

Memoirs of a Zetetic
My Life with Meher Baba
by
Amiya Kumar Hazra

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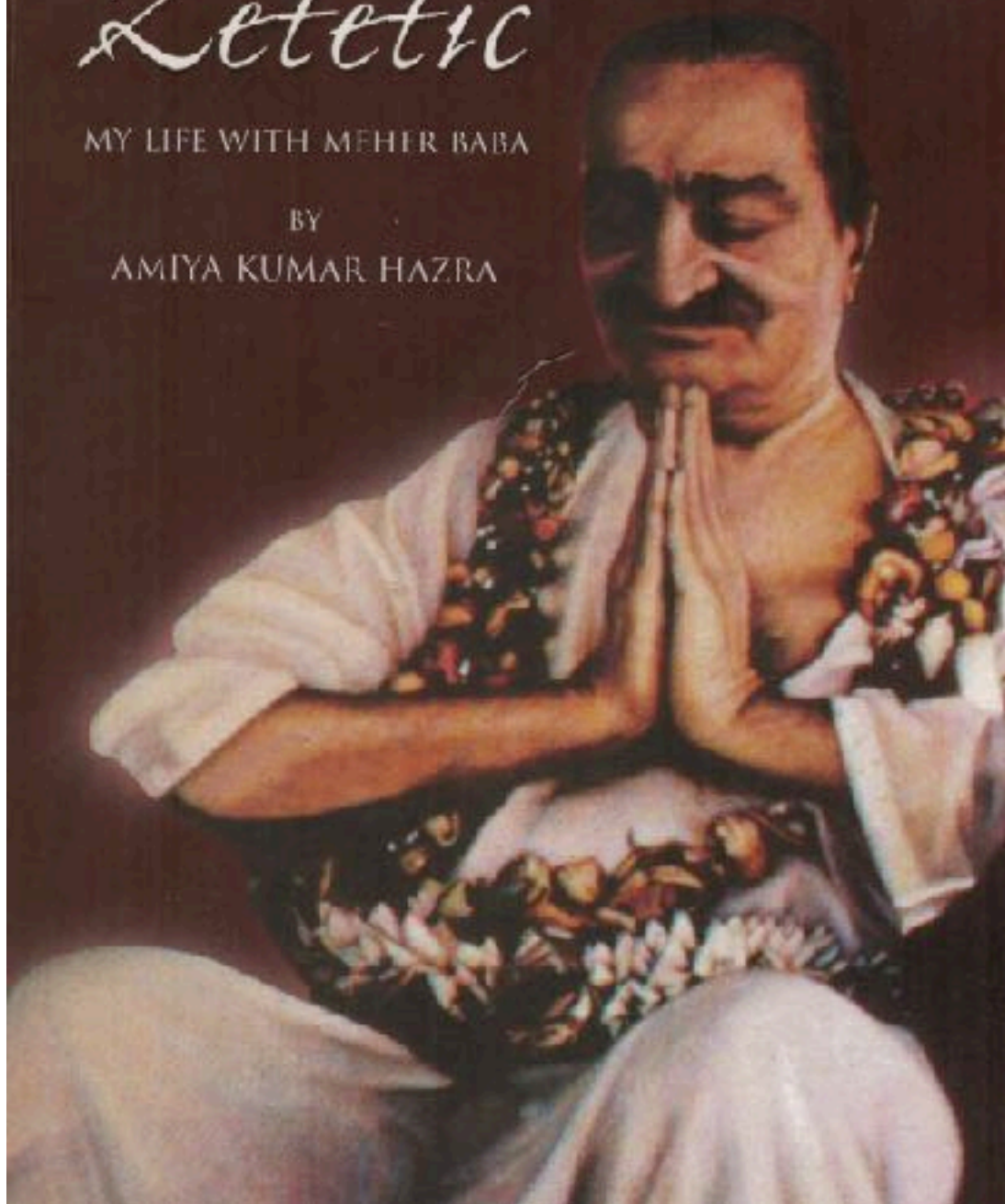
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The Memoirs of a Zetetic

MY LIFE WITH MEHER BABA

BY
AMIYA KUMAR HAZRA



Memoirs of a Zetetic

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by

Amiya Kumar Hazra

Internet Edition
(Essentially equivalent to Second Edition apart from some footnotes)

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Avatar Meher Baba, attended by Eruch Jessawala and Dr. Hoshang P. Bharucha, the editor of the First Edition.

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Preface to the second edition

It is a great pleasure to bring out the second edition of the *Memoirs of a Zetetic*, which I dedicate to my husband Hoshang P. Bharucha and place the book at the feet of Avatar Meher Baba. Hoshang, though a medical practitioner, was a staunch and dedicated Baba follower who spent his time and energy in spreading Avatar Meher Baba's love and messages. He was a tireless torchbearer of his Master. He was the one who inspired Prof. A. K. Hazra to write the *Memoirs of a Zetetic*.

I wish to express my thanks to Prof. A. K. Hazra for suggesting a closely corrected script for the second edition and a deep appreciation to Keith Gunn for spending a lot of labor and time for getting that objective accomplished. My thanks to Balaji for an excellent get-up of the book and finally my heart-felt gratitude to all Baba lovers, particularly Kantibhai Modi, Eruch Buhariwala and Dr. Ajit Soni for encouraging me to bring forth a second edition of this book which was so dear to dear Hoshang.

M. H. Bharucha

Introduction to the first edition

Amiya Kumar Hazra was born on the 18th of October 1931. At the age of seven he went to school in Bengal but was very soon sent to Jabalpur where his father, a doctor, was posted. When he was in the fifth class, to his horror, he was declared to be myopic at the age of ten. He soon got accustomed to his spectacles and the “artificial seeing.” He grew up without any sectarian bias or communal strings. He says, “I always felt that I belong to total mankind and I have no inhibitions in mixing with people of all religions.”

At the age of sixteen, he got access to his father’s collection of erudite books. His interest in reading grew more and more intense. In his early twenties, he did not care for wine, women or wealth. The trinkets of the world did not dazzle him. His only interest was to read books, for he was thirsting for knowledge. His reading was broad-spectrummed, for he read books of literature, psychology, history, geography, natural and bio-sciences and even books of palmistry and numerology that claimed the knowledge of fate and fortunes. He read and read all day and into the night till 3 A.M. In spite of all this reading, he saw mental mists all around. Baba had once said, “Throw them all away – no more books. Mind is like a barking dog – give it a few crumbs to keep it quiet.” He felt books cannot illumine the vast face of Truth in toto, and there was utter confusion in his mind. In his twenty-third year, despair turned into bitterness. He had no respect, nay, he hated books of religion and philosophy. “To me the world of religion and philosophy was the world of make-belief.” He felt the fear of death and of the unknown prompted people to use the “fake-balm” of philosophy. He had hundreds of questions unanswered by books of science. “The phenomenon of death left me disconsolate. The word atheist or agnostic can really not define my state of mind at that age of twenty-three.” He lost faith in his own abilities to solve the riddle of the universe. A great vacuum entered his life. Yet he continued studying for his master’s degree in English literature.

It was at this time that a Baba lover presented him books by and about Meher Baba. When he saw the first picture of Meher Baba sitting on a tiger skin, he felt that “the steady gaze of His large eyes had tremendous power.” When he saw the book, *The Perfect Master* by Charles Purdom, a scholar and a literary critic, he was enticed to read it. He had always tried to explain spirito-occult experiences in terms of illusion, delusion, hallucination, auto-suggestion, hypnosis, mesmerism, etc. He says, “As I went through these books, the soul-stirring human tales of love, of beauty and purity of people’s attachments to Meher Baba and His unfathomable attachment to them, made me wonder more and more as to who this person was who could invoke such love in the hearts of people of all ranks and cultures, religions and tastes, climes and countries.” He experienced through these books the tremendous flow of love going forth and back from Meher Baba to His lovers – “pure, unselfish love at its best, at its highest, at its noblest.”

When Baba lovers told him that Meher Baba was omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient, a prayer arose from his heart asking Baba to give him experiences that would establish His divinity. It was a challenge to Meher Baba, being a product of his doubting mind. Soon, Baba began to give him scores of experiences. But, his intellectual mind felt that all these experiences involved some human agency and he thought, "It would be more conclusive an evidence of Meher Baba's guiding hand if I got some experience or at least some glimpses of any of the planes ... so that I could develop the belief that it was a direct hot line communication of His grace to me without a third person in the cosmic play." He did get the experience but tried to explain it away by the term "hallucination."

He wrote his first letter to Baba in 1957. As soon as he mailed the letter, he began to really love Meher Baba. Then the longing to meet Baba became more and more intense and unbearable. Pangs of separation tore at his heart. After several letters to Meher Baba he was given permission to meet Baba at Pune at Guruprasad Bungalow on Sunday the 8th of December 1957. His first meeting with Baba may better be read from his memoirs than my describing it. That day can never sink below his mind's horizon. How sorry he felt for being critical, doubting and even sarcastic about Meher Baba, though Baba had given evidence of His omniscience, omnipotence and omnipresence. When called to embrace Baba, "I tried but seeing His eyes full of light and compassion, I lost the power to violate the sanctity of that Being by my unworthy embrace." When Baba left Guruprasad in the evening, "I felt terribly desolate. I wept and looked at the rows of beautiful flowers that seemed sad at the departure of their Beloved – for Baba was equally dear to man and nature, to birds and animals; the expression of silent suffering on the faces of the ever-silent plants and flowers made me feel more bitterly disconsolate."

His next meeting with Baba was at the 1958 sahavas. When he returned home after the sahavas, "The home town appeared to be drab and sapless and insufferably dull." He made an impulsive decision to quit his job and home and immerse himself "in the highly inspiring remembrance of Baba." How Baba, in His infinite compassion, retrieved him back to his family is a long and touching story. "By the end of 1958, I, a zetetic of considerable obstinacy of disposition, was gradually made to feel by Meher Baba that my attempt to outface Divinity and its existence was getting reduced to an oxymoron, however deft an intellectual oarsman I felt myself to be, and the boat of logical agnosticism now seemed to be in perennial threat of being capsized." Later, Baba in His own loving way brought home to the zetetic to resign to His will. He found peace in the knowledge that he was in the hands of Baba – God. Amiya's final darshan of Baba was at Meherabad after Baba dropped His body on the 31st of January 1969.

From these memoirs one concludes that small men with small minds have large egos. The mind can be as destructive as a host of locusts when they descend on a garden. In their ignorance, the zetetics resist His knowledge; in their helplessness they defy His power; in their blindness they defy His light. If they could only be free of the inhibiting and corroding influence of their intellectual wisdom, their hearts would open up to the flow of His grace. The

sun of His love always shines whether we bask in its rays or shun it. Meher Baba's love will always remain beyond the domain of intellectual understanding as anything comprehensible can never touch the fringe of Reality. Kabir says, "That body which has life but no love, I take as a corpse. Like the smithy's bellows, it breathes but does not live." It is impossible to learn God, but one can earn Him by loving Him as He should be loved.

With Baba's love and grace, Amiya Kumar has a conviction that Baba is God, a conviction that is strong, unassailable, unchallengeable. The conviction has become a part and parcel of his life. Baba has resurrected the word "Love" in Amiya's heart. This love has swallowed his academic pride. His awakened heart has blossomed into songs of Baba's praise. Like the hammering of a blacksmith forging a piece of red-hot iron into shape, Baba's unseen hand has hammered all the personal traits and weaknesses of the ego in Amiya to prepare him into shape for participating in the design of Baba's work in awakening slumbering humanity. Amiya now carries the pollen of Baba's love from heart to heart.

Dr. H. P. Bharucha

[Written for the first edition in about 1985]

Introduction to the online edition

You might recognize the title of this work, or perhaps its brown cover will seem familiar. In the early 2000s it was in print, and bookstores around the Baba world carried it, which would probably be where you would have seen it.

So here's a second chance to peek into the world of a Zetetic, a mysterious type of person who insists on material proof for any statement, the kind of person who has to "see it to believe it." That is how Amiya, the author, styled himself, prior to being overwhelmed by Beloved Baba's love.

Amiya's stories are filled with the charm of Baba's company, a topic on which so many persons have held forth in memoirs and personal recollections, many of which have been captured on video.

Amiya's immediate family, his friends and his caregivers, hope that you will share in the fun of reliving these stories. As he writes, Amiya Kumar Hazra takes you into his world with its unique and attractive point of view. Beloved Baba was amused by his child-like nature, and obviously enjoyed playing with him. Baba expressed that Amiya was His "most disobedient son." Even Amiya doesn't know precisely all that this may imply. But, if you read the stories, you will see that Amiya disobeys Baba's orders at various times. Rather than causing Baba to reject him, though, Amiya's disobedience appears to have been humoured by Baba.

Having observed Amiya telling his Baba stories, I have a hint of why even his disobedience might please and amuse Beloved Baba. For one thing, Amiya is thoroughly Baba's. Not one bone, not one grey cell, not one part is reserved. For another, Amiya has quite an active, witty sense of fun, and it is well known that Beloved Baba was charmed by humorous persons who saw Life more as Divine Comedy than as tragedy.

Of course, I, like everyone who didn't meet Beloved Baba in the flesh, love to hear the stories of those who did, particularly if the relationship being recounted is an intimate one. And, Beloved Baba was intimate with Amiya. At their first meeting, Beloved Baba "spoke" to Amiya in English, saying, "Amiya, you are God." Then, pointing to Himself, He said, "You see God," and then after pausing for a moment He said, "But you have to become God." Thereafter, He switched to Hindi, and all His conversations with Amiya from that time forth were in Hindi. In that language, there are three modes of address – formal, less formal, and intimate (as between father and son, or lovers – and it can also be used for reproach or reproof). From the first, Baba used the intimate tone with Amiya. And, many of the incidents reflect a compassionate, sometimes somewhat beleaguered father dealing with a devoted but sometimes misguided son.

The other aspect of this book that is unusual is that Amiya recounts spiritual experiences given to him by Beloved Baba. Now, in the community of Baba lovers it is rare to hear

anything about spiritual experiences. It seems that either aspirants don't tell about them when they get them, or practically nobody gets these experiences. But, in this book one gets a rare account of what it may be like to glimpse the inner planes of consciousness. And, one gets the sense that it might not be that much of a lark after all.

The beginning of the book recounts Amiya's childhood and sets the groundwork to explain why Amiya felt he had to challenge Beloved Baba to prove His Divinity. Part of the wonder of the book is that Baba permitted Amiya's almost endless attempts to rationalize away the amazing gifts Baba was giving him. By all means, enjoy the story of the stubbornness of the lover and the whim of the Beloved.

For anyone who experiences an extended interest in these materials, Amiya's correspondence with Baba, together with Amiya's commentary on what was happening to stimulate the correspondence, can be found at <http://trustmeher.org/meher-baba-letters-and-correspondence/meher-babas-letters-to-amiya-hazra>. A link there will take you to the complete collection's table of contents.

Oh, one last thing: footnotes in italic were added by the editor. Amiya contributed the ones in plain typeface. A few we might have done together for the Second Edition — authorship is a bit obscure. For some readers, footnotes provide needless explanations. I apologize to those readers for whom this is off-putting.

Keith Gunn
April 2020

Gratitude

I thank all those generous readers who so liked the book that they exhausted the entire stock of the first edition, but kept on talking kindly about the book, thus generating fresh interest in the next generation of readers who wanted to read it thus leading to the birth of this new second edition.

The persons who came forward to cater to their desire are many but here I mention only a few, knowing that the rest of the admirers are able to hear a silent “thank you” in their mind’s ear from me — an unuttered but hearty gratitude to them all. The early publication needed two things. Firstly the purging of the printing slips and secondly some editing and expansion.

Who else could have done it with such terrible perfection-mindedness as Keith Gunn and he not only did it meticulously but with a creative touch that makes the new edition look more like it evolved from the early one. So thanks to you my dear and Beloved Baba’s child Keith Gunn! Further truly worthy as the wife and consort of the great Dr. Bharucha and as companion of all his undertakings, I feel deep gratitude for Mrs. Bharucha who came ahead and like her dear late husband made this edition possible by financing its publication. Hats off to the noble lady.

John/Carol Gunn did a final proofreading, catching lingering errors while suggesting valuable stylistic improvements. I feel so happy that they contributed to the manuscript.

If you have ever seen our always cheerful, self-assured and assuring publisher, a young, talented and relentlessly optimistic guy who catches up with the train that has left the platform, then undoubtedly you have seen Balaji! I thank him profusely for once again coming forward to help us out so that the second edition could be safely delivered to the world. I wholeheartedly thank him for his labour of love.

My gratitude extends to the Avatar Meher Baba P. P. C. Trust for permitting the publication of the letters I received from mandali members on behalf of my Beloved Meher Baba, who remains not only the author of the first and second edition of this book but also the real author of the book of life that he makes us live.

Jai Baba,
Amiya Kumar Hazra

Memoirs of a Zetetic
by
Amiya Kumar Hazra

1. MY MOTHER'S TALE OF MY INFANCY

Although the “zero hour”¹ of my life suddenly struck the epicurean music dumb when I was barely twenty-three,² subsequently compelling me to be a white-hot zetetic, yet I would rather prefer beginning my Memoirs from younger days.³

“Mamma, I am deeply interested in knowing about those toddler days of my life whose precincts remain untrodden by my memory. Please tell me about it.”

“It was 10:15 PM on a Sunday. The date was eighteenth of October, nineteen hundred and thirty-one. In India, the time often coincides with the worship of the Goddess Durga by Hindus with as much reverence as revelry. Some distance away from our house lived your father’s friend Mr. Dashrath Lal Samadhiya, popularly called “Dashai Maharaj.” At his place Durga worship was going on. Bands, drums, bugles and cymbals poured in devotional music before the immortal Goddess of power and protection. Dashai Maharaj was the grand master of the celebrations.

“News reached him immediately that you were born. It made him so happy that the old man did not hesitate to shift the venue of the musicians at once from the altar of the immortal Goddess to the compound of a house where a helpless human mortal was crying and panting with the first gush of air. Your father was not only a reputed doctor, but was loved and respected by the people for the rock-like integrity of his character. To congratulate him on the occasion of your birth, they brought out guns and fired several rounds, a kind of military ovation.”

“Great,” I exclaimed, and thus a long-standing riddle got solved. “Now I have come to know why I am so allergic to ‘gun pops’ or even the exploding of a harmless firecracker by children during Christmas and Divali celebrations. Now I know why I prefer plugging my ears with lots of cotton on these holy days and keep my doors and windows shut against that startling ‘noise pollution.’ It is the outcome of that poor infant’s fear – the infant that was me, when in the name of joy they made him smart and wince with gun-reports more than half a century back.”

“The record of your misdeeds as a child is too long to reproduce. Here I tell you only a few things. You were twice nearly drowned. Once you fell into a dry well and got a hole in your scalp. Once you fell into a big pot in which I was boiling milk. Every other day you were missing from home and even sometimes from the precincts of the village. Then you were such a jealous brat since you were a toddler that nobody could be proud of you on that account. From the time your sister was born, you willfully gave up the use of your legs and insisted on being

¹ In Parliamentary proceedings, all official function is suspended at the zero hour. Here it means cessation of all serious search within the intellectual realm.

² *At the age of 23 Amiya experienced a loss of interest in life because his learning did not seem to solve the questions of life and death. See Chapters 6 and 7. This was a prelude to encountering Meher Baba.*

³ I honor Wordsworth’s epigram declaring the child to be the father of the man

carried by me, just to prevent my carrying your little sister in my arms. In spite of all your mischief, you were so dear to us, dear to all, that we loved you more than any other child in the village; you were the apple of everyone's eye."

"So I wasn't so sour an apple after all. Tell me how others loved me."

"Yes, I was coming to that. In fact, we never really felt that you belonged to us alone. The Hardikars (Marathis), the Awasthys, Shuklas, Pandeys (Hindu Brahmins) and Kajeets (Muslims) and a lot many others perforce, took you away from us and would keep you for long hours at their homes, give you food, dress you up and spoil you by over-fondling."

"That was great," I beamed.

"You know we are Bengali Brahmins, and eating food at the house of castes different from and especially lower than ours was a taboo then. But firstly because of your father who didn't at all believe in religious barriers and secondly because of the overwhelming affection of all these people for you, we had to let them take you away."

"It was jolly well that I was allowed to grow up without any sectarian bias and communal strings. That is why I have always felt that I belong to total mankind and I have no inhibitions in mixing with people of all religions. Well, that explains the jigsaw puzzle – Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Indians, English, Marathis, Bengalis, Hindustanis all showered their love-blessing on me and made me just what I am, a plain human being which in fact everyone is, when not bolted to any artificial communal⁴ scaffolds.

⁴ "Community" in the time of Amiya's youth meant much more than it does today. The community, typically specific to a religion, supported people belonging to the community, but also constrained behavior, enforcing conformity, for instance passing on the suitability of a marriage. The implied threat was ostracism.

2. I GO TO BENGAL

For intermittent periods during 1937 and 1938, I resided with family and near relatives in my native state of Bengal before finally coming over to Jabalpur in the early months of 1939. Bengal was lush green except for the giant city of Calcutta (which was brick and wood, mortar and marble, iron and steel all over). The rest of Bengal wore such a green appearance as would justify Wordsworth's line, "green to the very door." And yet rural Bengal had more pathless woods than paths, more ponds than fishes, more granaries than grain, more footballs than food, more poetry than people and more people than it could contain. Hence the exodus of many doctors, engineers, professors, administrators, lawyers, etc., for other States of India and also abroad from Bengal right from the beginning of this century. My father joined the Central Provinces⁵ Government Medical Service, after taking qualifying certificates in medicine from Calcutta and in radiology and pathology from Dehra Dun and Nagpur.

Being seven years old and in Bengal, in a town called Nabadweep⁶ where my maternal grandfather lived, it was thought fit to send me to a school with Bengali as the medium of instruction.⁷ The school was a morning school and I found it a miserable experience to get up from bed and sluggishly collect the books and copy-books, drag along the road, rubbing the still sleep-laden eyes to learn "two multiplied by two makes four!" I developed an allergy to the old teacher with his peevish visage and croaking voice and really dull manner of teaching. Naughty as I was, I made a couplet to describe the old crow in Bengali –

Budho mastarer paathshala

Vidya howbey kaanckolla

When I uttered this at home, the elders were so horrified that they closed my little mouth with their big hands, severely warning me not to say such things. It surprised me. Why shouldn't I say what I felt? Then it was an innocent reaction. The couplet meant:

The old teacher runs a school

Where a pupil ever remains a fool!

This is only a rough translation of the purport of my little poem, but it shocked my uncles and aunts and even my mother, as though I was an uncultured person unfit for genteel society, to speak such things about the old teacher, though it infinitely delighted the knot of naughty school friends with whom I passed my school times.

Nabadweep once had a rich heritage for philosophy and learning, and great scholars congregated there. But more than that, it became famous for Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu whose unique love for Lord Krishna could only be likened to the unique love of St. Francis of Assisi for Lord Jesus Christ. After the advent of Sri Chaitanya, Nabadweep became more a capital for

⁵ "Central Provinces" is now known as "Madhya Pradesh", sometimes abbreviated here as "M.P."

⁶ "Nabadweep" means "new island" and refers to the portion of the town amidst the mighty Ganges river.

⁷ "Bengali medium" means that classroom instruction was delivered in the Bengali language.

lovers of Krishna and less a seat of philosophical sorites and catechism. At the age of seven, when I was hardly expected to know about these things, I tamely followed my elders to the temples of Kali, Krishna and Shiva, where the priests chanted “mantras” and people offered flowers and edibles to deities amidst clanging of bells and beating of drums. A part of the “prasad”⁸ was distributed among us, and I ate my share with pleasure. That was the only activity to captivate me at that age. My stay was suddenly cut short by the news that my father was transferred to the district town of Jabalpur and, educational facilities being good there, I was to be sent back from Bengal to study at Jabalpur. Within a month, my stay in Bengal came to an end.

⁸ *Consecrated sweets and fruits*

3. AT CIVIL LINES 1939 - 1941

It was the early part of 1939. Fresh from Bengal, I joined my parents, who resided at Jabalpur within the Civil Lines.⁹ My father, Dr. D. N. Hazra, was a busy person. His medical duties began at 6:30 AM, when he went to inspect the Reformatory School where juvenile prisoners were kept. After checking their health, he returned home for bath and breakfast. By 8 A.M., he was at the police hospital checking the health of policemen and treating the sick ones. At 9:30 A.M. he returned from police hospital to Civil Hospital where he was kept busy by numerous patients, who included both Indian and English Government Servants and their families. Meanwhile, some dead bodies would invariably arrive for postmortem. Again my father hurried to the mortuary to cut open these corpses for their "final diagnosis." His lunch remained literally at the mercy of the number of corpses each day. Sometimes he was as late for lunch as 5 P.M. After this he had again to go to the police hospital for an hour for the evening round, then return home for a cup of tea and then go back to Civil Hospital once again for the final lap of his duties. By 8:30 P.M., i.e., after 14 hours, his duties would be over and then he would return home, read for an hour or talk to friends and finally after supper go to bed. We children had hardly a few minutes of his company, but during those brief minutes he gave us all so much affection that we felt amply compensated for his otherwise day-long absence.

Once in a while father would find time, particularly on Sunday evenings, to take us out for a walk, or for a film, or for a visit to one of his friends, but that was a rare event indeed. My father was very robust and strong. When he laughed it was a hearty and full-throated laughter. Once it was so loud that it frightened the cat stealing milk in the kitchen and made it jump out of the window!

He could forgive and forget things easily, but never a lie. Even an attempt at something equivocal or with a touch of obliquity by anyone aroused tremendous wrath in him. He turned red at falsehood but that was not all. The person who uttered a blatant lie, whether big or small, of rank or file, was sure to get a thunderous slap on his face. It was so patent a fact that I have yet to see a human being so allergic to lies. Once I saw father beating a person into jelly for a like offense till others rushed to save the victim from father's mighty fists.

But how easily father could be pacified was also seen that day. The man, either out of fright or due to the physical thrashing, had developed pyrexia in the night and this news came to father. He went to the person's house, treated him with motherly tenderness, gave him money for medicines and milk and saw to it that the man became okay. But he bade him never to lie again. "Your father," my mother once said, "has asked me not to bother much if you broke a thing or committed any mischief, but to see to it definitely that you never stole and never uttered a lie." I had personally witnessed the dire consequences such an offender had to face. So, much though I might be tempted to hide an act that was not thought good while I at all cost wanted to be thought "good," I had to make a true statement when asked. Father used to say, "If a man admits an act honestly he lies open to correction someday, but one who lies habitually shuts with his own hands the doors of conscience and then can never re-true his steps."

⁸ "Civil Lines" is the name for a campus in which civil servants and government officials lived and worked, differentiated from the neighboring canton while D. N. Hazra was employed by the Government.

As father was busy with his duties and mother with her domestic work, I had all the time to roam about in the gardens called "Seth-ka-Bagicha,"¹⁰ killing frogs with stones, catching grasshoppers and other insects and tying their tails to a long thread to enjoy making them fly like kites, stone down green mangoes, make catapults to knock down a bird and even search for a snake like a hunter in the wilds. The thoughtless adventures and joys of childhood at times amounted to cruelty but I had no means of discerning this fact at that age. Soon these adventures were over as the school where I was to study opened. Some friend of my father told him that the two years of study through Bengali medium was a waste and that unless I took two double-promotions,¹¹ I would be late by two years for all important things in my life. He suggested that I must complete the first four grades within two years, and for that two private tutors would be required to teach me in the evening, one after another, after my return from school. Father agreed to it, and an agonizing phase in my life began in the name of education. The day at school, then just one hour to play, and thereafter two teachers in the night driving knowledge into my brain. I felt as though the lessons were being physically drilled into my skull and I would all but weep due to exasperation and exhaustion. The teachers called me "intelligent," "quick in picking up," etc., but all that was poor consolation. The fields, the gardens, the hopping and jumping, the pelting of stones at the fruit-laden trees, the watching of birds and butterflies – all these joys were taken away from me. Substituted were a heap of books and copy-books, a chair to sit on like a statue, a table to lay my small head and go on scribbling and scribbling what the teachers in the name of homework bade me to do!

But when the results came out, they all felt elated. I had done very well. The course that in the natural routine I would have completed in four years had been completed in two, thus saving two precious years of my career. But little did they care to notice that two beautiful and irretrievable years of childhood had been sacrificed at the altar of education, and with that another invaluable gift. It was found out only when I was admitted to the fifth class level in the best school of the town. The teacher was writing something on the blackboard for us to take down. As I could not decipher what was being written on the blackboard, I looked out of the window. Other students kept taking down the notes. The teacher came up to me and pinched my ears. A tear rolled away from my eye. When I told him that I was not copying from the blackboard just because I was not able to see the letters, he paused in bewilderment. He took me closer to the blackboard. There, it was easy to see!

The teacher cleared his throat to say, "Sorry, I have unnecessarily pinched your ears." Then he wrote a letter to my father, told me to go home at once and deliver the letter. When my father read the letter, he looked troubled. In the evening an ophthalmologist examined my eyes. It was myopia with a rapid stride – minus 4. "Dr. Hazra, that's a bad beginning at the age of ten," said the eye doctor. Two days afterwards, I, a lad of ten, wore thick glasses with steel rims. As I walked beside my father through the King's gardens, I could see the flowers clearly, but they looked smaller than their size. Dr. Shastri, another friend of my father's, by way of comforting me said, "Well, son, you need not feel shy about it. Why, you know? Because only highly intelligent persons get myopia, and you are one." He gently patted me on the shoulder. I feebly smiled to say, "Thank you, sir." In fact, I was itching to fling away the steel-rimmed spectacles

¹⁰ *"Garden of the Businessman."*

¹¹ *(Skipped two grades)*

that felt like such a dead weight on my eyebrow ... fling them afar onto the fruit-laden trees and knock down a mango!

4. AT CIVIL LINES 1942-1949

Sometimes odd associations of events get transfixed in memory. I still remember my first cup of tea. It was late winter in 1939. The town's observatory recorded 4 or 5 degrees above freezing point.¹² Though I could not understand much of what my father was telling my mother, one sentence got rooted in my mind: "The World War has begun," and he showed her an English newspaper with photos of tanks and soldiers. My mother had placed before him a cup of tea. I had never tasted tea before so I looked longingly at the cup. Father divined my feelings and asked mother to give me a cup of tea as it was a very chilly morning. My delight was as great as I sipped my first cup of tea with the enthusiasm of a neophyte. So with the beginning of the Second World War, I had my first cup of tea!

At Civil Lines and at school, I soon developed many friendships, some of which are kept up even now. Jabalpur being cosmopolitan, my list of friends encompassed a fairly representative cross section of boys from different communities and castes, including a few "untouchables." Of these last-mentioned friends, one was a very good boy and one day I took him home for tea and snacks. My grandmother had come to stay with us from Bengal. She was rather orthodox. At first, she welcomed my friend warmly and placed before us dishes of snacks. But during conversation when she came to know that the boy belonged to a sweeper family (sweepers were then considered "untouchable" by Brahmins) her fair face clouded. She called me inside and said, "You have been unwise. He cannot eat from the same plate as we do, nor can he sit on a chair beside us. Don't eat with him. After he finishes, we shall throw away the plates for good, but don't commit this blunder again." I flushed when I heard this. Though just 12, I felt some kind of natural resentment at my granny's words, which I could not understand at that age. I sharply said, "If he cannot eat or sit with me, then I shall not eat and sit with you" and with these words I went out, picked up my rather surprised friend and went to his hut to play. Perhaps during my absence my grandmother discussed the matter with my mother and upon second thought decided to let me have my own way in this matter. She came up to me and said, "Dear child, I'm sorry for what I said. You can bring your friend again. He is quite a good fellow."

"Yes, Grandma, that he is, and at his home they are all so good. They gave me a cup of tea also!"

"A cup of tea and you drank it?" Granny turned pale for a moment. "Was it a clean cup? I'm asking because they clean toilets and sweep conservancy lanes and roads, all dirty places, you know."

"Grandma, their hut is cleaner than our house. It is whitewashed and not a particle of dirt anywhere. They sweep better than we do – that perhaps is the reason, isn't it?"

Considering arguments futile, my grandmother decided to go inside the house and there ended the question of "untouchables" in my life. That friend of mine is now an important medical man.

¹² 40 degrees Fahrenheit

As I advanced in age, natural law replenished my limbs with new energy and my mind with fresh vitality. One day I espied a pair of grip-dumbbells once used by my father. I was permitted to do physical exercises with them. At school and in the neighborhood we had playing fields and we boys raised a hockey, a football¹³ and a cricket team. I was good at these games and found a place in the teams both at school and outside. The spirit of competition goes to one's head like alcohol. When we had matches to play, we were excitement personified. I was a desperado as an athlete; I felt that my team must win, fair or foul. I am ashamed of it now. That spirit led to fights with the other teams more than once.

I often got either hockey stick or spectacles broken – by now, I was wearing spectacles with very great correction. In one of the matches I scored a goal but simultaneously fell and dislocated a leg. The Civil Surgeon attended on its plastering up the next morning. But only a week later I escaped from home with my equipment to join my playmates, when an ancient-looking Englishman of the Church came upon the scene. He said nothing, only pointing in the direction in which lay my home! So, I backed away, preferring to forego the pleasures of playing with a plastered leg to facing the stern look of that commanding gentleman!

In addition to sports, just when I had turned 15, I dared to open a long rectangular box. My mother came rushing to prevent me. The box contained my father's gun, an excellent B.S.A. 12 gauge shotgun. "Your father will be annoyed if you do that. He was once fond of hunting, but has given it up now. So please have nothing to do with guns." I was disappointed, but decided that my cricket bat was good enough, and indeed runs flew from it! In later years, as a young man, I had started going out on hunting expeditions with some elderly hunters. Father got the scent of it one day, and within a few days he sold the gun to a police officer! Since then, I have never hunted.

At sixteen, I happened to open the covered bookcase containing my father's books. Apart from medical literature, the books included a wide variety of novels and plays, many in English. Although Hindi and Bengali were the only languages in which I was fluent, I had profited from English medium instruction in school. In addition, I had developed friendships with several English families, so the language was not that unfamiliar to me. When I expressed the desire to read these books to supplement my school reading, Father and mother lovingly consented. After sports, or on Sunday mornings, I used to bring a chair out into the garden of our house and thus began my first acquaintance with the writers of these books. They were the great names of English literature, and often I could not really understand the texts, but I went on reading in spite of some confusion. I did this for months, and towards the end of the period I found that context had supplied meaning for even the words with which I had not been familiar. I was learning the language in an unorthodox way, but it seemed to work well. By this time, I was comfortable with works like *Anna Karenina*, *Man and Superman*, *God the Invisible King*, *The Passionate Friends*, *The Toilers of the Sea* – in short, some sizeable, complex books. In the process I had discovered a new world – the ebb and flow of love, the rise and fall of fortunes, the sunny smiles and tears of scores of human beings, the birth and death of people, and the comedy and tragedy of the human saga. So engrossing were these books that I peered into the pages, straining my eyes even when the light fell to an insufficient level, just to find out if Levin

¹³ Field hockey and soccer football

would ultimately win Kitty's love or Tanner would really become a superman, or fall prey to Ann, and often I smiled or shed a tear with the character of the fiction or the plays.

By the time I was nearly eighteen, I had read an enormous range of English literature, and in the process had assimilated quite an advanced degree of vicarious experience. I was thankful to father for keeping such books in his library, and even more thankful to the likes of Shaw, Tolstoy, Mrs. Henry Wood, Dickens and the rest for making me feel identification with so many men and women. Perhaps they were imaginary persons, but as I saw it I had acquired a much wider friendship than only my friends at class and on the playing field.

5. THE LAST YEARS AT CIVIL LINES

India gained freedom in 1947. It also got divided. Pakistan was born. I still remember some events of those days in my town. Most of the English families were leaving India, and quite a few were on very friendly terms with us. They came to our home and shook hands with us. Some of the English ladies kissed my mother, which touched her. At the same time, we felt both the triumph of national freedom and the sadness at seeing friends depart. Another sorry sight was the mass exodus of Muslims for Pakistan. These included some very good friends of our family. Like the English boys, some Muslim boys were so close to my heart that I really felt sad when I saw them going. My father was loved and respected by them all. He was a good doctor and thousands of human beings, whether they considered themselves this or that, when in the throes of physical suffering, all cried alike and were treated and cured by the same medicines that my father gave them, with the best of his medical care and skill. It was natural for them to feel sad at the moment of parting. Our teams were broken up. I could not help remembering my friends who went away. I have not seen even one of them again. But I do hope that they too, at times, remember us and the days at Jabalpur.

With the breakup of our teams, I turned further to reading, and began Bengali and Hindi literature – mainly Tagore, Saratchandra, Bankim Chandra and Premchandra. Thus I became acquainted with a more international literature. The more I read, the more I was compelled to feel that all literature was basically one, in spite of the superficial differences in custom and attitude.

Another side effect was that literature softened my heart with respect to my fellow creatures. I had been pretty ruthless towards various animals, but Dickens and Tolstoy, Tagore and Sarat and the rest had shown me human misery and human helplessness, to the extent that the sight of an ant drowning in a gutter would make me soil my hands unhesitatingly to take it out and place it upon my palm to dry and then move along to safer grounds. I went through a romantic period during which I found it difficult to pluck a beautiful rose from its stalk. "Let it bloom and have its day," I thought. "I need not kill it to appreciate it!" I now hold the view that no nation can be civilized, regardless of its material attainments, unless its children are given the opportunity to develop their hearts and heads in a balanced manner with the help of the reading of good literature.

Towards the close of 1948, I came to know that father was due to retire soon, and that a piece of land had been purchased in another part of Jabalpur called Bai-ka-Bagicha,¹⁴ where we would build a house to live. When I went to see the place of our future dwelling, I felt frustrated. It was a place bereft of trees and garden, dusty and full of unsanitary conditions.

My uncle had come from Calcutta to Jabalpur. He was very intelligent and very well educated. When I asked him why we were to live in an unhealthy place, when Jabalpur had many nice localities in which to reside, he beamed with a knowing smile, and said, "It is my choice and a highly practical one. Your father is going to retire soon, and will have to set up his private

¹⁴ *Garden of the Lady.*

medical practice. If you go to live in a healthy locality, how will he get patients? This Bai-ka-Bagicha is without any Bagicha. It is full of squalor and hutments and the people suffer from all sorts of diseases. Your father shall have a roaring practice there! Now I hope you understand why I selected the place?"

My intelligence quailed before my uncle's and I retired to bed thinking of the sordid place where we were going to dwell and to bid goodbye to civil lines, with its green ground, mango and orange groves and many flowering plants. But it took another year for father to retire, and for the house to be constructed and it was early in 1950 when we finally went to Bai-ka-Bagicha, where I continue to dwell till date.

6. THE PURSUIT OF TRUTH

Men seek pleasure in many ways. But in general they strive to obtain it in wine, women and wealth, of course in varying degrees. I was allergic to eating fish, but everyone else in the family liked fish immensely. If they got fish to eat, their faces brightened up to the same degree to which my face darkened. They wanted me to share their pleasures of eating fish and put forth a volley of arguments in favour of fish-eating. I liked mutton very much, which they did not like so much. As I was almost a minority in the matter, more often than not, there was fish rather than mutton cooked at home. No doubt I thought the bunch of them selfish! They would so voraciously devour fish as to shame even a cat and tell me with Socratic airs, "Fish adds to your intelligence while mutton only adds to your mutton!" Suffice it to say that pleasure-seeking is a vast and varied affair and more often than not, one person's meat is another person's poison!

The reader of my memoirs by this time might have become curious to know what were my "pleasure-pots" in the early twenties. Definitely, I had a platonic itch for feminine charms but of the type that would make a woman contemptuously remark, "The fellow is good for nothing. He shows such friendliness as if he were heels over head in love but when I advance he retreats like a tortoise into its shell. Ugh, what a man! Is he a man?" As for wine, no one offered me a glass in those days and accordingly I had no idea of its worth.

Now to wealth: frankly I am surprised to look back at my photographs of those old days. An ordinary shirt and an ordinary loose trouser called pajama decked my body although my father's income was very good and I was his only son. The only value, to me, of money was to buy books. I never thought of amassing wealth or becoming wealthy. It was not in my grains. My friends said I was not fit for urbane society. I still remember what I said to them, "Yes, gentlemen, I admit it – I can't belong to your urbane society, for the simple reason that they care for what is growing outside their heads, while I care about what is growing inside my head!"

In short, I did not care to be wealthy, just because I didn't need much money! No foibles and fashions, no wine or women, only books – that was all I cared about. I was thirsting for knowledge – knowledge beyond the few textbooks of the college. This thirst increased day after day to a surprising degree. The more books I read, the more brains I met, and the more brains I wanted to meet by reading more books. Now it was no longer just literature that interested me, although I continued to read literature voraciously, but books of psychology, of history, of geography, of natural and bio-sciences and even of palmistry and numerology that claimed knowledge of fate and fortunes. As the study hours increased, the number of friends diminished only to those who also cared to know more, to learn, to question and to seek the right answers. I remember how I read with short intervals, all day long and then again, in the silence of the night until somebody at home would wake up and admonish me to get some sleep.

Reading had become a passion. I wanted to know what the wisest people, the thinkers and the scientists, have come to know about nature, about living and the non-living, about all this world around, all the starry universes, and above all about ourselves and our purposes and fate on this globe!

For recreation, I preferred three things: an excursion to some river or lake or a stroll in the park; a good film (at the time there were a number of sober films, both English and Indian); or to listen to good singers of the town. For friends, now I had only eight or ten, all in colleges and all with an intellectual bent. Then one day I suggested the opening of a reading club, and all agreed. We bought fine books. A weekly reading session was initiated, followed by a candid discussion. Our common motto was to weigh every thought carefully, not to impose ideas on others or our own selves, to remain willingly and joyously open to correction and to strive to find out the truth in the form of “facts” and “result-oriented experiments” – logical sequences leading to conclusions – and also to discover *truth* in its real universal meaning. Thus we had a strange intellectual culture where nothing was taken for granted, nothing accepted without reasonable believability and nothing was compartmentalized and cut off from all other human experiences before its individual claim could be recognized. In this spirit, the total view of a rose was not just the “facts” as seen in botany, but also as seen by a poet, as seen by a lover of roses or a gardener, as seen by the seller or buyer of roses, as seen against the background of creation and if possible as seen by the rose itself. Truth was not seen by our little coterie to be the monopoly of any single branch of knowledge, whether botany or zoology, poetry or philosophy, mathematics or physics, medicine or chemistry, sociology or psychology, political or economic theory. Nor did we accept our human senses also as the last word of all criteria of judgment. This was not warranted, as we knew our sense-limitations and variations from all other species too well. Anyway, it was a real good intellectual exercise that we were developing in those days, and it gave us pleasure, humbled our egoistic assertions and led us gradually to that crisis whose most miserable victim I was, myself, as the next chapter will indicate.

7. IN THE EARLY TWENTIES: THE ZERO HOUR

Reading and reflection over matters that interest and concern the intelligent human being, a scrutiny of knowledge attained so far and the limitations of that niggardly total; myriad questions advanced by intellect and reason about all sorts of things, became a part of our nature at an age when we might have followed the ways of youth, the ways of the flesh and the world. But the pleasures and recreations held no thrall for me and my very few friends. We still went to the sports field for an hour, but just to keep fit; we listened to songs just to give pleasant rest to our minds; we watched the lakes and the green trees just to relax our eyes that traveled half a mile through the latest books and journals of several hundred pages daily and nightly. We still visited people, but mainly scholars and professors, reputed in their knowledge, only to make enquiries. I still chuckle when I recollect a professor of Chemistry whom I used to meet and found specially interesting. One day he suddenly sprang a question on me: "Hazra, your friends have told me that you are a voracious reader. How many books have you gone through by now?" I was about twenty-three years old. I thought about it for a while, and then produced the figure, more or less, of 800. He looked frankly puzzled. Turning to me with an earnest gaze he said, "I simply wonder that you haven't gone mad! Now, could you select for me 20 books to read from the various branches of knowledge that could give me a fairly comprehensive wisdom?"

I returned his gaze with the same earnestness and said, "Sir, I see mental mists all around. These books are like so many little candles. They cannot illuminate the vast face of Truth. They light up a very small patch here and there. So there is more confusion in my mind than perception. I come to you for your guidance, not to guide you!" The professor smiled gently. "You have read more books than I have. I am only a gramophone record of chemical data, a record that has been playing for more than your age in the classrooms, a record which is almost rubbed off! I can't guide you. I know that I do not know enough of my own subject. Every day, new facts are coming up, old theories are giving way to new ones and the new ones are marking their time to give way to more modified ones. So, I'm in a greater mist than you are." We parted. All the professors I met were somewhat frustrated, but they all covered up their frustrations with the blanket of academic qualifications and rank, with wall-to-wall carpets, fine furniture, a car, a telephone, good dishes and so many niceties. Naturally, they were aware of the mist but not perhaps so poignantly, bitterly and helplessly as I was. Nor did I, or do I blame anyone for making a compromise with ignorance. How many are willing to leave the smooth road to life, and climb a mountain? How many mountaineers are daring and sacrificing enough to climb atop the tallest cliff in the world? The agony of the seeker is a rare kind of agony. It is not for the armchair philosopher or the successful businessman or the pleasure seeker to know this agony. It is good that they are spared the pain! Even the accepted wise people – the Nobel prize winners – mostly derive a lot of satisfaction when they celebrate the award with champagne, sign autographs and beam a "thank you so much" message to admirers of their achievements. But the mist hangs heavy even before the eye of their consciences. They too strike a compromise with ignorance and I do not blame them, either.

In my twenty-third year, despair turned into positive bitterness. I saw my father reading books of religion and philosophy. I was really shocked and surprised. I had no respect for these books. I hated them from the core of my heart. They talked about "God" and "angels," heaven and

hell, reincarnation and spirit, immortality and eternity of soul and the like. They featured symbols—soul and spirit – that I felt had been created to assuage man’s fears about the transitory nature of existence. The rules of nature ultimately constrict a man regardless of his wisdom. To me the world of religion and philosophy was the world of make-belief and when my sagacious father turned to them, I felt he was growing old – and old age is the age of fear. By this I mean specifically the fear of death, the mightiest fear. I assumed my father was trying to use the “fake balm” of philosophy to avoid the pain of oncoming death. I didn’t blame him, either. He was becoming like so many others. But the bitterness from which I suffered increased day and night.

I felt that there were hundreds of questions not answered at that time even by books of sciences. The “why” of things led to further “whys” till nothing seemed to be the answer to the fundamental “why.” Physics was lost, chemistry followed, mathematics was a sham in the ultimate analysis, botany and zoology all dwindled before the more fundamental “whys.” I do not want to belittle human efforts whether in science or humanities. They seemed good as far as they could go, but not an inch farther than that. They were nowhere near the core of truth or real knowledge – the impeccable absolute knowledge.

And then came the day when I, in my own turn, was thinking of the phenomenon of death seriously. Already there were gadgets for birth control, but to my utter despair I saw no gadgets for “death control.” The inexorable phenomena of birth, growth, decay and death ruled supreme in nature. All had to submit themselves for final execution: scientists and artists, saints and philosophers, emperors and clowns, trees, animals, bacteria and bacilli. Yet how busy these creatures were, making nests and houses, talking of property and problems, giving learned lectures or planning the future of a nation, waging wars or flying pigeons of peace. How busy, no time to pause and ponder about the final moment when the doctors would remove the oxygen cylinder, check the pulse and the heartbeat and declare them dead. DEAD! Lost forever their endeavours, their achievements, their concerns and their cares, prides and passions, gone to the grave to rot and decompose along with their corpses. I remembered the childhood sights,¹⁵ the mortuary, the corpses, one woman drowned, stomach swollen hugely, the fixed stare of dead eyes surveying nothingness, the man cut under the railway train, the man stabbed to death. I remembered the passing away of relatives and friends and lamentation raised to a crescendo for a few weeks, only to subside and then all mourners revert to old ways of talking, laughing and forgetting the episode – the episode that was one day going to overtake each and all of us, whether King or beggar, whether one sat on a mountain of money or rolled in the pit of poverty.

In short, the phenomenon of death left me disconsolate. I had never held religion in high regard, but I had some hope that it might be possible to find absolute value in both pure and empirical sciences. Now, that hope began to dwindle as I reflected that all the scientists of the world put together had not been able to conquer death. I discussed this point with many friends, some of science and bio-science learning, and all turned up their noses in despair. I asked my friends how long we would live. My friend looked up with a startled expression. I remarked, “I do know we shall die one day, and that takes away the sweetness of even sugar.”

¹⁵ Dr. D. N. Hazra, in his role as Pathologist, managed the morgue, and probably unwisely permitted his son to visit him there at an impressionable age. The impressions this left were very intense, and continued to pester him for decades after he wrote this.

My friend rejoined, "Hazra, you have become morbid nowadays and it is not good for you or for your friends either. Why be so death-obsessed? You were such a jolly guy, such a wit, you were one of the most coveted persons in our circles with your reading, storytelling, singing, playing, etc. Please become your old self again. Give us joy, Hazra. I know you can give us a lot of it, and forget death."

"Okay, my friend," I said, "from now on, when we are together we shall have fun – real fun – and you will not have to complain about it."

"Thank you so much," my friend said as he left for his home.

I felt good also. I had no right to make others unhappy because of my personal problem. I resolved to keep the problem to myself, my misery to myself, my agony to myself, my "mist" to myself and whenever my friends would be with me I would try my best to keep them joyous. Really, although I was miserable, what more could I do? From that period onwards, I was leading a "double life," on the surface a jolly, amiable entertaining friend and deep within and during hours of solitary retirement, a man surveying nothing, seeing nothing, understanding nothing of the scheme of life and creation, a man shaken to the depths by the heavy weight of mystery on his mind, a man who only knew that he really knew nothing!

Let me do justice to myself, dear reader. I was not an atheist in the sense that I did not subscribe to religious faith alone. What would you call a man who had forfeited faith in religion and science, philosophy or poetry, music and mathematics, human strength and pleasures, possessions and attainments, all alike? The word "atheist" or "agnostic" really can not define my state of mind at that age of twenty-three. I do not know which word can aptly describe it. Suffice it to say that it was an entire loss of faith in all things and beings, all learning and research, in all strivings and efforts – and what was worse, loss of faith in my own abilities to solve the riddle of the universe, to conquer the laws of the cosmos, to be anything different or mightier than anyone in the world. And with this feeling, the great vacuum entered my life. The "zero hour" had set in. At twenty-three, I thought myself the saddest individual in the world, not because some girl had broken my heart, not because I had failed an examination, not because I had ill-health to contend with, not because I lacked the necessary money, not because of any and all factors that might make a man very sad – I had no complaints on the mundane plane at all. As uncle had predicted, my father was having a roaring practice and our family was having the best of material pleasures. But my sadness was qualitatively so different! And the worst aspect of it was that there was no cure for my sadness. At least in that "zero hour" I was compelled to feel that way! On top of that, I was also compelled to keep it to myself!

8. A BLANK CHEQUE FROM HEAVEN!

It was some time in 1954. I was now studying for my master's degree in English Literature. But as I had already said, it was just a dragging on – because I had to carve out a career of my own and education was a ladder to it. I had already annoyed my father by refusing to enter the medical profession. Now if I didn't do well enough in arts, I would have not one member of the family left to show me sympathy. So I read the books and tried to do well in the examination – the art of killing the joys of literature and taking the dead bodies of beautiful classics for a “cut up,” a kind of literary postmortem!

My uncle had planted a beautiful little garden full of colourful and fragrant flowers inside the house in the inner courtyard. Moving from flower to flower and enjoying their mute and fragrant presence was my real delight when all the other members of the family went to rest. The flowers, surprisingly enough, still supported me in my murkiest hour of life. Those plants – poor dumb creatures, but how kind and good as companions they were to me. I would draw a chair up and sit beside them, into the late hours of the night.

I had suspended all extra reading, because the readings did not solve my fundamental questions. The assigned reading was not more than fifty books a year, and as a fast reader they didn't take me much time to complete. Nor was I really interested in a brilliant grade. It was such a farce – once I had come face to face with the “MIST.” So, I kept moving in the garden, trying to forget the gnawing at my heart. Then one night, as I strolled along, I was startled to hear a tremendous mighty voice from within me. It said, “You are the son of immortality!” The force with which this was heard by my inner being visibly startled me. For a few minutes, I stood stock-still. Gradually my brain began to function normally. The voice was gone. The feeling was gone. I smiled at myself. I applied Newton's third law to the case in a manner even Newton might never have thought of. Every action has an equal and opposite reaction. That voice was nothing but an equal and opposite mental reaction to the year-long mental obsession with “I am mortal and I am going to die some day, just as everyone else will. I will cease to be – sans eyes, sans ears, sans smell, sans everything!” I smiled at myself for giving way to that reaction! Pooh! “I am the son of immortality!” Just like Don Quixote fighting with a rusty sword against the windmills! Like striking a tiger with a hand glove to kill it! I laughed aloud. “That is the sort of inner voice that makes saints of common people,” I thought. I kept pacing the garden.

Some days passed and then an evening arrived which at that time left me bored but later on proved itself of tremendous importance. That evening, I went out for a walk. But suddenly I felt I should not take a long walk but rather return home, so I turned back. As I trod along the road, keeping to my side of the road, I came to a place called Jai Narayan ka Wada, with a big archway inside which there were houses. I had never gone through the arch, since I didn't have any friends there. Just near the archway were some wooden cots and just about 25 to 30 persons were sitting on them, listening to a young bright-looking bespectacled gentleman,¹⁶ who spoke softly about something that I could not understand from a distance. But as I was about to pass by that spot, I felt a magnetic attraction to the place, and I slowed down, a bit puzzled.

¹⁶ Bhau Kalchuri

Suddenly the gentleman's voice was audible. "Meher Baba tells us that we have to pass through various stages of evolution to evolve our consciousness." I stopped to listen. "The soul becomes stone-conscious, then mental conscious, then ..." It was now difficult for me to keep away from the scene. I was surprised. It seemed to be a religious or philosophical gathering but the gentleman was neither wearing the ochre robes of a yogi, nor the vermilion marks of a preacher on his forehead. His dress was a bush-shirt and long pants. He was completely self-possessed and mild-toned. But what was he talking about to these people? Was it Darwinism adapted to spirituality, or spirituality adapted to Darwinism? First of all, was it an open meeting? What right had I to join it uninvited? But, in spite of myself, I was surprised at my own behaviour – years of practice in etiquette given by my family and the English atmosphere could not overcome the peculiar attraction of that meeting. It was as if a mental magnet was drawing me to it and, without tendering any apologies to anyone present, I went up and sat on one of the cots! But within a few minutes of listening to the speaker the "fundamental whys" cropped up in my mind. After he finished speaking about what Meher Baba had told him, I asked him about the possibility of anything being called the real primary stuff of creation without at the same time having to ask how and from where did this primary stuff come, if it did not have some pre-primary stuff to create it and so on, ad infinitum! The gentleman, whom I did not know then, asked me, "What are you doing at present?"

"I am studying for my Master's degree," I replied.

"First complete your education. Later on, you will understand these things."

Frankly speaking, this answer did not satisfy me, and I rose to go. Meanwhile tea had arrived, and one gentleman very lovingly offered me a cup, but being hurt in my pride of knowledge and also the intellectual discontent welling up from within, I refused to take the cup of tea so warmly offered. Without even the ceremony of "goodbye" I stalked off and walked home. I was still reacting to the man's words. What was my M.A. to do with all this? Will the M.A. work a miracle? Why did he not face my question or even care to pay any attention to it? Was I such a non-entity? And then the allergic reaction set in. "These people and these make-believe talks, I have shunned them in the past and I must shun them with greater determination in the future. It was foolish for me to feel that attraction and go up to the place and listen to all that. No more of that from now on," I muttered to myself, preferring my "mist" to "made to order" philosophies like that one. My ego assuaged, I applied myself to my coursework again.

A few weeks elapsed. Although I had already told my friends that I did not have any faith in religion or God's existence, etc., and that they too ought not develop a blind belief in these things, yet one day a friend of mine brought me a book and in a casual manner said, "A devotee of Meher Baba gave this book to me to read. I decided that you are a better judge of these things. So, I have brought the book for you to read, of course if you care to."

I recollected the episode of Jai Narayan ka Wada a few weeks back and it had not been exactly a palatable one! So I casually opened the book at some page and began to read a line or two. Then my allergy returned to me. "See, my friend, this person has laid down a table, almost a mathematical table, of what he calls perfect masters and men on planes, etc. He says that there are 56 perfect masters in a cycle, 5 in each age and so on. Why 56 and not 55 or 57? What is the special charm of 56? Here, take the book and return it to the fellow who gave it to you." I was getting hotter. "How many times have I to tell you that we shall have none of these fairy-tales? Even science is not able to understand the mysteries of the cosmos and shall we waste our time

with these books? Take it back!" My noble friend, knowing my moods and passions did not argue, nor did he offer a counter argument. He took back the book and said, "It's okay – what you say is right. We must not believe in all these things." That was the end of the matter for two years.

Meanwhile, I was getting more and more drawn to my studies. I did not do well at the preliminary M.A. examination, just because I could not adjust my temperament to the needs of the examination. Critical appreciation or criticism of *Macbeth* or "Ode to a Nightingale" or *Pride and Prejudice* seemed to me a pathological activity. But to become a Master of Arts it was thought essential to do everything with the poem or the play or the story except enjoy it. I almost felt that bad writers wreak their revenge on good writers by becoming "critics" and bad critics wreak their revenge on innocent students by becoming professors! As this was the reaction of a fool, I hope none of the noble gentlemen of the profession will take it seriously. Besides, I am also doing the job of teaching in a college for the last twenty-six years.

When I found my performance poor at the M.A. preliminary exam, I was compelled to take warning and "do as the Romans do" in the final examination, i.e., borrow and steal brilliant statements and enlightening remarks of scholars on particular authors or topics prescribed for study. I memorized the whole thing, vomiting it out at the first opportunity at the examination. Fortunately, the questions matched the answers I had memorized. Equally fortunate was that I had attained a very powerful memory, with which I was able to reproduce not only words but even the punctuation of the sentences containing the words, for hundreds of pages. With all the virtue of a parrot, I did well enough in the examination, to the happiness of all around. I had completed my education. But I had almost forgotten the words of the gentleman in 1954 that I must first complete my education and then go for those esoteric things. Little did I know that a blank cheque from Heaven had been slipped into my pocket. It was now possible for me to draw upon the account at will.

9. CHANCE OR COINCIDENCE OR PLAN DIVINE

The words “chance” or “coincidence” are not for nothing in our human vocabulary; they are matter of fact things but is there some law or laws working behind even chance or coincidence? That’s the question!

It was winter of 1956. My friend Rabindra Nath Bhattacharjee¹⁷ (RNB)’s elder brother’s marriage was to take place at Maihar. Naturally we, a few friends of RNB, were included in the bridegroom’s party at Maihar. Apart from attending the marriage, I had another attraction in going to Maihar. I had for a long time loved to listen to the sarod playing of Ostad Allaaddin Khan Saheb, the greatest instrumental musician of our century, whom even Menuhin compared to the “Ocean of Music.” As his seat was Maihar, I did not wish to lose this opportunity to listen to his music at his residence, presuming that the event could be arranged. We were soon at Maihar, with some thirty others, and of course the bridegroom. It was a typical Bengali marriage, but I, RNB and Suresh Kumar Ganguli (SKG) were looking forward more keenly to the great Ostad’s music than the marriage, which fairly enough ought to have interested the two who were getting blown into each other’s arms by the gust of that age-old custom. The evening approached, the bands played outside and Mr. Chopra bade us all get ready for the bridegroom procession to the bride’s house. At this juncture, a simply dressed man whom I did not know approached me. He had been in the bridegroom’s party. Why he chose me to talk to, I don’t know. But he very politely introduced himself as Yedullu L. Muniraj (YLM) and said, “Have you any idea about Meher Baba?” At that moment I was buttoning up my coat, and I was a little puzzled at how the topic of “Meher Baba” had suddenly and, apparently without any previous context, appeared before me in the person of this gentleman. RNB and SKG, my close friends, were well acquainted with my tough attitude towards religion and spirituality, and they approached us apprehensively, as if to protect YLM from the tactics in which I might indulge. But I assuaged their fears by politely telling YLM that I had heard of Meher Baba once, that I was not interested in mysticism, and that I was at the moment occupied with dressing for the party that I presumed he too would be joining. Far from being put off by what I had said, YLM countered, “I understand what you say, but there is no harm if you read just one page of a book in which Meher Baba tells us about the theme of creation.”

“But we would be getting late!” I still politely protested. I knew that I had begun to colour at this imposing request.

YLM simply said, “Just one page! How much time would it take?” and without waiting for my consent he rushed to his box, opened it, quickly pulled out a thin volume and came back to me. I looked at my friends. They still bore the expression, “Please spare the fellow. He is too simple to deserve your anger.” I sighed and most reluctantly took the book from YLM, one page of which was to be read by me to please him, a total stranger, not caring to bother about my time, my aptitude and even my name.

I casually opened the book at somewhere in the middle and began reading it. As I read down the page, two thoughts came to me. Firstly, that it was a coincidence that Meher Baba’s book

¹⁷ In casual conversation, Amiya always names his friends through sets of initials, so the convention has been maintained throughout the book; a cross-reference is provided in the last page of the book.

had again come to me, and as his disciple in 1954 had said, after I had done my M.A.! The second thought was that the page was telling me about the same topic that the disciple had been discussing on the night when I had first encountered him, and the style of presentation of the material was authoritative – no “if,” no “but,” no “possibly.” More than that, Meher Baba had given diagrams to illustrate the material. The language was forceful, and the sentences breathed tremendous self-confidence about how things evolved and why. Well, I went on reading down the first and up the second page, feeling at least one thing, that “right” or “wrong” this person had no “hitch” or “hesitation” or “inhibition” or “incertitude” in describing the cosmic plan, as if he was its maker! His style also showed that he was educated in all respects and had a natural tone of authority that compelled our attention even before we could find time to argue about the “issues” that he had brought up. Well, that was all at the moment, for Mr. C. again blew upon his horn to tell us to file out for the marriage procession. I hurriedly returned the book to YLM and got busy tying my sandals. YLM did not ask me anything. He was just happy that I had read a page or two from that book. I saw the pleasure on his face. As I rushed out to join the procession, I wondered in what category of Homo Sapiens to place this man!

The marriage ceremony was underway. Then came dinner. Then a promise by some musician of Maihar to help us all to listen to the great Ostad at his residence the following evening. We felt so happy at the opportunity that we profusely thanked the gentleman.

We returned to the rest house at about 11 P.M. Again YLM came up to us there. We had made a separate bunch as we were friends, of the same age, and also because other members of the party were very elderly people. As I saw YLM approaching, I couldn’t help chuckling to myself, “Here’s that fellow again!” but this time he didn’t ask me to read Meher Baba’s book. He simply wanted to know what time it was. RNB told him that it was 11 P.M. Then YLM made a very odd request to RNB. He said, “Please as I do not have a watch, would you alert me a few minutes before midnight? I have to chant a line 500 times from that hour.”

RNB was amused. “What line is that?”

YLM: “Om Parabrahma Paramatma. I have to repeat it 500 times.”

I think it was SKG who quipped, “Why are you doing that?”

YLM: “Because Meher Baba has asked His lovers to do so for six months. As I do not have a watch, I have to take the help of someone who has one. So will you please alert me just before midnight?”

RNB said, “Yes, I will” and YLM went up to his bed.

To us, it seemed so funny, really, that we exchanged smiles. This “Om Parabrahma Paramatma” was a Sanskrit line meaning something about God that we neither understood nor cared to understand. It was our affair as human beings to help the man with our wristwatches, as he didn’t possess one, and there the matter ended.

A few minutes before 12, amidst snoring at octaves by the majority of our party RNB told YLM that it was about to strike 12. YLM, to our amusement, got up out on his bed and sat up on his haunches. Just when RNB told him that it was exactly 12, he started chanting “Om Parabrahma Paramatma” in a low monotone with great devotion. He went on counting also so as neither to exceed nor to fall short of the 500 mark! I turned to the other side, to contain my incipient

unmannerly laughter. To whom was he praying? To whom was he calling? Was there anybody like Paramatma? Who was listening to this simple man's prayers? My unbelieving mind felt pity for YLM and the entire lot like him, who went on persuading themselves that there was a God, in spite of His neither appearing nor proving His existence to them! I do not know when sleep overtook me, and I did not awaken until late in the morning when they brought us tea in bed.

The day was highlighted by post-marital ceremonies, as marriages in India are quite long drawn out affairs, perhaps to rub the idea of having gotten married in a lasting manner into the minds and hearts of the bride and the bridegroom. In the evening I was late for the visit to Ostad Allauddin Khan Saheb's house and to my surprise the only two late comers to the programme were myself and YLM. So we found ourselves together, again, sitting outside the hall within which the great Master was playing his sarod and creating an atmosphere with great beauty and serenity. The programme over, as we began strolling back towards the rest house, YLM broke the silence and said, "Where do you live in Jabalpur?"

"In Bai-ka-Bagicha," I replied.

"Bai-ka-Bagicha? That is not far from where I live. I live in Jai Narayan ka Wada."

I remembered that it was there that I had first heard about Meher Baba, but I kept quiet.

YLM looked at me and said, "I invite you to come to my home. Will you care to do so?" It was just a polite response on my part when I said, "Why not? One of these days I may drop in."

"I would be greatly delighted if you visit me." Then with singular warmth he added, "Is it a promise?"

"Take it that way, if you wish," I said, and laughed. In spite of the esoteric things I did not like, this man was very unassuming and revealed a natural friendliness that we had to some extent lost in our sophisticated society. After this brief talk, we parted. On the way back from Maihar, nothing spectacular happened except that SKG's pocket was picked. However as the money lost was not much, SKG could stand the loss with a smile and without comforting and thus ended our trip to Maihar.

10. I FORGET MY PROMISE BUT YLM DOES NOT

More than a month elapsed. I got busy with my daily round of activities. One day, as I was on my way to the laundry, which was close to Jai Narayan ka Wada, out came YLM calling out my name. I stopped. Here he was again. He hastened up to me and said, "You have not cared to come to my home as promised while I waited. Please do come with me now."

"Now! Well, I am afraid I can't make it just now. I am going to the laundry for my clothes."

"Never mind the laundry. First fulfill your promise to me. Just for a few minutes, that's all. My house is over there, only a minute's walk." And he pointed his finger inside the archway to a small tile-roofed house.

I looked at YLM. No, it was really impossible to shake this man off! I agreed to go to his house. His apartment was ordinary and poorly furnished. His wife, who was doing some kitchen work, arose and YLM introduced me to her. We exchanged salutations, and YLM asked her to prepare some tea for us. I tried to restrain her from doing so, as I felt it might be an additional burden but whatever their real financial condition, both husband and wife were so eager to host me, maybe at the cost of a cup of milk for their young ones and also sugar and the warmth of their hearts was so touching that I thought it would be hurting them if I said "no" a second time.

As Mrs. YLM went back to the kitchen to make tea, her husband took me to another room in which hung several pictures with a large one in the middle. "That is Meher Baba, brother Hazra," he said and I looked at the coloured photograph. Meher Baba was sitting on a tiger skin in that picture, and his own hair flowed down to his neck like the luxuriant mane of a lion. The steady gaze of his large eyes had tremendous power. His features were not just handsome, they had a sympathy and beauty that would entice a Raphael or a Vinci to make his portrait. The eyes drew me back to them again. "Extraordinary," I said to myself and tried to think of all the faces I had seen either in person or in photographs or in paintings to find one that would vie with this face in majesty, magnificence, power, grace and at the same time such softness and delicacy of skin as would outdo any female! No, none that I could think of could match this face in the totality of impression it carried. And the impression was uncomfortable for my intellectual bent, not just what you would call "human." The radiance had a touch of the "celestial" and "unearthly" about it. "He is not an ordinary person," I admitted to my heart, though I said nothing of the kind to YLM. He then showed me some photographic prints of Meher Baba giving "Darshan"¹⁸ and "Prasad"¹⁹ to people somewhere in Bombay. In one print it was heartwarming to see Meher Baba embracing a child with a twinkle in His eyes, a smile on His lips and such a natural expression of love that it was poles apart from the expression on those who exhibit love for the sake of the cameraman more than for the sake of love. But YLM would not wait for me to take my own time to see the pictures. He began piling up photos,

¹⁸ "Darshan" means "seeing."

¹⁹ Earlier in the text, this word was explained as "consecrated sweets and fruits." The larger meaning, applying in the relationship between devotee and Master, is a gift from the Master, often a candy or other sweet. The gift is presumed to have spiritual significance as an expression of love from Master to devotee.

write-ups, magazines, etc. in front of me in such quick succession that, much though I would like to do justice to them, I simply couldn't. He was hurrying me from one thing to another, all the time with a hasty commentary that sounded like the delicious gurgle of a just-opened soda bottle. A break came with two cups of tea for us. But it was just a momentary one. YLM hardly took a sip and then started all over again. I tried to listen to him, to see the photographs and books, to hold the cup of tea in an upright position so that it would not slip from the saucer and simultaneously to drink it! I began to wonder at the depth of YLM's love for Meher Baba. Then, as I had already discovered that he didn't have much education, I could not help asking if he had read all these books by and about Meher Baba. YLM said, "I have read a few in Hindi. English I don't know much – rather I know very little. But for me Meher Baba is enough. I keep these books for learned persons to read, not so much for myself."

"Right, but why should you mistake me for being worthy of so much pains as you have taken? Although I have been reading quite a deal, yet this is the province that I have left untrod because I simply cannot bring myself to believe in the existence of God! Please do not mind my saying that – it is not said to hurt you. You are such a good person and so honest; but it is also my honesty towards an honest person like you to tell you that I have never found any concrete grounds to believe in the existence of God. However, this I will definitely admit: your Meher Baba is a unique personality, and I have enjoyed looking at his beautiful face and also at his – I don't know how to describe it – magnetic or winsome or knowing eyes. He has commanded my respect, spiritual things apart. Now permit me to thank your wife and you both for the tea and the kind attention and also let me beg your leave." I rose. YLM also got up rather reluctantly.

"Must you go?"

"Yes, I think I have to," I replied.

"When will you come again?" he asked with eagerness.

"Any day." I smiled.

"You won't forget this time, I hope?"

"No, no, it was such a pleasure meeting you. Goodbye." As I was leaving the room, but this time of my own will, I stole a glance at that photograph of Meher Baba seated on the tiger skin, his own hair flowing down to his neck like the lion's mane. His powerful eyes still showered a smile somewhere from their corners, and once again I had the same feeling coming over me, "He is extraordinary and generates a good feeling when one looks at Him."

11. THE PRELUDE

Although I did not repeat my visit to YLM's house, yet my mind was compelled to think about one thing: "Why and how is faith in the existence of God generated in people?" On an impartial plane of thought it was a fact that some great and illustrious people of the world, both past and present, accepted the idea of the existence of a Divine Being or a Divine Power. I still subscribed to the view that fear was the root-cause of worship, superstition, totems and taboos. Bizarre and erratic imagination was the cause of seeing visions, apparitions or hearing supposedly Divine voices. Clever trickery by "spiritualists" and "occultists" seemed to me to be the source of the credibility of the naïve. Yet, when I considered how many great persons also believed in Divinity, I was half-inclined to suspend my inflexible attitude towards these esoteric matters and cautiously, slowly and objectively undertake a proto-scientific survey of the entire matter over a considerable period to find things out for myself. Any experience that could be objectively verified and re-verified could earn the respectability of a scientific status. However it was going to be a difficult and not-without-errors undertaking and I was wondering how best to proceed in the matter when to my surprise I saw YLM standing before the door of my home one day.

"Since you wouldn't be coming of your own, I thought I must pay you a visit. 'If the mountain does not come let Mohammed go.' I hope I have not disturbed you by calling upon you without prior appointment?"

"No, not in the least. Please be seated."

YLM sat down in a chair in front of me. "Did you think of Meher Baba during the intervening period?"

"Well, yes in a general way. I mean, I was thinking of all such people who develop faith in esoteric things. If you do not mind my asking, how did you develop your faith in God's existence? Is it because of the tradition of faith that is passed on to us by our previous generations, or was it something else?"

YLM nodded his head, "I have had a faith in the traditional sense, as you say, but it was just traditional and nothing more till I came to Meher Baba."

"What happened then?" I asked.

"Faith just turned into conviction! Meher Baba does not only tell us that God exists, He himself is the Avatar of the age."

"What do you mean by Avatar of the age?" I asked in astonishment.

"It means that Meher Baba, Himself, is the living embodiment of God-hood; when God becomes a man, He is known as the Avatar, like Krishna, like Rama. In fact, Meher Baba tells us that during the previous several thousand years He has taken human body seven times: first as Zoroaster, then as Rama, then as Krishna, then as Buddha, then as Christ, then as Mohammed, and finally in our age as Meher Baba. He is the self-same Being who comes into our midst after long intervals and fortunate are those who come in His contact and receive His Grace!"

“That is what Meher Baba tells you, dear man, but what things made you believe in Him? Something very positive it must have been to believe in such things, in your case, wasn’t it?”

“Yes, brother Hazra, or else why should I have to believe in Him as the God-man! He does not pay me any money to do propaganda for Him. There are some critics of Meher Baba and myself in Jabalpur. When do they speak of me, do you know? They say I am working for Meher Baba on an agency basis! ‘He pays me money’ they say. But you have seen me, my house and family. I am a poor man. I wear the cheapest sandals – sandals of discarded tyres. Neither is Meher Baba rich. He wears coats that are worn out, the seams have given way and stitches have been put on several times. He eats so little that even a child would eat more; He undergoes such marathon fasts as would kill a man, however healthy he may be. And these fasts are so frequent! He undergoes unimaginable hardships to cheer up humanity, sitting for hours at a stretch listening to their problems, telling them not to worry, giving them the best advice, instilling such confidence in them that they overcome their difficulties and filling them with such selfless love that they feel there is no one else in the world who could love them as Meher Baba does. And brother Hazra, all He says is not through His mouth but through an interpreter, for He has been silent for over thirty-one years!”

“Silent for thirty-one years! You mean, Meher Baba never speaks? Had He the power of speech before?”

“Yes, many are alive who heard Him speaking and singing beautifully. But from 1925 on, He imposed on Himself an utter silence, so much that not a syllable has passed out of His mouth during all these years, in spite of intense activity, in spite of a thousand emotional situations, in spite of exciting events and provoking circumstances, including two major auto accidents that He sustained. What do you think of that?”

“If what you say about His controlling speech is true, and why should it not be, then I can at least say one thing, that I wouldn’t be able to maintain such incredible control over such an important organ. Even the beasts, birds and lower creatures of evolution take resort to uttering sounds. Even a dumb man produces odd sounds in excitement or under provoking circumstances. You say that Meher Baba with full and normal power of speaking put a total stop to that power in 1925 and never uttered a syllable from that time forward? Did He not even make a sound or utter a “Bah” or “Oh” during some funny situation that incites laughter or some physical suffering when man tries to comfort himself by sympathetic auto-sedative monosyllables like “Ah,” “Ooh,” etc.?”

“Brother Hazra, you are a learned man while I am just not even a matriculate. I have never heard even a monosyllable or a sound from His mouth all these days. Nor has anybody of the hundreds of thousands who met Him, told Him of their problems, sat with Him for hours, watched Him in all sorts of circumstances, heard any sound. If you feel it difficult to believe me, why don’t you go and check Meher Baba’s silence for yourself. I would like you to do it. You would not be the kind of person who would believe what others say, unless and until you get things verified in your own way.”

“That’s absolutely the thing, brother YLM. I do so like you for saying it. It shows there is no humbug about such things, no fear of exposure. The courage of inviting me to test Meher Baba, on your part, shows that this silence of Meher Baba has nothing ‘fishy’ about it, though I may be permitted, as you said, to find things out for myself one day. But one thing, why does He

observe this tremendous control of speaking? Is it to demonstrate His extraordinary abilities of a superhuman nature to people at large?"

"Oh, no. It is not for that. Meher Baba says that He has undertaken silence for the benefit of mankind and for His 'universal work', about which I can't explain anything except that it is meant to spiritually uplift mankind."

"So, that is the mission for which Meher Baba has sacrificed speech and as you say communicates through an interpreter? How does He do that?"

"Earlier He used an alphabet board. Whatever He wanted to convey to a person He did by placing His finger on the letters one after another, thus forming words and sentences. Anybody with a quick eye could read the letters for himself, but the interpreter being experienced, it was easier for him. Thus the conversation could go on at a perfectly normal pace; the interpreter could read the worlds formed on the alphabet board as quickly as Meher Baba placed His finger on them. Later on, shortly back, He even gave up the alphabet board and began making words and sentences with certain "mudras" of His ten fingers – gestures you might say – and Sri Eruch reads these for Meher Baba. It is done so ably, and with such natural and spontaneous ease and quickness, that sometimes during conversation one begins to wonder who is speaking – Meher Baba Himself or His interpreter."

"Wonderful, and quite interesting, I must admit. So Meher Baba, on the one side, exercises a matchless control over His tongue and at the same time does not let it hamper His communication with all who talk to Him? And this Silence, you say, is for His Universal Work or spiritual mission?"

"Exactly"

"Well, on serious thought, I have to confess that I cannot keep such perfect silence myself. I may not wish it, but a sudden, unexpected blow or jerk or pop or an angry mood or any similar exciting event may make me at least let off an ejaculation or a groan or a cry, in spite of myself."

"What do you then conclude?" YLM asked.

"At present, at least this much: Meher Baba can do what I cannot. And now let me get some tea for you." I rose.

"Tea for tea?" YLM smiled.

"Yes, not tit for tat." I laughed and he joined me in the laughter. In spite of my tough intellectual hide I had begun liking this man, who had so little education, so few possessions and yet so much warmth and simple human appeal. I felt that he was a rare individual. I went inside to ask my relatives to prepare tea. I felt ashamed of thinking that I was superior because I had read so many books and had taken university degrees, and this man had not even done his matriculation. How stupid of me to think that way. Shakespeare had read up to 6th or 7th grade in a grammar school and hundreds of people take their Ph.D. degrees by writing learned commentaries on that not-so-well educated man! Tagore had never been to any university and the university people earn their bread and name, their degrees and decorations by explaining Tagore's books to others. Yet when I met YLM again, I could not resist the temptation of asking how far Meher Baba had studied! Such is the weakness of a man addicted to his so-called personal scholarship. YLM told me that Meher Baba was a very good student and was doing

His intermediate in Deccan College in Poona when the “Spiritual Event” took place and He discontinued His studies.

“So,” I asked, “He never graduated?”

“You talk of a B.A. degree or a B. Sc. Degree. What happened to Him when Perfect Master Hazrat Babajan kissed Him was beyond the conception of your university men. He got all-knowledge, the absolute experience of Truth. Brother Hazra, pardon me for asking you – in spite of all your learning do you have a final answer to who you really are?”

“Frankly, if you ask that way, I really do not know – who I am, or what stuff I am ultimately made of!”

“Well, knowing by experiencing that final stuff of which you are made is God-Realization, the Absolute Knowledge, the Supreme Gnosis. When nothing remains to be known, you become knowledge personified. This you can’t get in the university. This Meher Baba got when He was in the college. So where was the need to be going for college degrees after that?”

To be honest, I could not help admiring the man for talking so plainly, even though in a little rough-edged way. I had 100% doubt about “Supreme Gnosis” and “final stuff” or “Absolute Knowledge” but hadn’t I decided to suspend hasty judgment and undertake a slow, cautious pro-scientific survey of the matter? I kept quiet, listening more and speaking less. Already, I fear, I was beginning to appreciate Meher Baba’s Silence, by letting others talk, a gesture of civility, if not of spirituality. At least, Meher Baba could be taken to be the most civilized person in the world, who allowed everybody else to wag the tail of the tongue before Him. Silently, patiently listening to them for hours – this had to be more enlightened than talking and preaching and returning five sentences for one just to show that you were five times more worth hearing than the other fellow.

After tea, I thanked YLM for coming. He asked, “Would you care to read some books by and about Meher Baba? They can perhaps better explain things than I, a half-educated man, can do.”

“Please don’t underestimate yourself, brother. Yet, I think I would like to go through some literature of Meher Baba. Can you give me any book about Him by some scholar?”

“In English?”

“Yes, English would be better, and if written by a scientific or intellectual person drawn to Meher Baba that would be better still.”

YLM was glad to hear this: “I feel so happy that you have decided to read the books. There are a few with me. *The Wayfarers* by a medical man Dr. William Donkin. Then one by Jean Adriel. Another by Charles Purdom.”

“Charles Purdom? You mean the noted critic and Shakespearean scholar? Is he an admirer of Meher Baba?”

“I do not know much about Charles Purdom. I can bring the book he has written. It is entitled *The Perfect Master*.”

“*The Perfect Master*? Wonderful title. Well, if he is the same man I know of, then I would definitely like to read the book. That is what Mr. Charles Purdom considered Meher Baba?”

“Yes, it is about Meher Baba exclusively.”

“Well, Purdom is a scholar, a respected name in recent English literary criticism. Please do give me all these books you mentioned, and thank you.”

YLM took leave of me. In a day, the books were on my table! Books written by scholars who were experts in their own spheres! I was really excited now. I really longed to know what these intelligent persons found in Meher Baba or His Philosophy that was worth the labours of writing sizeable books about Him.

12. SEEING THROUGH THE EYES OF OTHERS

In the past, I had deliberately avoided mystic literature or biographies because of psychologists' (especially Freud's) adverse comments on them. I had grown up with psychological terminology – which implies a way of thinking – and terms such as illusion, delusion, hallucination, auto-suggestion, hypnosis, mesmerism, etc., provided a comprehensive vocabulary for categorizing spiritual/occult experiences. In this camp, all religious experiences are aberrations induced by stimuli or stress conditions – imbalances of the nervous system. Drugs that intoxicate or inebriate exercise a similar impact on the nervous system, turning normal perception upside down. Perhaps spiritual/occult experiences were due to chronic toxic conditions of the body, senile or organic degeneration of the nerves. There was even one school of thought that suggested that they resulted from the brain's trying too hard to solve certain problems and in the process losing its hold. Herbert Reade has the view that young men should not think of infinity, arguing that trying to imagine the "unimaginable" might jeopardize the "delicate mental fabric."

At the core of this set of views is the insight that man is not master of the mind – mind is rather the tyrant ruling over him. Anyone who tries to prevent thinking of a particular thing, such as "I am not thinking of anything" for a period of a few minutes discovers the problem. "Thought suspension" is as impossible on the part of an average individual as "breath suspension" itself.

If then anyone claims mastery over mind and proves it, and is "normal" in our sense of the word and yet displays supernatural powers, he undoubtedly has a claim to our attention. Whatever he says likewise has a claim on our reflections. Psychologists like Freud have had a clinical acquaintance with what might be a limited range of people. Perhaps they never encountered supernormal and supernatural cases. I was excited at the prospect of looking to see if such things existed in any form.

I could clearly sense that the books that lay on my table even before I opened them were undoubtedly of this nature, and my excitement was manifold as I turned to one of them. It was *The Wayfarers*, written by Dr. William Donkin, a medical doctor. Soon, I forgot my surroundings, as I romped through the pages. It was the strangest book I had ever seen. The descriptions of strange people, places and events full of excitement reminded me of Jim Corbett and his book on hunting man-eating tigers on expeditions throughout India. The only difference was that here it was not a tiger hunt, but mast-hunting.

"Masts," it seemed, are more troublesome and dangerous than tigers, since they are people – both men and women – with supernatural status, whose outward appearance differed not much from mad persons. Meher Baba had explained to His disciples that masts hold the power to affect the laws of nature, performing miraculous feats at will. The masts were to be brought to Meher Baba to share His Universal Work, and it was not at all a joke to coerce them to cooperate. First the hunter had to search for a real mast while discriminating mast from mad person, then to extricate the mast from the circle of his devotees, then with endless patience and pain to coax the mast to accompany the hunter to Meher Baba. This done, Meher Baba then had to do the actual work with them, which would typically appear to be, (a) to normalize their dazed condition, and (b) thereafter – in some way which we of normal gross consciousness could never hope to understand – to make them work for Meher Baba.

Not everyone, not even every disciple, could do this work. Dr. Donkin's book is fascinating, and gives us insight into the more mysterious realms of consciousness and power inaccessible to us. "Mast tours" took Meher Baba and His select band of stalwart devotees throughout India. In all, these trips comprised more than 70,000 miles of traveling. Methods of travel were dictated by the place to be visited, which sometimes was so remote that it could be reachable only on foot. All the modes of land travel might be necessary on a particular trip – car and cart, taxi and train. Individual trips could last days on end, and the trips were undertaken at various intervals over many years. Throughout the period chronicled in the book, several thousand masts had been contacted, along with ten thousand men called "sadhus" (spiritual mendicants or hermits). The description of some masts and their ability to subsist in first class health, without food, in unsanitary sites, without bathing, without a roof overhead, defies all medical wisdom, particularly given the tropical climate of India. Dr. Donkin had produced quite a book, illustrated with photographs of many of the masts, and containing minute accounts of the events of the various tours and the personages, organized by the various places in India where each was found. The book was a testament to the meticulousness and discipline of the British at their very best.

I understood little of the spiritual side of the book, but reading the book was a wonderful experience. I was most impressed with Dr. Donkin, M.B., B.S., F.R.C.P., M.R.C.S. of London, who had dedicated himself to the service of Meher Baba and lived in India with Him. On top of all that, Dr. Donkin had, of necessity, to perform these services without recourse to explanations of why the various actions fit into a larger scheme – generally Meher Baba did not provide much explanation of who these mysterious creatures were, or what was happening in the invisible part of these interactions. I reasoned that Dr. Donkin must have found in Meher Baba someone who was worth obeying. Surely he must have seen and experienced something to sweeten all his toils and troubles.

My friends RNB and SKG were frankly astonished when they saw me with the big volume written by Dr. Donkin. "You are reading about Meher Baba?" they asked in surprise, as that might have been the last thing they would have expected of me.

"Yes, friends, and it is such a fantastic book. I've never seen the like of it."

"Please, allow us also to read it then," they pleaded.

"Not yet!" I was taking on the burden of the group. "First let me see through it all and if I feel sure that these books are good for you, then surely I'll let you. This precaution is necessary, because you may be easily snared into believing things, without examination, like falling in love with a girl at first sight!"

My friends generally never crossed me, as they had a great deal of faith in my "wisdom." So, although they looked at the book with thirsting eyes, they finally agreed that the matter was best left to me.

"You are right, brother Hazra. First you read these things, and only if you feel sure that it is neither hoax or nonsense then we shall go through them." Needless to say, it pleased my ego a great deal to have such reliance on my capability to judge.

After reading *The Wayfarers*, I went through the other books: *The Perfect Master*, by Purdom and *The Avatar*, by Jean Adriel. I found the books invaluable, so much that I felt pity for myself that I had occupied myself with reading other, pedestrian books rather than these books.

As I went through the books, the soul-stirring human tales of love, of beauty and the purity of people's attachment to Meher Baba – and His unfathomable depth of concern for them made me wonder more and more, who Meher Baba might be. Evidently, He could invoke such love in the hearts of people of all ranks, and cultures, religions and tastes, climes and countries. I ignored, for the moment, the question of whether He had profound wisdom, psychic powers, and so forth, although the various authors claimed that He did. I only experienced through these books the tremendous flow of love going back and forth between Meher Baba and His lovers – pure, unselfish love at its best, its highest, its noblest! Then YLM gave me a dozen or more issues of a journal called *The Awakener* published in America. I went through these volumes; the saga of love of so many lovers of Meher Baba touched me profoundly and once or twice, sharing their feelings, I could not help shedding a few tears. Who is this Person, who could be loved so much, and in such a selfless manner? The books suggested that Meher Baba did not promise His lovers anything, terrestrial nor celestial, and emphasized nothing but the give and take of pure unadulterated unexhibitionist love – a sort of “total love.”

Going back to the photographs of Meher Baba, I noted the variety of His expressions: some with a bewitching smile that gladdened my heart, some with His eyes looking far off, some with a tinge of sadness and compassion. Was that for us and our sorry schemes? Anyway, by the month end, during which I had read some books and a few journals, the residual impression on my mind and heart was that Meher Baba was in some way the very embodiment of love. Since love appeared to me to be the rarest thing in the current mixed up world, it followed that Meher Baba must be the rarest being, too!

13. THE PRELUDE ENDS, THE PLAY BEGINS

"One can sympathize with a person who has a toothache, but one cannot experience that person's pain." This old saying can be applied to all experiences of a personal nature. As you can't deny the fact of another person's toothache (since you do not experience it), similarly you cannot deny the validity of any person's personal experience. In this chapter I am going to record what transpired with me during the months from January 1957 through April 1957, and also a few "events" that some of my friends experienced, without asking the reader to expect them to happen in his/her life (but equally, I hope, not expecting them not to happen). Perhaps if you can suspend judgment, you may choose to ponder the mysterious ways in which the "supernatural" may happen in anyone's case, if it has the "mood" to do so. I use the word "mood" to substitute for the word "grace" which to me has sanctimonious overtones. But, it is my conviction that once the "supernatural" chooses to work for someone, there is no escape from the events.

One might ask if I consider this a privilege. I do, and from that it follows that one can't claim that it ought to be occurring to him or her. I have seen people seek these experiences with success and abject failure, perhaps due to too great a desire of fulfillment. My advice is "do not over-seek, for then the supernatural is certainly going to play hide and seek with you!"

The spirit of earnest enquiry is not enough in matters of the "supernatural." Put another way, why should the supernatural have to prove its existence to you? But, my experience shows that once a real spiritual being is in the "mood" and has decided to "convince" someone of things in which he has utter disbelief, he can do so, and continue doing so, to any extent.

The converse is also true, in my experience. If you then decide that you want these events to stop, it is out of your control. If an ordinary king cannot be dictated terms by a commoner, what about an ordinary person's dictating terms to someone who is that extraordinary?

On the other hand, I have one conviction about this topic. The most miraculous power on earth is "love." Think of the world's most powerful boxer or wrestler, who routinely crushes the skulls of opponents, yet see how helpless he feels when his own three-year-old child sits on his huge chest, tugs at his mustache or even beats him with his small fists to fetch him some toy. The giant is in the thrall of love. All his power of destruction is converted into the power of love, and it preserves, protects, tolerates, helps and humbles one's ego. Love of the commoner for the king can, if it is tremendous, conquer the powerful monarch's heart and the monarch might fulfill any wish of such a commoner.

In my experience, what is true of the gross world and its citizens is much more true of the supernatural world and its beings. So if you want to experiment, and if you want my advice, first try to develop sincere, unadulterated love devoid of ulterior motive for the supernatural entity, and then there might be some chance that it might get into the "mood" to dish out the experiences that you may covet.

The theory that one must be a psychic or a person of intensely subjective mood to have a spiritual or occult experience requires modification. When the supernatural deems it appropriate that you receive such an experience it, of its own accord, induces in you that intensely subjective, subtle and psychic receptivity that is needed to obtain the experience. Here

we see that our own efforts are not as productive as the “mood” or “grace” of the supernatural entity. Perhaps one reason why most meditators fail to get convincing experiences is that they are conceited enough to think that their efforts can “buy” the experience. Again, I very humbly suggest that one begin by purifying the heart, freeing it from the debris of ego, from arrogance, from the assumption that one has the right to sit in judgment over the experience, and even that one has the right to claim to be a seeker. Soil your heart with the tears of love and then you stand a better chance to enter the doors that Jesus Christ referred to when He said, “Seek and ye shall find. Knock and the doors shall be opened to you.”

Well, one may argue, “How can one love someone or some entity about whose presence one is still not convinced?” That is the basis for a circular argument. In my case it was just that sort of thing, but thanks to YLM I had taken the first step to loving Meher Baba. He had given me all the love-stories of Meher Baba and His devotees, and even without fully accepting I had begun to love Meher Baba for His many virtues, and above all for His unbounded love for everyone, as so vividly recorded by those books and journals. This love increased as days passed by. I told my friends that irrespective of whatever I learned from Meher Baba and His devotees about God or Creation and the Divine Theme, Meher Baba was really a loving person worth loving. Hence, I began encouraging my friends to go through the books to have a rich feast of “love.” My friends were only too eager to read the books, and soon I discovered that they too had begun to love Meher Baba and talked of all His wonderful statements like, “I have come not to teach but to awaken;” “Love is contagious;” “Love is as you experience it. Love varies in degree and the ultimate final state is ‘Union with God;’” “True love means the dedication of one’s self or the complete surrender of one’s self to the Beloved. It seeks the happiness of the Beloved without the least thought of obtaining happiness from the Beloved.”

Meanwhile, another thing happened, which YLM kept a secret from me and my friends for some time. He later on told me, “I was praying to Meher Baba that He should grant you and your friends His grace and that conviction whose lack was keeping you on the atheistic level.”

“A sort of recommendation?” I asked, smiling.

YLM felt a bit shy to tell me that it was. “So, that is that! You must be dear to Meher Baba for your tremendous, unquestioning ‘faith’ and ‘love,’ so your recommendation must have touched His loving heart and that explains the beginning of the ‘play.’”

“No, no,” YLM protested with utter humility. “You must have been already in His ken. He only made me an instrument to work out His Will. Don’t praise the instrument, praise the one who works with it.”

“Thank you for being the instrument, my dear YLM, in the case of we three, and let me not be mistaken for a flatterer if I add that the pains you took to help me with books connected with Meher Baba and the hours of questioning you endured while trying to tell me what I wanted to know make you not just an instrument but a worthy instrument of Meher Baba.”

YLM didn’t want to listen to praise. Later on, I came to understand that devotees of Meher Baba are alert on this point, since praise is ego-inflating, and inflated ego is just like a big boil or abscess on the body of the mind. Rather than be proud of such an abscess, the thing is to get rid of it as quickly as possible. But, now back to our story.

Another couple of days passed after I had read the books and YLM met me to ask, "What do you feel about Meher Baba?"

"Well, He is the most loving person I have read about, and even I have begun to love Him. I also have no reason to disbelieve that He has psychic powers as so many hundreds of people both of East and West have recorded their experiences in these books and journals. Yet, YLM, dear friend, as I have personally no experience of such extraordinary things from Meher Baba, I wish to suspend judgment on that score. That He is a good man, I can surely say with all my heart – why, I can go to the extent of saying that He is the best man I have heard or read about, and definitely worthy of being loved and respected so deeply by you all. But how can I say that He is God-man, since I have no knowledge of the supernatural side of things?"

"Don't you believe in His being the God-man?"

"Well dear friend, the taste of the pudding lies in the eating. I love Meher Baba whether He is or is not a God-man. Even such a good man is a valuable and proud treasure of civilization, but if I have to believe that He is the God-man then Meher Baba alone can give me that conviction on a personal level. The books won't do it, I'm afraid."

YLM looked a bit perturbed. I felt a little sad that I said things that must not have been so palatable to such a "believer" in Meher Baba's Divine Powers. "Why then, what are you going to do?" he asked me.

I had a thrilling inspiration at that moment. I caught hold of YLM's hand and gently asked, "Well, YLM, you take Meher Baba to be the God-man or Avatar. Does that mean that He is omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent – the three aspects of God?"

"Certainly, yes," YLM replied, "A God-man is nothing but God Himself working through a human body. Meher Baba says that the body He has is only a coat that He is wearing to become 'visible' to us. He is not the coat – He is something quite different, and as you already read in the books, He has again and again affirmed that He is the Ancient One, the same as Rama, Krishna and the rest. So why should He not have the attributes of Omnipresence, Omniscience and Omnipotence?"

"Right, brother YLM. Then, do one thing, I pray. Leave me to Meher Baba for some time. Not that I am snapping contact with you, but I do require now a period of comparative solitude – a few hours to myself. I won't tell you what I'll be doing during those hours, and don't ask me. But one thing is sure – I will tell you, of my own, everything when I feel that it is time. You may take it for granted that I will tell you everything faithfully. So, for some days, goodbye."

Perhaps YLM was not exactly prepared for this rather abrupt decision, but he agreed and as we shook hands to part, to my great puzzlement I felt something like a mild electric shock when I caught his hand. YLM had already turned away when I thought that it would be wise to test this phenomenon to see if it would recur, and whether it was a shock or a nervous sensation of some sort. I called after him, myself taking a few steps towards the simple man as he turned around. He also took a few steps towards me. Stuck for an explanation of what I was seeking to do I said, "I thought I would shake hands with you once more, for we may not meet again for a few weeks."

“Oh, is that all?” he said and proffered his hand again towards me with all love. I caught hold of it and as I shook it, I got the same sensation of electric shock, this time even a little more powerfully than before. The shock was not unpleasant, but it was there, clearly!

“Goodbye!” said YLM. “Hope to see you again soon,” he added and went away. I turned my steps homeward in a musing mood. What was that experience! A real one? An auto-suggestion? I prayed to the departed soul of my dear and respected Sigmund Freud to help me with an answer to the question, but no satisfying reply seemed to come from the heap of psychological literature that I had read.

“It happened twice,” I thought aloud as I reached home. But, YLM had not betrayed any awareness of its happening. Was this then Meher Baba Himself up to some game? I felt a considerable tension that evening in trying to work out where the sensation of shock might have come from.

At night, alone in my room, when the rest of the family had gone to sleep, I sat up on the bed and almost audibly said, “Meher Baba, they say You are God, You are God-man, You are the Divine Incarnation. They say You are Omnipresent. If You are that, then You must be right here in this room with me. They say You are Omniscient – that means You are listening to these words and knowing all that I am thinking and feeling. They say that You are Omnipotent – that means You are able to perform any act – even the supernatural. Well, Meher Baba, I am a non-believer. I have suffered a lot of mental anguish because of the ‘Mist’ in front of me – so thick and dark that intelligence has not been able to penetrate it. I would definitely wish that if what YLM says is true, then give me experiences that establish Your Divinity without doubt in my eyes. I shall not ask for anything with greed or ulterior motive, but I may ask for certain things – trifles, perhaps – but if these things come to me then I will know for certain that You are the giver, and then I shall have faith. I want so much to have faith, but alas how can I have faith without evidence? Please Meher Baba, understand me. If You are omniscient as YLM says, You are already able to understand me. I need some proof – of a direct kind.”

I think the prayer or request or appeal was not a long one, but it rose from the very bottom of my heart indeed. A desperate prayer it was, but though it had a “tinge” of a challenge somewhere as a product of a long doubt-conditioning of my mind, it was more (as I see it now) like the last grip of an exhausted wrestler who was already at heart admitting the defeat that was impending, but wanted to keep the spectators still believing that he was keeping up the fight a hundred percent.

Sleep eventually overtook me. The next morning I rose as usual. The daily round of activities began. In the evening, I went for physical exercise along with RNB. I did not know at that moment, busy as I was throwing the discus, that an hour hence the cosmic play of my life was to begin with the fragrant entry of the hero – Meher Baba – Himself.

14. IT BEGINS “SWEETLY”

That evening, our coach Eric Charles had made us do a little more work than usual and when we left the grounds, I felt a dry mouth. Only a sweet thing, perhaps a candy, could best act in such a situation, I mused. Home was about half a kilometer away, but the desire to have a candy increased as I went ahead. Then suddenly I remembered my mental request to Meher Baba the previous night. I thought, “Why then not test, as YLM says, ‘His all-knowing grace’ by asking for a candy right now?” I was in a half-playful mood, as is the case where faith has not yet pitched its tent firmly. I tossed the prayer to Meher Baba, “Please, get me a candy from someone. If it happens, I’ll believe that You have provided it.” Meher Baba was physically over a thousand kilometers away from where I uttered the prayer.

I hurried home, my mouth getting dryer. About 30 paces from home stood an elderly gentleman. He knew me, as we were fellow-members of the Bai-ka-Bagicha club. He greeted me obviously in a mood for conversation and I was, at least at that moment, desiring to return home immediately for a glass of water. But it would have been impolite to ignore his invitation to stop, and so I went up to him with a “Good evening.”

“Good evening, Hazra Saheb, you seem to be in a great hurry,” he smiled.

“Well, a bit, no doubt, as I am returning from the playgrounds after a two-hour session at the ‘throws.’”

“Okay, you can go in that case, but before that please have this candy.” He offered me a candy in his hand.

“Candy? You keep them with you, do you?” I was so confused that I was at a loss to know what I ought to say.

“Oh no, I’m not a kid. It’s only because the doctor suggested the other day that I should defer smoking for a few days to recover from pharyngitis – and you know what a job it is to overcome the temptation to smoke. So, I bought some candy to eat whenever I get the itch to smoke. Please have one.” He smiled.

As I ate the candy, the thought of Meher Baba unavoidable loomed large in my mind. Was the timely arrival of this candy just a chance incident, or was the event really directed by Meher Baba from afar?

“Thank you. Why are you standing here alone? Waiting for someone?” I asked.

“No, I came out for a stroll, and then came up here and decided I wouldn’t go further.”

“Well, er, thank you very much for the candy. Goodbye,” I said and hurried home.

As I was washing my face in the bathroom, one half of my mind kept telling me, “It was just a coincidence, Amiya, don’t give it any undue importance,” while another half of my mind kept saying, “You asked Meher Baba to get you a candy and see within minutes an elderly gentleman standing 30 paces from your home with a candy in hand offers it to you instead of eating it himself; as if he had no other work to do but just to wait and catch you to give you the candy. Don’t doubt Meher Baba’s Grace. It has begun to shower itself on you already!”

Clearly I was unable to decide which side of my mind was right in its promptings. I sighed and like Joseph Addison's poor dear Sir Roger mused to myself, "Well, much could be said on both sides!" and thus shrugged off the problem.

I had already mentioned that I had let my two close friends in my intellectual coterie, RNB and SKG, read Meher Baba's literature. Little did I know that they too were in for some interesting incidents contemporaneously. Though, because they knew my skeptical attitude too well, they at first thought it better to keep their experiences to themselves. But things that appear extraordinary can't be kept back from friends who share even the most ordinary experiences. Hence, two or three days after the "candy event" RNB met me and said, "A strange thing has happened."

"What strange thing?" I enquired.

"Yesterday after returning from my duty at the Power House, I had an urge to eat mutton. When I divulged my desire to the family members they said that it was no longer possible to get mutton as the mutton shops were already closed. So they told me to wait till the following day to get a dish of mutton. I was clearly frustrated because the urge to eat mutton was for that night and not for the following morning! Indeed, as the hours passed by, and vegetarian dishes were being cooked in the kitchen, I felt my frustration mounting. Then I resolved that if I did not get mutton to eat that night, I would forego taking even meals. Well, Amiya Kumar, then I suddenly thought of Meher Baba and what the books said of Him. I will frankly admit this to you, that I prayed to Meher Baba to see that I got mutton to eat in spite of the shops being closed that very night, otherwise I would keep a fast!"

"You did that? You prayed to Meher Baba for mutton?"

"Yes, and I decided that if the prayer wasn't fulfilled then I would not take a bite at the dinner, that night."

"What happened then?"

"Well, what happened was interesting. Quite late in the night, Dr. RKG's servant came to my home. He held a lump of mutton in his hand. He gave it to my elder brother's wife and said, "Doctor Saheb has just returned from a hunting expedition out of station. He bagged a big barking deer and bade me give a slice of it to you. As the deer was killed many hours back, he suggested that it should not be kept for another day but cooked without delay."

I looked at RNB quizzically. "Then, did they cook it?"

"Yes, immediately almost. They also teased me because now I declared that I would break my 'fast' and eat, since 'mutton' had been cooked. Now, Amiya Kumar, what's your opinion about the thing? Was it just a chance happening or something else?"

"I wouldn't know for sure, dear RNB, but I do tell you to keep watching for similar events if they reoccur. Right?"

"Right," he said, and left for his office.

Once again I was left to myself and I consulted both my right and left sides of brain about this event in RNB's life. Again Sir Roger popped up in my mind with the same reply – "Much could be said on both sides."

Here I must mention that our coterie of skeptics and intellectually-inclined friends included a dozen or so young men. One was Gurudas Chatterjee (GDC), the nephew of a reputed doctor of the city, who was always telling us that he loved punctuality above all virtues and that being punctual was being polite. So, in matters of appointment, we were very particular in regard to him. If we had an appointment with him, and if we were so much as a minute late, he would leave if he could, or refuse to talk, or if compelled by circumstances to talk would be barely polite.

One day, I had an appointment with him at his home at a certain hour of the evening, and the place was nearly 3 kilometers from my house. I became late for the meeting! This would present a very bad beginning to our meeting, so far as GDC was concerned. I wanted his help with my own work, and here he was to be kept waiting beyond the appointed hour. As I hurriedly pedaled my bicycle towards his place, I felt at heart that it was futile. I estimated that I would reach his house at least 600 seconds after the time of politeness would have expired. At a crossing called Malaviya chowk, I was to turn into the right side path to make for his home. At this point I experienced misgivings, considering his well-known propensity for treating latecomers badly. Who knew – he might even refuse to see me.

Again Meher Baba flashed into my brain. “Well, Meher Baba, here I am in a fix. I must meet GDC this evening. Could you help me in this?” Just as I repeated this request, in spite of myself I found that I did something, or was made to do something, quite irrational. The handle of the cycle turned towards one of the four roads that was certainly not going towards his house.

“What an ass I am. Why did I do that? To be still more late, and lose the last hope of seeing GDC tonight?” I went on muttering to myself as my cycle and I propelled ourselves down the wrong road, as though we simply refused to obey logic. And then, to my great surprise, I saw him around the corner in a small shop. He had a scowl on his face, definitely because he wanted to teach me a lesson by leaving home and coming to this area to avoid seeing me, for I had failed to respect “Mr. Time”!

“Good evening, dear boy.” I beamed a smile to palliate him, “of all places this was the last at which I expected to find you.”

“Good evening, Mr. Late Lateef!” He arched his brow, “And you were the last person I had expected to meet at this place. I had deliberately shunted off from home so you mayn’t get me. How on earth you came this way? Did someone guide you?”

“I don’t know, rather I can’t be sure. I just turned into this path without knowing the why and wherefore of it,” I said.

GDC looked suspiciously at me, “Talking mystically? Anyway, since you’ve got me, let us better get down to business at once for some minutes as I have another appointment ...”

So we got down for business. But much though I expected Sir Roger to pop up in my mind to unsheathe this phenomenon of irrational cycling to find my friend, he did not. Instead I heard Hamlet brandishing his dialogue in my mind’s ear, “There are more things, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy.”

I am reminded of a humorous remark to the effect that if a man once falls off the Empire State building, it’s an accident. If he falls off twice, it’s a coincidence, but if he falls off three times, it’s

his habit. What would you call a series of extraordinary events happening in quick succession over a number of months and going on for years?

Soon after the GDC incident, one evening as I sat engrossed in reading. My mother asked me to go to the market to buy a dozen lemons. The juice of the lemons was needed to help my sister solve a gastric problem she was having – dyspepsia. I felt lazy at that hour, and I refused. Mother got annoyed, and chided me for being so indifferent to my sister's suffering. The moment she left the room, I thought of Meher Baba and His "Mood of Grace" and again requested Him that I would be so glad and grateful to Him if He somehow arranged for the lemons as he had arranged for the candy. This thought passing, I went back to reading my book.

Only a few minutes elapsed. I could still hear my mother telling my sister how heartless I was becoming, when someone knocked on the door. The servant of one of our neighbors appeared. He had a smile on his lips, and a bag containing more than a dozen lemons in his hand. Depositing the lemons on the table he departed. I took them to my mother. She was astonished.

"How could you get these lemons. You didn't go out to fetch them, did you?"

"Oh no, I never stirred from the room, but someone who listens to my prayers has prompted someone to send them to us. They are from our neighbor. Did you send any message to him yourself for lemons?" This last I asked because a familiar side of my brain was seeking evidence, as a matter of habit.

"No, I told none beside you. An "No, I told none beside you. And why should I, unless you prove yourself utterly useless to us!" With this final sting, sweet mother collected the lemons, evidently happy for their receipt, although not that happy with me. As she went away, I was trying to rid myself of my intellectual dyspepsia. I had read so many books that had fostered so much skepticism. Now I felt the desire to achieve faith in Meher Baba, but now my habit of emulating Doubting Thomas was not easily expunged. I told myself, "Peace, my dear Amiya Kumar, don't be in such a hurry to conclude. Let lots of water flow by before you finally form a verdict."

During that early period I needed some money for a trip. I had done some translation work for someone, but my remuneration was not sent to me. I was not in the habit of asking, even if entitled by circumstances, and so I didn't. The result was that the day for the trip arrived, and no money with it. By early evening, the money still had not arrived, and it was two hours until I would have to entrain. I didn't want to ask my family members for the money, either. Desperation came to me as I watched the clock ticking down the hours till departure. I did not know what to do. Why not again ask Meher Baba and see if He cares to listen to my request, even this time?

And this time I was really surprised. The personal assistant of the rich gentleman whose work I had done knocked on the door. Yes, there was no doubt about it; he had brought the money – not in the form of a cheque that would need to be cashed the next day, but the entire payment in cash. I said a hurried "thank you" to the gentleman's personal assistant as I seized the currency. Then I packed my things and went to the railway station. This time I was not in a mood to critically examine the event. Something was happening and if really Meher Baba was the prime mover of all these episodes, well it would mean a revolutionary change in my life and outlook!

Each incident left a wave of surprise in my mind, and I was also equally or perhaps more surprised at another thing – I was feeling love for Meher Baba: not always, not all the time, but at times for a minute or two. At those moments, I experienced a beautification of my mind and a purification of my heart of a nature that I had never experienced before. Meher Baba seemed to come close to my consciousness for a brief period, evoke love and then withdraw, leaving me to feel and perhaps to judge the difference.

Frankly, I highly valued these moments. However, I was unable to prolong them by my own efforts. I felt obliged to recheck my feelings to find whether they were generated by me or induced in me by Meher Baba, as an additional gift (over and above the trivial gifts).

Nevertheless, there were many other things that transpired in those days, of which at least a few could be of interest to the reader.

15. BABA-FLAG AND THE TIGER

While I was still engaged by the skirmishes of intellect, the vaunting tirailleur, YLM, suggested that I should meet some other townspeople devoted to Meher Baba so that I could hear what they might say. By this time, not only myself but also RNB, SKG, GDC, Genda Lal Varma (GLV) and several others had begun to share a common interest in Meher Baba. So we at times in groups of three (and sometimes all five) began to accompany YLM to meet a “Baba Lover” named Sardar Pritam Singh “Meher” – an elderly gentleman who deeply impressed us with his age, sagacity, intelligence and utter devotion to Meher Baba.

Formerly a Government contractor and having property and business outside India, this old gentleman’s story of his first meeting Meher Baba touched us deeply. He saw a brilliant light and lost consciousness of the outer world. After he regained consciousness, someone asked him what was his impression about Meher Baba. Pritam Singh’s reply was “Can a new-born baby describe his father?” This was an apt manner in which to describe the indescribable. Each and every person who came in Meher Baba’s contact had a different story or experience to tell. No two persons’ stories may be just the same. Yet every person has a common denominator in his experience – it is the feeling of a kind of love for and from Meher Baba that has no parallel in the world. We can understand our love for our children, our wives, our house, our material possessions, our favourite songs, actor or sports figure, etc. But the love – the all-out love – for a person who bore no relation of any of these kinds, who was neither a “star” nor a “hot football favourite” was simply inexplicable. Loving Baba always appeared to be like loving one’s innermost self. Baba made them feel that He loved them more tenderly than they could ever manage to do for themselves.

The moment someone expressed true and genuine love and faith in Baba, He immediately and invariably responded to that love in some unexpected manner. In the case of Sardar Pritam Singh, we saw this happen thrice.

A peculiar phenomenon took place when Pritam Singh was pouring out his heart’s love for Meher Baba in the most touching words. A strong exudation of fragrance, like a hundred roses, would suddenly fill the room as his old eyes sparkled with tears punctuating his stories about his master. Meher Baba must have made an invisible member of the audience at such times apart from SKG, RNB and myself, and the sudden manifestation of fragrance was the testament of His presence.

Sardar Pritam Singh “Meher” was in his sixties at that time, while we were in our twenties. But he looked brighter and more youthful than we with all our meat-eating and high calorie diets, as well as our physical exercise. One of his stories of Meher Baba’s help to him was quite interesting and I am tempted to relate what he said.

“Those days, I was doing contract work for the British Government in some forest area. As Indian forests were full of tigers before the reckless hunters had almost made their fauna extinct, this forest was also not an exception to the presence of tigers. Several hundred workmen were working in the forest for me. Then one day some of them were confronted by a tiger. They ran for their lives, and although no one was mauled, panic seized them. The next day again some people were confronted by a tiger, and the day following! Now the workers began to

revolt. They told me that it was risking their lives, working in that forest, for anything could happen to any one of them with the tigers taking such an interest in them. Much though I would try to explain that it was only a man-eater that was harmful and not all tigers, they would retort, 'Wise proverbs could be appreciated by men but to expect tigers to appreciate them is going a little further than common sense bids.'

"I was in a fix. The workers, afraid as they were of the tiger-infested area were, it was apparent, in no mood to continue, but were in the mood to leave their jobs, leaving me stranded midway through the work. In desperation I took a piece of cloth and prepared a flag of Meher Baba, then I hoisted it just outside the area where the labour and officers were camping and the work was going on. I then gathered all the people and told them that I had prayed to Meher Baba to see that tigers do not approach that area from now on. 'If you see any tiger in spite of the flag being planted, then I will without a word agree to suspend all work at whatever cost it might be to me.' The workmen agreed to my proposal.

"To the surprise of all, including myself, from that day the Royal cats seemed simply to disappear. No one came to the site, nor even indulged in roaring to make people know his mighty cataract-like singing ability.

"A few weeks elapsed, then one day one of my assistants returned from some nearby village in the evening to the camp, and he was in great panic. He rushed to the camp trembling all over. Had he seen the Royal beast? But he was too frightened to speak. I rushed him to the hospital in a nearby town. He was suffering from high degree of pyrexia and delirium to the anxiety of all concerned. However, medical care cured him after several days and he became his normal self.

"It was then that I and others wanted to know the cause of his terror. What the assistant told us was something none had expected to hear! He told us that, in the evening when he had reached the flag point, he saw Meher Baba standing beside His flag. His limbs were as huge as the trunks of trees and His head soared up to the skies. The immense proportions that Meher Baba had assumed rendered the poor fellow mentally unable to withstand the sight of a man so huge, and from that moment he wanted nothing but to reach the camp somehow. The fear he had experienced was worse than having seen a score of tigers line up before him. He then did not know anything.

"I comforted the man, and told him how fortunate he was to see the divine sentinel dutifully remaining on guard against the tigers: 'That is why you have not seen or heard any of those fearful beasts all these weeks. So cheer up man, Baba is the Divine protector of all those who really seek His protection.'"

As Sardar Pritam Singh "Meher" ended his tale of the Baba flag and the tiger we three were unable to make any comments, for he was a man not only learned and rich but a man of such total integrity of faith in Baba that it was easier to argue with a tiger than with him.

16. AMONG UNCHARTED WORLDS

Now, I return to my personal story of that early period of 1957 again. As coincidences mounted up, my curiosity deepened and although not yet in solid position of understanding these overwhelming coincidences, I was definitely trying to work out some fresh dimension of experience that would preclude the word “coincidence” itself. Up to now, all the episodes that had transpired involved some human agency – i.e., lemons were brought by the servant of a neighbor, or candy was given to me by a gentleman, etc. As I was by the time getting conversant with Meher Baba literature and had read some references to subtle planes and mental planes of consciousness, I thought it would be more conclusive if I got some experience or at least some glimpses of any of the “planes” but such experiences should be received by me when I am not asleep but awake and would not leave any room for any ambivalent psychological situation. In other words, while undergoing any such experience I must be able to indulge in normal activities like working up a mathematical product and later determine that the product had been correctly calculated. With all these due precautions, I got down to pray to Meher Baba one day to “grant” me glimpses of some plane so that I could develop the belief that it was a direct hot-line communication of His Grace to me without grounds for suspicion regarding a third person in the cosmic play.

The day passed as usual. I worked on a synopsis of a proposed thesis. After supper, it was my habit to read some books. I went to my room and half-reclined on bed. I was just about to start reading when a phenomenon began that I can describe but cannot explain. I was surprised and put off the electric light to realize better what was happening. I was in complete possession of my senses and not at all sleepy, because it was just about 9:45 PM. My normal bedtime was past midnight. A milky white light began gradually pervading the entire room – a light that was soft but shimmering and cool. I felt my breathing getting softer to a degree that it set up a rhythm of its own kind – an almost marginal kind of breathing. The light was gradually increasing in its brilliance. My commonsense mind prompted me to get out of the bed to search for its source. Was somebody from some point near the room or outside the window sending this light through some milk-white glass-covered torch or cell-lamp? I peeped out of the window. There was no one. I looked under the bed and table, but could detect not extraneous source of light. As it had never happened to me before, I was a bit rattled. Then all of a sudden, I recalled my prayer to Meher Baba to give me glimpses of subtler planes. Was He doing that? I got up on to the bed and frankly and even at the expense of some of you laughing at me, I tried two or three mental multiplications. They all came through correctly. Just then, I saw tremendous flares of colourful lights in the otherwise lightless room. The beauty of these coloured lights was great and also surprising. Now, another thought came into my mind. Why not close my eyes and see if that has any altering impact on this seeing. I closed my eyelids, but to my increasing surprise it made no difference in the phenomenon of seeing. I felt as if I were losing a badminton match and in a desperate bid, I seized a muffler and put it on my eyes to shield out the all-pervading play of lights. The muffler did not succeed in shielding the lights. With my final stab at a rational approach, I wound my muffler four times around my head, covering my eyes better, hoping that the lights would bid farewell. But they had no such intention – instead, they increased in intensity and grandeur. Like a lost skipper I finally reclined on my bed to watch the rest of the phenomenon, a helpless spectator. I cannot even describe the play and interplay of

those lights and colours; it went on for perhaps a half-hour (the duration is not that clear in my mind). Then something happened that I did not expect. Till then, the spectacle was surprising but not alarming – I could even enjoy it. Now, a brilliant circle of golden light, like a golden ring, became visible in front of my sight. This “ring” or “circle” moved with a terrifying velocity towards me. I was almost getting panicky. Then a sudden seizing sensation came in which I found myself leaving home, the Earth, the people, moving away at an incredible speed. I had no idea of the destination, but I moved so far away that I despaired of ever returning home or even to the Earth. Well, that was the limit. I shouted with deep-rooted revolt. I didn’t want to be taken away from my dear ones to some place terribly far away. I jumped out of bed, scampered through the other rooms where my relatives were peacefully asleep and unaware of my wretched condition, out into the inner courtyard of our house, desperately trying to get rid of my experience, which threatened the loss of all contact with the gross world.

I now was compelled to make a prayer in misery to Meher Baba. “Meher Baba, forgive me for testing You. Please send me back to my family, do not send me away to that far-away place. I love my mother, I love my father, I love my sisters – please send me back.”

As I prayed on, the experience gradually began to wane, and panic began to subside. After a few minutes, to my great relief my consciousness was no longer of those other things and other planes but of this dear, dear beautiful world to which I was so attached. I thanked Meher Baba wholeheartedly, also feeling that I didn’t want any more of that stuff – glimpses of subtle planes, etc. I returned to my room, so shaken that I decided only to rest and to sleep.

Sleep came, and I woke up the next morning with the light of the sun pouring through the window. I got up from bed. I recalled the experiences of the previous night. It had been wonderful and terrible at the same time. But, as the day wore on, the other side of my brain began to function according to its habit. I thought of that vocabulary kit of the psychologists, hunting for the word that would explain away the experience. The word that I desperately grasped as you would grasp a log and cling to it in an ocean was “hallucination!” By definition, “hallucination” is a state of experience in which the degrees of difference between the “subjective” and the “objective” diminish so much that you see things that really aren’t there. Although I was not a drug user and therefore there was no question of “delirium tremens” or disorder of the nervous system, yet I insisted on discarding the “experience” through invoking the “insights” of psychology.

17. A STRANGE TALE FROM A SANE PERSON

YLM next introduced me to Dr. Murli Kale, one of those exceptionally noble persons whom you naturally feel greatly honoured to meet. Dr. Kale had been with Meher Baba intermittently since childhood and later was a close companion in His New Life phase, a phase that has been referred to in all important biographical books on Meher Baba. Dr. Kale was surprisingly free from ego. We felt disarmed in his presence. Frankly, though he listened more and spoke little, whenever he spoke he made us feel like a group of Gratianos²⁰ with two grains of wheat in two bushels of chaff. Nevertheless, we pestered him with questions regarding his experiences with Meher Baba, to which his oft-repeated remark was that all experiences except the experience of ultimate and universal reality were, according to Meher Baba, a big zero. But I kept on tenaciously inquiring and then one day he had this to tell: "Baba was always insisting on the importance of implicit obedience regarding His instructions, however strange those instructions might sometimes appear to be. On one occasion Meher Baba gestured to me to attempt to fly! I, without debating the instruction, leapt up with all my might and tried, and then fell down with slight bruises. But Meher Baba was clearly pleased with me for my implicit obedience. The episode was over there and then without a comment. However, some time later, a strange event transpired in my life that might have either killed me or injured me seriously. On my way up to the top of a cliff, I put my foot on a stone that treacherously rolled away and I slipped and fell from the cliff, a hundred feet or thereabouts down. But to the utter astonishment of others I was found gathering myself up to climb the cliff as if nothing had happened. This seemed to defy the laws of gravitation." Not to mention, of course, momentum and physiological trauma.

When I asked Dr. Kale how he escaped being killed in that precipitous fall, he said, "Although I went down with a terrible speed, just before I touched the ground the momentum suddenly decreased, in spite of the laws of physics, so much as if someone made me gently waft like a bird and then made me alight on the ground like one of the members of the feathered clan." Then, looking keenly at me, Dr. Kale said, "Dear Hazraji, instead of contacting me or other devotees, why don't you directly go and meet Meher Baba. Nothing is impossible for Him to show if He wills it. Therefore find things out for yourself. At present, do one thing: at least write a letter to Him."

Now though this suggestion was given in a friendly, unobtrusive manner, it at once created a negative reaction in my mind. Clearly, I did not feel any inclination to write a letter to Meher Baba at least at that moment, so I just smiled non-committally and switched over to another subject – the borrowing of some books by and about Meher Baba that peeped out of a beautiful glass case he had in one corner of his dispensary. Dr. Kale prescribed medicines to those who suffered from physical suffering, but Meher Baba photos and literature to those who also longed for spiritual relief from afflictions of the mind and the heart.

Dr. Kale agreed to give me books from his glass case, and I was glad to have them, as I now really wanted to know more and more about what others had to say about Meher Baba. Once I asked YLM how many devotees Meher Baba had. He told me that apparently the number was

²⁰ *Ever the English professor, Amiya refers to the fool in Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice.*

in lakhs²¹ but actually everyone who loved God was loving Baba, directly or indirectly. I had no desire to indulge in polemics regarding this latter part of the statement as I had decided just to observe and suspend judgment for a while.

My next question to YLM was whether all these lakhs of people believed in Meher Baba because they had experiences.

“Yes, of course,” he replied, “otherwise how could anyone develop faith in Him?”

“But there is something like traditional faith, dear YLM, and people have such faith in holy places, holy figures of past and even those who preach of esoteric things today. Is it that kind of faith in Meher Baba or something different in case of the lakhs of His lovers?”

YLM smiled, “I am taking you to persons who are educated like you, only because I being not so educated, you may not have faith in what I say. Now, meet as many educated Meher Baba devotees as you can and being a seeker, listen to what they tell you. They all have experiences to tell you. But even if you do not believe them – then also it does not matter. The best thing would be for you to meet Meher Baba and also experience things for yourself. Am I right?”

“Absolutely, dear friend,” I said.

“You therefore wait for your own experiences. By the way, didn’t you get any experience so far?”

As that was a direct question, I had no other alternative but to say, “Well, I have yet to prepare or make up my mind regarding spirituality and therefore I hope you will appreciate my going slow in such matters. But this again I repeat, that if even one lakh persons have two experiences each from Meher Baba, then statistically it becomes a valid observation that Meher Baba has the extraordinary power to give such experiences to the tune of 200,000, an awe-inspiring figure.”

YLM sharply intervened at this point. “Dear Hazra, do not try mathematics with Meher Baba and His powers. Instead, seek His kindness and grace. He says that He performs no miracles. He says that even souls a little advanced on the spiritual path can perform miracles, so one should never try to judge Meher Baba’s real status from the standpoint of miracles. Still, if He is in the mood to grant you experiences it means only that He is compassionate enough to draw you out from ‘doubt’ to ‘faith’ which shall be for your own good.” I never heard YLM speak in such a downright manner before. Is he getting exasperated with my “doubting Thomas” or “jesting Pilate”-like attitude? Anyway, I really could not pick a quarrel with the earnest man. I was the one who was elusive. I was the one hiding my experiences from him, in spite of the fact that I was asking Meher Baba to give me experiences, and by now several scores of “inexplicable things” had happened. But woe to a man who can’t bring himself to believe in anything! So, I kept quietly nodding my head to YLM’s biddings but at my heart requesting Meher Baba for more and still more experiences so that I may one day really believe in Him.

²¹ The lakh is a unit of counting in India. One lakh equals 100,000, two lakhs equals 200,000 and so forth.

18. THE ARROW OF REALITY

“Love! Be Moderate; Allay thy Ecstasy.” – *Merchant of Venice*

Soon after this meeting with YLM I had an experience that I still cherish, recollecting it as one of the most precious ones before meeting Meher Baba. It was early morning; I was still in bed. I had a dream in which I found myself going by bus to some hilly place. Then I alighted and went to a place where I saw some person whose face I had never seen. A few moments afterwards, a strange, indescribable ecstasy began to fill my heart and simultaneously a question was born in my mind – “Who am I?” It was a strange phenomenon – the question “Who am I” in itself led to some sort of dim sense of recognition and that in turn led to a fresh gush of ecstasy that had no comparison in my experience of happiness during all the years prior to 1957. I think this “bliss” or “extraordinary joy” continued for not more than fifteen minutes. The reason for the joy was not external – it was coming from within in great gushes and waves, and was, if any cause is to be ascribed to it, its own cause! Till today I do not understand how the question “Who am I” came into my mind and how it resulted in such tremendous happiness. As I left the dream state and became half awake and began to crawl out of bed, still the happiness did not leave me altogether. I wondered and wondered at it – that cause-less joy – and I felt so good that I felt like loving everyone without discrimination. Dear reader, how fortunate a man must be who has the experience of spiritual bliss that Meher Baba has referred to in His books. I do not say that I experienced that kind of “bliss” but, as I have no words of my own to describe my experience for those few minutes that morning, I am taking this liberty, even if unwarranted, to use the word “bliss,” even if it might be the most remote shadow of the real thing. It had come in the wake of my mental contact with Meher Baba. Thus, my most plausible explanation for its occurrence is that Meher Baba willed that it be given to me to fortify my not-yet-sprouted conviction regarding spiritual happiness – to show me that it came from deep within, and could occur without external cause.

Soon after this Dr. Kale and I met. He suddenly asked if I had written to Meher Baba.

“Not yet,” I said.

He seemed a bit disturbed. He said, “You do not seem to realize that you are losing a great opportunity. It is a great fortune to come in Meher Baba’s contact. If you lose this opportunity, it will be like standing in a long queue such as you see at Tyavalli’s oil shop. In short, you will have to wait hundreds of years for a like opportunity.” Dr. Kale fell silent.

For the first time, I started to feel the gravity of the situation. After all, if Meher Baba is the God-man I would definitely lose a great opportunity of wonderful experiences by breaking off contact with Him. Apart from the logic of this, I now felt a great love for Him, even a sense of separation, and a desire to meet Him. So why not write a letter to Meher Baba. But how to begin? How to address Him? I screened my feelings and strangely the appellation that came up in my mind was neither Beloved Baba, nor “Great God,” etc., but “My Surgeon-Lover” and without a second thought I wrote my first letter to Meher Baba with the salutation “My Surgeon-Lover!” In some way, I felt He was cutting away the growths of doubt from my mental body like a deft surgeon and also doing it because He loved and cared for me.

From the moment I wrote and posted that letter a strange sensation began to possess me. I really began to love Meher Baba! I began to miss Him terribly. I wanted to have Him near at hand

close to my heart, and I was surprised to see myself clutch at the branch of a tree or even the wall of my room as if I was touching Meher Baba. He had begun stealing my heart in a subtle way. I looked at His photographs and sighed as if He were my old, old father whom I had neglected for thousands of years, not caring to serve Him. All the time He was patiently waiting for me to come back to Him.

Now I was really uneasy. This new experience of love was so unknown to me that I marveled at it. Love for Meher Baba increased of its own accord, day by day, till I was actually watching out for the postman to bring me His reply to my letter. From the beginning the kind of love I felt for Meher Baba was that of a “truant son” who had repented and had returned to his all-compassionate and infinitely-lovable father, after repenting for his sins of both omission and commission.

At last, the coveted reply came:

It is in Eruch Jessawala’s hand, dated 14/4/1956 and reads:

My Dear Brother Shri Hazra,

Your heart spoke through the letter dated 10th inst. and spread joy.

Beloved Baba heard the voice of your heart and was touched.

Baba says that it is your very absence from his presence that gives you a feeling that you are separated from him. Baba is unimaginably close to your “self” and it is your very imagination that makes your search futile. Stop imagining, stop the search and find Him as your own true “Self” within you. This is no new secret. Age after age Baba has been repeating this Truth and yet so few realize this consciously and continually. Baba wants you to love Him. Baba sends His love to you.

It is the mind that keeps the game of hide and seek going birth after birth and plays havoc, too!

Realization of God is beyond the domain of imagination, for God is Truth and not Imagination! That point in Time and Space when imagination stops, God is Realized. To stop imagining, mind must be annihilated. Love, pure unadulterated Love, alone can overcome the mind and find God and the True Self of all.

Yours lovingly,

Eruch

Each word of that letter was important, not for me alone, but I feel for all persons who cultivate doubt and for all times to come. The letter unfolds at once the fundamental obstacles that a seeker after Truth generates in his very attempt to experience the Supreme Reality, the final locus of his spiritual journey. In the process, the ego – which hides its activities from the seeker with consummate skill – becomes fortified, even if the seeker is wary of this possibility. One who has attained the Goal knows the problems the seeker is facing, and bestows His benevolent guidance on the lost wayfarer, and thus cuts short the process of “hide and seek” that might otherwise go on interminably.

In fact, that letter of Meher Baba was and is the very Testament of Spiritual Truth in the briefest set of words, and I have absolutely no hesitation in saying that, like “first love” that “first letter” is unforgettable, not only for sentimental reasons but as I grow older and examine myself and other seekers, I see all the more distinctly the Supreme Wisdom meted out by each sentence of that letter to me. It is the seeker’s mind that tempts him to imagine the nature of Supreme Reality, and thus ideation is surreptitiously substituted for actual experience. On top of that, imagination, being playful in its fundamental nature, creates a phantasmagoria of images about Truth, not the Real Thing. Imagination even leads to imaginary sensations of both “union” and “separateness” from Truth. Now, frankly, in the context of this gnosis of Meher Baba conveyed through that precious letter, even psychology’s arguments about a lot of spiritual experiences as “abnormal,” “imaginary” or “bizarre” did not appear to be so very much off the mark, and even they could find nourishment for their attitude in Meher Baba’s gnosis. But the negation of mind’s capacity to experience ultimate Reality did not at all mean the negation of Reality itself,

NOT be helpful to you as it can only Bindra House supply the books if purchased.

Yours lovingly, Meher Baba, Poona 2
26/9

My dear brother, your P.C. of 18th inst. was read out to Beharad Babu. Babu expressed his happiness to hear from you that you want to know precisely what Babu wants you to do.

The first thing that Babu wants you to do is that you should love Babu and think of him as much and as frequently as you can.

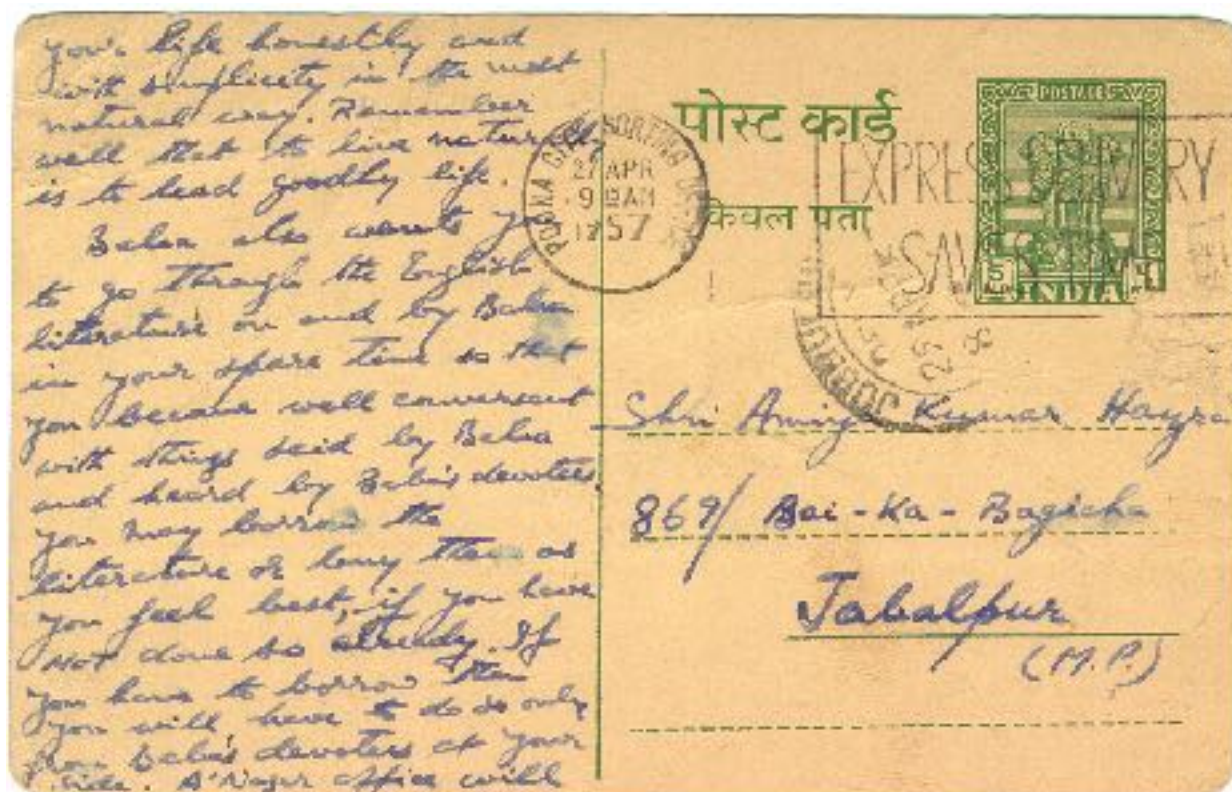
Secondly, you must not touch any woman or girl with lustful motives. The only exception to this instruction will be your own wife.

Thirdly, even if you get angry and exasperated with anyone you should never hit anyone in anger or hatred. At such times you think of Babu and try to remember that Babu is in everyone alike.

Lastly, you should live and lead

and the possibility of its experience by a seeker, but only that according to Meher Baba we are looking at the thing from the wrong end of the telescope!

As I read the letter several times, gradually the practical difficulties of following what Meher Baba wanted me to do became apparent. If the process of imagination had to be stopped, some method must be there to do so. Oh was it possible to do it by willing? By willing strongly? How to make the mind a blank, devoid of image-formations, ideations, reactions and sensory responses? I tried for a minute and found to my alarm what a storm of thoughts I had conjured up in my attempt to become "thoughtless." So, I gave up in desperation. Really, what did Meher Baba want of me? To stop imagining seemed impossible. In desperation, I wrote another letter to Him asking what He wanted me to do to achieve all that was indicated in His first letter. The reply that came had nothing apparently to do with all that I had conventionally thought of. Instead, the instructions were – well, see for yourself (in the illustration).



This reads:

Bindra House

Irwin Road

Poona 2 26/4

My dear brother,

Your PC of 18th inst was read out to Beloved Baba.

Baba expressed His happiness to hear from you that you want to know precisely what Baba wants you to do.

The first thing that Baba wants you to do is that you should love Baba and think of him as much and as frequently as you can.

Secondly, you must not touch any woman or girl with lustful motives. The only exception to this instruction will be your own wife.

Thirdly, even if you get angry and exasperated with anyone you should never hit anyone in anger or hatred. At such times you think of Baba and try to remember that Baba is in everyone alike.

Lastly, you should live and lead your life honestly and with simplicity in the most natural way. Remember well that to live naturally is to lead goodly life.

Baba also wants you to go through the English language literature on and by Baba in your spare time so that you become well-conversant with things said by Baba and heard by Baba's devotees. You may borrow the literature or buy them as you feel best, if you have not done so already. If you have to borrow them, you will have to do so only from Baba's devotees of your side. Ahmednagar office will NOT be helpful to you as it can only supply the books if purchased.

Yours lovingly,

Eruch

Frankly, at the moment, I found myself unable to see any relationship between these instructions and the "cessation of imagination" as a prerequisite for God realization. But the instructions were worthwhile following, for they were ethical. But the subsequent period revealed the actual significance of that letter!

19. THE DIRECTOR OF MY LIFE-EVENTS

Meanwhile, my parents and elders desired that I should join some college as a lecturer in English and pursue my research work in addition to it. Soon I came to know of a vacant post in a newly-opened college in my state of Madhya Pradesh. I applied, and received a letter scheduling an interview.

When I reached the location for the interview, I saw several aspirants for posts in different subjects, including English. As other candidates were interviewed, candidate after candidate was sent out wearing a look of dejection. On enquiry, someone told us that the interviewers were asking odd questions not pertaining to the subject either to stress the candidates psychologically or to gauge the breadth of their knowledge. Someone said, "You see, I went in for my interview as a lecturer in philosophy, and one gentleman asked me what was the difference between a rifle and a revolver! Am I supposed to know these things?"

We sympathized with the scholar of philosophy as we might do with a medic if instead of asking about diseases, the examiners might have asked for a discourse on transcendent reality. Now, as candidate after candidate filed out after the interview, the dejection was getting almost universal. Surely the merciless interviewers were keeping up their tough tactics. Then my name was called. Inevitably, I was feeling the same apprehension that the other candidates had experienced, and I remembered Meher Baba and asked Him to help me, in the same way as a soldier heading into battle in the front row of the charge. Soon I found myself face to face with a group of keen-looking grey-heads, and the first interview of my life began. They asked me about modern English poetry and almost without premeditation I enquired whether they would like to hear some English poetry from countries other than England. They evidently now showed more interest, and I talked about English poetry written about Meher Baba by His Australian and American poet-devotees. As I had recently read these, it was easy to give a narrative that was both faithful and full of fervour. Heedless of the consequences, I talked, and they listened and nodded their heads in appreciation. Thereafter they asked only two or three questions about nature, poetry of England, Romanticism and poetry in Chaucer's age. Then beaming a smile at me, one of them said, "Thank you!" and that being a signal to depart, I bowed and came out, little divining what my performance might have been worth in their minds.

After lunch at the guest house, where all candidates were lodged by the College Management, I acquired acquaintance with a senior lecturer who had also come for the interview and he was my competitor as his subject too was English. He had come from another State, and had put in a few years of service. By contrast, I was a fresh chap, so I hardly expected to be preferred to him. But when, in the late afternoon the Manager of the College came to the guest house, he, after formal enquiries regarding our food and lodging and other conveniences, told all in a general way the results of the interview would be intimated to all later at their residential addresses.

Then he turned to me and said, "One result is out, and that is yours, Mr. Hazra. The Committee has selected you for the post of English as you have topped the list with 80% marks.

Congratulations!" and he held my hand and shook it warmly. "Now, Mr. Hazra, we would appreciate your coming to the College office within an hour to receive your appointment letter forthwith." As the manager left the hall others rose to congratulate me. I was half-ashamed and

half-glad. I was also slightly surprised to see that my senior competitor was not selected. How it all happened, I do not know. But I could clearly discern the signs of frustration on that dear man's face, and that took away all the joys of triumph at this outstanding success in an interview where no one else was yet informed about the result.

At heart, I felt like a follower of Christ, who would not relish being happy at the cost of somebody else's happiness, but a job was a "must" for me, so I went to the College office and received the appointment letter with lots of appreciation by the members of the board for my performance all over again, especially about that poetry that was from the poems about Meher Baba.

In the evening, after I received my letter of appointment and returned to bid farewell to the other candidates, I said to my senior competitor, "Sir I'm not joining this college." He looked surprised. I didn't want to explain. My heart alone knew the reason. Anything that hurt another person could not be relished by me. As I boarded the train for Jabalpur, I had made up my mind. Although they had given me too much appreciation and awarded the appointment, etc., yet I would not join.

Back home, I was a bit at a loss to understand my own behaviour. If I didn't join that college, what was I to do? It was difficult to get a job! I turned to Meher Baba. Now it was a different kind of request: "Thank you for making me successful at the interview and for getting me the job. Now, please see that I don't have to take that job. Rather, see that I get some other job so that parents do not get angry with me. Sorry for bothering you so much. But see it happens, O Meher Baba."

At home, the news of my appointment was joyfully received by the members of my family and everyone asked me when I was going to join! Well, it was an awkward question because I did not want to join at all, and also didn't want to disclose this fact to them.

"Let me see. I am allowed a week's time to join, so I can decide at leisure." That was enough to send them contented to their respective jobs and to allow me more time to worry about the problem and pray to Meher Baba for its solution. I didn't know if Meher Baba was really going to help me in the matter. It was perhaps asking Him for too many things. Well, nothing could be said, and I had no means of judging the limits of Meher Baba's patience! As things stood, in the normal circumstances I had only one alternative left, i.e., to look into Ad. Columns of newspapers for fresh job opportunities. Sleep came to smooth the lines of worry on my forehead and the morning came with the offer of fresh vigour and vitality. I had taken my breakfast as usual, when the thing started all over again – I mean the inexplicable phenomenon of coincidences! My father was seated in his dispensary room, and from there sent a messenger to me to see him immediately. I went and found a gentleman seated in front of my father. He was not a patient. Father introduced me to him. The gentleman was the principal of a recently-opened college in another town of the State and there was a vacancy in the department of English. Some professor who had taught me had recommended my name to him the preceding evening, and he had come to offer the post to me in person. Now, would I go?

Dear reader, you can imagine the delight and relief I felt at this unexpected offer without an ads, applications and interviews, right where I was sitting at home! As if the job came jogging along to me when it was not that easy at all. Think of the thing! The Principal comes and takes you away and makes you join.

The Principal, upon hearing that I already had an appointment letter from another college in another town looked up and asked straightaway, “Well, young man, if it comes to choose between the two jobs, which will you give priority – the one for which you had to go all the distance, appear in the interview and undergo all tension, or the one that comes to you without your asking and for which there is no interview to face? I, the Principal, have myself come to take you with the assurance that I will do everything to make you feel at home there. Well, what do you think of that?”

Clearly, he had made the case so plain that there was hardly any room for deliberation. My father looked at me, and I felt that he too was deeply impressed by this gentleman’s personal interest in me. And it sounded more human for me to accept his offer. The college was in Mandla, about 60 miles from Jabalpur (only a three-hour bus ride), which meant that I could visit my parents often during weekends and holidays without appreciable expense or exertion. I declared my willingness to join this unexpected new job at a new place where I had no rival and my gain would be no person’s loss – at least not obviously, since they hadn’t even put an ad in the newspaper. Thus, within a few minutes everything was settled and the most wonderful part of it was no one insisted that I join the other college. So my prayer to Meher Baba had been responded to so graciously by Him, and in this strange fashion within 12 hours of the prayer. The problem, the tension and the worry had all simply evaporated as though they had never existed at all.

I felt it was incumbent on me to express my joy and feeling to Meher Baba for all this, through a letter. But again as I wrote the letter, I felt whether it would not be better to know if He had accepted me as His “own” as I had started doing on my part. But to ask it in words would not be the right thing. If He is the doer of all these things in my life, the director of my life’s events, the omniscient one, why should He not of Himself communicate a reply to my heart’s question, even if I had not worded it! So, I simply wrote a letter informing Meher Baba about my first and second job offers, and my decision to take the second one, and also asked him to send His blessing to the person who had been my competitor in the competitive interview.

Ahmednagar
29/6

My dear Amiya Kumar,

Your P.C. of 24th inst. was read out to Beloved Baba and He heard what you said of Professor Ganguli.

Baba has made me write a P.C. to Professor Ganguli conveying to him Baba's Love and asking him not to feel worried over things that come and pass off as quickly as they come.

Baba says that He feels happy that His Amiya Kumar has begun to think of Him. Baba sends His fond love to you.

Jones - Eruch

Ahmednagar 29/6

My Dear Amiya Kumar,

Your P.C. of 24th April inst. was read out to Beloved Baba and He heard what you said of Professor Ganguli.

Baba has made me write a P.C. to Professor Ganguli conveying to him Baba's Love and asking him not to feel worried over things that come and pass off as quickly as they come.

Baba says that He feels happy that His Amiya Kumar has begun to think of Him. Baba sends His fond love to you,

Yours, Eruch

Meher Baba's letter came, and it said that He had noted all I had to tell. But that was not all – the last lines of the letter did answer and answer very positively, in unequivocal words, the question of my heart whether He accepted me as His own. It said, "Baba sends His fond love to His Amiyakumar." His Amiyakumar. His Amiyakumar! His Amiyakumar!! Oh, He knew everything! He knew the yearning of my heart 700 miles away, and had replied to it. What more proof of His compassionate All-knowing Divinity was now required? I felt so happy! Indeed, I belonged to Him – I, a skeptic, a man who was testing Him all the time, and He who had only love to return to my unworthy self.

20. WHEN YOU REALLY LEAVE IT TO MEHER BABA

Every creature in existence fights to defend beings or things it considers precious, including itself. Our body fights against diseases, while medicines help as adjuncts to the involuntary and voluntary defence forces within. It seems that there are also other defence forces than the ones with which we have become familiar. I am referring to a “greater Factor” in existence; when we depend on it, this factor begins to help us in a manner that might seem incredible at first. With experience in its existence, we eventually become, without surprise, accustomed to receiving its help. This immensely great factor is both cosmic and supra-cosmic in its nature. It works through many channels, of which the most easily available channel is that of the Being who becomes one with the Supreme Reality. That Being also retains consciousness of the lower planes such as the gross or physical; the subtle or power-realms and mental or ideational and emotive-propulsion realms. As such Beings have the “keys” to help, they do help people in the most unexpected or unanticipated manner. In this chapter, I would like to narrate some of my personal experiences in this connection.

During the month following my interview for the first job, I experienced unnecessary and unmerited harassment by certain persons on several occasions. As I, after my newly-felt longing for Meher Baba, did not feel much attraction for materialistic things, I also had softened down to a degree in ego defences. This latter was a risky development from a practical perspective, since it allowed others to feel secure while hurting me. Although I felt embarrassed by the uninvited bullying, I offered no counter-offence but nevertheless requested them politely to desist from such undesirable behaviour. Feeling that I was quite a harmless creature, they ignored this patient and friendly request on my part and rather enhanced their insulting pranks. Four or five days passed with that kind of pestering, and then I began to lose my patience! There were the ordinary ways of acting in such situations as suggested by worldly wisdom, but I suddenly thought of not resorting to them. Why not ask the Divine Being to intervene in the matter in a way as to stop this process and teach them a lesson?

The prayer from my heart resulted in two interesting events. First, a monkey alighted on the roof of the house of the main troublemaker, and then entered that person’s room, gave him a hard slap, and went away. The following night, when one of the troublemakers was still not desisting from his unsavoury jokes and comments, I prayed to Meher Baba to take a hand in the matter and see to it that the uncouth fellow was prevented. Within ten minutes, the so-called gentleman began to toss on the bed with intense pain and a shooting fever. Clearly, he was in a panicky state and the most wonderful part of it was that although I said nothing to him nor prayed aloud to Baba, the man also seemed to divine that his offences had crossed the limits of cosmic tolerance, and he at once began to apologise to me while clutching my hand in agony and fear.

My heart was filled with surprise at the “immediate response” and now filled with pity for the burly egotistical man’s helpless condition. Now his plight turned to convulsions. I got a doctor called. Medicines were administered, but that hardly helped the man. As he had come from another town where his family resided, he insisted on being sent away and with the help of some friends we arranged his exodus!

It was my first experience of what Meher Baba could do if He wanted to protect one on the right path praying for help. I cite a few more experiences of the same nature in the second part of these memoirs.

However, I feel that praying to Meher Baba does by no means make you His favourite in the cheaper sense of the word. That is, He won't overlook your own errors of omission and commission just because you take His name! I have found Meher Baba giving me a stiff jolt if I commit an offence or act unjustly against someone. That sort of unfailing chastisement has only enhanced my respect for Him, and I am sure that His favour does not extend as far as to permit one to commit unjust actions. One thing is very certain – compassion always accompanies His justice. His punishment has an ennobling and never a debasing influence on a person's psyche. I will cite some examples of such "punitive compassion" later. At present, I continue my narrative with the remarkable things that went on happening with the frequency of a printing press.

At Mandla, I met my colleagues who were appointed to teach in the newly-opened college. They told me that they had arrived before me, and had found it impossible to obtain lodging apartments. As we were walking down the street, I felt that it was a common problem in which I had a share. Although I was temporarily lodged with the Principal, I knew that this was unsuitable for both of us. The town did not seem more than a large village bordered by the Narmada river, and there were very few houses to let and still fewer hotels with kitchen provisions that would suit people who would be coming from outside. So, the house-finding mission must occupy our immediate attention. Suddenly, as before, into my mind came the thought that I, in my personal capacity, should ask Meher Baba for His help in this problem also. I prayed inwardly and as usual did not disclose it to my newly-acquainted fellow lecturers, for I did not want to force my beliefs on anyone. Secondly, I saw no occasion for justifying a discussion on Meher Baba at the moment. As I inwardly prayed, one person, tall, middle-aged, wearing a dhoti²² and kurta²³ was seen walking ahead of us. I cannot explain to you what made me feel that he was the one who, if asked, could help us find a vacant house for let, unless it was an intuition given to me by Meher Baba Himself. I hailed the gentleman: "Sir, would you listen to me for a moment?" He paused and I went up to him.

"Namaskar,"²⁴ he said politely, "Please let me know what you wish of me."

"Sir, we are lecturers newly appointed in your town college, but we are not getting any house on rent. Could you please help us in this matter? Of course, you'll excuse us for the trouble."

"No problem!" the man said. Then after a pause for reflection, he continued, "Yes. I think there is one house that is partially vacant, at least it was so a few weeks back. It belongs to a friend. I can take you there if you wish."

We thanked him, obviously very glad to obtain accommodation. As we started down the road, I could not help pondering the "fact" that my feeling that this stranger could help us in finding a house to let had come literally true! But again I wanted to try out whether it was Baba-

²² A free form pant, draped from the waist downwards, worn often by Hindus

²³ A shirt with long fringed sleeves, with fringe that extends to the waist

²⁴ "Salutations"

sponsored intuition or just a chance. The “itch” to confirm was so deeply rooted in me that the more I scratched, the more I felt like scratching that intellectual eczema! So, I prayed for more intuitive knowledge or “divination” about the house I was going to see. The thought that clearly and with no “ifs” and “buts” came to me was that it was (a) double storied, (b) that there was a lock on the staircase door, and (c) that we were going to get a room up that staircase. When the stranger took us to the house, I was again face to face with another supernormal experience. The intuition was 100% true. The house was double-storied. The door on the staircase was locked. The rooms upstairs were to be let. As a member of the family opened the lock and welcomed us in, an introduction followed. The terms of rent were settled and the problem of living solved. I, in the corner of my mind, hiding it all from my colleagues and the others, was wondering at the whole phenomenon that helps you know a thing with 100% certitude, without any external means for communication! Let us call it intuition, as the knowledge was not tutored from outside. I can at least say with confidence that the intuition could not have come to me of its own. It hadn’t come to me for the preceding 25 years of my life. The process had only begun after I had come into Meher Baba’s contact and after sincerely appealing to Him to throw light on the dark areas of understanding of which man is generally ignorant.

Was it not then sheer ingratitude to that Divine Being’s grace not to ascribe all that was happening to His Mood to help me gently on the way to faith through personal experience both of subjective and objective kind? But as sincerity demands, let me confess, dear reader, that yet my mind was not totally satisfied. It yearned for more and more experience of the supernatural and verifiable order, and while I halted to thank Meher Baba for one, the next moment I went ahead asking Him to grant me another!

Life at Mandla was really enjoyable for some time except for food, which was served at a small hotel and consisted of the barest items of chapatis²⁵ and potato lady finger’s curry, which was hot due to the copious presence of hot chillies. The river Narmada at Sahashradhara²⁶ presented interesting scenes, where the big stones split the gushing river into a multiplicity of waves. The sun spreading its crimson smile over the foam of river water enticed me. In the month of August the heavy monsoon rains descended. At this time the river was at its fullest power, and its waves hissed and lashed against the shore incessantly. Boats ran the risk of being capsized; huge waves, as seen from the shore, seemed to swallow them up for a moment and then to eject them.

Another part of the river had a stone bridge over it, and at one end of the bridge was a renowned spiritual being called Sri Dhaniram Dada, who looked like a prince in rags, with a sickle tied to his hand, and whose utterances were difficult to understand at times. He was a “mast”²⁷ of a high plane,²⁸ if we accept the description of masts in Dr. William Donkin’s *The Wayfarers*. In that book, Dr. Donkin describes Meher Baba’s mast contact at Mandla with one

²⁵ *Thin flat, unleavened bread*

²⁶ “Thousand streamlets”

²⁷ Spiritually advanced soul as described in *The Wayfarers*. Masts, like the one mentioned in the text, often appear oblivious of the worldly ways of living, clothing, eating, etc.

²⁸ State of consciousness

mast called “Lohewala Baba”²⁹ which very much corresponds to Dhaniram Dada’s appearance and his habitual residence in a hut just near the edge of the bridge. The mast was wearing an iron chain and carrying an iron sickle.

I was taken to visit the mast by one of his devotees, an engineer, and found him to have a tremendously powerful and self-commanding personality, in spite of his thin shriveled visage, his rags and frequent inarticulate utterances. He seemed to radiate an atmosphere which became palpable when in his proximity. Surely I was subconsciously desiring to see a “mast” as I had read about them in Dr. Donkin’s book and about Meher Baba’s contacts with them. I visited this great mast thrice and always received a gracious welcome – which was rather surprisingly different from the treatment that he was accustomed to meting out to people. Often harsh and abusive and even violent, he typified the “jalali” mast described in *The Wayfarers*.

Then came the really pleasant surprise of my stay in Mandla. Someone, coming to know of my interest in Meher Baba, told me that Meher Baba had visited Mandla in 1938-1939 and that he had been fortunate to see Him. This aged man, while describing Meher Baba’s appearance, was clearly fumbling for the right words, and aided by powerful gesticulations tried to convey to me that Meher Baba was so radiant, so effulgent that He almost looked like the rising sun and that He walked at an incredibly fast pace.

This man then told me that although Meher Baba did not choose to build up His spiritual enclave at Mandla, yet He so profoundly impressed the prominent citizens of the town that they transferred to His name about 80 acres of land with a mango grove, and also built a room with another underground room approached by a flight of steps from the upper storey. This structure of brick and cement was called Meher Kutī and still stands behind the Police Lines³⁰ of the town. But ultimately, as Meher Baba positively declined to have anything to do with either the huge plot or with the structure, a trust was formed to look after the place and that for some time a Jain sadhu called Swami Mangalanand³¹ had been dwelling there.

I had not much interest in meeting the Swami, but after hearing the story of Meher Kutī I did express a desire to visit the place, and this gentleman promised to take me there the following evening. As I approached the immense lands and the Meher Kutī, I saw a shaven-headed monk in saffron robes standing near the railings of the Kutī. He smiled when he saw us approaching and finally said to me, “I was expecting to see you.” This did not impress me much. When he said that he had seen a snake coming in his dream in the night (it is considered auspicious by Hindus to see snakes) he felt sure that some God’s good soul was coming. Again this too did not impress me except as ordinary “clichés” indulged in by “swamis” and “sadhus” – they often talk like this to impress credulous people. So I cut him short by telling him that my purpose of visiting the place was because it was associated with Meher Baba. He then began to praise Meher Baba, His silence, etc. Then he produced two manuscripts in his handwriting, the one

²⁹ Loha – iron

³⁰ The region of the town set aside (originally by the British) for police to live and work.

³¹ This same gentleman appears in Lord Meher, the biography by Bhau Kalchuri as “Swami Mungalananda Paramhans Dhuniwale” (www.LordMeher.org, page 4253).

called “Om”³² and another “Mauna.”³³ Well, politeness demanded that I should speak a few encouraging words to the Swami, who at least appeared to have been devoting himself to penances, etc., and then I returned home.

At Mandla, although everything went on well at College and also at home, where I developed a few acquaintances of like interest, still I began to develop nostalgia for my family and friends at Jabalpur and soon began to long for a change of place. This state of mind led to a “confusion” in which once again the idea shimmered in my mind to determine the purpose of my life. Is it to be just contented to be a popular teacher, a loved or liked person, a successful careerist, or something else? Surely, the preceding list did not contain enough temptations to me. I yearned again for the solution of the riddle of the universe, for my place in it, for the hidden mechanics and purpose of creation. The old disease of the early fifties was coming back to me and would not permit me to be satisfied with mundane achievements. Even discussions by people about worldly things and problems made me weary. Those who talked of philosophy did so only from book knowledge and had nothing of their own to offer me. Only one person perhaps could do it, and He was Meher Baba. I had not yet seen Him, but a great number of incidents were associated with His remembrance. Why not then meet this Being and see if He could really help me to solve the problems – the ticklish riddles – and lift the veil of ignorance that gnawed at my heart? I wrote a letter to Meher Baba giving vent to my feelings.

³² The primal point of cosmic evolution and the sound that is supposed to emanate from it constantly.

³³ Silence

Ahmednagar
27/7.

My dear Aniya Kumer,
your P.C. giving your
new address in Mandla was read out to
Beloved Babu. Your mood as depicted
in your epistle of love is but natural and the
Beloved wants you not only to strive to keep
afloat the flame kindled in your loving heart but
He wants you to nurture it with all diligence
as it must burst out one day soon into a flame
to spread warmth and love in the hearts of others
who come in your contact.
Babu has noted with pride
and satisfaction that His dear Aniya is not inactive.
He has noted about Prof. S. K. Tewari. Convey to

him Babu's Love.

Babu wants you to drive
away all confusion. It is
just to give strength to His
loved ones the Beloved, true
and again affirms that He
is the Ancient One; He is the
One so eagerly awaited
by mankind! Just love
Him - for the sake of pure
LOVE - for He is the Only One
worthy of being loved. Begin
to love Him and you will
find that you are in love
with God. Love strengthens
faith and faith drives away
all confusion. With love Grace.



Shri Aniya Kumer Haugra,
Department of English,
Ravi Bargarwati Mahavidyalaya
MANDLA
(M.P.)

Ahmednagar 27/7

My Dear Amiya Kumar,

Your P.C. giving your new address in Mandla was read out to Beloved Baba.

Your mood as depicted in your epistle of love is but natural and the Beloved wants you not only to strive to keep aglow the flame kindled in your loving heart but He wants you to nurture it with all diligence — as it must burst out one day as it must burst out one day as a flame to spread warmth and love in the hearts of others who come in your contact.

Baba has noted with pride and satisfaction that His dear Amiya is not inactive. He has noted about Professor S. L. Tiwari. Convey to him Baba's love.

Baba wants you to drive away all confusion. It is just to give strength to His loved ones the Beloved, time and time again, affirms that He is the Ancient One; He is the One so eagerly awaited by humankind. Just love Him — for the sake of pure love — for he is the Only One worthy of being loved. Begin to love Him and you will find that you are in love with God. Love strengthens faith and faith drives away all confusion.

With love, Eruch

The reply came from Him asking me to “drive away all confusion.” If letters could do that, then I might have been able to drive away the confusion. Instead, this letter made me feel more intensely the desire to meet Meher Baba so as to entreat Him to help me with illumination. The swami at Meher Kuti called me and I told him that theoretical discussions were tiresome to me and I wondered how people could feel so complacent with armchair philosophy. He must have felt a little crestfallen, but did not argue; what was I doing, after all, if not helping him face the facts bravely? Then after about three months I told him to meet Meher Baba who, I added, seemed very likely to be the holder of the keys that could unlock the mysteries that engulf me and him alike. The swami agreed, and wrote Meher Baba a letter and he too received a reply in which Meher Baba told him that “One who knows everything displaces nothing.” He also told the swami that there was nothing like time and distance except in imagination, and also that He (Baba) was in every being and everything and as such there was no question for earmarking anybody as bad or good. Meher Baba gave the swami His Love Blessings. Although the letter was hardly understood by the swami, or myself for that matter, the Love Blessings cheered up our hearts and minds and we decided to seize the first opportunity of going to Meher Baba to receive all that He might condescend to grant us.

Now as the rains receded and the sky was full of colourful clouds, we had delightful walks along the roads of Mandla. My love of nature sustained me a bit, but now my longing to meet Meher Baba was getting more intense day by day. If He was the God-man, what an idiot I was wasting my time here at Mandla instead of rushing to Him by the first train! I got positively sick of Mandla within a few days and again began to pray that I may be allowed to leave Mandla whether I got a job or not afterwards! So, instead of driving away confusion, I was creating more for myself. But as the prayers intensified, my divine Listener must have relented and only a few days later I found to my surprise my father sitting on a chair in my rented apartment. I could not discern the meaning of his sudden arrival from Jabalpur. The only commonsense rationale was probably that he wanted to see for himself how I was getting on in this new place.

But that reason was soon invalidated as he showed me a letter with a smile. It was from the Education Department of the government of Madhya Pradesh – a letter of appointment as Lecturer in a college at Bhopal with immediate effect – the maximum period allowed to join being seven days. My heart, sick of Mandla for no known or valid reason, was filled with surprise at the speedy course of events that had arranged for my exit from the town for another job at another place.

But this was not a complete solution to my problem. True I wanted to leave Mandla and now I could do it, but it only meant shifting to another town – Bhopal³⁴ – with which I was totally unacquainted. But looking at my father's delight, I kept quiet. He was so happy that I was being given a gazetted post by the Government with better job security and prospects that he hardly expected that I might have a contrary view on the matter. It also seemed ridiculous to tell him that I was not attracted by jobs or ranks, as I was puzzled by the riddles of the Universe. I wonder if even 1% of the people of the world would think as I did. Hence I desisted from any reference to my inner state of feelings before my father, and agreed to tender my resignation the very next day at Mandla, to carry my tent on my shoulders, and to pitch it in the capital city of Madhya Pradesh.

The college authorities, including the gracious Principal and the pupils felt depressed that I was leaving, but ultimately the resignation was accepted and I was permitted to bid goodbye to Mandla. Before leaving, I met the swami and told him to keep ready to meet Meher Baba on a signal from me, and also assured him that I would keep contact with him through correspondence. Thus came to a sudden end my stay at Mandla. However, little did I know that instead of driving away confusion, I was only shifting it from one point in this globe to another!

³⁴ Capitol city of Madhya Pradesh

21. SO NEAR AND YET SO FAR!

Before I narrate my experiences at Bhopal, I would take the liberty of looking back to a meeting with a spiritual aspirant at Jabalpur.

During my frequent return trips to Jabalpur from Mandla, I was met by several friends, and a few told me of this person, whose name I do not disclose on purpose. He was a logician and his Master's degree was in Philosophy. He was obviously trying to lead people through clever arguments to his way of thinking. Like many other powers, the power of argumentation, aided by the "gift of gab,"³⁵ is well known to attract persons. But, the result may be that such persons gain only the intellectual satisfaction of feeling that they understand spiritual reality. Mere intellectual satisfaction through logical argumentation is dangerous, as I learned from meeting this, by now, quite well-known person.

He had sent me some of his own books, which contained his ideas about spirituality, and he proposed that I pay him a visit to learn more about real spirituality. He welcomed me, and his brilliant arguments seemed so apparently convincing that in a minute it was clear to me why people had started regarding him as a great spiritual guide. By contrast, I found him to be a clever logician, who could get away with any position for a time, as long as his listener was not permitted to ponder deeply over his position. Inspecting the person, I did not find in him any real spiritual or extraordinary capabilities, Far from omniscience or other such divine qualities, he was just a brilliant articulator, like Bertrand Russell and his tribe, minus the latter's quality of acknowledging honestly the limitations of his mental reaches. My acquaintance the logician was already assuming the imaginary post of "spiritual guru" or "master."

What a far cry from Meher Baba this was! Our discussion came to the topic of love for God, and the brilliant man with his brilliant logic tried to convince me that there was no point in "loving God" because we could not love one whom we did not know!

"Then you do not believe in 'love' as a way to realize God?" I asked.

"I maintain, Mr. Hazra, that loving someone you don't know is absurd! It is like taking a mirage for 'water.'"

"You then mean that the generations of God-lovers throughout the world have just been running after a mirage, taking it as water?"

"Yes, and they died with thirst, no doubt!" The person chuckled like a table-tennis player who has scored a point over his rival.

"What then is the way of realizing God according to you?" I asked.

³⁵ At the time of writing *Memoirs of a Zetetic*, AKH was determined not to identify this person, because he didn't wish friction with his followers. Now, with the passage of time and the demise of both parties, it is probably not dangerous to identify the person, who was subsequently known to the world as "Bhagwan Shri Rajneesh."

“Renounce what is false, sacrifice all ephemeral things, what remains then would be Reality. I therefore plead for renunciation and sacrificing of false and imaginary things to gain the experience of Reality.”

“Well, that is also a traditionally-sanctified path, and I see no real difference between the two paths, i.e., loving God and renunciation and sacrifice of worldly things.”

“I fear there is a lot of difference,” the thinker maintained.

“Well, from a logical perspective perhaps, but from the psychological standpoint I find both paths not only collateral but almost the obverse and converse of the same coin.”

“Can you justify what you say?” he demanded.

“I hope I can. See, for example, the primary instances of sacrifice or giving up or giving away material things. When do we do that? If I am asked by a beggar or a stranger for a thousand bucks I would definitely refuse, but if it is my son or my good friend or someone I love, I may give it. All sacrifice, all giving ups and giving aways, are done only in favour of some being or other thing or some cause that you love. People even sacrifice their lives for certain ideals. Hence, unless you love you won’t sacrifice. If someone else’s child is in danger you may show a bit of sympathy, but if your own child were in danger, you would do the utmost to save your child. Why? Because you love your child! So, love and sacrifice go together. I may go even further to say that love for something is a pre-condition for sacrificing something else. Hence, even if ‘Reality’ or ‘God’ is to be realized through renunciation of worldly things, ephemeral pleasures, comforts, achievements, etc. and through courting suffering and troubles, it cannot really begin unless you have really begun to love or long for something higher and greater, something that is not ephemeral but permanent and abiding. And, dear sir, coming to the imaginary aspect of the matter, all that you call sacrifice or renunciation is set to naught unless you can sacrifice your mental habits themselves. That is, mind being the seat of imaginary attachments must first go, so that renunciation is really effective and lasting, otherwise giving up of certain material attachments might be just a deceptive simulation of real sacrifice, not the thing in fact. In short, that kind of ‘sacrifice’ might be as ‘imaginary’ as love of God is imaginary according to your logic.”

The thinker became silent and serious for some time. Feeling that further arguments were futile, I took his leave. But, honestly speaking, I felt very little satisfaction about that harangue. I was convinced that both he and I were mere theorists trying to appease our intellectual appetites by logical point and counterpoint. Neither did he really understand much about “renunciation” and “sacrifice” as paths to realization, nor did I know anything about divine love as a way to achieve union with God. Both were just dangerously complacent, that was all! At my heart I longed to have that love for God that leads to giving up all attachments to worldly things, not the artificial love, not the artificial renunciation that is made incumbent upon people who join ashrams or hermitages out of momentary enthusiasm, to later regret their decision for the remainder of their lives. That error leads to a double-life that neither helps them in worldly things nor in other-worldly things (as genuine spiritual longing would do). As I had not yet felt that degree of intensity for God-realization I was merely dabbling in intellectual arguments. I had by this time come to think my experiments in the same class as intellectual arguments.

Honesty demanded that I should admit that I had no real “longing,” no dynamic “drive” for spiritual things, but much though I wished to feel love for God, I could not generate that

“feeling” within me. I felt frustrated. But soon, I was to become busy with a new college and a new place at Bhopal, and only a few hours of solitude at the hotel where I stayed allowed me to feel the “pinch” of my spiritual poverty.

In His letter, Meher Baba had asked me to “love Him more.” Now, I had a photograph of Meher Baba in my hotel room. His beautiful face shone, His lovely eyes looked at me, His lips concealed a secret smile of affection. I looked and looked at Him and then one day suddenly I seized the photograph of Meher Baba and kissed the lips. I put the photograph on my bosom and pressed it onto my heart. What was I doing? I looked at Baba’s face again. Did it shine brighter, was the smile more bewitching? I did not know, I understood nothing. I just madly kissed the photo again and again, hugged it to my heart repeatedly and still felt dissatisfied with all those adorations. Oh God, what was happening? That night I did not lie on my bed alone. Meher Baba’s photograph was with me and first I kept it on my heart and then by the side of my pillow. I had the most intimate experience of companionship and the sweetest sleep that night. Morning came, and with it the un-ebbing conviction that this was the preliminary experience of that longing for the pure, the good, the sublime and the dearest entity – the love – that saints have called “love for God.”

I, a teacher in a college, acted like a child in the influence of that longing, and for once I felt glad that I could feel that I was once again a child, and Meher Baba was my Father, my Beloved, my Guide, my Goal, and my Surest Friend. He was infinitely worth loving. But did I love Him of my own accord? Even a day before I had not felt this sort of intense longing for Him. Was it my love for Him that made me love Him or His love for me that generated that intense longing for Him? Was the iron particle drawing the magnet towards it or the magnet drawing the iron particle? Surely common sense suggested that it was the magnet – the divine Magnet that was Meher Baba, drawing this iron-hearted man, this cold and intellectually-insulated being called “me,” and showering on me His Infinite Grace of unending Love out of His compassion and ceaseless and bounteous nature. Then day after day the longing began to become more and more intense and unbearable. Tears often gushed out of my eyes. Pangs of separation tore at my heart. Oh Meher Baba, why have you kept me so far away from you? Why? Why don’t you come and become one with me? You are my most precious Beloved. Oh Meher Baba, I feel so near at times and yet so far from you. At least have some pity on me. Allow me to go to where you live and meet you. And in the anguish of this painful longing I wrote a letter to Meher Baba praying for His Darshan immediately.

Ahmednagar
4/11/57.

My dear Aniya,

Your P.C. of 29/10 was read
out to Beloved Bala yesterday soon after his
return from Bombay on 2nd evening.

In reply to yours, Bala wants
you NOT to come to him at present or even
during X-hell vacation. Bala wants you to
see him during the School vacation in February 58.

Bala sends you his love.

Also convey Shri Ahmed Ali
Bala's love-blessing and tell him that he
must NOT lose heart and feel so much

distressed. Time will
change and the situation
is bound to alter.

Nothing ever remains
unchanged except the
One Eternal Being on
whom depends everything.

With affectionate regards

Yours lovingly,

Renu

पोस्ट कार्ड

जवाबी

केवल पत्र



Shri.

Aniya Kumar Nayya,

Bombay Hotel,

Near Peer Gate,

BHOPAL (M.P.)

In reply came the letter shown:

Ahmednagar 4/11/57

My Dear Amiya,

Your P.C. of 29/10 was read out to Beloved Baba yesterday soon after his return from Bombay on 2nd evening.

In reply to yours, Baba wants you NOT to come to Him at present or even during X-mas vacation. Baba wants you to see him during the Sahavas Occasion in February '58.

Baba sends you His love.

Please convey to Shri Ahmed Ali Baba's Love-blessing and tell him that he must NOT lose heart and feel too much distressed. Time will change and the situation is bound to alter. Nothing ever remains unchanged except the One Eternal Being on whom depends everything.

With affectionate regards,

Yours lovingly,

Eruch

This letter was frankly so frustrating that I was unable to reconcile myself with waiting four months to see Baba. As the latter part of the letter was for Sri Ahmed Ali,³⁶ I conveyed the contents to him and tried to explain the perennial wisdom contained in the concluding lines of the letter, i.e., "Nothing ever remains unchanged except the One Eternal Being on whom depends everything." But for myself, I could hardly feel comforted. I longed to meet the "One Eternal Being" but as everything depended on Him, I did not know how to manage the meeting.

Some time passed, and I wrote a second letter again asking for Darshan. How expectantly I was waiting for a "yes" reply from Baba. But when this letter came, it only made me more frustrated.

Sri Eruch wrote to inform that I was to control my emotions and "digest the rich food of love" that Beloved Baba was feeding me, and the cup of Grace that He was making me drink "without spilling a drop." Sri Eruch in his tenderly-worded letter bade me not to try to see Meher Baba at that time but patiently wait for His Will.

That meant waiting for nearly four months, while I was not able to bear the separation for even a few minutes. It was misery at its maximum, indeed! Dear reader, Love of God, when God or God-man generates it in your heart, is not an imaginary thing; it is more real than all those things that we generally consider to be real, and it is qualitatively so different from all other earthly "loves" that no comparison could be made without making a fool of oneself. No doubt love is divine but love for the Divine is the yearning of the innermost being to become one with itself – at once an antithesis and a synthesis, a process as well as its own fulfillment. It can never really be described but it can palpably be experienced when the Perfect Master generates this

³⁶ Amiya had written about the distressed condition of a radio artiste Shri Ahmed Ali seeking Baba's love-protection.

state in someone. This could be done by a mere touch, a mere look, a mere word and even without these media, silently on a vibrational level from a distance of thousands of miles by mere willing on the part of the Master. If I value anything above all other things, I value this experience, though it lasted for only several months, and was not the real longing, but the dimmest shadow of that longing for God, and I wonder that if even the dimmest shadow of the real longing could be so shattering, so intense, so fierce in its grip on one's psyche, then what could be the "real longing" or "love" that is being experienced by the real lovers of God, the "masts" as described by Dr. Donkin or the saints, like Saint Francis and Sri Chaitanya, etc.? That love was not food for weaker vessels like me, and I was glad to have only a remote shadow-experience of it. But even that shadow-experience given to me by Meher Baba upset my worldly attraction to an extent that despite Sri Eruch's brotherly advice to "exercise control," I failed to take interest in even teaching, a job of which I was otherwise fond. But Sri Eruch's advice prompted by Meher Baba was highly practical, not only from the worldly point of view but also from the spiritual point of view. But, the wisdom of that advice of course did not dawn upon me at that moment, and I became more and more restless to meet Meher Baba. The worst part of the thing was a sense of frustration like one that you feel when you are waiting very eagerly for a train, and the announcer tells you that it is getting more and more delayed.

This sense of frustration finally resulted in an exciting episode of which I still feel ashamed. One evening, in desperation mingled with anger towards Meher Baba for having barred my meeting with Him, I picked up His photograph from the table in a mood to dash it to the ground! It was love embittered to the extent of irrational activity, no doubt, but even the most sensible of us may admit having occasions in their lives when they could not keep their hearts harnessed and their brains braced. But, the apparent tragedy suddenly turned into a comedy, when just at that moment entered my friend. Without divining what I was going to do with Meher Baba's photograph, he simply took it from me and lovingly replaced it on the table as if it belonged to him. He then did an odd thing. He shook some talcum powder into his palm and lovingly besmeared Meher Baba's photograph with it as if he was doing this to his child before going out for to a party. Partly helpless, partly in agony, and partly in wonderment, I saw all this happening. I could not help admiring Meher Baba for thus saving His photograph from being dashed to the ground by a stupid lover – and thus saving His stupid lover from an unworthy act with possibly highly unsavoury repercussions on the nervous system if the thing had been done. Naturally I recovered from my emotional state at that peak point of excitement, and we fell into conversation. I hid my unwarranted intentions.

But frankly the days and nights that followed hung heavy on my mind, and there was only one thing in my heart – to rush to meet Meher Baba. Earlier, His devotees had told me about the emphasis that Meher Baba laid on "obedience" but all those wise words could not offer me any comfort. At last, I wrote another letter to Meher Baba telling Him that if He wanted to see me happy, then He must grant me audience. A few days later His reply came (presented overleaf). It communicated that although He wanted me to see Him during the Sahavas Gathering in February 1958, yet since I was so insistent, He has permitted me to see him for a day in December 1957.

I cannot express my feeling in words when I read this letter. It was as if a long-sealed book of my life was to be opened after all; I felt both greatly overjoyed and greatly nervous. What would the meeting be like? Will I really be seeing the God-man face to face, or just meeting an ordinary human being – one of the thousands of such ordinary meetings? Was I going to meet

the real author of the numerous events in my life during the past eight months or would my hopes shatter to pieces and make me relapse into my atheistic state of mind again? Will the mist be penetrated by just one glimmer of light, or will it be still more gloomy and hang more heavily on my mind than ever before?

Frankly, it was going to be a more crucial moment of my life than even what we are fond of calling a "life and death issue." If Meher Baba did not appear as I had thought of Him, and read of Him or heard of Him, that would mean the death of hope, of faith, nay of everything that now I had begun to value. But if He appeared to be the Person I had by now assumed Him to be, what joy and revelation that would be! It would then be the greatest discovery that I could think of making – the Discovery of God and the fortunes attending on such a discovery would undoubtedly be untold!

please bring your service. If you are
 still, only to see Baba in December
 then, with it he and I will

Please give the exact date, time, Ahmednagar
 and address. The place in Poona. Yours lovingly, 18/11
 My dear Amiya, your P.C. of 15th inst. was read out to
 the beloved. In reply to yours Baba wants you
 to convey dear Mishra his Baba's love-blessings. I
 have requested brother Adi to send you a photo of
 Baba for Mishra's beloved for yourself.
 In response to yours, longing to see
 Baba and to be with him, Baba wants me to inform
 you that you should come alone to Poona and meet
 Baba on 8th Dec unless he tells. This date is not yet
 confirmed. I shall let you know the exact date
 and address (where you meet Baba in Poona). But
 Baba says that he feels that you to come to him
 for only a few hours and that if you are
 determined to obey him, to do exactly as he wishes

you to do. You must NOT
 let out this news to
 anyone who might accompany
 you for Baba's Darshan.
 Because Baba orders you to
 come all alone - without
 anyone accompanying you for
 Baba's Darshan. This does
 NOT mean that you MUST
 come and see Baba in Poona.
 Baba would love to see him
 during the holidays in Feb.
 at Indore, but as you
 seem to be impatient, Baba
 permits you to come to Poona
 for a day and return same
 evening, only if you can
 get leave dearly without

पोस्ट कार्ड

केवल पता



Shri

Amiya Kumar Hanra

Bombay Hotel,

Peer Gate

BHOPAL

(M.P.)

Ahmednagar 18/11

My Dear Amiya,

Your P.C. of 15th inst was read out to the Beloved. In reply to yours Baba wants you to convey dear Mishra Lal Baba's love-blessings. I have requested brother Adi to send you photos of Baba for Mishra Lal and for yourself.

In response to your longing to see Baba and to be "with" him, Baba permits me to inform you that you should [come and] meet Baba on 8th December. But this date is not yet confirmed. I shall let you know the exact date and address (where you meet Baba in Poona). But Baba says he permits you to come to Him for only a few hours and that too if you are determined to obey Him and to do exactly as He wishes you to do. You must NOT let out this news to anyone who might accompany you for Baba's Darshan because Baba orders you to come all alone — without anyone accompanying you for Baba's Darshan. This does not mean that you MUST come and see Baba in Poona. Baba wants you to see Him during the Sahavas in Feb. at Meherabad, but as you seem to be impatient Baba permits you to come to Poona for a day and return same evening, only if you can get leave easily without jeopardizing your service. If you are still [determined] to see Baba in December then write [a] card to me and I will then give you the exact date time and address of the place in Poona.

Yours lovingly,

Eruch

22. JOURNEY TO GOD

As the day of darshan drew nearer, I entrained from Bhopal for my home town of Jabalpur to rest for a couple of days before returning to the train to continue onward to Poona. Darshan was to be held at Meher Baba's current residence, which was a building called "Guruprasad" in Poona. I didn't know Maharashtra (the state in which Poona was located), apart from an earlier brief visit to Bombay, and I didn't know the local language, Marathi.

Unaccompanied, I took the train to Kalyan, where I was to change trains to catch the direct train to Poona. As the local trains halted for only a few minutes, I had to rush into the first compartment that halted in front of me. To my delight, I saw an empty seat in the otherwise overcrowded compartment, and sat down upon it. Just a few seconds before the train left the station, a burly gentleman entered the compartment. With a tone that was not cordial, he demanded that I vacate the seat, telling me that it was his, and he had just left it for a moment.

I complied with his demand, but felt that my mood had been spoiled by his aggressiveness. On this last lap of my journey to Meher Baba, I did not want my mood to be ruined by such discourteousness. The train had picked up speed, and I tried to console myself with the fact that many other passengers were similarly standing in the compartment holding the handles hanging from the ceiling of the train. But honestly, I was still smarting within myself and felt sore. Suddenly, a strange thing happened. One elderly gentleman almost twice my age got up from his seat, came up to me, touched me gently on my shoulder and said, "come, Sir, you take my seat."

I was surprised. He did not know me and he was old. Why then should he come forward with such an unexpected request? I felt abashed and, while thanking him for his gesture politely refused to dispossess him of his rightful seat. But he would not take "No" for an answer and very lovingly caught hold of my hand and literally led me to his seat and made me sit on it. I was surprised at this and suggested that we both could share the seat in case he was so eager that I should be seated. He gently smiled and, touching me on the shoulder said again, "It's okay. I don't mind standing, therefore please do keep sitting. No problem, you see!"

I could only mutter "thank you so much" to this stranger, and now the soreness of my heart was totally gone with this touch of love. As the train was nearing Lonavla, a deep valley shimmering with the light of the broad sinking Sun appeared. I was again occupied with thoughts of Meher Baba. Only a few hours, only a few miles more, and then I would be in His place! He had already made me love Him, He had already created events that seemed more than coincidence, but now I was going to be face to face with Him and no doubt that would mean a world of difference, would it not?

The Darshan was to take place the next day, and as I did not have directions to Guruprasad, I was supposed to try to find a vehicle driver who knew it on the following morning. Meanwhile, I was to remain content to wait for the few hours of the night before the dawn broke and the sun was to rise – maybe the sun of all suns was to rise in the sky of my mind and dispel the mist. Oh how I longed that this would really happen – that the weary traveler would find the place to rest his troubled head, that I would find the Real Guide who knew the goal and could take me there.

23. SUNDAY BECOMES THE DAY OF THE SUN

“And then felt I like some watcher of the skies when a new planet swims into his ken.” – Keats

It was Sunday, the 8th of December 1957. As the morning light entered my hotel room, I stirred up from bed and hurriedly went through the morning wash and breakfast. Then, dressing up, I came out of the hotel and flung myself into a three-wheeler that stood empty beside the road. I directed the driver to take me to Guruprasad Bungalow, near Bund Garden, where I was to meet Baba. The driver took an unbearable extra minute to locate the Bungalow, and I jumped off the vehicle, paid the fare, and began walking towards the big gate of palatial Guruprasad. The long approach to the building was covered with well-kept gardens on both sides, with fountains and statues. As I walked up to the building, I saw hundreds of people, all strangers to me, but all talking of Baba. But where was He? I ventured to ask one of them, and he told me that Baba was to arrive at the place at 8 AM, and that they were all waiting outside to greet Him. Nobody took note of me, so engrossed were they in waiting for their first glimpses of Baba. I stood amidst the throng, feeling rather like an alien, and a bit lost, too! I had till then written letters to, and received letters from, Baba. I knew that I would recognize Baba when He came, as I had seen His photographs. But, I could not see how Sri Eruch or Baba Himself would recognize the writer of those letter, for they had never seen me nor my photograph!

This was so clear now from the crowd of unknown faces that the situation posed a problem for me – the problem of “introduction.” I would have to be introduced to Baba, or do it myself when He came. But the appalling number of people flocking around to see and meet Him made it look rather difficult to get the opportunity for a personal introduction, much less an interview. I had not anticipated that there would be so large a gathering, and my longing for a close, intimate contact with Baba now seemed a remote hope. I felt a little dispirited.

Just then, the crowd espied a blue car slowly entering the portals of Guruprasad. They began to rush towards the car with shouts of “Avatar Meher Baba Ki Jai!”³⁷ and the atmosphere became electric in the blink of an eye. The car slowly threaded its way through a throng that was so eager to see Meher Baba that I had to stand on my toes to attempt to get a glimpse of Him. But then, in a few moments, the car reached the portico, the door swung open, a few members of the Mandali³⁸ alighted, and then out came Meher Baba Himself, clad in a pink coat and white sadra. He looked radiance personified, so graceful, so pure and His personality was so awe-inspiring and yet so heart-warming that I could only stand and stare at Him.

He nodded gently to His numerous devotees, and just as He started moving ahead towards the hall, He suddenly turned and looked at me with His big Star-like eyes and smiled, and the next moment He was gone – gone inside the hall, the devotees still shouting “Avatar Meher Baba Ki Jai” and running after Him to take their seats, perhaps as near His seat as possible. As hundreds of shouting people rushed up the stairs past me, I recollected that I should do likewise, but I was a little late. By the time I entered the hall, more than three-quarters of it was full and, if I remember rightly, the best seat I could find was four rows from the exit! Frankly it was not, to

³⁷ “Hail God-man Meher Baba”

³⁸ Meher Baba’s intimate disciples and continuous companions.

use Mr. Pickwick's words, "a capital position." Moreover, three turban-wearing villagers³⁹ from Maharashtra sat in front of me and fairly eclipsed the line of vision so that I could hardly see Meher Baba. How exasperated I felt at that moment. An alien, a newcomer, coming all the way to meet Meher Baba, and now not even able to see Him properly. And the worst part of it was that there was no one who knew me there, no one who could send a word to Baba that I had come and was sitting in the hall to have a personal contact with Him.

Music was struck and a Bhajan⁴⁰ and Arti⁴¹ were sung. My despair mounted. The feeling that came to me was that I had come all the way from Bhopal only to see three turbans instead of Meher Baba and that none, including Meher Baba Himself seemed to take any notice of me. At that moment, there was a parting of the turbaned heads and there was Meher Baba at the other end of the hall on a chair looking like the King of all Beauty and grace that the world could exhibit. And then He stretched His hand and directly pointed His index finger at me. He made some gestures with his fingers, drawing the attention of the gentleman who stood by His side. The gentleman bent a little low to read the gestures and spelt "Amiya Kumar!" Meher Baba nodded His head in assent and again pointed out His finger at me. The gentleman, only afterwards known to me as Baba's interpreter Sri Eruch, now understood and looked at me and said, "Amiya Kumar, Baba is calling you to Him." I stood up for the first time face to face with Meher Baba. He shone like the Sun, His extraordinary eyes were on me and in a moment He had given proof of His all-knowingness by indicating who I was – the only person among the hundreds present who knew my identity. I began to tremble as I tried to cope with the instruction to go up to Baba. With every forward step I took, the trembling increased. I felt as if I was wading through water. This strange feeling of atmospheric resistance made me nearly faint with nervousness. Although a sprinter and an athlete, I had never felt that I had such a weak pair of legs ever before in my life. The fear entered my mind that I would fall down unconscious if I attempted to walk any further towards Baba, and I inwardly prayed, "Meher Baba, You are omniscient, You know me, You also know that I am utterly unable to hold onto my limbs at this moment, so please don't call me now."

While I prayed and took one or two staggering steps towards Him, Baba raised His hand again and made some gestures. Sri Eruch read them out for me, "Amiya Kumar, Baba wants you not to come to Him just now, but He wants you to sit close to Him at that place," and he pointed out a place that was to Baba's right, where the women devotees were seated. I staggered up to the place and sat in front of the ladies. This was close enough to Baba's chair just about ten or twelve feet to His right. Then Baba looked at me and again gestured for Sri Eruch to read "Amiya Kumar, you could not see Baba clearly before. Now can you see Him properly?" I nodded in assent with gratitude at this change of place, and Baba beamed a comforting smile at me and soon after began a discourse on types of "Obedience." The discourse has been published, so I do not give it here. What it meant was that Baba attributes great importance to a willing obedience to the Master, without any greed for a reward or remuneration as the best precondition for attracting Divine Grace.

³⁹ Wearing veery tall turbans is a village custom in Maharashtra.

⁴⁰ Devotional song

⁴¹ Arti is a desperate cry from within for health, protection and blessings by one who is suffering

Although Baba's discourse on obedience was ennobling, I was more attracted by Him than by what He was telling us. How devoutly others were looking at Him and how seriously were they listening to each word that came out of Sri Eruch's mouth as Baba gestured with His hands. My feeling at seeing Baba was that of having found a friend or relative with whom I had lost contact for ages and whom I loved most and who loved me immeasurably.

Yet had I not been wagging a loose tongue about him and all spiritual persons while at Jabalpur not a year ago? Was I not critical, doubting and even sarcastic? And Meher Baba had by then given evidence of His Omniscience, Omnipotence and Omnipresence to me? Had He not fulfilled, at long distance, several scores of very odd requests made by me? Even, just a few minutes back, He had unmistakably shown that He and He alone knew me. So what was I to do? How was I to behave? Was I to ask His forgiveness for my earlier arrogance and unbecoming criticisms?

I felt deeply sorry for whatever unjust thought I had nursed a year back about him and inwardly prayed to be very kindly forgiven. Baba, who was busy describing something to the audience, suddenly stopped and turned fully towards me and looked at me with eyes so full of pity and compassion that I instantaneously burst into tears. He turned His face away, and went on with His discourse.

I wept for some minutes and then gathered myself up to look at Him. Again I felt as if I needed a second affirmation of His divine forgiveness, for I felt that my sins were very great. Again, Meher Baba turned towards me and looked full into my eyes – eyes that very eloquently conveyed to me His love and forgiveness blended into one. And how strange it was that I burst into a flood of tears once again.

What was this phenomenon of tears? Why did I weep when His eyes met mine? As a teacher of literature, I can remember and cite instances when some wonderful line of a poem or situation in a novel, some very touching song or wonderful gesture in dance, can cause an emotion that can draw out tears from the eyes of the audience or spectators. But here, just a mere look from Baba could make us weep as if our hearts would turn into a pool of tears! This has not happened to me alone, but to hundreds and thousands of persons. The weeping was rising out from the deepest depth of the heart. It was both in ecstasy of meeting Baba and feeling pangs of actual separation from Him at the same time. Well, as I was unable to control my sobbing this time, I had no other alternative except to bite my wrist with my teeth to cut off the stream of tears. Even then, it was difficult to overcome the emotional state, and then I again wished Baba to look at me with love, unconditional love, because I felt that I needed His love most of all things in the world. And, unfailingly again, the Omniscient one turned towards me and filled my heart with His love-pouring eyes. So real was that experience of love, so sublime, so unselfish, so all-giving that I found a new meaning of the word "love" that no dictionary had been able to give.

Discourses and beautiful music by Baba's musician devotees poured in and the place was overflowing with the purity and serenity of His presence. As I watched Him and reassessed my gains, I was compelled to admit that all that I did not believe in 1954 or 1955 was here – in active demonstration – but a demonstration of the most unobtrusive kind. Baba's omniscience seemed as natural to Him as the leaves to the tree, and His power of Loving as tremendous as the power of the ocean. All our "love" seemed so base, so calculating, so temporal and so crude in comparison to His love.

My assessment went on as He was busy asking now this person, now that whether he had slept well, had a good time and always assured everyone “not to worry.” My mind was reckoning, like a clever accountant, what I had gained. The one who had proved His Omniscience must know better about all those things about which we are starkly ignorant. And when the all-knowing One is sitting right here, what warrant have we to doubt His statements about the Creation and its purpose that He has condescended to divulge before the world?

In a mood to surrender, and as a gesture of being really prepared to belong to Him, I made a mental pledge of not leaving His physical presence at all through the hours that He was going to grant us on that day. This pledge made me happy, but the happiness did not last long enough, for soon came in some giant baskets full of sweets to be consecrated by his touch and afterwards to be distributed among the devotees as His prasad. Baba touched these baskets lovingly and then up came a volunteer to the microphone to announce, “Please leave the hall and take Baba’s prasad outside on the verandah and thereafter you all shall be served some tea. Baba will be sitting here and after you have finished, you may re-enter the hall to have His Darshan again.”

The moment the devotees heard the instruction they began to rise and slowly make for the exit. I was clearly in a fix, for I had no sooner made the pledge not to quit Baba’s presence then had come this order that meant leaving Baba’s presence. Now if I left the hall to obey the volunteer’s instruction as all others were doing, I would be right in my conduct, but false to my own inner oath, but if I ignored the instruction and kept sitting in the hall in Baba’s presence, then I would be right in keeping up my conscience but wrong in defying the discipline of the proceedings! What a pretty self-created dilemma I had landed myself into. But there was hardly time to deliberate upon it. In a helpless state of mind, I looked straight towards the Omniscient one, praying for His granting me some way out of the dilemma, but to my surprise and frustration, He turned His face away from me and began to make gestures to one of His Mandali as if totally unaware of my prayer.

At that moment again my “doubts” returned to me with a vengeance. All the scores of experiences or events that took place at Jabalpur, at Mandla and at Bhopal and the ones that took place right here in Guruprasad seemed to fade into insignificance before that intense suspicion that total “Omniscience” was impossible. I rose from my place and slowly joined the persons who were leaving the hall for prasad, but this time with an oppressed heart, as if the castle of my dreams had been razed to the ground. I went out on the verandah to occupy my place with others to eat prasad. Clearly, Baba’s turning away His face right when I was praying to Him to look at me showed that He somehow missed my thoughts and my solicitations. Yet He had earlier responded to these very things not once or twice but on a formidable number of occasions and not within the area of a hall but in instances in which there had been great distances between us. I was at a loss to reconcile these two aspects so opposite in nature, i.e., one of an omniscient person who knew and responded to one’s slightest mental vibrations and the other of a perfectly average human being like me or millions like me, who can’t know about a thing that goes on in somebody else’s brain unless verbal communication comes to aid.

Unable to reconcile the two, I suddenly hit upon a self-formulated solution to the problem, i.e., Meher Baba’s mind was very sensitive and superhuman but only in a modified way – it was like the radio set that caught a particular radio station only when it is tuned to the frequency of its transmitter. So what must have happened was that Baba at that moment when I prayed to Him

to help me know whether I was to stay inside the hall in support of my resolve or to go out, was not mentally “concentrating” on my thoughts and as such He had no means of knowing what was passing through my mind. He was not, then, omniscient in the comprehensive sense of the word. I finished my prasad and then followed the rest out into the back yard of Guruprasad to drink the cup of tea they were so hospitably serving. One of the volunteers smiling handed me a cup of tea but that very moment the proverb about the “cups and lips” became true in my case. A man from the Mandali ran out from within the Guruprasad hall shouting, “Amiyakumar – who is Amiyakumar?” I turned to him and told him that I bore the name. He keenly looked at me and in a rather stentorian voice said, “You are Amiyakumar, are you? Well, leave the cup of tea and rush inside the hall, for Baba wants you.” I left the cup untouched by my lips and began hurrying after him. Not contented with my speed, he said, “Don’t walk but run, for Baba has been asking about you all the time.” I thought to myself in surprise that I had been out of the hall less than five minutes. Anyway, as the man wanted me to run, I scampered back to the hall and just at the entrance was met by another tough-looking volunteer. He looked at me sternly, “You are Amiya Kumar from Bhopal, aren’t you?”

“Yes, I am.”

“Well, why did you leave the hall? You come all the way to be in Baba’s company and when He wants you, you are not there. You ought never to have left His presence. Now go in and meet Him!”

Dear reader, this was the biggest lump I was forced to swallow. How did he dare chide me thus for obeying the instructions that held true for all, including me? At that very moment my eyes fell on Meher Baba sitting on the sofa, smiling softly at me. All at once, the things became clear. It was not that rough-tongued volunteer but Baba Himself who was taking me to task through him for leaving the hall and thus playing false to my pledge. Yes, He was chiding me and through that benevolent remonstrance teaching two lessons at the same time. Firstly, once I made that holy resolve not to leave His presence, I should have stuck to it, not heeding what consequence might befall me in the breach of discipline. Also, when I made a resolve that was unilateral, and never cared to consult the other party, why did I expect Baba to respond to my prayer? My resolve had been self-made.

Surely being a grown-up teacher, I ought not act bewildered like a moustached baby at such a juncture. And secondly, and that made me like a frost-bitten rabbit, the clever idea of modified Omniscience through the radio-transmission analogy had been shown to be a complete fiasco rather than a clever “discovery.” I really looked small and shriveled up before the august presence in front of me, beaming with a smile and a face so illuminated as if someone was invisibly focusing a torch on His face. Suddenly I heard His interpreter Sri Eruch say, “Amiya Kumarjee, come to Baba and embrace Him.” I heard the call and took a few steps in the empty hall but now both a deep sense of shame and guilt overpowered me at having again doubted the person who had given me so many kind evidences of His Divinity and above everything His all-giving affection. I struggled to go ahead, but when my eyes fell on His pure lotus-like feet I felt I could not proceed. No, I am not worthy to touch even His feet. He is so noble, so pure and so loving and I am so suspicious, so mean and so full of filthy egoistic vices. So instead of going ahead I sat down midway and said, “It is okay from here.” But Baba gestured, His two arms continuously calling me to Him, and Sri Eruch interpreted, “Amiya Kumar, Baba wants you to come up to Him and embrace Him.” Again I tried but seeing His eyes full of light and

compassion, I lost the power to violate the sanctity of that Being by my unworthy embrace. As I tried to sit down, Sri Eruch again interpreted Baba's gestures that continuously motioned me to embrace Him.

"Why are you keeping away from Baba? Baba wants you to come quite close to Him and embrace Him," said Sri Eruch in soft tones. Then, seeing no other alternative, I went up to Baba slowly, closed my eyes and held my hands like a blind man does when he seeks some alms. In a second I found my hands caught by the most loving hands that I had ever felt touching me, and then those hands drew me close and soon I found myself locked up in an embrace that I cannot talk about but only sigh about till this day. My head rested on His shoulder and He kissed me as the Father does His son when they meet after a long interval. Well, I felt all my sins being washed away by that holy touch and my heart full of misgivings was set to rest. Yes, Baba loved me and loves me, and He really doesn't mind my cross-examining silly brain but tolerates it as only the really great could tolerate the really petty. After the embrace was over, Baba made me sit near Him. Still the hall was empty as people were enjoying tea outside.

Then Baba said through Sri Eruch the first words during that momentous meeting during the Darshan interval: "Amiya, you are God (Baba pointed His fingers at me). You see God (Baba pointed His fingers at Himself) ... but you have to BECOME GOD." The word "become" had an added emphasis as Baba's gestures became emphatic and Sri Eruch faithfully lent his voice to what Baba wished to be communicated. Now, this sentence bewildered me then as it does now insofar as while I was almost ready to accept Baba as "Divine," I was not at all prepared to accept myself as anything but the most ordinary human being. Nor do I feel any different now. So when Baba said that I was God, it must have meant not that I had the attributes of God as Baba had, but that Baba, if and when He wished could impart those attributes of His to me, and thus make me "become" God. It was in His power and not in my power to become anything else than what at that moment I was, or what at any given moment I remain.

After that first sentence an interesting thing happened. Baba's eyes twinkled and He suddenly said, "Amiya has plenty of grey matter." Then, turning towards me, "I will test your intelligence today." Clearly, that was the last straw on the camel's back. The all-knowing was not testing the convulsions of a pseudo "thinker." I shuddered at my impending doom. But Baba assured me, "It is only an analogy between breath and God. Only ten sentences. I will give you a discourse on breath and God and you will have only to repeat it, that is all."

Well, the topic was firstly one that had preoccupied my mind ever since I was thinking of death and cessation or suspension of "breathing" in Jabalpur in 1954. Secondly, if it was only ten sentences, I should be well able to do it, because for my M.A. degree I had developed techniques that allowed me to reproduce a hundred pages verbatim, even with the punctuation marks, an ego-inflating accomplishment. So, I nodded in assent to the text with a less uneasy air. Baba began His discourse and Sri Eruch interpreted it slowly. As each sentence followed the previous one, I tried to visualize and thus retain it, but to my utter dismay I found the sentences simply vanishing. I strove my best to retain them but by the time the tenth sentence was over, I found my mind an absolutely defunct machine. I only remembered the title of the discourse, "Breath and God." Baba waited for me to reproduce His discourse, but nothing came out of my mind. I was crestfallen and muttered, "Baba, I am a fool. I don't recollect anything."

His eyes brightened and He gestured, "No, you have plenty of grey matter. Anyway, don't worry. When you go back to Bhopal, try to recollect what I said and then write it out and send it

to me." I nodded assent but held little hope that I would remember any more upon returning to Bhopal. Then Baba's face beamed with great good humour and love. He gestured, "Have you taken your tea?"

"Well, the manner in which He gestured unfailingly told me that He knew from within the hall that I was deprived of sipping that cup of tea that I held in my hand when I had been called away. So I had to say a simple, "No, I haven't taken tea" to the Omniscient one.

He then gestured to someone, "Go and bring a cup of tea for him here." The man left and brought a cup of tea for me. Baba again lovingly gestured, "Drink it before Me." I hesitatingly took the cup of tea and looked around. The hall was full. All the hundreds had come back having finished their tea outside, and here I was alone sipping my tea before God Himself, a privilege of all privileges granted to me for the first time in that meeting. No, it was absurd to doubt this Being's Omniscience. He knew everything that was happening everywhere, every moment – whether in the mind of one man or all men. And no one, I felt, could ever devise a computer to assess the capacity of such "infinitely knowing" mind as possessed by Meher Baba. The way to preserve my small brain was not to try to imagine what Meher Baba's mind was like. I, being on the side of those who want to preserve their brains, decided to take His All-knowingness as a thing to accept. Nor would I analyse or probe into its mysteries as it seemed to be a supra-scientific phenomenon.

24. THE AFTERNOON AND THE SUNSET

Life and its events go by calendar and clock and these do matter even when you are on a date with your Timeless Beloved. I was called most graciously by Baba in the afternoon of the same day for a nearly two-hour darshan programme. I returned to my hotel for lunch and siesta before I boarded a three-wheeler again for the beautiful Guruprasad, which housed the God-man. I found it amazing that the road passing by the Guruprasad bungalow was constantly full of fast-moving vehicles filled with people who never knew what a precious treasure they were passing by. Such has been the case in earlier advents of the God-man, and such might be the case even in future, howsoever intelligent we might have become by then. Yet it was really not without a tinge of surprise that I saw myriads of people pass and re-pass Guruprasad so engrossed in their petty but important-looking tasks and starkly ignorant of the fact that ought to have mattered more than anything else in their lives – the presence of the God-man on the Earth, right in their city, within a few yards of where they were. Was it not some sort of divine paradox – the leela?⁴² Baba was obviously veiling Himself from the great multitude and was sharing His presence with a comparatively very few persons. Well, with a gesture of resignation I entered the hall, although I could very well have shouted out like a madman all over the world, even to the sun and the moon, to invite all to take His Darshan.

Today, I have two thoughts about the whole thing. Firstly, we who had His physical Darshan also were equally unfortunate, because as He had said we were not capable of having His real Darshan, due to the veil of ignorance that shrouded our minds. Secondly, Baba has told us indirectly not to feel egoistic for having had the privilege of His physical proximity and Darshan, and He indicated that lovers of greater stature and intensity of devotion would come after He had dropped His physical form.

Once inside the hall, I saw the Radiant One sitting there, the gathering consisting of brief gem-like discourses and conversations interleaved with devotional music. As the clock ticked and like a tireless sprinter made for the last minutes of the session, the shades were not only gathering outside in the garden but also in my mind. Was He really going away by 6 PM? Was I really to leave His presence? Was this union with one's innermost self to turn into separation again? To be frank, only His presence could give the feeling of meeting God in human form. Apart from Him, the heart had no music, it had no song, it had no joy of union. On my own, I felt so incapable of sustaining that experience which He had induced in me. It is too true when Mr. Francis Brabazon indicates that devotion becomes possible only when He comes.

The rest of the time, we pay more or less a lip-homage to the Divine Being. It was so easy to love God now that Meher Baba was present. The best thoughts and feelings touched you – the sublime was at your threshold – the conscious experience of what is divine was continuously being imparted by His Silent Presence.

Finally, Baba gestured that the parting hour had come. One by one, lovers rose, embraced Him and were ready to make way for Him to leave, although very reluctantly. The car was ready. Baba stood up and began moving towards it. My heart was nearly broken to see Him going away. I knew that for some reason I was unworthy to live with Him, or why should He go

⁴² Playfulness

away? Tears welled up in my eyes, and although I had enough of it in the morning, still that foolish phenomenon of weeping resumed its chorus. "Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean" said Tennyson! Really, these tears meant almost nothing except that they stood as witness to man's helplessness to attain that highest state of existence where all beauty, all love, all power, all knowledge all bliss and all consciousness dwell in their unending state. The throngs rushed after Baba's slowly-moving car for a last glimpse or touch. I, standing away, recalled myself to the fact of His going and threaded my way up to the car. He proffered out His hand and it met mine. Ah! So He does love me, and I am really fortunate in being so dearly loved, in spite of all these shortcomings. Well, if Love is to be worthy of the name, it has to be the kind that Baba had for us – all-absolute, impeccable, unconditional, limitless and self-sustained. I still feel that if a man becomes omniscient or even a thought reader for a day, and knows what is going on in the hearts and minds of people around him, he might end up wishing them all dead, or might lose all his regard and affection for them. But here was Baba, who knew us all better than we knew ourselves and yet loved us with so much compassionate tolerance and with so much Blessingful encouragement that we felt better than we actually were while in His presence. I do not think this is all possible unless and until in some way you become the very part and parcel of another person's self, and however evil or wicked, cruel or heartless he might be, you feel that he is your own imperfect counterpart to be improved and made divine sooner or later. Meher Baba's Omniscience and unlimited compassion were twin fountains of His Divine Benediction on mankind, springing from this essential experience of unity with all existence and also knowledge of the underlying divine potentiality of all beings.

However, back in 1957 that evening as the Sun had almost gone behind the horizon, I had no philosophy to console my heart with, when at last Meher Baba was carried away by the car out of the massive gates of Guruprasad and within a few minutes His lovers also left the place. I felt terribly desolate. I wept and looked at the rows of beautiful flowers that seemed sad at the departure of their Beloved – for Baba was equally dear to man and nature, to birds and animals. The expression of silent suffering on the faces of the ever-silent plants and flowers made me feel more bitterly disconsolate. I could hardly know what to do, where to go. I returned to the portico and laid myself down on the steps unable to stand it anymore. Just then, Sri Eruch came out of the hall and very gently patted me and consoled me with so many kind and loving words. At last, the pangs were overcome and I went back to the hotel and then to the railway station. As I sat in the train bidding farewell to Poona, I sensed tears again. I closed my eyes and to my utter amazement saw Meher Baba's face smiling at me lovingly and gently. He continued to remain in front of my inner eye, with the same brilliance as I had seen Him with my physical eyes. The train jostled along the steel rails and the passengers sat opposite and around me, totally unaware of my mental condition and my inner experience. Beloved Baba had given me that rare companionship without any sadhana or spiritual austerity, a gift that mendicants and hermits aspire to during very long and arduous meditations in caves and forests. The sun had set but it had risen again in another land – the land of my inner world – and that was because the sun never really sets!

25. THE GREAT SAHAVAS OF 1958

“O Wind, If Winter Comes, can spring be far behind?” – Shelley

The month of December 1957 had brought me to my Real Beloved and then ensued the winter period through January till the middle of February 1958. It was the winter of separation and the only comfort was the communication from Sri Adi K. Irani, Ahmednagar, that Baba had condescended to give a full week of most intimate “Sahavas”⁴³ with Him to all of His lovers from India who desired to be with Him at Ahmednagar. I, just like thousands of others, eagerly awaited that Sahavas week and got a letter of consent from Sri Adi to be included as a participant. At the last moment, two more participants were included. One was my own dear mother and the other Swami Mangalanand of Mandla about whom I had made mention earlier.

In my mother’s case, an interesting situation had arisen. My father, who knew nothing about Baba, did not quite approve of her going to Ahmednagar. He assured her that he would take her to the ashram of his guru Sri Aurobindo, but somehow mother felt so keenly drawn to Baba that she stuck to her desire to accompany me. This hurt my father and also annoyed him a bit. No wonder. He thought that I was undertaking a trip that was of no spiritual value and involving my mother in it. My younger sister Srimata Sumona then quietly passed on a word to my mother that on the day of departure, both mother and myself should quietly take the train and that after we had left for Ahmednagar, she would reveal the news to my father and make him understand. I was a little dubious about the thing and feared that the poor girl might have to bear the brunt of my father’s annoyance all the more keenly because we would be sort of absconding, but on second thought we agreed that the plan was fruitful and we did as she bid us do. Then, on the day of departure, mother and myself left Jabalpur by Bombay Mail and several companion Baba-lovers boarded the train with us, including the three agnostic friends SKG, RNB and GDC, who by that time had felt that it was imperative that they must also see “Baba” to confirm the first rays of conviction that broke through the thick fog of earlier doubts during the early months of 1957.

The great sahasas of 1958 has been both objectively and subjectively described by many who witnessed it and in Hindi there exists a complete volume devoted to it published from Hamirpur, U.P.⁴⁴

Here I would confine myself to only a few interesting sidelights that concerned me, my mother and my friends from Jabalpur.

Although Baba was not staying in the precincts of Meherabad where we sahasas companions were lodged, yet the whole atmosphere in a mysterious way pulsated with His invisible presence, and we felt as if Baba was just round the corner within very easy reach, and although eyes failed to see Him, the inner sense felt His imminence throughout the campus! In a way, “sahasas” was thus not just physically restricted to Baba’s stay with us from morning till evening at Meherabad, after which period He daily left for Meherazad, some fifteen miles away. The “Real Sahavas” that He was giving, was this feeling of His presence in every nook and cranny of Meherabad whether He was physically present or not, and it gladdened our hearts

⁴³ Living together

⁴⁴ See also www.lordmeheronline.org pages 4244-4337

and enthused our spirits to a high pitch and in the most natural way. I do not remember that in any period of my life I felt so light, so gay, so spirited and so pleased as during those seven days of sahas with Baba. We were joyously moving about, chatting, singing, lovingly embracing others and exchanging greetings with newly formed acquaintances, some of whom were old lovers of Baba and had much to tell us about Him. This heightened spirit of joy was not just limited to me or a few, but was manifest in the bearing of each and every individual of the thousands who participated. Whenever, in subsequent years, Baba gave us His kind permission to spend some days with Him, I remember that those days were the best days and hours of our life – a life in which inner joy was most naturally accelerated as if we were not denizens of this earth which Keats describes as a sordid place “where men sit and hear each other groan” but a world, or a patch of a world, where intense happiness oozed out of the atmosphere and touched the musical chords of our hearts and minds. I remember that some people with physical suffering and mental agony also came to Baba and eventually got an impeccable insulation of some kind that they would not bother a mole about their misery, about which at home they had been bothering a mountain. What we learned through His message was that life is a passing show, a shadow play, an elusive phenomenon, a phantasmagoria, not to be involved in too deeply. This was not an attitude to be practiced and attained in caves and jungles. In Baba’s company, it was right in the worldly atmosphere and it was yours for just breathing that atmosphere!

You may have come across Baba’s oft-quoted benediction, “Don’t Worry, Be Happy!” But I assure you from firsthand experience that once we were with Baba, it was spontaneously the end of worry and the beginning of happiness. He was literally the Sun that shed love, the alchemy that assuages suffering, the power that instilled a strong and cheerful self-confidence and courage. Added to this was our confidence in Him and our conviction in His easy ability to help us out of all kinds of troubles – the example of which ability we had so frequently witnessed both in his company as well as thousands of miles away from him by only wholeheartedly praying to Him for help.

Although the Great Sahas was a momentous event whose significance would hardly be assessed by pigmy-statured minds like mine, yet it was not without some humorous events for me and my friends. One or two examples would not be out of place to mention here. RNB was addicted to snuff taking. In hot haste to board the train, he forgot to bring enough snuff to last him for the sahas week. Only a few pinches of snuff were what he espied in his snuff-box with dismay – not enough to last an evening. The charm of the sahas seemed to be thwarted by this dismal discovery. He asked the betel-leaf stall-keeper to bring a box of snuff the following morning. The stall-keeper agreed, but somehow forgot to comply with the request. RNB’s depression was writ large over his face. Even the prospects of meeting the God-man did not seem to allay the pangs of not having the opportunity of stuffing his nostrils with stimulating snuff. He looked at me helplessly. As the town was some six miles from the Meherabad precincts, it was nearly an un-entertainable idea to go there at that hour. RNB sighed. He thought of Baba in despair. If Baba could get me candy, could He not provide snuff to RNB? I could not suppress a devilish glee at his despair although I too wished that RNB’s desire for snuff be fulfilled. Just at that moment, in that huge dormitory where hundreds of cots were spread, our eyes landed on a person who was sitting on his cot and who took out a big box of snuff and with extreme relish stuffed his nostrils with it. “Eureka” cried I to RNB, “Come along. There is a snuff-taking Baba lover like you. Let’s go and request him to give you two or

three pinchfuls of his treasure.” RNB’s eyes brightened up but he was not quite sure whether the unknown gentleman would grant him the privilege. However, desire overcame hesitation and soon we were by that gentleman’s bedside.

“Jai Baba,” he joyfully welcomed us.

“Jai Baba,” we chorused. He offered us seats on his cot, then asked us from where we had come. Well, in a minute we felt like friends of long standing. Then I made bold to ask him if he could lend a pinch of snuff to RNB, as he had forgotten to bring it from Jabalpur.

“A pinch? Why, how would that do? No, friend, bring your snuff box!” RNB produced his snuff box from his pocket. The gracious gentleman filled RNB’s snuff box to the brim to our joyful surprise, even with the very brand of snuff that RNB preferred, as if there was nothing unusual about this act of generosity. RNB was so grateful. His dear snuff had come to him in that unique manner that was Baba’s way to provide us our small “loves” and “likes.” On the way back to our side of the dormitory, RNB expressed measureless gratitude to Baba. I was very happy too! Was it not real fun to have the invisible but benign Father help His children to their petty desires in a manner as if it was just a coincidence!

“He is really the Avatar,” said RNB, stuffing his nose with a giant pinch of snuff!

RLS⁴⁵ who was a research scholar and whose article on the problem of good and evil had elicited admiration for its depth and insight into human nature, had also accompanied us for the sahasas. Being an advanced student of philosophy and a voracious reader, his mind was very well informed about philosophical wisdom both of the past and the present, of the East and the West. During the sahasas, Baba suddenly chose to give us a discourse on what we can call the “Split I.” The discourse was brief and touched all the important aspects of Karma, Bhakti and Dnyan yoga as well as of Love for God. It ultimately ended with showing us how deep, all-giving and constantly consuming divine love alone would annihilate the separative ego-shell of an aspirant and lead his soul to become conscious of the indivisible universal Self. Thus, the aspirant would be freed from the “Split I” that otherwise manages to remain in spite of all yogas, whether Karma, Dnyan or Bhakti. The discourse hit RLS straight and an interesting thing happened to that bright scholar. Appreciating the matchless wisdom of Meher Baba, RLS went up to the dais where Baba sat and laid himself down at his feet as a gesture of surrenderance – a surrenderance of the intellectual kit before the sole giver of flawless wisdom of the Supreme Gnosis.

I had never seen RLS so submissive at Jabalpur, for he had ably argued with some saintly personages who later became world famous. When I met him afterwards I asked him why he prostrated himself in such utter surrender. He said, “For the first time I have come across the person who has lightened the hitherto dark corners of my mind. Amiya, the more I hear from Baba, the more I perceive the truth!” When RLS went, I felt glad that he had found Baba’s discourses on God-realization admirable. As for me, I had very little intellectual agony left about philosophy. I felt only that the more I saw Baba, the more I experienced the feeling called “love.” And in that feeling, no comparison could be made with all our human loves. The quality of love that Baba elicited was so different that it could hardly be explained in terms of the meaning of love given in the entire range of dictionaries.

⁴⁵ Ram Lakhan Sharma, another friend of AKH who has subsequently changed his name.

My Mother at the Feet of Meher Baba

For the first time, during the first day of the sahavas, dear mother saw Baba. In 1958, Baba was 64 years old, and yet mother, who was then 58 years old, felt such a motherly love for the Divine Father that her heart began to repeat lovingly the words "Baal Gopal, He is my Baal Gopal!" This meant Baba appeared to her as the infant Lord Krishna in all His innocence, purity, softness and matchless power of evoking motherly love. As the experience had been narrated to me by mother herself with tearful eyes, there was no room for stupid questions from my side. The experience was valid for her, ratified by continuous heart feelings that even now make mother tearful. No doubt Baba must have appeared to mother in the same emotive form in which she used to adore Lord Krishna as the child-god of Brindavan.

Thereafter, during the session, mother developed high fever and was transferred to a hall where those sahavasees who were physically indisposed were kept for medical treatment. Three or four doctors were discharging their duty towards them most assiduously so that they could get well all the sooner to attend the darshan programmes. I was so much engrossed in Baba that I almost forgot to go where mother lay – a breach of human duty. It was then that Sri Bhau Kalchuri came up to me and asked if I had seen my mother, who was suffering from cough, cold and fever. Nonchalantly, I replied that as Baba was there to take care of everyone, why was I to bother even about mother. To this, gentle Bhau remonstrated with me and explained to me the difference between being carefree and careless. He told me that I should be beside my mother's sickbed and give her attention. I realized the point and went. Mother was improving and she later told me that Baba Himself had come to the nursing room, that His Sight had helped her and others greatly to feel better. Soon mother was fit to come to the sahavas gathering and though weak she enjoyed the divine sight of her "Baal Gopal."

Baba Himself was having fever, and in spite of it sat daily for nearly 6 to 7 hours most lovingly to give darshan, discourses, prasad and His Love to all concerned. This was sahavas in the truest sense as Baba was sharing His lovers' physical and mental suffering as well as their physical and mental enthusiasm. It was rather warm during forenoon and Baba humorously asked a magistrate who was His devotee and who wore a warm woolen coat if he thought it was snowing that day!

Small ripples of laughter punctuated the love-charged atmosphere and only made it more enjoyable. We really did not feel that we were only sitting before God, but also felt that since He had chosen of His own accord to become a man we should take Him as such. But, the most paradoxical thing was that we could not for the worlds forget that although He was a man, yet He was in many respects utterly different from all other men in the world. In other words, Baba was not a man in the general sense of the term and whenever we tried to take Him to be just like us, we were in for pathetic self-deception. Something invariably happened to make us realize that He was most secretly pulling some invisible strings to cause or create events that controlled our actions and reactions. And thus the sahavas was intermittently alternating between the company of a man and the company of the God-man.

One event was witnessed by me during this sahavas, and is worth mentioning. A devotee had seen Baba and lost his consciousness of the physical world so completely that even after many

hours of medical treatment by Dr. Donkin and his fellow doctors, he could not be brought back to any awareness of the world. The doctors now got concerned about their patient's health, as the prognosis could become grave, leading to total collapse of the nervous system.

When the doctors reported the matter to Baba, He instructed His disciples to take Him to the patient's bedside. I, along with a few others, grabbed the opportunity to see the man and watch the subsequent events. The man was laid up motionless, his eyes transfixed in a stare, his appearance resembling that of a person in coma. Baba gently went up to him and touched the left side of his chest with His crutch very gently and asked someone to get a glass of milk. That man exclaimed, "But Baba, he is unconscious for more than 24 hours." Another man remonstrated, "Do what Baba wants you to do." So the man ran to fetch a glass of milk. We watched with curiosity the sight of a man who lay still like a log, limp, and whose breathing was hardly noticeable from his chest, which hardly heaved. Baba now removed the crutch from the left side of his chest and gently touched the right side of his chest with it.

At this point, volunteers repelled a small crowd that was gathering to watch the scene. Somehow we escaped being driven away. The moment Baba touched the man with His crutch the second time and looked at him with great compassion, an extraordinary thing happened. The man stirred, and as if with superhuman effort struggled to regain consciousness of the world.

I cannot give you an example of that "pull-up" effort of consciousness from utter unconsciousness. All the chloroformed cases I have witnessed in hospitals have had spells of involuntary and para-voluntary effort to become conscious until finally they regain their consciousness of their surroundings to a satisfactory degree. But the depths from which this man seemed to "pull-up" to full consciousness overawed us.

"If this is being ushered into subtler planes of consciousness by the Grace of God or the God-man, hang it," I thought, "I would not want it – gross consciousness is good enough for me. Spiritual experiences are poles apart from me." This train of thought, naturally, was from me, an average man who loved gross consciousness too well to surrender it to this alarming state.

But the next moment, a touching scene was witnessed. The man's consciousness regained, he saw Baba and with one scream of the words, "Baba, my Baba," he half rose from the bed and clung to Baba with such force that really we were afraid that his mad embrace might seriously hurt the body of Baba. Some volunteers even tried to disengage him.

Meanwhile, the glass of milk had been brought and Baba held it to the lips of this man and asked him to drink it. What a sight it was – Baba holding the glass lovingly and the man drinking the milk like a child from his father's hands. It reminded me of Jesus offering water to a thirsty man. Before crowds could gather and break the cordon, Baba turned around, gave some instructions to his disciple-doctors and beamed a smile at me. Then, lifted onto the armchair by some, He returned to His cabin as if nothing had happened and no one should even pause to ponder it. No publicity!

I have already mentioned GLV, a prominent artist of my town who died in 1983. He too took part in the sahasas. He was not an atheist, but in 1957 when we met, he was not quite sure whether he ought to believe in Meher Baba or not. He believed in Goddess Durga and Saraswati with great devotion and often undertook fasts. When once he was with us in Meherabad, the first thing he sighted was the seven-coloured flag flying from a high staff.

“What is that?” he asked me.

“That’s Baba’s flag. The Avataric flag for this age has all the seven colours in it.”

“All the colours! Beautiful! That makes me very happy. Baba is an artist like me. Only He, as you say, is the supreme artist. This is the artistic flag – perfect artist’s flag!”

“Baba is artist for artists, scientist for scientists and everything else for everybody else,” I said. “He says that He is in everything and every being.”

During the sahasras as we lined up for Baba’s Darshan, GLV whispered to me, “If somehow I could touch His hand, I am sure I will get inspiration to do artistic works much better.”

“Let’s see,” I said. The normal procedure was that we were to go up to Baba, bow down at His feet, then embrace Him and move forward for others to do the same. But, to my pleasure I saw that the moment GLV approached Baba, the God-man with a knowing smile purposely extended His hand towards GLV and shook his hand warmly, thus fulfilling his desire of touching Baba’s hands. Afterwards, GLV often proudly remembered how Baba had shaken hand with him to give him better artistic power. Indeed, there was a visible improvement in his artistic performance after the sahasras touch and he later on did a lot of fine paintings, including many portraits of Baba Himself. Of the several events that transpired during this week, I now conclude the chapter with two that concern me.

First, it was evening, and Baba emerged out of the pandal,⁴⁶ got into His car and took leave of the sahasrasees for the day. But suddenly, the car slowed down and my name was called out by Sri Eruch. I went up to Baba – Baba gestured and Sri Eruch interpreted – “Amiya, have you sent Swami Mangalanand back to Mandla?” I nodded my head in assent. That moment Baba stretched out His hand from the car and gently touched my cheeks, a token of His love. Then the car slowly went up the main road and sped away. I do not know, nor can I explain what happened to me due to that touch. I felt a great ecstatic agony. I left lower Meherabad and headed towards a desolate place along the railway lines that divide upper Meherabad from lower. The sun had set. It was dark. The touch had not worn off – it now intensified on my being. Briefly, I experienced a strange thing. The trees, the grass, the earth, the stones, the rail lines – everything – seemed to be a part of myself, a real kin in actuality! Losing the experience almost immediately, I grasped at each and everything as if trying to regain my total entity as all these things. But however poignantly I reached for them, that very act injected the feeling of hopeless separation. I tried to retrieve my total existence, which I had glimpsed, but to no avail. In great agony, now, I began to roll on the darkened grounds sobbing. It was the weeping of a person who had just come to know that he is part of everything but he does not know how to re-connect the parts. It was like a man whose hand has been cut off who entreates others to join the hand back to his arm. The agony was beyond expression. How close I had come to actual universal Entity and yet how far I remained from it.

Oh, how to do away with the limited ego shell of mine! In great despair, I decided to commit suicide. I must get rid of this obstructive ego and become my actual self – that way! Just then I heard the whistle of a train. The light of the engine shone on the rails. I stood up determined to

⁴⁶ Pandal is used with two meanings in this text. Here, it is the fabric roof and sides that enclosed the meeting place – a kind of large tent suitable for hundreds of people. Elsewhere it is the enclosure within which people’s cots were pitched during the night.

lay myself down on the rails. Baba had made me feel a glimpse of reality for a moment, but He was not granting me to become what I was. So the best thing would be to end the agony under the wheels of the oncoming train. As I was about to go up to the rail track, two persons appeared almost from nowhere. "What are you doing here?" one sternly demanded.

His voice brought me back to my senses. "Nothing. I was taking a solitary stroll."

"No, you go down immediately to your pandal," he said sternly.

Meanwhile, the train passed by. When I looked to the other side of the rail track the two persons had gone away, but they had brought me back to normal thinking. Who were they? Were they sent by Baba? What was I doing? Just one "glimpse" and I was about to do away with my gross life. And two days prior, I had shuddered to see the unconscious man and had decided not to ask for any spiritual experience. Shame overtook me. I now knew why Baba did not grant great experiences to unripe men like me. I thanked Him wholeheartedly for the lesson. The experience had gone. But while it lasted it was the living testimony for our actual Entity as the Infinite Being – which state we have now foregone in our limited ego-experience. As I went back to the pandal, where people were singing or reading, talking or joyously taking Baba's name, I felt more normal in the general sense. I pulled out a cigarette from my packet and began smoking it. "Well, thank you Beloved God-man for that touch. I know that you have given me that priceless Sahavas, the touch, that has made the idea of the Unitary existence of God clear to me." And I slept comfortably on my bed, for thanksgiving to Baba threatened to become infinite and sleep was a better alternative!

Second: the sahavas over, we took the train for Jabalpur via Manmad. Mother was still rather weak. Besides, she felt thirsty a little too often. As ill luck would have it, I had not bought a pitcher generally available at railway stations to make provisions for water. Over and above this, the stations on the way to Manmad did not have much traffic significance as such, so the train did not halt at any station for more than a minute or two. To render the situation worse for my sick and thirsty mother, the water taps provided by the stations en route happened to be so far from our carriage that there wouldn't have been time for me to run to a tap, fill up a glass and take it back to rejoin the train before it pulled out. I wondered what to do, and it pained me to hear her repeatedly ask for water without getting it. With my head and heart full of the glories of the sahavas, this mundane problem would hardly have mattered, but for Bhau Saheb's advice during the sahavas "Be carefree but don't be careless!" Now, I felt that the situation was almost hopeless. Every time the train stopped at a station, I dismally looked at the water tap left far behind my carriage. This happened nearly four or five times and I got restless. Suddenly it dawned on me that the most important Being who could help me as He had done so many times on such occasions was Meher Baba. So why not to pray to Him till the train reaches the next station to somehow provide drinking water for mother? Yes, I prayed and at once, the one who had never failed, again proved it to us that He was the most faithful friend. As the train steamed into the next station and halted, I found a water-squad service team standing just near our carriage. I called out for a glass of water. They immediately fulfilled my request and mother drank the water. In a matter of moments the train pulled ahead. We were glad that mother had obtained a glass of water. But more surprises were there. As soon as the train halted at the very next station, we found again a water-squad team standing in front of my carriage. Again we got a glass of water for mother. And then matters headed for a humorous climax when the same thing happened at the third station. Now although I got a glass of water

for mother, she was not at all thirsty. She drank a quarter glass only. We wholeheartedly thanked the ever-compassionate Baba for thus helping us with the needed glass of water for the thirsty and sickly mother. Thus, the Sahavas with the God-man continued, although the Sahavas week was over!! And it continues till today!!

26. OH, WORLD WHERE ARE THY CHARMS?

The great exhilaration of spirits during the sahasras was so powerful that when I returned to Jabalpur from Meherabad, the home town appeared to be drab and sapless and insufferably dull. Nothing seemed interesting. It could be like Adam's feeling after he was deprived of paradise! Every worldly activity, even the ones we generally liked, such as seeing films, attending concerts, the sports field, reading fine books and indulging in intellectual discussions now lost all importance for me. The worst was in regard to my profession of teaching in Bhopal. Although it was a good job, it appeared to hold no charm for me. And I made one of those impulsive decisions that is called starkly irrational from the mundane point of view. I decided to abjure teachership and to immerse my being in the highly-inspiring remembrance of Baba, to tell as many seekers as I could about Him and help people to get first-hand acquaintance with the most incredible phenomenon of the world, living in the form of Meher Baba! Was this like embracing asceticism? Was it a kind of escapism? Was it a temporary aversion to materialistic pursuits? I didn't know, and I didn't want to know. I only acted impulsively and tendered my letter of resignation to the Government. Everyone at home was shocked and my father was jolly-well infuriated.

"What are you headed for? Do you call that spirituality?" he demanded.

"I don't know. I only feel that I cannot forego the wonderful feelings that I have recently got and am still getting for drab worldly things."

"Nonsense. This is a blunder and you'll regret it. Think of it. You have resigned from a job that so many want and so few get. Is this Meher Baba's teaching?"

"No, it is not! I am acting on my own."

"Well, if you're so willful as that then I want you to go one step further and leave my house. Let me see how long your spiritual enthusiasm sustains you." For the first time my father was seething with rage in regard to me. For the first time in 27 years he had uttered such unkind words, and for a while I was taken aback.

But the very next moment, I felt proud of my egoistic decision. If Baba is God-man and if I want to live in constant meditation on Him, what matters if I get my grub at home or out of it or even starve to death. Little did I pause to reconsider my judgment. I turned to my father and coolly said, "Well then goodbye, father. I'm going away from your house and am ready to face the future as it would turn out for me." I had implicit faith in Baba's control of events and that SOS calls issued by me would not go unanswered. I took my bicycle and without a bag or a suitcase or an extra shirt or pant or even a coin in my pocket, I left my home!

My father looked aghast. My mother trembled with fright and agony. Was I really going away for good? The only son – that too so dear to my parents for all those years. Suddenly I heard my father shouting from behind, "My son, come back, forgive me, come back." But my bicycle had turned the corner. My decision had been made. It all happened in a matter of minutes. I did not hearken to his agonized call. I sped along the road and slowed only to turn into YLM's house. Soon I was at his place knocking at his doors. YLM came out and, looking at my rigid face, remarked, "What's wrong? Are you ill?"

“No, it is simply that I have left my home for good, and I really do not mean to go back there”

“You have left your home? Why?” YLM asked in the acme of astonishment.

“My ideology clashed with my father’s. He wants me to continue in this third-class world as a professor, get money and forego all the real joys that I feel vibrating in my heart since the sahasas. I’m not willing to degrade myself any more, so we argued and have made quits. That’s all.”

YLM looked genuinely worried. Nevertheless he took me in, very kindly giving me a seat and a glass of water to drink. Then he settled down and peacefully told me that Baba had always stressed the point that His lovers were supposed to do their duties – to be in the world. But, that they were not to get too much attached to it.

“But dear YLM, I have developed so much aversion to mundane things after tasting the fruits of spiritual joys at Meherabad, that all worldly duties would only act as so many nails in my shoes to pinch me at every step I take.”

“So, what would you do now?” YLM asked in a non-plussed manner.

“I do not know. I suppose Baba my helmsman will decide things for me. Meanwhile I will be at your place for a few hours and contemplate.”

YLM kept silent. I kept silent. His wife too kept silent. Nobody knew what was happening, and what was going to happen. About twenty minutes passed in that frame of mind when suddenly we were startled by a knock at YLM’s door. Was it my father or was it some messenger from him to cajole me back home? No, it was a new acquaintance very recently made, Mr. Madan Prasad Sinha (MPS). He came in, and YLM offered him a chair. He did not know anything about my affairs, so he began chatting about his new appointment as instructor at the Soapstone Training Centre, which trained artisans at Bhedaghat,⁴⁷ a place nearly 22 kilometers from our town. Bhedaghat is a tourist spot of rare beauty, full of marble and soapstone. As he was going alone to Bhedaghat village, he was a little dispirited in spite of the job prospects.

The moment he had finished his talk, YLM looked at him and pointing towards me said, “Amiya has just made quits with his parents and house, in search of the spiritual life. I’m really worried about his decision I don’t know where he has to go and what he has to do. But he doesn’t even give me time to think!”

“What’s there to think about? If he has renounced the world, God has sent me to help him on that path,” MPS smiled.

“What do you mean?” YLM asked.

“Dada,⁴⁸ you are most welcome to come with me and live with me at Bhedaghat. You can continue your spiritual and ascetic life under the same roof where I would stay. I am a bachelor and quite alone. I will have your company and also benefit by it. As for food, I am in

⁴⁷ Eruch, in correspondence with Amiya, refers to the place as “Bheraghat.” Either spelling is an equally poor approximation of the Hindi, but it is rendered as Bhedaghat on Indian Postal Service literature.

⁴⁸ Elder brother

government service, the village is cheap and there wouldn't be any problem regarding your requirements. I will consider it my good fortune to serve you with whatever you might need."

YLM looked up in surprise. "You mean it? Really?"

"Yes, I mean it this minute. God sent me here. I was not thinking of coming at first but suddenly, while near your locality, the urge came to meet you before I left Jabalpur and witness the result. I get a companion and that too an ascetic!"

For a moment we all kept quiet. YLM looked at me: "Amiya, you may still reconsider your decision."

"No thanks, YLM. Don't you see that I am in for this? Is it not divinely ordained by Baba that MPS should drop in at your place with a new job at a place known for ascetics (for Bhedaghat had been visited by thousands of saints over centuries) and wants me to go with him without my asking?"

"Yes, you may be right after all. Well I only pray Baba keeps your parents okay. It would be a shock to them, poor creatures."

"Oh, don't worry on that count. Baba takes care of everyone as He alone can do."

"Dada," MPS rose, "it is now almost 3 PM. Are you coming along? I must leave Jabalpur at once."

"Yes, I'm as ready to leave it as you are. Baba bless us. Dear YLM, if you are worried you may see my parents and assure them that I am taken care of and not in the soup, but do not, for God's sake, tell them or any of my relatives where I'm going. Thanks and Jai Baba."

I left YLM and his family staring still rather blankly at me and as I rode my bicycle alongside MPS I whispered to myself, "A new life welcome, and farewell to the old life with parents. Help me, Beloved Baba. Adieu Jabalpur." And within half an hour we had gone out of the corporation bound plunging in the green shrubs and trees flanking the road to the village of Bhedaghat.

27. LEARNING LOVE'S ALPHABET

So suddenly did I leave Jabalpur that my father had no means of knowing where I had gone. He was very much depressed. To add to his depression, my mother blamed him for showing unkindness to me and as a second blow to my poor father, she too packed up her luggage and went to Calcutta where her brother lived. Thus Father for hardly any fault of his except uttering a few harsh words, had been left desolate at Jabalpur. Today, when I look back upon those days, I really feel ashamed of my deeds, although “destiny” must have conspired with human nature to bring it all about. Soon, my friends came to know about my leaving my home and they very kindly used to attend on my father and help him. That was the only silver lining in an otherwise dark cloud for my father. But Father was obviously perturbed and gloomy and I have ever repented for causing him such pain.

My case was not an isolated one. A striking similarity was found in the case of RLS. He had joined a Government job and it promised him a bright career. But after the sahas week, this philosophy-scholar had a continuous experience of subtle visions and fragrances so enchanting that he could not think of resuming his duties for the world. I do now remember that during the sahas Baba had specifically instructed all the participants just to enjoy His company and neither ask for any material gain nor for any spiritual experience. He has also said that He was in such a mood that if somebody asked for something, it would be that person's responsibility to bear the brunt of his desire. I feel that at least some of us, including RLS and myself, had inwardly craved to be brought closer to the more divine plane, and the end result was this experience that was so enticing that it reduced to naught all the pleasures of the world. Just as I resigned from my job, so did RLS also resign from his job! I do not know the consequences in his case, but I mention this because soon we two were to be bracketed together!

Meanwhile I was in the village of Bhedaghat and the serenity and calm, the fragrance of the vegetation around, the marvelous beauty of the water, tall pink and creamy marble hills that towered on both sides of the river Narmada, the roaring cataract called Dhuadhar⁴⁹ – everything enchanted me. The small house in which MPS took me in had a tile roof thatched with bamboo poles. It appeared pretty old. The village paths were all made by constant walking of the village men, women and children – uneven, narrow and full of pebbles! But the Marble Rocks were an enchanting spectacle and tourists from all over the country and also from foreign countries came to take a boat trip, thus making the village fully crowded during the days and moonlit nights. Two Government rest houses and a few private hotels catered to lodging and boarding of the tourists. The other source of income of the villagers was small figurines carved out of soapstone and marble; the village artists sold these to the tourists who obviously bought them with pleasure to keep them at home as a nice memento of their visit to the spot. The other sources of income were rowing the boat for a trip to and fro in the marble rocks and cultivation on the other side of the otherwise rocky tract. In short, it was a self-sufficient village and the appointment of MPS was a gesture on the part of the Government to help the soapstone and marble workers make more artistic things than mere marble pencils, marble toy boats,

⁴⁹ “The smoking cascade”

soapstone Shiva-lingas or soapstone incense containers and temple models. The training center was opened at MPS's house and he was its supervisor. The change from town to village, from known persons to strangers, was full of novelty. I liked it. Besides, this was the most congenial place for meditation on Baba, and also to experience soul's closeness to the Oversoul. As soon as I was lodged at Bhedaghat, MPS was asked by the villagers who I was, and he had to tell them about me and my purpose of staying with him. In India, people have a great and often blind reverence for those who abjure material pleasures and embrace the life of renunciation and spirituality. More often than not, this reverence is grossly misplaced, and thousands of mendicant and saffron-robed persons are not real saints. Instead, they are exploiting this weakness of the Indian nature and are thriving on the society as parasites and cankers!

Meher Baba's books and discourses read by me up to that time (1958) had made it amply clear to me that hypocrisy of any kind was the most dangerous of all vices, and He wanted us to avoid it. If any man pretended to have divine powers and experience while he had none and posed to do things for people that he could not really do, then he was incurring a great psychic disaster for himself that would engulf him for a terrifying number of years. So, I told MPS point-blank that no villager should ever consider me a saint of Sadhu, that I was to be taken as a brother, a fellow being no better than they, and perhaps worse in some respects, that I had come to spend some time in telling people what the God-man told mankind to do so as to make life better, happier and more peaceful, that I would appreciate their coming for get-togethers in the evening for one or two hours and sing bhajans and listen to Baba's life stories and messages and go back refreshed with psychic vigour. I also told them that no one was to show me any abnormal respect as a special being from another planet and none should expect me to cure diseases or solve problems. But all that a man in his ordinary human capacity could do, I would do for them besides one special thing, and that was praying to Baba to shower His Love-Blessings on them. As far as Baba was concerned, I told them that I was very much convinced about His inexplicable Omniscience, His Divine powers to control situations and absolutely convinced about His incomparable love and mercy. All this was conveyed by MPS to the villagers and within a few days quite a number of them began joining me and MPS in the evenings in our prayer-music and discourse meetings. Earlier, as I was told, they either gambled or fought or indulged in idle gossip, but now they found something that cost them nothing but on the other hand gave them a mental prop, a cheerful outlook, a loving disposition and a peaceful attitude. As for the more difficult aspect of Baba's books on divine Gnosis, I deliberately eschewed them as these rural folks had no grooming either in the sciences or in metaphysics, but the way they took to the stories of Baba and to the photographs of that ever-beautiful and smiling face was really heart-warming. Within a fortnight, the generality of villagers knew about Baba and greeted me or MPS and even their fellow workers with the familiar words, "Jai Baba." Soon my friends at Jabalpur came to know that I was at Bhedaghat and they began coming to me at MPS's house. Many of them were Baba lovers, and they now gave a great impetus to the evening get-together. Rajani Kant Upadhyaya (RKU), who had just emerged out of his scepticism regarding Baba, was adept at both composing heart-touching love songs for Baba and in giving discourses in a language that was ideally suited in this rural setting for the villagers to understand, as he could command both the sophisticated and the native dialects with equal ease. All this made me very happy. I visibly saw the wholesome impact of Baba-programmes in Bhedaghat. Definitely, Beloved Baba was pouring His Love-drops in the heart-cups of these villagers and now they began to pester me with demands for

Baba's photos, lockets, badges and, above all, His Love-Blessing in the form of letters. As it was, during the intervening period I had not corresponded with Meher Baba's office at Ahmednagar and had not told Adi K. Irani of my change of address. Now, due to the villagers I had to write letters to Sri Eruch soliciting Baba's Love-Blessings for them. To my surprise a bunch of letters came to me from my Jabalpur address carried by my friend and one letter given below shows how Baba the Omniscient One could become "not-knowing" if it was His intention to chide a stupid and careless fellow like me for a slip in duty, i.e., not conveying my new address promptly. Remember, dear reader, the episode on the eighth of December 1957 in Poona, and how Baba duped me into thinking that He really did not possess all the wires of inner communication intact, only to be exposed while sipping tea? Once again, Baba did not exhibit Omniscience and did not disclose where I actually was. Instead He wished that letters be written to my Jabalpur address, and then let circumstances gradually make me write my new address to Sri Eruch and get a good chiding for not letting them know in good time about it. Had Baba not deliberately kept off His Omniscience and instead told Sri Eruch where I was, then I would have missed the good opportunity of learning two things:

- (a) that I should not be careless about my outer contact with Baba as with my inner contact, and
- (b) that Beloved Baba did care for me after all. Here's the letter.

Ahmednagar
7/3

My dear Aringa Kumar,

Your P.C. (without date)
from Bharghat and dated to Bahadur Baba.

In reply to yours
Baba directs me to convey his love to
you, Ramprasad, Shree, Chotalal, Suresh and
Koti. Baba also sends his blessing to
Ramprasad, Chotalal and Koti.

Baba wants me to add
here that He is pleased with you.

By now you must have
received many letters from our side for
Mangalamdasi, Pandita. If you have not got
them yet then please collect them from your
own. The English address. They are important
letters and you should read them properly and
keep in mind Baba's instructions.

We have also noted
the change in your address.

Please note well that
you must inform brother Kati first about
change in your address whenever you go from
place to place. One can never say a
The Bahadur would want to send any message
to you. It is imperative that Kati should
know your address.

We do not know since when
you are in Bharghat and we have been sending
you letters addressed to your permanent address
at Jalgaon. Had you mentioned your Bharghat
address earlier you would have had Baba's letters
promptly.

With love to you

Yours lovingly,
Bahadur

Ahmednagar

7/3

My Dear Amiya Kumar,

Your P.C. (without date) from Bheraghat was read to Beloved Baba.

In reply to yours Baba directs me to convey His love to you, Ramprasad Tiwari, Chotelal Tiwari and Moti.

Baba also sends His Blessing to Ramprasad, Chotelal and Moti.

Baba wants me to add here that He is pleased with you.

By now you must have received many letters from our side for Mangalananda of Mandla. If you have NOT got them yet then please collect them from your Bai-ka-Bagicha address. They were important letters and you should read them properly and bear in mind Baba's instructions.

We have also noted the change in your address.

Please note well that you must inform brother Adi first about change in your address whenever you go from place to place. One can never say when The Beloved would want to send any message to you. It is imperative that Adi should know your address.

We do not know since when you are in Bheraghat and we have been sending you letters addressed to your permanent address at Jabalpur. Had you intimated your Bheraghat address earlier you would have had Baba's letters promptly.

With love to you

Yours lovingly,

Eruch

This letter expressly directed me to collect some letters sent by Baba to my Bai-ka-Bagicha address. Had I been really an obedient lover of Baba, I would have immediately rushed to Bai-ka-Bagicha and thus met my suffering father and perhaps it would have resulted in cutting short his agony of being deserted by his wife and only son in his old age. But little did I realize the impact of Beloved Baba's compassion, much though I talked about, and explained His discourses to others, or sang love songs in His praise. So, instead of heeding the instruction of going to Bai-ka-Bagicha, at least once even to collect my letters, I waited for my friends to bring them to me. Since twenty-five years have passed from those early days, I have fractionally realized one thing – how difficult it is not to inflict pain on others, how to be compassionate and really loving as well as dutiful. Indeed, with all my love for Baba and vociferous protestation of His divinity, I have yet to imbibe just one iota of His unfathomable love, mercy, His tolerance and His all-forgiving compassion. But in 1958, I was continuously self-justifying in the name of spirituality my acts that brought nothing but undue torture to my father and Beloved Baba knew this. That was why that single sentence glittered out of the rest specifically for me. But to those who had not yet had the experience of Baba's Omniscience, this letter might have only proved that He was just as ignorant of worldly things and happenings as we are. For me, it was not that. I already knew that Baba was all-knowing, unfailingly knowing – in fact, too-much knowing, since He knew me too well for me to be entirely comfortable with His uncovering me. Yet, as I had said before, it was one thing to love Baba and quite another matter to obey Him. In obedience, one's personal ego-likes and dislikes and self-justifying tendencies might often be at stake. That was where I felt the rub, and though wrong, maintained my stand only to become a little wiser after causing a lot of pain to myself and others.

A Unique Example

What came both as a pleasant surprise as well as a unique example of principle in money matters followed by the Meherabad Office, where devotees of Baba worked under His ever-vigilant and perfect guidance both in spiritual and material field, was the circular issued on 28-4-58 by Sri Adi K. Irani. The image of it is given here. Thousands of us had participated in that sahasas in which we were provided with cots, bed-rolls, bathing and toilet facilities, wholesome breakfast, lunch tea and dinner. Even if a handkerchief was lost by someone in the precincts, it was carefully retrieved by the volunteers and announcements were made to the owner over the loudspeaker to get it back from the office. Medical facilities were at hand all the time. Electricity was provided for lights and ample water was provided in spite of the difficulties attendant upon Meherabad's chronic, persistent lack of ground water. Buses had taken us from station and bus stands to Meherabad and really by the time the sahasas week ended, we were surprised to witness how wonderfully well we all had been looked after at Meherabad. The small amount of Rs. 30/- that we had paid for all these arrangements seemed nothing in comparison to the facilities and food, the dormitory, the bath, the sanitation and all other services provided to us. But the biggest surprise came with the circular from Adi K. Irani (received by all of us after our return to our cities). As you can see, the accounting had turned out to permit a small amount of Rupees to be returned to the various groups.

Issued on 28-4-58

For the information of those who participated in
Avatar Meher Baba's Sahavas at Meherabad
in February 1958

Out of Rs. 46,830 subscribed at Rs. 30 per head per week, the total costs of all arrangements for and during the two weeks of the Sahavas is Rs. 45,870 (including for the postage and printing of this information). With Baba's approval, the Management is returning the balance of Rs. 960 at Rs. 80 each to the 12 Centres at Andhra, Hamirpur, Dehra Dun, Delhi, Calcutta, Jabalpur, Bilaspur, Nagpur, Saoner, Bombay, Poona and Navsari.

Adi K. Itani

MEHER PUBLICATIONS
KINB'S ROAD
AHMEDNAGAR—DECCAN
BOMBAY STATE INDIA

ADI K. ITANI
Disciple and Secretary
Avatar Meher Baba

All correspondence with Avatar Meher Baba, Eruch and Adi, is stopped from 30th April 58 till the time of Baba's return from the West, that is end of June 1958. Only cases of death may be informed telegraphically. Please inform all other Baba lovers in your contact.

While the money was immaterial, the principle was instructive. The priceless love of Baba had been the Koh-I-Noor that each of us wore in our hearts. But, Baba appeared to be giving us a valuable lesson in the handling of money for his work, through returning Rs. 80/ to each center. Meher Baba wanted us to practice what He had preached, and that meant being scrupulously careful with money where it concerned His work.

Meher Baba never spent money on personal luxury. The museum at Meherabad, to this day, displays some of His garments, and we find how He had used them until they could no longer be further patched together. The sandals were not given up by Him until they hardly could be retained even by the poorest of us and stitches had been taken in His pink coat to keep the fabric from falling apart. Meher Baba was always at the giving end and all He wanted to receive was love and obedience, and that too not to gratify Himself but to help us become nobler, better and greater. If you choose to find out the details of Meher Baba's life – how He lived – you can find the whole story exquisitely documented down to the minor details.

Back to our story of Bhedaghat, I was hardly a few days with MPS when I felt that I had no right to be a parasite on his hospitality. Though he never asked me to pay for my board, yet my conscience which was internally impelled by Baba, pricked me and then I seriously thought of doing something about contributing some money to meet my expenses of food. In that village, there was nothing for me to do except become an artisan-trainee and the stipend I would get for the period was Rs. 15/- per month. I suggested to MPS to enroll me as a trainee and told him to take the money for my work and later on when I was fully trained I would earn my bread by selling my articles.

At first, MPS was somewhat shocked to hear my request. He repeatedly told me not to bother but I would not give up my point. So one day he entered my name in his register and I began my artisan-trainee career with Rs. 15/- per month. It was a far cry from my erstwhile salary of RS. 230/- per month as a lecturer in a college but the satisfaction it gave me was genuine and total. It was the Baba lover's ethics and as I was not an invalid, I could easily go for it. I did not feel any shyness or shame to be equated with illiterate villagers to sit with them and take lessons in carving soapstone. I rather felt happy that they did it better than I could and were superior to me in that work, in spite of my knowledge of Shakespeare or Milton. I still relish the memory of those days and I wish that any able-bodied lover or seeker of God who renounces the world should not renounce work and try to do at least enough to earn his daily fare, however humble the method of employment may be.

Bhedaghat was soon charged with Baba's love and to my delight I learned from old people that Baba had once been to Bhedaghat with a few of His disciples and had stayed in the upper resthouse and also had taken a boat trip in which everyone was instructed by Him to observe silence, including the oarsman. The elderly villagers who had seen Him during that brief visit to Bhedaghat described Him with full-throated enthusiasm and admiration.

One said, "He looked like the Sun when it is just above the horizon, as glowing and bright, as powerful and warm. He walked so fast that others had to almost run. We have never seen anyone like Him."

"Yes, you are right," I said, "I too have the same feeling whenever I see him."

The villagers were both Hindus and Muslims but there was a communal harmony among them and when it came to loving Meher Baba, they all were unanimously for it. Omar Khan, Kareem,

Raheem Khan, Shamsuddin Khan and many other Muslims came for the prayers. Brahmins and other Hindu castes joined as fervently – the Tiwaris, the Patels, and the low castes like Moti, Gopi and others who were called “Mallahas” meaning the oarsman caste. There was not a single voice of dissention nor of any intellectual arrogance in that village. In that atmosphere of harmony the lotus of Baba’s love bloomed and the human bees hovered over it from all castes and communities.

Then one day I felt I must do something for the village! Why not make a good road? I disclosed my plan to the villagers at a Baba meeting. They all expressed approval and promised to participate. Spades, shovels and other tools were brought. We began the road-making with a shout of “Avatar Meher Baba ki Jai.” Till today, the village road we build is intact, broad and fortified with stone pavement, and although the Government has done a lot of road-making around, the road we made is still conspicuous.

The next idea that came to my mind was that the villagers should have some games to play in the evening. Why not have a football, a shot-put session and such other exercises? So I had to go to Jabalpur for it all and the games began. It was good fun for them all. It added another dimension to their lives.

Now my friends from Jabalpur began to visit me almost every second or third day. They came all the way on bicycles and it meant a round trip of 44 kilometers or so. I had to return the visit and thus my contact with Jabalpur began to get re-established although not with my home and my father. Meanwhile, my mother who had gone to Calcutta came to know of my stay at Bhedaghat and made my maternal uncle, for whom I had great respect, write me letters asking me to return home, for spirituality can be practiced at home as well as away from it. “How can you get happiness if your father, mother and all your relatives are constantly missing you and live in sorrow? You should come back and no one will interfere with all your spiritual activities.” My maternal uncle was a celebrated writer and artist of Bengal, as I have already mentioned in the second chapter and his own life had a spiritual dimension, and only a few knew that he was practicing some spiritual sadhana. Anyhow, at that time I was not in a mood to return home, and I wrote back to that effect to my dear uncle.

Of the many interesting episodes during my stay at Bhedaghat I will cite only a few here. The first was during an evening music session. We had a get-together at Gopi’s place. He was a boatman and though his cottage was as humble as a poor man’s cottage could be, it was as clean as a five-star hotel. He left no pains to keep it spick and span for the occasion and it was his love for Baba that prompted all the labours.

In the evening about thirty of us assembled and as the songs were sung, the atmosphere was being charged with devotion for the Creator of all living and non-living things. Far off in the distance, the Dhuadhar cataract roared. Otherwise, the silence that hovered over this place of the rocks and the river was broken only by our singing. I felt highly inspired. I wanted to pour out my love for Baba in the form of a bhajan. I chose to sing a song composed by Madhusudan Sri Pund – “Ayee Gokul ke Firsey Sawariyaa.”⁵⁰ As the song progressed, I felt one with the words – my heart was testifying to the words for I really felt that Meher Baba was the self-same Beloved Krishna of Gokul. Suddenly, I saw a man come towards the assembly. No one noticed him as the listeners faced me. But I faced the man. He looked at me, his eyes big and black, and

⁵⁰ “The beloved Krishna of Gokul has come again to us.”

then He smiled. Well, He was Baba! Meher Baba! For, no one else could smile that way. He smiled again and my fingers playing the harmonium stopped. He peered into my eyes and my throat choked and the song would not come out anymore. I gazed at His divine face and burst into tears. Here, 700 miles away from where He physically lived, Beloved Baba had condescended to appear and give me His love and His smile of pleasure. But it was only a matter of a few seconds. He turned away and then mingled with the darkness outside. Much though I tried to continue with the song, I could not – my voice would not cooperate at all. My heart had again met the Beloved, and Oh! How compassionately He had come all these miles in His inexplicable manner to give me His Darshan. I told no one about what I saw and got up. The programme could not be continued obviously for no other reason except that I was too moved to sing. Everyone else, although ignorant of what had happened, felt a strange awe overcome them. I motioned to MPS to return to his home. A friend who had come from Jabalpur supported me and led me to MPS's home while all others returned to their respective homes. Lying on the bed, I silently enjoyed and suffered from the erstwhile union and separation again from Beloved Baba at Bhedaghat. That was the first time Baba appeared to me at a place far from where He was physically staying.

The second incident was a serio-comic one. As it was, visits to Jabalpur were undertaken by me from time to time and the road was flanked by trees and beyond them were plains that now are punctuated by colonies of people newly come. But back in 1958, long stretches of the road, especially between the small village of Tewar and Bhedaghat, were almost desolate. Those days, panthers and occasionally tigers visited the plains in search of prey, especially the monkey which they could manage to paralyse with one fierce roar and thus make the most of their nocturnal dinner upon the unfortunate animal. One night, along with another Baba lover, I went to Jabalpur and overstayed there. It was nearly 1:30 AM when we picked up our bicycles and rode back to Bhedaghat. The road was like a black ribbon as the night was moonless. Only the lamps in front of our bicycles lighted up a small patch of the street ahead of us. We began to cross the desolate plains near Tewar. Far away from the road, we could dimly see the trees that backed up against the Narmada river. We had covered hardly a mile or thereabouts when, near a culvert, alongside the road, the terrifying roar of a panther greeted our ears. The panther is known to be more damaging than the tiger and attacks even if it does not do so for the sake of eating. By comparison, the majestic tiger is hardly concerned with human beings unless it be a man eater, or is unnecessarily provoked. But the panther respects no ethics of the forest. The moment we heard the roar a second time, our blood froze and we almost felt that death had come upon us in the form of that wild creature. Although now I can comfortably narrate the story, sheltered within the four walls of a house in a busy town, the experience of that moment was absolutely different. I was never so terrified in my life and the same was the case of my companion. At that moment of crisis, when we expected the panther to make a charge at us from the culvert and tear us to pieces, I saw a wonderful sight. My lamp was shedding a patch of light on the road, and almost paralysed with fear, we were unable to pedal the bicycles anymore. What I saw was the beautiful face of Beloved Meher Baba in the focus of the light from that lamp. Baba looked at me and He smiled, and the power that radiated from His face was indescribable. So there He was! The very moment I saw Baba's face, I became absolutely normal and rather over-brave. I called out to my terrified friend, "Get down and don't worry. Baba is with us. Don't be afraid."

My voice was bold and commanding. Still within some 10 yards of the culvert, we got down from our bicycles. "And now my friend we shall walk for some distance. No harm shall be done, as Baba has chosen to appear before me."

My friend was still very nervous. He said, "But Dada, these panthers are very wicked. They can silently track us for some distance and then jump on us."

"Nonsense. Don't fear. Let us walk." I almost spoke like a dictator. I do not know where such courage came from. So we walked for about two furlongs. The panther did not roar. He did not chase. Nothing happened. More than satisfied, I told my friend to ride on again, and as we sped towards Bhedaghat still some six kilometers ahead, we began to sing bhajans. Finally, the village was sighted, all plunged in sleep and darkness. My friend took leave of me at the road bend to head to his house. I was to go only a hundred feet or so to reach the house of MPS. But here the comedy began. The moment I reached the doors of MPS and knocked at them, a sudden fear seized me. "Open, open the door, MPS, open quickly!" I shouted in panic. I felt as if so near safety the panther could yet snatch me away. In hurry and alarm, MPS got out of his bed and opened the door. I rushed in leaving the cycle outside and bolted the door. I was trembling in an uncontrollable manner.

"What is wrong with you, dada?" MPS asked in surprise.

"Oh, we met a panther on the way, but I saw Baba's face and the fear went – but it has come back again!"

"What, here where you are absolutely safe? Dada, do not joke please!" said MPS incredulously. But I was trembling and he noticed it. He lit up the stove to make tea for me and began to normalize me by repeating, "No panther can do any harm to you here. And when Baba saved you right on the road, why should you be afraid of an imaginary attack here? Cheer up, Dada, cheer up."

Needless to say, I also knew that I was acting funny but it was only after some fifteen minutes that I began to calm down and sip the tea. The roar was still in my ears.

"It had the stamp of death in its voice, MPS," I said to my friend.

He smiled. "Yes, that is why a monkey would just drop down from the tree when it hears that roar. Here panthers come almost every night and prey upon the cattle that have lost their way or the monkeys that abound in the place. Well, well, tell me about your seeing Baba!"

"Well, MPS, that was the most wonderful thing. Baba's face appeared on the road in the patch of light, as clearly as if He was there and that gave me courage. Otherwise I could not have reached Bhedaghat tonight."

The next morning when my friend met us, we laughed about the panic that seized me when I was quite safe and the courage I felt when we were in real danger. Odd creatures we are, alternating between fear and courage, despair and hope. But yes, let me look at the whole thing as a reviewer. Was it possible that Baba switched off the key of fear at that terrible moment, only to release it when the external object was gone, just to work out that emotion of fear? Those who have spent many years in close association with Baba might be better able to explain the

phenomenon in the light of the Master's working with our Sanskars.⁵¹ For me, I can only say that Baba had given proof of His compassion once again that night when the panther sang its dinner-song in my ears.

My experiences at Bhedaghat would take many pages to narrate but I would only cite one or two more things. One evening, I was reclining on my bed. It was about 7 PM. Suddenly, a fragrance of the most wonderful kind greeted me. It was so divine and enchanting that no earthly perfume could match it. I got up from my bed and began to sniff at everything in the room for its source. No source was found. Then after opening and corking the bottles in the room, I went out to seek the source. It was nowhere outside, either. Then again I returned to my room and lay down. The fragrance was so powerful and yet so sweet that it brought tears to my eyes. The deeper I breathed, the more I got of it. Instead of wasting time in any further investigation of the source of the fragrance, I now wholeheartedly began to enjoy it. Only then, someone entered the room and greeted me. I asked this Bhedaghat man if he smelt any perfume of extraordinary sweetness in the room. He sniffed, blew his nose, sniffed again and then looking at me in surprise said, "No, Dada, I don't get any smell here. Why do you ask?" I avoided his question intentionally as I now knew that it was a subjective experience confined to myself. After another few minutes, the fragrance was gone and no attempt on my part could bring it back. Like the rest of the experiences, it was perhaps granted to me as a gift and taken away from me in good time by Baba, as He surely would not have gotten me involved in it at all. It was only a proof that divine smelling was a fact. But these sorts of experiences contain the potential to be obstructive, through our attachment to them. The Goal is progress to the Ultimate Reality, and there is no reason to stop along the way.

Nearly two months had passed in Bhedaghat. Suddenly, I received a wire and also a letter from Baba, from Mahabaleshwar, a hill station some eighty miles from Poona in the Western ghats.⁵² The message was an immediate call by Baba to meet Him on a particular day. The letter added that money was being sent by telegraphic money order to cover my fare to Mahabaleshwar, and that all the expenses would be borne by Baba Himself. It also said that I was to lodge at the Ripon Hotel, at which a place for me had already been reserved. The last thing in the message was that RLS was also to join me in the trip. In fact, both were summoned by Baba to meet Him and we were both overjoyed to be called. It was a great fortune that Baba wanted to see us and that He sent money to enable us to meet Him. Were we exceptionally good Baba lovers to be thus invited? Alas, little did we know then what was in store for us at Mahabaleshwar!

⁵¹ Often rendered in English as "sanskaras" or "samskaras," it refers to impressions or habit patterns from previous lifetimes or earlier in the current lifetime. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samskara_\(Indian_philosophy\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samskara_(Indian_philosophy)) or, more to the point, Meher Baba's *Discourses*.

⁵² The Western ghats are a mountain range running north-south just east of Bombay.

28. SWAN SONG TO ASCETICISM

When I met RLS, I also found that he had received money from Beloved Baba to go to Mahabaleshwar. We decided to travel together, as instructed by Baba. But we also made a rather amusing decision that we would not spend Baba's money for the trip but return it to Him! This required us to do something to obtain money. I sold my BSA cycle at once for Rs. 100/-. And likewise RLS mortgaged his gold ring for the same amount. Then we boarded the train to Poona where we were to stay for the night and take a morning bus to Mahabaleshwar the following day. At Poona we went to a hotel to dine. RLS had gone out for a moment so I placed an order for some items for both of us. Then when RLS returned, I went out for two or three minutes, probably (I don't remember exactly) to fetch cigarettes. RLS did not know that I had placed orders for our board, and he went up to the counter and asked for certain items of his own accord, sufficient for both of us.

When the plates began to arrive, both of us were surprised. Instead of two plates of rice, four plates arrived. Instead of two plates of poories, four. From that point forward, food for four persons was served to the two of us. We called the waiter to explain. He blandly told us that he was giving us exactly what we had asked for. The mistake found, we requested the manager to withdraw one pair of dinners out of the two, but he firmly declined, saying, "Once served, we can't take back anything – either you eat all that or throw it away – it's your choice!" The situation was really funny and embarrassing but we were in for it, and had no one to thank for it but ourselves. So, we rolled up our sleeves and got down to trying to eat two dinners each so that the money we were supposed to pay did not go to waste.

After we finished you can very well imagine our condition. Like the python who had just a minute back devoured a stag, we were scarcely able to move. Even the hand bag seemed to weigh a ton on our shoulders and we returned to our lodge at the pace of a pair of snails and sat down twice or thrice on culverts at the roadside to recover our pent-up breath. The fun of the situation was that much though we wanted to laugh at our folly – our two dinners – our full bellies wouldn't let us do it, and every giggle produced a counter-spasm from that most important part of our bodies – our stomachs. The night was restful, except for the fullness we felt in our stomachs.

The following morning we caught a Deluxe bus for Mahabaleshwar. The trip to Mahabaleshwar was a wonderful one. The entire route was up through winding hilly tracks and as we climbed one hill after another, the vast shimmering planes below, the valleys and the hills looked spectacular. Finally, Mahabaleshwar was reached and we found ourselves in one of the most beautiful hill stations of southwestern India. But there was hardly much time to admire as our minds were focused on meeting Baba, who had called us for a purpose known only to Himself! We hired a vehicle to be taken to the Ripon Hotel, as our entire arrangements were made there. The hotel was lovely and we were glad to be in it to wash and to take our meals. The day of meeting Baba was still 24 hours ahead, so we could relax and rest. But the moment we had washed and gotten ready for lunch, in came a car and out of it came dear Ramjoo, one of Baba's Mandali. He came up to us and said, "Baba wants you to come just now for the interview and He has sent me for you."

Now, we were not exactly mentally prepared for that. "The interview has been fixed for the following day," I humbly pointed out, "Ramjoo Saheb, Baba has asked us to meet Him tomorrow!"

Ramjoo looked sternly at us and said, "Okay, then, wait until tomorrow. You don't seem to realize that when He has sent me to take you to Him today, you should not use your own mind but implicitly obey His instructions."

I was crestfallen and said, "Well, I'm sorry. We are ready to go this moment."

Ramjoo said more gently, "That is fine but take your meals first as Baba wishes it, but take it fast, as Baba is waiting to see you."

With those words in our ears, we sat down to eat. It was another kind of funny situation again. This time the plates were not duplicated as in Poona, but there were too many items of real good food littered in vessels about us, but as Baba was waiting to see us and Ramjoo stood close enough to emphasize the urgency of the moment, it was literally impossible even to relish or eat at leisure all the items. We just began mechanically gulping down the nice stuff and it was the speediest lunch I ever had! We didn't even take note of all the items that were laid down at our table but mixed one into the other and pushed the thing down our throats.

Lunch over, we hurriedly washed our hands and mouths and scrambled into the car. Within a few minutes we were at the portals of a bungalow probably owned by the Aga Khan. Ramjoo pointed to a hall whose doors were open and told us to cross it to go to the hall where Baba wanted to see us. As we neared the entrance of the hall, we were greeted by a volunteer outside. RLS immediately got in, while I, out of reverence for Baba, removed my sandals. But, the moment I entered the hall and saw the Beloved, He gestured. Sri Eruch, standing at His side, interpreted, "Amiya Kumar, Baba wants you to go out and put on your sandals, and then come in." It was an indication that Beloved Baba was not in a mood to appreciate such outward shows of reverence from me. So, I hurriedly went out, put on the sandals and re-entered. Now, as I sat next to RLS, I found that there were about a score of other Baba lovers including Dr. C. D. Deshmukh occupying the chairs in a semi-circular fashion in front of Baba. Baba was as full of beauty and freshness as a rose newly sprung, but He was emanating such power that day that I could not ignore that aspect. Baba then asked us some questions regarding our trip, and after we had replied, He asked us how was the food at the hotel. Did we relish it?

"Yes, Baba, it was very good."

Baba's eyes twinkled with humour. "Well, what did you eat?"

The funny thing that now made itself clear to us was that we had almost forgotten the dozen or so dishes except three or four. As we recounted these and then told Baba that we were not exactly able to remember the rest of the dishes, His face wreathed with silent jollity and He asked us whether we had eaten certain dishes that He named. And that began to bring the dishes that we had eaten and then forgotten back into our minds.

Finally, Baba stopped and said to the assembly with the gesture of a doctor who found two helpless cases, "See these fellows. They are scholars. They are supposed to know what they have eaten for lunch but as it stands, I have to tell them what they have eaten!"

A ripple of gentle laughter went around the semi-circular rows of audience. Then more humour was generated when Baba asked if we had received the money for the fare and if it was

sufficient for our needs. RLS got up and said, "Baba, we had the money in time but didn't spend it."

Baba's eyes wore an expression of surprise. "Why?"

"Because we had our own money."

"But I wanted you to use the money that I sent. Are you quite sure that you didn't spend it?" Baba asked.

RLS replied, "Yes, Baba, I kept all the money you sent in a separate part of my purse and from the other section we were spending our money."

Baba asked RLS to take out his purse and make sure that it was really the fact. RLS, with great confidence, opened his purse, and then a buttoned-up part in which he had put all the notes received by us from Baba and which to the best of our memory we really had never opened. For, there was no need also, as we had enough money of our own. But the surprise that awaited us made us gape our mouths and goggle our eyes. As RLS counted the money that Baba had sent, it was short by some rupees, and also some small coins came out of the buttoned part of the purse.

"Well, you have used my money, haven't you?" Baba asked merrily.

"Well, er, Baba, I really can't understand how and when we could have done that."

Baba again pointed out that we were professors (RLS was also once a teacher of Philosophy in a college) and scholars who had given up their jobs out of love for Him and with the desire to serve Him. The assembly nodded, but obviously they did not think much of our scholarship after the two evidences of our pathetically short memory displayed by us up to now.

Then Baba looked at us earnestly and wanted to know how we got the money for our fare to Mahabaleshwar. RLS told his story of mortgaging his gold ring, and I in great shyness very slowly whispered, "I have sold my cycle and come, Baba." I spoke the words in an undertone because I did not want others to hear my words.

As for Baba, He was Omniscient, and I knew He would not need to hear loudly spoken words to follow what I was saying. But a look of child-like mischief came in Baba's eyes. He looked at me and said, "Speak louder, Amiya. I am rather deaf and couldn't hear what you said."

So I had to speak louder the words that I did not want others to hear, "I sold my cycle and came, Baba."

I thought the matter was over after all, but Baba was not satisfied yet. He pointed His fingers at the assembly and said, "All these persons are also are hard of hearing. So Amiya, shout out to them and tell them how you came."

Baba knew that none of those present were hard of hearing but being determined to drive out all my inhibitions, He had adopted this method. I had no alternative but to should literally the words, "I have sold my cycle and come, Baba!" It was loud enough and Baba expressed His satisfaction to hear.

"Amiya loves Me!" He said affectionately, but the next moment His face wore an aspect of seriousness. "To Love is one thing, to obey is another. It is very difficult to obey me implicitly.

And that is really important." We kept quiet. Baba was in a mood to explain further. He looked at both RLS and me in turn and said, "Will you both obey Me?"

"Yes," said RLS.

"Yes, Baba, I'll try to do so," I said.

"Know well that it is not easy to obey Me, but it is very, very difficult. Now Amiya, if I tell you to ride your own shoulders can you fulfill My orders?"

"No, Baba, I can't," I said in alarm.

"Or, if I tell you to jump in the sea with a rafter tied onto you with the command that you should see that not a drop of water wets you, can you do it for me?"

"No, Baba, it is almost impossible," I muttered.

Baba's face grew more serious. The atmosphere suddenly changed from gaiety to grim silence. Baba continued, "It is like that – to obey me is like riding your own shoulders – at best you can take a somersault but you can not really ride your own shoulders. RLS and Amiya, do you understand?"

"Yes, Baba!"

"In order to attract My Grace, you have to obey me implicitly," Baba said.

"Baba, why don't you give us your Grace so that we could obey you?" I ventured to suggest.

Baba turned more serious, "If I were to give you My Grace to do something, where is the point in asking you to do it yourself?"

"Yes, Baba, that is right!" I said, admitting my folly in making such a request.

"Now let Me see if you can fulfill even less difficult orders. RLS, can you do one thing?"

RLS looked more self-assured. "Yes, Baba, what is it?"

"Strip yourself of all your clothes, just now, here, then go to the bus stand, take a bus to Poona, then take a train to Jabalpur, not minding that you are absolutely nude, then take a round of the Jabalpur city in that condition and then make the return trip to Mahabaleshwar nude as you are. Can you do it, RLS?"

RLS: "Yes Baba I can do it, but ..."

Baba: "But what?"

RLS: "But Baba, I feel that you would not really like me to do that."

Baba looked up at us then resumed, "When I give a certain order why do you suppose that I would not like it?"

RLS was silent. Then Baba turned towards me. "Amiya, will you obey Me?"

"I will try," I said with little confidence in my voice as any weak-willed person could have.

"Amiya, there is a leper woman at a crossing in Mahabaleshwar. Her flesh is slowly giving way – face, nose and all that. She is terribly stinking. One feels nausea in her presence. Now if I ask you to go and make love to her, will you do it?"

Frankly, and in all the names of God, I had just come through the description of the leper-woman without vomiting out all the fine stuff I had eaten at Ripon Hotel and now the question of going for amours with her meant only rigours to me. I looked at Baba and with genuine feeling of one who had lost the game, said "No Baba I really can't do it. I am not capable of obeying You at all, to keep You pleased. I am ... I am ... useless!" And with that tears came out of my eyes.

At once, Baba's stern and earnest gaze turned into a gentle and compassionate softness. "Do not worry, Amiya. Do not worry, RLS. It is only to tell you that God realization comes only when you implicitly surrender to your Master –without any reservations, without any thoughts. Do you see?"

"Yes, Baba," we chorused.

"What do you do at Bhedaghat, Amiya?" Baba asked.

"I keep telling people about you Baba, and besides ..."

"And besides, what?"

"And besides, I am trying to practice a state in which I am trying to achieve my dissociation from the mind."

"What is that?" Baba asked, His face wearing an expression of surprise.

"Baba, I try to keep thinking that I am not mind—that the mind is not me – I am different from the mind – I am in fact above my mind and all the thoughts that come to mind therefore need not perturb me."

That was perhaps the climax of events. Baba almost got up. He looked at me and said, "Though I am God, still I cannot understand what you explained. Dr. Deshmukh is here. He is a renowned scholar. Perhaps he can understand your philosophy! Deshmukh?"

"Yes, Baba?"

"Could you understand what Amiya meant?"

"No Baba. I could not understand his philosophy."

Baba: "Even Deshmukh cannot understand what you are saying, Amiya." Then Baba looked at me gently and continued, "What is all this you are doing in Bhedaghat? Don't you realize that it is your mind that is saying 'I'm not mind, the mind is not me? I'm above mind, I'm below mind'; it is mind saying all this to itself, Amiya. The truth lies beyond the mind. Unless mind is annihilated, Truth cannot be realized and to annihilate mind you have to attract My Grace. How will you do it? By implicit obedience. Can you draw My Grace? Why did you both leave your jobs?"

"To do your work, Baba ... to spread your message."

"It was not necessary to leave your jobs to do my work. Amiya, tell me the truth, why did you resign?"

"Baba, I was full of your love and that made me so soft that the atmosphere of the college, their behaviour, etc., did not suit me. So I resigned."

"You should not be so hypersensitive, Amiya."

“Baba,” I now advanced towards the God-man. With tears in my eyes, I said, “Baba although I am not in the least worthy of you, nor can I obey you as you wish me to, will you always love me in spite of my failures? Will you never give me up?”

Baba held me in His embrace. “Amiya loves me deeply. Both RLS and Amiya love me deeply. Now listen. You do not have to worry about anything. My Nazar⁵³ is on both of you.”

“Thank you, Baba” we said with tears in our eyes.

“But before you part from here, listen carefully to my instruction for each of you. They are easy ones. They are the ‘ABCD’ and if you learn them by heart one day you will be M.A.!” Then Baba gave us orders that seemed very easy indeed. They were to take up our jobs, return home, never touch a woman in lust unless she be one’s wife. These appeared simple, but they later turned out to be quite an uphill task.

Baba looked at me and said, “Amiya, go home, enter some service. You love Me, now obey me also. Try to please your mother. As for your father, I have nothing to do for him.”

Whatever Baba meant by all that only Baba knew. But with the passage of twenty-five years, I too have come to understand a bit of what all Baba conveyed to me in April 1958. It was good and very consequential for me in the months and years that followed.

Suddenly, Baba looked at us with a gesture of concluding the Mahabaleshwar meeting. “Now, Amiya, take that.” And to my surprise I saw Sri Eruch produce a hundred rupee note from his pocket. That was the exact cost of my cycle that I had recently sold!

Now for the worlds, I did not want to take the money, as already Baba’s money was with us, then the hotel cost was also at Baba’s expense, and now to accept more money was too much. But just as Sri Eruch came forward to give it to me, and I had decided to refuse, Baba called Sri Eruch’s attention and made gestures. Sri Eruch interpreted, “Amiya, Baba says that this is His Prasad to you.” So again I was made to learn how to obey and, without demurring anymore, I took the note. Likewise RLS was given an amount and also Baba’s book *God Speaks*, the greatest exposition of Supreme Reality as well as creation written in this century.

Now the parting moment had really come. Afternoon was giving way to evening. Baba motioned us to embrace Him and take His leave. We went up to Him and touched His feet. Then the Beloved kissed us – His ignorant sons – with great love and mercy. Then He gave us His embrace and finally instructed Sri Eruch to go with us and show us the beauty of nature that was so conspicuous at Mahabaleshwar. Sri Eruch took us to his room and gave us cake and tea. I wanted to smoke but felt hesitant as Baba was in the same building. But Sri Eruch said, “Why do you think Baba is only confined to one place? He is everywhere, so smoke freely, if you like to do it.” And realizing the importance of what Sri Eruch was saying, I took a cigarette and smoked it.

Meanwhile, in another room strange noises were coming out of the mouth of someone. We looked up at Sri Eruch. He told us that the person was Kaikobad Dastoor, who was experiencing subtler things. Baba was working on the spiritual planes with him.

⁵³ Literally “gaze,” but here the implication is that Baba will take care of anyone on whom His Nazar falls.

“But,” Sri Eruch said, “do not try to catch a glimpse of Baba now. Remember you have to obey Baba implicitly. He has told you not to turn back to see Him after the parting. So now let us go for a stroll. I shall then go up to your hotel before I take leave of you.”

RLS, Sri Eruch and I walked out of the bungalow. The hill station was aglow with the flaming redness of the setting sun. Baba had told us to enjoy the beauty of nature. So we were taking a rich east of the verdure and the gleaming valleys. A girl on horseback rode past us. But my mind was so full of all the things that had transpired during that afternoon that I said something about Baba to Sri Eruch. Sri Eruch gently reminded me, “Dear Amiya, Baba told us to enjoy nature’s beauty. So do only that. No discussions – do you understand?”

I looked at this wonderful person. How literally, how sincerely and how seriously he adored, loved and obeyed Baba. If we could imbibe a fraction of his love and obedience we could perhaps please Baba to some extent. But before we could do that we were to learn by failures – bitter and dismal failures indeed. The next morning, we left Mahabaleshwar for Jabalpur. RLS and I parted. He said, “So, you are to obey Baba and I have to do it too. The first thing for you now is to go back to your Bai-ka-Bagicha home, to your parents, and leave Bhedaghat.”

“Yes, RLS, I have to do that.”

“Then you have to enter service, too.”

“Yes, RLS, that I have to, much though I dislike the idea.”

We parted. Baba had given us only the “ABCD” of the alphabet of His spiritual orders to learn, but the doing of M.A. in English was much easier than to learn even the first four letters of Baba’s spiritual alphabet.

29. THE HOME-COMING AND RECONCILIATION

As mentioned earlier, my giving up of my job had led to the estrangement from my dear father and my leaving home was a blow to him. Besides this, my mother also had left for Calcutta, putting all the blame on poor father for the family crisis. But now I found that the order by Beloved Baba to me to return home from Bhedaghat and enter service only showed that my father was not wrong at all in telling me that I was wrong in giving up my job. The Mahabaleshwar session now revealed its inner meaning to me, which was basically connected with a clear understanding of Baba's attitude towards real spirituality as distinct from pseudo-spirituality. By escaping my duties, by escaping situations in college or elsewhere that were not as easy or rosy as I would want them to be, I was adopting an escapist attitude towards life and had given it the name of renunciation under the guise of Baba work. I had shirked my responsibility towards my aged father and mother but also towards my own self. I had denied myself the opportunity to be useful to the society by being a good teacher – the profession to which I belonged. To top it all, leaving home was a grossly unjust act of uncharitability towards my well-meaning and affectionate father. Baba, by calling me to Mahabaleshwar, had corrected all the mistakes in one stroke. Ordering me to obey His instructions had paved the way for righting the wrongs that I was doing to my parents and perhaps to my future life, which was full of incertitude and impulsive speculation. Now, from Bhedaghat I came to Jabalpur and to some friends told my intention of striking a reconciliation with my father and returning home to live with him. But I must make sure whether he really wanted it on his part, and for that I suggested that both father and I should meet at a third party's house as a common token of mutual desire to meet each other. My friends, who used to go to father, told me that all this was not necessary as father was missing me terribly and his heart had already forgiven me. But I insisted on my plan, and they agreed to convey it to my father.

When I entered the room, I found my father silently seated on a chair. I went up to him and touched his feet as a mark of respect. That great and strong doctor, whom I had never seen weep, had nothing to reveal but his love for his son, through a stream of pearl-like tears coursing down his cheeks. In a moment, I poignantly realized how much unnecessary suffering I had caused him for two months by leaving the house. No words were spoken. The other persons present were our host and his family members, as well as one or two other friends. Soon afterwards, my father and I walked together, got into a rickshaw and reached our home at Bai-ka-Bagicha. I found that my father was cooking his own food and now he had to cook my food also. Much though I protested and sought to help him, he refused any help. I knew the sorrow of that tough person, whose wife had taken sides with his son against him in a cause in which he was right. The only atonement I could do was attend on Father most tenderly and also send a telegram to my mother at Calcutta to return immediately as I had come back home. Within three days, mother came along with my celebrated maternal uncle. All were so much relieved and so happy to witness the family reunion. Friends and well-wishers poured in and all appreciated me that I had after all made good my mistake and returned home to help my old parents and also to go for a job. But who was to be thanked for all this happy termination of a tragic episode? The Silent, and ever-knowing, ever-merciful Meher Baba, of course. Had He not called me and instructed me to return home, it could not have ended in such a happy way. Once again, I was witnessing Meher Baba's mastery over situations and circumstances and felt that irrespective of whether I could obey Him or not, His instructions were invariably for the best, both in our external and internal life.

RLS also returned home and his miserable mother who had taken to bed when she thought that he had renounced the world now smiled with tears in her eyes and thanked God for bringing her dear son back to her. Thus all ended well for us and we were grateful to Beloved Baba for it.

But at Bhedaghat, the villagers, the boatmen and hotel keepers, MPS and his artisans, the rest house keepers and vendors all felt lonely and missed me. To my joyful surprise, I found bunches of them now coming to my Bai-ka-Bagicha home to meet me from time to time. They also extracted promises from me and my friends not to cut all contact with Bhedaghat but to pay visits and hold Baba-programmes whenever we were free to do so. An informal Meher Baba Centre was opened at their behest at Bhedaghat and we often began visiting Bhedaghat from Jabalpur to hold programmes. Thus the Bhedaghat people also felt happy, and we all were in contact through the ocean of love called Beloved Baba.

30. ONCE AGAIN WITH THE BELOVED

The month of July 1958 brought a pleasant surprise for me and many others. Baba had decided to impart His Universal Message and some two hundred of us were called to be the personal recipients of that Message directly from Him at Meherabad on the tenth of July 1958.

The night of 9th July 1958 was spent by us at Ahmednagar railway station. I could hardly sleep because RKU could not sleep and would not let me sleep. RKU was convinced about Baba's divinity but he wanted to confirm that Baba was none other than his Rama whom he had loved and worshipped all his life. He would shake me and say, "How can you sleep when you are so close to the God-man physically? How far is Meherabad from here?"

"About eight or ten miles," I said, concealing my smile at RKU's restlessness.

"Amiya Kumar, don't sleep, please!"

"RKU, you are so lucky to be born in that period of world history when the God-man has come again and called you to meet Him. Remember that it is only through the God-man that God becomes accessible to man. Otherwise, God is beyond our reach as Nirakar and Nirguna." Just then, a few drops of rain fell on us from the heavens above. That was really strange – for rain to come to the almost rain-forsaken city of Ahmednagar.

RKU paced up and down the outside campus of the station in spite of the light drizzle. I felt that if he had had the power he would certainly have accelerated the rotation of the earth and brought the dawn four hours earlier for it was almost 2 AM then!"

The tenth of July eventually came. Incidentally, it coincided with the date on which Baba had begun observing His unbroken Silence in 1925. We were all taken to Meherabad by bus, and then to the hall where Baba was physically present. Baba looked so regal and radiant that even the fairest of people faded into darkness! He was very serious, though it was the eve of His Universal Message – the message that we were to spread all over the world. The meeting and distribution of the Universal Message leaflets was a solemn event. The gist of the message was that it was high time to practice in all sincerity all the messages that He had imparted to mankind, in His advents, past and present. Mankind was reminded not to make a mockery of His words for that has led the world to chaos and confusion and to the brink of colossal destruction. Then Baba asked some of His devotees to recite prayers of different religions. This done, Baba gave us five minutes time to embrace Him. The atmosphere was so solemn that, to my surprise, none dared to rise and embrace Him. As I found the clock ticking away, suddenly I thought of asking RKU to rise and embrace Baba, but to my dismay he too failed to rise and go up to Baba. Even Shuddhanand Bharati, the great Yogi who sat very close to Baba's sofa, did not rise and embrace Him. The clock ticked away and we could hear our breathing. Then suddenly Baba gestured to Sri Eruch asking whether the five allotted minutes were over. Sri Eruch found that the period was over and Baba then looked at us all and gestured that no one was to get up and embrace Him now. Our hearts sank as suddenly we realized what we had missed.

Why did I fail when the Beloved whom I love asked me to embrace Him? My feeling was that He looked so solemn, so sad and so remote that I couldn't muster up the courage to go up to him – I felt I had let him down.

That led my mind to wondering if this had anything to do with His silence. Had he become silent to help His children to realize, repent and re-true their course of action? And if even this silence is unheeded, then there would be no alternative except to reap the results of all wrong doings!

And yet, though silent, as a final chance out of the depths of His compassion, the God-man still gave us His Universal Message. It was nothing new or novel, it was only a reminder of the same age-old messages of all the previous God-men with an emphasis on “practice.”

Soon after the meeting was over, Beloved Baba told us that He would give us His embrace outside the hall. We filed out in the open and I asked RKU how he felt about his first Darshan of Baba. He said that he had found his Beloved Rama at last. But then I asked him why could he not embrace his beloved Rama? He looked at me and exclaimed, “My God! I had not an ounce of courage left in me when I saw Him! Embrace? Forget it. It is enough to see Him from a distance.” Incidentally RKU’s feelings were not just exclusively his own in that first session of 10th July 1958. Baba appeared indeed very, very solemn and serious. And honestly, when He asked us to leave the hall, I at least felt it was a good breather. This illustrates how Lilliputian is our inner stature as compared to Baba’s, both in principle and practice. Well, soon the congregation lined up outside the hall and Baba’s chair was planted for Baba to sit and give us His love-embrace. Now Baba’s face shone brightly with “love-bearable” and His mood, though not exactly that of humour, was kindly and inviting. We felt relieved and partly relaxed as the line moved and one after another the two hundred recipients of the Universal message went up to individually approach Him, took His embrace and bowed at His feet.

Then once again a memorable event happened in my life. I was behind some dozen or so persons, when suddenly Baba turned fully at me and for some seconds constantly looked at me. My eyes somehow got fixed up by his and almost rooted – I could not move my eyeballs – then a stream of blinding light seemed to enter my eyes from His. Unable to bear the intensity of the light for long, I closed my eyelids. But to my greatest surprise, I could still see, with closed eyes, everything that was going on – the darshan, the grounds, the men, the trees far off ... the eyelids acting as no veil to this sight, as though the eyelids by some magic had become transparent. I was never so astonished in my life. Baba had meanwhile turned away His gaze, but when I again closed my eyes, I again was able to see everything, without any difficulty, and it was a colour perspective. Had He planted a magic eye in my eyes? Was it the Dristhi Deeksha as the Masters in India had sometimes done? I do not know, but ever since that day, 10th July 1958 one thing I can frankly admit – that whenever and wherever I concentrate my eyes, the form of my Beloved God-man appears before me with His glowing face, shining eyes, His pink coat and white sadra. His eyes like the sparkle of two many-splendoured gems always shed light and colours in front of my eyes.

In the beginning it was so difficult to wrench my sight away from this constant spectacle and see the worldly forms of friends or strangers, but gradually I had been by his grace able to see other things as well.

You can see the image of the Sun for a few seconds after closing your eyes, but for only a few seconds. I should like to know how an ophthalmologist would explain this in terms of constant retinal retention of an image for a quarter century, and also how in spite of growing a cataract this image remains absolutely unaffected in any manner. But to be made able to see His image

for 28 years, it beyond my personal comprehension now! It is an incomparable gift, so that I do not lose my faith.

31. LE ROI LE VEUT

By the end of 1958, I had gradually been made to feel by Meher Baba that my intellectual approach to explaining away His superhuman attributes was doomed to failure. My considerable obstinacy was opposed at every turn, so that there was no place left – no viable self-deluded “explanation.” In the Ocean of His Divine Reality, my little boat of rationality had sunk. Because Le Roi Le Veut,⁵⁴ I was forced to surrender!

On the eighteenth of October 1958, my father, Dr. Dhirendra Nath Hazra, passed away. Coincidentally, this was my birthday. He had been operated on for an enlarged prostate, but the surgical team inadvertently cut a large artery, and the bleeding would not stop. My father, a surgeon of considerable skill, who had helped so many patients, thus fell victim to surgical error in the end.

As mentioned earlier, he had as his guru the great yogi Sri Aurobindo in South India. My father had not taken to Baba seriously. But, on this last day of his life, just before he was being taken to the operation theatre I, despite a possible revolt from him, showed him a photo of Meher Baba. To my surprise, he smilingly touched his forehead to it, and smilingly looked at Baba’s face, and then to my still greater surprise closed his eyes as if refusing to see anyone else. In that condition, he was carried into the operation theater by the stretcher bearers.

When after seven hours of medical ordeal the doctors came out and sadly told me that they could not save my father, I felt bitter and helpless. When however, the stretcher bearers carried the dead body out and I rushed up to look at my father’s dead face, I was wonderstruck to see a smile of ineffable sweetness on his lips! His half-closed eyes showed no trace of panic at all; instead there lurked a streak of something indescribably joyful. I had seen faces of many dead persons but have never seen such a smile and joy on them as I saw that evening on my father’s face. It seemed to challenge my deep-rooted belief that death is the most painful episode both physically and mentally for the dying person.

I hope my readers will forgive this little retrospective digression from 1959 to 1958. But I could not perhaps skip it as it was a major episode in the lives of my family members, especially in the life of my dear mother. How she wept day and night for her dead husband! Incidentally, a month or two before my father’s death, a circular letter had come to her from Meher Baba that circumstances during the next three months would be testing both the faith and the courage of His lovers. I ignored it at first, but now that circular letter began to assume some importance in my eyes. My father was dead. Suddenly, I received a telegram from Bengal. It conveyed another doleful message – my mother’s mother had also died a few days back. As if Death was not concerned with Its gluttony, another wire followed telling that my mother’s elder brother suddenly expired. A sordid hat trick had been scored by the King of the Dark Chamber, within precisely the three months about which Meher Baba had forewarned us.

While consoling my mother and other relatives, I little knew how close I was getting to death myself in 1959. It was a cold morning in mid-November of that year. I had just returned home from my morning walk. All of a sudden, I felt limp and darkness settled in all around me. Although I thought I was in first-class health, the experience unnerved me. The feeling

⁵⁴ Literally, “The King wishes it.”

increased and I checked my pulse to ascertain what was happening. The pulse was very feeble and then hardly palpable at the wrist. Needless to say, I was in a panic. I told my family members to send a message to Meher Baba immediately, asking Him to save me. This was done by them in hot haste. I lay down on my bed, almost fizzled out. Just then, Dr. Daulat Singh, a devotee of Meher Baba who had been with Him for some time in the New Life phase, entered my home. Being told of my condition, He rushed to my bedside, checked my pulse and heart sounds and his face clouded. At once he rushed out and brought an injection from a nearby drug store along with a syringe and a needle and gave me the injection. I feebly asked mother if the message had been sent to Baba and she told me that it had been. It was such a relief to hear that. A new-born faith whispered within me, "Your prayer has gone to Him, you need not worry." After an hour or so, Dr. Daulat Singh re-checked my pulse and heart-sounds again, and now his face relaxed. This noble, old doctor who had all of a sudden come in the nick of the moment to help me, felt happy and told me that I was recovering. I too was feeling better. The crisis seemed to be over and with a few more injections and medical attention by him for two or three consecutive days, I was almost my normal self again.

I was still puzzled about that morning. As a young man with no previous or recent ill-health, why should I be so close to death? Well, I thought it better not to think about it. Just then, the telegraph courier knocked at our door, and when I opened the telegram, well, here's what I saw. I cannot describe how emboldened I felt when I read the Beloved's message. It was unequivocally assuring. It was like the Omniscient One I had met at Poona, to send a message like that.

Almost at the heels of the telegram followed a beautiful letter from Baba's noble disciple Sri Bhau Kalchuri. The letter was written in Hindi. A translation of the letter is given as follows:

Meherazad

21st November 1959

Dear Sister,

Your letter about Shri Amiyakumarjee's health has been received by us today, and we read it out to Shri Baba. Before that, we had received a letter from Shri Amiyakumarjee and Baba had immediately got a telegram sent to him. We hope that the receipt of that telegram must have brought peace to all the members of the family.

In reply to your letter, Baba orders you not to have any worry, not to feel despondent, not to become nervous. Baba's Nazar is always on his dear son Amiya.

Baba is very pleased with Amiya's love and Baba wants that his dear son should remain happy in His love and should not have an iota of worry. Baba wants that you and your mother should get some doctor to treat Amiya, and should take care of Amiya's health.

Mother and sister also are the recipients of Baba's special love, and that's why Baba wants that none of you should have any kind of worry or despair. Baba's love is on you all, Baba's Nazar is on you all, you all are Baba's dear ones, so you all should keep happy and by being happy keep Baba happy.

Baba sends you all His love.

Affectionate friend,

Bhau

This episode over, I went back to my duties, invigorated.

III-33 58-111/2-178-23.7.33-1,00,000 B.42.

INVEST MYSELF
TO
SAVINGS
CERTIFICATES

INDIAN POSTS AND TELEGRAPHS DEPARTMENT

Class _____
Post _____ Code _____

No. _____ C.

Recd. from _____ Sent at _____ H. _____ M. _____
To _____
By _____

Office Stamp

Handled in at (Office of Origin) _____ Date _____ Hrs _____ Mins _____ Service Instructions _____ Words _____

0 KG AHMEDNAGAR 19 20 AMIYAKUMAR HAZRA /B69 BAIKABAGICHA JABALPUR

BE BRAVE AND BE RESIGNED TO MY WILL ALL WILL BE WELL LOVE - BABA

D. C. Chatterjee & Co.

11. 11- The name of the sender, if telegraphed, should be written after, but separated from the text.

32. ANOTHER EPISODE

A horse, a horse! My Kingdom for a Horse – Shakespeare (King Richard III)

Although a scrawny person, I had enough physical and mental prowess or I would not have been selected to play for College teams and clubs, but this episode had definitely shaken me up due to its unpremeditated suddenness. However, Baba filled me with fresh courage and confidence, but little did I then think that another and still murkier episode was soon going to overtake me.

It was in the early months of 1960. One day, a strange sensation overcame me as if somebody was very powerfully holding the nape of my neck. I tried to get quits with the sensation by moving my head in all the directions north, east, west and south but it did not at all help. The grip remained as tight as ever, and within a couple of hours I had no alternative except to go to a doctor and ask him to find out what was wrong with my neck. The doctor, in the normal course, diagnosed my case in the category of a stiff neck, sprain, etc., and accordingly dished out a handful of pills and capsules for me to swallow and analgesic massages to be done. But no medicine could combat the strange hold on my neck. It grew from bad to worse and I was just scampering from one doctor to another in hope of relief. The night hours were the worst. I could not lay myself down on the bed. Pillows to the tune of three or four had to be kept under my head to give a shadow of relief. But the disease seemed to make a ghastly grin at all these attempts that had persisted for days and then for months on end. Imagine dear reader, someone or something holding your neck from behind with a strong pressure for months. I literally cried out at times, to the sorrow of my family members and consternation of my friends.

Surprisingly, just when I was suffering like that, RKU went to a doctor for some treatment. The doctor gave him some injections and big allergic patches all over his back, thighs and neck were all that he got from the treatment. Although the doctor swore that the injection could not have produced that kind of reaction, yet RKU drew little comfort from such medical assurances. Worst came to worst, he felt like scratching the patches violently and he did it with his fingernails and with chips of wood or a pencil when the remoter parts of the back appeared inaccessible to his fingers. Soon the patches turned into wet, itching sores and RKU began to go from doctor to doctor in search of a cure. I do not at all undermine the skill of doctors in my town here. They are good ones, and many of them have degrees from foreign countries too. But in both RKU's and my case, all their medical wisdom seemed to fail without any apparent reason. When the best medicines had been tried and no results obtained, both victims had only one alternative left and that was to approach Meher Baba and see if He could cure us.

The darshan of Meher Baba ultimately was declared open during the summer months at Poona and we both decided to reveal our troubles to Baba and ask Him to do something about it. But before we had boarded the train for Poona, we had already about five months of the most miserable kind of experience in our lives. Now we could bear it no longer, and we wholeheartedly looked forward to relief if Meher Baba could effect it. During that trip, my mother also accompanied me and a simple-hearted poor youth was also with us. Named Maruti, he was the servant of a rich lawyer.

As usual, thousands gathered for darshan at Guruprasad Hall, Poona, but when we entered the portico, some volunteers came forward and told us that Baba had strictly enjoined His devotees

not to ask for anything during the darshan period. They even requested assurances from the devotees that they were going to respect Baba's wish and not ask for anything. Now that was what you might call the drowning of a boat just within inches of the shore! We looked like paintings of dire misery! One with his neck tightly screwed up from behind and the other who had done hardly anything but scratch his body for months and months! But I was really desperate by then. As I was entering the hall I asked to my mother, in the name of love, to tell Baba about my suffering. She agreed, as most mothers would do, and that was my chance.

When we were admitted to Baba's august presence, He seemed busy for a while with somebody. Then He looked at us. Well, that was the moment. Mother without any hitch, told Baba that I was suffering for the last five months from a strange neck pain that no doctor had been able to cure. Baba looked at me with a questioning glance. I looked back with all the self-pity I could summon and said, "Yes, Baba I am really miserable. Please cure me!"

The moment I uttered those words, Baba's face clouded and became stern. "Why did you ask for anything? Did you not know that I have forbidden all my lovers to ask for anything?" I broke into tears at this admonition. Suffering as I was, I had no other alternative except to ask Him to help me; I was like a spent swimmer clinging to a life buoy.

"All your disease is imaginary," He said, sternly.

Between sobs I conveyed to Him that I felt that even a healthy dog was more fortunate than I was and I had undergone untold agony for so many months.

Baba said, "Is he not handsome, is he not looking well?"

All those assembled responded, "Yes he's healthy and he looks fine." Such an entertaining point. I wondered why Baba asked me. He knew I wasn't fine. I knew I wasn't fine.

Baba's face softened and He told all devotees to go out of the hall and signaled me and my small group including RKU to remain inside. When the hall was vacated, He said, "I shall pulverize your body, Amiya!" That brought fresh tears in my eyes. Then He asked Eruch to get a bottle of medicine from another room. As Eruch brought a small bottle containing ten tablets, Baba touched the bottle with His hand and gave it to me. "Now take that. Every night take one tablet with a cup of milk. But remember one thing for sure. Before you swallow the tablet, you must take My name 100 times. Will you remember that?" I nodded my head but Baba looked doubtfully at me. He directed His gaze at RKU. "Are you staying with Amiya?"

"Yes, Baba."

"Well, I entrust you with the responsibility of seeing that he takes My name 100 times before swallowing one tablet every night. Will you do that?"

"Of course, Baba, I shall see to it." This was essential, because I have always been very absent minded and RKU is very present minded, so his assurance reassured me.

"Well now, Amiya, do not worry any more. You shall be well if you follow My instructions."

How grateful I felt at that moment and also how bold. Little did I care for breaking Baba's instructions about not asking for anything. I looked at Him and said, "Baba, poor RKU is also suffering from an incurable itch all over his body."

Baba looked stern again. "Why do you tell Me all this? RKU, go to a doctor. There are many good doctors in Poona. Get yourself checked up by any one of them." RKU kept quiet. I felt sorry for him. Baba had relegated him to a doctor again and there was no courage left in me to ask Him to do something for Rajani after the serious manner in which He had given this advice.

My scientific mind again began to work. I was already well read in medicines — I knew medical science. After we left Baba's presence, I asked Dr. Goher⁵⁵ what was in the pill. Goher rebuked me. She said, "What do you mean? Is that medicine? It is Baba's prasad! He just gives anything and that becomes prasad. It's no longer medicine." My God, she got mad. She said, "You only do what He tells you to do and forget about medicine."

Back at Ganeshkhind where we were staying, when night approached, I asked my cousin for a cup of hot milk and took Baba's name a hundred times as bid by Him, and then swallowed one tablet. After about an hour, I developed slight pyrexia. I do not recollect when I went to sleep. The morning cup of tea woke me up. Then, as I sipped it, I exclaimed with unmitigated joy, "Great God, where is that five months old pain gone?" All the members of my family surrounded me, with surprise written large on their faces. I was glee personified! There was no trace of that insufferable pain in the nape of my neck. Baba had cured me undoubtedly, under the cover of a randomly chosen tablet, while so many doctors could not do it in my town with so many medically appropriate medicines!

When I looked at RKU, he sort of scowled. Evidently he could not help it, nor could I have, had I been in his position. I told him to go to one doctor for a checkup as Baba had bid him do. "No," he roared, "I won't go to any doctor. Baba has cured you, and Baba has to cure me, too!" As RKU was physically stronger than I was, I thought it better not to argue the point with him, knowing and almost feeling his irritation and frustration. No doubt Baba had meted out differential treatment to two of His lovers who were suffering. But we were reacting in our normal human ways, just because we were starkly ignorant of Baba's Divine ways of working with each individual.

At Guruprasad that day, Baba showed pleasure when He heard from me that my persisting neck-pain had totally disappeared. Then He turned to RKU and asked him if he had gotten a medical check-up about his disease. RKU, after a pause, said, "No Baba, I have not visited any doctor."

"Why?" Baba asked, wearing an expression of surprise.

"Baba, I have already had enough of doctors at Jabalpur and to no avail. I have therefore come to you to be cured by you."

The expression on Baba's face was now partly humorous, partly serious. "What do you take Me to be, RKU, a doctor?"

"Yes, Baba, you are the Doctor of doctors," came RKU's instant reply.

Baba looked at the assembly. "Just listen to what he says. He takes me to be a doctor!"

⁵⁵ One of the women Mandali and a medical doctor.

The assembly kept wisely quiet about the issue. Baba went on, "So, you take Me to be a doctor. Do you? Okay. Let me see your disease. What sort of skin disease do you have? Remove your scarf, shirt and banyan. Come on, and show it all to me."

RKU took off his clothes as bid by Baba. I, sitting next to him, stood ready to point out to Baba the wet sores at the various places that I had seen them on his body.

But what did I see? What did RKU see? Not a vestige of the skin disease was to be found anywhere on his body. The skin had suddenly become immaculate and whole. Where had the disease suddenly gone?

Baba looked at RKU and said, "Show me the patches, come on!"

RKU could find none, and for want of words at this miraculous and instantaneous cure began to shed tears of silent gratitude.

But the Divine Doctor still demanded, "RKU, where are the patches you were complaining about?"

"Baba, there are none now."

Baba, evidently desirous of not permitting others to clearly understand what He in His infinite compassion had done, now deftly diverted the topic. "Well, RKU, what do you think of Me? You don't have any disease and yet you complain of one. You want to befool me, don't you?"

RKU wept and I was tongue-tied. The surprised assembly kept quiet. Evidently, Baba — as usual — did not want others to know what He had done. I was also to be a mute witness.

Baba looked at RKU: "Now go and change your clothes and don't weep," He bade RKU in a gentle tone.

Thus, the Lord of Compassion had cured two of His lovers, RKU and me, and yet took particular care to see that no one could get an opportunity to clearly detect what He had done. We back went to Ganeshkhind, so happy at heart. I told RKU that he was singularly fortunate to be cured by Baba without even a tablet as in my case. RKU looked at me brightly and nodded his head. All his earlier complexes were completely wiped off. Yes, Baba loves us all and although outwardly His method seemed different, His Love was all-embracing, His mercy all-encompassing, and His ways unfathomable. That summer in 1960, I had to admit to myself that my college-knowledge was not the least helpful in regard to understanding Meher Baba's divine Modus Operandi and mastery over phenomenal nature.

This story has a humorous postscript.

Baba had asked Rajani Kant whether he could help me remember to take His name along with the pill. "Yes, Baba! I'll do it," he had replied. Rajani Kant is very present-minded, and I was inferior to him, I'm absent minded, so I needed help. Fine. First night, I opened the bottle, I took the pill in my hand, and said, "Baba, Baba, Baba ..." counting. And after a hundred times I took the pill, took the milk and gulped the pill down. I was cured. But the order was to keep taking the pills, and I hadn't lost track of that.

The next evening, just as in Freudian psychology, it just happens that you forget something when you don't need it, like forgetting an umbrella when it doesn't rain. I took the cup of milk, and took the second pill out of the bottle, and Rajani Kant forgot to remind me. At the time, he

was retelling some tales from the Mahabharat, and Maruti and I and everyone else were so wrapped up in listening to the tales that we did not remember that I had to take Baba's name. I absentmindedly took the pill. As I tried to gulp it down, it got stuck in my throat. Now I shouted out, as I realized that I had forgotten to take His name, and Rajani and I and Maruti were all simultaneously repeating, "Baba, Baba, Baba." The whole atmosphere was different. We were all in panic.

The next day, we went for Baba's darshan. For the entire duration of the trip to Guruprasad bungalow, which is 6 kilometers away, we were all praying to Baba, "Baba, please do not ask us. We have made a mistake," and He did not ask us.

That night, I took the pill and took His name.

The day after that as we were going to Guruprasad, we forgot to pray that He should not ask us about our forgetfulness of two days prior, and He asked us. See, the first time He fulfilled our prayer, but the next day we forgot to pray again, and He asked us. "Did you take My name?"

I said, "No Baba," in a very downcast tone of voice.

"Rajani Kant, did you not remind him?"

"No, Baba, I forgot," in a tone of voice equally embarrassed and humiliated.

33. AM I NOT YOUR FATHER?

The previous chapter contains two incidents of physical healing done by Baba. In this chapter, I am going to describe how Baba could assuage mental suffering as well. After my father's death and the death of my grandmother and uncle, mother was in such agony of mind that it was a pity that we could do nothing to cheer her up. From time to time, thinking of her lost relatives, she used to break down and we all felt invariably gloomy. As she was a widow she, according to Bengali Brahministic tradition, was supposed to wear a plain white sari and wipe away the vermilion mark on her forehead that symbolized a living husband. All this and many other rules she imposed upon herself as directed by custom, and it all only succeeded in reminding her of having lost her husband, thus perpetuating her mood of unhappiness. Otherwise, Time, the great healer, might have cured her. Then came the darshan days at Poona, and I insisted on her going for Baba's darshan with the hope that it would act as a healing balm to her deeply wounded heart. When we finally entered the darshan hall and sat down in front of Baba, He looked at us with great understanding and compassion.

Baba's eyes rested on me: "Where are you staying, Amiya?" He asked.

"At Ganeshkhind, Baba."

"Why are you living so far from here? Could you not stay in a hotel near this place?"

"Baba ..." I hesitatingly replied, "it's firstly because my cousin resides at Ganeshkhind."

"Is that all?" He asked. I knew that I had to give the complete explanation from the way He looked at me.

"Baba, it is also because my mother doesn't want to eat food cooked at a hotel."

"Why does she not want to eat food at a hotel?"

"Baba, because she has become a widow and a widow, in our caste, takes food either cooked by herself or by some relative who should be a Brahmin."

Baba's eyes peered into mine at the statement. After a moment's pause, He said, "Amiya, am I not your Father?"

With tears coming to my eyes, I replied, "Yes Baba, you are – you are indeed my father."

"Well, how can your mother be a widow, then?" and Baba pointed His finger at mother.

"You are right, Baba, she can't be a widow," I replied

Baba's face suddenly assumed tremendous brightness and austerity. With calm but Divine seriousness He further gestured with His hand making a circle in the air.

"Amiya, I am the husband and father of the entire Universe. Know that for sure." I bowed my head in assent. Baba continued, "There is no need for your mother to shun food prepared at hotels and feel that she is a widow."

I told mother⁵⁶ what Baba conveyed. I told her not to feel like a widow bereft of a husband because she had Baba's grace – the symbol of help and protection. Mother perhaps did not quite understand all that was meant. But after leaving Guruprasad Hall, I noticed a change coming over her. Slowly but steadily she began to come out of her mental gloom. The sudden outbreaks of weeping ceased and, although she still maintained some of the rules imposed upon her by custom, she was no longer in the throes of agony as she had often been in the past. Baba had started healing her wounded mind and tortured heart in His imperceptible manner from that moment. Now I never find mother lamenting the loss of her dear relatives.

Another episode comes to my mind connected with that darshan. I have already mentioned Maruti, a poor youth, the servant of an advocate who had accompanied us. His wages were not adequate to save money for the expenses involved in the trip to Poona for Baba's darshan. But such was the love for Baba that he decided that he would save a few rupees every month by curtailing some of his needs to have enough money to pay the railway fare. I do not know how much sacrifice he had to make to do that, but by the time we were ready to leave Jabalpur for Poona, he had made enough. At last, he had his desire fulfilled. When he sat in front of Baba with us, Baba cast a loving glance at him.

"Who is he, Amiya?"

"Baba, he is Maruti from Jabalpur. He is a servant in an advocate's family. He loves you, and being poor he saved a few rupees every month for about six months to come to you for your blessings."

Baba looked at Maruti with infinite compassion. Then He said, "Maruti, is it true that you have saved rupee after rupee every month to have my darshan?"

"Yes, Baba," replied Maruti.

"Do you love me so much?"

"Yes Baba, I love you."

Baba again looked at Maruti. "How much money do you get every month?"

"I get thirty rupees every month, Baba."

Baba wore a quizzical look in His eyes. "You get thirty rupees every month? Well, Maruti, you are richer than I am! I do not have even a penny, just see!" and Baba put His hand in His coat pockets and showed their utter emptiness to Maruti. We all looked at Him. "Maruti, I am very poor. I am the poorest of the poor. Yet being God I am also the richest of the rich. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Baba."

"Never consider yourself to be poor, Maruti. You love Me and I love you. I am very pleased with your love for me. Come and embrace Me."

"Maruti rose and went up to Baba. Baba gave him such a tender embrace that we felt as if the ocean was being poured into the cup. Maruti came back to his seat with tears streaming down

⁵⁶ Baba spoke to Amiya, always, in Hindi. Mother's language was Bengali, and Amiya had to translate complex ideas from Hindi to Bengali to help his mother understand.

his cheeks. He no longer appeared oppressed with the sense of poverty which had been in his mind, and about which he had talked to me at length at Jabalpur.

During the darshan period, which lasted for about a fortnight for my mother and me, at last the day of parting arrived. It was morning time. Mother and I were getting ready to leave. Suddenly, I thought of first paying a short visit to Baba for a farewell glimpse and then go to the railway station. We sat in a three-wheeler. Mother said in Bengali, with a sigh of longing, "I wanted to have a ride in Baba's own car!"

I was surprised beyond measure. "What are you dreaming of, mamma? This is a child-like expectation on your part. Who can travel by Baba's car? It is meant for Him and a few of His Mandali. So, give up the idea." Perhaps my tone was gruff and I saw a shade of humiliation come over mother's face. But she said nothing. Truly, Baba's car was meant for Baba, for the God-man, and not for such ordinary beings as us. So, she kept quiet and we reached Guruprasad palace by the three-wheeler. Inside the gate, with its nose towards the road, stood Baba's car. It meant that Baba was in the hall, and we could have a parting glimpse of Him. As we went ahead towards the porch, a man from the Mandali came up to us. "Amiya, where are you going?"

"Why, for Baba's darshan, before we leave Poona. Is it not possible? Will He not give His darshan?"

The gentleman nodded his head and said, "Well, Amiya, Baba has left for a house-visit a few minutes back. So you can't see Him." Mother and I looked very much disappointed.

Then I looked at the car and could not help asking, "But Baba's car is here!"

"Yes. He has gone by another car. And He has instructed me to tell you that He has left His car for your mother and yourself to go to the Poona railway station. So please go in it or you would be missing your train."

As we got into God-man's car, a sweet fragrance greeted us. The driver started the car and we were off for the railway station. I looked at my mother. She looked back proudly and said, "You talked as if you were not my child but my father. But see how Antaryami⁵⁷ Baba has fulfilled my desire to travel by His car. So remain a child that you are, okay?"

Well, she was right and I was wrong. As the car sped towards the station, I could not help wondering again about Baba's Omniscience and Love for us. How fortunate we were indeed to be loved and taken care of by one who knew the slightest wish and thought that sparked in any mind in the world!

Back at Jabalpur, a few days passed in the still-fresh memory of all the joy and comfort we had during Baba's darshan. But as everything that has a beginning must have an end, so gradually we were closed in upon by the dull and dry humdrum life of the town. I again began to feel unwell. Someone told me to try homeopathy, another suggested going to Calcutta for a change. I wrote a letter to Baba for His direction. Baba sent my mother the message that I could take homeopathic medicines if I felt like taking them. As for going to Calcutta, I could go there if the condition of my health was not very bad, otherwise I should cancel the trip. I do not know what magic effects Baba's letters had. When I got the letter, I began to feel better and suddenly the

⁵⁷ "The Omniscient One"

thought came to me that all my ailments were due to my physical distance from Baba. How good would it be if I could stay close to Him, as do the fortunate Mandali. Then, there would be no vacuum to face, no illness to fear. All would be joy, thrill, self-confidence and a healthy life for me. So I wrote a letter and a poem to Baba expressing my wish to remain in His Blissful proximity. Soon came His message communicated through Sri Bhau Kalchuri. It is an important document for all like me who long to be in Baba's Mandali and for those who missed Baba's physical proximity. Here is the English translation:

18th January 1960

Dear Sri Amiya,

Received your letter. It was yesterday that the opportunity came to read out both your letter and your poem to Baba and He was very pleased to hear them and He sends His love to you all.

Dear Amiya, nobody is far from Baba. Baba is like the center of a circle and all people are on the circumference of the circle. Everybody is at equal distance from Baba. When a disc revolves, then according to its speed of revolution, the distance of the circumference from the center gradually seems to diminish and when the disc revolves very fast then only the center remains visible.

Thus, if we move with Baba's speed, then the feelings of distance and nearness in regard to Baba would not be generated.

Look at the spectrum. There are seven different colours in it. When we begin revolving a spectrum, gradually all the colours vanish and only whiteness is perceived and when the revolution is still more accelerated than only the center remains visible.

In the same way, in spite of all of us being differently structured in our impressions, if we move with the speed of Baba, then we shall advance towards the center. By turns, both centrifugal and centripetal forces work. If we do not move with Baba's speed, the centrifugal force draws us towards the circumference, and if we move with Baba's speed then the centripetal force draws us towards the center.

Therefore, you give up the idea of distance and nearness. It is possible that you may indeed be closer to Baba than we. Physical proximity has no special relation to the Path. You see how masts, who are very close to Baba remain lying in distant parks, in far-flung nooks and corners of the world. Can anyone be closer to Baba than these masts?

The real experience is only One and that is Oneness with Baba. Therefore, it is unimportant to deliberate on this subject any further. You are extremely fortunate whom Baba remembers from time to time, and whose letters are being heard by Him with pleasure.

In conclusion, I again feel happy to send you all Baba's Love.

Regards to mother,

Affectionately,

Bhau

So then that was the end of hopes of being with Baba at Meherabad or Meherazad. Although I felt disappointed at first, later on I realized why Baba kept me away at a physical distance. I was soon called upon by a group of lovers at Jabalpur to go from village to village and town to town spreading His Love-message and to tell people that they could see the Avatar (God-man) in person, an opportunity that comes only at intervals of centuries.

This mission was not something easy to accomplish as people were divided into scores of minor religions, sects, not to speak of the major ones. When they heard from us that Meher Baba was from Persian stock outwardly, this was an immediate barrier to some. Others, when they heard us say that He was the same Ancient One as Zoroaster, Rama, Krishna, Buddha, Christ and Mohammed were impressed, or agreed to verify for themselves, and others were critical to the point of hostility. But none could find anything wrong in Meher Baba's message and that was a point where they felt frustrated in their attempts to condemn or denounce Him. The only argument they proffered was why does He call Himself God or God-man, as if it only could mean an exhibition of egotism of the highest degree. Our approach to all these persons and their arguments ranged between replies of humorous and serious nature, but we had made up our minds never to fail at one point, even if we failed to convince them, i.e., the point of earnest love and tolerance. As Baba-lovers, it was our bounden duty more to love them than to give them dry discourses. In this, Baba Himself was palpably helping us and the love that we could give them irrespective of their mental attitudes and religious beliefs was definitely coming from Baba to us, and then going to them. It was the same love that YLM had given me, the same tolerance and absolutely sincere attention. Once they felt that love, then they became more and more inclined to know about Baba. The result was that some of them told us that if we could thus love them, in spite of being total strangers, then there must be something after all in Meher Baba who had instilled in us such love. They all knew one thing for certain, and that was the supreme importance of love, without which name, fame, power, possessions, wealth and wisdom – in short, nothing – could fill up anybody's existence. "Love" was the keynote of our mission among thousands of people throughout the state and throughout the country.

There was another important thing. It was that we were to be sincere in what we said and felt about Baba, and our expression was to be 100% genuine while telling others that He was the God-man. Today, when I look back upon those years in the 1960s when I joined the band called "Baba-workers," I cannot help feeling that it was after all a service and a mission for which Baba had earmarked us. Thus we too were serving Him, although in a different way from the Mandali's service, as willed by Him. We might have done worse than the Mandali had we been privileged to live with Baba at Meherabad or wherever He went. The bitterness of longing for physical proximity was almost gone when we found hundreds of people seated before us, and we were telling them about Baba – His Love, His compassion, His gnosis and His wonderful ways of working with all who directly or indirectly got linked up with Him. Hours passed by; all our toils were rewarded when we saw eager faces hearing that the Redeemer of their suffering was near at hand and they could see Him, write to Him, remember Him and above all lovingly depend upon Him for His guidance and love. Soon, the fruits of our humble labours became apparent. Flocks of people started coming to share our love feast and many told of wonderful things that were happening to them after they had heard of Baba and had started thinking of Him. I was so very happy. Baba was working with them all, using us as a bunch of imperfect tools for that work and it was no ordinary comfort and happiness to know this. In subsequent chapters I will try to relate to you some of the interesting stories connected with

Baba work, in addition to my personal life and Baba's all-important role as the Helmsman of my lifeboat.

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INDIAN POSTS AND TELEGRAPHS DEPARTMENT

From: _____ To: _____

Send Date: _____

By: _____

Number in the order of Order: _____

Office of Origin: _____ Date: _____

Office of Destination: _____

Words: _____

TO REMAIN RESIGNED TO MY WILL LOVE = DADA IN SECTUSION =

W. L. - The name of the sender, if telegraph, should be written above that contained from the post.

INDIAN POSTS AND TELEGRAPHS DEPARTMENT

From: _____ To: _____

Send Date: _____

By: _____

Office of Origin: _____ Date: _____

Office of Destination: _____

Words: _____

TO BAIKABAGICHIA JABALPUR =

THOSE WHO LOVE ME NEVER DIE INDRA IS IN ME = DADA =

W. L. - The name of the sender, if telegraph, should be written above that contained from the post.

34. “BE RESIGNED TO MY WILL”

At Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, lived my sister Indira. She too heard of Baba from us and although she already had a guru she developed a deep regard for Baba. She composed poems on Him. My nephews were also drawn to Baba and we received an invitation from them to hold meetings at Varanasi to tell people about Baba. Meanwhile, my sister Indira fell seriously ill, and developed galloping tuberculosis. When we received the communication, naturally we were worried and mother was greatly perturbed at the news. Treatment apart, Indira's health was in very poor state and recovery seemed difficult. Now, I had no alternative except to write to Baba, and this time for my sister's recovery. The telegram I received from Baba was highly significant in regard to what our attitude was to be when such circumstances engulfed us. An image of it is given to the left.

In spite of being in seclusion Baba had this message sent to us and it was our first lesson to try to be resigned to His Will. From the text of the wire it appeared that Indira was not to survive long, yet such was Baba's grace that she recovered at that time and lived for three more years. Her end came when one day an intravenous injection containing an air bubble by mistake, killed her. During the three further years of her time on Earth, Indira developed still greater love for Baba, and when I communicated to Baba that she had died in 1963, Baba sent us the telegram reproduced to the left.

Of course, my dear sister's death caused grief but by that time we had developed enough conviction in Baba's divinity and the message brought us relief that Indira had joined those fortunate ones who eternally reside in Baba.

I now go back to some episodes of a different nature in 1961 and 1962. I had already mentioned that Baba, although He cured me of my neck ache had also said that He would pulverize my body. I had no inkling of how literally it was meant, until I became trapped in a strange kind of diarrhea in March 1961. Every day I had about six to eight loose and watery stools, making me considerably weak. Streptomycin/caolin and pectin and all important anti-amoebic drugs were promptly administered to me by the doctors, but to little purpose. The condition remained the same throughout the months from March to July, i.e., five months! It was only Baba's grace that kept me alive during that horrible disease. I tried many doctors and they in turn tried many medicines. Microscopic investigations also did not help much as the drugs were not withdrawn. In utter prostration, I wrote several letters to Baba begging His Mercy once again to cure me, and invariably the reply that I received was not to lose courage, not to be impatient, not to worry and in one letter Baba even wrote to my mother that if I was going to have His next darshan in bad health He would pinch my ears and punish me! I was at a loss whether to laugh or weep at such a remark. Surely, it was some inner process going on otherwise why was I not getting cured by the medicines? By this time, it was July 1961, and I was getting pretty exasperated, as I hope all readers can understand. I then thought of all the methods that could coax and cajole Baba to relent and grant me recovery from the disease. Suddenly, I thought of writing a poem to Baba telling in it about my pitiable condition and to top it all, I coined a new name for Him that I would use to address Him by in the letter – Ashutosh Baba. “Ashutosh” means one who is quickly pleased or satisfied, and it is used for Lord Shiva who was for

centuries known as the God whom it was most easy to please! So, addressing Meher Baba as Beloved Ashutosh Baba, I sent Him my letter and poem. It worked! On 24th July 1961, I received a letter in English from Baba written by Sri Eruchjee on His behalf. The image of the letter is shown in the figure.

Well, when I read the letter all the medical information I had acquired from my father, his books and other doctors went against Baba's prescription. Cabbage juice was surely the juice of the leafy vegetable on which amoeba were supposed to thrive. So was it indicated or contra-indicated in such a case as mine? On top of it, avoidance of salt was another enigmatic advice. The loss of salts through diarrhea certainly was an established fact and salts were rather very much indicated for a patient suffering from such dire diarrhea as I was having.

For a few moments, I was **actually** unable to decide what to do! But because I was desperate, I once again relegated intellect to the background, and decided to go by Baba's prescription – the oddest one at that time to me. In addition, I decided to discontinue taking other medicines to see if this Baba prescription could combat the disease better. I called for fresh cabbages and every day one vendor brought fresh ones to our home. I began to take a quarter-cup of cabbage juice daily. Within five or six days, to my utter astonishment and to the equally great surprise of the medics, my diarrhea vanished, stool solidified and the number decreased to one or two. Within a fortnight I felt fit, had no weakness and enjoyed eating the way I had before the onset of the disease five months before. Yes, Baba had done it again, and with a prescription that would have made any doctor wince.

Physically fit and fine, I once again bowed my brain-box at the feet of Baba's picture and whispered, "Well, Baba, You are really the controller of all laws and You can make, remake break or flout them as You will. It would be really stupid of me not to believe that you are every inch a God-man now."

But brain is such a tyrant that one cannot be sure of its ways until one tries to confront it. Many thoughts came to me again and they were directed to find out some alternative possibility of my recovery other than by means of avoiding salt and taking cabbage juice.

Then the big jolt came in my life. Baba had decided to give His darshan again, and as I sat close to Him, looking at His lotus-like feet, Baba suddenly pointed His finger towards me and said, "This Amiya has one hundred percent love for Me but he does not trust me fully!" The words pierced my heart like bullets. Oh, how true they were. How literally descriptive of my mental attitude which had incurred the great malady of doubting. What a doubting Thomas my silly brain had made me and there was Baba who knew it all – knew that I loved Him but knew that I wanted Him to prove His Divinity to me. Time and time again He had condescended to do so out of His compassionate Love for me, cured me twice, catering to all my needs and desires.

How faithful a father He was, and how faithless a son I had been. I made a quick decision. I hurriedly bent and placed my head on His feet and silently prayed, "Oh Baba, I know you are Omniscient and Omnipotent. Now, since you have done so much for me, please do one more thing – take away this doubting habit, this questioning attitude which has almost become a morbid state of consciousness for me. Please, Baba, grant me a doubt-free, question-free conviction in you." My head kept touching Baba's feet. He did not remove His feet away. He did not convey through Sri Eruch anything. He absorbed my prayer silently and it must have touched His Heart and made Him grant this newly-sought boon. From that day forth until

Beloved Bala sends his LOVE to you
and your sweet-dear Mummy.

Gurnepressed
Room-1
24-7-61

Yours lovingly,
My dear Aniya, Baba

Despite His strict Seclusion, your
Beloved Ashutosh-Baba heard your appeal and
I read out your "broken-verse" appeal and your
letter to me. In reply to yours Baba wants
me to convey to you and your mother that He
wants you to take good treatment from your
doctors and continue to do so till you feel
better. In addition to the medicines given to
you by your doctors and the diet prescribed,
Beloved Baba wants you to drink a quarter-cup

of fresh Cabbage-juice
daily without adding
salt to it. Gradually
you may increase the intake
to half a cup of
cabbage juice, if you
feel that you can easily
take it. Baba wants
you NOT to worry at all
and He wants you to
become happy and cheerful.
Baba says that His "Nazar"
is on you and you should
regain confidence in yourself.

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JABALPUR

(M.P.)

today, I have never doubted His Divinity or His Powers although suffering came and things went against my will many times. In my heart of hearts was now the conviction that whether I liked it or not whatever happened was by the Divine Will of Avatar Meher Baba.

To conclude this chapter, I would like to add a reflection. What should be the best attitude of a person who was convinced that Baba's Will rules Destiny, both individually and collectively? The better part of me concluded that it was best to practice a willing resignation to His Will. The egotistic part of my brain still struggled at the idea of resignation, for it loved and wanted to retain or acquire the many things that it felt would give it pleasure. So, although from this time forth I never doubted Baba's supremacy over the world, achieving a hearty and joyful resignation has been, and continues to be a tediously slow process. I'm continuously being tested to obey His words, "Remain resigned to My Will," and I have found that to achieve and attain that state is no child's play. It requires a real hero of life to do so, and one in billions may be such a hero. But for sure I know that I am not one of those rare persons!

35. INCIDENTS CONTINUE

The birds sing arti

One afternoon, I felt a sudden urge to go to the outskirts of my town where abound ancient hills that have for millions of years suffered from the slashes of seasons and crumbled down into big rounded boulders that are 95% buried inside the earth. There is an old castle or watch tower in these hills called Madan Mahal, built by a ruler of Gondwana called Madanshah. Some trees grow here and there, trying to bring a green relief to the blackened rubble heap of what might have been a majestic mountain in the distant past.

When I went there, a sweet fragrance was pervading the place as it does in the first rains, coming from wild flowers, from the wet earth and from the grass. The place was silent and serene and I found no one around. The urge that had taken me to that place was a strange and odd one. At home, I had felt that I should sing Baba's arti in the glade and request the birds to join me and sing along. A very funny and crazy thought that was, but since I had made up my mind, there was no going back, and I reached the secluded spot all by myself, kept my cycle under a tree and sat myself down upon a boulder preparing to sing the arti. The tree in front of me was semi-barren. There were no birds in sight, and I found that I could not compel their presence by willing it. After waiting in vain for a few minutes, I gave up the crackpot desire to have birds sing with me and, folding my hands, decided to begin the arti by myself. The moment I sang the first line – *Jahan kalpana shabda na pahunchey, aisey aparampar* – I found to my surprise scores of golden winged tiny birds suddenly flying over my head. They settled down on the branches of the tree in front of me. They began to chirp, and a very odd harmony was established between my singing as it proceeded and their excited chirping! I am sure that just as I did not understand what they were chirping or singing about, so they too must not have followed any of the words in my arti. But it was a strange chorus of two unknown languages, all right! Were they there on purpose in response to my wish? Had they suddenly come to participate in my arti, for which I had come from eight kilometers away on cycle, or was it just a mere chance? Well, I hardly wanted to know about it all at that moment. As I was progressing through the last stanza of the arti, their chirping became so intense that I could hardly hear my own voice. Then came the end of my arti. To my utter surprise, the moment I sang the last note, all the birds flew away and disappeared, leaving me to feel the throbbing silence of the place in the darkening plains surrounded by the rocks. It was as if they had come for the arti alone and left the moment it was over! I returned home suspecting that Baba had done it, i.e., fulfilled my wish that I should have an arti of Baba sung in the forest glade with birds taking a share in it. If the feeling was wrong, I would hope to be forgiven. However, I hesitate to examine the event, lest it prove like a scientist dissecting a butterfly to examine its beauty.

MPS meets Baba on his own terms

Although I had left Bhedaghat, my ties with its inhabitants, especially MPS, were not snapped. We met once or twice every month. One day, MPS told me about his intention to meet Baba at Guruprasad. While I was trying to tell him about the procedure to be adopted for Baba's darshan, MPS impatiently shrugged his shoulders and said, "You don't have to bother yourself about it. Baba is God and He surely knows how keenly I want to meet Him. I will neither write letters to seek His consent nor wait for any official announcements for appointment. I will just take the train and go and do you know what I want that meeting to be like?"

A bit perturbed, I murmured, "Well, I have no idea. Is it going to be something novel?"

"Yes, you are right. I want to meet Baba when He is absolutely alone!"

"That's impossible, dear man," I protested. "How do you expect to meet Him when He is alone? There would be lots of people around Him as usual and even if there are none, at least His interpreter Sri Eruch is bound to be by His side. So, please give up such an idea of meeting Baba alone."

MPS was the very map of determination and cheerful and self-confident. "I know that I will meet Baba when there is no one beside and I know that Baba will arrange it in a way that there would be no one around when I meet Him."

"But why do you insist on such a meeting?"

"Because that is the way I want it."

To this, I had no further arguments to proffer. Surely MPS was behaving like a crackpot and it was futile to argue with a man when he enjoys being whimsical. So, I ended the meeting with that sort of smile that only denotes the vacuum in my brain. A few days later, MPS went away to Poona. Thereafter, he headed for Guruprasad bungalow and walked up to the darshan hall. He was full of confidence that he would meet Baba all alone.

There were people loitering outside. He went past them, climbed the steps of Guruprasad and then stood at the door of the hall. True to his desire, he found Baba seated on His couch, all alone, smiling at him! Yes, even the constant companion Sri Eruch was not there. Baba must have sent him into another room in the bungalow for some work, only to grant MPS his keenly-felt longing to see Him all by Himself. Their eyes met, the eyes of the One who knew every heart and every mind and of the other who was confident that Meher Baba would not disappoint him. Yet, though Baba had not failed MPS, what was this? Why was MPS losing all his courage? Why was he not able to enter the hall and go up to Baba and touch His feet? Baba was still looking at him. MPS was awe-struck and unable to move an inch from the door. A few moments passed and then entered Sri Eruch. Baba looked at him and then in His usual natural manner told him to call those who wanted to meet Him. The crowd began to enter and with it MPS also scrambled in. It took some time before he could regain his composure. It was one thing to talk of Baba as God, while at Jabalpur, and quite another thing to see Him prove His Godhood – quietly, but with the majesty of a limitless ocean. The power of Baba's presence crushed MPS and his ego. At the same time he was happy and also alarmed. There was the one who knew and controlled thoughts and situation that control lives of men, and MPS felt that supreme-controller's might in his heart. Well, if Baba's Divine power could unnerve him, His compassion could equally assuage the agitated state of the mind. Soon MPS was made at home by Baba and was given a warm embrace, a twinkle and a blessing.

MPS returned to us at Jabalpur and told us all that happened with him. "Did I not tell you not to bother about my desire to meet Baba in my own manner? See how He arranged it! He is definitely God, yet it is no joke to meet Him all alone. He gave me the chance but I could not for the worlds enter the hall."

"That's it, MPS," I said, "He is at once the slave of our love and the Master of our fate. Anyway hearty congratulations to you for this novel meeting."

Judge with a difference

Scandal mongering and back-biting, with a great many of us, is the greatest malicious pleasure that perverted ego can derive. We not only ascribe the most devilish acts to persons we know, but do the same with people about whom we have no direct knowledge. We are prone to judge everyone else except ourselves and practice mental cruelty in the name of being judicious critics. To defile or destroy someone's image is perhaps as bad or unkind an act as destroying someone by shooting him down physically, but the subtle shade of this offence conceals the damage we do to others as compared with physical assault. Very few are there who have the courage to own their faults and allow others to know of these.

A staunch Baba lover who passed away in 1984 was one such courageous man, and when I approached him in the sixties to know about his experiences with Baba, he told me of a few episodes of which I mention the first one, not only because it revealed his fearlessness in laying bare his own rather murky side of life. VY was a contractor. He was moving much with so-called spiritual people and he got addicted, as they were, to marijuana, the common intoxicating smoke of many self-deceiving seekers of God in India. His addiction, in the course of time, had become almost irremediable and in spite of strict excise laws and penalties, he had grown into the habit of carrying a lump of this stuff concealed in the folds of his clothes, in a box wherever he traveled. It was during this phase that VY was traveling from one state to another by bus. Needless to say, he had concealed a lump of marijuana in a steel box which was, along with the boxes and other luggage of all passengers, atop the bus, tied with ropes as is common in India. Only a few weeks back had he heard from someone about Meher Baba and had seen some literature and one photograph of Baba. He had liked the books of Baba and His sayings, but as yet he had not forged any deep or tangible spiritual relationship with Baba. In a small handbag he was carrying these pamphlets and photographs of Baba and enjoying the bus ride. Suddenly at an octroi post, some Excise Officials signaled the bus to stop. Soon, the atmosphere changed. These hardened men entered the bus and sternly demanded of the passengers if they were carrying anything not permitted (marijuana is on such a list) and if they were, it would be better that it should be revealed to them before the Officers found it themselves. They added that it would be both a penalty and a jail term for anyone found committing such an offense, according to the magnitude of the offense. VY turned pale and felt a lump rising in his throat. He was a respectable contractor and now his reputation was at stake if he was found carrying marijuana with him.

When no passenger said anything to the officers, they became angry. The lead officer told his companions that he would conduct a box-to-box search of all the goods on the roof of the bus, and would teach a hard lesson if he found anyone had lied to him. VY's heart sank as the officer and his companions took the conductor out and also ordered all the passengers to come out of the bus. No doubt, he meant business. No empty threats – there he was climbing the stairs to the roof of the bus. His followers called out the passengers one after another, seized the keys to their trunks from them one by one, and proceeded to search all boxes and bags for contraband.

As the boxes were being opened, searched and closed, and passenger after passenger was being called upon to surrender his or her key, VY was almost on the verge of a nervous collapse! Certainly, his turn would come and then the shame, the humiliation and the insult. His head swam. He would be arrested, fined, maybe even jailed! His picture and name would be in the

newspapers and his friends and acquaintances would read about him and the scandalmongers would delightfully add many more shady activities to him thereafter. VY trembled.

Suddenly, he thought of Baba. His friend had told him that Baba was God in human form and God, VY thought, can forgive if a man sincerely repents and prays for forgiveness. "Well, Baba, if you rescue me this time, I shall never again carry marijuana or do anything illegal in my life. Pray, save my prestige for once."

As he was praying, the officer was calling out passenger after passenger, while relentlessly searching for a trophy that might get him credits from his department. No, not yet, but persist he must, and he did persist like duty personified. Almost all passengers' boxes had been examined, and only a few were left. VY was surprised that he had not been summoned as yet. But then, surely he was going to be in a short while. He prayed with trembling voice to Baba. The last but one passenger had handed over his keys to the officer, and now the last passenger to be summoned was VY himself. What would happen? "Oh God, oh Baba, why have I done such a thing? What would the punishment be? Can't you save me for once? They say you are God, all knowing, all compassionate, and though you judge, yet you forgive us when we realize our mistake and try not to repeat it. Pray help! Pray help!"

And to the utter amazement of VY, suddenly the Excise Officer's face so long stern and inflexible, relaxed. He got up and said, "Well, nothing worth the labours! Let's get down. Maybe we shall be more lucky with the next bus." As he and his companions climbed down off the roof of the bus, VY saw with a shudder that the Officer had all the while been sitting on his box, and had failed to open it because he had thought of it as a seat, not a box.

As the bus continued on to its destination, VY wondered why the officer forgot to open his box, and further still, of all boxes why did he choose to sit on his box! Was it just a coincidence, just a chance, or was it because he had prayed to the God-man Meher Baba? Like an honest man, VY told me, "Well, I could not say with total conviction what it was – a chance or a situation created by Meher Baba to save me after hearing my prayers. I was not acquainted to any appreciable degree with Him at that time."

"Yes, you are right, VY. But now that you have been acquainted with Him for the last twenty years or more, what is your opinion about Him?"

VY laughed. "I have found it out during all these years that Meher Baba knows everything. I have also found out that if I went wrong anywhere, after I had begun to love Him, He had soon enough brought me to my shortcomings, but how great is He, do you know? The moment you repent and promise to try never to repeat the offence, He showers His forgiveness on you. Indeed, He is the Judge with a difference!"

36. AT THE TOLL-BAR OF HEAVEN

(Mercy) ... "is an attribute of God himself ... in the course of justice none of us should see salvation."—
Shakespeare (The Merchant of Venice)

One of the most common utterances in the world is "Excuse me!" One of the rarest utterances in the world is "Let's excuse him!" In this, I humbly take my seat among the multitude. I find it hard to forgive others for the insult or injury they have caused me. I feel like annihilating them, although I know my lack of power to do so and therefore, I generally arm myself with a smile while I grind my teeth and I say with extreme sweetness "Let us forget the thing, okay? No more of that, please don't mention it again." The other one, who I feel is the worst person in the world, is led to think that I am a truly noble soul and the thing gets patched up with the cement of hypocrisy. But when I make a mistake, or harm someone to a considerable extent, I quickly go up to the altar of the Divine Being and pray to Him to protect and forgive me. I salute those rare persons who are not like me. Here, then, is the story of my offence in late 1962 and the interesting events that followed.

Meher Baba had given me certain instructions and wanted me to obey Him with utmost sincerity. One of those instructions was, "Do not strike anyone with anger or hatred," adding that Baba was Himself present in other persons, which in other words meant that if I beat them it would be indirectly hurting Baba Himself. Now, when the instruction came, I felt a big intellectual jolt. In this world, people are always trying to be up against you. At some point, a situation may arise that needs one to be either on the offensive or on the defensive. At such a time, the ability to carry out a physical response is a big asset. To be constrained not to strike, in spite of being intensely provoked, would expose oneself to all the assaults of the world.

The question bred another question. Suppose I become non-violence personified, would Baba protect me in any such situation that threatens to be dangerous to me? In short, the instruction kept me brooding and uneasy, and frankly I could not, at the age of 31, totally accept its validity in the practical field of life. Was He trying to make a martyr of me, or what?

Well, from youth, I rather was brought up with an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth sort of attitude. Here, Baba had presented an ordeal for me – for my ego – and it was as difficult to digest the instruction as to digest the flesh of a tiger. But much though I wished to write to Baba and find out if He literally meant what He said or allowed a latitude for modification in special cases, I could not write to Him, because I had seen enough of His ways of working by that time to know that He wouldn't want me to demand explanations! I had to sort the problem out for myself, as and when trouble should arise, only consulting Him if a special case should arise.

Thus some three years passed, and the order was unbroken, because no situation had arisen to challenge it. Then in 1962 the challenge came in right earnest. I was getting thoroughly exasperated with someone for always contradicting me and then a day really came when I could contain myself no longer and broke Baba's order by dealing out a hearty blow to that person.

After the deed, for a moment, I felt as if the world was standing still. It was not the blow, not the person who withdrew, not the question of justice or action or otherwise, but only one point that gnawed at my heart, "You have broken Baba's order, who loves you so much and has shown such compassion on you. You have not done a good thing. Go and seek Baba's forgiveness in

person.” The feeling grew more and more intense as the day passed and I was on the breaking point by the evening. I could not remain in Jabalpur for a moment more. I knew that Baba was in Poona but was not allowing us to see Him. But the desire to tell Him of my disobedience and the desire to obtain His forgiveness made me restless to the point that I took my traveling kit and boarded the train for Poona just in order to be forgiven.

The train sped forward but it was nearly 700 miles to Poona. I tried to comfort myself but misgivings were lodged in my heart and I was not sure if I would be able to gain His forgiveness. Had I not read in several books how much emphasis He had laid on implicit obedience? He had told His devotees that when they break orders specially given to them, they interfere with His Work – the great good work He is doing for the universe. None would wish to hinder His work instead of helping it. As this work included working for our own spiritual beauty and perfection, it was also self-damaging.

The next day I reached Poona and went to a Dharamshala⁵⁸ near the station. The following morning I had planned to go to Guruprasad to meet Baba and seek His forgiveness. I began to get ready. I went to the toilet, which had a huge, massive wooden door with a ridiculously small latch inside to close it. Well, when I had finished, I rose to open the door. The latch opened but not the door. Due to rains or something it had swollen to a degree that it got almost fixed to the doorframe. I tried and tried to open the door by tugging on the latch, but it did not move. In desperation, I tied the latch to the cord that held up my loose trousers and tugged hard. The cord broke and the impact resulting in a cut on my finger, which started bleeding.

In alarm, I surveyed the toilet. It was small, ill-ventilated, stuffy and suddenly the idea came to me that Baba was punishing me for hitting that person in Jabalpur and perhaps He intends that I be locked in here for hours. The dharamshala was nearly empty and there were many toilets around. I thought to shout very loudly for assistance, but first I tried to open the door again. It continued to be immovable, like destiny itself—grim and awful. “Oh Baba, surely you don’t want me to die here in fright by getting choked,” I cried. Then I heard someone at the tap at some distance. The swoosh of water made me jump up. I cried myself hoarse – “Please, whoever you are, come and open this jammed door for me.” To my relief I heard footsteps advancing towards the toilet door. Bang, bang, bang, and at last the door opened. To my shame, I saw that it was a lady who had performed this “beau geste” for me. I thanked her and went back to my room to dress, but the experience had left me quite shaken and unnerved. From then till now, whenever I have to go to a toilet, I first carefully examine the door, the latch, the hinges and also ascertain whether the toilet would let me out without much toil and would not frighten me as that one did.

That was the inauspicious prelude, and it made me feel my guilt for having broken Baba’s orders very keenly. Whether Baba had a hand in it or not, it was as if some cosmic law had started extracting the penalty for my offence, not a very comfortable feeling!

After about half an hour or so, I set out for Guruprasad bungalow where Baba was staying. Soon I was at the gate of the bungalow. It was closed from within and Baidul, one of Baba’s stalwart devotees, was posted to prevent any infiltration. The moment I greeted him, his face, which had always responded in a sweet and mild manner, now turned red in anger. He sternly asked me why I had come when Baba was not giving interviews to anyone. The stern and

⁵⁸ Charitable guest-house

almost heartless manner in which he told me to go back at once made me wince. Was he the same Baidul or was he only speaking like that because Baba the Omniscient One inside Guruprasad might have prompted him to do so? Instead of the endearing "Jai Baba, Amiyakumar, how do you do, etc.," he told me that I was disobedient and he would have none of me, and I had better leave the place immediately. In desperation I exclaimed, "But Baidul, I have come all the way from Jabalpur to see Him!"

"But why? Why on earth have you come?"

"Because I have made a mistake. I broke one of His orders and have come to seek His forgiveness."

"And now by coming, you have broken another order of Baba that no one should visit Him during His seclusion unless He calls that person. So don't argue, simply go back."

"Please open the gate!"

"No, I can't do that! You have broken Baba's order. You reap the consequences. Go and don't disturb me."

So saying, Baidul started moving away when suddenly I felt a strange sensation in the hand with which I had hit the person in Jabalpur. It became limp and dangled by my shoulder as if it was just an artificial limb. In panic I screamed, and Baidul turned back. I told him in a pitiable voice that my arm was limp and perhaps I was getting a paralytic stroke.

He, my friend who had formerly behaved so genially, now had the harshest reply to make, "If it is so, go to a hospital. There is nothing here for you. Go!" I saw Baidul going back to the porch of Guruprasad in the most nonchalant manner. And there I was, suddenly realizing that breaking Baba's order was not child's play and not inconsequential, and it could mean as much as total estrangement from Him. I began to weep, tears rolling down my cheeks, chasing one another, as did the cars and buses on the street beside me. Baidul was gone inside the bungalow. There I was, with one hand limp, heart breaking with sorrow at Baidul's behaviour, and head unable to bear the idea of having been given up by the ever-compassionate Meher Baba because of one mistake. I do not remember how long I wept, how long the agony lasted, but suddenly I felt a strange conviction surging up in my heart like a wave in a mighty ocean! It was the conviction of Baba's inability to give up loving His children, however wrong and wayward they might be at times. Yes, Baba, the all-merciful, all-forgiving one has to remain Baba for all times to come, and He has to pick up every lost lamb in His loving arms and pat it and drive away its fear. In other words, I felt sure that Baba would not give me up, for that would mean more than death.

"No, no, Baba you cannot drive me away from your Heart. You simply can't, whatever Baidul says. You will have to call me, forgive me and love me and give me a fresh lease on life!"

Just as I was thinking and feeling like that, I saw another Mandali man coming down the porch towards the gate. He opened the gate and simply said, "Come in, Amiya, Baba wants to see you." I at once entered the gate, tears still rolling down my cheeks, my feet faltering at every other step. I was not quite myself. I felt like a boat broken by the blast and the impact of hitting a submerged rock. But then I was led by this man into the presence of Baba, who was seated with His Mandali and a few who had been specially summoned by Him.

Baba looked at me. Never had I seen that dazzling silver-like appearance on His face. It used to be soft pink or golden, but this time it shone like the brazen shield of a lancer. The eyes, instead of beaming a smile or love were flashing black and seemed to sparkle with tremendous annoyance only controlled by His own power to do so. I broke into a fresh flood of tears when I saw such displeasure on Baba's countenance. Then breaking the awful silence in the hall, His gesture was translated by Sri Eruch in as stern a manner as was His look, "Why did you hit? Was it not My order to you that you should not hit anyone with hatred or anger?"

I only wept. No words.

"Now you break another order by coming here without My permission. And you seek forgiveness for all this disobedience."

"Baba, please forgive me," I cried and rushed to His feet and placed my head there. A minute or so passed, then I felt two soft, delicate hands pick me up. They were Baba's. He looked with the same old love in His eyes with which He had greeted me during my first darshan. Then He patted my head, kissed my cheeks and in a moment the whole atmosphere changed. It was as if invisible angels of music were playing at their harps and the drying buds freshened and opened up with beauty and fragrance at the sudden break of rains.

I looked up at my Divine Father.

He keenly gazed into my eyes and said, "Amiya, you are dear to me and I forgive you, but do not repeat the mistake – be obedient. Remember, if you again break my orders, I shall not forgive you."

A few minutes more were needed to feel relaxed and I knew that I had gotten out of the straits. The following conversation ensued.

Baba: "Are you relaxed, Amiya?"

Me: "Yes, Baba, I am."

Baba (to others): "Amiya is very dear to me. Only he does not obey me! He is, you know what? My problem child!"

Everyone around seemed to laugh at this. I too felt happy that Baba owned His problem child as much as He would His angelic ones, and that was all I needed in the world!

"Amiya, today I have a special programme for you all. Music! Hira Bai Barodekar⁵⁹ is coming in the evening to sing. You can come to attend the programme and now you may go." Baba gestured me to rise and go to Him for a second embrace.

When I came out of the hall, I felt good. I went to a hotel to take some milk and snacks. I was happy in the knowledge that Baba had not forsaken me. While I was taking the snacks, I suddenly became conscious that the hand that had become limp was now active and strong, as if nothing had happened to it. I began to wonder. Was it a psychological development or was it Baba's way of teaching me a lesson that I should not hit people with hands that are meant to work for Him? Well, I leave the issue to wiser judges than I and return to my hotel with my

⁵⁹ Famous ghazal, bhajan and classical singer – an All-India great body of music. Her voice was incredibly beautiful and all lovers of classical music and devotional songs in India know her name.

readers. It was about 12 noon. I had too much emotional stress and strain in the morning and I felt exhausted.

Suddenly, a thought came in my mind. Baba had said that He had forgiven me this time, but He shall not forgive me if I broke His order again. "What does that boil down to?" I mused. Does it not mean that I was out only of the immediate crisis, but not of all the possible failures and their consequences in the future? How could I feel so stupidly happy and complacent when there were years to live and many provoking situations to face? What was the guarantee that I, who had broken His order once, would not do so again when driven out of bounds of tolerance? Yes, I did not command infinite patience. Rather I was more impatient than many. The idea of future failures and their consequences now oppressed me. The problem seemed to regain its grimness. I was feeling more and more worried as time passed by and by the time I reached Guruprasad at 3:50 PM for the music programme, I was really worried. As I entered the hall, Baba smiled and bade me sit down. There were some forty or fifty persons there.

Suddenly, Baba began to gesture to the people, "Now, you all know Amiya Kumar. He is very intelligent and he loves Me. Amiya, I do hope you are no longer worrying?"

"Baba, I am more worried now than before!"

"Baba registered a look of surprise. "Why? Have I not forgiven you? Why must you worry any more?"

"Baba, you said that you shan't forgive me if I again broke your orders and that wrecks all my peace of mind. I am not sure of myself. I may again make a mistake and if you do not forgive me then – then it would be better to die now!"

Baba looked all around at His devotees. Silence prevailed for a few moments. Then Baba began, "What does Amiya want me to do? Can someone tell?"

One person sitting close to me said, "Baba I think that he wants You to go on forgiving him for all the mistakes he may go on making."

I felt like eating up the man like a raw onion. Was that the way to explain my condition? But, he had said it and now I had to face Baba.

"Amiya, is it exactly like that?"

"Yes, Baba," I said desperately with my throat choking with emotion. "I want to be forgiven – to be owned by You. Whether I am worthy of being loved or not – You simply love me Baba please, for whatever I am – please always love me."

A wonderful light came upon Baba's beautiful face – although His eyes still wore the look of being intrigued. "What does Amiya want? Is it not surprising?"

"Yes, Baba," somebody said.

Baba turned His full face towards me. In it was the steady and inextinguishable flame of love. He looked at me and then gestured, with Eruch interpreting "Amiya, Baba says that you don't have to worry from now onwards. Baba has permanently forgiven you." Baba's hand rose – He emphatically made a gesture. Again Sri Eruch interpreted, "Kaayam Key liya maaf!"⁶⁰ A

⁶⁰ "Permanently forgiven"

murmur of surprise rose in the hall. No one perhaps had exactly anticipated the last limits of compassion that Baba could shower.

As for me, I felt I was the happiest and most relaxed man on earth. I went up to Baba and touched His feet. Baba said, "Amiya is so intelligent – so loving – only he worries too much. Now Amiya, do you promise Me not to worry?" It was as if my worry was something that the God-man, who bore all the suffering of the world, could not bear!

"Yes, Baba, I am without worry now. You are mine and I am Yours."

"Amiya is my son – but in spite of being a scholar he has one screw loose in his head." The audience giggled at this.

I sort of pleaded with Baba, "Why don't You tighten that loose screw, Baba?"

Baba's face acquired an expression of comic dejection. "How can I do that? Keeping your company My own screws are getting loosened!" People laughed. I tried to join them. Then Baba finally gestured to us to go to the main hall of Guruprasad where HB was to arrive to give a session of devotional music to Baba and the Mandali – a respite from the incessant Universal work that the Silent One was doing in His own unfathomable manner.

We filed out of the room to the hall and took our seats thereon. After some time HB came. Her devotional songs and love for Baba made us spell-bound. Baba blessed her. It was time for us too to take His leave. One after one we went up to Baba. My turn came – He touched my head reassuringly – and I kissed His feet. Then I boarded the train back for Jabalpur.

Just now, I remembered one sentence that Baba had said that evening, and which was forgotten because of the forgetting nature of a selfish ego. "I have permanently forgiven you, Amiya, but that does not mean that you should willfully go on breaking my instructions"

And I had said to Him, "I understand, Baba, I will try my best, however weak I am, to obey your instructions."

In 1985, can I say that I have tried my best to obey Him? I know that I haven't.

37. 'SHORT AND BITTER'

"One word is too often profaned for me to profane it ..." – Shelley

Readers who had gone through the previous chapter might well be curious to know what other orders Meher Baba had given me and what was their fate in my incapable hands. Of all the orders a very important order to me was not to touch any woman with lustful motives; the only exception to the rule was to be my wife. As I was a bachelor, the order was almost like a double-lock system. It made me so wary that I had to see that I was not coming in physical touch of any woman that might provoke lust in me. In buses, in trains, in College, at homes of friends and relatives, in cinema halls, everywhere, I had to see to it that I did not let go the hold of the reins of this tremendous discipline Baba had imposed on me.

A very interesting situation arose during one of my train journeys from Bhopal to Jabalpur. I was seated on a nearly empty train bench in the carriage and was going through a novel when the train halted at a station and a bridal party entered the carriage, nearly filling it. One of the girls, aged about eighteen, well-dressed, wearing a nosegay and silver anklets as some Indian newly-weds wear, came up and sat on the seat just in front of me. But that would hardly have mattered. She raised her feet and placed them on mine, perhaps to relax! The book nearly fell from my hand at this strange situation. I withdrew my feet immediately and placed them at a different angle to prevent further touching. But the lady, as if possessed by the devil himself, shuffled her feet and again touched mine with them and kept them almost pressed on mine.

I forgot the novel and alarm seized me. What was she doing? Why was she doing it? Did she want me to be thrown out of the carriage window by her hefty male relatives? But why? We had never met. We had neither the common love nor the common enmity to justify such an act. I looked around uncomfortably at her relatives. Yes, they had noticed the activities of the lady and clearly frowned at her and at me. Did they suspect us of any former clandestine friendship? My God, what would be the outcome of all this? As always, I racked my brain to consider all possible ways out of this fix, and only then considered asking for Meher Baba's help. I slowly tried to disengage my feet from hers, and started taking Baba's name and called out to Him to save me from the awful situation.

Nothing seemed to happen. The moment I removed my feet from under her feet, she rose and deliberately sat by my side as if to challenge and infuriate those accompanying her. Till today, I don't know why she was doing all that. Was it possible that they were forcibly taking her away? Indeed, they looked like a rude bunch – tall, gaunt, and fierce. But how was I concerned, and what could I do to save her against such a band even if my fears were true. But no – I was not to be concerned about her so much as about Baba's orders – and the soft, delicate feet adorned with silver anklets was to be dreaded as the hood of a cobra. But now she was by my side, almost leaning on my shoulders. The eyes of her relatives became visibly angry. But, thanks to Meher Baba, the train reached another station and halted with a jerk. The stentorian voice of the eldest of the male companions of the lady rang out, "Let us get out of this carriage and get into a more spacious one." He ordered and, one after another, all the members including that lady left the carriage. The carriage became as nearly empty as before. I breathed a sigh of relief as the train started. I blessed myself for the gentle riddance of the lady and her companions. I thanked Baba for two things, because He had saved me twice in this affair – firstly, from the woman who appeared to be trying to get closer to me, and secondly from the situation itself, which appears

as though it might have ended in trouble, misery, humiliation and danger. But the situation had been averted only because I sincerely wanted it to be averted and sincerely prayed to Baba to help me get out of it.

In later years, I had one occasion when, confident of being able to carry out His order, I almost became proud of my virtue with respect to this order, to the extent of briefly believing that the order had done its job, and now I would be free to ignore it, since I had conquered the battle with lust for women. As a result, I fell off my guard and was unshielded by Baba's name. The consequences were dire for me, dear reader. You will only realize the importance of this if you give Baba importance, and through that importance give importance to His order, whatever your feelings about free, unlicensed entertainment. However, as I do expect you, if not to share my feelings about obeying Baba, at least to bear with me as a friend would do, I briefly relate the incident here.

I was never so foolish in my life as at that time. I forgot Baba, I forgot home and relatives, I forgot my own name and honour – and felt greatly drawn to a kind woman, who was very good to me and perhaps didn't intend anything more than kindness towards me. But as time advanced, I felt a kind of addiction, as though I could not live without her. And then came the jolt! She frankly made it clear that she could live without me! I was shocked in the extreme. The way she showed her indifference to me was not only painful but also a great eye-opener. I retreated into my ego-shell and began to consider the whole thing all over again. Was it possible that I loved her so sincerely without being able to evoke a like response? And if this was possible, then why try to love any woman again? Why not have done with it once and for all?

I remembered Baba. Yes, I had shelved Him away for all these months for the sake of a wild goose chase. I took up His photographs and memories of His deep love came back to me. I opened the scores of letters that had come from Him to me, all dishing out unadulterated love to me, always wishing me well, and expressing care for me. He was the only one worthy of being loved worthy of staking one's heart upon. He would never break it, but would fill it with His own inimitable love that was the finest and most sublime experience. From that day I knew the difference between the vain, egoistic infatuations between man and woman and the real, invaluable and everlasting attachment between man and the God-man. I forgot my initial frustration and wholeheartedly thanked Baba for terminating that episode, which might have become more complex, more involving and more hurtful if allowed to go on for a longer period. The jolt that came early was like the sting of a bee – it could have been the sting of a viper, had the jolt come at a later stage when my emotions might have totally overpowered my mind and my heart. I might then have had no other recourse left except to commit suicide as so many unfortunate victims of such infatuations do. Now, who saved me? Well, I have no hesitation in saying that it was definitely Baba's order given to me a dozen years back that saved me, and I feel grateful to Him for rescuing me from what afterwards could have been the most gruesome disaster.

38. THE THREE SAINTS OF VARANASI

Meher Baba was well known for His fathomless love not only for an ordinary defaulter like me, but also to those who were genuine seekers and lovers of God – the saints, sadhus, the masts and the mendicants. He went from place to place picking them up and contacting them giving them motherly care and attention. If He was at one moment devoutly bathing a leper and feeding him and helping him with medicines, at another He was traversing hundreds of miles on foot to almost inaccessible places to meet a sage or a mast and bathe their skin unwashed for years and feed them. These masts had become oblivious of the worldly concerns in their all-absorbing love for God and longing to unite with Him. Baba never liked any of us to belittle any saint or for that matter any person and always told us rather to devote our time in discovering our own shortcomings and weeding them out than to waste it in the “dustbin research” of other personalities. No one, according to Baba, was a statue, but a dynamic being undergoing a continuous evolution of consciousness and purification as well as rarification of *sanskaras*, a process going on with all creatures, sped up by the Perfect Ones and in a marked degree by the God-man or Avatar. As such, He told us often that sinners were His liabilities and saints were His assets and that He was continuously at the task of converting His liabilities into His assets. It was indeed impossible not to be uninfluenced by the immeasurable nobility that graced Baba’s personality, not to become conscious of our own egoistic ulcers and not to try to get rid of the festering sores after coming in His contact.

Nevertheless, Baba for very important spiritual reasons had told those who were in His contact not to run after saints and sages or disturb masts. He told us that they were His children and like us they were under His spiritual care and guidance on the path. Running after them might cause us to leave the heartfelt remembrance of Beloved Baba, which afforded us rock-like safety and protection. The great saint Keshavanandji Maharaj of Rishikesh had met with Pleader, one of Baba’s Mandali. The saint had told Pleader not to run here and there for spiritual guides but return to Meher Baba who, the saint said, could see the whole of India at a glance!⁶¹

Gopinath Kaviraj

Now to my story. Ordinarily, I was not interested in any spiritual adventures outside Baba’s fold. But an interesting incident took place in my life that made me come into contact with not one but three saints of India, all residing in Varanasi. It was the mid-sixties. My nephew had come from Varanasi in search of a job at MP Electricity Board. I accompanied him to the head office and to our great delight he was offered a post at Korba Power Station, which he accepted. By the time I reached home with my nephew “R,” it was almost 4 PM. We were late for lunch by three hours, but we thought it was better to have a late lunch than to go without eating. As eating was progressing in a jolly mood, I suddenly heard an inner prompting that was quite intense. It said, “Go to Gopinath Kaviraj and give him the book *The Everything and the Nothing*.” Now, this was a recently-published book, a compilation of Meher Baba’s messages

⁶¹ Keshavanandji is mentioned in *Glimpses of the God-Man* Volume I (Bal Natu), in *The Wayfarers*, and in Bhau Kalchuri’s *Lord Meher* (www.lordmeher.org, page 1602-1603).

done by His lovers in Australia. As we went on eating, the prompting became more and more intense. I had not seen Gopinath Kaviraj, but I had read a description of that illustrious scholar and saint of Varanasi in a serial entitled “Bardhaky Varanasi.”⁶² The author, Sri Neelkanth, had eulogized the saint unequivocally. But that was all I knew about this saint. The other story in that book was about Sri Kalipada Guharoy or Kalipada Maharaj, another very great saint about to whose extraordinary powers Sri Neelkanth had made a few references and which had impressed me. But all that had not developed any interest in me to contact them, as after reading *The Wayfarers* I had almost accepted the fact that there were, as Baba had told, thousands of advanced Yogis, Tantrics, masts, etc., who have attained power over material phenomena. But what was happening to me that afternoon at 4:30 PM? The inner prompting went on gaining such indomitable power that I felt as if someone was really pushing me from Jabalpur to go to Varanasi, some twelve hours journey by train, to give Meher Baba’s book to Sri Gopinath Kaviraj. A chain of arguments and counter-arguments cropped up in my mind as the evening shades closed in upon me. “Why should I feel such desire to give him – especially him – Baba’s book and especially no other book but *The Everything and the Nothing*? Secondly, why should I have to go hundreds of miles to do it? Why can’t I send the book by registered post even if I obey the inner prompting? Why go personally? Thirdly, what would my relatives think of me, a college lecturer, behaving in such an eccentric manner as to spend a hundred rupees to give someone a book costing eight or ten rupees?”

As the time ticked on, I became more and more restless because there was no change in the inner voice within me – no modification. It kept on prompting “Go to Gopinath Kaviraj and give him the book *The Everything and the Nothing*!” The worst part of the case was that although I had the money to go to Varanasi, and I knew that Raju Mukherjee would gladly accompany me, it being his home town, yet, where was the book? I did not have a copy of it! By 8 PM, I thought that I must make a decision in favour of the inner prompting, however irrational it might be according to my college degrees. I must rush to Baba devotees to see if anyone has a copy of that book, get the railway tickets, pack my clothes and Raju’s too, and leave for the railway station by 10 PM. To my relief, I got the book from YLM, the first man I met, and to my delight it was a brand-new copy that he had just bought and had not gone through yet. I insisted on buying it from him there and then, and when he wanted to know why was I in such hot haste about it, I desisted from telling him because I was afraid that all the people who would listen to me would either tell me to refrain from such a stupid obedience to the so-called inner prompting or tell me not to go to Varanasi but send the book by post. So, I thought better not to tell anyone about my plans. But, at home it was a tough time indeed. My relatives got shocked and irritated when they found me leaving for Varanasi without any valid or important reason. I had no time to pacify them, and to explain things, for that would have been detrimental to my mission. I quickly packed my things and slipped out of the house, not without overhearing a desperate remark from my relatives that I was losing my head and it was a mad thing indeed! Well, by midnight, the train steamed in at Jabalpur station and we boarded it. The mission had started, a funny one at a glance, but how spiritually significant I was to learn only a day later.

My brother-in-law Abanipati Mukherjee greeted me with great warmth and when I asked him where Sri Gopinathjee resided, he gave me his complete address and instructed Raju to escort

⁶² “Varanasi for the old-aged”

me. In the evening I entered the compound of a building at Sagra, which was very quiet and had a remarkably peaceful atmosphere around. At the steps of the verandah appeared a calm and self-possessed gentleman who seemed to be the secretary of Sri Gopinathjee. He asked me who I was, from where I had come and what was the purpose of my visit. When I told him all, he very politely told me that due to physical indisposition Sri Gopinathjee had not been meeting people for quite some time and I had taken some sort of risk by coming without a prior intimation and appointment. I agreed that he was right. Nevertheless, I requested him just to ask the great saint if he was not unwilling to grant me just two minutes' meeting. The gentleman mused for a while, then decided to try. He went inside the bungalow. After a minute he came back and told me brightly that Sri Gopinath would meet us and that I may at once go into his room. I felt a bit excited as we entered the room in which the saint was seated on a hard, wooden bed – the very picture of silence and equanimity. We wanted to prostrate before him, which is the tradition in India while meeting a saint. But, he withdrew his legs and told us not to touch his feet.

Then he asked me why I had come. I tried to explain in a few words the feeling I had the previous evening to bring him Meher Baba's book *The Everything and the Nothing* and that urge had made me come all the way from Jabalpur with the book. I produced the book from my bag and gave it to him. The great saint was visibly moved. He said, "Meher Baba is wonderful! Only a few days back I had seen this book with Dr. Khare of B.H.U. (University) and I very much wanted to read it. And now you are here with the book." A few moments of silence seemed necessary to appreciate Baba's love for this saint and also His unique way of working. Then he keenly looked at me and said, "Go to the corridor and see what is there on the wall." Raju and I filed out of the room and looked at the corridor leading to the saint's room. There we found a beautiful photograph of Meher Baba!

"Have you seen it?" he asked when we reentered.

"Yes," we replied.

"I have had Baba's darshan at Poona. He is wonderful," he said.

Two minutes had gone by so I said, "I am so happy to have met you. Please, if you don't let me touch your feet, at least give me a blessing." Gopinathjee raised his hand and said, in a solemn voice that rings in my ears even now, "May your faith and mind always remain constantly fixed to Meher Baba's feet." Perhaps no greater blessing and wish could gladden my heart than the one Sri Gopinath had given. Faith and mind are the most shaky things in the world. One can never be sure of anything, however tall one's claims to fidelity might be, and to be steadfast in devotion to one you adore in spite of the whole world deserting you, or humiliating you, is a tough job indeed. Both calamity and prosperity are great tests of your love for the God-man. Sri Gopinathjee, being a true saint, gave me the truest blessing that a saint could give. I hope that at that moment Meher Baba said "Amen" to this utterance, for He did and does love His problem child, does He not?

We left the room with bowed heads and thanked the secretary for his cordiality. When he learned that we had come to give a book of Meher Baba to Sri Gopinath, he was very interested. He told me that if I had more books left over with me, I could as well go to the great Tantric saint Sri Kalipada Maharaj who, according to him was the greatest sadhak of Shuddha Tantra, the greatest Yogi in India, ever since Sri Aurobindo had passed away. "You will not find him

wearing ochre robes and all that. He wears a loin cloth, a shirt and a coat, a muffler and goes on smoking. Don't be led astray by all those untraditional things. He is great in the truest sense of the word. He is a mighty Yogi."

I nodded my head in assent and told him that I had already read about Kalipada Maharaj's miraculous powers in a serial. The secretary then graciously gave us Sri Kalipada's address and added, "You can tell that you have been directed from here to meet him." I profusely thanked him and we parted.

"How I wonder what you are"

The following day, Raju and I went to the bungalow with a long verandah in which Sri Kalipada Maharaj resided. As usual, the private secretary came out and asked me the same questions I had been asked when I had visited Sri Gopinath Maharaj. Again the response was not without a hitch in his voice, "You came all the way from Jabalpur without an appointment and I am not sure if Sri Maharaj will see you now."

"Please try to explain to him," I murmured.

"I was directed by the secretary of Sri Gopinathjee." The secretary softened and said, "Well, I shall try, but I can't guarantee the results."

I was taking Baba's name, while the door opened and the secretary came and told us that Sri Kalipada had agreed to see us. "Please leave that leather bag outside," he told Raju. So we took out the booklets and asked him if we could take them in; he gave his assent. We entered a middle-sized room with a row of chairs facing a wooden cot on which sat the Yogi in the dress and posture that Sri Gopinathjee's secretary had told us to expect.

He was puffing away on a cigarette. When he looked at me, I could not but gasp for a while because I had not seen exactly that sort of pair of eyes before. They were big and shot out light like the eyes of some denizen of the forest. Except those tremendously powerful eyes, nothing seemed to tell us that he differed from the common man. In correct English, he returned our salutation, but the moment we tried to touch his feet, he covered them with a sheet of cloth called chaddar⁶³ and told us not to do it. He then said, "Please take a chair and tell me what has made you come to me?" I briefly told him that I had read about him in a magazine, that the secretary of Sri Gopinathjee had reinforced my feelings about him by asking me to contact him as one of the greatest Yogis, and finally that I, being an humble devotee of Meher Baba, had thought it proper to hand over to him some booklets containing Baba's discourses.

A palpable mark of warmth and affection appeared on his face. He lit up another cigarette and said, "Do you know the life history of Meher Baba?"

"To some extent, yes, I do," I replied.

"Well then, narrate the life story to me."

"Kalipada Maharaj, I am afraid it may be a long tale and might consume much of your time."

"Do not bother about time. Take all the time you need." Then he called his secretary and told him that no one was to enter the room till our meeting was over.

⁶³ A bedsheet

“Yes,” he once again looked at me with his diamond-like eyes, “Commence the tale.”

“Would you prefer it to be in English?” I ventured to ask.

“Why not? Begin.” And he sat in a concentrated mood to hear the tale.

Never before had I faced an ordeal of this sort. It was not talking to the masses about Baba but to a great spiritual pilgrim, a man whose scholarship and spiritual attainments had elicited appreciation from persons like Gopinathjee himself. Well, I inwardly prayed to Baba to help me, and began from the story of Baba’s father in Persia who sought God, sacrificing all worldly comforts and facing untold hardships from the tender age of about fourteen. As the story progressed, I found myself forgetting my initial inhibitions and extraneous considerations such as whether what I was relating was interesting to the saint. He steadfastly looked at me, lighting cigarette after cigarette, not speaking a word, and as for Raju he was glued to his seat, almost transfixed for want of any other activity to do. I guess it must have been nearly one hour and a quarter when I came up to the mid-nineteen-sixties of the tale, and naturally there it had to end, for I did not know what Baba would be doing in the succeeding years!

A moment of silence reigned, and then Kalipada Maharaj said, “Good! Now you will do one thing for me. When you write to Baba, convey my Shashtang Pranam⁶⁴ to Him.”

I was startled beyond words. I had met Baba so many times, but had never prostrated myself in that manner and here was one of the foremost saints of India offering such a salutation!

“Please do remember my words. Shashtang Pranam,” Kalipada Maharaj reminded me.

“I will definitely do as you bid,” I said with great emotion.

Suddenly Raju, who had been silent all the while, broke in. “You have seen Baba, then, haven’t you?”

Kalipada Maharaj’s eyes shone like brilliant stars. “Yes, I see Him, but not in the same way as you do!” There was a complete hush after that powerfully-delivered sentence.

Suddenly, the inner door opened and we found cups of tea, sweets and snacks being brought for us. Oh how loving Kalipada Maharaj was insisting that I should eat all my share. I felt drawn to him in love. Then while eating the sweets and drinking the tea, I remarked that only the truly great ones could know the majesty of Baba.

“I feel blessed to have met you,” I said, and then just as I had done in the residence of Gopinathjee Maharaj I said, “You have not allowed me to touch your feet. At least give me a word of blessing that might help me.” With great sweetness he looked at me and to my surprise he said the same thing that Gopinathjee had said, “May your faith in Baba forever remain steadfast and make your mind remain chained to His feet.”

We rose. Never shall I forget Kalipada Maharaj, the saint and seer who knew what our limited intellects would crash in the attempt to know – and his wonderful love for Baba. What were these two great saints teaching me? To love Baba, the only one worthy of worship, to surrender to Baba, the only one worthy of our surrender, by their own example. And what was Baba teaching me? Baba had shown me more of His real lovers. These ones, though not in His

⁶⁴ An act of prostration at the feet of a Master in perfectly horizontal position upon the earth, denoting complete surrenderance.

physical proximity, inwardly loved Him while not making an ostentatious show of their devotion. But the story and not yet ended for I had to meet yet another saint of Varanasi.

He was last but not the least

At home my elderly brother-in-law heard about my adventures and he remarked, "Now you may give some of the Baba-booklets to yet another great, great tantric Saint, Taranand Avadhoot, whose mysterious powers are well known to many, including me. I shall give you his address."

I opened my bag, and found a few booklets left and one photograph in which Baba photos ranging from childhood up to the 1960s had been composed in a montage. Well, I thought the material was not adequate, but better than nothing, and I agreed to meet Sri Taranand Avadhoot.

As the evening hour drew close, we were heading for his residence. The disciple who met me did not take much time to ask the great tantric if he permitted my admission. Raju and I went into a hall-like room, where he was seated on a bed with a white sheet on it. Under the cot was a bowl full of red solution of sandalwood, used by tantrics in their spiritual practice. Taranandji was aged, but he had a commanding face. As I proceeded, he nearly startled me by saying, "Stop where you are, keep standing and don't move!" I stood like a soldier turned into a statue at the order of his officer. More than a minute passed – Taranand Avadhoot was peering into my eyes so intensely that I felt helpless. I remembered Baba in alarm. Then that awful period passed and he relaxed. "I am seeing a spiritual aura around you." I said nothing to that, for he was seeing what Baba must have been showing him, I being utterly incompetent a chap in the path of spirituality. I then took his permission to deliver the photograph and booklets to him. He looked at them, then said, "I know Meher Baba." Then he took the photograph and for a long time looked at it, his eyes moving from one pose to another. No speeches were exchanged. I did not know what to do. A bit shaky, I wished that nothing strange should happen, as my brother-in-law had led me to believe might happen. Well, Baba heard my prayer and Taranand Avadhoot said, "I and X had given Baba our adoration and reverential reception at (woe to my memory for I do not exactly remember the names now). You are a good soul. You have to come to Varanasi again." He smiled and I folded my hands in respect to him and retraced my steps from his room with Raju, who was also a little uneasy during that meeting.

On our way back, I was thinking about these great beings. Clearly they had all known Baba. So why was I supposed to respond to the inner prompting to go to Varanasi? Why did I have to meet them all? I was unable to find any intellectual explanation. I only wrote a letter to Beloved Baba and to my pleasure I received a letter in which He wished me to convey His love-blessings to all the above-mentioned saints of Varanasi. Thus ended the adventure of my Varanasi visit and I only wish that the Blessings of those spiritual Beings should fructify in my faith in Beloved Baba becoming unshakable, and my surrender to Him becoming complete, one day.

39. ATTENTION AND AFFECTION

In the mid-sixties, to no small degree of delight, I found Beloved Baba fulfill all those innermost desires of mine that I cherished secretly but to which I had never given expression. Upon self-analysis, I had always felt myself unworthy of such privileges. Let me now make a confession. Over a number of years, at heart, I had felt that Baba must surely have noticed in me glaring shortcomings, and that was why He did not let me in as a member of the Mandali. The Mandali constituted, even as it does now, men and women extraordinarily gifted with unquestioning obedience, extreme hard work and without any moments of idle curiosity about Baba's workings, much of which remained mysterious. These members would go many hundreds of miles to fetch a seemingly madman to be taken care of by Baba or get a number of lepers to be washed and fed by Him, arrange for Baba's darshan to several thousands of people and control them lovingly so as to avoid stampede, act as night watchman when inside a room atop a hill where He would sit with doors closed all through the night doing something on the spiritual planes of consciousness for the progressive welfare of all beings. Intelligent, well-read and sturdy, these Mandali members were supposed to remain always on tiptoes to go on any errand that He might give them, however puzzling those orders might appear to us from ordinary standards of rational thinking. But the more they obeyed, the more they realized that everything He did or said had its own deeper meaning and magnitude and perforce they had to admit that there were domains of working where the ordinary intelligence of man cannot be of any real use. The result was finally a literal surrender to Baba to be of any real use in His work and Mandali members did that.

I knew I lacked these qualities, so I did not wonder why I was not taken up by Baba to serve Him as a member of the Mandali. I would have been able to make many costly mistakes, create many nerve-racking obstacles and cause hundreds of gaping slips in His work by my superficial faculties. To be sure, I hoped that these faculties could be of use elsewhere for Baba.

The Mandali represent to me a set of matchless beings, a band of angels, the true followers of the Cross that crucifies not your body alone but your very mind and ego. I knew I did not have the right qualities for this Mandali work. And yet, I had my irrational longings to do some of the things that the Mandali might, I guessed, be doing, such as reading out letters to Baba, writing down answers to the letters as dictated by Baba, removing the flowers from His beautiful feet as heaps of them were added during darshan programmes, holding His hand lovingly, etc. But where were the chances to do all that, as I was outside the Mandali and I had no other reaction except that of heaving a sigh for unfulfilled desires whenever the thoughts came to me.

Then came 1965 and Beloved Baba, the Omniscient One, decided to fulfill those very desires one by one, without taking me up as a member of the Mandali. The way of doing it was typically His own. During the 1965 darshan programme at Poona, when the devotees from Madhya Pradesh were covering Baba's feet with flowers after bowing down to Him, suddenly Baba gestured and Sri Eruch called me. I went up to the stage where Baba's chair was set and Sri Eruch said, "Amiya, go on removing the flowers covering Baba's feet so that every next devotee can touch His feet when he or she comes up to bow down."

My heart sang like a lark. I sat near Baba's feet like a Mandali member and started assiduously removing every flower or petal or stalk from His feet. When I started, there were still many hundreds of people in line waiting to bow down to His feet. Every time I moved a flower, I could not help touching His feet myself, feeling the unearthly purity and softness they had. Well, this work was exactly one of my dreams – the thing I had wanted in my heart to do – and now I was doing it! For nearly an hour, I was removing the flowers, watching the tear-clad eyes of devotees who kept their heads on His feet for His compassion. I was also looking up at Him gratefully, and how Baba beamed back, a twinkle littered with smile, that all-knowing smile that pretended – Baba pardon me for using that word – to know nothing when you just had come to suspect that He knows your mind. My heart was filled with joy, pride and lots of egoistic fumes, so much so that at one moment I looked up at Sri Eruch and said, "Eruchjee, shall I take Baba away with me?"

I cannot forget the expression in that noblest of men I have ever seen. Eruchjee looked at me softly and just murmured, "Yes, you may take Him away, Amiya." But the tone in which he said it made me shudder inwardly. What have I said? Was it not the voice of a dying man in which he replied to my question? The indescribable pain of the very idea of separation rang in that subdued murmur. I chided myself severely and felt like smacking my own cheeks for asking such a question. There was he whose very existence seemed to depend on Baba's proximity, and there was I, a superficial lover, who wanted on the spur of a moment's emotion to take away the Beloved of all Beloveds, the Emperor of all Love. I said nothing more. The best thing was to let other things happen and let the moment pass by. I think Sri Eruch, busy as he was in interpreting Baba's words to the devotees who came up to Him, might have forgotten that short dialog after all these years. But I cannot afford to forget it myself if only for the sake of that revelation of the depth of Eruchjee's incomparable love for Baba, in sharp contrast to the so-called devotion of a person like me.

The next occasion came when I was at Meherazad after 1965. Baba was going to distribute prasad to some men who had come for His darshan. Usually, when He did that, He would not look at the tray carrying the prasad, but at the person who was to receive His gift of grace. So it was important to see that the prasad (usually toffees) was shoved towards His hand so that He did not have to look away from the devotee, a work that some Mandali member would be doing. Again, to my surprise, I found Sri Eruch looking at me and saying, "Amiya, come and sit near Baba's chair and move the prasad towards Baba's hand when he distributes it." Once more, another longing was on its way to fulfillment. As I touched the toffees and moved them towards Baba's fingers, I also managed to touch Baba's fingers themselves, an act that was not called for, so far as a real Mandali-member was concerned. But if the Mandali were discipline personified, I was indiscipline personified and I touched Baba's soft, delicate fingers every time I moved the toffees, like a stealthy lover does when he sits beside his girl friend. Once, I felt Baba might be annoyed, but when I looked at His radiant face, there was no trace of annoyance there. Assured of His all-bearing capacity, I went on touching His hands till suddenly I did the most thick-skulled thing that I was capable of. I caught hold of His very hand, right when it was going to pick up a toffee for a devotee standing before Him and then oblivious of everyone and everything around, I held it up, surveyed the fingers and the nails, and kept the hand caught up in mine for a few moments. Till today, I fail to understand why Baba did not remove His hand or chide me for interrupting His activity. Instead, He perfectly let go of His command of the situation and allowed me to grab His hand for as long as I wanted. Suddenly, I myself came

back to my senses and, thoroughly ashamed of my stupidity, released His hand and continued moving the toffees as before. But, was it not a pointer that had I been taken up by Baba into the Mandali, I might have proven to be Mr. Hindrance rather than Mr. Help? And that indication had come within barely a few hours of Mandali duty.

The third occasion of Baba's affection and ways to mete out His graceful attention to our secret wishes came when I was at Meherazad on another occasion in the late sixties. That time many Baba lovers requested me to carry letters to Him that described their problems and in spite of correspondence being prohibited during that period, I could not but take the letters with me as a gesture of sympathy.

When I entered Meherazad Hall and was seated, my pocket was full of letters. After some time, I told Baba about them. Baba looked at me and said, "So you have brought letters when there is a restriction on correspondence. All right, take down the replies yourself and see that they get the replies."

Now, that was one of my wishes. Sri Bhau and Sri Eruch had often been doing this work and here was the opportunity given to me. But instead of being elated, I was extremely nervous when I suddenly recollected that I did not know how to read Baba's gestures. Was it going to be direct communication as with the Mandali, or through Eruchjee? In a moment, Eruchjee guessing my predicament came to my rescue saying gently, "Amiya, start reading out the letters and write down what you hear."

As letter after letter got read out and replied, I was very busy in scribbling down what Baba was communicating through His wonderful interpreter Sri Eruch. It was a speedy affair and I had to be so attentive. Then came the anti-climax. A letter had come from Behrampur, and as I read it out, its deep note of sorrow and suffering shook me to the core. Right in the middle of the letter, I broke down into sobs as if the sorrow of that abandoned person had been my own. A terrible moment of silence pervaded Meherazad hall. Baba looked at me, deeply, intently and gestured "Amiya why are **you** weeping?"

"I don't know," I said and went on sobbing in spite of myself. I then felt that I was a bad reader of letters. Thousands of letters must be coming to Baba and the Mandali men must be reading out to Him, but what wonderful power of tolerance must have been given to them by Baba to do so without flinching. By the time I finished reading that pathetic letter, I was exhausted but I knew to my bones what reading out a letter in the presence of the Divine One really meant. Every word of the letter became intensely more meaningful than in ordinary circumstances. Once, I had been working on word-meaning conditionings and their nerve impact. This incident showed me how the emotive impact of words could be greatly enhanced in the presence of One who was wordless in the ordinary sense of the Word.

Suddenly, Baba turned His gaze upon me and Eruchjee interpreted, "Amiya, tell her NOT to worry but lovingly remember Me. All her problems shall be solved one day." A pause as I took down the note. Then Baba again looked at me and said, "See Amiya, I have but one Key to all problems. The moment I turn that Key all problems simply vanish. One day, I shall certainly turn that Key for you all."

The letter-reading session was over and with that I knew that another wish of mine had been fulfilled. Little did I know that my Beloved was doing it all because He was secretly preparing to leave this world. A few days later when I went to Him and the meeting was over, He called

me and asked me to kiss Him. I kissed Him gently and alternately on one cheek and then the other as He turned His cheeks towards me. But before I could plant the fourth kiss, He removed His face, caught hold of my hand softly and, as if feeling my temperature, said, "Amiya you have fever. Go to Adi. He knows Bio-chemic treatment. Take some pills from him." Thus we parted, but on my way back, I started to get worried. Why did He not let me kiss Him a fourth time? Was it because my love for Him was not true, not deep enough? I felt despondent and in that mood I entered Adijee's office and told him to give me some Bio-chemic pills as directed by Baba. Sri Adi was evidently pleased as this was a testimony to his medical skill and I sucked the pills. Then I sat brooding in my room, which was adjacent to Adijee's office. A few minutes elapsed when one person entered. "I have come from Meherazad," he said and handed me a letter. "This is from Baba," he added and left the room.

The next day, I had again an opportunity to meet Baba. As the moment for taking leave came, He drew me close to Him and gestured, “Amiya, kiss Me.” I began to kiss my Divine Beloved and this time He let me kiss four times, two on each cheek. I was right glad in my heart.



40. HIS NAZAR

In spite of long-drawn seclusions in the years following 1965, Baba did never really give us up. On the other hand, wonderful were His ways of getting into touch with people like me when we found ourselves in trouble. In 1966 my first son was born with a cleft palate and the Calcutta doctors suggested surgery to repair it. The infant was not able to suck breast milk and the prognosis was not favourable. As there was a strict ban on correspondence with Baba, I was on tenterhooks. After consultation with my friend, I decided to get the infant admitted in the foremost polyclinic at Calcutta, where a famous surgeon was reputed to do plastic surgery very successfully. But when we reached Calcutta, to our utter dismay we found the hospital cabins and even half-cabins booked for more than eight months in advance. Much though we pleaded with the surgical registrar to get us a nook for the child who was growing up along with the problem, he shook his head apologetically to say that it wasn't possible. In desperation, I left my wife and child in care of relatives to wait for any opportunity to get accommodation in the hospital, but Calcutta with a huge population had many patients to get treated and the prospect for my child seemed rather gloomy. I returned to Jabalpur to be present at the job front, but at heart I was extremely worried. A few days later, I found the postman at the door, and he handed a postcard to me.⁶⁵

It reads:

Meherazad

6th December 1967

Dear Amiya,

Today, Beloved Baba remembered you, and He wanted to know about you and the family's welfare. But, I had no information from your side, so I could not tell Him anything. I only told Him that Amiya has become very obedient nowadays, and because of the ban on correspondence is no longer writing any letters. Now for the sake of informing Baba, at least you write this much, that how you and your family's health is and how is the Baba work in Jabalpur going on.

Baba is very happy with your love, and He sends, from His seclusion, His love to you, to Matajee, to Sister Gauri,⁶⁶ and also His love-filled kiss to Mehernandini and Meher Kumar.

Jai Baba

Yours affectionately,

Bhau

"A singular exception to the rule," I mused, and hurriedly wrote a letter to Baba stating precisely the problem about the operation my son urgently needed. In it I explained that the polyclinic had no room. Sooner than I expected came Baba's reply, stating that I was not to

⁶⁵ Bhau, of course is the scribe, and the front of the postcard is shown to the left.

⁶⁶ Hazra's mother, wife, daughter and eldest son respectively. A second son, Aabir, was born later.

worry. Baba directed me to inform my wife at Calcutta also not to worry because His Nazar was on the child. She was to take Baba's name and after a few days, go to the polyclinic and try again for the child's admission. I scribbled a letter to my wife to that effect. After a week or so, I was startled to receive a telegram from her stating that the child had been admitted and was to undergo the operation three days later. I kept wondering how, in spite of the fact that the beds had been booked for eight months, they had managed to get this opportunity so soon. But at that moment, I had nothing to worry about except the prospects of the operation and I sent a wire to Baba praying to Him to see that the child, barely a year old, returned from the surgical table alive and not dead. Baba's reply was again the same. I was **not** to worry. His Nazar was on the child and He wanted me to remain happy in the knowledge that my family and I were very dear to Him. Trunk calls and other means of communication helped me to note with satisfaction that the eminent surgeon had performed the operation perfectly and that the child was in very good condition. After about a month my wife returned with the child with the wound perfectly healed

My joy knew no bounds. It was now time to ask her how she managed to get such a quick admission in such an overcrowded hospital. My wife laughed, and told me that surely Baba had a hand in the whole affair. One day, after she received my letter in which Baba had told her to go to the hospital, she undertook a casual, half-hearted visit to the hospital. To her utter surprise instead of the hubbub and clamour of patients and their relatives all over the huge hospital compound, a perfect silence reigned. What was the matter? No doctors, no nurses, no patients, only a lady receptionist was seen sedately poised on a chair near the entry. Rather apprehensively, my wife enquired if at least a half-cabin could be obtained for her son's operation. The receptionist raised her eyes, "Half-cabin? Madam, the hospital with all its cabins is at your disposal. Get your son's name registered at once." That was the most flabbergasting news. Seeing the puzzled look on my wife's face, the receptionist smiled, "You see, our doctor and the anesthetists had a difference of opinion about certain privileges, and the hospital was closed with no date for re-opening. All the patients had to leave. Today, just a half hour back, a reconciliation has taken place and now the hospital is open, and it is at your disposal – the whole of it – because you are the first person to arrive at the counter!"

I heard the story from my wife with a gaping mouth. So that was how my son could get admission in a trice and that was why Baba was telling us through His letters not to worry because His NAZAR was on the whole family. What a NAZAR! He had really reduced mountainous problems to nothingness!

Another sign of compassion

At the home front, due to those individual traits that constitute our ego shells, we suddenly found ourselves raising storms in teacups. The problem was, what was to be done with my daughter, who was then just four years old and who, as if to wreck vengeance on our heads, had taken birth in our family. Her little mind was full of pranks and everything she did was shocking. She viewed her school as less attractive than we would have viewed a prison. She used to jump out of the vehicle that took her to school. The result was a nice smacking from her mother. However, this caused a dispute between the two schools of thought about child discipline – to hit or not to hit. Lots of bitterness prevailed over this small kid, with my wife and

my mother⁶⁷ taking opposing sides. And I began to grow allergic to the whole thing. Personally, I disliked taking sides for my ego had its own side and I thought it was the best, but neither mother nor wife would endorse my side. In utter disgust, I one day decided to take mother to Ahmednagar to talk it out with Baba. This was the worst indiscipline that one could think of, as Baba was in intense seclusion. The moment Sri Adi saw me enter his office, he literally jumped out of his chair. "What on earth has brought you here, Amiya? You haven't come to see Baba, I hope? He is seeing none, not even me!" I looked sympathetically at that noble-hearted, generous gentleman, whom I had admired from the beginning. Only thing I could not do was to be good and obedient, as they all were. It wasn't in my grains. I knew that Baba was in seclusion. I knew that He was that Master of Masters who could raise a flood or demolish a planet by a single wish. I had seen Him in those moments when you would not dare approach Him and I had seen Him in those moments when He could make us weep and laugh at the same time. I had felt like a plaything in His hands. And yet, so strongly marked was the quality of mercy in Him for me that I was undauntedly taking those steps that an angel would shudder to take.

I sat on the chair opposite Adijee and said, "Dear Adijee, I wouldn't have come if matters hadn't come to a head at home. They are quarreling over a small child's education as if it were more important than starting or not starting a war in the world. I have brought my mother, she being the senior-most member, and I would request you to send word to Beloved Baba to grant us audience for at least an hour to decide the issue as per His instruction."

"Amiya," exclaimed Adijee in alarm, "Even if someone commits suicide, we are not to go and inform Baba about it, and you – you want such a thing to be attended to by Him?" And he literally covered his head with his hands and became absolutely silent. It was then that I realized what a choice pest I was, not only to Baba but to His dear Mandali as well. Was I not exploiting all their love and affections shamelessly? Really, I am not behaving like one with the least common sense or decency would! But what was I to do, now that we had come 700 miles from Jabalpur? Shall we return without seeing Baba? My head reeled. I did not know what to decide or do now that Adijee had made me keenly aware of my stupidity.

Just when the stage of helplessness reached its climax, Adijee raised his head and said in a husky voice, "Amiya, Amiya, what am I to do? Baba loves you so much, but why don't you learn to obey His wishes? Well, forget it. Let's come to the problem. Amiya, it is better that you write a letter to Baba detailing out all your problems and I will try, though I cannot promise, to see that Baba condescends to hear it, in spite of His ban on letter reading. If He does so, then you should be prepared to obey Him. He might see you and mother, or He may tell both to return to Jabalpur. I hope you shall not make excuses over His wish then."

"I won't," I said, trying to be a better man.

"Then here is a paper and pen – write quickly, but in details and when you have finished it read it out to me." After half an hour, Adijee bade me to go to the railway station and wait for any message that would come there to me the following morning. I profusely thanked Adijee for his gallant gesture and went to the railway station. Needless to say, it was difficult to sleep. So near Baba physically and yet so far! Would He permit us to see Him or order us to go back? Should I pray to Him? Surely, when He could hear my prayers from 700 miles, He could hear them now

⁶⁷ We were residing with her.

that I was only nine miles away from Him. All I wanted was to see Him and dump the whole nerve-racking problem at His feet and regain my composure.

The morning sun woke me up. Then I went to the railway station caterer to ask if he could make a quick lunch for us. "Not now, sir, only when there is some train about to come that we start cooking." I stared helplessly at the man and asked for a concession in his terms but he again shook his head. "No train, no food service, Sir," he said and before I could ask again, went inside his restaurant. I was hungry and so was mother, but I could not afford to leave the station as at any time Adijee might send a message to me. So, putting up with hunger in the stomach and fuming with rage at the merciless caterer, I paced up and down the station campus, when suddenly a jeep drove in and stopped right in front of me. "Are you Amiyakumar from Jabalpur?" a gentleman came out and asked.

"Yes I am"

"Here is a note from Adi Saheb for you." I read the note. My heart danced with joy. It said, "Beloved Baba has condescended to give you and mother darshan today in the forenoon, so please go to Meherazad without any delay."

I called mother loudly to come along. Both of us scampered into the jeep and in a minute we were heading towards the Abode of Boundless Mercy!

The moment we alighted, Sri Eruch came up to my mother and me. His smile was so heartwarming. "Amiya, Amiya and mother, Jai Baba to you both. Please step in. Baba is waiting to meet you." We hurried into the room and found Beloved Baba seated on His chair in Mandali Hall looking incomparably radiant. He gestured to us to sit near Him, almost near His feet. Then the conversation began. It was a short one. Baba wanted peace and loving understanding at His home (meaning where I lived!). For the time being mother was to go to Calcutta for some special work. My wife and mother must make it up for Baba's sake. They should exchange letters and my wife should always inform about my daughter's pranks. Baba also told me not to worry although He expressed sympathy for my mental suffering. In a few minutes, the mess was cleared up. Always at Jabalpur we could be mean and egotistical and everything that stinks; but here was an automatic elevation of nature, a sublimation of self from its base instincts of jealousy, revenge and complexes to that of a purer existence where the higher self awakened to chide the lower. Soon we felt that the clouds were dispersing and we began to smile.

Then Baba looked at me, as He had in 1957 when I had seen Him for the first time. That time He had asked, "Have you had your tea?" This time He asked, "Have you both had your lunch?" I told Baba how the station caterer had refused to oblige. Baba looked up at Eruchjee and asked him to go to the kitchen and see if there was some food for us. Sri Eruch came back and said, "Yes, Baba." He was perhaps about to motion us to come out and go to the dining room, when my heart, which was notorious for desires, in a flash longed to eat in the presence of Beloved Baba, right inside the Meherazad Mandali meeting hall. A pause ... Baba looked at me and then at Sri Eruch and gestured to bring the food there in front of Him! The plates arrived – humble fare – but how delicious! Baba sitting before us, smiling and supervising like the Ancient Father, asked us to eat at leisure. So again a gift – the manna from Heaven, the Bread from Christ's hand. The One who feeds the whole world indirectly, invisibly, was now feeding us in His direct presence. Baba had overfilled my heart with gratitude, He had made it almost burst with His

grace of love, He had made my head bow down to His feet in indescribable adoration. All this He had done and I have no words to thank Him. All His acts give me thoughts that are “too deep for tears!” Alas, I did not then know that soon Baba would go into a seclusion from which He would come out perfectly still, His eyes half-closed, His beautiful head slightly raised, ice-slabs embracing His cold sides, His lips still wearing a tender smile for all His millions of lovers – nay for all the countless beings in Creation – and that I could not possibly disturb Him any more, nor receive that loving glance, that warm embrace, that fatherly advice!

41. THE FINAL DARSHAN

Yes, just when we were expecting to see Baba again that summer, news came that He had dropped His body on the 31st of January 1969 and that we could go to Meherabad tomb shrine to have His final physical darshan. When I heard the news I did not immediately register any reaction. I hurried to the place where other Baba-lovers had gathered. We were to discuss the mode of conveying the news to lovers in our town and surrounding areas. We also had to arrange for our trip to Meherabad. Just when we were discussing what to do Matadin Bari burst out weeping, "You all had never allowed me to see Baba. Every year you all said, 'Matadin, you attend your school duties. Next time we shall let you go.' And now ..." and again he burst out weeping. And then it was difficult for us to hold back our tears. Really we had wronged this man who so much longed to see Baba, but what could we do now? Even an apology would be too crude.

Soon, I was at the station. Hundreds of Baba lovers were rushing to Ahmednagar. People from all over the world had heard the news and were hurrying to have the last glimpse of Baba's physical form. How long would they keep the tomb open? We were uncertain. Dr. Jaya Prakash Vaidya (Dr. JPV) suddenly reached the station. He straightaway told me that he too was going. "But you don't have any luggage, not even a bag," I exclaimed.

"Yes, I have just heard and have come from the medical college. Well, I don't need anything. I only want to see Baba."

"But what about your scooter? And your family?"

"Please get the scooter sent home by someone you know at the station. Please also send the news home."

I looked troubled. But so intense was his determination to go for Baba's last darshan that I had to rush to see if a ticket could be had for him, his scooter sent home and his message conveyed. All was done just in time for us to board the train and I was perforce reminded of Baba's ways, which seemed to remain the same now, even though He had shed His body three days back. The same hurry and worry and then that feeling of relief when "all's well that ends well." Dr. JPV was the last man to get in the train, and he had not a single spare shirt or sheet with him. But he, in spite of never having come in Baba's physical contact, revealed a love that puzzled us. It must be Baba drawing the doctor, I said to myself, and tried to forget the issue.

I will not detail out the last darshan of Beloved Baba for the simple reason that it causes so much pain to me that I lose sight of His loving smile and the words that you might often find quoted below His photographs, "Don't Worry. Be Happy!" Suffice it to say that thousands and thousands of lovers, all in tears, were slowly going up to the Tomb where He lay, still so radiant that it was difficult to believe that He was physically dead! The body was kept for darshan for seven days because Baba had expressed the wish that He would give a seven-day darshan to His lovers.

My readers might be curious to know about my reaction when I saw my Divine Father's body lying in state for the final darshan. Well, I hardly felt any pain at that time, to be frank. I only felt that Baba, the Baba I have come to know, cannot die, never dies and is not dead. It was only

later when I missed His guidance through letters that I felt very keenly His physical absence. But to my surprise, my first reaction was correct about his physical death, as I shall describe in the final pages of this book.

42. EPILOGUE

Meher Baba's story is seemingly endless, because even after He has dropped His body people come and tell me how He is guiding them, appearing in their dreams and visions and leaving in their hearts an indelible impression of His loving presence. One such story is mine, too. In 1970, a year after Baba had physically bid us goodbye, there was a gathering of Baba lovers in Hamirpur. I did not want to go anywhere and only constant appeals to me by His devotees compelled me to go. Although I had managed to say "no" to several devotees, the request of an elderly woman seemed to be the last straw on the camel's back. She said, "you ought to be at the gathering because Baba wants you there." Now, I was a bit irritated to hear such a downright statement and only with difficulty did I avoid saying, "How do you know?"

Nevertheless, it was she who made me, most unwillingly, undertake the journey. I generally do not like to do anything in which I do not find my heart responding, and this trip was one of that kind. At Hamirpur, I found a large number of devotees, many of whom knew me and came forward to embrace me warmly. The touch of their love made me feel better. The initial internal apathy over, I started taking interest in the proceedings. The following day there was a symposium that I was to initiate. For a while I spoke, and then sat down to listen to the distinguished lovers and scholars who were participating in it. As Dr. C.D. Deshmukh was speaking, I suddenly saw in the second row in front of the dais, Baba sitting with his cheek resting on one of His hands, attentively listening to what Dr. Deshmukh was saying about Him. He was in His pink coat and white sadra. My head reeled. I cleared my vision to see if it was some mistake. But no, there He was just as He used to be in front of us during darshan programmes. He was so clearly visible that if it was hallucination, then all the darshans I had had of Him right since 1957 could also be called hallucinations. But what intrigued me was why others were not noticing Him. I turned aside to one of the devotees on the dais to talk to him. But that was a costly mistake. Instead of helping him to see Baba, I lost sight of Baba myself, for the moment I turned to where Baba was sitting, I found Him gone! The gathering went on and the deep currents of love for Baba that flowed from His lovers blended into an ocean threatening to drown me in it. The same atmosphere that we had experienced during Baba's physical sojourn was evident. On my way back, as I lay on my berth in the railway carriage, I saw the cheerful face of Baba looking at me with a twinkle of approval. He was pleased with me and my heart at last accepted the remark of that lady that Baba wanted me at Hamirpur. I did not rue the trip any more.

My relationship with Meher Baba was and is that of a Loving and Compassionate Father (who differs from fathers in general in that He is all-powerful) and His unworthy son. Back in 1983, Baba proved it again that the relationship was intact. A few days before 31st January, I had my railway reservations done to go to Ahmednagar to attend the Amartithi function at Meherabad. Then, to my consternation, I found gum trouble, an occasional complaint of mine, flaring up again. Inflammation and pain and slight pyrexia followed. Those who know what toothache is will surely chuckle and sigh for me at this juncture. I immediately rushed to the dentist. I feared pus pockets and I told him so. He smiled, gave me tablets, and did not lacerate my gum, much though I wished it. I came back home. By the evening of the 28th, the pain was simply unbearable. The pain succeeded in killing the pain-killing tablets. I felt bitter and angry at Baba, whom I blamed for giving me such a hell of a time just when I was ready to go for the Amartithi

the following evening. Was Baba really dead, or was He just being cruel to derive a malicious pleasure out of my pain? I wondered. After swallowing a couple of tablets, I went to bed and tossed on it in spite of a sleeping pill. Tears came to my eyes and you can imagine the state of a man of 52 years having to shed tears just when he was hoping to have all joy for a few days. I do not know when sleep came and my mind closed to the outside world. Suddenly, I saw a dream. There was Baba, followed by Sri Eruch walking down a corridor. As He came near where I stood, I saw Him turn towards me, our eyes met, He smiled and then came forward. Holding my shoulders by His hands, He put His lips onto my lips and then deeply sucked something out. The next moment, He turned away and walked on with Sri Eruch. An intense fragrance of millions of roses greeted my nose. I woke up and sniffed around. Yes, the fragrance was there all right. It was coming from my body, my clothes, from my pillow, from the blankets and from the entire room. I inhaled that wonderful fragrance to my heart's content. It was the same fragrance that had greeted us when we used to go to Baba, the same that sometimes filled the room when Sardar Pritam Singh "Meher" wept and told his stories. So, Baba had really come and met me in my subconscious state, that He had kissed me and gladdened my sad heart. Again, I fell asleep. Soon the family members woke me up with the bed tea that they had brought for me. I sipped it. Then to my great surprise I found that the pain in my gums had absolutely gone, as though I had never had it! My heart was brimming with gratitude. Beloved Baba, how often I misjudge, how often I reproach, how often I throw You away from my heart! Yet every time, You – the Christ, the Rasool, the Avatar, the God-man – put up with me lovingly, forgive me, and humour me as if You were at fault all the time, and not me!

Well, that was 1983 and since then hardly a month passes before He comes to me in my dreams and gladdens my heart as nothing can do. So the darshan of Meher Baba for me still goes on. While many new lovers come with their stories in ever-increasing number, I do not wonder for the Meher Baba story shall never end, as Baba is really eternal and His periodic physical manifestation is only underlying His constant presence on all the planes and spheres of cosmos and beyond.

To conclude this book, I refer to an American young man who had come to the Amartithi function in the early eighties. When I asked him why he came when he had never seen Baba, he said, "You talk of seeing Meher Baba. Well, you saw only the bottle containing the fragrance. In 1969 that bottle was shattered and now the fragrance is everywhere. It is because of that fragrance that I am here!" I had no possible reply to what he said.

I thank all readers who have patiently gone through this book, and if I have to wish them anything from the deepest depths of my heart, I wish them that supreme experience that Baba said was the only one worth having, and meanwhile if some sideways glimpses are granted to them by Baba, well, I shall consider my writing this book amply rewarded. Amen!

JAI BABA

People mentioned in the text and subsequently abbreviated

In order of appearance:

RNB - Rabindra Nath Bhattacharjee

SKG - Sukesh Kumar Ganguli

YLM - Yedullu L. Muniraj

RKG - Dr. Ranjit Kumar Ganguli

GDC - Gurudas Chatterjee

GLV - Genda Lal Varma

RLS - Ram Lakhan Sharma, now Sri Ram Sharma

MPS - Madan Prasad Sinha

RKU - Rajani Kant Upadhyaya

Dr. JPV - Dr. Jaya Prakash Vaidya