

THE
TOMB-SHRINE
of
AVATAR MEHER BABA



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The following sources were used for this history of Avatar Meher Baba's Tomb-Shrine:

82 Family Letters, "Combined Diaries," "Chanji's Diaries,"

Lord Meher, Meher Baba's Last Sahavas, Sobs and Throbs

Further information about Avatar Meher Baba and the Tomb-Shrine is available on
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The Tomb-Shrine of Avatar Meher Baba

For those who love and follow Avatar Meher Baba, His Tomb-Shrine is the most important site in the world. This is how and why that came to be.

*A*fter Meher Baba returned to Meherabad on December 25, 1926, many of the faithful students of the Hazrat Babajan School, which had disbanded two months earlier at the end of the ‘first long stay’ at Meherabad, were still anticipating further direction from Him. So Baba reestablished interim classes for these boys, and over the course of the next few months many discussions took place concerning a new ashram school. However, for this new ashram school, Baba wanted to place emphasis on “spiritual training”, in addition to the high quality secular education that had been originally offered during the Hazrat Babajan School. This boarding school was named ‘Meher Ashram’ and it first opened in the bungalow in Arangaon for ten boys on May 1, 1927. But after a public announcement offering free education through the direction of Meher Baba soon drew a heavy response, it was obvious that a much larger facility would be required. Baba decided to make use of the property on the hill, which included the large ground level double water tank from the previous army

camp. This area offered sufficient space, isolation for privacy, and quietude for meditation. During the month of June 1927, openings were broken through the thick rock walls on the ends of each tank and doors were installed. The first temporary buildings of the usual Meherabad construction were also erected on the hill then, with frames of wooden poles, walls of bamboo matting, and roofs of corrugated sheet metal. Included in these first temporary buildings was a hut, which Baba wanted for His personal use. It was erected to the west of the tank rooms, away from the approach to the hill. Baba spent His first night in this hut on June 30, 1927, a school holiday and day of celebration. It was the day that the Meher Ashram was officially shifted to the hill.



Meher Ashram boys outside the East Tankroom, August-September 1927. This is the first known image of the Crypt Cabin (behind at right).

In the course of conversation a few days later Baba conveyed: “I am going to lock myself up, but all the arrangements about the Ashram etc. must be ready before I do so. . . . There will be a spiritual outburst here. . . . Many sages already know about it. . . .” Sometime during July Baba gave instructions for the hut to be removed and for a pit to be dug on the same site. This pit was dressed in stone masonry with steps built into it from the south side to form a crypt 40 inches wide, 80 inches long, and 60 inches deep. Ramjoo commented that none could make head or tail of it at the time. They referred to it as the ‘khadda’ or pit. One day in early August, after the stone work for the crypt was completed, but before the cabin above was rebuilt, Baba sat on a chair in the crypt and had each of the Meher Ashram boys descend the steps one at a time to wash His feet.

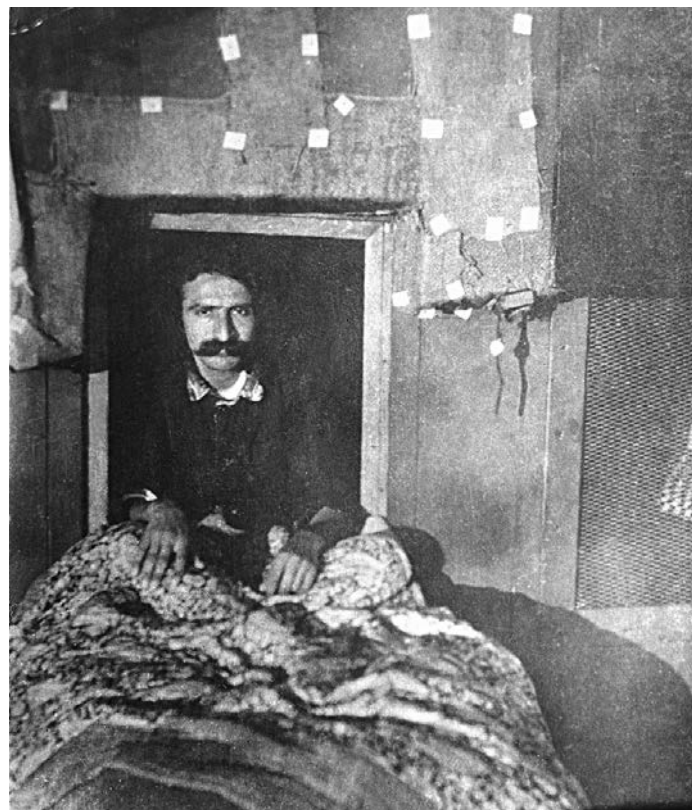
Above the crypt another cabin was built of wood frame and board, with a corrugated steel sheet roof. A cover of wooden planks was built to place over the crypt, keeping the narrow stairway open for access. The door to the cabin was in the south wall, with two shuttered openings in the east wall, and one in the north. A stone platform about 22 feet wide and extending about 26 feet was built outside the east wall facing the ashram. One opening in the east wall was covered with mosquito screen and the other served as a passageway to the platform, where Baba could meet with the boys, mandali, or visitors. On August 16th, the Crypt Cabin became Baba’s new Seat on the hill.

On November 10th, Baba began the prolonged fast to which He had previously alluded. From November 23rd, the spiritual instruction classes in different languages were postponed, and Baba

personally began giving regular evening discourses to the boys, usually in the west tank room (referred to at that time as 'Hall #1'). After morning exercise with the boys on November 28th, Baba disclosed, "At first I had intended to advance you gradually in the path, but the time of the great spiritual outburst that takes place in the world at long intervals is near at hand, and so I have changed the program. Very soon I am going to advance a few amongst you who will be ready with love."

On December 2nd, Baba opened a special "bhakti ward" for seekers, which was called the 'Sadhak Ashram'. Five cells of the usual Meherabad construction had been built in a row to the north of the crypt. That morning Baba placed five men of different religions and castes in seclusion in each of the small rooms. They were to meditate and fast on milk and water, and were ordered not to leave the rooms under any condition. Two of the mandali (Vishnu and Siddhu) were ordered to be their attendants. On December 19th Baba directed Gustadji to leave the Jhopdi verandah and begin staying along with his brother in two more temporary rooms that were built near the crypt. The next day, after forty days of that long fast, Baba began staying on the hill; He confined Himself in seclusion inside the Crypt Cabin. He usually slept and bathed in the pit itself. Pendu was Baba's personal assistant during this time.

Baba began giving the evening discourses while remaining in seclusion in the Crypt Cabin. He would sit and extend His legs through the window opening while the boys and some of the men sat on the crypt platform listening as one of the men read the board. Chanji began to refer to the evening discourses as the nightly "love injection".



Meher Baba in the east window of the Crypt Cabin.

The atmosphere of love had already become intense with Baba's fasting and His increased attention to the Meher Ashram. Different boys would be found weeping for no apparent reason when they were apart from Him. But January 1, 1928 was an unusual day by any standard. As if contagious, most of the boys experienced spells of crying throughout the day. By seven in the evening, every boy in the ashram was weeping uncontrollably. Baba called more of the mandali to the Hill to witness this. They could

only stand by stunned, helpless to give any assistance. The only recognizable words in their wailing were, “Baba, Baba.” At 7:30 pm Baba made His appearance, sitting in the window opening, placing His feet on the crypt platform. The boys assembled there and were immediately pacified by his presence. Baba explained to them, “Your weeping means love, my love for you; but also obey my orders. When I order you to stop crying, you should stop. Don’t check your love—increase it; but obey my orders.”

On the morning of January 6th, a dozen soldiers passing by were given permission to come up the Hill for Baba’s darshan and salute Him. Baba ordered the school closed for the day and had the boys and mandali come to the Crypt Cabin to participate in the washing of His feet and His back. Afterwards Baba had His brother Behram read out a declaration concerning a meeting of spiritual masters that had taken place in the Crypt Cabin the previous night, wherein it was decided that a great war would soon begin.

Baba had persuaded Abdulla Pakrawan to join the Meher Ashram by November of 1927, and in that intimate atmosphere he quickly began to awaken spiritually. Unable to focus his mind on anything except Baba, he was allowed to abandon his studies. He took every opportunity to be with the Master, but when that was not possible, he sat in his cell meditating. One evening as Baba was discoursing, Abdulla began to see the radiant effulgence of God everywhere. He cried out Baba’s name and lost consciousness. On the next day he found that without effort, his every thought was only of his beloved.

Absorbed in that state of constant remembrance he had become indifferent to food, water, cold or heat, passing the hours in meditation and weeping. As the sun set on January 11th, Abdulla Pakrawan was

sitting near Baba as He was giving His usual nightly discourse from the east window. Suddenly Abdulla wailed and swooned as Baba glanced at him. His physical eyes were closed, but his Master had opened his inner eye. He was taken to the hospital down the hill where he remained lost in the vision of his beloved Lord for five days. Baba began referring to Abdulla as ‘Chota Baba’, meaning ‘little Baba’.

During that month a number of the other boys also swooned with deep experience and wept when they could not be in the Master’s presence.

The resident women sequestered down the hill were continuing their life of service and devotion. They had seen how much Baba loved the boys and the boys loved Him when they came up to have



Baba with Rajaram and Abdulla Pakrawan inside the Crypt Cabin on January 22, 1928. He is wearing a flower garland and crown made by the women, His feet resting on the plank decking over the crypt.

Baba's darshan on January 1st, for Mehera's birthday. Since Baba was in seclusion the women thought that He might forget them, so they thought it would be nice to make Him flower garlands and crowns. After the day's work, Valu would bring wildflowers from the riverside in Arangaon back to the womens' compound, where they would sit up till late in the night making their floral creations. The next morning Korshed's father, who was their link to Baba, would carry these flowers wrapped in damp cloths up the hill to Him.

On the 23rd, Baba stopped drinking His usual coffee with milk, and for the next four weeks took only hot water and plain weak tea.

On January 25th, the work of enclosing the space between the Crypt Cabin and the Sadhak Ashram to the north was completed. This provided a private room for Chota Baba and Rajaram. The



Chota Baba on the gaadi in the Crypt Cabin.

wooden window that had been installed in the north wall of the cabin was removed because it obstructed Rajaram's space. Only a cloth curtain was hung between Baba's Crypt Cabin and the space; this was a wonderful thing to the mandali, something they had never seen before. Baba had never allowed anyone to sleep so near to Him. Chota Baba was given his own special gaadi here. No one was allowed to enter the space or even look inside.

Sayed Agha Ali was also one of the ashram boys who was deeply affected during this time. But from the second week of January, Baba began to ignore him. Whenever Ali was called, he would be dispassionately dismissed without receiving the affection he had come to expect. And though his heart was in a state of turmoil, Ali continued to carry out Baba's commands without complaint.

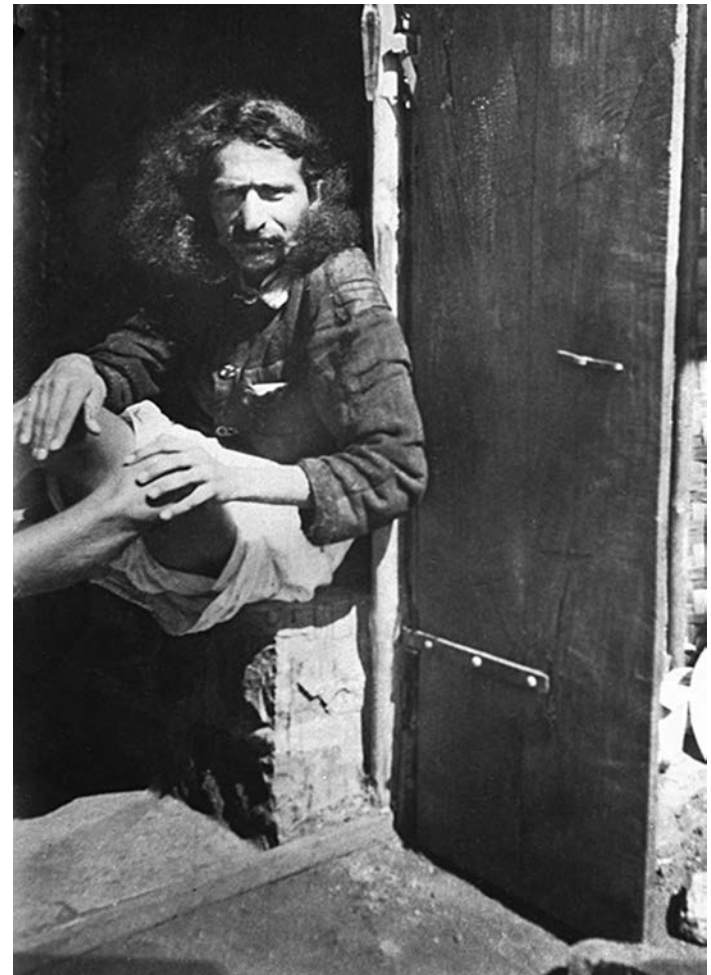
On the 28th of January, the ashram was given a holiday to celebrate Hazrat Babajan's birthday. Baba remarked to the mandali that Ali and Vasant were ready to receive the touch from Him. While the boys and mandali were gathered on the crypt platform the following evening, Baba taunted Ali; "He is only interested in His studies lately. He has forgotten about me and only thinks of his father." Ali could take no more. He began to wail uncontrollably; his only impulse was to get up and run away. Baba signaled Raosaheb to catch him and bring him back. But this time nothing could pacify him including the Master's proximity; Ali continued sobbing for three hours while the others could only watch in stunned silence. Finally Baba had Raosaheb carry Ali into the Crypt Cabin. Baba held him in His arms, kissed him on the forehead, and laid His head on Ali's chest for a few minutes. The boy closed his eyes and became calm and quiet. After fifteen minutes or so, Baba directed Raosaheb to wake him up, but Ali could not move or open his eyes. After being repeatedly questioned for some time, he managed to respond in a faint whisper: "How are you, Ali?" "Happy" "What do you see?" "Baba" "Where?" "Everywhere".

Padri and Raosaheb were assigned shifts to care for Ali in the hospital for the next few days as Baba gradually brought him down. As he came out of his dazed state he became restless, and this

compelled him to run. So the mandali continued the careful watch over him around the ashram. Ali could not overcome his aversion to eating until Baba fed him with His own hands. Then he began to sleep at night and became more normal. But his restlessness grew more intense as he lost his high spiritual experience, so much so that Baba renewed it temporarily on February 9th by passing His fingers over Ali's forehead.

On February 17th, the elder brother of one of the Moghul Moslem boys named Muhamed came to remove him from the ashram. Though the mandali spent many hours trying to dissuade this man, he was unmoved, and so around eight in the evening he was escorted up the hill. All were gathered on the crypt platform as usual when the boy was informed that he would have to leave with his brother. Mohamed tried to run away, but was quickly caught by Raosaheb who did his best to calm him - to no avail. As he began to sob helplessly, the enraged elder brother grabbed the boy by the collar, shaking him and dragging him away. When Muhamed continued to resist, his brother began to slap him. Everyone watched, simply shocked. One of the men shouted, "Be human handling that poor soul!" The brother retorted, "Alive or dead, I'm taking him away from here!" As the tonga carrying the two brothers began to ride off, Muhamed cried out his departing message: "Tell Baba, I may be dragged away, but I will not forget Him." Not a dry eye witnessed this event. The boys continued weeping quietly there. Baba did not send them to bed till around midnight. Ramjoo wrote, "The Master did not retire for rest throughout that night and continued weeping silently for a long time."

The next day Baba allowed His birthday celebration to go on



Meher Baba at the door of His Crypt Cabin.

as scheduled, since some of His lovers had come a long way to attend. It was one of the few occasions during this period when the women mandali were allowed to leave their little compound and come up the hill. Separately, the boys, the women, and the men

mandali had the opportunity to wash Baba's feet at the door of the Crypt Cabin, but His mood was not joyous.

On the morning of February 25th, Ali's father showed up at Meherabad. Over the course of four hours, Raosaheb was able to gradually convince him that keeping his son in Meher Ashram would be to his greatest benefit. But just when Raosaheb stepped out of the room to get the draft of the new agreement to be signed, another Moghul arrived, full of preconceived notions.

On his way to the office, Raosaheb passed Ali and felt prompted to ask him what he had in his pocket. Ali showed him a penknife and said that if his father took him away from Baba, he would cut his own throat! Ali was quickly escorted to Baba who scolded him, "Never even think of violence against anyone, including your own self." And Baba promised him, "If you are taken away I will either come out of seclusion or break up the institution."

By the time Raosaheb had returned, the second Moghul had persuaded Ali's father to remove his son from the ashram, so now the process of trying to reasonably convince both men had to begin again. After a few more hours of intense discussion, Raosaheb realized that it was hopeless to pursue the case any further; the boys would be removed.

Ali checked his emotions and silently obeyed his father's order to sit in the tonga, but he was not planning to go away and live happily ever after.

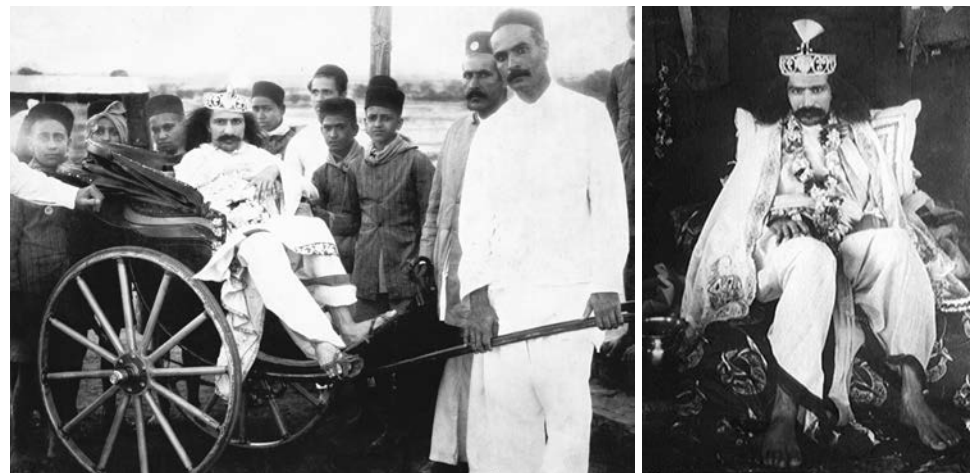
At the Crypt Cabin that evening, for the first time Baba asked the mandali how long he had been fasting in seclusion. The count was: 67 days in seclusion, 107 days fasting- the last 33 days on weak tea without milk. Baba told them, "I have become very weak. I will

come out and begin eating. Ali will not lose anything, but the purpose of the work has not been served; I will have to do it all over again."

At 5:45 pm on February 26th, Baba came out of seclusion and was taken to lower Meherabad in the rickshaw to visit the women and sit near the Dhuni for some time.

Not feeling well, Baba spent the next day inside the Crypt Cabin becoming more restless as the day progressed. He would lie down in the crypt below only to come up within a few minutes to stand, sit, or lie down there, then repeat the routine. He became pale and gestured, "I am dying", and by sunset His hands and feet were cold and limp.

On February 28th, any hopes the mandali had for Ali's return faded with a pessimistic telegram from the men who had been sent to Bombay in an effort to reason with his family. But Baba's health and mood were much improved. He even allowed the boys to dress Him as Lord Krishna.



February 28, 1928 at the Crypt platform.



Meher Baba standing to the east of His Crypt Cabin taken just after the end of that long fast.

The group of over twenty boys who had experienced an advanced state of restless love for Baba was designated as a special 'Prem Ashram' on March 25, 1928. Baba's severe fast continued until the morning of April 25th. This photograph of Meher Baba standing to the east of His Crypt Cabin was taken just after the end of that long fast.

In early June, the vast majority of the Meherabad Ashram was shifted to Toka. The work with the boys that would have to be done all over again happened there. Many of the residents suffered from colds and fever as the winter weather came on in November; Baba began to complain about the Toka climate. By December the Toka ashram was dismantled and all the materials and supplies were gradually shipped back to Meherabad.

Returning to Meherabad on December 9th, Baba stayed in the small room south of the tank rooms for four days. Then He began to spend the nights in His Crypt Cabin again.

On December 13th, Ali's father showed up again looking for his son, who had once again escaped from home attempting to return to Baba. He was exasperated from the months of chasing after the boy, and was finally ready to listen to the common sense advice of the mandali. Asking them to readmit Ali, he gave a fresh promise not to disturb them again, but it did not last.

A few other boys had also escaped from their guardians and endured difficult tramps back to Baba. On the evening of December 28th, while He and the mandali were sitting on the crypt platform, a haggard young boy quietly approached and placed a wreath of fresh wild roses on Baba's head. It was Ahmed, one of the boys who had been taken away with Ali on the 19th of August. He had slipped away from Bombay six days before, walking and begging his way back to his Master.

Baba spent most of New Year's Day 1929 in meetings with the mandali discussing practical matters. They were already out of money and continuing with an ashram of this size was untenable. The mandali did not know how they could break the news to the boys and residents; the size of the Meherabad colony would have to be greatly pared down. But Baba told them not to worry; everything would go well. Over the course of the next few days, many of the ashram boys expressed a desire to go back to their families. Baba persuaded others to leave by promising to call them back soon, though many wept and pleaded to stay. After a few weeks, only a smaller Prem Ashram of eighteen boys was left on the hill.

Later in February, one of the boys, Genu Chamhar, fell ill with pneumonia. Baba nursed him often and arranged for the best care. He placed the boy in His own Crypt Cabin. Genu's family was

informed, and his father came to take the boy away on the morning of the 24th. Though Baba tried to dissuade him, he was insistent. So Baba had one of the men arrange for a taxi and ordered, "Place Genu in the taxi when it comes. No one should do anything more regarding him."

But in the meantime, two of the mandali involved urged Genu's father to leave the boy at Meherabad, assuring him that he could get no better care than from Baba. Genu's relatives agreed and his father eventually consented. The two men happily went to inform Baba, but instead of being pleased He was very upset: "Why did you break my order? I told you to put him in the taxi and do nothing more!"

While Baba was scolding the mandali, Genu's father appeared. He begged Baba's forgiveness and pleaded to allow his son to stay.



Standing east of the Crypt platform.

Baba replied, "That time has passed now. But if you want him to be here, keep him here at your own risk. I will no longer be responsible for Genu. He will be given the best possible treatment, but I have now severed my connection with him."

Genu's father accepted responsibility, and Baba agreed to allow the boy to stay. But Baba did not see Genu even once that day, and at midnight, he died.

Genu's father and the men felt great remorse for not carefully

heeding Baba's words. Baba remarked, "Genu has won, but his father, Sidhu and Pesu have lost. Genu is with me. He is freed and has no more births left."*

Baba reminded the mandali that sometimes He had to make adjustments due to inevitable events. In order to wipe out the mixed effects of Genu's death, He decided to take the boys and a few of the mandali to Happy Valley for a few days. It is unclear exactly where Genu died at Meherabad, but while Baba and the boys were gone, some of the mandali began the work of dismantling the Crypt Cabin. As part of the change, the wooden structure would be replaced with walls of soft rock. That work was completed in about ten days, and the new Crypt Room was inaugurated on March 9, 1929. Baba used the Crypt Room from time to time over the coming months. These photographs were taken during that period.



On the Crypt platform.

* Bhau Kalchuri, *Lord Meher: The Biography of the Avatar of the Age Meher Baba*, online rev. ed., 1013. <http://www.lordmeher.org/rev/index.jsp>. (Myrtle Beach, SC: MANifestation, 1996).



Baba with many of the participants of the seclusion program, June 1, 1930.

In May of 1930 due to frequent disturbance of His seclusion and milk fast program at the new cave in Panchgani, Baba returned to Meherabad. The milk fast seclusion was continued at Meherabad after a darshan program on June 1st. After sunset, a procession wound its way from lower Meherabad to the Hill, stopping at certain places where the different mandali were to be stationed. Baba, three of the Prem Ashram boys, and most of the mandali stayed in the tank rooms. Raosaheb Afsari was directed to stay in the Crypt Room.

On the 13th, Baba called most of the men, including Raosaheb, out of seclusion. But Pleader was to continue the fast and silence, and during the coming months he spent time secluded in the Crypt Room.

The fifth anniversary of Baba's silence was celebrated at Meherabad on Thursday, July 10th, 1930. He permitted the mandali, along with His followers from Arangaon and Ahmednagar, to meet with Him on the hill. To celebrate the occasion, the mandali washed Baba's feet and Pendu sang the Gujarati arti. After distributing prasad to all, Baba ended the celebration.

During the two years prior to September of 1933, Meher Baba

had traveled abroad five times, contacting His close followers and spiritual agents, and laying His spiritual cables around the world. Since moving to Nasik with most of the mandali at the beginning of 1931, Baba seldom visited Meherabad.

In 1933, word came from Meherabad that thieves had stolen the corrugated steel sheets from the roof, the planks over the crypt, and the door of the Crypt Room. Baba called the reformed notorious criminal, Satya Mang, who sometimes worked as a watchman there, and after questioning him, ordered him to find out who committed the crime. Satya Mang departed and called a meeting of his former gang members, but no one admitted to having perpetrated the crime. So Satya Mang said, "Meher Baba says that the thief is among us and His words are always true." Hearing this, one of the men, named Fakira, cried out, "If that is so, then you yourself are the thief!"

When Fakira addressed his former leader in this manner, Satya Mang boldly replied, "All right. First, we both go to Meher Baba. Then we will both go to the dhuni and, taking its ash in our mouths, we will repeat these words: 'May he who is the thief die within eight days!'"*

Fakira agreed to do this and both acted accordingly. Fakira died within the week, and later it was learned that he was indeed the thief. This greatly impressed Satya Mang's former gang members and put a stop to their criminal tendencies, much to the relief of the local populace.

On September 15th, Baba instructed Pendu and a few of the other mandali to return to Meherabad and construct some buildings

* *Lord Meher*, online rev. ed., 1579



New Crypt Room Door.

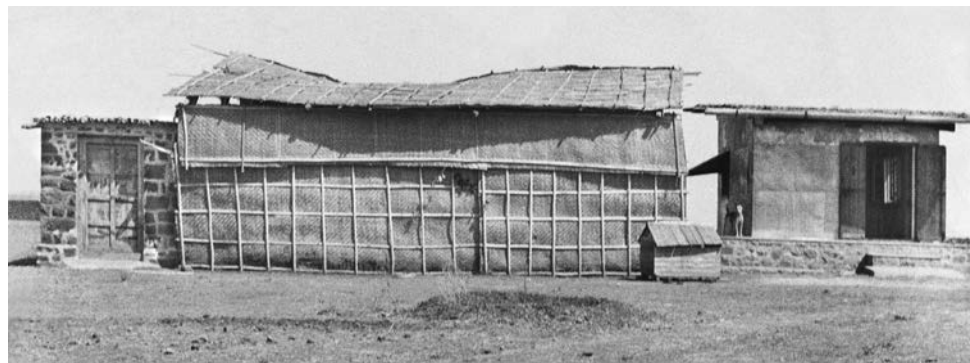
on the hill to accommodate the women's ashram. When the Toka ashram had been disbanded late in 1928, the valuable door of Baba's cabin there with its frame was also removed and returned to Meherabad along with the other materials. This door would now be used in the repair of the Crypt Room, which was also done at this time.

On November 14th, Baba returned from another trip to Europe, and after a few weeks of making arrangements, He moved most of the men and women mandali with the ashram back to Meherabad from Nasik on the 30th. At first, Baba was spending the nights in the west room of the new kitchen building. But Chaghan or one of the other men always had to be on duty as a watchman near Baba at night, and this could not satisfy His wish of keeping the women's ashram completely isolated from the men. So Baba moved back into the Crypt Room, while the men on duty stayed on the platform, which was covered with bamboo matting and canvas to give them some protection from the cold winter winds. During the warmer months, Baba had His bed placed on the crypt platform.

Every evening during May of 1934, after listening to Raosaheb read the Persian poetry of the Qutub Shams-e-Tabriz, Baba would play the game seven tiles, with the mandali at lower Meherabad. During one game on May 13th, Kaka Baria deliberately pushed Baba during the play, and then did the same to Gustadji a few minutes

later. A fight between Kaka and Gustadji ensued, and Baba was furious at them, "It is better they were dead than to behave like this in my presence!" He spelled out. "How dare they do this right in front of me! Their hands and legs should be cut off!" The men realized then that they had done wrong to fight over such a petty matter.

As Baba rested in the Crypt Room that night, with Kaka Baria and two of the other men doing watch duty on the hill, a severe hail-storm with lightning, rain and tremendous winds swept through Meherabad. Roofs were blown off, trees were uprooted, water cans and other small items were carried away into the fields. The men on the hill had to hold the purlins of the Crypt Room firmly, as the roof was about to blow off. Baba came out of the crypt to help, but the force eventually became so great that the sheet metal roof was actually dancing in the wind. The severity of the storm forced them to leave the Crypt Room. No one had ever seen such a severe storm in Meherabad, and they thought that the events earlier in the evening during the game of seven tiles had perhaps saved one of them from being seriously injured.*



Crypt Room with shaded Crypt platform, Baba's cabin on right, 1935.

* *Lord Meher*, online rev. ed., 1605.

To better accommodate Him during His stays on the Hill, Baba directed Padri to build a cabin just to the east of the Crypt Room platform. This work was done quickly in June and July of 1935.

During 1936, a barbed wire fence was installed around the three remaining sides of the area around the Crypt Room and Baba's Cabin in order to form a compound. A gate was installed in the center of the south border and a henna hedge was planted in line with the fencing.

Baba wanted to bring more women into the ashram before World War II started. When the major reconstruction on Meherabad Hill occurred in 1938, Meher Baba's Tomb-Shrine was also built. The Crypt Room was demolished to ground level. A better quality building was planned using the same fine old door from the Toka cabin, but with a new window in each of the other walls. The old Crypt Room would have just fit inside the new building. Baba asked the architect, Naoroji Dadachanji, to

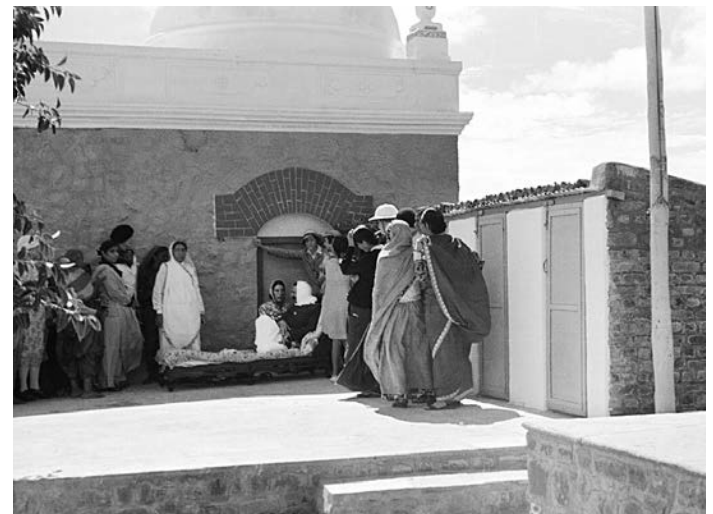


August 1938

incorporate a symbol of each of the four major religions of the world into the design, along with a dome. Baba had informed them that this 'Dome' would be His Tomb.

Stones from the old Post Office building were used for the construction of the new Tomb-Shrine. An improved new platform was made to the east of it, and to commemorate the Sadhak Ashram, a row of five meditation cells were built across the back side of the platform.

On August 10th, Naoroji arrived from Bombay with the four concrete models: a Zoroastrian fire-urn, a Christian cross, a Hindu temple, and a Moslem Mosque. They were fitted atop the four corners of the Tomb-Shrine and the finishing plaster was completed. Set in relief in the plaster frieze at the top of the front wall was Baba's motto, Mastery In Servitude. The celebration for the new expanded ashram took place on August 28th.



Meher Baba and women disciples on the new platform.

Two Swiss artists were also staying on the hill now. Though the masonry was still damp and curing, Baba knew that these women would only be staying a few months, so He directed Helen Dahm to cover the interior of His Tomb-Shrine with murals. Hedi Mertens would assist her by mixing the paints. It was all done in about three months.

In September of 1940, Baba directed Rano Gayley to remove the centerpiece portrait that Helen Dahm had done two years before from the north window of the ‘Dome’, as the Tomb was called then. He asked her to cover the plywood with a new portrait, picturing Him seated wearing the sadra with His hair down. Later when it was finished, it was titled, ‘The Avatar’.

On August 1, 1941 Baba began another important phase of seclusion work on the Hill. But just like some of the previous seclusions at Meherabad, nature reacted. The mandali had never before witnessed



Dictating from the Cage Room.

such winds in August. It became impossible for the watchmen to sit in their tiny cabins at the four corners of the hill. The sheet metal roof of the mast ashram rattled and created a nerve-racking uproar, disturbing Baba terribly. He sent word confirming, “Maya is working against me.”

Baba stayed in the Cage-Room like this for a week and then shifted to the ‘Dome’ on Thursday, August 7th, where He remained for five days continuing His Universal Work. When Baba left the mast ashram to walk to the Tomb, He completely covered His head with a cloth and ordered everyone to clear the area, maintaining His seclusion.

The inclement weather continued. Being disturbed in the Tomb also, Baba moved to His Cabin five days later, on the 12th. But He was disturbed here too, because the mast, Chatti Baba, brought his things to the cabin the same day and took possession of it! So Baba had to move into the bathing room of the mast ashram.

Because of all the disturbance, Baba shifted His work to Panchgani for three months beginning September 1st. Baba continued His seclusion upon His return to Meherabad on November 28th, but this time He began seeing those of the mandali to whom He had assigned different duties. Mostly He would keep to Himself in the Tomb and do His inner work during certain hours. The men continued to keep watch on all sides to maintain an environment of strict quietude. During this period of one and a half months, Upasni Maharaj dropped His body and Baba established the permanent routine of having the Meherabad Dhuni lit on the 12th of the month, by personally attending in December and January.

During the 1940s, Baba occasionally held small darshan or music programs in His Tomb compound, usually in conjunction with Mehera’s birthday. The platform served as a nice stage for these.

During the Divine Theme Sahavas of May 1943 Baba would gather the men attending near the platform outside the Tomb in the evenings. At times, Baba would crack jokes, give discourses, or

listen to ghazals and funny stories from the men. But Baba stressed that they concentrate on the charts and explanations concerning the Divine Theme.

While Baba was busy with His mast work in Satara sometime in mid-May 1947, burglars broke into the Dome and Baba's Cabin on the Hill. They rummaged through files and books, and displaced Baba's mattress, but apparently found nothing that was of value to them. Baba sent Pendu a letter ordering him to increase the number of night watchmen on the Hill and added, "If anything again happens on the Hill, Meherabad will be doomed." (Baba occasionally used this phrase to express the seriousness of an issue to the mandali.)

In September of 1947, Baba made Sarosh the joint owner with Him of the parcel of land on the hill on which His Tomb and the rest of the ashram there was set. When Baba entered His New Life with a few companions in 1949, He disbanded both ashrams, selling off most property. However, Meherjee and Nariman purchased Lower Meherabad and Meherazad respectively. Baba only kept the property on the Hill in joint ownership with Sarosh. Before leaving Meherabad, during the meetings, Baba gave the order that if and wherever He might drop His body, the companions should bring it back to be buried in His Tomb on the Hill. This order stood for the rest of His life.

In November of 1952, Baba called three hundred men for a three-day meeting at Meherabad to set plans for the upcoming Fiery Free Life tour. At the end of the last day of the meeting (November 9th) Baba granted permission to all the visitors to visit the Dome on the Hill, commenting that the place was of great spiritual importance.

In September of 1954, twenty western men had the opportunity



1940s



September 14, 1954.

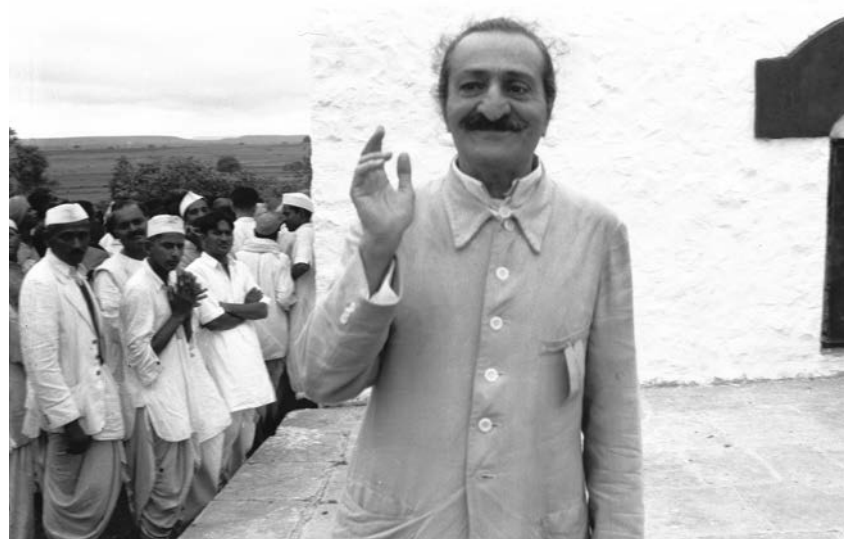


September 24, 1954

to spend time with Baba, staying on the Hill at Meherabad. It was a very eventful period that came to be known as 'Three Incredible Weeks.' On the morning of September 14th, Baba showed the western men, Godavari Mai and the kanyas from Sakori His Tomb-Shrine. When Baba walked into the Tomb, there was a dead sparrow lying on the floor. Baba carefully picked it up and spelled on the board, "Lucky sparrow."

On September 18th, Baba instructed two young Australians, Bill LePage and John Ballantyne, to sit in His Tomb at midnight for half an hour for a few nights. On September 24th, Baba again took the men for a tour of His Tomb and Cabin and the graves to the west.

On the morning of September 30th, Baba led a thousand men up the Hill, who had come to attend the special meeting that day. They walked



On the platform, September 30, 1954.

through the Meher Retreat Compound directly to the Tomb where Baba and some of the mandali stood on the platform. Baba narrated a few details about His seclusion and fast here during the Meher/Prem Ashram period. He also praised His intimate mandali. He asked the men to form a queue and go into His Tomb one by one to bow down to His final resting place. After circumambulating the Tomb-Shrine, they all returned down the Hill, where that afternoon, Baba delivered His monumental Final Declaration.

In November of 1955 Baba invited men from all around India to attend a sahavas with Him at Meherabad. The sahavas lasted four weeks, one week for each different language group. During one morning of each Sahavas week, Baba would lead the men walking up the Hill where He showed them the different structures and reminisced about the experiences there. Baba would enter the Tomb and stand on the side ledge of the crypt with Eruch, and have ten men at a time come in. Eruch would tell them about Baba's long seclusion and fast there in 1927–28. After Baba narrated experiences on the Hill to the last group under the Tin Shed, He observed, "It is



Meher Baba on the side ledge of the crypt of His Tomb.

your great fortune that I myself brought you to my last resting place. After sixty years, this place will be a world center of pilgrimage.”

In February of 1958, Baba gave a sahasvas program for His lovers from India and Pakistan, this time for both men and women. The language groups were divided into two different groups, each attending for five days. Because of the damage to His hip from the automobile accident in 1956, Baba was carried up the Hill in a sedan chair by men taking turns on one morning of each of the group sahasvas. Inside the Meher Retreat compound on the Hill, Baba described some of the past events and phases on the Hill giving particular importance to His Tomb. To the second group Baba stated, “After I drop my body, my physical remains will rest here, and this Hill will become an important place of pilgrimage for the world. You all do not realize the importance of this day. After 70 years, this place will be a place of great privilege and pilgrimage.”*

Baba wanted all those attending the sahasvas who had not seen His Tomb before, to go there and take darshan. “See it and pay your respects with a firm resolve that you will try your best to give happiness to others

at the cost of your own, and that you will love Baba with all your heart. Having made this resolve, try to follow these two things honestly.”*

On April 6, 1959 the Avatar Meher Baba Trust Deed was registered in the presence of Meher Baba and the ten original trustees. The ownership of the Tomb was now in the name of the Trust. The deed also stipulated two points concerning the Tomb: 1) the names and position of the graves of eleven of Baba’s close women disciples directly to the east and west sides of His Tomb-Shrine, and 2) the mention of a future ‘super structure’ covering the area extending at least fifty feet from the Tomb-Shrine in all directions.

Padri, one of the trustees, remembered how hard the ground around the Tomb-Shrine was, and brought it to Baba’s attention. To dig eleven grave sites of proper depth would have been very difficult. So Baba allowed ten of the women to be cremated, but He insisted that Mehera’s body should be buried at His right side. The work of excavating Mehera’s grave site was done during the 1960s.

On August 11, 1962, Baba attended the burial of Gulmai K. Irani at the cemetery to the west of His Tomb-Shrine. Baba placed flowers on her body, and then her coffin was closed and lowered into the ground. This was the last time Meher Baba ever visited Meherabad, a fitting tribute to His spiritual mother who was instrumental in bringing Him there.

*A*fter a prolonged illness exacerbated by the years of strain from His Universal Work, Avatar Meher Baba dropped His body at Meherazad at 12:15 pm on January 31, 1969. Padri came to the Tomb and directed the work of removing the stone flooring at

* *Lord Meher*, online rev. ed., 4334.

* *Lord Meher*, online rev. ed., 4269.



"Begin the Beguine" in the Tomb, February 1, 1969.

the base of the crypt and excavating the depth another foot. In Ahmednagar, Chaggan and Donkin meticulously oversaw the work of creating a special coffin. Baba's body would be placed upon a flat plywood base while the plywood cover that would be placed over Baba's body was constructed in the form of a box to fit the base, with a handle at each side corner. At 5:00 pm, accompanied by Eruch and Bhau, Baba's body was brought to Meherabad on a stretcher in an ambulance, and then placed in His Cabin on the Hill. Mani had brought the phonograph player from Meherazad and played the record "Begin the Beguine" there and later in the Tomb, a total of seven times, as per Baba's wish.

FACING PAGE: *Interment*



By sunset the work in the crypt was complete, and the stretcher was carried from the Cabin into the Tomb and placed on the ledge of the crypt. The wooden base on which Baba's body was to be placed was then lowered and set into the base of the crypt. For better visibility, Eruch placed three pieces of the stone flooring under the wooden base, where Baba's head would be placed, to bring the angle of Baba's body up about four inches. As all present repeatedly shouted, "Avatar Meher Baba ki Jai!", His body was lifted with the carpet on which it lay and carefully lowered onto the wooden base in the crypt. Baba's head was to the north and His feet near the steps leading down into the crypt. Bed sheets were neatly arranged around His body and blocks of ice covered in teak sawdust were placed in the space between the crypt walls. With the light of a kerosene lantern, Chaggan stayed near the Tomb the entire night while people continued to come for darshan. Padri stayed at Lower Meherabad, receiving people and directing them to the hill. Some did not sleep for days, meeting the crowds of His lovers or tending to details.

The next day there was some argument between Baba's close disciples; some were of the opinion that since Baba's body was not embalmed it should be interred as soon as possible. But led by Sarosh, others were adamant that as long as there was no sign of decomposition, Baba's body should remain uncovered and available for those coming not only from around India, but from all over the world to have one last chance for His physical darshan. So they closely monitored His body as the days went by, and recalled the different remarks Baba had made during His final days. When the mandali had been concerned that the strain of the upcoming darshan program would be too much for Baba, He had replied that

He could give darshan lying down. And when they countered that people would not easily be able to see His face, He had responded by signing that His head could be lifted a few inches, so that their view would not be obstructed.

Hundreds of people began coming for Baba's darshan, and though the accommodations at Meherabad were minimal, many stayed. Women stayed on the hill wherever they could get a space and the men slept on the floors and verandahs in Lower Meherabad. There was no electricity at Meherabad at that time, but the full moon that week offered some light.

Every eight hours the doors of the Tomb were closed while fresh blocks of ice were placed around Baba's body and covered again with sawdust and rose petals. For the first two nights, Eruch drove Mehera and the women mandali back to Meherazad in the evening. But from February 2nd, they began staying on Meherabad Hill in the East Room of the Meher Retreat building. They continued coming to the Tomb often. Dr. Goher regularly examined Baba's body for signs of deterioration, but none were found.

After a few days a simple cloth awning stretched over bamboo poles was erected at the front of the Tomb to protect people from the sun, and later another larger pandal was quickly set up in the area east of the Tomb. A simple wooden railing was arranged from Baba's Cabin to the door of the Tomb to ensure an orderly darshan queue. On the platform to the east, different bhajan groups poured their hearts out in song. Keshav Nigam recited his composition 'Meher Chalisa' inside the Tomb each day, and Harry Kenmore said the Parvardigar and Repentance Prayers.



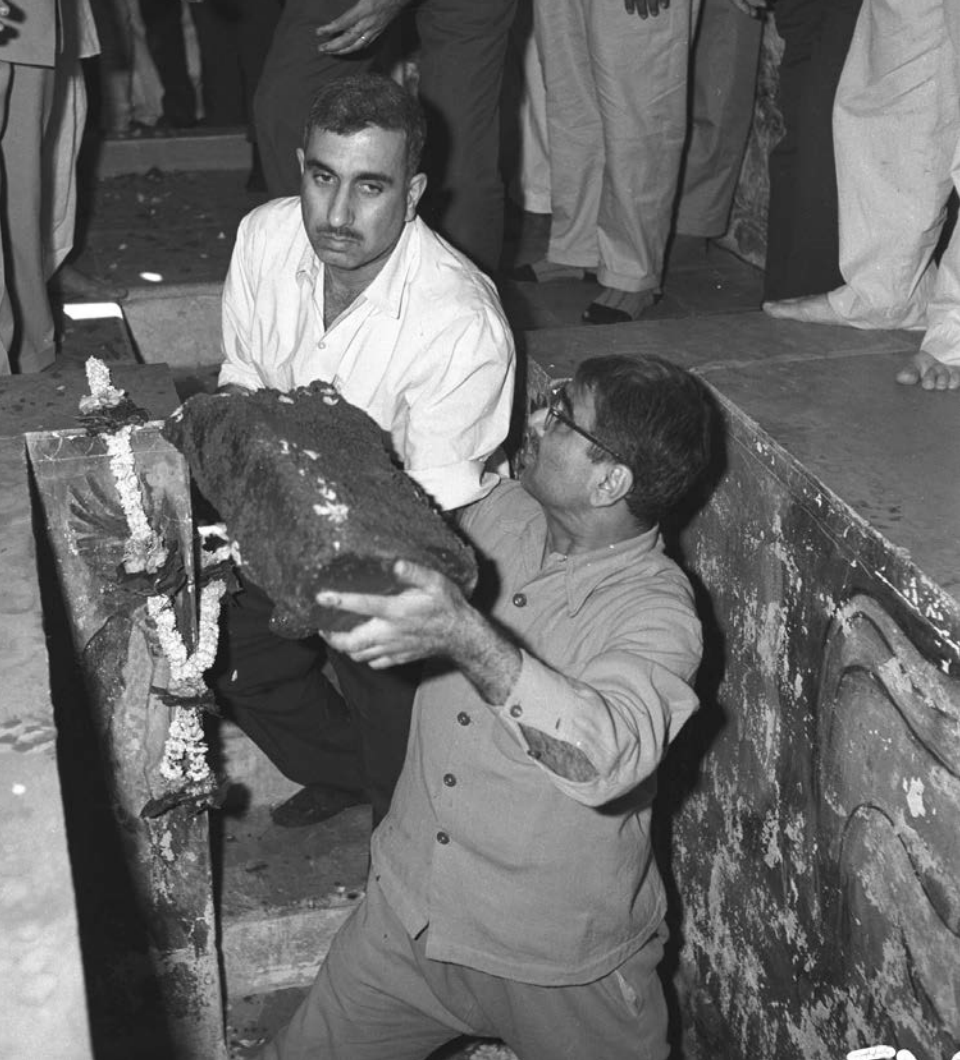
Baba's face remained fresh and lustrous.

As the days went by they recalled that on the morning of the 31st Baba had stated that He would be 100% free from His suffering in seven days. The mandali agreed that the seventh day would be the correct day for Baba's interment. It was also His birthday according to the Zoroastrian calendar. By 4:30 am, on February 7th, several thousand people had gathered at the Tomb. Twenty minutes later the women mandali entered. Everyone stood and sang the chant, "Satchitananda, Paramananda, Meher Baba, Vidyanand" until five o'clock, when all in unison loudly cheered, "Avatar Meher Baba ki Jai!" three times.

After the women garlanded Baba they returned to the East Room. The doors of the Tomb were opened and the final darshan began. After sunrise there was a tremendous rush of people to Meherabad, since newspapers publicized that February 7th would be the final day of darshan, and Baba's body would be interred at 12:15 pm, exactly seven days after He had dropped His body.

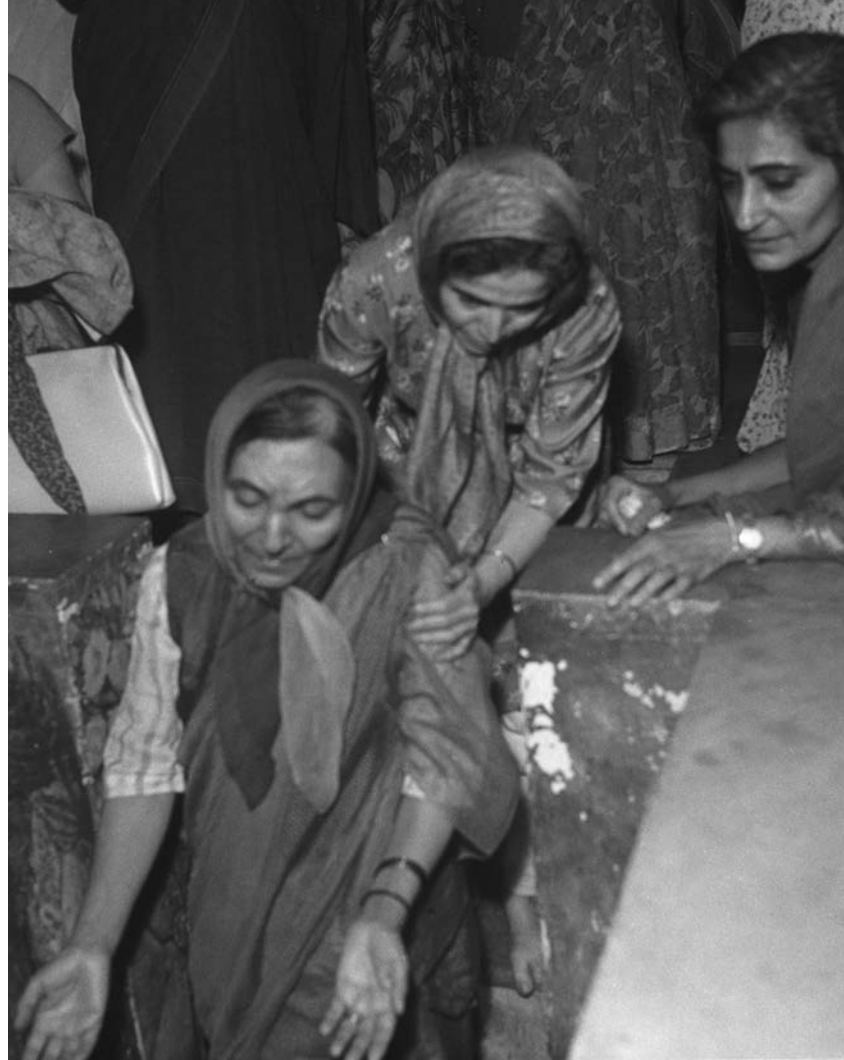
Only a very few were allowed to descend into the crypt and touch Baba's feet. There simply was not enough time for everyone to have that privilege. After 7:00 am, no one was allowed to enter the Tomb except the two men on duty, one at the door and the one fanning Baba. Many were given the privilege of this duty for two minutes each.

By 11:20 am, everyone present had taken their last darshan of Baba's body. Anece Hassen took some film footage inside the Tomb. Exactly at noon, Kenmore said the Master's Prayer, and at 12:15 pm again three loud cheers of "Avatar Meher Baba Ki Jai!" rang out. The doors of the Tomb were closed temporarily, while Baba's body was covered with a clean outer sheet.



Removing the blocks of ice.

Eruch removed the ice blocks, passing them to the other men who stood around the crypt. These were passed to the Western men who stood outside. When all the blocks were removed, the pink cloth around Baba's head was changed for the last time. His hair was brushed, the scarf around His head straightened, dust particles on His face gently wiped away, and He was adorned with fresh roses.



The women washed Baba's feet in their tears one last time.

Mehera, Mani and the other women mandali then came to the Tomb to have their last darshan. Everyone else stood silently around the Tomb. In the pin-drop silence, only Mehera's heart-breaking sobs could be heard. After Mehera garlanded and kissed Baba in final farewell, the women stepped out of the Tomb.*

* *Lord Meher*, online rev. ed., 1013.



Mehera and the other women watched from the north window as the box-cover was hoisted up by the mandali standing on the crypt's landings, and amidst loud cries of "Avatar Meher Baba Ki Jai!" it was slowly lowered over Baba—sealing His body from sight for all time.

The men mandali then went inside the Tomb. The teakwood coffin box-cover that had been kept in a room was passed through the door of the Tomb, and ropes were tied to the four handles on its corners. Just before it was placed over Baba's body, Eruch went down into the crypt and placed a very fine scarf given by Mehera over Baba's face.



Padri directing the work.

After the box-cover was set in place, Padri placed a stone slab between the crypt and the steps leading down into it. Additional teak planks were placed across the width of the coffin, perpendicular to the longer boards of the box-cover to provide extra weight-bearing capacity. The men mandali came out and the women went inside once again to lay a large garland of roses over the coffin. After Mehera and the others left, the men went in to strew flowers over the entire



Additional teak planks were placed across the width of the coffin, to provide extra weight-bearing capacity.

coffin. A ghamela full of earth was brought inside, and each of the men mandali scattered a handful of earth over the coffin.*

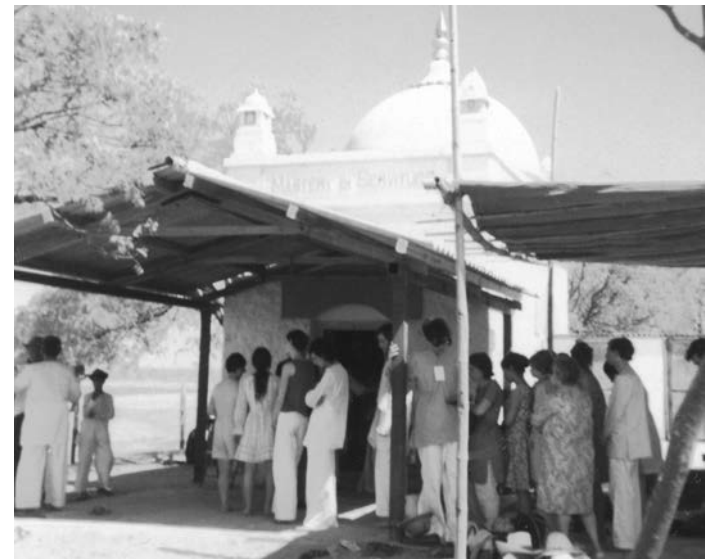
Since several thousand men, women and children were waiting outside, it was decided that instead of each lover walking inside the Tomb and placing earth on the coffin, they should only touch the earth at the threshold. The earth would then be strewn over the coffin. In this way the long queue began. As the crypt was gradually

* *Lord Meher*, online rev. ed., 5412.

filled, more stone slabs were placed vertically between the crypt and the steps, and the steps were also filled to floor level.

Because it was Baba's birthday (according to the Zoroastrian calendar), prasad was distributed to all who came for darshan. After nearly five hours, before 5:00 pm, the crypt was filled with earth. The floor of the Tomb was swept and cleaned. Baba's seven-colored flag was draped over the earth. The women mandali returned again to what had become the Samadhi of Avatar Meher Baba, to offer flowers to their Beloved. Most of them continued to visit Baba's Samadhi at least once every few weeks for the rest of their lives.

Within two months the first semi-permanent porch section had been constructed to offer shelter at the front of the Tomb-Shrine. It was ready when the first groups of pilgrims attending the Great Darshan in Poona came in April that year.



Darshan, April 1969.

About six months after interment, the box-cover of the coffin partially collapsed, creating a depression in the earth fill of the crypt. For some weeks after that occurred, the Tomb was filled with the fragrance of the many roses that had been placed on Baba's body during the interment. A rumor spread that Meher Baba had come out of His Samadhi, and so people from miles around came to His Tomb to see for themselves.

Until the top of the crypt was sealed, some people coming for darshan were taking handfuls of earth from there. So every few days the level had to be carefully replenished. By the first anniversary of Baba's passing, the floor section covering the steps was paved with green aggregate tiles and the top of the crypt with fine concrete plaster. The platform and meditation cells adjacent were removed



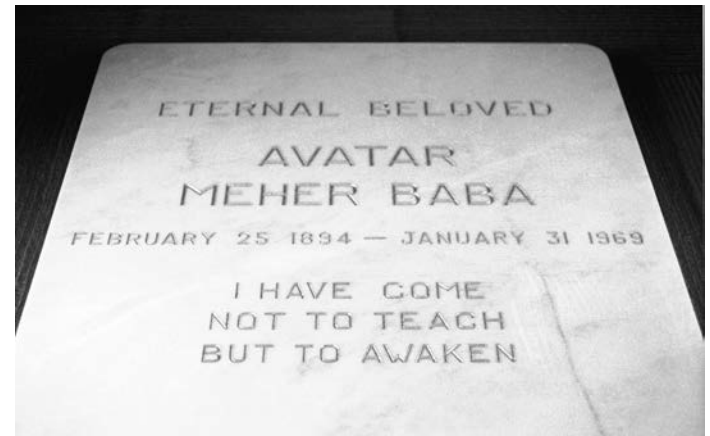
1969

and a new covered platform, which was named Sabha Mandap, was constructed in the larger space further east.

The anniversary of Meher Baba dropping His Body has come to be known as 'Amartithi' (immortal date), a term given by Bhau Kalchuri.

During a trip to the West in 1970, Rano made arrangements to purchase the Italian Carrara marble slab to be set over the crypt. Padri supervised its installation on November 14th, 1971. The composition for the inscription was determined by unanimous consensus of the mandali. In 1985, a slab of rose granite replaced the original tile flooring that covered the crypt steps.

In the early 1970s Mehera asked Charles Morton to create a stained-glass work for the north window from a photograph of her choice. Since the medium required extensive work, Charlie thought it would be a good idea to make a painting of it first for approval by those supervising the work (Mehera, Mani, and Rano). In 1991, by Mani's decision, the painting itself was installed.

*The marble slab.*

The large photograph of Baba that it replaced is now kept in His Cabin.

Mani also chose the exterior colors of the Tomb-Shrine, and a complete restoration of the original building was done from 1990 to 1992. The repainting of the interior murals that had been done by Bhaiya Panday in 1971 was removed to reveal what was left of Helen Dahm's original work. The murals were then completely restored.

The stretcher that carried Baba's body from Meherazad that day is still there, kept inside His Cabin on Meherabad Hill. Remnants of the henna hedge and the single west gate-post from Baba's compound still remain there as reminders of those earlier days.

Meher Baba's Beloved Mehera passed away on May 20th, 1989. Her body was interred directly to the right of Baba's, as per His wish. Baba's sister Mani and the other nine women designated by Baba to have their graves near His Tomb have also passed away now.

The physical body of the Avatar is God's direct means of interacting and working for His creation in the perfectly personal way that He alone can do. Proximity to His physical form, even after He has left it is the most tangible way for humanity to access the unique treasure of Divine Impressions, established by His perfect labor during the lifetime of God in human form. These Divine Impressions can purify and sanctify any life.

As the years go by, the number of people from around the world making pilgrimage to the Samadhi of Avatar Meher Baba is steadily increasing, especially during Amartithi.

***"Meherabad will one day become
the greatest place of pilgrimage on earth."***

MEHER BABA

FACING PAGE: Crowd gathered on Meherabad Hill during Amartithi.



this is the inside
back cover