see. He appears to us to be very loving, full of love, overflowing with love, and we feel as if we want to do nothing but love Him. Again, there is a change in mood, and He

appears to us to be very stern or fiery, and at such moments, we would like not to love Him, but just to pay our respect to Him, and wait for His orders and instructions.'

Baba remarked, 'No one can understand My ways. I am beyond your understanding. Only Perfect Masters can know Me and My ways.'

Continuing, Baba explained, 'As you all become more intimate with Me, with opportunities to come closer to Me, all that is good and all that is bad within you comes out in sparks, as it were. All the impressions of the past, the accumulation of past sanskaras of all illusory things, which include both good and bad, come out. My proximity, the intimacy with Me, just change that mass of sanskaras and sometimes you find sparks of good and bad flying out.'

An example of a 'flying spark' occurred during that day at Meher Mount. Agnes was about to leave her guests and go to Baba, when Ivy Duce asked for something. Agnes was in such a hurry that she did not fulfill the request, causing Ivy to make some disparaging comment about Agnes. Fuming, Agnes came to Baba and said, 'I don't love everybody - what am I going to do about it?' Baba looked at her, and answered through Adi Snr., 'Agnes you have to love everybody, but you don't have to like everyone!' Agnes replied, 'Oh, okay. I can do that.' (It was true that Agnes was often critical of people she met and of their motives, and would at times emphatically describe them as 'hypocrites' or 'flaky yahoos'! In later years Agnes concluded that the reason she was so often surrounded by 'hypocrites' was that Baba wanted her to learn to bark and snap at their heels, but not to bite!)

At another time during the day, Baba called Agnes into the 'Baba-room', and with only Adi present, said, 'I want Adi to know that I am very happy here, and very pleased with the property, and I want you to know that it has a very spiritual atmosphere.' And when Agnes started to say something, Baba clapped and repeated, 'Meher Mount has a very spiritual atmosphere.' Agnes then asked if the spiritual atmosphere was due to the Tumash American-Indians because this was their area, but

Baba did not answer, simply looking, to Agnes, 'kind of wise'. She said in later years, after the grandson of the chieftain and the medicine man of the tribe had come a number of times to Meher Mount to simply be again in their old spiritual place, that she was happy with this connection between the Avatar of the Age and the American-Indians.

The next morning Baba was to fly to San Francisco, and He had directed that all were to fly there also. At some point at Meher Mount, Agnes said that, because she had been given various things by others to take to San Francisco, she would drive there. Baba emphatically said, 'No, you are to come with Me in the plane.' She, admitting later she was being really stupid at the time, but thinking then that she was being reasonable, argued with Baba that driving for her made sense, and it would be of help to others. Despite the fact that Baba continued to say no, Agnes also continued to press her case for driving to San Francisco. Finally Baba agreed but only on the condition that she did not drive alone. Then she argued that she could drive all night, and reach there at the same time as He in the plane. Baba again said, 'No,' and again Agnes argued that she had such a trip 'dozens of times' and she would be perfectly all right. But after Baba, obviously displeased, emphasized that someone must be with her, she capitulated. He also specified that they were not to exceed 40 mph and had to stop each hour for coffee.

After a few more private interviews, Baba and the mandali had tea, and prepared to leave in order to reach Los Angeles by 6 p.m., as Baba had ordered. Just as the sun was setting over the scenic hills of Ojai, Baba was driven again by Agnes back to Los Angeles. This time He asked Agnes to drive by the longer coast road and often mentioned on the way that He thoroughly enjoyed the sparkling blue Pacific Ocean. At one point Agnes returned to the incident with Ivy Duce, and said to Baba seated alongside her, 'Baba, You know what Ivy said about me I don't believe it, but if it is true what am I going to do about it?' Baba slapped her on the shoulder and chuckled, 'I like you the way you are. I like your spirit!' At another point in the journey, Baba pressed His hands on Agnes' head and gestured, 'Now promise to

drive slowly.' Agnes thought He was referring to her driving at the time, and slowed down. Again Baba pressed her head with the same instruction, and when she queried this, and said she could barely travel slower, Baba looked at her as if she was, as she said later, stupid. It was only much later that she realized that He was referring to her San Francisco journey.

On their arrival at Los Angeles came the fun for Agnes of finding some fellow driver to accompany her to San Francisco. Various ones that she approached, and who were happy to go with her, were eliminated by Baba for some reason or other. Finally Baba Himself produced a suitable companion, a young man who was 'suffering in love.' The fiancée of this young man had fallen in love with the young man's best friend, and Baba had called all three and explained to the young man that 'the girl and his best friend love each other, but don't wish to hurt you, so I am asking you to release her.' This the young man tearfully did. At the last moment when there did not seem to be anyone to go with Agnes, Baba called her and said, 'This man will go with you.' Agnes knew him and was happy with the choice, and more so when she heard the whole story, and, through sympathetic listening during the long hours of driving, was able to cheer him up and enable him to gradually accept the loss of his fiancée. But he said that he could only have done so because of Beloved Baba. Before leaving Baba reinforced His injunctions by telling the young man also that they were not to exceed 40 mph and to stop each hour for coffee.

Agnes and her companion had a very happy journey, stopping each hour for coffee and talking of his life and of Beloved Baba. Nearing San Francisco, with Agnes driving very slowly, suddenly there was the siren of a police car behind them. She pulled over and a very angry policeman berated her for not stopping earlier than she did, and in fact said that he would have rammed her car if she had not stopped. Despite her extreme indignation, declaring she would have him fired for such an attitude, and in any case pointing out how slowly she was traveling, and that she would take this to court, she was still given a ticket. On reaching San Francisco and the hotel, they slept well. In the morning, immediately on Baba's arrival, even as His luggage was

still being carried in, they were both called to Him. He asked how was she, and how was the journey, and Agnes replied that she was fine, but that He had got her booked on the way, and now she had a fine to pay, and that it was all His fault.

For a while they joked about this accusation, and then He suddenly became very solemn, and Agnes fell silent. Baba took each of them by the arm, and with Adi, went to a far corner of the room. There He said, 'You don't know how hard I had to work to prevent a catastrophe.' He was very serious, more so than she had ever seen before, as He said this, and she was very shaken by the intensity of His words and presence. Whether it was the policeman stopping her at a critical moment, or whether His general injunction to travel slowly, she does not know, but in any case she was immensely touched by His loving care for her welfare. She commented later that He could have told her what a 'stupid little idiot' she had been, or punished her in some way, but instead He simply prevented her from some disaster. To her that was an example of His true greatness, accepting her as she was, and having the patience to await her awakening to the Truth.

While in San Francisco, Agnes brought up the question of ownership of Meher Mount. She wished to put it in Baba's name, but a lawyer stated that Baba could not own property in California. Baba said to put it in her name, and after protesting a number of times that she did not want to own the property, even as Baba repeated His wish, Adi finally told her to shut up and accept Baba's orders.

On her return to Meher Mount, troubled by her confusion on what to do with the property, she wrote a very frank letter to Him, stating that she did not wish to restrict the property to Baba lovers only, that she was not at all keen on it being an ashram, that she did not like group work anyway, and that if He wished it otherwise, then she was prepared to take 'her cats and dogs and go elsewhere.' She received the message back from Beloved Baba, 'Dear Beloved Watchdog, whatever you say about Meher Mount is OK with Me.' That was the message, no lecture, no instructions, that was all.

Agnes was again with her beloved Meher Baba in 1958 during His stay in the Myrtle Beach Center, but there is no record of her exchanges with Him.

Particularly during the 1960's and 70's, large numbers of people found their way to Meher Mount, and with many, Agnes's living example of love and service for Beloved Baba helped to inspire a change in their lives. Thus many continued to come over the years to assist her in her work of serving people in distress and need, and in the development of the Mount. In 1989, she established the Meher Mount Corporation with the aim of: To preserve and enhance Meher Mount as a natural, educational, recreational, and inspirational resource using the natural setting and interested people to teach social, humanitarian and environmental concepts and values, along with the teachings of Meher Baba.

After the great fire of 1985, while she sought to clean up the debris, she fell from a ladder and broke her back. She also appeared to have suffered a stroke, but to the end she denied this. For the last years of her life, only a few close companions could decipher her speech and handwritten notes. On her death in July 1994, Mani, Baba's sister, wrote to the Board of the Meher Mount Corporation, as follows:

Our Baroness Agni now resides in the court of her King enjoying His glory and reward of her long faithful service to Beloved Meher Baba as 'Watchdog' on His Mount. Most blessed is Agnes Baron to thus serve the Ancient One and most blessed is each one who helped her do so. May Meher Mount ever remain Meher's Mount reflecting Agnes's love for Beloved Baba and His Love for His Mount hallowed forever with His physical presence. Avatar Meher Baba ki Jai!

From all Meherazad family - Mani

Gokaran and Urmilla Shrivastava

Gokaran was born in Jabalpur in 1938, the year that Beloved Baba had a mast ashram there. A little over twenty years later he met Baba, whom he immediately accepted to be his Father, and Gokaran was anxious to know more of his Father's presence in the city of his birth. Fanciful as it may seem he felt that no Father could refrain from visiting His son or at least where the son is born. ·

He remembered that, as a child of nine or ten years going to school, he would pass through a certain area, and experience as he did so a joyful, elated feeling. He now felt certain that that area must have had something to do with Beloved Baba, yet try as he might he could not obtain information on where Baba actually stayed in the city. There was in the mid-sixties little derailed published information on Baba's movements and residences. He persisted in asking everyone he thought could help, and eventually he did meet one who, over-hearing Gokaran inquiring of others, exclaimed, 'Why did you not ask me? I can show you the place.'

He then went on to explain, 'I was an electrician, and when Baba came to Jabalpur, there was no electricity, and I was hired to provide electricity to the house where He was to stay. After doing so, Baba called me to Him, blessed me, and gave me His photograph.' He then took Gokaran to that place where Gokaran had all those years ago felt His presence. That was his first conscious, although unknown to him then, connection with his Beloved Master.

A second connection of which he was unaware at the time is also interesting. While studying in a college in Jabalpur, he was required to undergo a brief military training program as a part of his studies. He was in a unit of the Armored Corps, and therefore was stationed at the Barracks at Ahmednagar for short periods of training during the years 1957 to 1960. On one day in the '1960' period, he and the other trainees were taken to the old reservoir area near Meherazad for certain training. At lunchtime Gokaran asked for extra salt for his food, as this was his habit since early childhood, whether it was actually needed or not. The senior Army people said extra salt was not there, and in any case became

rather indignant at the implication that the Army did not put the correct amount of salt in the food. But Gokaran persisted in refusing to eat unless he had the extra salt. The taunts and jibes of the other 499 cadets also somehow only intensified his resolve not to eat without that salt. In what appeared a short distance away, Gokaran suddenly perceived the buildings of Meherazad, and immediately set off with his plate to ask for salt there. The buildings were in those days clearly visible through the few trees, although the distance was actually one kilometre from the lake. He was given salt by a servant, but he did not inquire who lived there or anything about the Place. The next day he returned to his college, and in doing so the next step on his path to his beloved God-Man followed.

That very day Gokaran approached one of his teachers, and said, 'Sir, I would like to visit your house.' Now this teacher had been teaching Gokaran for three years, and yet Gokaran had never felt any particular interest in him. But on that day he became very aware of the teacher, and without any idea of why he was doing so, he approached him with that request. The teacher responded that he was most welcome to visit that evening, and gave directions to his house. Looking back, the whole episode seemed so strange - he asked Gokaran nothing, his name, class, standing, and Gokaran gave him no particulars of himself.

The evening came, and as Gokaran entered the house, he saw opposite the door a large photograph of Beloved Baba. Although the photo immediately drew his attention with tremendous force, it was also situated amongst other obvious family photos, and Gokaran naturally assumed 'him' to be one of them. Apart from that, Gokaran also did not comment on the photo because he was strongly disturbed by it, and was busy trying to digest the experience. From childhood, Gokaran had felt painfully that he was missing something in his life, but did not understand what that was. He was born into a devout orthodox Hindu family, who worshipped Lord Krishna and Lord Ram; but Gokaran himself never felt that he was seeking God in the midst of the family's prayers and rituals. In fact he has stated, until coming into the orbit of Beloved Baba's Love, that he had never

experienced love or respect for his parents, his siblings, nor had had any interest in life's activities. He did not enjoy games, and nor did he enjoy his studies. He was just one in the classroom, on one of the back benches, with no interest in or awareness of the lessons.

Now the impact of Beloved Baba's photo on him awakened even more forcefully that feeling of 'something' missing in his life. He felt very much that the 'something' was related to the photo, but if it was but one of the professor's family, he could not understand its significance for him. So he remained in mental conflict.

The teacher was quite unaware of all this turmoil in the pupil's mind, but simply proceeded giving the lesson, for which he assumed Gokaran had come. After an hour's lesson, the teacher said that he liked Gokaran's now apparent attitude to his studies, and he could therefore come each evening for a lesson. This pleased Gokaran, because this arrangement meant seeing the photo again and again. In the midst of a lesson, Gokaran would ask, for example, for a glass of water, and while the teacher was getting it, he was able to spend more time gazing at the photo. It never occurred to Gokaran to ask about the photo. In India, at that time, the relationship between teacher and pupil was a narrow, strict one, where personal questions were never asked. In any case, Gokaran did not want to disturb the arrangement, in case he was not able to continue seeing the photo!

Six months passed in this way, and in that period, Gokaran's life changed considerably. The sincere effort of the teacher to impart knowledge, and the teacher's personal courtesy and kindness towards him, began to have an effect on Gokaran. Within a month of the evening lessons, he had moved from the back benches to the very front row, become really interested in the work, and gradually this awakening interest in his studies, also extended to an interest in his family and friends. All this was due, unknowingly, to the awakening connection with Beloved Baba. So the months passed, until after six months the teacher dropped a mental bomb on Gokaran by announcing that he was being transferred to another city. Gokaran was devastated, and tears came into his eyes. The teacher patted him, concerned, and asked why

he was so upset. This made Gokaran at last speak openly; saying it was not the loss of the teacher, much as he was deeply touched by his loving help, but the loss of not seeing again the big photo in the room - pointing to Baba! He admitted frankly that it was the photo which had made him come again and again, yet also telling the teacher how his love and sincerity had helped so much to change Gokaran's life. Now he pleaded to know who was the man in the photo!

The teacher then happily said, 'This is Avatar Meher Baba.' When he said those words, those three words 'Avatar Meher Baba', and knowing the meaning of 'Avatar', Gokaran experienced total conviction in Him being God in human form. It was as though Baba had manifested in his heart, and he felt no need whatsoever to question His Divinity. Then he asked where did Meher Baba live, and when the teacher said outside of Ahmednagar, Gokaran asked for further details. As the teacher began to give directions, Gokaran suddenly asked if the place was near Pimpalgaon Lake, and it was the teacher now asking, 'How do you know?' So Gokaran told the story of the salt, and the teacher then confirmed that he had indeed taken salt from the House of the Lord.

Before leaving Jabalpur, the teacher introduced Gokaran to Amiya Hazra who was closely connected with Baba, and who hesitantly lent him the only Baba book he had left - God Speaks - hesitant, because he thought it too difficult for a newcomer. He had lent to friends all his other books and none had been returned. But Gokaran experienced no difficulty in reading the whole of it, and said that it meant at the time for him a second inner manifestation of Baba being God.

In July 1961, Gokaran wrote to Baba. He admits that it was a 'funny' letter of complaint. In it he complained that He had come to earth six times before this present Advent, and yet He had not taken him into His company. For that omission He must pay! In the reply, written by Bhau, it was said that Baba enjoyed his complaint, but did not comment on the payment, simply conveying the message to keep waiting, keep remembering Him, and that the time will come when He will give Gokaran darshan.

Following this, Gokaran wrote many letters to Baba, and each one was answered giving the same basic message - wait, remember, I will give darshan.

Sure enough, Beloved Baba did give darshan - at the East-West Gathering in 1962. Gokaran was over-joyed, and determined somehow to have seven darshans - six for each of His previous Advents and one for this Advent. However during the Gathering, it was announced often that each person should take darshan only once, and Gokaran observed that in some way Baba would subtly indicate to the mandali if a culprit was trying to take darshan again, and they would be removed from the queue. So, as he joined the queue for his second attempt to take darshan, Gokaran prayed fervently to Baba to permit him to make up for his lost opportunities, and not allow him to be caught. He gradually came closer and closer to Baba, and then just as he was in a position to be caught, Baba turned His face away! This was very encouraging for Gokaran, and he proceeded to join the queue five more times, and each time Beloved Baba turned His face away. So, by Beloved Baba's grace, he achieved his heart's content, and put his head seven times on the God-Man's feet.

But it was only with the first darshan that he experienced what he described as 'a timeless moment.' To an observer it might well appear that the moment of putting one's head on His feet and then being hurried along by the mandali, was nothing more than one of 'a split second' duration. Yet for Gokaran in that first darshan there was no sense of being hurried, and the experience was one of timelessness, giving an inner feeling of complete satisfaction. And he said, 'There is nothing in this world softer than His feet.' He also loved the simple naturalness of Baba's appearance and manner, although this in fact had been something of a shock on his first sight of Him. He had been brought up in the Hindu tradition of God portrayed with Light emanating from Him, a halo and aura, and the eyes big and abnormal. In short a Being in supernatural form - and Beloved Baba was a simply natural Presence of palpable and endearing Love. This experience of the actual sight of God-Man was therefore a happy shock for Gokaran.

In 1963 came the next opportunity for Beloved Baba's lovers to have His darshan, and this time Gokaran wanted to make sure that his eldest brother, whom he loved very much, should also have Baba's darshan. The brother, who loved Gokaran in return, would listen, and express willingness to come to Baba, but it seemed he never had the time to do so. In 1963, Gokaran made another effort, traveling to another city where the brother was living with the father and the youngest brother of the family. He arrived in the morning, and spent the entire day until the evening train to Ahmednagar and then Poona, trying to persuade his eldest brother to come with him. He did not succeed, but much to his astonishment and joy, his father and youngest brother, aged fifteen, came with him. What was amazing to him, was that the father himself entreated Gokaran to take him, and that the youngest brother then came forward and declared that he would care for the father. Gokaran had not asked either of them during the day. Added to his amazement, the father was ready within half an hour, where normally he would take many hours to get ready for any activity.

They reached Poona in the afternoon, and went to a sort of boarding house where a good number of Baba lovers could stay. On arrival somebody from Guruprasad came saying that Baba had sent a special invitation for Baba lovers who had already arrived to come then to see Him. There were fourteen persons, including Gokaran and family, who immediately took up the invitation. Being small in number they saw Baba in the Mandali Hall, not the big hall used for large gatherings. Also there was Dr. Deshmukh, a longtime Baba lover. Baba lovingly embraced each one, and then called for Eruch to bring some sweetmeat prasad. This turned out to be a large container of some five kilograms of sweets. Baba then gave the sweets to each as they filed before Him. This was all very new to Gokaran and to most of the others, and what really astonished Gokaran was that Deshmukh repeatedly rejoined the queue, and obviously without caring what anyone thought of his actions. After every second or third person, Deshmukh would again be there before Baba, and Beloved Baba would give him more prasad. The fourteen, mostly newcomers, dared not do as

Deshmukh was doing. Finally when everyone had received prasad, and it could be seen that some sweets were left, Deshmukh stepped forward and with his two hands held his shirt like a large scoop, and invited Baba to pour more sweets into it. This Beloved Baba did.

After the darshan was over, the fourteen pestered Deshmukh to share his great amount of prasad with them, pointing out that they had received so little. He refused, saying this is my share, and that they should have asked Baba for more as he had done. Many years later, Gokaran related the incident to Mani, and she explained that Baba was shy of strangers - meaning, if one were to feel as a stranger with Baba, then He would also, as it were, remain at a distance. Deshmukh, as an example, cared not a fig what people thought of him, his only concern being his proximity to his beloved Baba, and therefore Baba permitted intimacy that would be denied others. It was an interesting lesson for Gokaran.

The next day darshan was given in the large hall of Guruprasad, and apart from the intense joy of being again with Baba, Gokaran had two interesting experiences. The program for the day included qawwali singing by Begum Akhtar, a most famous female qawwali singer of her time. In those days qawwali singing and particularly female singers of ghazals and qawwalis were not well regarded by the general public, - in fact ghazals and qawwalis were somewhat looked down upon as in bad taste and not of a high spiritual order. Now Gokaran observed that Baba had especially asked Shantadevi the ex-Queen of Baroda to look to every need of Begum Akhtar, thus bringing together, as it were, the highest and the 'looked-down-upon' stratas of society to the same level. So, on each side of Baba sat the singers and Shantadevi, and all could see the great happiness with which He listened to the singing. In addition, after the program of singing, Baba put a ring on the finger of each lady, thus again bringing them to the same level before God. This was an enlarging inner experience for Gokaran.

The other interesting thing that he observed was that each day Baba would ask those who did not sleep or eat well to stand up and speak of their problem. Some gave humorous explanations which Baba enjoyed. Pukar, a large man, claimed that

he did not sleep because of hunger, and on questioning explained that he normally ate forty to fifty chapatis a day, and that yesterday he was only able to get half that number! So he was not able sleep well! Baba thoroughly enjoyed the exchange. Gokaran observed all this over the first three days, and also observed that Baba asked of each one their story when they stood before Him.

So on the fourth day, he resolved to forgo his evening meal, stand up the next morning when Baba gave the opportunity, and thus for the first time be able to speak to Baba. He had a particularly heavy lunch, and then had nothing in the evening. The next morning he was ready and very keen to stand before Baba, but immediately Baba entered the hall He began giving darshan, and asked no questions of those there. Moreover He did not even look at Gokaran the whole morning. In the end Gokaran accepted that Baba would not respond to such a blatant attempt to gain His attention.

Gokaran's father was very happy with his darshan of Beloved Baba, and he accepted fully that He was God in human form, as Krishna, Rama had been. His prayers now included Baba's Name in his morning's hour recital of the Names of God. Occasionally he would ask Gokaran to write to Baba, and was always keen to hear letters from Baba.

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March 1964 was the month for Gokaran's final college examinations. During these studies, since he had begun writing to Baba, he received many messages from Baba that he must pass his final examinations first class, and so he was studying extremely hard throughout, and before the finals, some fifteen or sixteen hours a day, with perhaps two hours rest. Then before doing them he received a message from Baba that he was to marry immediately. Apart from fulfilling Baba's wish of 'first class' results, the successful completion of his studies was of utmost importance because of the need of his family for further income. His father had retired, and his eldest brother was carrying the financial burden of the parents and the younger brothers and sisters. So this message

from Baba was a further shock, yet one that must be answered coming as it did from Baba. Gokaran went to his eldest brother for him to select a suitable girl, as was required by their Hindu culture. This news was also a definite shock to the brother, and he was also concerned over the effect on his brother's studies. Now his brother had by this time gained respect for Baba, so he wrote respectfully to Baba saying that it would take time to find a suitable girl, and in the meantime there was the pending examinations. Beloved Baba sent the message back that Gokaran could do the examinations, but was to marry soon after them. This was a gift of time from Beloved Baba, and both brothers were relieved.

Gokaran duly passed the examinations successfully 'first class', but after them, he was so fed up with study, that in his letter to Baba giving news of his results, he also expressed his earnest wish to be finished with further studies. In due time, he received a message from Baba, expressing His pleasure in Gokaran's results, but also saying He wished him to obtain a Ph.D. in his studies!

Then messages again came to both him and his brother from Baba that he should now marry immediately. Letters were therefore sent to various families seeking marriage negotiations for their daughter, but this was viewed with distrust, because normally the matter was handled the other way around. They suspected that there must be something wrong with the boy. Now Gokaran by this time had a teaching position at the college, and his brother learnt of a young woman, Urmilla, who was also a teacher in the same subjects as Gokaran. So the brother thought that she would make a good match, and wrote accordingly to the family of Urmilla, who were then also confused by this unorthodox approach.

The father of Urmilla, in his confusion, sought advice from others, among them a neighbour, who happened to be a Baba lover. He advised the father to write to Baba expressing his doubts, and not to worry about doing so, even though the father knew nothing of Meher Baba. This he did, and the answer came that his daughter must be married to Gokaran. Without really knowing why, the father took this as an injunction to be honored, as though it had come from his own guru, and so the marriage took place -

and of course the union proved to be most fertile ground over the years for the expression of love and service in Beloved Baba's Cause.

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Before the marriage, Gokaran learnt that Beloved stopped for a moment on the road near the Trust Office on His journey from Guruprasad to Meherazad, and that a little crowd gathered there to have His darshan. This was on the 1st of July 1964, and Gokaran, at the time intensely longing for Baba's darshan, realized that this would be his best opportunity to do so. He would simply join the queue, and because Baba Himself stopped, he would not be breaking His order not to come for darshan unless called by Him. Thus he would at least see his Beloved Baba.

Gokaran arrived at the Trust Office one day early, and by good fortune, was offered a vacant room in the compound. Then, by further good fortune, the same man suggested that Gokaran take the mail, accumulated over three months while Baba was in Poona, to Meherazad, which Gokaran had never seen.

This proved an unexpected extra joy for him with Kaka Baria giving him a thorough tour of the place. It was the fulfillment of another earlier dream of his, to be, even if it only proved to be for one day, the postman for Meherazad and deliver a letter to Baba.

The next day it was announced that Baba would pass in the car about 10am and a small queue of about twelve people gathered on the roadside. The car came and slowed down, and as it did so, Baba put out one hand, and each person had the opportunity of kissing it.

Gokaran was standing back, knowing that he was not a part of the local group, and not sure that he should be there at all. Then one of the group told Baba that 'Gokaran from Jabalpur' had come and was standing there. With this Gokaran was called to Baba, and, while His one hand was being kissed by the others, His other one grasped Gokaran's hand firmly and he was made to walk alongside the car as it was slowly moving. Then, still grasping

Gokaran's hand, Baba caressed his cheek with His other hand, which had become free, and Gokaran, for the first time, saw his Beloved Baba's face close by, and was able to look into His eyes. This was truly the supreme moment of his life, and the living clarity of the memory of His face has remained ever with him, and he often finds himself seeing that Face unexpectedly in all sorts of physical objects of the world.

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The life of Urmilla, Gokaran's wife, ran amazingly parallel with Gokaran's, particularly with regard to the first intimation of her connection with Baba. She lived in Nagpur, and attended school there until going to College in Bhopal. In Nagpur she would walk to school and pass each day the bungalow of Jal Kerawala, the close lover of Beloved Baba.

He was the Collector of the city at that time during 1951-52. Urmilla, around the age of thirteen years, was very drawn to that bungalow, and would always stop before it, and stand and gaze at it. Her friends would question this obsession, but she had no idea why she did so, nor did she have any knowledge of the occupant. Then one day she found many vehicles and many people at the bungalow, all wearing black, and looking very sad.

Urmilla asked her father that evening why this was so, but all he said was that the Officer who lived there had died. Later some other person lived in the bungalow, and Urmilla found she no longer had a liking for the house, and in fact would run past not looking at it.

It was not until 1980, when her father happened to be reading about Jal Kerawala in Glow magazine, that he remembered Nagpur and told Urmilla what he didn't tell her at thirteen thinking her too young, that Jal had lived and died in that bungalow, and that Baba Himself had stayed there with Jal. She then understood why she had felt such an attraction for the house as she did.

As related earlier, with Beloved Baba's guiding hand, Gokaran and Urmilla were married on the 27th of February 1965.

At this stage Urmilla knew nothing of Baba, but on the day of the marriage, they were invited to the large feast the Baba family of Bhopal had each year as part of the Birthday celebrations. She said later that she felt the importance of the occasion but still did not know who Baba was and the significance of the celebration. After a few days, Gokaran and Urmilla returned to their respective teaching posts, Gokaran to Jabalpur and Urmilla remaining in Bhopal. In one of her letters to Gokaran, she wrote that she would give him love as much he can absorb from her, but in return for her love he must give her God. This was his opportunity, and in response he wrote that he was so glad she had asked for God, because he could give her that, whereas in worldly matters he would have failed. He then wrote a very long letter about Baba, about His Advent, the Spiritual Hierarchy, Perfect Masters and enclosed His message, The Highest of the High, and the circular letter from Baba announcing that He would give darshan in May 1965. This circular had come at the same time as Urmilla's letter. She replied that she totally accepted all that he had sent her, and that she would definitely go with him to the darshan program.

This time there was no hesitation from the extended family to attend this possibly last darshan to be given by Him. Gokaran's father could not go this time, and so Gokaran's eldest brother, as the elder now of the family, led his family of wife and five children, his mother, sister and young brother, and another sister and husband to Guruprasad, as well as Gokaran and Urmilla. Unbeknown to the family, the young brother carried to the darshan program a wet cloth, which he intended to place on Baba's feet and then wring out the water into a jar afterwards. Why? In Lord Rama's Advent, Rama sought passage across a river in a small boat. The ferryman refused to carry Him, saying that His feet were so powerful that his boat, his sole livelihood, might turn into a man or woman - as He had earlier changed a woman who had been cursed into stone, back into woman. So he would not allow Rama to enter his boat, unless He permitted him to wash His feet. This was a pretext so that he could perform this most sacred ceremony, in which the water used for washing the Master's feet is collected and distributed as prasad to everyone, not just ordinary prasad like

a sweetmeat, but one that is believed to be a very source of salvation.

This is what Gokaran's young brother hoped to achieve. But when he reached Baba, someone caught him with the wet cloth and did not allow him to use it. The lad was very upset, but told no one of his anguish. As the whole family were leaving Guruprasad, a cry was heard, 'Mr. Gopal from Bhopal come here.' When they turned back, there was Bhau, one of the close mandali, holding a large-sized bottle of water. He gave it to the eldest brother, saying, 'This is water used to wash Baba's feet, and is for your family.' So the young brother, instead of perhaps a few drops, got a whole bottle - such was Beloved Baba's compassion towards the longing of one little heart, now overwhelmed with love for Him.

At another time during the days at Guruprasad, Baba permitted groups and families from different cities to be with Him. Gokaran's family were all individually introduced to Baba, and He asked about Gokaran's father who was not able to be there. Baba said to them, 'Don't worry, wherever he is, I am at this moment with him.' Later the father confirmed that he had, at that moment, strongly felt Baba's presence.

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Gokaran and Urmilla had one further darshan of their beloved Baba in this lifetime. They were staying together during a vacation time, and word came that Urmilla had been selected to attend an Educational Conference in Bombay. This was an opportunity to also see Baba, if He permitted, and they wrote asking if they could do so. The reply came that they could do so, but only if Gokaran was also selected for the Conference. And beautifully timed, a letter of Gokaran's acceptance came a day later! They arrived in Poona on the day, left their luggage at the station, and arrived at Guruprasad at 3 pm. The time set for the darshan program was 4 PM and their train to Bombay left at 4.30. When they came into the big hall of Guruprasad it was packed with people and they were now deeply concerned about whether

they would be able to have His darshan and still catch their train. Gradually, by His Grace they were able to work their way to front of the crowd, but their anxiety continued.

At precisely 4 Baba appeared with Bhau as interpreter, the first and last time this was so and immediately Baba gestured, and Bhau called for Gokaran and Urmilla. Baba said He called them to come now because they had a train to catch at 4.30. Overwhelmed at this turn of events, they hastened forward and with great love bowed at His feet. Then Baba began to ask Urmilla questions of herself, what was her educational standard, what was her subject, what Degree did she hold, her position in the examinations and so on, and at the end Beloved Baba raised two fingers and then one finger, and Bhau interpreted that they were both first class. Thus Baba re-emphasized their togetherness, and it is indeed interesting that, although in different cities, and in different years, they both had the same subject, the same division, the same position in the University and the total number of marks obtained in their final examinations for Master's Degree were also equal! Thereafter Beloved Baba kept them both at par in qualifications, in job, in salary and any letters that came from Him were always addressed in both names.

Some years later Gokaran's younger brother had a very serious motor accident. He was in hospital unconscious, and the doctors told Gokaran that he would not survive. Gokaran held his brother's feet, and began praying to Baba, and also sent a telegram asking that Baba accept his prayers. There was no effect, and as he continued to pray it occurred to him that he was praying alone, and that the telegram had been in his name only. With that thought he began to pray again on his and Urmilla's behalf, and sent another telegram in both their names. As soon as he gave that telegram for transmission his brother showed some signs of recovery and gradually fully recovered. This episode made a deep impression on Gokaran, and he was convinced that the joint prayers of Urmilla and himself were always needed to gain Beloved Baba's attention. From that time he never did the prayers for himself alone.

Reflections as Chairman of Avatar's Abode

During those wonderful days of the 1970's when money was even tighter than it is now, we all joyfully came to Avatar's Abode and worked to clear the land and at least make more presentable the overgrown old pineapple farm that the Abode used to be.

We never thought of payment, we did not ask to whom did the land belong; we did not question why were we doing such work, and we did not feel any possessiveness after completion of the work. If questioned we said that this land and House is His Abode, and, remembering the general joy of those days, I can say we simply delighted in serving Him in any way we could.

We also took to heart Eruch's words, as he spoke from the depth of his great love for Beloved Baba about gatherings in His Name: particularly for our main gathering of the year – the anniversary of His stay on Avatar's Abode.

'All that is needed is just to keep His presence at the time you are gathered. You gather not for your own sake, but for Him, to love Him, to pour out your love for Him, to worship Him, to adore Him and to devote all your heart feelings to Him.

Music can also be used to entertain Him, but let such programs be there not to entertain the visitors, because there is no visitor except Baba whose house it is. And at such gatherings all should be permitted to participate in the entertainment, for the songs, the skits and indeed everything is enacted with a view to entertaining Him.

Let there be stories told about Baba, and readings too from printed material. Above all, bring His personality and His being to our minds and hearts and feel deeply His presence.'

It was as if the wave of His awakening Love in our hearts had washed over the dry sands of our sanskaras, and they were momentarily submerged. It was a honeymoon period in this life, an encouraging glimpse of what life can be during that eternal love affair with the Divine Beloved. I am reminded of Beloved Baba's words: 'Remember Me. Why? Not because I will solve your

problems, or change your destiny, but because I give you the strength to fight the battle of life,' and this gives much courage for this 'holy war'.

Beloved Baba has said that He will remain with us for one hundred years as though He was still in the body, and because we therefore feel His presence, albeit unseen, we tend not to feel the separation. But as He recedes further into Himself, we will feel the separation more and more intensely. Then will be the time when people will flock to His Abode anxious to experience His presence and prepared to worship every grain of soil that His feet have touched.

It could be said that the whole world is His home, and in that home are many rooms. They are all His, but some places are more dear to Him than others, and those more dear to Him contain more of His Presence and Perfume. These become His universal Places of pilgrimage.

They are His, yet in His love for His creation, He allows each one of us to think of the Places as 'ours'. As Eruch has gathered from Baba, and expressed, '....while pilgrims should not lose sight of their belonging to the Place and the Place belonging to them, they should also not lose sight of the trust that the Lord reposes in each pilgrim when the pilgrim comes to the Place of pilgrimage.'

As the 1970's passed we took up patterns of life as our sanskaras prompted, and now some continue to give physical help and some provide help to His Abode in the form of money. Now while we continue to do so, we bear in mind Beloved Baba telling Adi Snr. in the early years:

'Keep your actions subject to your obligations. Your obligation is to devote your mind and heart to Me while, at the same time, studying at the college. But always remember that the chief duty in your life is to think of Me.'

Adi asked, 'Should I think of You even while studying?' Baba advised, 'When studying, have no thought toward Me, but when you find the time, devote your entire attention toward Me, remembering Me in the same way in which you

naturally remember those whom you love. It is the inner contact that matters.'

That exchange reminds me of a beautiful passage from the Upanishads:

'Whatever lives is full of the Lord. Claim nothing; enjoy, do not covet His property. Then hope for a hundred years of life doing your duty. No other way can prevent deeds from clinging, proud as you are of your human life.'

* * *

The question of money in Beloved Baba's ministry is an interesting one. Earlier in 1954 during His tour in Andhra Pradesh, Baba made some very significant remarks on this matter:

If you depend upon money for My work, then do not work for Me.

To depend on anyone or anything means the work (for His cause) suffers.

For God's sake, for Baba's sake, beware of money. One pie taken from others with false pretensions makes one die a million deaths!

Let principle in work and honesty in life prevail!

Those who have money should spread My message of love

Those who have no money, large families and no spare time, should share their love for Baba with their own family and friends.

Let each Baba lover be a Baba centre radiating My message of love.

The really wealthy man is he who knows how to spend his wealth well.

(As expressed by Eruch: Baba has indicated that one may amass wealth, but to avoid becoming attached to it, you must spend it well in the service of the Lord.)

Throughout His ministry Baba was very serious in regard to money. As He said, 'I am the Fakir, (yet) you have no idea how much money has 'flowed' through My hands.' From some He accepted money, from some He accepted money and then returned it as His prasad to be used wisely in their own life, and from some He refused money even to the extent of seeing that it was forcibly given back.

I was one of the small group of Western men who stayed at Meherabad in 1954. One day, with all the group present, Baba signaled out an Indian, a close one in His love, and said, 'This man loves Me very much, but in his love and fervor for My Cause, he has created a burden on Me. In his desire to spread My name and message more and more, he has borrowed money and now has a large debt. This is of concern to Me on his behalf for his family and their welfare.' This was conveyed by Baba in a serious manner, and was clearly intended as a lesson for us all, yet He also seemed to me to give comfort and forgiveness to the man in expressing it openly as He did. And the incident finished with an embrace from Baba for the man.

Yet even into the subject of money Beloved Baba injected humour at times. Sam Kerawala had purchased a car, but finding that it absorbed money and precious time in his short periods of shore leave, was greatly relieved when Baba called for it to be given to Him for His work. He happily handed it over, thinking the financial strain was over, and then sat contentedly with the mandali in Baba's embracing love. It, he thought, would now all be Baba's headache.

A little time passed with spiritual chit-chat, when Baba suddenly turned to Sam, saying, 'Look here, that great black monster you have brought and thrown on My chest, who is going to pay for the gas, for the repairs if something goes wrong?' And while saying this, Baba turned out the pockets of the coat He had on, 'You can see I have no money! So from the money you have with you, keep enough for the bus fare home, and give the rest to Eruch. He will inform you regularly of the expenses incurred, and you are to send the amount to Me.' And this was what happened until Baba one day directed that the car be sold to the first bidder.

In 1968 another of Baba's close lovers died. He was Kishanchand Gajwani, a very prosperous businessman, who had over the years contributed much to Baba for His work, for example in his financial support of the Bombay Centre. He came to Baba through another well-to-do businessman of Bombay Sorobji Signaporia, who had established the Bombay Centre, and Gajwani over time became very drawn to Beloved Baba. Even in old age he looked and acted the picture of health, and once Baba asked him if he slept at night. He replied that he had no trouble sleeping but that he slept only three hours a night. With Baba's questioning gesture, he said that he meditated on Baba until midnight, slept until 3 o'clock and then again meditated on Baba, thinking of Him, repeating His name, until preparing to go to the office. He had 2 or 3 large factories. Baba expressed surprise at so little sleep, but Gajwani said that he always felt fresh and active with that amount. Baba was very happy to hear this, commenting to the others how straight and fit he appeared despite being in his eighties. Baba then said that He was happy with his love, and with all that he did in His Cause, and that he should love Him more and more. A few days after this meeting Gajwani died of a heart attack in the early hours of the morning.

In the early Sixties, at one of one of the darshan gatherings in Guruprasad, Dr. Deshmukh suddenly jumped to his feet and asked Baba if He would come again to Nagpur, his home city, and give darshan to the public. Deshmukh was very bold with Baba, and Baba tolerated this trait - possibly because he was also very innocent in his love for Baba. This move of Deshmukh's then of course gave courage to numerous others to rise and plead that Beloved Baba should also visit their home places. Baba allowed these lively requests to continue for awhile and then told all to sit down, adding this was not the time for such a program. However Deshmukh was very persistent, and on every opportunity would stand up in the assembly and ask Baba in effect, 'What about my request that You come to Nagpur?' He was, as said, very bold.

Perhaps a year went by in this manner, until one day, totally unexpectedly, Baba announced that He would after all do a tour of India and come as Deshmukh requested to Nagpur. This of

course produced a flurry of excitement, and Baba then directed that Eruch write down the names of those men who would accompany Him to Nagpur. Eruch began as ordered, and as the list got longer and longer to a total of some 40 names, it was observed that Deshmukh's face also got longer and more dismayed, particularly when Baba directed that he, Deshmukh, should arrange board, food and transportation for them all. After this Baba looked at Deshmukh and gestured, 'Now you must be very happy seeing that I am coming to Nagpur.' But Deshmukh had another characteristic, and that was an intense dislike to spend money. The prospect of providing for so many quite stunned him, and he stammered out barely a reply.

Baba looked surprised, and asked, 'What is the matter? Aren't you happy?' Very hesitantly Deshmukh replied 'Yes Baba. But I won't be able to afford such an occasion.'

Baba thoroughly enjoyed his discomfort, and silently laughed. Now Gajwani was also present in the gathering, and he then jumped to his feet saying he would bear all the expenses of Baba's visit to Nagpur. At this Baba gestured to Deshmukh, 'Look how willing Gajwani is to pay for the visit, couldn't you have done likewise? And Gajwani has only recently come to Me, and see his attitude!' All this brought forth much amusement for everyone except of course Deshmukh.

The general excitement over the proposed tour continued for some time, and many sought Baba to come to their place too. Suddenly Baba said one day that the tour was cancelled. Everyone's face dropped, but accepted the news as their Beloved Baba said that He had His own reasons for the cancellation, and all should accept His wish. Later in the smaller gathering room of Guruprasad, Gajwani told Baba that he had put aside the money for the cancelled tour, and what now should he do with it. Baba replied that he should keep it, that he would be told when to bring to Him, and there the topic closed.

The next year at Guruprasad Gajwani again brought up the question of the money, and Baba directed that it should be willed to Him in Gajwani's Will. Gajwani happily agreed.

After Gajwani's death, his family unexpectedly came to Baba at Meherazad to pay their respects, and despite His strict seclusion they were allowed to see Him. At this time the eldest son spoke of the money left to Baba in his father's Will, and Baba gestured that if that was so, it could be placed at His feet. But the son said that he did not have the money with him now, and that he would send it. Baba accepted this, and said that after returning to Bombay he could send the amount to Adi Snr's Office.

Time passed, and on one of Adi Snr's visits to Meherazad, he mentioned to Baba that he had not received the money, and asked if Baba wanted him to write to the son and remind him of the debt. Baba directed that he should do so. The son replied acknowledging again the debt, but said he did not have the sum at the moment, adding that he would send it when he had it. Again time passed, and no money from the son. When Adi reminded Baba of this, Baba said not to write further, and with a twinkle in His eyes, He gestured, 'No, let it be, that amount at compound interest, will be a tidy sum for Me when I return in 700 years!'

To my own great good fortune Baba concerned Himself over my financial position. There have been two distinct financial periods in my life - the first period one of financial struggle, and the second of financial security. This second period began distinctly and precisely with my stay in 1967 at Meherazad with Beloved Baba.

During that time He questioned me on my finances, specified the amount I was to earn, showing as He did so a loving concern for the family's welfare, and then near the end of my stay, said to me, 'If you ever need money, come to Me, and I will see to it.' At the time I thought nothing more than that this statement was the concern of a loving Father for a possible critical financial situation in the future. And it never occurred to me that Baba would not be with us, as it were, forever.

Baba had reminded me of my family responsibilities, and He then ensured on my return that I earned sufficiently despite the incredible increase in Baba work that occurred with His

compassionate 'turning of the Key'. But even more astonishing was that almost immediately after He dropped the body, He inspired the beginning of a 'Baba' business, which not only provided for the family, but also enabled me to work more fully towards His emphasized Wishes to spread His Name and message, and to develop Avatar's Abode as a Place of world pilgrimage. .

By His Grace, the money needed to fulfill His wishes has never, ever failed to come to hand. This is true - yet there was a time when I became over-confident in the abundant flow of His money, and sought development beyond the need at the time. In His mercy He rescued me from financial disaster and at the same time gave me a very good lesson: cling to His feet and do not try running ahead of Him.

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In a conversation between Eruch Jessawala and myself, Eruch said at one point: 'But all we are to do is to sink our differences, and genuinely implore Him to bring us all together in His love. Each one should call out, genuinely. When there is a common cause of distress, then that cry, that call, should be there from Avatar's Abode imploring Him, beseeching Him, to get you all together in the oneness of His love.

And if that atmosphere prevails, you may have the Manifestation of Meher Baba at Avatar's Abode.'

What an incredibly joyous thought! Is it possible? Of course it is! There are numerous incidents in lives of dedicated lovers of Lord Baba that prove this. One among many comes to mind - the men folk of a certain place in India had been called to be with Baba, so the women resolved to come together and implore their Beloved Baba to be with them too. And the deep cry from their hearts did bring the Manifestation of the Lord to the place of their gathering, and each experienced the Image of their Beloved.

So we all here continue to strive for togetherness and harmony, and there is no doubt that He, in the Love with which He permeated His Abode, helps us to experience His Presence

more and more. Yes, He focused His Presence, the Spirit of Love, into His Abode that we might be continually reminded of the only true purpose in life as we spend time here. He is everywhere, there is no corner of creation where He is not, but He is more easily and strongly experienced here and in His other Places of Pilgrimage.

Avatar's Abode was born in God-Man's old age. It and the other Australian Place of Pilgrimage, Meher House in Sydney, came late in His ministry, and He did not detail their development as He did the Myrtle Beach Centre in the U.S. When doubt was expressed about making any changes to Meher House, Baba replied, 'Do whatever you will, nothing will ever destroy My presence there.' But He was not able to walk the paths of the Abode as He did Myrtle Beach Centre; He did not have a map of the Abode carried in the pocket of a disciple, calling for it from time to time, and pointing to a future cottage site, as He did for Myrtle Beach. He did not give a clear and detailed statement on the purpose and conduct of Avatar's Abode, as He did for the Myrtle Beach Centre. Baba, after all, did declare the Myrtle Beach Centre 'His Home in the West.' There is no reason why Avatar's Abode cannot be His Home in the South when we have His assurance that 'nothing will ever destroy His presence there.'

Avatar's Abode is primarily a Place of Pilgrimage, a 'stopping place' where we can pick up or strengthen 'the scent of the Beloved quarry - Meher Baba,' as is so for all Baba's places of pilgrimage: but it is also the main spiritual centre for Australia, a place where the tone, the atmosphere, the pace, the manner and nature of all activities conducted here will be a guide, an inspiration for all in Australia. The underlying basis must be Love and Service, the key-words Baba has given us for the spiritual path for this age.

It is a place for re-focusing one's life, assessing where one is at, and where one is going. Because He is here more potently than in the general environment, we may better gauge or 'measure what (we) may become.' Here we may rest and meditate, absorb His atmosphere, better able to take stock of the course of our life, and renew again the real purpose of it: 'To love God, to live for God and die for God.'

So, to me, Beloved Baba has given us in Australia a wonderful challenge - that of working towards the fulfillment of the purpose of Avatar's Abode as a Place of world Pilgrimage. It is only by His will that the great flowering of His Love occurs throughout Australia, but it is also by His will that He gives us the opportunity to apparently help to bring it about. To do so creates great joy to ourselves, and at the same time an atmosphere of love and joy for all who come; and the more we do so, the greater does Beloved Baba beam His pleasure.

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We might think that because Beloved Baba is no longer in the body, we are not subject to His taunts, tests and challenges. He is infinite consciousness, and particularly at present is infinitely active, strongly affecting every aspect of His creation. And the stronger the conscious connection of the individual to Him, the more He will provide taunts, tests and challenges to that individual. Yet the more the individual seeks to serve Him by trying to live His Message in the midst of an active life, seeking to be true to the trust He has reposed in one, the more the individual will feel His Presence, and feel His pleasure and displeasure in the efforts being made out of love for Him.

His words, given out when in the body, can equally apply now: 'I may scold you as much as I like, but if your conscience tells you that you have done your best, then don't lose your temper nor be depressed, however much I criticize and taunt you. These prickly words have some great motive behind them. Henceforth, swallow your thoughts and suffer everything quietly. You should not be annoyed, but remain in a good mood and be cheerful, despite your reeling brain. Your very wrath shows that you still lack something in carrying out My wish. However I may taunt, hurt or harass you, bear it like a stone and be conscious that you are serving Me.'

To one man He said, 'You are lucky to have so many hardships. Terrible suffering is the sign of happiness and peace to come. Great heat denotes the coming of rain. Great suffering and

intense sorrow indicate that happiness is about to dawn. Anything beyond your capacity will necessarily change your capacity, because so long as everything is within your limits, you don't know what is beyond them.'

Yes, to have a body is to suffer. Yet I am reminded of words from the Upanishads that the three greatest blessings one can have in life are a human body, a longing for God, and to have a Perfect Master. This in turn reminds me of a story from Sufi literature: Three young Sufis were condemned to death by the Sultan for heresy. One stepped forward, asking to be beheaded first. The Sultan was amazed, and asked why a man in the prime of life should seek death so eagerly. The Sufi replied that every moment in life was precious, because it can be spent in remembrance of the Beloved, and he wished to give his brothers the extra moments of life by dying first. 'One moment in this world is better than a thousand years of the next world, because this is the place of service, and that is the place of proximity, and proximity is gained by service.'

* * *

January 31st and Amartithi set me thinking of the challenge that Beloved Baba had given us all in dropping His physical cloak and residing where He always is: in every heart. What is the challenge He has given us?

Yes, there were of course little challenges in our life (although we may have seen them as large) before Beloved Baba dropped His outer cloak. We sought to carry out the little orders He had given us; we endeavored to maintain our tolerance and passion for Him in the face of cynicism and rejection, and we sometimes went without in order to have money to go to Him if He called. Our focus was awareness of His physical presence on earth and our longing was to be with Him physically again. Perhaps it could be said that we touched in a most minute way these words of the New Life:

Even if the heaven should fall

Do not let go the hand of Truth.

Let despair and disappointment ravage and destroy the garden of your life.

You beautify it once again, by the seedlings of contentment and self-sufficiency.

Even if your heart is cut to bits, let there be a smile on your lips.

Here I divulge to you a point worth noting

Your beggarly life will be the envy of kings.

But there are many stories from the lives of those close to Baba that exemplify this Song of the New Life, and one comes particularly to mind now:

There lived in Ahmednagar a Parsi family named Satha, on a large property known as Akbar Press. There were five brothers and four sisters and they all became devoted to Baba. Homi was one of the two Satha brothers who first had contact with Baba in the early 1920's. He was a locomotive driver on long runs such as Bombay to Delhi, and it is recorded that people would set their clocks by his departures and arrivals so meticulous was he in his duties. He married, and although both parents were apparently healthy, their first three children developed terminal illness by the age of seven. Then, when the fourth and last child was five years old, the mother died. Left with four children and three severely crippled, Homi retired with a retirement fund sufficient to give a monthly pension covering his expenses. This was in 1942. In 1947, his entire retirement fund was lost when the Moslem company holding the money, moved to Pakistan with the partition of India into two nations. At that point, Beloved Baba called Homi to Meherazad, and while he was taking off his boots to go into Mandali Hall, he heard Baba say to the mandali 'Homi has won and I have lost.' Homi was shocked and hurriedly came in and exclaimed, 'Baba, why are You saying that to me?! If I have done something wrong, please forgive me.' Baba assured him that he had done nothing wrong, but repeated what He had said first. Then He went on, 'See, I took away your very young wife, and you did not complain to Me. I gave you three crippled children and you did not complain to Me, and now I have taken all your money, and

you have four children still to care for. Still you do not complain to Me. Now you have nothing - so what will you do?' 'Baba, I always felt in my heart that all belongs to You. You have given, and You have taken away. I know You will never let me down, and that You will provide us all with whatever is necessary.' Baba then turned to Sarosh, who was sitting under the window where Eruch sat for so many years, 'You have a big business. From tomorrow Homi will work for you, and you will pay him 150 Rs. p.m. (This was the sum that Homi had been receiving from his retirement fund.) He is a most honest man, and will take good care of your business.' Homi began work for Sarosh accordingly, leaving the house at 7 AM and returned at 6 PM.

So what is our challenge? Eruch said, 'Baba was our companion during His years on earth, now it is up to us to be His companion.' That to me is the challenge, - to make Beloved Baba our living companion throughout our life in all circumstances and under all conditions. - much more than a passing thought, and much more than a memory. To make Him a real companion in our daily lives - that to me seems to be the challenge for all of us - those who were with Him whilst He was in the body, and those who came after.

* * *

Many natural opportunities are now arising to inform the world of His message, and this has made me aware of the deep change that has taken place over the years in fulfilling His Wish 'to spread My Name and Message.' The hunger of the world to achieve an answer to its frenetic unrest grows apace, with the increasing momentum of His Manifestation creating the hunger, and at the same time creating the answer. So seemingly spontaneous occasions come about to convey His Message in a natural way.

It is a far cry from the days when Beloved Baba was in the body. In our longing to share His Love with the world, we forced openings to speak of Him at every possible moment. We created public meetings, we distributed books and booklets free in

large numbers, even distributing on foot, door to door, to gain wider coverage; we sought invitations to other spiritual groups, and whenever possible put up posters far and wide proclaiming the Advent of the God-Man again. Such intense activity helped us no doubt to hold fast to the love that He had awakened.

That inner experience, so glorious in the joy of His physical presence and His always loving, tangible response to our efforts, could be epitomized in the cry of that great, close lover Ramchandra Gadekar in the last days of his life. He came to Baba in 1923 and from then had worked tirelessly and fearlessly in His cause, bringing many, many lovers to His feet. Now, in 1958, he was dying a painful death from cancer, and a month before his death, Baba called him to Meherazad. He had grown much weaker and was suffering terribly.

Weeping, he cried out, 'Baba, cure me. I want to go to different places to spread Your Love!' Baba consoled him, 'Don't worry, you will be alright soon. You have devoted your whole life to My cause, and I am pleased with you.'

Baba had one of the mandali return to Poona with Gadekar to help nurse him. After bidding Gadekar a loving farewell, and when he had sat in the car, Baba sent the mandali to stand near it and shout, Bhakta Shiromani Gadekar Saheb Ki Jai! Meaning 'Victory to the lover who is like a diamond in the King's crown!' It was a most touching farewell.

A month later, Baba departed for Bombay, stopping at Guruprasad for lunch. But before taking food or rest, He went to see Gadekar in his home. Gadekar tried to rise from the bed, and Baba gestured to him to stay, 'How is your pain? How do you feel?' Gadekar replied, 'Because You have come to see me, I feel no pain.' 'Today is Mahashivrati (a holy day in honor of Lord Shiva),' said Baba, 'and Shankar in person has come to your house to see you. Repeat My name day and night. Go on doing it.'

A few days later Gadekar died, and when Baba was notified, He commented, 'Only I know how fortunate Gadekar was, who with his last breath called out My name. He has come to Me for ever.'

In a recorded talk Eruch made one of his most beautiful and poignant statements, and it was spoken with perhaps even more than his usual inimitable depth of feeling, 'When one has been with the God-Man, he or she would long to be with Him again. The life is not a life that is full of fun, but it is a life full of joy.' This reminds me of life here on Avatar's Abode as we all labor to make it a Place of World Pilgrimage in such a manner that all who come are reminded of His Love and Beauty. That life is frequently not easy, certainly not 'full of fun' yet it gives at times a joy that is much beyond the joy of worldly life, touching the heart with His indefinable touch.

We took to heart His wish as expressed in 1967: 'Bill's objective will be to make Avatar's Abode universally known, for it is to become one of the great Places of Pilgrimage in the world. This is a great burden Baba is putting on Bill's shoulders, and it will be the responsibility of all who love Baba to cooperate fully with him as one heart with many hands.'

The unfolding of love and beauty is born of suffering. The heart must break, albeit in minute degrees, that through the cracks His Abode may shine as a beacon to all who seek Truth. Beloved Baba has said, 'Let each Baba lover be a Baba centre radiating My message of love through living the life of sacrifice, love and honesty for the divine Cause.' Our efforts to fulfill that Wish may certainly prove to be heart wrenching for all of us, yet that very pain must also be a source of manifold blessings. His many words of advice on working in His Cause become more meaningful and supportive, and give us courage to try again and again to work cooperatively together. Beloved Baba knew so well our humanness, and warned us often not to let slip our grip on His Daaman. In His gentle counseling, it was as though He allowed for the increased assertion of our individuality that follows from the conscious connection we experienced with the Lord.

Baba has said: 'But now you are older and are beginning to realize there is a greater work ahead of you than what you have been doing.'

It is not a different work..... it is the same work done in a different way. And that is the way of effacement, which means the more you work for Me the less important you feel in yourself.

I allow you to work for Me so that you have the opportunity to use your talent and capacities selflessly and so draw closer to Me

When you put My work before yourself the work will go right, though not necessarily smoothly. And when the work does not go right it means you have put yourself between it and its accomplishment.

The way of My work is the way of effacement, which is the way of strength, not of weakness; and through it you become mature in My love

There are bound to be differences of opinion among workers..... that is natural. But these very differences of opinions and feelings of competition and jealousy lead to the breakdown of the very foundation of work.

First of all, bear in mind that you should not at all seek appreciation from Me or from others.

Secondly, do not depend upon anyone or any outside help in your work for Me. The moment the worker depends upon anyone or anything, the 'real work' is undone.

One penny raised in My name, without true necessity, is dishonesty and will be the cause of millions of re-births.

To love Me as I should be loved is impossible, but to obey Me is possible.

Work should be done as work; otherwise it would be no work at all. I cannot tolerate egoism and hypocrisy. He who works for Me, does not obligate Me, for he works for his own self

If you really love Me, even a little, I want your hearts towards each other to be clean. Forget your past differences, clean your hearts and live for Baba if you love Baba.....'

Recently a Baba lover told me of his experience at Meherabad some twenty years ago, when he went there specifically as part of a team to assist in an important Baba work project. After

a little time, he found that he could not continue to do so because of deep differences of opinion on how the work should be done, and also because of deep emotional conflicts with others of the group. He expected harmony and cooperation and, in his view, found neither. He was needless to say, very upset, confused, and hurt, and, even worse, side-lined, and he spoke to Eruch, hoping that Eruch would intercede on his behalf. But Eruch only smiled and said, 'Now you are having the real Meherabad experience! My whole life with Baba was nothing but humiliation and frustration. You came to do Baba work, and found Baba is working on you. In the world you would be justified in seeking retaliation and justice, but that is not Beloved Baba's way. His way is one of effacement.'

But what an unfathomable blessing that, in His compassion, He is working on us all!

Maruti Patel and his daughter Tarabai

Tarabai said that she was born after her father's first meeting with Meher Baba, and so the history of those early years she heard from her father Maruti. He was the headman or Patel of the village of Arangaon, and as such was responsible for the administration of all the land around the village. Her father told her that Baba had come to his house seeking food. He was not in at the time, and his sister who was living with him, happily agreed to prepare food for Him and 5 or 6 others, and to take it to Him seated under the neem tree near Gilori Shah's tomb. When she was about to take the freshly cooked food, Maruti returned and asked what she was doing. She told him that a Man, so handsome and graceful, had come seeking food and such was His impact on her that she readily agreed to His request. Then Maruti said that he would accompany her with a pitcher of water. On seeing Baba, Maruti was convinced by His beauty and presence that He was the 'Great One' predicted by the Saint, who would come there. According to Tarabai her father was the link between Gilori Shah and Meher Baba.

As the Headman of the village, he had been asked by Gilori Shah for permission to have his tomb near the road side to the village. He said that he would die in eight days. When his disciples remonstrated the place chosen was remote from the city of Ahmednagar and therefore his tomb would be neglected, the Saint replied that after two months a 'Great One' would settle there. Maruti realized that it was indeed two months since that meeting with Gilori Shah. From that time Maruti Patel was devoted to Beloved Baba, and was with Him and served Him whenever possible and requested. He was in his early fifties when he met Baba, and according to his daughter Tarabai, he died in 1970, with his Beloved Baba's name on his lips.

Some examples of his willing service for Baba was the establishment of the Hazrat Babajan Girls School in his compound in Arangaon - the first Meherabad hospital which is still functioning as a clinic, is built on land given to Baba by Maruti

Patel, and as requested by Baba, Maruti also built a dharamshala for the 'untouchable' class, which still exists today near the village school. When Baba moved the ashram and school to Toka in 1928, He asked Maruti to bring his two bullocks to Him. This Maruti did walking the distance from Arangaon with the bullocks. There is a nice story in connection with those bullocks. At one point Baba was traveling from Toka towards Ahmednagar by car, and the car became bogged in a ditch. Local people brought six pairs of bullocks to pull the car out, but were unable to do so. Baba then asked the mandali to bring Maruti with his two bullocks. The local people laughed at the absurdity of two animals doing the job where twelve had failed. But Maruti, with full faith in Beloved Baba, put his hand on the bullocks and taking Baba's name, succeeded in pulling the car from the ditch. Baba was very pleased, and declared that those bullocks were now His. Under Baba's loving care the bullocks became plump and tame like pets, and He said that they would die near Him and incarnate as human beings in their next life.

In 1929 he was with Baba in Iran for more than a month, and he managed to do so by telling Baba that his wife was dead. On their return Baba found his wife very much alive, and asked why Maruti had lied. Maruti said if he had not done so he would not have had the joy of Baba's company for that time. Beloved Baba forgave him - and of course although his wife was upset by his absence, she was by Baba's grace looked after over the time.

Tarabai was the youngest of her father's four daughters. She remembers Baba from her childhood, but she knew nothing of His status, and He was simply one of her father's elderly friends. At the same time she liked Him, and was always happy to see Him. When the family quarters were established in her father's compound, Jal, Baba's brother, lived for a time in a corner of it.

She remembers as a child going to see him, and in return for example for cleaning his room, he would give her a Baba ring. Such gifts she loved and so in a way unknowingly love for Baba grew. But it was not until she was thirteen, and living in His Meherabad ashram that she realized He was God.

The marriage of Maruti Patel's two eldest daughters was with Baba's blessing. Then during a period of His absence from Meherabad, Maruti was approached by a sister living in a town in the far north of India to marry his two younger daughters to two 'good' boys there. Maruti replied that he did not have Baba's approval for this, but was finally persuaded that the boys were so 'good' that he should not miss the opportunity to have them as son-in-laws. Tara was then about eight years of age. The marriages were duly conducted, and the two girls moved to their in-laws home. However, Tara was very badly treated by the in-laws. Fortunately her elder sister, having moved with her husband elsewhere, wrote to Maruti of Tara's ill-treatment, and Baba instructed Maruti to bring her home. When Maruti asked how could he do such a thing, Baba told him to go with Gustadji's brother who was living in a nearby town to the in-laws, return any ornaments given Tara, answer any other demands the in-laws might make, but ensure by all means that Tara was brought back to Meherabad. She was by now barely twelve years of age.

When they arrived at Meherabad, Maruti said to Baba that he would take his daughter to her mother. But Baba said she was not to meet anyone, and that He would take her up Meherabad Hill to the women's ashram. This He did in Elizabeth's car.

For the first year of her stay in ashram, she was given no duties, spending her time with Mehera learning to conduct herself and adjusting to ashram life. Mehera also taught her skills such as embroidery, stitching clothes, flower arrangements and garlands. She commented that she enjoyed that period very much, and was very happy. However in the early days she had difficulty in accepting the simple food of the ashram. She was accustomed to spiciness, so she asked a servant to bring chutney from her mother.

The moment this was given to her, Baba came into the room and patting her on the head asked why she had the chutney without His permission. Tara told Him that she found the food bland. Then He called for Mani and Naja, told them what Tarabai had done, and said they were to give Tara a little of the chutney each day. He also said to keep an eye on Tara to ensure she did not

talk to any of the servants and ask for more things. At the time she took it very casually that Baba knew immediately what she had done.

However, a further incident a little later proved to be the turning point of her life. She over-heard two servants talking of her father. He had been severely beaten by thieves and continued to be very unwell. The servants also said that Tara obviously did not care for her father as she was not there to help him. Tara was very upset, and began to weep. As she did so Baba came, patted her on the head, and asked why she was crying. She told Him what she had heard, and Baba comforted her saying, 'Even if you were to go to your father, what sort of help can you be to him? I have My Nazar on him, and will see to everything.' In that instant Tara knew that Baba was Someone great and not an ordinary person, and she told Baba and the other ladies present that for her now He was God. Baba became consciously the pivotal point of her life. She was then thirteen years of age.

Over roughly the next two years Baba took her with the women mandali to various places such as Mysore and Bangalore. She was given training in cooking mostly by Gaimai, Eruch's mother, and by Katie who taught her very carefully and fully the refinements of cooking. She enjoyed this, took a keen interest in cooking, and also came to feel very close to the women mandali. At one point Korshed was given the responsibility by Baba of bringing up Rustom and Frieny's youngest child Jangoo. Baba also asked Tara to help. This she did for nearly three years, and in doing so came close to Korshed. Thus she grew in closeness to the various women. She remembers other Parsi women who were in the ashram from time to time, particularly Arnavaz's mother Bachamai and Pilamai. They would come into the kitchen, offer to help and give suggestions and different recipes. The final lessons in cooking she feels were given by Naja, who also, for Tara, made the deepest impression with her patience and tolerance. In time and for a time she had full responsibility for the cooking in the ashram. There were times when her efforts were criticized by others, and when Baba came to know of this He told her to serve Him first and He would tell her what to do. She said happily that Baba never

discouraged her in her duties, and in fact invariably received encouragement from Him.

In 1938 at the age of fourteen years Baba asked if she wished to go back to her husband. She said 'no' she did not have any desire for a married life, and Baba counseled her, 'Think well. If you stay with Me, there may come times when you do not even have chickpeas to eat.' But Tarabai replied that she wished to stay with Him, whatever the conditions. At this Baba instructed Vishnu to tell her father to send four hundred rupees to the husband and tell him that Tarabai is not returning to him, and that he is now free to marry some other woman.

During the war years Baba sent all the servants home, and all the work of the ashram was done by the women mandali. Tara commented that Baba was very strict, and insisted that every work had to be done at the appointed time. Gradually more and more work was given to Tarabai, at times because of illness amongst the women, and she thus became busy with work from 5.30am to 10pm. All the women were asked to repeat His name for an hour each day at a particular time. Meals also were to be taken at fixed times, and all allotted tasks had to be completed. At one point she asked Mehera if she should refuse the additional duties and tell Baba. But Mehera comforted her, and advised her strongly not to speak to Baba.

She recounted one time during this period - although there could have been many such times. It was in the afternoon and Baba called all the women for a talk. But Tara, concerned about the preparation of the evening meal, did not go and continued cutting up vegetables. Baba of course noticed her absence, and sent someone to fetch her. Baba said to her, 'Everyone is here except you, what were you doing?' She answered, 'Baba, I have to cook the evening meal, and I was making a curry.' 'This work donkeys can also do, but the time will come when you will have great difficulty in having My darshan. Do you want to do that work or do you want this opportunity of My presence? Be seated here.' After awhile she went to the kitchen and removed the pot from the stove, and then returned.

After the discourse Baba had Mani ask Tara what had she understood, and she admitted that she remembered nothing, not even a single word. When Mani reported this to Baba, He said to say to her that her mind was on the vegetable pot that she had been cooking.

Lunch was only rice and dhal, and on one occasion Baba called Tara and praised her for the dhal curry she had prepared that day. He asked her to save Him some for the evening meal. After a week Baba asked her to prepare the dhal curry again for Him. This she did but Baba did not relish it. He remarked that she had not cooked it whole-heartedly because she feared that she may have to cook it each day. Tara answered seriously, 'No Baba, that is not so,' and tried to explain that on the earlier occasion she cooked nearly five kilos of the dhal and this time it was only a small quantity for Him alone. Thus the taste was different.

Another time she cooked bottle-gourd or dodhi for Baba. Now this vegetable can be bitter or sweet before cooking, and so it is always tasted before cooking. This Tara did not do because it was to be served to the Lord, and to do so was against spiritual tradition. When she placed the food before Baba, He asked if she preferred people dying from her cooking or dying herself. She answered, 'Baba, I prefer to die myself.' He then asked her if she had tasted the food, and when she said no, He told her to do so and she found it bitter.

'Why didn't you taste it before giving it to Me?' 'How can I taste food that is to be offered to You?' Baba said, 'No, every time you cook, you must taste to see if it is proper or not.'

In Rajasthan, during their travels, they were only able to obtain camel's milk. This was unfamiliar to Tara and the other women, and they were not aware that it does not boil like cow's milk. In preparing their tea, they waited and waited for it to rise when boiled, and did not notice that it was also burning in the bottom of the pan. Eventually they realized their mistake and tea was made. While they were drinking, most of the women stayed in the room, but Tara and two others sat outside, laughing and chatting over the camel's milk and such oddities. All their concentration

was on the humor of the moment, but in the midst of it, Baba suddenly appeared, very angry at seeing them there, and, twisting their ears, accused them of displaying themselves, and watching the driver passing by. Tara said to Baba, but not in reproach, 'Why are You beating us? We have done nothing wrong. We are not aware of what is around us.' She was not upset, and in recounting this incident, Tara said that Baba was very strict indeed, and would give her at times scoldings and slaps, but she always felt it was justified, and she never ever thought of leaving Him. For her, all that He did was as from God, and she was determined to stick to Him through thick and thin.

Tara remembered an amusing incident. Walubai noticed a big snake on a flower bush. So a fire was lit beneath it, and when the snake fell, all the women killed it. At noon Baba came to the ashram, and was very much surprised to learn that they had killed a snake. It so happened that two baskets of sweets had been given to Him on that day, and He distributed the sweets of one basket amongst the women. Then He directed that the dead snake be put in the empty basket and covered with dung cakes and papers, and both baskets sent to the men at lower Meherabad. Baba later narrated what had happened with the men, much to the enjoyment of the women. Dr. Nilu was particularly fond of sweets, so it was natural for Baba to invite him to open the basket. This he did with great joy, only to find nothing but a dead snake, and Baba added to the merriment by saying, 'See the mischief of the women! They devour the sweets, and leave you only dung cakes and a dead snake!' Then He produced the second basket, and although Nilu was most reluctant to open it, he was persuaded to do so. To his great joy this one did have sweets, and Baba gave him an extra one as compensation for the trick played on him. Baba ordered the snake to be burnt.

There were of course other delightful times for Tara. She particularly remembers the celebration of Baba's Birthday as always special and memorable. Mani would prepare a play or skit for Baba, and press Tara to take part in them. She remembers specially being one of seven gopies dancing for Krishna. Sometimes it was skits on village life, with humorous dialogue between

perhaps husband and wife, or, one dressed as a peasant, selling vegetables in the market. All this would make Beloved Baba so relaxed and happy.

Tara had now been with Beloved Baba for some thirteen years, and He called her to Him and asked her to give Him a promise. She lightly agreed thinking it would be some task such as keeping silence, and put her hand over His as a promise. Baba then said, 'Your father has cracked My head (an expression meaning great responsibility had come upon Him).' When she asked how did that concern her, He said that her sister's husband had died from a heart attack, that her sister had then died from the shock, and thus their four children had been left parentless. Because of this Baba asked her to take care of the children. Concerned, she said, 'How can I do that? I have no money.' 'I will help you' and after a little while, He asked, 'How much money will you need?' But Tara protested, 'Baba, I have served You for thirteen years, if now I ask for money, what is the use of my service to You?' Then Beloved Baba gave her His sandals, and putting His hand on her head repeated that He would be with her, would take care of her, and she was not to worry.

So she returned to live with her father and the four children in the village with the instruction from Baba that she was to talk to no man except her father. Baba came to the house from time to time, and enquired lovingly of their welfare. She earned money from her sewing, and made clothes for the children from saris she had stored. Over the years she had been with Baba, He had given her from time to time new saris, but never allowed her to wear them except on very special occasions. Thus all those saris proved a financial help to her now. However, she was having difficulty in giving the children what they needed, including the education that she did not receive, but was determined that they should have, and her father was by this time too old to help much. So when the TB hospital was established near the village, she told Baba that she was having financial difficulties, and that she would therefore like to apply for a position there. However how could she with His injunction not to talk with men? Baba then said, 'Yes I have said not to talk with men, but I didn't say not to give water

to a dying man.' Thus He lifted His order to a level that enabled her to take a position with the hospital.

Once He came to the hospital and gave darshan to all the patients. He told her to serve the patients sincerely and wholeheartedly as though she was serving Him. and without fear of contracting TB herself He assured her that everything would be all right, and that she would not contract TB. This was one of the great boons that Beloved Baba gave her. She also says that she always feels His presence, that He thus gives her confidence in facing problems, and that He always does solve them. As an example she recounts that she had no money for her daughter's marriage (she talks of her sons and daughters as though they were indeed so), and she did not know what to do. In her sleep Baba came to her and told to ask her old woman friend for the money. This she did, and was given an easy loan of the money necessary for the wedding.

She continued to stay with her father until his death, but then with the children now grown-up, lived on farming land that her father had given them a distance from the village. By Beloved Baba's grace they have all prospered, and they care lovingly for Tarabai in her old age.

Kaikhushru Jamshedji Pleader

K.J .Pleader was one of the close mandali of Beloved Baba's court, always there known as Pleader, which means lawyer, his father's profession. He was born in 1898, the second youngest of a family of five children to Jamshedji Pleader and wife Veerbaiji. The father was from South India, very capable in his profession, but also very hot-tempered. As a result of this temper, he lost seven houses owned in his native place. He then died at an early age, and Veerbai had to struggle extremely hard to bring up the five children. She and the family lived a difficult but very honest and spiritually inclined life. Of the five, two died as young adults, the youngest, at the age of thirty, became mentally ill, and the third son lived as a mill-hand and died in old age.

Pleader, after studying to sixth standard at school, worked in various jobs, and lived by himself in very sparse conditions. In time he became a cashier in the Bank of India. He used to get up at 4am and recite God's Name, before leaving his room at 9am for work at the bank. After work, he usually visited his mother and sister for a time, and then would go to Chowpatty beach to listen to the evening prayers and lectures of the sadhus gathered there. He experienced a growing intense thirst to see God and attain Mukti.

At this point he came across a book 'Swami Ramtirth Yogasadhana' which made him realize that he must have a Perfect Master as his Guru in order to achieve his goal of Mukti. This now made him seek acceptance by a Perfect Master, and he continued again and again to visit Babajan, Upasani Maharaj, Narayan Maharaj and Meher Baba. He met Baba for the first time in January 1928 at Meherabad, and he asked if he could stay with Him there. Baba refused, and Pleader returned to Bombay.

On his seventh journey visiting these Masters, he asked Narayan Maharaj 'Will I meet my Guru in this life?' And He replied, 'Yes, and very soon.' After this, he visited Babajan, who spoke directly to him for the first time, 'Allah will destroy all your attachments.' From Babajan, he went again to Baba, accompanied

this time by Savak Kotwal and Minoo Pohowala. Baba permitted the three of them to stay in Meherabad and spend some time with the mandali and see the activities of the ashram.

The next day Baba called Pleader to Him on upper Meherabad. Baba said to him, 'This is your seventh visit to Me. What do you want, what do you seek?' Pleader replied, 'I want to see God. Will I achieve this?' 'To do so you must catch hold of a Guru.' With these words of Baba, Pleader was overwhelmed, and spontaneously and intensely grasped His feet. But Beloved Baba warned him, 'It is the most difficult thing in the world to undertake. To do so one has to possess unimaginable courage and undergo untold hardships.' Pleader emphasized his readiness to accept all deprivations and hardship, that he had no family responsibilities, and was completely free from the world. Baba instructed him, 'Go back to your home and arrange everything satisfactorily. When you have done so, then return here.' So he returned to Bombay, informed his mother and sister of his decision, attended to a few details, and was back in Meherabad within the week. This was just before Baba moved the ashram and school to Toka in early June 1928.

Initially Baba gave Pleader the duty of teaching the young ashram boys. Then one day Baba said to him, 'You should either work as a sweeper or fast for seven months on water. Which do you prefer?' Pleader chose to fast, but Baba advised, 'We Masters also work as sweepers cleaning latrines, and that We do internally. You should attend to the external latrines, and I will see to the internal. Don't think of anything else except this duty.' Pleader still hesitated, and Baba reassured him, 'Don't let it bother you. I will give you another duty after some time.'

In September the Patel of the village prayed to Baba for much-needed rain. Beloved Baba consoled him and assured him that rain would come. It did so shortly after the Patel departed, and it then rained heavily and incessantly for four solid days. So much so that the river became flooded, and threatened to submerge the village. The villagers came again, and this time with the prayer to stop the rain - and again Baba assured them that all would be well. Late that night, Baba asked Pleader and Waman Subnis to offer

prayers to stop the rain. Later, at 2am, with a few persons, Baba walked to the bank of the river, sat down, and dipped His feet in the water. Soon after, the rains eased and the floodwaters gradually receded.

In December 1928 the ashram at Toka was closed, and all returned to Meherabad. On January 15th 1929 Baba left Meherabad with a group of eighteen including Pleader. He returned to Meherabad after a walking tour of twelve days to various places including Karad, Rawalgaon and Diksal. On February 22nd He began bathing the boys, washing their clothes and sweeping their quarters. Pleader, Jal and Karim, were His assistants, although their only duty consisted in keeping hot water ready, and handing Him full buckets as He needed them.

Prior to going to Persia in September 1929, Baba stayed in Bombay, and Pleader sought an interview with Him. This was granted, and on seeing Pleader again after some time, exclaimed, 'What is wrong with you? You looked pulled down in health, and your eyes have sunken. Why is this?' Pleader answered, 'It is because of You. I only came to You for liberation.' Baba assured him, 'You are destined for it.' But then went on:

'Before Realisation the veil must be torn away and the mind must die. It is due to this veil that every individual mind functions in the gross and subtle bodies. Removing the veil would separate the gross from the subtle; when that occurs, in the subtle state you would be able to see internal things with as much clarity as you see gross objects.

While doing all physical activities such as eating, drinking, sitting, standing i.e. while your body is functioning, there is simultaneous progress into the subtle world. When the gross is separated from the subtle, it is like killing two birds with the one stone. But the veil must be ripped off. Though the veil is thin, at the same time it is very strong. It cannot be slit easily, but it can be rent in an instant by a Perfect Master. If it is torn, the consciousness of the soul at once enters the first plane. When a parrot escapes from its cage, it flies straight into the air without looking back.

But progress comes to a halt at the first plane if the rent in the veil is made through one's own efforts or with the help of a yogi or saint - an imperfect guru. Seekers advance of their own, but it is ultimately useless as they become inevitably entrapped. If a Perfect Master is there to help, He would not tear the veil unless the aspirant is fully ready; then the Master would take him straight to the goal.

Only a Sadguru can free one from the cage of illusion, but three conditions are required - longing, patience and rock-like faith. Nothing is gained without longing. This is all that is needed, but the aspirant should remain restless. For instance, if a man is stung by a scorpion, he constantly thinks of how to overcome the burning, throbbing pain. He forgets about eating, drinking and worldly pursuits. He forgets everything and has only one thought: how to make the pain subside.

In the same way, there should be continual longing to be one with God. There should be no other thought except this: I must be one with God today - immediately, this moment!

The mind and heart must be devoid of any other thought. Even though many years of suffering may pass, patience should never be forsaken. At first the longing is intense, but gradually it lessens and cools down. This should not be the case; patience must not be lost. It must be persistent. In the beginning there is great enthusiasm, and a person is convinced he will soon gain Realisation. But with the passing of time, his enthusiasm wanes.

A person may be purposely snared by the Master and then thrown out! I, too, do such things. But a wise man silently puts up with everything that comes from the Master. One who is unwise becomes impatient and starts grumbling. But Masters always coax the aspirant along and gradually give him a push on the path. Masters always behave like this; it is their nature.

Crossing the path is like a pulling-pushing tug of war. But a wise man does not act in this way. A smart bird that is caught in a trap does not flap its wings to free itself. It remains quiet and unflustered, waiting for an opportunity to escape. An

inexperienced bird flutters and squirms, becoming flustered and injuring itself more.

Think how patient Hafiz remained to have endured the treatment of His Master for forty years! Your steadfastness and determination should be like a steady flow of castor oil when poured.'

Pleader was still in the habit of visiting different Saints and Sadhus, and to counsel him against doing this, Baba said:

'Do not be after gatekeepers or watchmen; catch hold of the Emperor! Never be after His servants; no minister or secretary will help. A King is, after all, a King, and His servants, only servants. Once you have approached the King directly, it is of no benefit to maintain a friendly attitude with His servants. Your friendship with the King might precipitate any situation, but you should stick to Him. Even if you were about to die, you should never let go of His hand.

The Emperor is perfect knowledge. One should forget everyone and everything in His company. One should stop one's previous habits. One should not think of meditating, or repeating God's name or any other type of worship. The most that could happen with any of these practices is that you enter samadhi. Such practices can never make you one with God.

Instead, one should submit oneself to the Emperor's will, having only this thought: Oh God, when will You meet me? This longing must be present twenty-four hours of the day. If the feeling is intense enough, God will surely fulfill it.

To help people is good, but service done under the guidance and according to the instructions of a Perfect Master is the best. Service to half-baked gurus and false saints will throw you into a gutter. You will be left hanging by those hypocrites. If you are unlucky enough to find a false guru, he will accept you and take you into his service. However he will then give you up, and that will cool down your longing! Instead of losing, you will accumulate sanskaras, and become disappointed and disgusted.

These false saints cannot give you anything, while those on the first and second planes, and walis and pirs of the fifth and

sixth planes, can raise you to a higher state with just one look! But that is not the perfect state, as these advanced souls are not perfect. At times, even Perfect Masters cannot help those caught in these nets.

Therefore, except for the Perfect Ones, do not even be beguiled by the advanced souls of the fifth and sixth planes. Stick to the Emperor and don't leave Him for any reason! I am in everyone; but if you catch hold of Me, you will have the root of all creation in your hands. Then you will not need to go after the branches and leaves. '

If you are lucky enough to catch hold of the Emperor, you should never, never leave Him. Go on digging until you find water. Don't keep changing the spot. If you get impatient, by digging two feet here and four feet there, you will never strike water. If you dig only a shallow well, you will get impure water. Only patient, laborious digging will result in your finding crystal-pure water, and for that, you have to exert energy and dig deep.

This path is not easy at all; and if you enter it, you will not find joy here. Therefore I warn, think seven times before entering it! If you are after God, you will have to give up everything - your father, your mother, the whole world. You have to renounce each and every thing. Therefore, ponder well and then take your step. If not, leave this path, and attend to your worldly duties.

Once you fall for the path, don't be afraid of anything in the world. 'Who will look after my parents? How about my job? What will the world think of me?' All these thoughts are useless. If you had died, who would have looked after your near and dear ones? Those affected will care for themselves. God takes care of everyone. He is the true sustainer. Once you have entered the path, you should desist from such thoughts.

Try to be a lover of God. If you find out how to love Him, you may go mad. The real lover of God is never influenced by the world or what people think of him. He will not even care for his life. He will remain what he is - totally indifferent to the world, unashamed of anything.'

Beloved Baba ended by dictating :

'All rivers flow in Me. I am the Ocean. Stop looking elsewhere and look only at the Ocean. By concentrating on Me, you yourself will become the Ocean. To look at the Ocean means to carry out My wishes at all times.'

Pleader was very moved by Baba's discourse and earnestly took it to heart. He would always say, 'I want to be liberated all throughout. When I do not know about my families, wife, children, of my previous hundreds of thousands of lives, why not give away this present life to God only.'

Despite Baba's injunction to Pleader not to visit Saints and Sadhus, once he broke this order, and kept a Himachal Tyagi Sadhu in his room at Chowpatty, and lighted his dhuni as well. That he did so was a mistake, and he was punished for it. He traveled by train without a ticket to visit Tajuddin Baba's shrine, but was caught and made to leave the train at Jamkhed. He lied to the European Inspector who caught him, saying all his luggage had been stolen, and that he was stranded without anything. The Inspector showed pity on him, and told him to travel by the same train which would arrive at Jamkhed station after 24 hours, and he could then proceed further. If he was caught again, he was advised to say that he had boarded the train only on the previous station. This, Pleader felt, was Baba's punishment for breaking His order.

Pleader went on, 'Everyone makes mistakes. If they did not, they would be God. Once Baba was with the boys in the Prem Ashram, when a minister came to garland Baba with shivering hands. He had to wait for four hours for Baba to finish His work in the Ashram and agree to see the minister. The minister garlanded Baba and pleaded, 'Please make me free from the allegations in a murder case'. Baba replied that He was aware of everything that had happened, and yet He wanted an honest confession from him. He then reported the whole thing honestly to Baba, and Baba was pleased with this. Later the man was acquitted completely. When one believes Baba to be God; then they should empty their heart, and confess everything to Him without hesitation or reservation.

As against this instance, once an inmate of Baba's ashram, Maruti Patel, who was also a Police Officer, got involved in a conflict over a bullock's case. Baba told him to confess the truth, but he lied to Baba. Baba asked him twice more to state the truth, but he continued to lie. As a result Baba removed him from the ashram, and although he was still able to visit Baba, he had to be content with only His darshan.'

* * *

Before leaving for Persia, on the 15th September 1929 Baba ordered Ramjoo, Padri, Naval, Kaka Baria, Dastur and Pleader to fast on only milk, and to occupy a single room together at Meherabad. But the order was rescinded after one day for all except Pleader, who then continued to fast under varying conditions and in different locations for the next five years. During those years he would also be in seclusion for long periods, and at other times he was sent by Baba to various parts of India as a Sanyasi. As such he was ordered to visit various saints, and to travel with a begging bowl and in the saffron robe of a Sadhu with specific instructions to beg and eat whatever he got from the first three houses. If he did not get anything to eat from those three houses, he existed on wheat flour mixed with salt which in those days was provided in Dharamshalas especially for sadhus and sanyasins.

The last twenty-eight days, before ending the last period of seclusion on the 15th September 1934, he remained on water only.

It was apparently during this period that Pleader again had contact with Babajan. She took him with Her in a tonga for four hours, and whilst doing so consumed numerous cups of tea. She embraced Pleader, blessed him and said, 'Your Guru will enlighten you in both the worlds.'

In March 1930, Baba was staying in Nasik. After a few days He moved from Gyas Manzil to Rustom's garage, where Pleader was given a separate room and told not to leave it, and to remain only on milk and bananas. At first Baba visited him at 5AM with a rose on which perfume had also been sprinkled. On

the twelfth day, He came at 8PM with two jasmine. Later Baba returned to Meherabad, but ordered Pleader to stay in Nasik and continue fasting on milk, and at the same time assured him, 'I am arranging a good place of seclusion for Myself and the mandali. When all is settled, I will send for you.'

Before issuing a circular in April 1930, Baba, for the first time, showed it to the mandali. It read:

Three months after I go into seclusion, I will make Pleader enter the Path, otherwise, he will be free to go anywhere and do anything he pleases, and Pleader will have no further connection with Me.

In October 1930 Pleader was directed to stay in seclusion in the Post Office building at Meherabad, and to continue his fast on milk. He was not to move from the room, and Siddhu was appointed to bring him milk and water, clean his urinal pot, and see to his needs. He was also prohibited from reading, writing and speaking, and he was to spend his days silently repeating Baba's name.

Baba entered into strict seclusion in the Panchavati cave at Meherabad in November 1930.

One day, whilst in the Post Office, Pleader looked up and saw an exceptionally long black cobra hanging from the rafters of the room. He had orders not to leave the room, nor could he shout for help, since he was in silence. Although thoroughly frightened, there was nothing he could do but stare up at the cobra and remember Baba more fervently than ever.

A considerable period of time passed, and it is even said that the snake drank Pleader's milk. Finally, when Siddhu came to bring the next ration of milk, Pleader pointed to the ceiling. Siddhu stumbled backwards when he saw the size of the snake. He was so scared that for a few moments he could not utter a sound. Then he shouted and Pendu and Chaggan came running to help.

The cobra was curled in a corner of the rafters and it was difficult to lure it down in order to kill it. So Pendu and Chaggan wrapped a cloth around a stick, soaked it in kerosene and lit it. When they thrust the torch toward the snake, it began hissing,

spitting its venom, and trying to curl further into the corner. But the roof tiles soon became so hot that the snake fell down. Pendu and Chaggan struck it with a staff, breaking a vertebra. Chaggan then crushed its head. The cobra had landed so close to him that Chaggan, even though he was an expert snake-killer, afterwards fainted. Despite all this commotion, Pleader did not leave his room, nor break his silence, thus obeying his Master to the letter.

During the conversations between Baba and Gandhi on the ship Rajputana as they traveled to England, Baba spoke about His mandali including Pleader: A Parsi named Pleader has been living only on milk for the past two and a half years. He is quite healthy and happy. Not only does he live only on milk, but he is locked up in a room, not speaking with anyone and observing strict silence. He is also forbidden to read or write. Also he is continuously deprived of My company as I am always on tour from place to place. Even in Nasik I do not see him. During this period of two and a half years, I have hardly seen Pleader more than twelve times. Still, when I inquire about him, he indicates that he is happy.

* * *

After three years of the seclusion at Meherabad, Pleader was sent to Bombay, and from there sent on tour to various parts of India, contacting many saints. His one constant aim in all that he endured was the attainment of God-Realisation. Again after some period of travel, Pleader was once more with Baba at Meherabad. While there, he confronted Baba over several days, saying, 'According to Your orders, I fasted for three years, I kept silence, I remained in seclusion, but up to now You have still not given me the sight of God!' However Baba kept urging him to continue his harsh penance and austerities, although He did not give the other mandali such practices.

But one day, Pleader gave vent even more emotionally than usual to his dejection and frustration, and Beloved Baba became fed up with this attitude. He called Pendu to Him, and asked Pendu, 'How long have you been with Me?'

'Since 1922.'

'What do want from Me?'

'Nothing!'

'Then why are you with Me?'

'To serve You, to see to Your pleasure and do as You order.'

Sending Pendu away, Baba reprimanded Pleader, 'Pendu has been with Me for so many years, and you know how hard he works for Me. Still, in return, he wants nothing! You too should create that mental attitude which will bring you, unasked for, that which you desire!' Baba then sent Pleader back to Bombay after giving him certain instructions.

This was apparently not the only occasion when Pleader complained about not receiving sight of God and Realisation from Baba. Eruch described a later instance that stays vividly in mind. On this occasion Pleader in his complaint, began to pour out a litany of the incredible hardships which he had had to endure over the years, and Beloved Baba himself moved swiftly across the room, and putting His hand over Pleader's mouth, said, 'Don't destroy in a moment what you have gained over so many years!' And Pleader calmed down and kept silent.

* * *

Of the many saints with whom Pleader had contact during his journeys, one that particularly stood out for Pleader was Keshwanandji Maharaj of Rishikesh in the Himalayas. He was, as described by Baba, a sixth plane saint and His spiritual agent, and Pleader contacted him in April 1934.

Apart from his own disciples, Keshwanandji did not allow even staunch and high caste Hindus including Brahmins and Pundits, to touch him. At the crack of dawn he would bathe in the Ganges even in the depth of winter, and then clad only in a loincloth, go into samadhi facing the sun. As the sun moved so would he move, thus still facing the sun. At sunset he would open his eyes, and go begging. He always kept a wooden bamboo stick which he would swing to ward off anyone who came to touch him.

Pleader expressed his desire to a guardian disciple to meet Keshwanandji. The disciple refused to allow it, saying that Keshwanandji did not meet people in this manner. At that point Keshwanandji asked that Pleader be allowed to come to him. He asked Pleader why had he come to him. Pleader then showed the saint Baba's photo, and said, 'This is my Guru who has sent me to meet you.' At this, Keshwanandji closed his eyes for a time, then opening them, said, 'All right, be with me for six months and I will show you God.' Pleader replied, 'I am visiting you on the order of my Master, and if at all I am to see God, it will be at the hands of Meher Baba only.' Keshwanandji smiled in approval at this reply.

Some of the most ascetic Sadhus who came to listen to Keshwanandji's discourses once said to him, 'Pleader is a Parsi who has eaten meat and fish - why therefore is he allowed to touch your body, and not others?' He replied, 'Fools, do you realise Who his Master is? And what soul is Pleader? He is far ahead of you all and that is why he is allowed.'

While Pleader was in Rishikesh, the river Ganges was in full flood. 'At this time,' Pleader said, 'Keshwanandji was in a state of samadhi, and I was throwing buckets of the cold water over him. Suddenly he opened his eyes and shouted, Oh Padri (meaning Parsi) what are you doing!? Oh, all right continue to do as you please. Now this Padri will soon be God-Realized. Your Guru will be immensely pleased when He sees you now. You do not require Geeta, your Guru will make you that.'

After some years Pleader saw the saint a second time, and he said then to Pleader, 'Why have you come back? Your Guru wants to give you some big status. If He comes and puts it in the mouth then eat. Who is the mother who gave birth to such a child? She is really blessed.' During these travels he would sometimes be in Bombay. On one such occasion, he was observing silence and taking water only. He visited his family and found all three, mother, sister, and brother, in a very miserable state. His sister said that their neighbours were constantly tormenting them with remarks about him and his Master Meher Baba, and would he please make them stop this harassment somehow. He went with his sister to the neighbours and gave them a written note: Hereafter if

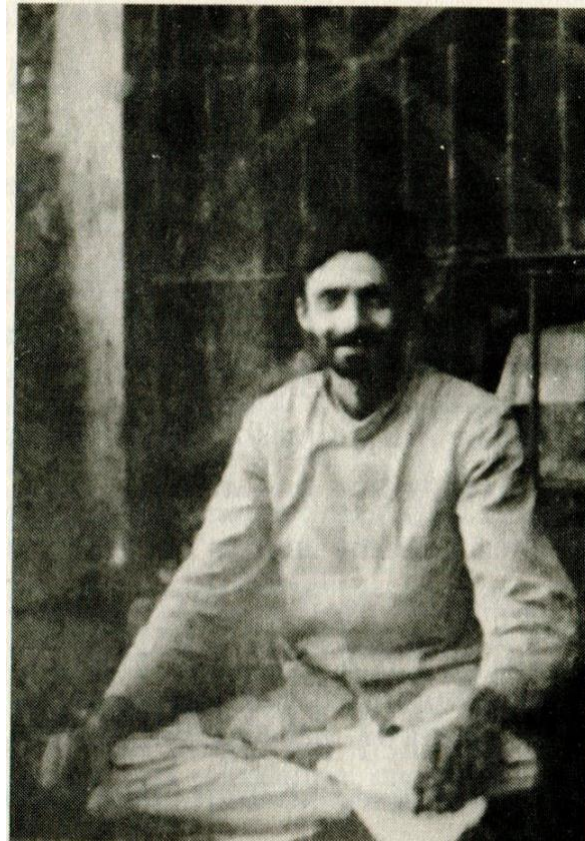
you harass my family, there will be deaths in your household.

Time passed, and Baba came to Bombay, and while there, visited Pleader's family. He did not say anything of the earlier incident, but clasping the arms of the brother and sister, walked with them past the open doors of the offending neighbours. But they did not seek His forgiveness, and continued to harass the family. A few days later, true to Pleader's curse, the husband died an untimely death. A couple of days later, the son-in-law died, and finally the young son died in a fatal road accident. All the deaths occurred within one month.

When Pleader came later to know of this happening, he came to Baba very distressed, 'What have I done!? Why did I curse them!? Why did I express myself in that way!?' But Baba consoled Pleader, 'I knew this would happen and therefore I myself walked past their door to give them the opportunity to seek forgiveness. But they were not thus destined. Your curse had to follow as you had just returned after your strict spiritual discipline (Tapashcharya).'

Pleader's tours continued, and he became so weak that he was, at one time, brought to a hospital in Bombay. But he did not recover, and when Kaka Baria visited him, he wept, so pitiful was Pleader's condition. Baba was informed and He sent a telegram that even though he had not recovered, he was to continue his tour to Kashi, near Benaras, and beg as usual for his food. However he was also now permitted to spend two annas as necessary for food. Before setting off for Kashi, he visited his mother as she breathed her last.

In July 1936 Pleader was in Bombay. He had, on Baba's orders, stayed in seclusion for a period of time in the Panchgani cave, and then in a cave on Mount Abu. Later he went on pilgrimage to Benaras and Rishikesh. In time he returned to Bombay, and there he saw Baba for the first time in many months. He came with Savak Kotwal, and Baba asked both of them to search for God-intoxicated masts, and bring them to the Rahuri ashram where He intended working with them.



Pleader before Panchgani Cave

The Ashram was opened in August 1936, and Pleader and Raosaheb were appointed supervisors, but Pleader, Kaka Baria, and Savak were also directed to travel about searching for masts and ordinary mad persons for the ashram. Among the genuine masts that Pleader brought to Rahuri was Mast Mohammed. He was brought on October 4th 1936. The ashram at Rahuri was closed in May 1937, transferred to Meherabad, and Pleader and Baidul continued to oversee the mad ashram.

In March 1938 Baba ordered Pleader to go on pilgrimage to Benaras, and remain there for eight months, begging his food along the way, and to fast for a certain period. Kaka Baria was sent with Pleader to Benaras, and he returned alone to Panchgani at the end of March and reported to Baba. Pleader returned to Meherabad in late May 1938, and resumed his duty as supervisor with Baidul of the mast and mad ashram. A few incidents involving the masts and Pleader have been recorded.

It was Baba's order that none should spit in the Ashram, and one of the masts, Lal Saheb, had a habit of spitting. After a time Pleader cautioned Lal Saheb, 'You have broken His Lordship's



Meher Baba at Panchgani

order of not spitting ten times. I may break an order once but not ten times.' Lal Saheb replied, 'Parsi Dada forgive me for that.'

Pleader said that Baba loved Mohammed Mast immensely. Once Mohammed became furious with Pleader in Baba's presence, but Baba immediately checked Mohammed by pressing his hand. In another incident, not in Baba's presence, Mohammed quarreled with Pleader and in the process spoke abusively of Baba.

Pleader asked, 'Why did you use such foul language for Baba?' Mohammed, suddenly aware, became frightened and said, 'Parsi Dada forgive me.'

There was in the Ashram a mast who would sing and dance joyously when Beloved Baba came to the Ashram in the morning. One day this mast created a disturbance and attacked another mast with his foot. Pleader became annoyed at this behaviour and twisted the mast's arm to punish him. When Baba came the next morning, the mast, contrary to his usual response to Baba's presence, was silent, withdrawn and gloomy. Baba asked Pleader the reason for this behaviour, and when he told Baba of the incident the previous day, Baba severely scolded him, saying, 'You are a butcher!'

Pleader could not bear this, and requested Baba with folded hands to relieve him of his duties, 'I beg for your permission to leave in the manner a servant asks after serving his Master for many years.' Baba gestured in surprise, 'What are you asking for!? All right, but do this last work for Me. Using the masts and mad as actors stage a performance of the play on King Gopichand.'

How could this be done? How could masts, absorbed in their love for God, become actors before an audience? How to expect the mad learn to control themselves on stage? Yet Pleader wholeheartedly agreed to this strange and extremely difficult task, and in accordance with Baba's wish, entirely devoted himself to it. Eruch and Homi were assigned to help him. Daily Pleader exhorted them to learn their lines and their roles in the play, and every morning at 5am Baba would come to see the rehearsals. A stage with floodlights and backdrop was erected at lower Meherabad for the production, and Pleader hired costumes from Poona.

On Sunday, September 25th 1938, the 'God-mad Ashram Special Program' was enacted, and lovers from Bombay, Poona, Nasik and Ahmednagar came for the unique performance. The women mandali from upper Meherabad also attended. The entire program of seven parts, including the drama 'Raja Gopichand', was enacted by the inmates of the ashram, and the audience was astonished by the high standard of their performance. Some of the audience even thought that they were professional actors.

After the program Baba embraced Pleader on the stage and said, 'Today My work is done, and on this stage of the universe I give you My embrace.' Two days later eighteen of the thirty-six inmates of the ashram were sent back to their towns and villages, and Baba explained that the play and the departure of the inmates were connected with world conditions. He said, 'All Europe is preparing for war Russia, France and England against Germany, Italy and others.'

Some time previously, Baba had indicated to Pleader that the 8th of October 1938, would be a day of special significance for His mandali, saying, 'All the sanskaras of My circle members will

be wiped off on that day. All will be free of sanskaras.' What Baba meant He alone knew. The mandali as usual continued to go about their assigned duties, and gave little thought to His unusual remark. Another interesting reference to His Circle was that Baba gave to Pleader a complete list of the Circle members duly signed by Him. When he did not find his name on the list, he queried this with Baba and He replied, 'You are not in My Circle. You are under My Will.' This list Pleader held with him until his death. After his death, Baba instructed Mani to write to Khorshed S. Irani, with whom Pleader had been staying, to return the list to Him. This was on 30th August 1960, and the list was enclosed in a special cloth bag, addressed to Baba. The bag was further enclosed in an envelope addressed to Eruch, and again in another addressed to Adi Snr. Baba Himself opened the cloth bag, removed the papers, and asked Eruch to send an acknowledgement. This was done on the 2nd September 1960.

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It is not clear about the date, but it could have been during the months of October and November 1938 that Baba instructed Pleader to again seclude himself in the Panchgani cave. Baba was in Bombay, and He told Pleader to recite a certain 'Shloka' during his stay in the cave. In giving Pleader the Shloka, Baba sent Eruch from the room, and then dictated it to Kaikhushru Afsari, with a warning to Afsari that he was not to repeat it again on pain of death.

The day before Pleader began his stay, Baba spent the night in the Cave. In the Cave during the nights he spent there, Pleader encountered snakes about forty times. They would sleep on his stomach and chest, and when they moved, he would wake up in the pitch-blackness to kill them. But in every case the snakes either disappeared or escaped before he could do so.

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On 26th November 1938 Walter Mertens arrived at Meherabad, and saw his wife Hedi after some months. A few days later, on Baba's instructions, Pleader took Walter and Hedi to

Panchgani for five days. While there, each spent a night in the Panchgani Cave.

The Blue Bus tour began on December 8th, and Pleader was told to bring Mohammed the mast, Walter, Katie Irani and two servants, Lakshmi and Bhami, to Hyderabad, where they would join Baba. While in Hyderabad, Pleader was sent to contact Mastani Mai, who; Baba said, held the key to all of Hyderabad in her hands. Baba did not go to her Himself, but instructed Pleader to tell her that He was in her city. Later Walter and Hedi were sent with Pleader to photograph her on the street where she lived. From Hyderabad Pleader was sent back to Bombay, and Baba left for Jabalpur.

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Baba revealed that Ankai, a mountain near Manmad, was surcharged with spirituality, and after the return of Papa Jessawala and Kaka Baria from inspecting some caves on the mountain, He ordered five - Papa Jessawala, Gustadji, Pleader, Bhabhanand and Savak - to stay at Ankai in the caves from July 30th 1940 for a full year. Gustadji was already in silence, and Pleader, Bhabhanand and Savak were also ordered to maintain silence. Papa (nicknamed by Baba as the Pistol) was to be their spokesman, and the four were ordered to obey him. Baba directed him to look after the others well. As the group were preparing to depart, Baba spoke seriously to Papa, 'Your austerities on the mountain will result in your spiritual progress.'

The stay on Ankai proved to have some heavy unexpected hardships for the four silent men over and above the usual ones. Papa would give them tea at 4am, lunch would be served at 7am., afternoon tea at 10am and dinner at 2pm.! If they did not get up for the 4am tea, Papa made such a loud racket that they would have to get up. All had to follow this absurd regime and none could hesitate to carry it out, nor speak in protest, since they were on silence and had been ordered by Baba to obey whatever Papa decreed. So it proved a time of doubly harsh penance, and their state was such that, if at 7am (the time fixed for lunch) someone wanted to fulfill nature's call, Papa would not tolerate

even a moment's delay, and would refuse to give them permission to leave.

Baba commented to the women about the five men during this time: Theirs is a hard test. There are no wells or proper shelter for them, and every week things have to be brought from Manmad, ten miles away. Four of them observe silence, and the one who is allowed to speak is the Pistol, and he drives them all so crazy that in their weekly report, the four wrote, 'We will keep silence for eternity and fast to death - but only if Pistol is not here!' I replied, 'Stay with Pistol and keep silence only for one year.' In a way it's good - it is discipline. It is Pistol's nature. Before he goes anywhere, he packs his luggage and is ready seven days beforehand!

On August 26th Baba directed Donkin to go to Ankai and see how the men were faring. He was to ask them whether they would prefer to stay at Ankai, or return to Meherabad. He reported that Papa said that all were happy, that he was caring for them well, and that they would of course continue to stay there until Baba Himself sent for them. The other four, silent as they were, could not tell Donkin the real facts.

Finally Gustadji was so fed up with Papa's regimen, he had Savak write a pleading letter on his behalf:

Dear Baba,

I was with Sai Baba; I was with Upasni Maharaj; I was with Babajan; and now I am with You, Meher Baba. But I have never come across a 'Master' like Papa! Affairs here have reached such a state that, either I will have to go away, or the 'Master' will have to leave. If You want to save us from this sorry situation, the only solution is to free us from the Pistol's clutches!

Gustadji

Baba was highly amused by the letter, and instructed Vishnu to call the five men back from Ankai. They returned to Meherabad on September 10th, and were accommodated in the vacant family quarters. Their orders of silence, seclusion and fast still stood, and Papa was also given silence with no longer any connection with the other four - much to their relief.

* * *

On November 1st 1940, Baba left for Bangalore by train, leaving Pleader in the family quarters still in seclusion, and still on silence. At Bangalore, Baba announced that Gustadji, Pleader, Bhabhanand and Savak were to remain in seclusion in the mountains from August 1st 1941 to February 15th 1942. In September 1941 Pleader, Gustadji and Bhabhanand were sent to continue their seclusion and orders at Mahabaleshwar. But on the 10th of September, Bhabhanand committed suicide, and, as Pleader and Gustadji were reluctant to stay at the scene of the death, Baba called them to Panchgani on September 19th.

On December 12th 1941, Baba came down Meherabad Hill at 6.45 p.m., and standing near the Dhuni site, said to Pleader, 'You will see God.'

Baba left for the Kumbha Mela at Allahabad on December 29, 1941. Ten days prior to Baba leaving, Pleader was sent there to make all necessary arrangements.

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After leaving Meherabad in the early forties, Pleader stayed at various places in Bombay as a paying guest, but wherever he was, he would go to Kharamanmasi's son Sarosh's house daily for meals. Then in his last years he had a heart attack, and was confined after that to Sarosh's place.

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Pleader did not see Beloved Baba again for nearly twelve years. About fifty close lovers, including Pleader, were called to Meherabad on the 1st of November 1952 for fifteen days, and Baba spoke to them about the up coming Fiery Free Life:

'These two weeks are of My final working, and after that will commence the Fiery Free Life. The period is so important that I had to invite the selected few to be with Me in order to take part in My preparations for the Fiery Life.

Pleader has not seen Me for about twelve years, but because of his old connection with Me, I have brought him here,

by force of internal compulsion, so that he may not miss this great chance.'

On Sunday morning November 2nd, Baba arrived in Adi's car from Meherazad. All assembled with Him in Mandali Hall, and He asked Pleader to repeat God's Name in his room for three consecutive days, 2nd 3rd and 4th of November, 9 to 11 am and 3 to 5 pm.

During a discussion in the Hall on November 4th, Baba turned to Pleader and gestured, 'Pleader has become so desperate he cries out, 'Why talk about the height of optimism or the Infinite Ocean of Love? I would be satisfied with just a spoonful of it! I do not want the Ocean!' But the fact is, if you get one spoonful, it goes very difficult to get the Ocean; that very taste would become an obstacle in your merging in the Ocean. A spoonful can be compared with the valley that lies between the sixth and the seventh planes of consciousness. In that stage, you stand facing God. You call Him, but do not get any response, and it becomes very hard to be One with God, the Infinite. So, when I give, I give the Ocean, not a drop.

In the *darbar* (court) of a Perfect Master, history repeats itself. But the beauty of it is this: that Masters enjoy equally in patience and impatience, and in faith and suspicion as well. This is their *leela*.

Again it is said that those who think they earnestly long to see God never see Him. It is so. Some think that their longing is limitless. Even accepting the above statement, it can always be said that there is always some *kasar* (deficiency) in them; for God, Who is equally in us all, is very, very eager and ready to meet us. Therefore, what is required is one hundred percent preparedness. When you come in contact with the Masters, they see that this is done. Even for this, a certain *ghadi* (moment) is fixed. Sadguru Tukaram says: 'It is of no use to be impatient, for the final opportune time is fixed.' And I think that My *ghadi*, the most opportune time, lies in April. So, let us earnestly hope that what I feel may come true, by God's Grace, to be the real *ghadi* at the end of April for us all.'

At 9 o'clock on the 5th Baba tied the sacred thread of the Zoroastrian religion around His waist, and put on a black Parsi cap, while Kaikobad read from the Avesta for half an hour, and then repeated the one hundred and one names of God. At the end, Baba gave Pleader the cap, and Kaikobad the kusti.

Later in the day Baba agreed that a circular should be distributed giving news of the death that day of Mehera's mother Daulat. While this was discussed, Pleader asked Baba, 'Baba, what is the use of getting circulars printed about those who have expired, for it is said, 'Aap mar gaye, doob gai doonya' - with our death dies the world.' This prompted Baba to quote a couplet of Kabir's: 'Discard the body, it remains; ·preserve the body, it goes. The astounding fact emerges that the corpse devours death!' Baba continued to dictate:

'People die in all sorts of ways but it is nothing to be upset about; they are born again and again in different gross bodies. But during one's lifetime, one should do whatever one honestly feels, without getting attached to actions.

Changing bodies between lifetimes is similar to changing a coat. Some die young, such as those who died at the time of the Indian partition; some live long lives. Like Gustadji, they do not change their coats frequently. (Gustadji was in the habit of wearing a tattered old coat with patches, and was reluctant to change his clothes.) But when Gustadji was with Me on the recent trip to the West, he became well-dressed and maintained a neat and clean appearance.

The masti (divinely intoxicated state) of masts neutralizes heat, cold and disease. This is an established fact. Masts do not worry about keeping their bodies healthy, yet they possess strong physiques. It is because in such cases the power of Vidnyan (Knowledge) that vibrates the universe sustains their bodies and looks after them. The infinite power of Vidnyan descends of itself to mano-bhumi (the mental planes) to help such souls. However, if the slightest thought of retaining the body or bodily strength crops up, the reception of this power stops. In a way, the mast is really dead. The same stands true for a Majzoob or Bal-unmant-

pishash (meaning a God-realized ghostlike man with childlike habits). Majzoobs have no connection with this world, and in this sense 'the corpse eats up death.' It is impossible for scientists to know about this power. They have discovered ether, electrons and protons, but they have not and cannot reach even the fringe of the subtle world.

Vedanta says, those on the gross plane live in anna-bhumi (gross plane); those on pran-bhumi (subtle plane) live in energy; those from mano-bhumi live in Akash (heaven, sky, space); and those from Vidnyan-bhumi live in the Suraj (Sun). One whose soul is united with the Oversoul lives in the Sun, Qutubs and the Avatar live in the Sun, but not the sun that you see in the sky. It is an altogether different Sun. It is the Source of infinite power, infinite bliss, beauty, sound, knowledge etc. Every attribute of the Sun is infinite. The infinite Tej (divine fire, effulgence) that exists eternally, first passes through the mental planes, and then through the subtle planes until it reaches the gross plane.

At present those who are in the subtle sphere wear clothes like you. They have their wives and children. They borrow their power from mano-bhumi (mental sphere). They can use this power either for good or bad purposes. Those in the mental sphere borrow their power from Vidnyan-bhumi (Power of God). Those on the sixth plane see God everywhere. They use their power, but it is always for the good of others. A majzoob .is after all a king.

But now let us turn to masts again. Masts are God-intoxicated souls. They have drunk the wine of love divine. They are not consciously conscious of their bodies. They do not seek to gain the power from mano-bhumi. But God, of His own accord, showers this power on them and looks after them. So Hafiz in one of His couplets has said:

'Drink deep the cup of madness
so that your worries are taken over by others.'

The power of the walis and pirs stationed on the fifth and sixth planes is very great, but they use it for the good of others. Those who eternally lead the Life of God are the Saviors of the universe and they live in the Suraj, the Divine Sun.'

After the meeting Pleader was allowed to leave for Bombay on the 15th.

At the Men's Meeting of the 29th and 30th of September 1954, Baba, standing near His tomb-shrine, gestured:

'May God one day make him (Pleader) realize that Baba is the only Reality, the Highest of the High, and all else is illusion.'

It has been recorded, although not the date, that Ravikant Rawal from Surat said to Baba: Pleader has grown a beard and become a Sadhu. Baba said to the assembly, 'None of you should become that.' At some other time, in speaking of suffering to the mandali, Baba gestured, 'I have given so much suffering to him the like of which I have not given to an enemy.' Baba repeated this two or three times, and when one asked Him of whom He was speaking, He answered, 'Pleader.'

In March 1955 Baba went to Satara, and then in April to Mahabaleshwar. On the way He stopped at Panchgani, and saw Pleader in His Tiger Valley Cave. Pleader had been staying in seclusion there for several months, and Baba instructed him to continue thus until June, when He would advise him further. It may have been on this stay that Baba directed Pleader to secretly give Rs.50 to each Sadhu.

After another very long separation, Baba called Pleader to Ashiana, where He was staying, on March 13, 1959. Baba began by inquiring about his health. Then He gestured, 'Gadekar has gone. I have relieved him.' Pleader replied, 'Baba, Buwasaheb has also gone. Gustadji too. Do I take it that I too will be relieved similarly?' Baba replied, 'Yours is a different case altogether, and that is the reason why I have called you today.' Pleader complained to Baba about a particularly vicious pain he had in the region of the kidneys.

No doctor or specialist was able to trace and cure it, and Pleader said that it was troubling him greatly. But Baba replied that this was a fraction of the infinite suffering that He was going through. 'I am suffering, but I have to embrace you all and take care of you all, working for the universe day and night.' 'Baba, why do You compare me with You?' And when Baba told him to bear

with the suffering for another four months, Pleader replied, 'Baba, if You are going to give me liberation it is alright, but otherwise please relieve me. Forgive me for the sins I have committed whilst away from You.' Baba responded, 'Do not say this. You are My heart.'

Pleader's agonizing pain continued and even increased in severity, and finally in 1960 at the age of sixty-two, he had an attack of coronary thrombosis. He was then confined to bed in a critical condition, yet he remained stoic and unconcerned in his deteriorating body. Many Baba lovers visited him, and out of feeling for his grievous state, wrote to Baba about him. Finally Kharmananmasi's grandson, Meherwan, sent a lengthy telegram to Baba, protesting that Baba did nothing to mitigate Pleader's miseries nor give him the much promised salvation. To this Baba replied by telegram: Pleader is fortunate to suffer a fraction of My infinite suffering. Meherwan replied to this that while He could plunge into infinite bliss, Pleader could not.

Baba then instructed the father, Sarosh, to bring Pleader to Him at Meherazad no matter what his condition may be. So with a number of Baba lovers, he was taken by train to Ahmednagar. On the way, as his doctor said would happen, Pleader appeared to stop breathing, yet on reaching the station he recovered. He was then taken by ambulance to Meherazad, arriving 10.30 am on February 19th 1960. He was taken to a separate room, and Dr. Goher attended to him. Beloved Baba saw the lovers who had brought Pleader, and explained, 'The disease from which Pleader is suffering is due to My wish, and it is for his own good.' And reprimanding them He continued, 'You all have been sending letters and telegram complaining of his condition - do you know that he had broken his promise by not staying with Me? Now that he has fulfilled his promise by coming to Me here, I will fulfill My promise given to him.'

Then Baba called for Aloba to give this couplet from Hafiz:

God says that I prosper My enemies and
butcher My friends!

And no one has the right to speak against it
or question why it is so!

Baba continued, 'Every one of you must have suffered in one way or another, but after being cured, the suffering becomes a dream. Are those pains and troubles still with you? No, they have faded like a dream.

What I accomplish by passing through ill health no one knows. I tolerate it eternally and derive pleasure from it. In spite of intense suffering and various pains, when pleasure is experienced, it becomes eternal bliss.

Those of My lovers who experience pain, participate in My pain.'

Baba then said that one of the group is required to stay there with Pleader. Two of the men volunteered, but Baba gestured 'no' to them. Kishore Mistry then came forward, and Baba asked about the duration of his leave from work: Kishore replied that he had taken indefinite leave, although in fact he had not been granted any leave, and had been told by his boss that if he did not report to the office the next day, then he should not come at all.

Kishore had decided to forgo his job in order to answer Baba's call. Baba expressed His concern over all this, and directed that he return to Bombay, and He gave him certain instructions to be carefully followed when he did so.

Baba kept one of the other men, Shapur Parekh, in Meherazad, and the rest returned to Bombay.

Baba would visit Pleader several times during the course of the day, pass His hand over his face, and kiss him. One day, Pleader, anguished, complained to Baba, 'Keep Your promise or stop calling Yourself God! Baba assured him, 'I will fulfill My promise before you drop the body. Don't worry.' At times Pleader would call out Baba's name. On the 21st He sent word to Padri to have a grave dug for Pleader, and saying that He would be sending Pleader to stay at Meherabad on the 24th. On the 23rd Baba called Padri and Donkin to Meherazad, and gave them instructions about Pleader.

The next day an ambulance was sent to carry Pleader to Meherabad. Before leaving, Pleader again cried out, 'Carry out Your word, Baba!' Slapping Pleader's palm with His own, Baba promised, 'Before you give up your body, I will carry out My word. Go to Meherabad where you will receive My grace. Before leaving the body, you will have a glimpse of Me as I truly am.' Baba then kissed Pleader's cheeks, his head, forehead, and hands, and passed His hand over his body in love and blessing. Baba stood by and watched as Pleader was carried to the ambulance, and he said, 'I have no pain now, Baba. Make me sleep in Meherabad.' Baba replied, 'Very soon I will make you sleep in Me, and your physical remains will be mixed with the earth of Meherabad.'

Pleader showed his gratitude, and the ambulance departed for Meherabad. There Donkin did his utmost in giving Pleader the best possible treatment and comfort. On Baba's order, Pleader was kept in a dark, cool room. At 1PM Friday the 26th, Pleader called out to Shapur, 'Put out the lantern, it is too bright in here!' Shapur said, 'It is daytime, and there is no light on in here.' But Pleader complained, 'There is a brilliant light on! It is too bright!'

Then Shapur reminded him, 'remember what Baba said about giving you His darshan? Perhaps you are seeing His lustre, His effulgence.'

Later Pleader called out, 'I have had Baba's darshan! He has kept His promise! Now stay near me until I breathe my last. After I give up the body, when Baba comes, convey my deepest gratitude - for I have achieved the Goal by His grace. Tell Him I am eternally grateful to Him.' During his last moments, it seemed as if he was enjoying infinite peace.

He passed away at 6.45PM.

On the 27th Baba came to Meherabad, and watched as Pleader's body was placed in a casket and lowered into the grave that Padri had kept ready. At the signal from Baba, Kaikobad said prayers, and Baba was the first to scatter flowers on the coffin. Baba remarked to His brother Jal, 'How fortunate he is that he got liberation.'

On the same day, as Kishore was awaiting the train to Bombay on the Ahmednagar Railway Station platform, he was given a letter from Eruch. This contained Baba's instructions to Kishore: he was to read the letter and acknowledge it on return to Bombay.

Kishore was to also see that various Baba lovers (named) in Bombay read the letter, and acknowledged that they had done so. He was also to tell all concerned of Pleader's stay in Meherazad and Meherabad, what Pleader had said before he died and of Baba's visit to Meherabad on that day. This was to clear all doubts in the minds of Bombay Baba lovers about the fulfillment of Baba's promise to Pleader.

Sarosh and Viloo Irani

Viloo

I married Sarosh in March 1927, and it was only after marriage that he told me that he had a spiritual Master, and One who he believed to be God. I said at the time, 'I believe that there is a God, but not that anyone is God.' 'Well, I want you to meet Him.' I agreed to do so, and afterwards seeing Meher Baba, I said to him, 'I accept that He is your God, and I respect Him for your sake, but I do not believe in Him.' Sarosh accepted this, saying, 'All right, do as you please.'

Thereafter, whatever Baba asked me to do for Him, I would do because Sarosh wanted me to obey Him. When Baba would come to our house, as He would do so from time to time, and sometimes have a meal with us, I would say to Him, 'Baba, I don't love You as God.' And Baba would answer, 'Never mind, one day you will love Me,' and I would just agree. But I was very bad, because when I wanted something, I would then tell Baba, 'I love You, You know.' And Beloved Baba would reply, 'Yes, I know very well that you want something from Me, that's why you love Me now.' Then He might say, 'Sarosh is so good. I love Sarosh so much, but you are no good.' 'It is not my fault. You never prepared me to love You.' Like this, life went for years and years.

At times for a few months I might feel love and respect for Him, even as God. Then I would change and say to Sarosh, 'No, no Sarosh, He is not God. He is just an extra-ordinary human being.' Sarosh never forced me in my beliefs in any way. But I was not stable in my beliefs, sometimes loving Baba and sometimes not. Even when I saw many miraculous things happen in connection with Baba, I would dismiss them as perhaps coincidences.

The main thing was that I was aware of Sarosh's deep love for Baba, and I wanted him to be happy and contented in the home, so I always respected Baba, and respected His wishes. Baba was certainly central in our life together. If we quarreled, then we would go to Him, I would complain to Him of Sarosh, and Baba

would always take my side - and we would then return home happily. Beloved Baba would listen so patiently to all our complaints.

There was one particular occasion that I had reason to remember frequently in later years. I was really upset with Sarosh, and I carried my grievance to Baba. I told Him in plain words that Sarosh does not think of his family, he has no concern for our well-being, he is in fact almost bankrupt because of his generosity, and so on. Baba stopped me in full flow and said, 'But you know he is a wonderful man, and has a wonderful heart.' With this I replied, 'Baba that is all very well - but who is going to look after me?!' Beloved Baba looked at me and said, 'I will.' That is exactly what happened in later years. Sarosh died in the early seventies heavily in debt, and yet by His Grace I was able to repay all debts, and continue to live comfortably.

To return to those early days, years passed by in this fashion. Then in 1963 Baba called me, and asked that we be His representatives at the annual 'Meher Baba Mela' or 'Fair' at the site of Meher Dham in Nauranga. In my mind I liked the idea of going to a new place, and I agreed, but I was not in the least interested in seeing His statue at Meher Dham. Baba then called Sarosh and asked him to accompany me there. Baba warned me not to pay attention to the poverty, lack of cleanliness, illiteracy and manners of the poor villagers of the general district of Hamipur, but to see only the richness of their love for Him. I replied, 'Baba, I don't mind all that as long as I get plenty of water for bathing.' Baba embraced us both and said, 'This embrace of Mine will reach thousands through you.' Little did we realize the depth of these words.

Although I was apprehensive about the accommodation in Nauranga, on arrival we were given a grand reception and showered with lavish hospitality. The unique atmosphere of love for Baba that continued over the time absolutely overwhelmed us, and particularly so on the last day. On this day every one of the villagers wanted to embrace us, and two long queues were formed, Sarosh embracing the men, and myself the women.

Now I had never liked being hugged and kissed by

people, and now much more so by dirty ragged villagers. Normally the very thought of actually embracing such people would have horrified me, yet as I did so I found that I felt no repugnance at all, no matter their condition. Nothing at all - and such was the intensity of their love for Beloved Baba expressed by them that I began to weep, and I wept for four hours as I embraced those thousands of people. Sarosh too wept. I had never in my life witnessed such love, and I remembered Baba's words with His parting embrace, and I felt in those hours an awakened love for Him, and a deep conviction of His divinity. I told Sarosh this, and he said, 'I don't believe you, because I know that in three or four months you'll say I don't believe.' But I reassured him that this time it was different.

While the journey to Nauranga had gone smoothly with beautiful weather, the return to Ahmednagar was the opposite - bad weather, engine trouble, flat tires, and poor accommodations. When we reported to Baba after our return, I said to Him, 'Baba You really are 'Something', and You must forgive me for all the years 1927 until now believing in You and then not believing. Now my love for You is firm and stable.' Baba replied, 'Yes, I think this time you will not go back on your word.' And I said again, 'Yes Baba this time I won't go back.' Then I told Him, 'You took us in great comfort because You wanted us to go for Your work, but on the return journey You did not bother about us, because Your work had been accomplished.'

About a year after this, Sarosh became seriously ill, and while the doctors emphasized the seriousness, Baba assured me, 'Don't worry, nothing is going to happen to him.' And I was reassured and at peace with Baba's words, despite the continued concern of the doctors. Then around midnight in the hospital, Sarosh said to me, 'Now I am dying. So I want to make my will.' Having faith in Baba's words, I said, 'You are not going to die, but if you want to, then make your will.' We had a nice verbal fight, with Sarosh serious, and me refusing to take him so. Then I received a telegram from Baba, again telling me not to worry, that nothing will happen to Sarosh. In time Sarosh was able to return home, and although he would go with me to the office, he was still

not well. When we went to Baba, Sarosh would walk straight and try to look and act normally. But at other times he would be different.

After some time, Baba gave me, by the hand of Dr. Goher, two thousand rupees, and told me to take Sarosh to Bombay, and have him again medically examined. It was found that he needed a third operation, a very difficult one. When I continued to be unconcerned, the doctor remonstrated with me, 'This is not a picnic, it is a very dangerous operation.' But my Baba had given me courage, and I was not nervous. The operation was successful, and slowly, slowly Sarosh recovered - and amazingly back to such a condition that the doctors regarded it as a miracle.

* * *

Sarosh

In 1922 I returned to Ahmednagar from Panchgani after my matriculation examination. I was asked to bring my aunt Gulmai, Adi's mother, with me from Poona which was on the way. Our train was at midnight, so after dinner she said, 'We have so much time, would you mind if we go to meet a certain person?' I had no objection, and we journeyed in a tonga with Gulmai giving directions. When we stopped, there were no buildings, nothing, but at a distance I could see a small hut, and about twelve people sitting around a fire. One person was playing the dholak and singing a ghazal. Gulmai went to the group and after awhile returned to say I should go and meet the gentleman. So I agreed, went with Gulmai, folded my hands to him, sat down, and watched for a time Merwan, as he was known then, playing and singing. He had long hair, and wore a long black coat. He asked me my name, that was all, and after a while we again folded our hands to him, and departed. I did not ask Gulmai who he was, nor any questions regarding him. Much later, after I had joined Baba, she told me that Baba had asked at the time who was the person in the tonga, and when she replied lightly that he was only her nephew, Baba had said emphatically to call him, saying, 'I want to meet him. I have a lot of work for him later on in the world.'

Four or five days after this meeting in the dark, I learnt that Baba had come to Nagar, and thinking I should see Him now in the daytime, I went to Gulmai's house to do so. He was seated with Gulmai, her husband, and their sons Adi and Rustom. After a while Baba asked me what I intended doing now. I replied, 'If I pass my matriculation, I will go to college and then join some business or other, as all adults do.' For a moment He paused and then said, 'Give up everything and come to Me. I will make you a king.' As I sat there stunned and wondering with these words, Rustom greatly encouraged me to accept Baba, saying, 'Don't hesitate Sarosh, you go!' So I told Baba, 'All right, I'll come.' Then Baba told me to come to Him in Poona when I received His telegram. It came after three days, and I joined Him.

He directed me to stay at a hotel, and each evening I would go to Him at Sadashiv Patel's house at Kasba Peth. The ground floor of the house was a toddy shop, and Baba and the mandali gathered on the first floor. With me He was always very kind, but He was not always so with the others. Then He directed me to take up automobile engineering, which I did, and at the same time I was to go to Him each afternoon. After a while, He told me, 'Sarosh, you have a lot of pimples on your face. It would be good to give up eating meat.' This I did. Again, after a few days, He said it would be good to also give up eggs, and again I did so. Thus gradually, tactfully, as a young boy just out of school, He guided me on a spiritual path. I did my studies from morning to afternoon, and then, with great enjoyment and happiness for both heart and mind, I would be with Baba. This lasted for some months, and then Baba announced that He was going to Bombay for a year, and that those who wanted to go with Him, had to sign an agreement to stay with Him. I had already given Him an undertaking, so I just accepted this new arrangement, and signed.

Before we left, Baba announced that we would walk to Bombay and called for another agreement. In this we absolved Baba of all responsibility if, on the way, tigers ate us, or if we had any other accident or calamity. Now by this time, I could definitely say I loved Baba, but I could not say He was God. We stayed in a house in Bombay named Manzil-E-Meem, the House of the



Sarosh behind Baba, Meherji Karkaria before Baba

Master. There He gave us special orders and ordinary ones, three pages of them, and to stay with Him, we had to obey them all. The nature of those orders are in books. Baba was very, very strong and strict, perhaps beating us for some little provocation or failure in obeying. As the months went by, life with Him became more and more difficult to bear, and the question often in the mind was whether to stay or go. I had given Him an undertaking, and that made me stay - but it didn't stop me saying to my companion Adi Snr., 'This is so tough, so very very difficult to pull on, and I'm fed up!' Adi would then tell Baba this in the course of the day, and in the evening when I returned from my automotive studies, I would find my bedroll and suitcase outside on the verandah. I would go immediately to Baba, and He would say, 'So you don't like it here, then go away!' I replied honestly, 'Baba, I don't like it yes, but I have given You a contract so I'll fulfill that contract for the one year.' Then He would embrace me, and my bedding and suitcase

would be brought back inside again. At times when Baba was very excited, and the atmosphere was very tense, I would be the only one with the courage to speak out, 'Baba, pardon us, we are wrong and very sorry.' Then He would calm down.

One day Baba said that we must observe a fast, no water, no food until the evening, and also to bring a number of beggars to the house. After these beggars were fed, then we ate. Baba then asked me to purchase four bottles of rose syrup from the bazaar, and these were added to clean buckets of iced water. Baba was about to distribute a glass of this cold sweet rose water syrup to everyone, when someone said something that annoyed Him, and He ordered me to throw all the syrup into the gutter. This I did. After a while He calmed down, again the syrup drink was prepared and this time it was distributed. As I have said Baba in that period was quite different from His behavior in later periods. Yes, we did obey His orders and accept the severe reprimands and beatings, and yet we knew we were only able to do so because of His love for us.

After a darshan program one Sunday when many people of all ages came to see Baba, I was not able to sleep with all sorts of thoughts, even thoughts of Baba. Much as I tried to shake off these thoughts especially of Baba, and even slapping myself for such thoughts, they persisted. I was very restless. About one or two o'clock in the morning, there was a knock on the door and Padri said, 'Sarosh, Baba wants you upstairs.' I went up, and Baba made me sit next to Him. He said, 'You cannot sleep?' 'Yes Baba I am disturbed, and cannot sleep.' Then Baba said, 'Sarosh, don't worry, you always have thoughts because you are a human being. You will get good thoughts, bad thoughts, you will get thoughts of Me also, but always bear in mind that I am very pure, and My love for you is very, very pure.' I immediately banged my head on the floor because of my guilt for having such thoughts for Him. He had me sleep on His lap for some time, and then He sent me back, and I had a good sleep.

As mentioned earlier I had a lot of facial pimples that made me very self-conscious and awkward with people. One fine morning Baba said to me, 'You have a lot of pimples. I will get rid

of them for you.' He made me lie down on His lap, and He actually sucked those pimples. This he did everyday over a few days and all the pimples disappeared. That for me was a miracle.

Now the tension was so great at times in Manzil-E-Meem that where possible I would use any excuse to be away from the house; for example, spend Sunday, when there were no studies for me, trying to sell Upasni Maharaj's biography. So one day when Baba with some of the mandali departed for a few days, I stayed back with the rest of the men. Baba determined the food menu for us, the amount of money needed, every detail was set down, but He gave some of us some small latitude. With me, for example, He said I could visit my mother and sister before returning from my studies in the evening.

Now one of the mandali had installed an electric motor pump, and while Baba was away, the owner of the pump sent a message that he thought the alignment of the pump was out, so an engineer should be sent, and he would pay for the service. The mandali member assured me that the alignment was actually right, but that I should pretend I was an engineer, and that he and I go there, and collect the fee for the service. This we did and after checking the pump, I assured the owner that everything was in order.

He paid me the train fares, plus ten rupees, and we returned very happily to Manzil-E-Meem. All the mandali who had stayed back, then gathered to discuss what should be done with the money. It was jointly decided to purchase special food and sweets and have a really good meal. And this we did.

When Baba returned He was in poor health having suffered severe diarrhea for several days, and He was in a fiery mood. After greeting Him, those of us, including myself, who had duty outside departed. On my return in the evening, my bedding and suitcase were again on the verandah. I was puzzled, not having complained recently, and I went to Baba. Baba was extremely irritated and said, 'Go away, and I am not pardoning you this time!

While I was away you enjoyed sweets without My permission! Because of breaking My order, My health suffered, and I have had

diarrhea for days. Is this how you love Me?' Much as I apologized and pleaded, Baba remained adamant, I had to go. Then I suddenly thought that if I had to go, so should the other mandali who shared the food with me, who had in fact decided that the food should be purchased. This I then told Baba, and He called them all to Him. 'Is what Sarosh says true? You all agreed to purchase food and had the feast?' And when they all admitted their participation, He then roasted them as He had me. After a while He calmed down, forgave us all, and again my belongings were brought back inside.

One of the general orders for the ashram was not to read or write or talk with anyone outside the ashram. Casual conversation at a chance meeting with an old friend was even prohibited. One evening on my way back to the Manzil, I saw an old acquaintance on the train. We had been at school together, and he greeted me with a welcoming smile. But, in obedience to Baba's order, I turned away to avoid conversation. The man approached me again, 'Sarosh, what's matter with you? Don't you recognize me?' I felt extremely embarrassed, but kept quiet, hoping the situation would soon pass. But the man persisted, and after more pleading to respond to him, he finally concluded that I had gone mad. Distressed, and in great pity for me, he told the other passengers that his old friend had gone insane!

Back at the ashram, I told Baba of the whole incident, and He instructed me to write to the man and invite him to visit. Sometime later he did so, and was greatly relieved to know that I was actually my normal self. He was permitted to visit on a few occasions, and thus had Beloved Baba's darshan. That was a happy outcome of that episode.

As I have said, Baba could be very excitable during this period of Manzil-E-Meem. We used to be very afraid of Him at times - you could say, we loved and were afraid of Him at the same time. In one period Baba had Ramjoo, Ghani and Adi immediately sit before Him, whenever He sat down. If anyone of them displeased Him, and he was dismissed, then I had to take his place. When this happened I inwardly cursed the one who had to go, because you have no idea what an ordeal it was to sit thus before

Baba. You never knew when He would suddenly ask 'What are you thinking?' and you had to answer. Sometimes He would slap you, sometimes fall at your feet. You would have at times no idea of the reason for His behavior. For example, for some unknown reason, He became furious with everyone, and declared He was going to Sakori alone. As He began walking we followed according to His general orders, and when He ordered us to go back, we obeyed His first order. Baba looked around again, and again said, 'Don't follow Me. Go back to the Manzil.' But they continued to follow Him. This time He lovingly said, 'All right. We will all go back.'

But we persisted because of His Love, and in the process we stayed together as one big united family, gradually overcoming differences of caste, creed, religion and personal traits.

After Manzil-E-Meem, and then a journey to Karachi and Quetta with Baba, I settled back in Ahmednagar. I had asked Baba to 'put me in the world', and one day I received a telegram, 'Start automobile business in Ahmednagar.' This I did with just five hundred rupees from my father and uncle, Adi Snr's father, and by His grace I can boldly and happily say that He did make me, as he had promised, a king. Baba was my guide in all aspects of my life, and He made me successful in business, in my political and social life, and in my marriage too. At every stage I would ask Baba what should I do, and I would never say 'no' to Him. And whatever He asked of me, I would do willingly, irrespective of result, saying, 'I do this for You Baba.'

In sending me into the world He gave me only two orders, one, to always love Baba as God, love and obey Him, and two, have nothing to do with any woman other than my wife. These I willingly and happily accepted, although I was not married at the time. Later Baba asked me if I wanted to marry, and after I said 'yes', asked if I had a girl in mind. I named her, and Baba said, 'You will not marry her, but try your utmost to do so. I will get you a 'good wife.' This is of course what happened - I did my best, but was unable to marry the girl. As mentioned earlier I married Viloo, and she is certainly the 'good wife' that Beloved Baba had said He would give me. And too by His grace, we have had three children.

In the 1930's Baba made Nasik His principal dwelling place, and because I did not go to Nasik, I almost lost contact with Him. Then after some years he returned to Meherabad, and He began to call me to Him at 3 pm every day. I sat with the mandali, and Baba would talk with everyone except myself. He just completely ignored me.

This went on days and days, and each day after about two hours he would signal me to go. I began to feel very upset and distraught, until one day, Baba addressed me, 'What's wrong with you? You look very upset.' 'Yes Baba, I am. Every afternoon You call me, but You don't talk to me, You completely ignore me.' Baba said, 'And you are feeling this neglect very much?' 'Yes Baba, I am.' Then Baba looked at me, saying, 'Now you will understand how I felt all those years in Nasik when you never came to see Me.' I was shattered, and I fell at His feet, begging forgiveness. 'Baba, I am really very sorry. Forgive me.' Then Baba said, 'Pay heed Sarosh, however much you may want to get rid of Me, neither can you do so, nor can I get rid of you! If you don't believe Me, open up your breast and see.'

This I did, and there on my naked chest was Baba's image. At this, overcome, I dashed my head on the floor before Him, and blood came out. Then He took my head in His lap, and consoled me.

This made me very bold in His Love, and I would do even more fervently anything He asked of me. I say again, by His Grace, my life has been a happy and successful one. At every moment I have turned to Him to guide me, and He has always done so.

(Sarosh died in the early 1970's, and it was noted that hundreds of very poor people crowded into Krushoo Quarters at his funeral service. When questioned various ones said that they wished to acknowledge Sarosh's unfailing generosity over the years in the times of their financial need, and the feelings that they displayed in speaking of him showed the very high regard they had for him.).

A Pot-pourri of Stories, Memories and Talks.

Eruch tells a story.

After the great Mahabharata war and Lord Krishna had returned to the Pandavas, He found Arjuna to have become somewhat egotistical. He had begun to believe that he was the most loved one of Lord Krishna, and that it was because of him that Lord Krishna had joined the Pandavas, and thus the war had been won. In short, he held that Krishna loved him the most, and that he loved Krishna the most.

Krishna did of course really love Arjuna, and therefore He was distressed that Arjuna should be thinking and feeling thus, and this story, heard by me in my childhood, illustrates so beautifully the ways of the God-Man. One morning Krishna takes Arjuna for a walk, and as they did so, they perceived something in a nearby field. It appeared to be some creature grazing. Krishna turned towards it accompanied by Arjuna, and as they came closer, the object became an old man bending over, apparently looking for something on the ground. He seemed a simple person, old, but with a long naked sword tied around his waist. When they came to him, they asked what was he doing, and he replied that he was looking for food.

'Food?!' said Arjuna, 'What sort of food can you find here on this earth? There is only dried grass, nothing more.' 'Yes, that is what I seek, dried grass, because I do not wish to hurt any living creature, or even green living vegetation. So I seek dried food.' But Arjuna then asked, 'If, as you say, you do not wish to harm any creature, why do you carry a sword with you?' 'Oh,' he replied, 'I have a long-standing grudge against some of the lovers, the so-called lovers of Lord Krishna, and particularly against certain ones.' Now that is a part of the divine game, that the God-man remains incognito when He wishes, and so the old man did not know that the Lord was before him. Nor did he know Arjuna by sight.

Arjuna became very interested and intrigued with these words, and asked who are these persons. 'Oh, what have such matters to do with you? Go your way.' 'No, we are very interested,

said Arjuna, 'we would like to know who these persons are.' So the old man said, 'I am a lover of Lord Krishna. He is my Beloved God, and I abhor the idea of persons who hold themselves as lovers of Him, and yet are a pain in the neck for my Beloved Lord.' 'What do you mean by that?' 'Have you heard of Radha?' 'Yes, we have heard of Radha. She is a great lover of Lord Krishna, and indeed is the beloved of the Beloved.' The old man as it were snorted at this, 'Oh, you don't know what pain that woman has given to my Beloved Lord! Had she really loved Krishna even a wee bit, she would not have given Him such pain.'

(There are many stories of the pain that the Lord suffered because of Radha's love for Him, but let us give just one here.)

Radha, a married woman, came from her home to visit Krishna, and He was as always delighted to have her with Him in His palace. He directed the queens and maids of the palace to care for her every wish. But there were among His close women-folk, some who were jealous of Radha, being the obvious favourite among His lovers. So it is said that the hot milk given to Radha as she retired to bed, was so hot that it burnt her mouth and throat. However, absorbed as she was in the thought of her Lord, she drank it all, unaware of its heat and unaffected by it.

But at the same time, it so happened that one of Krishna's queens was pressing His feet, and she suddenly noticed some blisters on them. 'Lord, some blisters are on Your feet. How have You burnt them?' 'Yes, it happened just now, because Radha, who holds My feet in her heart as most precious, was given some scalding hot milk to drink, and so the blisters came on My feet.'

Then the old man turned from Radha, and spoke of another of His lovers who regarded himself as a great lover, 'Have you heard of Arjuna?' Arjuna kept quiet, merely saying, 'Yes, we have heard of him - but what of it?' 'Do you know, he calls himself a great lover of Lord Krishna, yet he made Him his charioteer, and thus repeatedly bruised His delicate temples.'

How did this come about?

The charioteer sat below the warrior, protected from the

enemy, and guided the horses according to the directions of the warrior sitting or standing above the charioteer. These directions were given by the warrior pressing his two toes to the temples of the charioteer, thus guiding the chariot this way and that as needed. So Krishna, in condescending to be Arjuna's charioteer in the long terrible war of the Mahabhararra, suffered greatly in the constant bruising of His temples.

The old man finished by saying, 'That is why I carry this sword. If I were to meet Arjuna and Radha, I would surely kill them - even though I do not wish to harm any living creature, yet such so-called lovers of the Lord have given Him so much pain that they deserve this punishment.'

Thus did the Lord bring home to Arjuna the folly of thinking he was one of the greatest, even the greatest lover of His.

* * *

Sam tells some stories.

Baba was staying in Guruprasad, and at this time, Mehru was assisting in the cooking. Thinking that Baba's food seemed bland and colourless, she put into the rice and dhal some whole, red chillies. Baba was upset on seeing His food, and called Mehru. 'You know that I am not taking spicy food, how is it that you have put these chillies in the dhal?' 'Baba, You see they are whole chillies - I did not slice them so that the pungency of them would not seep through the dhal. But they would give some fragrance and colour. And in any case, Baba, these red chillies are what you might call synthetic chillies.' Baba then turned to the mandali and said, 'I am the Creator of the creation. I have been running the creation since time immemorial, and only now do I learn that I have also produced synthetic chillies!'

* * *

The secrets of the Spiritual Path are not revealed to us by God because we would not really know how to understand them, nor even appreciate them. There is a beautiful story told by Jalalul-Din Rumi that illustrates this.

There was a poor woodcutter who earned his livelihood by gathering firewood in the forest and selling it in the market. Because of his constant work in the forest, in the course of time he became very friendly with a monkey. They would both share the woodcutter's food of chappati and vegetables, and in return the monkey would share with him the fruits of the forest. This continued over time, and both were very happy in their friendship. Then one day the woodcutter found in the forest a beautiful diamond bracelet, and thinking it could be valuable, he went immediately to the city, and finding a jeweler, he was paid a fantastic price for it. Overnight he had become a very wealthy man, and he built a huge home and garden with all manner of luxuries, and naturally no longer went to the forest to cut wood.

Some months passed, and his friend the monkey came to him, saying, 'Friend, why don't you come to the forest and be with me any more?' 'I'm sorry but I have no need to come. I am now a very rich man.' The monkey wept on hearing this, and said, 'You were the only friend I had in the forest. Now I am alone, without shelter, and often without the food you brought with you, I have so little to eat. I am starving.' This touched the heart of the simple man, and taking the monkey with him to a lawyer, he transferred the entire estate to the monkey.

Overnight he became again a very poor man, and the monkey very rich. So the woodcutter returned to the forest to begin again his old profession. After some months he noticed that the monkey no longer came to join him. So he went to him in his great home, and asked, 'Friend, what is wrong? You no longer come to the forest to be with me.' The monkey raised his snout and replied, 'I never associate with fools.'

* * *

A young, handsome well-educated man was one day enjoying a cup of coffee at a sidewalk cafe, when he suddenly saw a young woman of extra-ordinary beauty. That first glance was sufficient for him to fall deeply in love with her. Realizing that she might the next moment disappear, and that he must therefore

move swiftly, he boldly approached her, saying, 'With my very first glance of you, I have fallen so very deeply in love with you, that I know that I cannot live without you for a second. Without you, even death would be better than life. I beg you to accept me as your lover and husband.'

The young woman quietly looked at him, and said, 'Yes, I find you too very handsome, and of good character and disposition. I see no reason why I should not accept your proposal. But there is however this one condition - never, ever set eyes on my sister. She is so very beautiful, that compared to her, I am but an ugly duckling. If this condition is acceptable to you, then I am willing to marry you.' The man replied, 'Where is this sister of yours?' 'She is standing now right behind you.' As the man turned around, the young woman gave him a resounding slap, and said, 'A moment ago you were swearing eternal love, that you could not live without me for an even a second, and the very next moment you turn to look at another woman! Your professed over-whelming love should make you forget everything except me. Go away you hypocrite! I have no time for such love as yours.'

Thus if you want Beloved Avatar Meher Baba, then you must have total concentration on that one and only Goal.

* * *

It was the hour for the Friday afternoon prayers, and the believers began entering the mosque. One put his sandals in his pocket, before entering and offering his prayers.

Another left his sandals outside, and then entered to say his prayers. After the prayers, a crowd sat discussing the behavior of the two, and the disposal of their sandals. Some said that the first man took his sandals with him so that if someone were tempted to steal them, they would not be able to do so. Thus saving an individual from committing a grievous sin.

Others held the theory that the one who left his sandals outside did so, in order that anyone being tempted to steal them could use his discretion and overcome his evil temptation, and gain merit in the eyes of Allah.

A wise old man present there told the congregation, 'Whilst you were absorbed discussing the hypothetical behavior of the two, a third man entered the mosque who had no shoes at all. Quietly he offered his prayers with all his heart and love for his Beloved Allah, and then left. His prayers were not only accepted by Allah, but he also gained the pleasure of the Beloved too. Be it noted well that the prayers of none of you were even heeded, let alone accepted by Him.

* * *

Dr. T. V Swamy's story

This is a simple story but one of the many that is so typical of the seemingly casual and natural way that Beloved Baba's Love brings His lovers to Him.

I graduated B.Sc. (Agriculture) from Madras University in 1944, (later obtaining my Ph.D.) and between then and 1953 I held various agricultural positions, mostly in the State of Andhra Pradesh ..

Towards the end of February 1953 I became very sick with Amebiasis due to the contaminated water drunk during my frequent travel on official duties in country areas. Despite the best treatment available at the time, I continued to lose weight and became anemic. My wife and I were both brought up to be devoted to God, and to the observance of spiritual practices and rituals. Now my deteriorating physical condition and mental agony made me turn more and more earnestly to God, entrusting Him wholeheartedly with my recovery. My father-in-law encouraged me to read the lives and teachings of Masters such as Ramakrishna and Vivekananda.

In the midst of this intense illness, I read in a newspaper that Avatar Meher Baba was visiting Andhra Pradesh, and this first sight of His beloved Name produced unexpectedly profound inner thoughts and feelings. Around the same time my wife returned in great excitement from a visit to my uncle Satyanarayana Swamy. She told me, 'I had the good fortune to have the darshan of Meher Baba in the company of your uncle who is a Meher Baba lover. He

is also a close friend of Dr. Dhanapathi Rao, 'the grand old man of Andhra Pradesh' as described by Beloved Baba, because of his work in bringing so many souls to Him. There were thousands for His darshan, and He gave prasad with such Love. I was so fortunate.'

While I rejoiced in her good fortune, it also intensified my anxiety to see Him too.

A little later I visited another of my uncles, and found him surrounded with many spiritual books. I felt a strong urge to go through them, and on doing so, to my immense joy I found 'The Perfect Master' an early biography of Beloved Baba. It was for me another answer to my over-whelming desire to know more about Him. And, of course, reading it over and over, made me more and more long to see Him. But after some days of this absorption in my feelings for Him, I felt that I should set aside this yearning and concentrate on my official duties. Accordingly I took my bicycle to the repair shop for servicing before setting out to visit the surrounding farmer's fields. It was about 5 pm and I over-heard the two young men in the shop chatting with each other.

'I've learnt that Avatar Meher Baba is giving darshan in our area - would you like to come with me?'

'Oh, yes, I would love to join you - let's go!'

So on questioning them, I found that He would be at Alamuru at 7 am the next morning, a distance of some 20 kms., and that He would be giving darshan in Shanti Theatre Hall.

I fell asleep that night thinking with such joy of the longed-for darshan of Meher Baba the next morning. I rose at 4AM took my bath and set out on my bicycle for Alamuru, arriving at 6.45 AM. The Hall was already packed with hundreds of people, and I was forced to stand away to the back of the Hall. Baba was distinctly visible, and mentally I had the intense feeling of bowing down to His feet. At the same time I noticed a man near Baba that resembled an old friend. So I went outside and to the back of the stage, and waited in hope that I might see him. Sure enough he did come out, and he did prove to be an old friend, Kutumb Sastri. He greeted me warmly, and immediately said, 'Come I will introduce you to Baba.'

Thus I came before my Beloved Baba. As I was being introduced, I tried to kneel down and touch His feet, but Baba quickly held my cheeks with both His hands, and then put flowers into my hands. As He withdrew His hands from my cheeks, I felt, as it were, a shock of electrical power pass through my body. The whole time I was also mesmerized by the beautiful glow of His face, and indeed it seemed, His whole body.

My return journey was in a state of suspended trance and tranquillity, with the bicycle, as it were, floating along in the air. And on reaching home I lay for several hours again in a dream-like state. Within a week I had recovered from my long illness, and within three weeks I was promoted to a senior agricultural post. Thus was I blessed by my Beloved Meher Baba, and from then on, my life has been a story of delights, successes and trials with His loving guidance and compassion.

* * *

Sam Kerawala gives some small Vignettes of life with Meher Baba.

During the 1950's Beloved Baba stayed at Ganeshkind Gardens on His visits to Poona. The Gardens were huge - more than two miles square - and my brother Dadi was the Superintendent in charge of all plant experimentation. He had a very fine bungalow, and Baba would stay there whilst in Poona. My mother Banumasi, Roshan and Dadi would be instructed to stay at Bindra House, but sometimes I would be permitted to sleep at the Gardens. When one entered the house from a very long verandah, there was first a large hall, and for Baba's stay, this was divided into two parts. On one side was exclusively for Baba with an attached bathroom and toilet; the other side was for Mehera and Mani. The other women occupied rooms further into the house.

On this particular occasion the women were not there, only Baba, Eruch and myself, and the maid servant was on the verandah. Baba came into the big hall, washed His hands and sat on the portable potty. I was standing outside on the verandah, and Eruch called me inside, and asked me to call for the servant to

come and clean the potty. At that moment in my heart I fervently wished to do that myself, and I looked at Baba. He gestured that I should do it. I very happily took the potty to the outside toilet, washed it thoroughly, and then replaced it in the commode and washed my hands. As I was washing my hands, Baba clapped for me, and gestured that I should clean His glass. I took it to the wash basin, and while thinking of all the possible germs that could be in the water, thoroughly washed the glass and accepted that that was all I could do. I put the glass on His table, and He asked if I had cleaned it properly. I said yes, not mentioning my thoughts. He expressed His happiness with my labors, and I stayed with Him enjoying some informal chit-chat.

While Baba and the women stayed in Dadi's house, the men mandali stayed with the Assistant Superintendent in his bungalow. He was a bachelor and very happy to have the company and all meals etc. provided for him. It was there that the Lord held His darbar, and He used the chair that my father had made. In a small room of that house Dadi stored all the mangoes to ripen. They were big, beautiful mangoes. Baba's chair was right in front of the door of that room, but I, sitting somewhat to the side, would go quickly behind Baba, seize a mango, eat swiftly and return. I did this two or three times, managing to return by the time Baba had noticed and questioned my absence. But then Baba suddenly asked, 'What's going on?' 'Baba, there are mangoes in the room.'

'Each time you go behind Me, you eat a mango?! Then He told me to count the number of mangoes, wash them and distribute one to each man.

At lunchtime Baba would be seated on the chair, and He would serve the food which had come from Bindra House to each man. I remember on one occasion looking up and finding Baba's eyes upon me. Baba gestured, 'Enough?' and I answered that yes Baba he was full.

For the marriage ceremony of Roshan and myself, Gaimai asked me to bring from overseas the best food ingredients available, and these were then given to the priest for the preparation of the feasts. However, unbeknown to the family, the

priest's daughter was also being married at the same time, and he used those best ingredients for her wedding, and inferior material for our wedding feast. The family was upset, feeling that the food given their guests, particularly the mandali, was not up to standard. However when Baba asked the mandali, 'How was it?' they replied that the food was excellent. The family therefore did not pursue the matter, dropping any thoughts of grievance towards the priest.

However, much after the wedding was over, Jalbai (Baba's brother) complained that the food had been inferior, and that Jal Dorabji's offer to prepare the food should have been accepted by Gaimai, instead of giving the task to the priest. It would then have been first class. I thought of speaking in defense, but then thinking that as Jalbai was Baba's brother, I should be silent, and so said nothing. Immediately Baba turned to me, and asked for full details of the matter, and I therefore recounted the full details of the matter. But at the finish Baba just said, 'It is over - so why now stir it up?' And that was the end of the matter.

It was the latter months of 1967 and Beloved Baba was in strict seclusion. I was due to return to sea duty as a ship's Radio Officer in February 1968, but because of His seclusion, I did not expect to see Baba before departing. But at the end of 1967, Baba did call Gaimai, Banumasi and me. Baba asked when my leave was over, and I answered 9th of February Baba, but that I intended to extend my stay until the 25th so that I could celebrate His Birthday with the family and other Baba. lovers. Baba asked, 'Is that extra period paid or unpaid leave?' 'Unpaid Baba' and Baba said, 'Who knows if My birthday will be celebrated or not. You must report for duty on the 9th.' Then He continued, 'Now I have sent a circular all over the world that I am in strict seclusion, and that no one is to correspond with Me, no matter the circumstances. But this rule does not apply to you on this particular occasion. Before the 21st of February you should inform Me where your ship is.' I replied, 'Yes Baba.'

As was His habit, after 5 to 10 minutes He said to me, 'Don't forget,' and again as they were stepping out of the room, Baba repeated, 'Now don't forget.'

A few days later, Baba again called me, but this time alone. He embraced me, and said, 'You must inform Me of your ship's location before the 21st of February.'

I duly reported on the 9th, was flown to the ship at Alexandria, and sailed on the 17th. On the 18th I sent a telegram to Beloved Baba giving the full itinerary of the ship, and included in the telegram my Birthday greetings to Him. The ship reached the Atlantic Ocean, and conditions deteriorated severely with strong storm warnings. The weather became extremely bad, the skies were completely covered, and with very poor visibility, navigation had to be done manually. Under these conditions the Captain underestimated the strength of the waves, and therefore also of the speed of the ship, and the ship was unbeknown pushed towards the coast. At 8am on February 21st the ship, traveling full speed, ran heavily aground on a reef. The whole of the bottom of the ship was ripped open, and it was firmly stuck on the reef. I called Gibraltar for dry dock facilities, but they refused. As did Malta also. They did not want their harbor polluted. I then tried Casablanca about 80 miles away, speaking to the authorities in Arabic as I was able to do. They said that unless human life was in danger, they would not take the ship into port.

After twelve hours the high tide came and the ship floated free. The engines were tried, and by Baba's grace they worked well. So the ship gathered speed, but at this point the Chief Engineer reported that the engine room was being flooded with water and the pumps were unable to cope with the quantity. I was immediately instructed to ring Casablanca again, and the authorities agreed to send a salvage tug to take them into harbor, but also said that the ship should still proceed as far as possible.

At about 4am the following day, the ship, with the help of the tug, reached Casablanca, and it was put into a dock where the oil spill would not go into the harbor. The next morning the Insurance Agent came on board and checked the unloading of the cargo of huge bales of wool. While this was happening all the ship's officers gathered in the Captain's cabin for drinks in celebration of their safe arrival. As they were doing so, the Agent came into the room and said, 'All I can say is that a miracle has happened. As the

bales have been lifted out of the holds, the plates of metal, 10 feet by 8, have just fallen away. All the rivets had been broken, and it is nothing but a miracle how all the plates held together all that time.'

Immediately I wrote to Beloved Baba explaining everything that had happened, and a reply duly came from Him, 'There is nothing to worry about. My Nazar is on you. My love to you and to all on board the ship.'

We were there for nearly a month, and the ship was declared a total loss.

* * *

More stories from Sam Kerawala.

Jalalul-Din Rumi said: It is only at such time that ignorance prevails, that one has recourse to words. When true love dawns, there is total silence.

A man approached the Perfect Master Abu Said, and requested Him to tell something of the spiritual Path. The Master said, 'The only thing I can say is that your life and My life are of short duration, and we do not have enough time to waste on talk. I suggest you go home and start remembering Him. That is the best advice I can give you.'

He was also asked: which is the greater blessing of God - a long life or a short life? Abu Said gave this beautiful answer: if the life is spent exclusively in remembrance of the Beloved then a hundred years of such a life is too short a span. Whereas a life of twenty-four hours spent in sensual enjoyments is too much of a burden for the soul to bear.

While He was saying these words, a young man who had spent his life to date in sensual pleasures paid heed, and approached the Master, 'I have heard Your words. Can You help me?' The Master replied, 'Yes I can.' But the young man was from a very rich and aristocratic family, and he did not approach Abu Said in the manner befitting one seeking help from a Master. Then he asked Abu Said, 'I hear You give Divine Love.' 'Yes I do.'

So the young man said, 'Name the price for this love. I can afford to pay.' The Master replied that he could not afford the price, but the man persisted, 'No I can - I am very rich.' Abu Said smiled and said, 'Divine Love is not for sale for mere gold and silver. But there is a certain price which I demand for one to become My aspirant.' 'Name it.' With that the Master reached under the mattress on which He was seated, and pulled out a huge meat chopper and said, 'Cut off your head as offering to Me.' For a moment the young man was frightened, and the Master said, 'Quick! Don't waste time! The price is very cheap if you have the will to do it.' And suddenly for that young man it was the right moment and the right words, and he said, 'Give me the chopper!' As he was about to cut his throat, Abu Said stopped him, and then accepted him as His disciple. In that moment the life of the man totally changed. This is how the Masters function, and they teach us that the only thing important in this world is the intensity of the desire to be one with the Beloved.

After Lord Buddha dropped His body, there followed a chain of Masters known as Buddhasatvas. One morning in the ashram of the third Master after Lord Buddha there came a young man. He bowed before the Master and said, 'Oh Master, accept me as Your disciple.' 'What is the purpose behind this request?' 'I want to search for God. I feel in my heart that He is the only Reality, and I want to become one with Him.' The Master perceived that the young man was sincere and worthy, but to test him He said, 'This Path is only for those who are high-born. Tell Me about your birth - what station of life were you born into?' The man replied that he did not know, but that he would return home and ask his mother.

When he reached home, his mother was eagerly awaiting him, embraced him, and asked, 'What did the Master say to you?' 'The Master wants to know my lineage, my birth. Can you help me?' The mother then opened her heart and said that as a young woman extreme poverty was her constant companion. She had nothing of this world, and because of that state she had to serve many masters. She continued, 'I know I am your mother, but I do not know who your father is.'

He returned to the Master, at a time when many disciples were present, and told the Master openly what his mother had said. The devotees present hearing this, angrily called for him to be thrown out, and thus not pollute the ashram. But the Master told all to sit down and be quiet. Then He called the young man to Him, and said, 'Station in life is never determined by birth, where you were born or who your parents are. One's station in life is always determined by the intensity of love and desire to be one with the Beloved. Today, by uttering the exact truth of your lineage, without the slightest hesitation, without thinking of telling a lie, you have surpassed the height of any Brahmin present here. So you are welcome in My ashram.'

* * *

A certain cook in an ashram went to the Master and said, 'If a child is to become a great master in his own right, then such a child would exhibit the greatness in him.' Yes, you are right,' answered the Master, 'and you are fortunate because in the next street there is a child destined to become a great master. Each morning he goes by our ashram to the bazaar to buy things. Next morning ask him this question - where are you going? And then tell Me the answer he gives you.'

The next morning the child appears swinging an empty basket, and he is asked, 'Where are you going?' The child replies, 'Wherever my legs carry me.' The devotee thought this a strange reply, but duly reported it to the Master. The Master said, 'You fool! You have to ask where will you go if you have no legs to carry you.' So the next morning he asked the child accordingly, and the child replied, 'Wherever the winds carry me.' When he told the Master this reply, He exclaimed, 'How many times do I have to teach you?! You have to ask him where will you go if there are no winds to carry you.' The next morning he eagerly awaited the child. Again he asked the question, 'Where are you going?' and the child said, swinging his empty basket, 'To the market to buy vegetables.' That was the end of the duel. It showed the inherent greatness of the child.

As Bayazid had also showed His greatness as a child. During His school days, the teacher related how he went on the long pilgrimage to Mecca putting his entire trust on Allah with only two dirhems in his pocket. But Bayazid asked the teacher why did he carry two dirhems when he had declared his entire trust and dependence in Allah. When you depend on Him, you do so entirely.

As .when the wife of the Pandavas was won in a game of dice, and the victors to humiliate her ordered that she be stripped naked. She clung to the edge of her sari and cried out to Krishna to save her, but He did not come. Then in the agony of her despair she let go her sari, and called to Him from the very depth of her heart, and He came. As one sari was taken from her, another would appear. So it went on, one sari after another, until finally the ordeal was finished, and she turned to Krishna, 'Why did You take so long to come?!' He smiled and said, 'While you were defending your sari, I could do nothing. Then you let go - and I came.'

As Beloved Baba said to the woman taking darshan, 'Are you thinking with concern of your children back in New York?' 'Yes Baba I am,' she confessed. Then Baba said, 'If you worry about your children, I won't. But if you do not worry, then I shall.'

* * *

Once a disciple of Ghansali Shah Qalandar complained of no spiritual progress in the Master's company. The Master flared up and said, 'God be praised! It seems you were not a babe at birth, but old, wrinkled and hoary! Yesterday you came as a disciple and today you want to be perfect! My dear boy, men of God have knocked at the door of the Divine Beloved for years and from amongst thousands, one has been allowed to cross the threshold. The spiritual path is not a joke and no business of a suckling babe.'

Having said this, the Master fell into an ecstatic reverie and began the illuminating and awe-inspiring lines of the poet-philosopher Hakim Sanai:

Days are required for a goatful of wool
To be a robe for a priest or rope for a mule.

Weeks are needed for a cotton seed to sprout
To become beauty's attire or martyr's shroud.
Months go by for a biological zero
To develop into a bride or an Ali-type hero.
Years change a stone acted on by the sun,
Into ruby from Balukshan and sapphire from Yamen.
Decades drag on before a stripling full of promise
Turns out a philosopher poet or an artist.
Ages roll on to induce Heavens to smile
To grant lovers a union or home for the exile.
Cycles evolve a perfect soul or produce a master mind
Like Bayazid of Khurasan or Owayre of faith blind.
Either depart and like women flirt away your time,
Or like Sanai take your chance forgetting mine or thine.

* * *

A Dinner Party - Group Captain Sakhare.

After a long period of seclusion Beloved Baba gave a public darshan in the Poona Baba Centre, and Baba lovers from all parts of India joyfully came and stayed over-night in order to have a full day with Him. The hotels were so full that some lovers stayed with us, and to help the harassed organizers of the Centre we arranged to have dinner for them all at our house. We wished to also honor our Baba lover guests. We estimated the total number for dinner would be 60 to 70, and Mona, my wife, cooked accordingly. However in the midst of the over-whelming joy of being in His presence, Centre lovers such as Gadekar enthusiastically passed the word around to, not only the Centre members, but also all visiting Baba lovers: dinner at the Sakhare's place! Do come along!

In the middle of the darshan program, with about half of the 10,000 present still waiting, Baba sent word that He was stopping the darshan, and would visit our place for a short while on the way back to Ahmednagar. We rushed back to the house, but

before we could arrange a seat for Baba, He was there. He made detailed enquiries about the dinner we were arranging, the food we had prepared, the number we had invited, and as stated, we told Him 60 to 70 persons. Baba was then shown the food prepared, and He blessed it. After arti was sung, Baba left.

About six in the evening, Baba lovers began arriving, and continued to arrive. The big hall of the house, where bhajans were being sung, was filling up, and with more lovers still coming, Mona gradually became more and more concerned, wondering how we would be able to feed so many. We spoke to Adi Snr. of our concern, and he empathetically reassured us, saying there would be plenty of food, as it had been blessed by Baba. At seven the first group of about forty sat down for dinner on the spacious verandah, and from then groups came to eat every half-an-hour. By eight-thirty Mona again became concerned with the food pots definitely depleted. The hall was still full, and the helpers and servants had not had any food. While we were discussing the situation, Perinmai, wife of Baba's brother Behram, overheard us. Immediately she assured us that the food would be sufficient, and there was no need to cook more. She also counseled Mona to take Baba's name as she served.

Well, the evening went on, new faces arriving with shouts of 'Jai Baba' and the old ones departing with 'Jai Baba' in a happy atmosphere of greetings, hugs and embraces. Dinner continued until ten-thirty, and then the crowd thinned out. The food in the pots was almost to rock bottom, yet amazingly there was enough for the helpers and servants. Even more amazing for Mona, was to discover in the morning again enough food for the poor who had gathered outside the house. We pondered in wonderment over the happy events of the night, and tried in vain to estimate the actual number that we had fed with food meant for only 60 to 70 people. That food was indeed His prasad, and of course it reminded us of Christ's miracle of feeding five thousand with five loaves and five fishes.

* * *

Eruch talks in Mandali Hall

What you say is right. The 'Parvardigar' prayer does seem to contradict itself. In the first half it says, 'You are without attributes.' and then in the second half it says, 'You are the One with infinite attributes.' So what? Do you mean to say that it is not true? Doesn't He have infinite attributes? Whatever adjective you can think of to describe Him, He is that.

Look, you have been here how long now, two weeks, three weeks? Something like that. And you go to arti at the Samadhi every morning and every evening. At least that is what I have been told. Of my own I have no idea who goes to arti and who does not. Nor do I care - what do I have to do with that? But someone was mentioning yesterday in the Hall that you go regularly and you sing. Now, how many different songs have you heard, have you sung during this time? No, no, I do not need a number, this is just to give you an idea.

And all those songs have so many verses, and each verse is a different way the poet has thought of to describe Him, to describe His attributes. And there are an infinite number of songs written to Him in His praise, and still people are writing songs. You heard the song Susan sang just now, and she wrote it. Is she here now? She's just stepped out. Why is it that whenever we want someone they have always just stepped out. Are you people psychic or something that whenever I am going to call on someone they leave the Hall? Whatever it be, don't fetch her, let her be. Anyway, if we ask her why she wrote the song, where was the necessity to write another song, she would say that the other songs don't suit her, they don't express her Beloved in just the right way, and so it goes, there's no end to it. No end to songs and poems and paintings. You see this painting here, you know that a blind man painted it? But that is a different story.

What I want to say is that when he came to visit Baba, Baba told him to paint Baba's face and he started doing that, and I don't know how many portraits he did, but it seems that is all he did for years and years until he became completely blind. How could he paint so many portraits, some wondered. After the first

dozen, the first score, the first fifty, what would be left to paint, and yet he never had any trouble because even the expressions on Baba's face were infinite, it seems. Baba's face is finite, it is a limited human form, and yet its expressions could not be exhausted by this painter, who painted nothing else for years and years together. And if this is true simply of Baba's face, then what of His other attributes? Surely they too are infinite.

You see how it is. And yet, whatever you say about God, He is also beyond that. It is impossible to limit God. If you say God is perfect peace, He must also be beyond that. For if God is only what you say, then you have limited Him, He is no longer infinite. So if you say God is infinite attributes, He must also be beyond that. But what is beyond that - without attributes. God simply is. That is why the prayer begins by saying God is without color, without expression, without form, and without attributes. There is simply an ocean of infinite existence, but even to say ocean is misleading, because this ocean has no shore, it has no color, no shape, no boundary, nothing anywhere which isn't also ocean. It is beyond our imagination and conception to conceive of such an ocean. So how does God get His attributes? Baba Himself answered this question.

One day we were sitting with Baba, and on His own He raised this very question. Baba then answered it for us. He said, 'Attributes are given by humans who love Me and want to glorify Me. But who am I? I am infinite and eternal Existence. All the attributes showered upon Me stem from My being infinite eternal Existence, infinite Existence, infinite.' Baba told us this twice, three times, to bring home to us the idea of infinity. Baba continued, 'That means if I am infinite Existence there is no nook or cranny where I am not, and so people give Me the attribute of being omnipresent.'

'Now, My being omnipresent means that there is no place where I am not. If I am everywhere, then nothing is hidden from Me, and if nothing is hidden from Me, then I must know everything, so they give Me the attribute of omniscience, all-knowing. And when I become in their eyes omniscient, then I must know how to create. Doesn't it follow that if I know

everything, I must know how to create? So I become the Creator. And I must know how to preserve, so I become the Preserver. I know how to dissolve so I become the Dissolver, so the Holy Trinity is attributed to Me. And if I am omnipresent, omniscient, and the Creator, Preserver and Destroyer, then it is only natural for me to be all bliss.'

Then Baba turns to us and says, 'What does it imply when I say I am omniscient, that I know everything? What must My experience be like?' So we said, 'Well, You must experience that You know everything.' 'No, no,' Baba said, 'I don't want dictionary definitions, tell Me what My experience must be like.' So we all tried in some way or other, but none of our answers satisfied Baba, so, as always, Baba came to our rescue and told us, 'My experience is that there is nothing to know.'

'Anyone wanting to know anything is a poor attempt to become it. But if I am anything and everything, there is nothing for Me to know, because I am that. I don't have to know it, I am already it. So My experience of being all-knowing is that there is nothing to know. I am everything, I am without attributes, that is My state, but mankind has showered attributes on Me, to glorify Me, to remember Me.'

Do you follow? You don't have to study yourself to know all about you. I am not you, so if I want to know what your likes and dislikes are, what you're thinking, I have to study you, I have to ask you a lot of questions, but you know all that because you are that. So if Baba is everything, then He knows everything. He doesn't have to study anything, He doesn't have to think about anything, because He automatically knows it because He is it. You see?

But you know, the other day I was telling this story to someone and a thought came to me. How would you like it if I addressed you by simply shouting, 'Hey you' at you? You wouldn't even know who I was talking to. And if I said 'you' again, you would feel something, you wouldn't like it. But if I turned and said, 'Tom' you would feel much better, that would suit you.

And it must be the same way with God. He must not

like it when we address Him as 'You'. But what else can we say when He is simply infinite Existence, when He is formless, without attributes. There is no name for us to use. Of course we have enough sense to call Him 'Thou' that much common sense He has given us, but that is still only a polite form of 'You'. And it doesn't carry the intimacy, the satisfaction for Him as when we call Him by name. So that is why we use His attributes. We say, 'Thou, the Lord of Lords' or 'the One with infinite attributes,' and that is a little better. God must be a little better pleased with this. At least it is clear to whom we are talking. In the same way, if I say, 'You, the one who is always tape recording these sessions,' Dara knows I am addressing him. But he still does not feel pleased about this manner of address as when I simply call him by name. But now what name can we give God? How will He get a name unless and until, in His infinite compassion, He comes in our midst as Man among men and gets a name? How God must love it to be called at last by such a name.

Even in the world we see this is true. Have you ever been around a couple who are in love? What do they do? They give each other many nicknames. They call each other 'darling' and 'sweetheart' and all sorts of endearments. And the lover might say to his beloved, 'You are the fairest in the land, your hands are so soft, your cheeks are so rosy, your eyes are like sapphires,' and so on and so forth. He is enumerating her attributes. But this is all the play of courtship.

When he really wants to declare his love, he does not bother with such flowery speeches, he simply gazes at his beloved and heaves a deep sigh, and simply whispers her name. And this is the very thing his beloved has been longing to hear. Because there is something about a name which captures our innermost being. We do not want to hear someone extol our virtues, we do not want to hear a long list of our attributes, somehow even that is too impersonal. We simply long to hear another say our name with great feeling and love, and that touches us.

At least this the way it is in the world. And the thought came to me that it might be this way with God too. So what He longs to hear is our calling out to Him His name. Yes, in a certain

mood, He might enjoy our praise, He might enjoy our listing His attributes, but how His heart must feel delight when one of His lovers is overcome with love and without even thinking about it, sighs and softly calls out, 'Meher Baba, Meher Baba'.

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The Column of Light by Group Captain Sakhare

One of my fellow-officers on the Poona Air Force station was a declared agnostic, yet he loved to discuss and argue on all and any religious and philosophical subject; and while he was highly skeptical of religious beliefs, he did so without showing disrespect for any Master and His message. Indeed he was eager at times to discuss and hear my views and understanding of Beloved Baba's statements.

One morning while we were thus talking on some spiritual subject over a morning cup of tea, I was asked if I wished to make a local sortie. Always happier flying than being deskbound, I readily agreed and also invited my argumentative friend to come with me. He agreed, and after take-off I set a certain course. He immediately asked if I was heading for Ahmednagar, and then circle the place where Meher Baba was staying. When I wondered how he had guessed my destination, he had no ready answer. He just thought that it would be so.

I had a number of times flown over Meherazad, and each time I would circle around the ashram seven times as would any devout Hindu circle the temple Deity seven times. As I approached Meherazad I came lower to have a better view and, hoping fervently, to again see Beloved Baba with the mandali waving to us, as He had on the previous occasions. On the second round I saw Baba and the mandali start to come out of Mandali Hall, and on the third round I could clearly see Beloved Baba waving to us. On the fourth turn my passenger suddenly pointed below, and said, 'There in the middle of the group is your Master in the long white robe. Isn't that so?'

To test him, I said, 'Where? That man with beard and mustache?'

'No no, He is clean shaven in a long white gown, bright and beautiful, fourth from the tree.'

'I don't know what you are talking about,' I said to test him further.

'Don't try and put me off - He is unmistakable, right in the middle, with that beautiful aura around Him shining like a column of light. If you cannot see Him you must be blind.'

We finished the seven rounds, and climbing again set course for home. As we flew I asked him how he had picked Baba out of the sizeable group of people. Thoughtfully he replied, 'I just can't tell you how, but I straightway knew Him. He had that wonderful aura and effulgence around Him, and He stood out like a column of light amongst those men.' Later, he added, 'I am really sorry I argued with you many a time about Meher Baba and His message and expressing my disbeliefs. Now I am convinced that Baba is truly great.'

Perviz Kelkar remembers:

Baba at one time wanted us to keep a mast in our house in Bombay for a period. Baba Himself came to the house and personally chose the room, how it was to be arranged, gave instructions for his maintenance, and the things that needed to be kept for him. However the mast was in the end never brought, but later Gustadji stayed with us, and it was in that room kept for the mast that he stayed. He required dental treatment, and Baba instructed us to take him each day to the doctor and bring him back. Baba also said to treat him simply as one of the family, and this we did most happily. As you know Gustadji was silent and had his own unique sign language to communicate. Yet once you understood it, and it was a simple one, he was so expressive and animated with it, that you were not aware of his silence. He was no trouble to us at all, very child-like and innocent, full of humor and full of wonderful stories of Beloved Baba. When we took him to the bus-stop for our trip to the doctor, he would always become

excited with a shop sign there containing the name 'Meher'. And with his sunny disposition and sign language he was a source of great wonderment and amusement to the people on our journeys.

While Baba was in Nasik, He would come often to our house, and talk with my parents, Dina and Navalsha Talati. I was a child at the time, and Baba would ask me to perform a little dance for Him. On one occasion Baba came to know that my father had scolded me, and He asked why. My father said, 'She disobeyed me. I asked her to garland Your photo, and also each of the five Perfect Masters. But she refused, wanting to garland only Your photo.' Baba replied, 'In garlanding Me only, she still automatically garlands all My Masters.' A small incident from childhood, but one that stays with me.

In the mid-1950's I asked Baba at a personal interview if I could go abroad, and He just smiled and said, 'Try.' And then added, 'If you do go abroad, remember one thing. You are responsible for your mother.' My father had died years ago, but I was annoyed that the responsibility was mine, the youngest child, and not my brother and sister's. The reason for Baba's directive became clear some eighteen months later when my brother died in England, and my sister had married and moved away from our home.

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Behram Sheriar Irani remembers:

You know Dr. Ghani was both a heavy smoker of cigarettes, and of cups of tea, and during the Manzil-E-Meem's days, Baba ordered him to have only six cigarettes and four cups of tea a day. Dr. Ghani said, 'Yes Baba.' Now he had a single room next to mine, and Baba stayed on the upper floor. A few days after this order for the doctor, Baba was passing his room and noticed coming under the closed door cigarette smoke. Baba paused for a time and noticed the smoke continued to appear far longer than would be so for one cigarette. So He told Dr. Ghani to open the door, and there He beheld the doctor carefully holding a cigarette

nearly two feet long. 'What is this? Why do you do this?' 'Baba, You told me to have six cigarettes, but You did not tell me the size of them! So I made my own cigarette, and made it long enough to last an hour!' Baba always had a good sense of humor, and He laughed at this novel 'breaking' of His order. But still He then gave the doctor six cigarettes and said, 'From now on only this size and number, and no longer than these.'

Again after a day or two, Baba heard Dr. Ghani sipping tea in his room, and again He paused outside the closed door. After the noise went on longer than would be the case drinking one small cup, Baba asked him to open the door. There was the doctor this time with a very large cup, and in response to Baba's admonition, he said, 'But Baba You simply said four cups of tea - You didn't mention the size!' Again Baba laughed and forgave him, but said, 'From now on, an ordinary size cup only.' And He gave him a cup to emphasize the size.

As you know, Baba and Dr. Ghani were close friends in school from an early age, and again in the years after Baba became God-Man. But he did not accept that this Friend was anything more than a friend. One day Ghani asked Baba to please give him company on the train to Bombay, where he had some urgent work to do. Baba refused despite repeated pleas from Ghani, saying, 'The train will only go as far as Lonavla and then return.' Ghani scoffed at this news, replying there is no reason at all why the train will not, as usual, continue on to Bombay. He took it as a joke of his school chum's, so Baba agreed to go with him on the train. Well, they reached Lonavla, and sure enough the train was delayed there. After half-an-hour the news came that a large boulder had fallen in the tunnel, and so the train could not continue to Bombay. It then returned to Poona, and when it reached there, Ghani fell at Baba's feet, saying, 'I have taken You simply as my friend and schoolmate, but now I am convinced that You are indeed God in human form.'

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Meherji Karkaria remembers:

I met Baba in 1927 and for two years I was with Him as a schoolteacher and as one of His mandali. Then I went to Persia, and began an import business. When I departed, Baba said to me, 'Never get disappointed in doing anything, try your best, stick to the job, do it honestly with Me at the back of your mind, and leave the result to Me.' I took these words to heart, and I have found that if I adhere to them, and leave all to Him, the process may not be to our liking, but ultimately all turns out well. My experience with Beloved Baba has proved this.

In 1945 I was called back to India by Baba, and at His bidding became a partner with Nariman Dadachanji in his business. However I was mostly with Baba on Mast trips and doing various tasks for Him, and in 1959 Baba directed that the partnership be dissolved.

With Baba's permission I then started a hand paper-making factory. From the beginning I encountered many difficulties, and for nearly five years the business was running at a loss. Yet Beloved Baba assured me often, 'Don't worry. I am with you. Even if the water comes right up to your nose, it will not enter your nostrils, and you will not sink.' Even at the point when the business was still losing money, Baba said, 'Don't worry. Do not lose courage. It is going to be very big - in fact so big that you will be not able to cope with the work.' And now as I speak, by His grace the business has so flourished that His words of assurance so many years ago are constantly with me.

The difficulties were many in the beginning. In purchasing land for the factory, I did not need a great space, but to obtain some at the right price, I was forced to take five acres, much more than I needed, and too it was the site of an old quarry. Yet at the time Baba assured me that the land would prove to be 'raw gold'. Then the dams of the Poona water supply burst, supply was therefore cut off, and water was essential for the filter paper-making process. I could not obtain water elsewhere, and so, although the factory site was nothing but rock, in desperation I hired a drilling machine with an operator, and pointing to a spot,

directed that the operator take Meher Baba's name and start drilling. We got water at three and a half feet! It was by His grace and blessing - nothing else! We then continued the four inch bore to seventy-five feet, and we then had a constant supply of 30,000 gallons a day, amply for our requirements.

The need in India at the time was for filter papers, and they were only obtainable at high cost from overseas. But the technology to make them was not available in India. So with Beloved Baba's name on my lips, we experimented and again by His grace, we developed over six to seven years almost sixty types of filter papers, all without foreign know-how. Baba expressly desired that I give work to as many unemployed people as possible, and to avoid mechanization in the factory. So we have at this time eighty women working here, many of them widows and therefore destitute.

Baba with the women mandali came on the 20th June 1963 to inaugurate the opening of the factory, and He gave His blessings to the enterprise, again reminding me not lose heart in the face of difficulties, but go on in His name, assured that He would always be with me.

* * *

Dara Irani remembers:

I am the son of Beloved Baba's youngest brother Adi, and Guloo. My mother died with my birth, and I was brought up by my mother's sister Villoo and her husband Sarosh until the age of thirteen, when I was taken to England to be with my father. During those thirteen years I had many occasions to be with Baba whom I was told, and whom I accepted, to be God. But the word 'God' was little more than a word for me during those years. Yes, I was aware of the amount of love and care that He would shower upon me, indeed as He did with everyone: aware also of the adoration and devotion that so many showed to Him: when He held a darshan program, I looked to Him as though He was a Rock Star or Movie Star, and not only was I greatly impressed, but I could also boast to my school friends, 'My Uncle Baba gave a

darshan program, and many thousands came to see Him! And I was there!' So He was for me Someone more special than anyone else, yet again for me He was simply one of the family, one whom I called Uncle Baba, who also happened to be God. Mind you there were times when I wondered why Uncle Baba, being God, had to suffer so much, and why He could not, for example, simply pass my examinations for me!

When I was taken as a child to see Baba, I was told to be on my best behavior, and this of course tended to make me stiff and unnatural with Him. This Baba did not like, and He would immediately lighten the atmosphere by tickling me. Then He would ask questions about school and my activities, putting me again more at ease, followed by games with Him, such as trying to catch His hand, or finding the middle finger. I would always end up losing, and one day I said to Him, 'Baba You're cheating!' Baba looked shocked with an expression that clearly said, 'I am God, and this boy accuses Me of cheating! I stopped and hurriedly said, 'No Baba. You are cheating as my Uncle, not as God.'

One of my special childhood stories was an occasion when I was at school. It was lunchtime, and I was in the school grounds eating my lunch and waiting my turn playing marbles with other boys. Then I noticed a car stop just outside the school grounds, and I recognized it as the one that Baba traveled in. Someone called to me from the car, and by the time I reached it, the front door was open and I could see Baba sitting there. He beckoned me to come close, and when I did so, He smiled and embraced me. Then He put His hand on my head, and with a look of concern He gestured, 'It is hot, and your head is hot. You should have a covering.' I replied meekly, 'Yes Baba.' Then His expression changed again, and smiling, asked, 'What were you doing? Playing marbles?' When I said 'Yes Baba,' He asked me to show Him my marbles. He held them in His hand looking at them, and then asked, 'Are you winning?' Fortunately I was at the time, and Baba gestured 'Good' patted me on the head, and sent me back to the school grounds.

In December 1964, after seven years in England, my father, family and I were called to be with Baba for three months.



Baba playing marbles with Meherwan Jessawala

We visited Baba two or three times a week. and I remember very vividly those occasions in Mandali Hall. What particularly stuck in my mind was Baba coming into the Hall, and other times when He was already in the Hall, and we would sit and be with the mandali, just as one of them. Baba might then ask if Francis had written anything new in the night, listen to cables and letters, to news of lovers in different parts, and during these times, often turn to me and say, 'I am God. Love Me.' I would just reply, 'Yes, Baba.' I was at the time responding mechanically, but now I know He was helping to bring me to the point of realizing who He really is. I loved Him then as a most kind and thoughtful Man, but still really as my Uncle. On another occasion, He turned to me, and said of Kaikobad sitting on a chair close by because of a broken hip, 'Kaikobad is so fortunate. Not only can he see Me as I am now, he can also see Me as God.' Again I know now that Baba was helping me gradually to greater understanding.

It was also during this visit that Baba, unexpectedly, turned to me and said, 'Don't worry. I will find the right girl to be your wife.' I simply replied, 'Thank you Baba.' Nothing further was said at the time.

We returned to England and I resumed my life there.

Three years passed, and I received a cable from Baba asking if I was ready to get married. I replied, 'Whatever be Your wish Baba.' The return cable was, 'I am very happy with your answer.' So my father visited Baba at Meherazad again in December 1967, and whilst there all arrangements concerning the wedding were finalized. I was informed that my bride was to be Amrit, whom I had never heard of, nor had she heard of me. Baba instructed me to take three weeks leave in December 1968 from my factory job, marry and then return to England with Amrit.

So I returned in December 1968, and by His Grace we were married. As you are aware Beloved Baba's health was extremely poor at the time. We stayed in Ahmednagar until the tenth of January, and one day Baba called us both to His bedroom. He was lying on the bed, and He gestured to us to sit each side of Him on the bed. He said nothing, but gestured that we should look at Him. He continued to look at us, and there was silence. Although I could say that nothing spectacular happened, yet a feeling of incredible bliss and contentment came over me, and I knew irrefutably I was in the presence of One who would always be with me, caring for me throughout my life. In that eternal moment of time, Beloved Baba gave me conviction of His Divinity. This was for me a realization of His true status for the first time in my life. There were no words, but Baba reached up and stroked my cheeks, and then took my hands and made me feel His cheeks.

Our last meeting with Baba was on the tenth of January, and we left for England on the eleventh.

Register of Editorial Alterations

Page 3, para 4, line 7, 2nd Kalki changed to Kalkin
Page 11, para 2, line 6, knick name changed to nickname
Page 13, para 1, line 3, past changed to passed
Page 24, para 3, line 3, Rishes changed to Rishis
Page 27, para 1, line 1, amidst changed to midst
Page 28, para 2, line 5, too changed to to
Page 28, para 2, line 11, "to" changed to "to do"
Page 33, para 1, line 12, livid changed to vivid
Page 74, para 5, line 2, "should" changed to "should be"
Page 91, para 5, line 3, "not" changed to "were not"
Page 96, para 4, line 3, rain changed to rained
Page 97, para 5, line 6, rend changed to rent
Page 98, para 2, line 3, gain changed to gained
Page 106, para 2, line 1, aesthetic changed to ascetic
Page 112, para 4, line 4, do changed to did
Page 118, para 6, line 5, similiarly changed to similarly
Page 136, para 6, line 3, Jaluddin changed to Jalalul-Din
Page 145, para 6, line 4, "not" changed to "not have"
Page 147, para 1, line 9, lineage changed to lineage
Page 151, para 3, line 4, sung changed to sang
Page 152, para 1, line 5, "this" changed to "this is"
Page 154, para 1, line 6, "that" changed to "that is"
Page 154, para 3, line 5, "want" changed to "want to"
Page 160, para 1, line 4, galleons changed to gallons

