

Lives of Love

by

Judith Garbett

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Lives of Love

The Women Mandali of Avatar
Meher Baba

Stories Of Their Lives
And Recollections Of Times
Spent With Them

Judith Garbett

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Dedicated to
Avatar Meher Baba



Meher Baba in Meherazad garden
as seen through Mehera's window, 1954

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I could not have completed this book without the loving help of a few close Baba friends.

First I wish to say a heartfelt thank you to Bill Le Page whose continuing interest, encouragement, reading time, helpful suggestions on style, constructive comments, and lots of other assistance, have all been invaluable throughout the whole project. I am particularly indebted to him for his generosity in setting up the computer in my cottage in November 1994 so that I could actually begin to write the book. It would have been impossible otherwise for me to do any work because increasing health problems meant I could no longer use a normal typewriter. But I want to add that from the outset Bill has firmly stated that it was Beloved Baba who arranged it all. While at Meherazad in September, and wondering what to do to help, quite suddenly the whole idea about a computer was completely clear in his mind. He knew immediately that Baba Himself had provided this answer, and so all he had to do was carry it out.

I am especially grateful to Mani and the mandali for many loving letters and messages saying how much they liked my book, for their encouragement, and their good wishes for its publication. In particular I deeply appreciate the time and energy they spent in checking all the stories. This has given an authority, a seal of approval, which I feel sure will be of value to future readers.

My thanks go to Ann Conlon of Sheriar Foundation for her kindness in going through my first manuscript, giving me encouragement about what she liked, but also offering some excellent suggestions for improvement in style and in the presentation of particular sections. And finally, in spite of her extremely busy schedule, she found time to go through the whole revised version of the book which also incorporated the various changes and additions from the mandali.

I want to say a word of special appreciation to Diana Le Page, Gary and Kaye Lindsay, Jenny and Ross Keating for the warmth of

their friendship and ongoing support in my work; to Mike and Jenny Walmsley for their expertise in guiding me through the early rather terrifying stages of learning how to use the computer, and also coming to the rescue when needed, to Peter and Kathy Milne for providing such a quantity of progressive print-out copies of my manuscript over the initial long period before I got my own small printer. I also thank a number of American and Australian Baba lovers who have written or come to see me at different times, expressing interest in the book and hoping it will be published.

Above all, I offer my love and gratitude to Beloved Avatar Meher Baba. He has given me everything, He has made everything possible. He is always there, His love is always with me. He has assuredly prompted me to delve deep within my heart and mind, unveiling the myriad glowing memories of all the wonderful hours I spent over the years at Meherabad and Meherazad with His dear mandali. He has helped me to describe at least some aspects of their true beauty, their warmth and humanness, and their love for their beloved Lord. ~ I dedicate this book to Him.

Judith Garbett
Avatar's Abode, February 1998

INTRODUCTION

This book fulfills my long-held wish to write about Mehera, Mani, and all the women mandali of Avatar Meher Baba whom I met, retelling the beautiful stories they told about Him and their lives with Him, and attempting to give a picture of each one, as well as some indication of what it was like to spend time in their company.

Each account is based on the extensive notes which I made of the stories the mandali told during my many visits to Meherabad and Meherazad from 1973 to 1991, as well as times at the East-West Gathering in November 1962, and the Great Darshan in May 1969 which were held in Poona. To these I have added my own clear recollections of the happy times I spent in each one's company over the years.

The majority of the anecdotes and stories included have not been published previously as far as I know. One or two stories may be found to differ slightly from those already known to some readers, but I have given them as they were told on the different occasions mentioned.

I am deeply indebted to dear Mani for her request late in 1995 to send all the chapters to Meherazad for Meheru to check, particularly the sections on Mehera. When the material came back to me I was so grateful to find that Meheru had carefully checked Mehera's stories, making a few corrections, and had similarly gone through her own chapter. As well as that, each of the mandali had likewise checked their chapters. But most touching of all was that in spite of her severe illness, pain and difficulties, dear Mani had given so much of her precious time and energy to going through her chapters herself, editing, making some corrections and even adding new details to many of her stories.

For those who have met Mehera, Mani and all the mandali, I cherish the hope that the book will bring back memories of their own times with them. For those who did not meet Mehera and some of the others, or who have not been at all to Meherabad and Meherazad, I hope that they will gain at least some idea of the beauty of Baba's close ones, and will also be able to visualize the very special places which are His Homes. With this in mind I have included some quite detailed descriptions of

Meherazad and Meherabad.

Apart from the wealth of material each one told about her life with Baba, I have tried to give pictures of the women mandali as I knew them, because this is the most natural way for me to write about them. I have also included here and there a few of the things they said to me at different times, and although these are personal I have shared them because they help to portray the loving kindness which the mandali offer unstintingly to everyone coming to Meherazad and Meherabad.

These close ones of Baba's all have that heart-warming quality of making you feel that they are just so happy to see you at His Home. And the depth and sweetness of their welcome is also Baba's loving welcome which is ever-present in their hearts, manifesting in the warm circle of their embrace.

Meher Baba is their Beloved, always the Centre of their lives. These accounts reflect their love and total dedication to Him, and at the same time give many beautiful pictures and different aspects of Baba Himself, the Lord of Love.

Judith Garbett

PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION

When Judith Garbett published this book in 1998 of some of Meher Baba's women mandali's stories, and of her life with them, it was welcomed hungrily, as most people did not know many of the stories appearing within it. The book had only the one small printing, which sold out almost immediately, and then Judith died shortly afterwards.

Most people have not seen or read *Lives Of Love* and, in many respects, it remains a unique book, even twenty years later.

Aside from eliminating some typos and correcting a few factual errors, and adding some commas to enhance readability, we have left the text as it was, with Judith's original (and sometimes idiosyncratic) punctuation, grammar and formatting intact, since it is her book.

Meher Baba has prompted many people to help in this project, unasked, without whom it would not have been completed. Steve Klein offered to retype the entire original text so that it could be digitized. Sheila Krynski offered to design both the front and back covers. Many photographs were generously donated by Susan White (her brother Win Coates' photos), David Fenster, and Anne Giles. David Fenster was one of the proofreaders and was responsible for correcting the factual errors in the original. My thanks to the photographers whose identity remain a mystery to us, for the two photos we used of theirs.

I would also like to thank Bill & Diana Le Page for their assistance, and of course the Avatar Meher Baba Perpetual Public Charitable Trust, who own the copyright, for giving their kind permission to go ahead with this project. So much help has come spontaneously on the way that I cannot help but feel how much Meher Baba wants this book to see the light of day again, available to anyone who would like to imbibe what is within.

in Meher Baba's love,
Eric Teperman
Myrtle Beach, 2019

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MEHERA – Part I

RECOLLECTIONS AND IMPRESSIONS

Mehera was Avatar Meher Baba's beloved and His chief woman disciple. Baba said of her on different occasions, "She is My Radha." "She is the purest one." "She is My very breath without which I cannot live." "Mehera loves Me as I should be loved."

Mehera had a beauty of form, and an inner beauty which cannot easily be described in words, for it was the beauty of absolute purity, of selfless love for her Beloved, her Lord. The love just radiated from her, and to spend time with her was to become more and more aware of the depth of her one-pointed devotion to Him, her constant thought of Him, her whole life's purpose to love and serve and obey Him, and her continual longing to be reunited with Him.

There was never any doubt of Mehera's special place among all the mandali, the pilgrims and the residents. Everyone was aware of an innate regal quality about her—Mehera was the queen, and all accorded her that deference. She did not accept familiarity, even if it was accidental or unthinking, yet she was never overbearing. There was a nobility and quiet dignity in her nature which of itself conveyed her status, and in her presence people spontaneously and naturally conducted themselves in the manner due to her as the beloved of the Beloved.

At the same time, Mehera was warm, friendly, and charming. She had a wonderful sense of humour, often characterised by delightfully infectious girlish laughter. When listening to her stories about Baba and her life with Him, one was quickly drawn into them and able to visualise the occasions which she was obviously re-living while describing them so vividly.

On the porch of the main house at Meherazad facing the garden, Mehera always sat in her comfortable big armchair which was covered in a simple cotton fabric. Down the side of the chair below the padded armrest she sometimes used to tuck in a few items such as photographs or cards to pass around among all present, and usually also kept there some small wrapped sweets which she liked to give now and then to children.

When Mehera was on the porch, one or two of the women mandali and other close ones were also always there, ready to help her in any way at all, whether it was a simple matter or of particular importance. As brief examples, in the early years she would occasionally

ask one of them in Gujarati for an English word or a detail she could not quickly bring to mind for the story she was telling. Mehera at all times had to be instantly protected if any man unknowingly approached too close to her, and on the very rare occasions when some unsuitable subject was unthinkingly spoken of in her presence or a disrespectful question asked, one of the mandali immediately put a stop to it.

Women pilgrims used to sit on the variety of chairs and low stools beside Mehera or along the edge of the porch, and men would sit a little further away or on the benches placed on the ground just in front of the building and directly facing her. Mehera always embraced women and children, but Baba's most strict order from the earliest years was that men must never touch her. So they would greet her while standing a short distance from her, their hands placed together in the customary Indian manner of respect. When one of the men pilgrims was leaving for home, Mehera would give him her usual prasad of sweets wrapped in a small brown-paper packet, holding it delicately by the string with her arm stretched out towards him and then with a smile she would let it drop down gently into his cupped hands as she said goodbye and "Jai Baba" to him.

Mehera did not hesitate to speak out firmly if pilgrims were thoughtless about anything to do with Baba. For instance, one morning on the porch she told someone who had put Baba's photo on the floor never to do that. At Meherabad she would anxiously say to some newcomers that the flowers or garlands they were offering to Baba must not be allowed to fall or touch the floor. At one time she made it very clear to those present that one should not smell the perfume of a flower before offering it to Baba because then it would not be given wholly to Him—"Baba must always come first," she said. At Meherazad she asked people who had touched their shoes to wash their hands before going into Baba's Room. In these and similar situations she would remind all to be more aware of their actions, to think more about Baba and what would be pleasing to Him.

On the other hand, Mehera would at times be visibly touched by the expression of someone's love for Baba—as an example, one Sunday during the music programme in Mandali Hall she wept at the words of a beautiful Baba song written and sung by a young American. She would also delight in funny skits produced and acted there, or be moved by plays specially written and performed for Baba's Birthday, or for her own birthday celebration. She enjoyed the songs and music presented at

times for her on the porch, and listened attentively to the words—many pilgrims are very talented musicians, so all present not only shared her pleasure in these performances but were happy to see her happiness in them.

The porch quite early became known as Mehera's porch, and it was always the venue for wonderful Baba stories for about an hour before lunch, and sometimes for a short period late in the afternoon. On Tuesdays and Thursdays those women who were invited for Tea with Mehera would also enjoy many little stories and anecdotes in the intimate atmosphere of Baba's dining room.

Mehera always looked so nice. She was of medium height, had a neat figure, graceful hands and small slim feet. Her skin was fair, and she wore her dark softly-waving hair in a very simple style which suited her, the length finishing low on her neck and lightly caught back with a pin or two. Her eyes were beautiful, so alive and very expressive of all moods. For special occasions she always wore bright saris, but her regular dress at Meherazad was an ankle-length skirt and fitted over-blouse with sleeves to the elbow, usually made of attractive cotton fabrics in prints and toning plain colours. Green, she once mentioned, was her favourite colour, but she also looked sweet in varying shades of mauves, blues or pinks. Generally she wore flat easy-to-slip-into footwear, some made of a dark red crushed-velvet material which went well with her long skirts when she was in the house or on the porch.

Mehera walked quickly with lithe and graceful movements, whether she was inside or outside, and one had to be alert to keep pace with her. When going from the main house to Mandali Hall through the garden she always used a small black cotton umbrella as protection from the sun, but at Meherabad when she was carrying garlands to offer to Baba in the Samadhi, one of the Western women residents walked close behind to hold the umbrella over her.

Over the years Mehera's changes of mood could be discerned now and then by those with her on the porch. During the early '70s when it was still so soon after Baba had left His physical form, sometimes Mehera would not seem to be in very good health, looking so drawn and remote that some even wondered whether they would see her again. But of course she always rallied. And naturally there were occasions when she appeared more tired than usual and then chatted only about "everyday" things with not so many Baba stories. But in the late '70s and through the '80s there were many, many occasions when she seemed very bright, very

relaxed, talked easily, told delightful stories, and laughed quite a lot. Yet underlying it all in her last years, it was also very apparent that she was gradually, gently, almost imperceptibly, becoming more quietly withdrawn, more and more absorbed in thoughts of her Beloved, constantly longing for His call to join Him forever.

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The East-West Gathering

I first met Mehera at Guruprasad, Poona, on 31st October 1962, the eve of the East-West Gathering. It was in Baba's presence, and just a few minutes after I had met Beloved Baba Himself for the first time.

With Mehera were Mani, Goher, Naja, Rano and Meheru. Our small group of Australian women spent only a very brief time with them but it was very sweet, the more so because it was totally unexpected—we had not thought to see them at all. So the quiet introductions to one another, the few words of greeting, the gentle embraces, all had a very special quality, and my memory of those moments is still crystal-clear. Indeed, how could it not be so, because this most wonderful occasion of my life—this meeting Beloved Baba and His dear ones—set the whole pattern of my existence from then on, brought me love and sweet companionship such as I had never before known, and opened avenues of enjoyment in daily living never dreamt of or aspired to.

There were two other occasions during the East-West Gathering to see Mehera. On the first afternoon after being drenched in the sudden rain-squall, all the Western women were called to the women mandali's quarters for changes of clothing. However, I was too shy, too overwhelmed to avail myself of this, and simply stood at the back of the room watching the others, so I didn't actually speak to Mehera then.

Finally, on the last afternoon when we were called to say goodbye to Mehera, she had a number of small items spread out on a bed from which she selected something to give to each of us in turn. My gift was a tiny photo of Baba sitting inside the house at Mahabaleshwar feeding carrots to the small horse Begum, and I still keep this among my special Baba treasures.

Everything about the East-West Gathering was so momentous for me—meeting Baba for the first time and being in His presence all day each day was an experience not easy to describe. Yet I know, looking

Mehera

back, that I never felt lost or out of it in any way. The focus was always on Baba, and time stood still in His presence.

The brief meeting with Mehera and the women mandali was also a very special part of it all, but it was not until years later at the Great Darshan that I began to realise the significance, the beauty and poignancy of times spent in Mehera's company.

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The Great Darshan

For our Australian group, the first morning of the Great Darshan was Thursday 15th May 1969. Walking into Guruprasad again after more than six years caught at my heart, and memories of meeting Baba at the East-West Gathering came flooding back. But now it was not the form of the Beloved who waited for us in His chair, just a large and beautifully-garlanded photograph leaning against the cushions. Yet Baba was so much there, His Presence was very, very strong.

Mehera, Mani, the Maharani of Baroda who owned Guruprasad, Goher, Rano, Khorshed, Arnavaz, Naja and Meheru came in from their quarters on the left-hand side of the big main room where we were gathered. Mehera softly and shyly greeted us with "Jai Baba." This was the first time we saw her participating in a large gathering with men as well as women present. The women mandali sat in a group near Baba's chair, partly facing us. Mani said a few words on Mehera's behalf, then they all sang the Gujarati Arti which had been composed by Baba Himself in the 1920s. Eruch and the men mandali sat on the other side of Baba's chair.

Soon came the long-awaited moment of taking Baba's darshan. His armchair, covered in a plain blue-green fabric, was placed a little towards the back of a small square dais. There was a colourful rug where Baba's feet would have rested, and on the floor in front a small Persian carpet. Behind Baba's chair, pink floral curtains were fastened together over the wide doorway which led out to the back rooms, and the strong morning sun shone through this fabric, highlighting His chair.

The framed photograph of Baba's head and shoulders leaning back in the chair was almost life-size. One by one all came to Baba, bowing down to Him in their own way, just as everyone did when He was there in His physical form. Each then left the room quietly to go along the front

Mehera

verandah to Baba's bedroom.

I felt that it was in His bedroom that Beloved Baba really gave me darshan, and to this day the memory of it remains the most beautiful time with Him during those four days. The room was not very large. To the left there were two armchairs side by side, one covered in a light green material which Baba used when relaxing. The other, covered in yellow, He used when working. Beyond the chairs there was a wooden clothes-rack and a small table, with some of Baba's things on each. On the right-hand side of the room just inside the door was Baba's bed with a pink flowered cover, and a plain pink cotton canopy over the high wooden framework. Beside the bed was a small rug, a footstool, and a pair of His sandals.

Baba's Presence was just so incredibly strong. He was *there*. My eyes filled with tears. I felt as though my heart was bursting, and that I was being drawn out of myself, beyond myself. Yet I was also aware of no outward movement, it was all within me, my soul was crying out to him and He was drawing me to Him. I turned to His bed, went down on my knees and bent my head to the flowered cover. A perfume wafted up, so overpowering in its sweetness that again tears spilled over, and in my heart I tried to talk to Him.

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These moments were quite overwhelming in their intensity, but Baba had more in store for me. Not long afterwards, when I had somewhat recovered composure and was standing on the verandah near some others, Dr. Goher came and said that Mehera was on her side verandah and would like to see us. I went round straight away. It was a rather small area, and Mehera was standing with the two or three women already there so I waited nearby. Soon it was my turn and she embraced me. She had remained standing and I stood facing her, my hands resting on her arms, and she allowed me to continue doing so while she talked of Baba, also of the 1962 Gathering and the Darshan.

Mehera said how much she still missed Baba's physical presence—she knew that He was in the heart, that He was everywhere, but she missed Him so much. While she was speaking tears were running down her cheeks, but she went on talking gently and in a calm manner. It seemed that although she had accepted Baba's Will, yet at the same time,

Mehera

being very human and loving Him as deeply and devotedly as she did, it was natural that her tears still came. She told of Baba's long and strenuous seclusion, of how tired He was after a work period, His body covered with perspiration, and His thigh bruised from the constant hammering with His fist, which He told them was to keep His link with the gross plane.

Mehera said that they all felt orphaned, and that whenever she broke down in tears the others would remind her of Baba's last message to her to be brave, and set an example for everyone. "Baba helps us and encourages us," she said.

While she talked I was in tears myself part of the time, and could only manage a word or two. Yet she, whose whole life was centered totally in Baba, stood there quietly in her immeasurable grief giving out so much love in speaking of Him, demonstrating so perfectly the strength and beauty of her one-pointed devotion for her Lord, her only Beloved.

Finally she said to me, "How fortunate you are to have been here in 1962 and to have seen Him then. And you are fortunate to come now, because you have obeyed Baba's wish in coming, and He would be happy about that because obedience always shows your love."

These few minutes surely showed something of Mehera's own obedience to her Beloved, a tiny glimpse of the depth of her love for Him in giving time and energy, despite her immense grief, to talk about Him to His lovers, many of whom she had never seen before. In this way she began the pattern of loving care and attention which she gave unstintingly to thousands of pilgrims over so many years.

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Late in the afternoon on that first day of the Great Darshan all the Australian women went to Guruprasad to spend two hours with Mehera and the women mandali. It was a relaxed atmosphere in that lovely room so filled with Baba's Presence. As in the morning, they all sat together facing us.

Mani asked Mehera to begin by telling some anecdotes. Mani held the microphone for her—but Mehera shyly kept leaning away from it, with Mani still holding it for her.

Mehera said she had come to Baba when she was sixteen. She remembered His love of singing in the early days. On one occasion at the

Mehera

old Post Office at Meherabad where she and the women were staying, Baba asked her to sing. The only song she knew was “Swanee” which she had learned at school. Baba asked her to sing it several times so that He could learn it, which He did very quickly, and next morning they heard Him singing it nearby. Baba had a very beautiful voice, Mehera said.

Soon Mehera asked Mani to take over the microphone and tell some stories. Mani did so in her own inimitable and delightful way, with comments or reminders from Mehera and the others. After some music, including Mani playing her sitar, we all moved about to talk to one another.

In the morning Mehera had wept, but now she was bright and smiling though at times a little serious. It was sweet to spend a few minutes with each of the mandali who were so loving, so gentle. They all said they were so happy to see us, and that they felt Baba was very present.

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Friday’s programme included entertainment for Baba, and in the afternoon His brother Jal took everyone to visit the special Baba places in Poona, starting with Sassoon Hospital where He was born and finishing at Baba House. There each in turn went into Baba’s Room where, set into the floor in the tiny alcove, is the stone on which at the beginning of the 1920s Baba would repeatedly knock His head while still coming down from God-consciousness to gross-consciousness.

The next morning after further entertainment there was an opportunity to be with Mehera again. She told me, “Hold on to His daaman, whatever happens. He used to shake the hem of His sadra to show how only the true ones would hold on through everything.” She then said, “You love Baba very deeply. Make sure you hold on to Him. There is no need to tell you that. Love Him more and more. He loves you.” She went on, “I didn’t see you yesterday.” I told her we had been taken to the Baba places and she asked “Baba’s Room? You felt His Presence there?” “Yes, it was so strong and beautiful.” She said again, “It is good you have obeyed Baba’s wish and come now.”

Then I talked a little with the other mandali. I felt as though I had known them all before, and love and peace and gentleness seemed to flow from them wordlessly.

After an all-day trip on Sunday morning visiting Meherabad and Meherazad, the last two days were spent at Guruprasad. When taking Baba’s darshan and saying goodbye to Mehera and all the mandali it was

Mehera

sad to realise that we would so soon be leaving. I still have a picture in my mind of that beautiful room at Guruprasad so filled with Baba's Presence and His love, as well as the love expressed in the eyes, actions and words of the mandali.

Baba had said that the Darshan would be only for His lovers, that it would be the last given in silence, and that it would be unparalleled. It truly was so. In contrast with the East-West Gathering, Baba's physical form was no longer there—instead, His Presence and His love manifested silently, privately, deep within each lover's heart, creating a new and intimate companionship with Him. It was an intensely personal time.

And the times I spent with Mehera formed the beginning of so many happy hours with her during my visits to Meherabad and Meherazad over the next twenty years.

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Meherazad, 1973

At the beginning of the 1970s groups of pilgrims from America, Europe and Australia began coming to Meherabad and Meherazad. The utter simplicity and sparseness of Mandali Hall seen in 1962 and 1969, which was the way it had been when Baba was physically there, was changed by the mandali to accommodate the Westerners. The floor is now covered by some mats and large grey cotton rugs to sit on, with a few cushions along the wall near Baba's chair for added comfort. Paintings and photos of Baba adorn the walls. Right in front of Baba's chair is a large square cushion with fresh flowers in the centre. Baba used it to rest His feet—now pilgrims can place their heads there when bowing down to take darshan.

In January 1973 the first Australian group on pilgrimage for Amartithi came to Meherazad the day before the celebration began at Meherabad. Eruch and Mani told stories in Mandali Hall, and then it was time to go over to Mehera.

The Umar Tree

Mehera took us straight into her bedroom to see the Umar tree outside her window on which an impression of Baba's face had first appeared in the bark in 1969 not long after He dropped His body. Recently, Mehera said, she noticed that small pieces of the bark near Baba's

Mehera

nose were becoming loose and she didn't know what to do about it. But the next morning she found that a very fine white spider's web had joined the pieces together. It was still there for everyone to see. Mehera also happily pointed out that Baba's face in the bark was positioned under an overhanging section of the tree trunk, and therefore rain falling from this higher point did not run down over the face.

Baba Himself had chosen this tree for Mehera's consolation. Ten years before He dropped His body, Baba was showing a lover round the garden accompanied by some of His men mandali. From inside the house Mehera and Mani saw Baba place His hand on the Umar tree which grew just outside Mehera's bedroom window, saying to those with Him, "This tree I like." There were many others in the garden which looked more attractive, and some time afterwards when Mehera asked Baba why He liked that particular tree, He said "Later on, you will see!"

When in the depths of her grief, Baba's image appeared on that tree so close to her window, Mehera knew He was telling her that He was with her, and this helped a great deal to assuage her immeasurable loss. Mehera also joyfully realised that Baba's face had appeared in the exact spot where He had placed His hand that day so many years before.

Baba's Room

Then Mehera led the group into Baba's Room. She showed us some of His hair, auburn-tinted from when He was a young man, which was arranged inside a thick plexiglass stand brought by Harry Kenmore and his New York group. Mehera recalled that when the stand arrived she felt she must be able to find a picture of Baba somewhere among the many coils of His hair. So she kept looking and looking, and then found His face on one side. She asked us to look too, without saying where, and stood there smiling. In turn each one searched, and some saw it quickly, others took a little time. When you find it, it is very clear, Baba's hair and moustache are well defined, and his face really smiles out as though He is enjoying the joke of hiding from you there.

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The Dining Room

Soon Mehera walked across to the dining room and said that Baba was always served first. The cooking pots were brought straight in from Mehera

the fire and placed on mats on the side table, the food being served from there to save extra work. Baba would eat first, then the women. Generally they would eat rice and dal, and sometimes there would be fish from Bombay.

Mastan

Baba did not eat much, and Mehera remembered that in the last years He would give choice pieces from His plate every day to Mastan, the faithful Tibetan [mastiff] dog whose love for Baba was unique. After Baba dropped His body Mastan grieved for Him continually. One day he went into the dining room and slowly walked round Baba's chair and the table, and another day he walked round Baba's bed, then finally seemed to accept that he would not see Baba again. He gradually stopped eating, grew so thin and weak he could not stand, and died in April 1969, unable to live any longer without his beloved Master.

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After the two-day celebration of Amartithi 1973 was over, our group went each day to Meherazad. The first morning Eruch took us up Seclusion Hill. Next day we walked with him to Pimpalgaon, the large and interesting village about a mile from Meherazad. That same morning 2nd February, Mehera, Mani, Goher, Meheru, Naja and Rano went to Poona with Francis Brabazon and Bill Le Page for the dedication of the site for Baba's Guruprasad Memorial building.

Those days, from 8:30 AM to 6:00 PM, were always so full. Usually Eruch would tell his wonderful stories for hours on end in Mandali Hall, or one could sit in Baba's Room, or be with Mehera enjoying her stories, or sit in the garden. On Sunday mornings Mehera and the others came over to Mandali Hall for the programmes of music, skits and other items. The group repeated Francis Brabazon's 'A Singing to Meher Baba' which we had sung together at Amartithi, and which all the mandali liked very much.

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Amartithi at Meherabad in the 1970s

For the period of the Amartithi celebrations every year, Mehera, Mani and all the women mandali always stayed in the East Room and Library in Mehera

the Meher Retreat building. On 31st January morning, after Mansari had cleaned the Samadhi by herself at 3:00 AM, Mehera and the other women would come for Baba's darshan about 4:00 AM and be alone with Him there.

Pilgrims could go in after Mehera had left. At two Amartithis I stayed up on the Hill over the 30th/31st January and was one of the handful of pilgrims who sat just outside Baba's Cabin with Eruch, listening all through the night to his enthralling stories. So I was able to go into the Samadhi just before 5:00 AM on Amartithi morning, soon after Mehera, Mani and the others had gone back to the East Room.

It was especially heart-touching being with Beloved Baba at that hour in the dimly-lit fragrant warmth and quietness. I recall coming outside again into the darkness and seeing a glorious full moon, brilliant in the clear sky behind the Samadhi. Dawn broke gradually, then the sunrise began, but the moon still glowed. It was incredibly beautiful.

During the Amartithi days the men mandali used to sit in different places among the crowds, or on the ledge around Baba's Cabin, or they moved about talking to people. Mehera and Mani with all the women mandali usually stayed together, sitting at first in two rows of armchairs near the Cabin, and hundreds of Eastern women would come in line to embrace them. Later, in order to see the programme items better, Mehera and the others often used to sit on thick rugs spread out at the Cabin-end of the stage. From time to time they would call other women to sit there with them, and occasionally I was one of the lucky ones.

Bringing The Torch To The Dhuni

Another vivid memory of an early Amartithi morning is waiting at the Dhuni at Lower Meherabad for the runners who carried the special torch all the way from Meherazad where it had been lit. It was well before 7:00 AM, still fairly dark and quite cold as we glimpsed the last member of the relay team running easily far down the road. The darkness thinned as he reached the platform, the flaring torch creating a pool of warm light around him and illuminating the faces and figures of the rest of the team and all of us crowded round the Dhuni. Then Padri called out loudly, "Come on! We'll light the Dhuni!" Facing Meherabad Hill he turned the torch downward, and the flames leaped up. It was a wonderful, most exhilarating moment, a perfect salute to Beloved Baba in the clear new morning.

Mehera

Meanwhile, Mehera with the women mandali round her had quietly walked down the Hill to see all this, and when it was over they moved to the edge of the crowd near the road. I was standing nearby, and suddenly was called and asked to walk close behind Mehera with two or three other Western women, to help protect her in the growing crowds. Mehera began walking quickly, and all I remember is just concentrating on her, only glancing round momentarily whenever people came by to make sure there were no men too near her, and walking fast myself to keep very close to her all the way up the Hill. I still have vivid recollections of feeling a little tense and nervous about this very real responsibility so unexpectedly given to me of helping to look after Mehera for a short time on that Amartithi morning.

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Meherabad, 1974

In 1974 the large Australian group went for Amartithi and spent the first day at Meherazad. Arriving there early we had some hours in Mandali Hall with Eruch or Mani telling stories before it was time to go and be with Mehera. The members of the Society for Avatar Meher Baba from New York came over with us to the porch. They sang for Mehera then left. Everyone else went inside.

In Baba's Room Mehera pointed out Harry Kenmore's gift of the big wing chair which Baba used many times. She talked about the pictures of Christ and Krishna on the wall near Baba's bed. He had told her to have them framed as He liked them very much. Then Mehera again took all to see the Umar tree from her bedroom window.

Soon it was lunchtime, and Mehera gave everyone prasad of two small sweets, at the same time smilingly quoting a Marathi saying, then translating it, "I give you this sweet that you may speak sweetly to me!"

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Baba's Afternoon Tea

One day in the more relaxed time at Meherazad after Amartithi, in Baba's Room Mehera talked about Baba having afternoon tea there. She would place a little table over His knees while He was sitting in the Harry Kenmore chair and serve Him—He always allowed her to serve Him, she
Mehera

said. Then she would sit in the chair by the window facing Baba. Rano sat on a small stool where the dressing table is now. Naja sat in the big chair, Meheru on a stool nearby, and Mani sat in the window to get the light as she read aloud to Baba from books by Rex Stout, Agatha Christie, P.G. Wodehouse and other favourite authors. Mehera recalled that Baba would often stop the reading at a most exciting place in the story, and none of them was allowed to look at the book before He asked for it to be continued on another occasion.

Then Mehera told those present to sit in various places while she continued talking for a short time—Mehera sat in her chair by the window, Joan Bruford was in Naja's chair, myself on a small mat, Lorna Rouse on a stool, May Lundquist on the pink carpet, and others elsewhere.

Soon afterwards, Mehera led the way into her bedroom and began showing photographs and other Baba treasures which she kept bringing out from her cupboard. She often did this during the '70s and everyone delighted in being there at these times. Later on she had to stop doing so as there were just too many pilgrims, and the Umar tree would be pointed out to them from the bedroom doorway only.

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Mehera's Birthday 1980

This celebration of Mehera's birthday was held on Sunday 21st December to enable more people to come to the occasion at Meherabad. For many years it had always been celebrated on 22nd December, as this was the date chosen by Baba in 1969 because it was her birthday that year according to the Zoroastrian calendar. (On our calendar Mehera's actual birth date was 6th January.)

For such a special day everyone dressed up in their nicest clothes so I put on a new sari and just after 10:00 AM went up the Hill, took darshan, then moved about talking with many already there, including Don Stevens and some of the men mandali. The "tin shed" verandah looked very colorful with all the decorations many pilgrims had helped to put up the day before.

The DeSoto arrived at last about 11:15 with Mehera, Mani, Naja and Arnavaz. Goher, Meheru, Katie, Rano and Khorshed came in another car. Many waited near the East Room to greet Mehera, and she walked quickly to the Samadhi with several of us around her. As usual, a number of

Mehera

women were already gathered there, and one had to be in the right spot and move quickly to follow the mandali inside (it was still permissible at that time to do this). It was so beautiful to be in the Samadhi with Mehera on her special day. Many garlands and flowers were offered to Baba, with some of us close enough to hold part of a flower-net as it was lowered over the Marble. Mehera called different ones to place roses on Baba's photograph.

When Arti was over, Mehera, Mani and the other mandali bowed down and placed roses at Baba's feet, then moved over to Baba's Cabin. In turn everyone else took darshan, and went across to the "tin shed" verandah. I was just in time to see Mehera cut the heart-shaped, flower-decorated birthday cake. She looked truly regal in her beautiful sari of emerald-green satin. Mani and the others, also looking lovely in their colorful saris, were gathered near Mehera, and the atmosphere, already enriched by Baba's loving Presence, was filled with the love and joyous greetings of all there for His beloved.

In a few minutes many were standing in the line to say "Happy Birthday!" to Mehera and put into her hands their small gifts which she accepted lovingly with smiles and embraces, handing each packet to one or other of the resident helpers to collect and keep for her to open later at Meherazad.

Soon lunch was served, after which several people took photos of Mehera, Mani and the others. Then everyone moved down to the open-air Theatre near the Samadhi to see the play "Majnun and Laila," specially written and produced for the occasion. The side-drops, the centre-top painting of Baba in Persian dress riding a white horse, and the colorful costumes were all excellent. The acting was first-class, and Mehera in particular, as well as everyone there, enjoyed the performance very much.

All the men and women mandali left by 4:00 PM. It had been a most happy day, and as I walked up the Hill again before Arti I thought how lovely the different soft greys were and how delicate were the patterns they wove in the evening sky. It seemed a gentle and fitting end for a wonderful occasion filled with Baba's love for His beloved Mehera.

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Christmas And New Year

A few days later, spending my first Christmas and New Year at
Mehera

Meherabad and Meherazad was also a most heart-warming experience, and both occasions felt more real, more joyous than they had been for many many years. I still remember that special warmth and lifting of the spirit as I went up to the Samadhi in starlight on Christmas Eve, and had the same feeling very early on Christmas morning, in the darkness with thick fog swirling around as I walked from the Pilgrim Centre and crossed the railway line to go up to greet Beloved Baba.

Christmas Day was a delightful occasion at Meherazad. The whole of Mandali Hall, the long verandah there, and Mehera's porch were all beautifully decorated. In those days, at Christmas-time the porch always became the stage for the performance of songs and skits and other items. Chairs for Mehera and all the mandali were placed on the garden path just below it, and the pilgrims sat on benches behind them. Afterwards Mehera gave prasad to everyone. It was a most happy atmosphere for Baba's Jesus Birthday, and it felt as though He was happy too.

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Silence Day 1982

In June and July 1982 I stayed four weeks at the Pilgrim Centre ending with the special highlight of spending Silence Day with Baba there. I shall always remember the most moving experience of being in the Samadhi with Mehera, Mani and all the women mandali, helping to place 1500 red and pink roses as a glowing covering over the whole of the Marble. The perfume and beauty of these exquisite flowers seemed to be His gift to all there to give back to Him—a love-filled offering in gratitude for the radiance of His beauty so strongly felt in the depth and serenity of His Silence.

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Five months later, in December 1982, the play performed at Meherabad for Mehera's birthday celebration was "Mary," and as before it was sweet to be with Mehera and the mandali and share their enjoyment of the whole day.

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Mehera

Myrtle Beach Center

In August 1984 I went to Myrtle Beach and spent three glorious weeks at the Center. My stay there remains one of the very special times in my life with Baba. Every single day He gave me so much love, so many sweet reminders of Him, so many happy hours in His Presence.

After the first three days I was moved to the Guest House which had been specially built for Mehera, Mani, Goher and Meheru to stay in for their visit with Baba in 1952. When taken to see it on arrival at the Center I had felt Baba's Presence very strongly, particularly in Mehera's room, so it was quite overwhelming to move there. I stayed in Mani's room adjoining Mehera's for three days, then in Mehera's room for the remaining two weeks of my visit and felt so close to them both.

While there I was told a few little stories about the times Baba spent in the Guest House. He came daily for breakfast with the four women, and sometimes in the evening other women who were staying on the Center were called for short periods to see Him. These stories seemed to make the whole house come alive, including the porch with its big comfortable swing which Baba often used. The small enclosed garden, and the glorious views over the lake provided further beauty and tranquility. I felt thoroughly happy in the warm, heart-touching atmosphere of this delightful house which Elizabeth had planned so lovingly for Mehera and the women. Mehera's radiant happiness in the company of her Beloved Baba at the Center is evident in photographs taken there, and something of her happiness still pervades the Guest House.

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Leaving Myrtle Beach in early September I went on to spend four months at Meherabad and Meherazad, and had many enjoyable hours with Mehera and the mandali as well as happily celebrating the anniversary of my meeting Beloved Baba and His close ones at the East-West Gathering.

Mehera's Birthday 1984

Another wonderful occasion was Mehera's birthday. Sitting with some of the women mandali right behind Mehera and Mani in the Theatre on Meherabad Hill, I watched the unfoldment of "Babajan," a most beautiful and moving play. It seemed like a special gift to Mehera arranged by her Beloved for her birthday enjoyment.

Mehera

This feeling was borne out later when talking to Heather Nadel about it, congratulating her on an enthralling portrayal of the title role. She and Alan Wagner wrote the script. They did much research, including asking Mehera herself for particular details about Babajan—her life, her appearance, her movements and mannerisms, as well as information about the location in Poona and people who spent time with her.

There were many rehearsals and everyone worked very hard to ensure that the final performance would be one which Mehera would really enjoy. But on the birthday afternoon shortly before the play was to begin, Heather said that she suddenly felt totally unable to portray Babajan adequately. From the stage she looked up to the Samadhi and cried out in despair to Baba that she couldn't do it, she couldn't do it alone and implored Him to take over the role. From that moment she felt that He did so—the whole play went smoothly, and was much enjoyed by His beloved Mehera, and by all who were there sharing it with her.

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Arti At Meherabad, 16th October, 1985

Over the years the women mandali came to Meherabad every two or three weeks for Arti, and pilgrims took the opportunity to be with them. On one of these occasions in 1985 Mani was not able to be present but Mehera, Goher, Meheru, Katie and Arnavaz were there. It was the so-called “quiet” time of the year with relatively few pilgrims staying at Meherabad, so it was very beautiful being in the Samadhi then. Mehera called some to place flowers on Baba's photograph. It was New Life Day, and although nothing was mentioned about that, there was a particular feeling, a deep happiness in being there.

When Mehera walked across to Baba's Cabin several went with her and stood inside against the wall. Sometimes she held out a flower to one or another saying “Do you want to offer this?” and the recipient happily did so. Then Mehera herself lovingly placed flowers on each of Baba's photographs, every movement radiating her devotion for Him.

Outside again, she smilingly acknowledged those waiting to greet her and allowed a few photographs to be taken—she always liked to know about this so that she could face the camera and not be caught unawares. Then she walked across to speak for a few minutes with Mansari, and finally moved round to the car where the others were waiting. They got in,

Mehera

but Mehera stayed talking with a small group standing outside the East Room door, saying how Baba loved driving—“fast, fast” He would tell the driver.

She recalled once coming from Poona. Someone had put a big ribbon bow on the car bonnet for Baba. He sat in the back, she was next to Him, then Mani. Goher and Meheru were in front, with a food basket at their feet. Baba liked to eat a snack when travelling this way, so He asked for something and they handed it to Him. Then He told them to eat, and they had the sandwiches and other food which Baba’s niece Gulnar had packed for them. Mehera said she loved boiled eggs, so she had one, then another, and even another! She was laughing as she told the story. When the food was being repacked in the basket by Meheru and Goher, one of them said there was one egg left, did anyone want it. Mehera said “I do.” But Baba said to her, “You have had three, no more!” Again she laughed, saying that Baba even knew what one had eaten, and so she couldn’t have that egg.

Then Mehera went quickly to the car and got in. Everyone waved, calling out “Avatar Meher Baba Ki Jai!” The mandali drove slowly through the gates on their way back to Meherazad, followed by happy little groups walking down the Hill to the Pilgrim Centre.

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Meherabad, 7th February 1989

This was a memorable occasion for all who shared it with Mehera. It turned out to be the last time she came to Meherabad to celebrate this special day.

On 7th February 1969 Baba’s body was covered in the Samadhi, so Mehera and the women mandali always came for darshan and Arti on that date each year. It is also my birthday, so being at Meherabad with them all made it an extra-special time for me.

Wearing a favourite sari I went up the Hill at 11:00. I always wore one for special occasions because Mehera used to say she liked to see me in a sari, and I loved wearing one anyway. The first car with Katie, Meheru, Khorshed and Davana Brown came at 11:45 and Mehera, Mani and Goher arrived half an hour later. Goher and Mani each wished me “Happy Birthday” with a warm embrace. Shortly afterwards while walking towards the Samadhi among the group with Mehera, Davana whispered to me to tell Mehera who immediately gave me a loving smile and birthday greeting,

Mehera

adding “And many more in Beloved Baba’s love!”

After each of the mandali had taken darshan, some of us went in and helped in turn to lay the flower-net and various garlands, then moved out, leaving the mandali by themselves. They said only the Beloved God prayer and again took darshan. Mehera sat down beside Baba’s feet on the left-hand platform edge, and Mani was below her on the floor with Goher. Meheru and Katie were on the window ledges, and Khorshed sat on the right-hand platform edge.

One by one pilgrims went in for darshan and straight out again. Various ones sang for Baba, and after Arti some began to move over to Baba’s Cabin. Mani sent a message to me to go in with Mehera for my birthday. Mehera picked up a garland and told me to take the other side of it, and together we placed it over the picture of Baba which hangs on the wall opposite the doorway. How sweet this was—a gift to give back to Him.

Then Mehera took one rose at a time from the small basket held for her by one of the Western residents, and going to each of Baba’s photographs in turn she gently stroked His hand or arm or cheek with the flower and tucked it into the base of the garlands already there, all the time murmuring lovingly to Him. It was always so heart-touching to be near Mehera in the cabin, realizing that she was thinking only of her Beloved as she offered Him the flowers and her gentle words.

After spending some time at Baba’s gadi under the “tin shed” verandah where she called others to place flowers, Mehera then moved round to join the mandali in the cars which were parked outside the East Room. A few minutes later we waved them all goodbye, calling out “Avatar Meher Baba Ki Jai!” as they drove through the tall iron gates at the edge of the compound.

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Mehera In The Samadhi Early '80s

I have some especially lovely memories of being with Mehera in the Samadhi on various occasions in the early 1980s when she and the women mandali came for darshan and Arti. Not as many pilgrims were present in those days and three or four could stand inside the Samadhi below the platform without crowding the mandali.

Mehera

First taking darshan at Baba's feet, Mehera would then move up near His head on the left-hand side on the platform. Kneeling down, she would slowly and most lovingly lay first one cheek and then the other, on the covering spread over the Marble, kissing it, and at times she would gently reach out as though caressing or embracing Baba. Her thoughts being with Him, Mehera seemed unaware of anyone else there. Her love for Baba welled up so strongly, tangibly filling the Samadhi like a most beautiful perfume. It was deeply moving to be there and always brought tears.

After a few moments Mehera would rise, and flower-nets and garlands would be laid over Baba with some of the Pilgrims helping to do this. Still on the platform, Mehera would choose the loveliest single flowers, usually roses, from a shallow basket which the mandali had brought. First touching them to her eyes and holding them to her heart, she would offer each flower in turn to Baba, and with most loving care place them over Him in exactly the positions she wanted for Him amongst the garland and other flowers already there. Then she would move down the platform and sit on the edge. Sometimes while sitting there looking towards Baba she would not be quite satisfied with the appearance of a flower, and so she would again go and gently move it a little, or open out the petals, until she was happy that it was just right for Him.

In the later years, although Mehera did not continue to offer these outward caresses to Baba in the Samadhi, her love for her Beloved constantly flowed to Him from her innermost being. To be in the Samadhi with Mehera was to feel Beloved Baba's ever-beautiful Presence and His Love for her and for all, as well as being aware of the heart-touching sweetness and purity of her love for Him.

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MEHERA – Part 2

STORIES ON THE PORCH

Late in the morning at Meherazad a message would be brought over to Mandali Hal that Mehera was on her porch and those wishing to see her

Mehera

could go across.

It was sometimes a little difficult to forego the progress of one of Eruch's absorbing stories, because at the same time one wanted to be with Mehera, and listen to the variety of stories that she would tell of her life with Baba. So first one then another would quietly slip out of the Hall through the nearest doorway, followed soon by a few more. Even while they were walking through the garden and still a short distance away from the porch, Mehera was aware of those coming as she often smiled and gave a little wave of recognition, and when they came up the steps onto the porch she would stand to greet and embrace each of the women, then continue talking to all there.

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Wild Flowers

This little anecdote was given by Mehera during the '70s.

After some days of seclusion in His Cabin on Meherabad Hill in the mid-1930s, Baba did not come to the women's quarters but walked in His compound. He picked some wild flowers, tied them together with a blade of grass, and sent them to her with the message that they were the wild flowers He liked best.

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From 1980 onwards I often used to sit in the garden at Meherazad and write down all I could remember of the times on Mehera's porch and at her Teas, adding to these notes later at the Pilgrim Centre. At Mani's request I sent my manuscript of Mehera's stories to Meheru in 1996. She most kindly checked them, made a few corrections, and occasionally added some little details which have enriched a story.

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At The Circus With Baba

Mehera spoke one day of going to the Circus with Baba on several occasions. She said that the last time they went with Him was in Ahmednagar in 1957. It was very enjoyable, with many acts. At the end of the show the manager himself came into the ring with a big elephant.

Mehera

They walked up to Baba who was sitting with Mehera and the women mandali. The elephant carried a garland in her trunk and gently placed it round Baba's neck, and the manager offered Him a large bouquet of flowers. This was a special mark of respect to Baba from the manager who was a Hindu, and all the members of the circus were also Hindus.

After Baba dropped His physical form, it was many years before Mehera and the women mandali again went to a circus. This occasion was also in Ahmednagar, and not long before the circus was due to leave after a stay of many weeks. As usual all the women mandali enjoyed the different acts. The last one was by a team of elephants. On a dais in the centre of the ring the figure of a Hindu goddess was placed. Three elephants, one small, one large and one medium size came and performed arti, walking round the figure of the goddess, offering flowers, ringing a hand-bell, showering vermillion powder, and presenting a coconut. This greatly appealed to the whole audience.

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At The Races

Because it rains very heavily in the monsoon season August to September, the Races at that time are held in Poona. If Baba happened to be in Poona with Mehera and the women, He would take them to view the Races from a vantage point. It was very pleasant for them under the spreading banyan trees by the roadside where they could clearly see part of the racecourse. The car would be parked in the shade, and when the horses lined up, Mehera and the others would stand by the picket fence.

Mehera recalled one of these occasions. They were very excited at being there, and had bought a Race-book for 7 or 8 annas to read about the horses, jockeys, colours and names. Mehera said she looked for the "best name" to say it would win, and chose Mogul King. All the horses were well-groomed, and before the race they paraded near the grandstand looking very fine. It was a six-furlong race and eventually all were ready at the post and began to race. It was very exciting to watch—but Mogul King came last! Mehera enjoyed the joke against herself, and Baba also laughed when she told Him about it.

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Mehera

Babajan

Describing the horsemen who came from Baluchistan in the far north of India, Mehera said they were very smartly turned out. On each man's head a starched turban-end stood up in front, and there was a long tail at the back. They wore special white shirts with embroidered jackets, and very full pants. Children were told that if they were naughty they could be snatched up and hidden in these pants and then taken away.

Mehera remembered that in Poona a number of these men would come to pay homage to Babajan. They would sit in a group in front of her to her right. Babajan would sit against the neem tree, and Mehera and her mother and aunt would visit also, sitting back a little to Babajan's left.

Babajan would not talk much at all, but would listen to the men talking to her, and at the same time she would give a slight movement of her eyes towards the women, thus acknowledging them and including them in the group before her. Mehera said this was done very sweetly, and commented that years later she was occasionally reminded of Babajan's eye movements by Baba doing the same.

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Mehera then remembered this story of Babajan's earlier life.

Sometime around the 1890s while at Rawalpindi in northern India, Babajan had declared to a group of Baluchi soldiers who were Mohammedans, that she was one with God. They were furious at such blasphemy, attacked her and held her, and then buried her alive, believing they would be spiritually rewarded for killing this heretic. But Babajan did not die, and not long afterwards she managed to make the thousand-mile journey to Bombay where she stayed for a time, and then moved to Poona.

Some of the Baluchi soldiers who had buried Babajan happened to come later on to Poona, and seeing her there very much alive, they realised that she was indeed a superior being, begged her forgiveness for their act, and became her devotees. Her followers continued to increase over the years and she was widely revered.

Mehera said that Babajan would sit quietly in her place by the neem tree listening to people gathered there, although talking little herself. Mehera could not remember whether Babajan's eyes were blue-grey or hazel, but she had a very fair skin, and her hair was white. She had been very beautiful when young.

Mehera

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Babajan And Merwan

Mehera went on to relate how Baba had described cycling or walking every day past Babajan during the years when he was at college and still known as Merwan. He did not have any contact with Babajan then, although he knew that she was regarded as a saint by many of the local community. His studies progressed and he worked diligently. At this point in her story Mehera commented that Baba had to achieve a high standard of English in preparation for his work in the world, although of course at that time he knew nothing of his future role.

For years Babajan would watch Merwan go by, but it was not until one day in May 1913 when he was 19 years old that she first beckoned to him as he was cycling along the road near her. He immediately dismounted and went to her. She stood up and embraced him, saying “My beloved son!” From that moment everything changed for him. For a time he appeared outwardly normal but he began to lose interest in studies and sports, preferring to remain alone except for his visits to Babajan every evening when he would sit for hours beside her. This continued for some months.

Then one night in January 1914 Babajan kissed Merwan on the forehead, giving him God-Realisation. She turned to her followers and said to them, “This is my beloved son. He will one day shake the world, and all humanity will be benefited by him.” Babajan was one of the five Perfect Masters of the Age. Each of them over the next seven years carried out their pre-ordained roles of bestowing divine attributes on Merwan and unveiling Him as the Avatar.

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Baba When Young

Talking of Baba as a young man, Mehera said He was so beautiful. He had a lovely singing voice, His hair was a wonderful colour, fine and abundant. His skin was so fair and soft (Mehera here touched her face). He would wear a simple sadra with no button at the neck, and when He played the drum His sleeve would sometimes fall away from His shoulder and they could see the beautiful white skin there (Mehera touched her right shoulder).

Mehera

Coming To Meherazad

For myself, each day at Meherazad, particularly during the 1980s, had a quality of its own. There was so much to look forward to. Bal Natu was there on Tuesdays, Eruch on Thursdays, Mani and all the mandali on Saturdays and Sundays. And Mehera was there every day.

From the Pilgrim Centre at Meherabad the distance is about fifteen miles, easy to traverse in the comfortable big new bus owned by the Trust, and after a while one is able to watch for familiar landmarks when getting near Baba's Home. Seclusion Hill can be seen some miles before turning off the main road. As the direction changes there are different aspects of the Hill, but always its beautiful serene shape dominates the landscape on the left hand side, appearing and reappearing according to the terrain.

Before long, Pimpalgaon Lake comes into view on the right side, and then slips behind as the bus turns into the Private Road leading to Meherazad. On either side there are some little farms. Outside one small farmhouse with thatched roof close to the edge of the road, sometimes a couple of children play beside their mother who sits on the ground occupied with some task.

The bus continues under groups of spreading trees, and from here Seclusion Hill looks most beautiful, its unique conical shape silhouetted against the sky. Until the early '90s it had no trees, just long grassy slopes broken here and there with faint uneven lines of rocky formations, and near the top a circle of darker rock hangs like a necklace around its shoulders. In hot bright morning light, or backed with dark grey storm clouds, or against the setting sun, Seclusion Hill always has a particular beauty which touches the heart. Baba's considerable time spent in seclusion there gives it an indescribable and unforgettable quality.

Soon the bus reaches the end of the Private Road. There is a small plain sign reading Private Property, Meherazad. Over to the left under thick shady trees a pair of wide gates hung on tall stone pillars bear the name Meherazad Residence. These close off the garden entrance to the women mandali's side. The backs of some small structures are seen as the bus proceeds to the right, then swings slowly to the left where the road bridges a wide water channel, and stops in the open parking area in front of the Meher Free Dispensary.

Everyone in the bus calls out "Avatar Meher Baba Ki Jai!" All get Mehera

down quickly, use hats or umbrellas against the hot sun, and walk across to Mandali Hall verandah, passing the corrugated iron sheds on the left where the cars are kept, and the small three-room cottage on the right where different men mandali lived over the years—for example Baidul, Francis Brabazon, and later on Nariman Dadachanji. Bill Le Page also had one of the rooms there when Baba called him to stay for two weeks in February 1967.

Beyond the cottage, in the open area between Eruch's cabin and the side door of the Dispensary, there are small, bright flowerbeds. On the other side of the fence which encloses this area is the extensive rose garden of many beautiful varieties which was specially designed and set up for Mehera in the mid '80s.

After greeting the mandali on the long verandah and going inside for Baba's darshan, one could sit in Mandali Hall listening to stories until the time came to walk through the garden on the women's side with its shady trees, bright flowers, varieties of shrubs and colorful vines, and be with Mehera on her porch.

Mehera herself did so much work in this garden from the time that she, Mani, Meheru and Margaret Craske came to live at Meherazad with Baba in 1944. Establishing it was not easy because they were often away travelling with Baba, and the soil was not good, water was always scarce. Baba one day said to Mehera that He liked the garden very much. She told Him that it meant a lot of hard work, and He replied that it was because she put so much effort and loving care into it that He liked it so much.

The colour, light and shade of the garden, the calls of many different birds, the delicate movement of leaves in a gentle breeze, all emphasise Baba's beautiful Presence and provide a perfect setting for the serenity of Mehera's porch.

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Meherabad, 1920s

On the porch one morning when a number were gathered there, someone asked Mehera about the early days when Baba told her and others with her to pray and write God's Name.

Mehera began by telling how she and her mother Daulatmai had lived in Poona, and when Baba called them to be with Him in May 1924, He told them to bring one trunk of clothes for one year, and their bedding

Mehera

rolls. They had to collect things within a few days, and her mother had to get some clothes stitched.

Mehera's sister Freni was married to Adi Senior's brother Rustom, and her first baby, who had been born in Poona at her mother's house, was about a month old. So, leaving their furniture and valuables in the house, they put a lock on the door and all came to Meherabad together. Small Khorshed and Baba's aunt, Dowla Masi, also joined them. They stayed across the road from the old Post Office in the Bathing House which had been used by the British military. This building no longer exists, but it had two nice rooms (about 6' x 10'—Mehera indicated the size on her porch as she told the story). There was an arch between the rooms with a curtain across. They had their baths at the end of one room, and there was a narrow drain channel around the edge of the room to take the water away. They cooked in the other room.

Later, Baba told them to stay in the two rooms with an arch between them in the main building of Khushru Quarters in what is now the Trust Compound, where they stayed for a few months before moving back to Meherabad.

Just before Baba called them to move to Meherabad again, Khorshed had told them that Baba liked fakirs (those who live a life of poverty), and so they should not have comforts. Khorshed said they should not use pillows, and because they thought Baba would like this, they stopped doing so, although Mehera found it difficult lying on the hard floor. When they arrived at Meherabad Baba came to their room and asked what they had brought, which was one trunk each and their bedding. He looked at these, and when He found no pillows, asked why. When told the reason He said He wanted them to have pillows and to look after their health. So He sent to Ahmednagar for them.

Mehera's mother and Dowla Masi cooked for the mandali and Baba. All had the same food, and Mehera would wash dishes, clean the garlic, or whatever they asked her to do. She didn't know how to cook yet.

One time while cooking was being done Mehera was there doing some job for the older women. She saw Baba walking towards them. He looked so beautiful, she said, in the dark Kamli coat which then had no patches, and a white sadra and His lovely hair flowing. He asked about the food, and what she did there. She told Him she didn't know how to cook yet, but did whatever the older women asked her to. He was pleased, and said she should do some work and keep occupied.

A Dessert For Baba

Mehera then digressed a little to tell us how she did try her hand at some cooking earlier that year, when they were in Bharucha Building, Bombay. The older women prepared the main meal—Baba always wanted it early and fast, at about 11:00 or 11:30 in the morning. Mehera and Khorshed decided to make a dish for Him as a dessert—it was a puri with thickened milk but not sweet. But the milkman had watered the milk and it wouldn't thicken, so Mehera added some semolina. It was taken to Baba. After a while Mehera and Khorshed were called to Him and He said, "What is this? It's food for someone sick, like gruel!" They explained what had happened and He said, "All right" and ate some of it.

Writing God's Name

After this stay in Bombay, when they were at Khushru Quarters while Baba and the mandali were away, He told them to write God's Name, fill pages of it, so Mehera wrote "Yezdan, Yezdan" in tiny writing for about an hour at a time.

Baba also told them to get a picture of God—Rama or Baba or whichever one they liked—and meditate on it. He said the mind is full of tricks and keeps fluttering. (Mehera moved her fingers quickly, making a circle in the air with her hand, her fingers fluttering all the while) and He told them they were to keep bringing the mind back to the picture, concentrating on it again.

After Mehera and the others had written God's Name on their sheets of paper, Baba told them to cut out each tiny Name separately. Baba said he wanted these slips mixed with dough to make pellets to throw into the sea for fish to eat. However, Mehera recalled that because there was so much other work at the time, the pellets were never made.

Making Shirts

Baba told them to make shirts for the poor. Mehera's mother bought the material, a strong khaki cloth, and they began sewing. They made various children's sizes, and for men a simple style with plain sleeves, no cuff, one button at the neck front, and nice and long. There were about 40 done when Baba came again and He said "Only 40? Make more, I want more." So they went on, the number grew to 75, 100, 125, 150, and soon Baba said there were enough. He also wanted prasada, a big sack of it.

Mehera's mother also collected this. It couldn't be messy or sticky,

Mehera

and gradually she got peanuts, puffed rice, and chickpeas.

The shirts were tied up in bundles according to sizes, and everything was put on a bullock cart and taken to Meherabad where Baba wanted to give it to the poor villagers from Arangaon. When the gifts were to be given out, the bundles of shirts were placed ready for Baba and the big sack of prasad opened. The tiny children sat in their mothers' laps. Baba called each child to come separately to Him and He would give a little shirt with a small amount of prasad on it to the child who would go back proudly to its mother, sit with her and eat the prasad. Gradually all the older ones came to Baba, and finally the men, who were given a larger amount of prasad with their shirts.

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Mehera's Father

Mehera also talked about her father. He was a very tall man, 6'4." She laughed and said she was glad she wasn't tall. He died when she was eight years old. He was a very fine man and she loved him very much.

Then she told us that one evening in 1968 she was with Baba and said to Him that she was sad to think that her father had not had the opportunity to know Him and to love and serve Him. Baba told her not to think that, that he had been born into a Baba family and had been with Baba and loved Him. He would not say Yes or No to her guesses. Although for a while she wondered who it was, she said it was better that she did not know.

Mehera recalled that her father was absolutely fearless, and expected her to be the same. One day he put her up on a camel—she was only four years old—and told her to hold tight and not fall off. She managed to cling on, but didn't like the movement of the camel-ride.

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The Deer

Later on, talking of times on Meherabad Hill in the 1930s, Mehera remembered the occasion when Baba had a small deer brought into the East Room and called her to pat it. Its horns were just showing through, and it was very young and sweet-looking. But when Naja came into the room it began to butt her. When she moved away it followed, slipping on

Mehera

the stone floor, still trying to butt her! Mehera said it was very funny to watch, and that Baba laughed, enjoying the scene.

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Quetta

Some days later on the porch, Mehera was asked about their visit to Quetta and she gave this detailed account. It was in 1924. She, Naja, big Khorshed (Baba's brother Jamshed's wife), Baba's aunt Dowla Masi, Mehera's mother Daulatmai, and Adi's mother Gulmai, were there. Mani was only five years old and too small to go. Mehera was not sure about all the men mandali who were with Baba but remembered Pendu, Padri, Rustom, Adi Senior and Gustadji.

Baba and the men had left Meherabad first for Bombay. Then the women came to Bombay and stayed five days at small Khorshed's parents' home, which was a very nice house, Mehera said, with long rooms. They went by train to Quetta—there was plenty of room in those days, and they had a reserved carriage. On arrival they were taken to Goher's father's house, then stayed in another house with not a stick of furniture—there was a big carpet on the floor and only their trunks in the room.

There was a very big bagula (a large cooking pot) containing the food for all the men and women. All ate the same food, the cooking being done by Goher's father Rusi, but Baba served it to everyone, the men first.

Mehera used to stand last in line of the women. When she held out her plate to Baba one day, He asked her why she was always last. It was just because she was so shy. He seized her plate and threw it out to the back landing where it bounced right down the stairs! Then someone gave her another plate as she stood there before Baba. He gave her a very large helping, although she protested, and told her to eat every bit of it. Next day she began standing in front of the girls, and Baba gave her food without any further throwing of the plate.

One morning there He asked the three girls if they prayed to God. Mehera said, "Yes, Baba, the Kusti Prayer" "For how long?" "About five minutes, Baba." "Is that all the time you can give to God?" So He began to dictate a prayer to them in Gujarati, speaking slowly. At the end He took Khorshed's writing to check, and it was correct. Naja's book had one or two mistakes which He corrected.

Then He looked at Mehera's book—she had written only two lines of
Mehera

the prayer and He asked why. She told Him she didn't know how to write Gujarati well, that there hadn't been time to learn it at the Convent school in Poona. [Actually the Convent school didn't teach it—Mehera must have meant she hadn't learned it well at home or at the agyari.] So Baba wrote out the whole prayer for her Himself. And she would say it. But later someone stole it from her trunk. “Who would do such a thing?” Mehera said to her listeners on the porch, amazement and sadness in her voice.

Another day Baba told them all to be dressed ready to go out at 4:00 PM. There was a mini-bus which the men got into, and the women were in a car, packed in, with Baba in front and Meheru's father Rustom driving. They drove out of the city of Quetta to a place of some small mountains, very rocky and steep. Baba and the men climbed, and Baba was soon a long way ahead. He was standing about halfway up, looking very beautiful, Mehera said. He wore a sadra tucked into His shorts. He was young then, 30 years old, and His hair was open—Mehera recalled that Gulmai used to comb it for Him. It was now late afternoon and getting darker. There was only a short twilight and Baba said they should go back.

So the men got into the mini-bus and also the older women. The three girls were standing nearby and Baba said “Why are you standing there? Get into the car!” So they quickly got into the back, and Baba was in front with Rustom again driving. But Rustom couldn't find the way home, roads were going this way and that. They had to ask the way, and then again ask. It was now dark and lights were being lit. But the girls didn't mind—they were lost, but they were lost with Baba which was wonderful! Eventually they got back to the house, and the older women said they had been worried. The girls weren't! Mehera said that Baba had been staying inside His room in the house and wanted to get out and walk, so He took them all for that outing.

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There were a few interruptions while Mehera talked about Quetta, but she always came back to the story until it was finished. Watching her, it was easy to realise that she was re-living those days, seeing Baba all the time.

As people were leaving the porch for lunch and thanking her for the stories, Mehera said she was happy to be reminded of them. She spoke about the food, and was then asked if Baba always gave her a big helping.

Mehera

She said no, but that she did eat that one—it was just dal and rice and easily digested.

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“What are you thinking?”

Late one Saturday afternoon Mehera again talked about Meherabad in the very early days. Baba and the men were staying in the Post Office, and she and her mother stayed in the Bathing House across the road at Lower Meherabad.

One day they could hear Baba singing and a drum being played. They went over to the Post Office to listen and sat there while Baba continued. Suddenly He stopped and asked Mehera what she was thinking. Mehera recalled that this was the first time Baba had asked her that question—the first of many, many times. She said she was so happy that she could answer, “Baba, I was thinking how beautiful your hands are, playing the drum.”

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The Myrtle Beach Shell For Mehera

One morning when several women were with Mehera on the porch, someone mentioned Myrtle Beach and collecting shells by the ocean. The talk then went on to the day in July 1956 when Baba sat on the beach there, and from the shells which different people brought to Him, He selected one to take back to Mehera. One of the women then told Mehera that the shell which she had found and brought to Baba wasn't accepted, and asked who was the person who had found the one Baba chose. Mehera gently pointed out that it wasn't a matter of who had found it, but the shell which Baba thought she would like.

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A Place Near Goa

Mehera went on to talk of the perfectly quiet and lovely beach at a place between Bombay and Goa where the women mandali and some of the men went one time with Baba for about seven days. They stayed in a dak bungalow (a type of government rest-house for travellers), which was
Mehera

built high up on a cliff-top overlooking the sea, and they would walk along the road, which was also perfectly quiet because no-one used it, then go down steps and along to the beach.

It was a wide bay. Little boats would go out in the evening looking serene in the moonlight. There were also larger ones which would take on loads and loads of cashew nuts grown in this area. Baba took Mehera and the other four women mandali to a cashew nut factory one day. Mehera said that women workers would sit on the ground with two baskets, sorting the whole nuts from the chipped ones. The whole ones were for export, the broken ones kept for domestic use. The nuts grow on shrubs over six feet high with large attractive white flowers in which the nut develops. The flowers are also taken and used to make a strong alcoholic drink.

At that beach, Mehera remembered, it was either they or Dr. Donkin who told Baba it would be good for Him to get into the salt water. Baba didn't swim, but walked in the sea with the water coming above His knees while Dr. Donkin and Eruch stayed with Him. He had already sent the women further along the beach, telling them not to watch Him.

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Following Mehera's description of cashew nuts, someone asked whether she liked nuts. She answered that she liked almonds and pistachios very much but found macadamias too rich. She admitted with a little laugh that she preferred almonds in the shell "because you spend more time cracking them than eating them!"

Mehera commented that Baba didn't eat nuts. She then talked about the fruit which He liked.

Grapes At Meher Mount, USA

Baba's favorite fruit was mango, then papaya and ripe figs. But at Meher Mount He ate some grapes which Dana Field had provided and wanted Him to eat.

Filis Frederick wrote about that occasion in "The Awakener." She and Dana Field were among those with Baba when He visited Meher Mount, Ojai, California in August 1956. All had lunch together under the trees, and Baba was seated in a large chair. He was in a jolly mood. Later on when inside the house, He said "Dana has told me, 'Baba, you should

Mehera

eat grapes, it's good for your health.' And today, as soon as I entered this room I found fruits here. So I ate a whole bunch of grapes. And now listen!" Baba patted His tummy, and they all heard it rumble and burst into laughter with Him. There was further conversation and much laughter, then Baba sent them all out to see the view.

Shortly afterwards Baba called a few back into the room with Him. He was pacing up and down, looked at them solemnly, and said, "I have made my decision! When I come back in 700 years there will be no more grapes on earth, and maybe that will help the liquor problem too!"

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Playing The Piano

With a change of topic, Mehera talked of her school days when she learned to play the piano. At the Convent of Jesus and Mary in Poona there were many pianos and the girls practiced a lot. Mehera recalled that even though she knew the pieces well, she was very nervous at music exams. She passed, but not with honours as expected.

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Meherazad, February 1989

I was continually grateful to Beloved Baba for making it possible for me to go to Meherabad and Meherazad in February 1989. It was a wonderful visit, particularly the many hours spent in Mehera's company. No-one then had any idea that this would be the last time with her, that just three months later she would join her Beloved forever.

The first morning on the porch Mehera began talking of the play produced at Meherabad to celebrate her birthday in December. It was about Sheriarji's life. She described parts of it, and mentioned the beautiful Arti which had been recorded with Katie singing it. The words had been written in the early years.

Mehera's memories of Baba and of the play were crystal-clear, but she seemed a little vague at times about various things that people on the porch said, and occasionally didn't even recall who they were. Kishore Mistry from Bombay was there and sang for Mehera which she enjoyed. I told her how Kishore had helped our Australian group at the East-West Gathering, and she said, "Were you there, how is it I don't remember

Mehera

you?” I just said “Well, I was very shy then” and left it at that. But a couple of months when hearing of Mehera’s illness, I recalled this lapse of memory and realised that her forgetfulness that day was a very early sign of what was to come.

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Baba Stories From Early Years

Over the next couple of days Mehera related a few brief stories. She spoke of the Meherabad Jhopdi and Baba telling them on 9th July 1925 that He would be silent until His work was finished. They all thought it would be for a week perhaps, but time kept going on and on. None of them in those days thought He would stay silent for long.

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When Baba started the school for village children at Meherabad in the mid-1920s the women mandali had to cook big bagulas (large cooking pots) of rice and dal for their meals. The grain first had to be washed at least three times, and it had to be properly cooked for the children. Mehera said Baba was very particular about that. He told them that they should cook it well, as though they were preparing the meal for Him.

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During one of the periods of seclusion and fasting in His Cabin on Meherabad Hill, Baba took only one cup of milk per day. Baba told Mehera not to cut garlic or onions before preparing the milk for Him as there must be no taste or smell of that, and the milk had to be boiled carefully in a perfectly clean pot. He also asked her to prepare for Him one green chili with a slit down one side to remove the seeds, a clove of garlic crushed with salt inserted, and then fried. Baba would take a little of this to clear the taste of the milk from His mouth. The milk would be given to Baba in the morning. He would drink some of it then, and the remainder a little later on, but had no other food during the fast.

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Mehera

Later someone asked Mehera whether Baba had meals in His room at Meherazad, and was this on the bed. Mehera said that in the last three years Baba would sit in His room in the big wing-back chair which Harry Kenmore brought for Him. She would bring food and serve Baba on a table placed before Him while He remained sitting in this chair.

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Upasni Maharaj

Mehera then began talking of the very early years and Sai Baba's orders late in 1915 to Baba to go to the Khandoba temple where Upasni Maharaj was staying. Baba went there immediately, walked into the room where Upasni Maharaj was sitting and stood there in front of him, head up and unafraid. Upasni Maharaj suddenly picked up a stone and flung it at Baba, striking Him on the forehead on the exact spot where Babajan had kissed Him the year before. Blood flowed, but He stood there without moving or crying out or attempting to stem the flow of blood. Upasni Maharaj was pleased, and knew that Baba was indeed the One.

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Narayan Maharaj

Baba also met Narayan Maharaj at Kedgaon in 1915. Mehera described Narayan Maharaj, how his followers dressed him in splendid clothes with diamond buttons on his shirt or coat. He was of very small and slim stature, and never seemed to age. In Bombay he stayed at the home of one of his disciples who had invited him there. It was a beautiful big house with carpets and other comforts. But none of this meant anything to him, Mehera said.

One day in the mid-1920s when Baba was in Bombay staying at Bharucha Building, He told Mehera and her mother Daulatmai and Naja (Baba's cousin) to go with Gustadji to see Narayan Maharaj.

Baba gave Mehera a photo of Himself with "Meher Baba" printed on it, and told her she was to show it to Narayan Maharaj when she met him, and say that she had been asked to bring it. When they arrived they were shown into a big room, but Narayan Maharaj was not yet there. They were

Mehera

told to wait and presently he came into the room. There were a lot of

other people also waiting, mostly men and a few women. The men immediately crowded round Narayan Maharaj to have his darshan, and Mehera asked Gustadji, “Oh, how are we to get near him?” She also told Gustadji about the photo.

So Gustadji said he would make way for her, and he moved forward telling her to keep close behind him. Soon Mehera was standing in front of Narayan Maharaj. She put her hands together, shyly saying “Namaste” (a greeting of reverence). Then bringing out the photo, she told him she had been asked to show it to him. Narayan Maharaj immediately said, “That is Meher Baba. Yes, I know Him very well.” Mehera again bowed and moved away. Her mother and Naja also greeted Narayan Maharaj, and then they all left.

On their return to Baba He asked what had happened and when Mehera told Him He was pleased, and nodded as though He knew Narayan Maharaj would say that. Mehera didn’t know why Baba had asked her to take the photo, but she was happy that He was pleased she had carried out His order. She did not see Narayan Maharaj again.

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Australia Versus America!

A couple of days later on the porch Mehera greeted everyone, then sat as usual in her big armchair. She looked very bright and relaxed that morning. I was sitting close beside her on a low stool, and Wendy Connor was in one of the chairs opposite us. Mehera suddenly said to Wendy, “Australia is better than America!” Then turning to me, her eyes dancing in fun, Mehera put her hand over her mouth and whispered “What is that animal that jumps?” So I whispered “Kangaroo” close to her ear. She looked delighted, and told Wendy triumphantly “Because they have kangaroos and you don’t!!” Everyone laughed enjoying the joke, including Mehera who continued to be in a very happy mood.

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Baba’s Car

A little later she recalled that there was a burgundy-colored car which Don (Dr. Donkin) bought for Baba in the last three years. He drove it to Meherazad parked it under the big tamarind tree and came to Baba to ask
Mehera

Him to sit in it. Baba also called Mehera and the others, and they all liked

it. But for travelling to Poona it was really a bit small and didn't give enough leg room for Baba or space for all of them. She said Don was allowed to drive them at times in this car, but the DeSoto was best for Baba as it was more spacious, and so they used that car more.

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Stories From The 1920s and '30s

One morning Mehera talked about Baba going into Silence in July 1925. At first He used a slate to communicate with the mandali, sometimes writing in Marathi or Hindi, and at other times in English.

Then Mehera recalled that on His birthday that year Baba took a bath in the old army bathroom. There was a cool breeze and Meheru's father Rustom, who was a tall and well-built man, took Baba in his arms like a baby, enfolding Him and carried Him to the room where all the men and women were gathered. Baba said "Women first" and they came to Him, bowed down to His feet, folded their hands in Namaskar very quickly poured a little water into their hands to wash His feet, then put their still-wet hands to their faces.

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Mehera went on to talk of the Blue Bus tours with Baba. In Jabalpur they all complained that it was very hot. Then they went on to Nagpur where it was *terribly* hot. Rano's mother Nonny was sitting with her eyes closed, exhausted. Rano took a bed-sheet and wet it, laid it on the floor for Nonny to lie down on, then wet more cloths for her head. Baba was also concerned for Nonny's health. Mehera said that they brought a wet sheet for Baba to use too.

In the bathroom the women took off their outer clothes to wash them and gave them to one or another to hold while they were washing their faces to get cooler. It was so hot that their clothes dried in 15 minutes. There was no relief at all. In the evening Baba took them for a walk to the lake but it was still very hot, and even the night was hot without any breeze. They left early the next morning.

Then Baba took them to Lonavla. It was so pleasant, green and cool. The lake there had stone walls built round it. There was an electric

Mehera

generator using power from the hydroelectric scheme where the water

rushed down at a steep slope on concrete runways. Later on water was made available for farmers to irrigate their crops. Mehera described all this clearly, including the machinery.

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Helen Dahm

Mehera spoke of Helen Dahm and her painting on the dome ceiling of Baba and twelve disciples which was done in 1938. After 1969 the paint began flaking and two painters were called to restore it, but they did not come. Another man was called, and his work on the walls was all right, but the dome was spoiled and Mehera showed her sadness at this.

Then she talked of Helen Dahm's later years in Switzerland and how she was finally recognized for her art. For her 90th birthday she was given a big celebration with band music and dancing, and a horse carriage took her to church. She was honoured by all.

Reverting to 1938, Mehera told us that Helen did not speak English, only German or Swiss—Hedi Mertens and Irene Billo could talk with her. When Helen became very ill on the first Blue Bus tour, Baba told Irene to look after her. Soon afterwards, because of her health problems Helen returned to Switzerland with Hedi Mertens early in 1939.

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Irene Billo

Mehera continued talking then about Irene Billo, who came to cook for them in the big kitchen at Cannes. She cooked what she called “earth flowers”—mushrooms—and Baba like them very much so He asked Mehera to tell Irene to cook them every day. Mehera described Irene as a big girl with fair, curly hair, and said that she was very happy to cook for Baba.

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Mehera

The “M” Sign

When Mehera gestured while telling a story, sometimes the palm of her hand was visible, and anyone sitting close to her could then see the beautiful “M” in the lines on her hand. Mani also had a similar “M” sign in her hand.

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Baba’s Birthday Programmes, February 1989

Straight after lunch on 23rd February the children from Pimpalgaon village, which is about a mile away from Meherazad, came for their Baba’s Birthday darshan programme. Mehera was not present at this, but it was a delightful occasion.

Later there was a karate programme under the pandal, given by a Korean man. Mehera and all the women mandali came to see him. This man had attained Olympic standard but was not sent to the Games because of politics. He was one of the best in the world according to this standard, and he was indeed wonderful to watch. Mehera was very happy and enjoyed the performance.

After tea which was served there on the verandah, Mehera went back to the women’s side. She sent a message to this man, saying he was very blessed because his was the first offering for Baba’s Birthday, it was given at Baba’s Home at Meherazad, and it was a very special performance.

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The play produced at Meherazad on Baba’s Birthday was a skit on Shakespeare’s *Midsummer Night’s Dream*. It was very well done indeed, and hilariously funny. Mehera, Mani, Goher, and Mehera thoroughly enjoyed it. They sat in the front row at the edge of Mandali Hall verandah under the big pandal which stretched right across to the men’s cottage opposite. This was the “stage” area. Other mandali and pilgrims crowded into the rows of seats on the verandah. It was hot, but everyone enjoyed the afternoon very much, and at the end of the performance all the players came to greet Mehera. She looked very happy, talking and laughing with the different actors, and with many others who also came to greet her.

A few days later on the porch Mehera talked of this play for Baba’s

Mehera

Birthday. Various actors and scenes were remembered by different ones,

so everyone laughed heartily about it all over again.

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Meherazad, 1943

With a complete change of subject Mehera began to talk about Baba's first coming to Meherazad in 1943. Baba wanted to go to a quiet place for seclusion. Vishnu remembered hearing about this property and took Baba to see it. Baba liked it very much, and spent a few days in seclusion in the small building which later became the servants' quarters. (The room Baba stayed in is now actually locked up and used for storage.)

Baba soon brought Mehera and Mani to see it. Mehera said to Him, "Oh, yes, Baba. I like it very much," and He replied "I thought you would." In contrast with the dry and barren effects of Meherabad, there were several beautiful trees and it was very quiet. There was no garden then, the small cottage had only two rooms, and there was no main house as now. Baba told them a new house would be built later on. This was finally completed in 1948.

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A Play For Baba In The Early 1940s

Two days later Mehera told us about a play put on by the women for Baba at Bangalore, and about Katie's very good acting as the chief of an African tribe. Her head-dress was a pineapple top, and any charcoal available from the kitchen fires had been saved to blacken her skin as well as various other actors.

A very amusing part of the play was planned to take place around a small hut backstage made from pieces of tatta (woven bamboo matting). A short fat one, Khorshed's mother Soonamasi, was to be in the hut and come out saying "Mammy, Mammy,"—but she was always so vague that there had to be rehearsals for this line!

Then they thought of a funnier sequence to amuse Baba. Another fat one was also to be in the hut and come out when Soonamasi said "Mammy" and stand there with her. So Kharmenmasi, a bigger and

Mehera

fatter version of Soonamasi, took this part—she was a good actress and

played it well. Mehera said she was sitting with Baba and the handful of others in the audience, and Baba laughed a lot at these two.

Rano played an Englishman on safari and Irene Billo was his wife. There was a funny sequence with the Africans getting the cooking pot ready, and then checking Rano—“No, too skinny!” Then they looked at Irene—“Yes, yum, yum!”

There was also a scene of Rano playing a tiger, using a beautiful big tiger skin complete with head which had previously been given to Baba. The stage was fixed to look like a forest, so these scenes and the real fire under the cooking pot meant much planning and preparation—all to give Baba an amusing and happy interlude, which it certainly was.

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Umar Tree Photos

One morning in early March when the pilgrim season was nearly over and most of the big crowd had gone, Mehera came out to the porch earlier, at about 12:00.

Mani came soon afterwards and talked about Baba’s face appearing gradually in the Umar tree outside Mehera’s window in 1969, and said that after a few days when it became so clear, she took the photo which Mehera wanted. Then small prints were done, with a circle round Baba’s face on the tree, and they sent these out to various Baba Centres. One came to Meher House in Sydney. I remembered it clearly, and mentioned how much all of them enjoyed seeing it.

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Mandali Hall Sunday Programmes

On Sunday mornings there was a programme of entertainment in Mandali Hall, usually musical presentations, and sometimes an amusing skit was given by pilgrims, followed by a Baba film. Seating was arranged from the middle to the back of the room, with chairs in the front rows for Mehera and the women mandali.

There was an informal, warm and intimate atmosphere in Mandali Hall for these programmes, each item being offered to Baba. The men mandali sat on the carpets in their usual places along the walls opposite or
Mehera

near to Baba’s chair, and most of the pilgrims also sat close together on the

floor, filling the center of the room facing the performers and able to look back to Mehera and the women mandali from time to time.

Sometimes Mani would turn round a little and make a comment to those close by, sometimes those near Mehera would be aware that she was particularly touched by the words of a song about Baba, sometimes all the mandali would be laughing and enjoying a funny skit. At times during a film Mani would comment on it to everyone, and also interpret some of Baba's gestures.

When the programmes ended, many of the pilgrims usually spent a few minutes talking to Mehera and each of the mandali inside. Soon Mehera would move out quickly, to be greeted by those waiting outside for a few words with her and the others as they left the Hall. Mehera would smile, move aside her umbrella so that someone could take a photograph, then wave goodbye and walk across to the house through her lovely garden.

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Mehera did not tell stories or make comments in Mandali Hall. Her venue was always the porch or in Baba's dining room.

Memories of being with Mehera on her porch will remain evergreen for all who spent time with there, and her gentle presence will forever pervade and grace the house where she gave so much to so many.

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MEHERA – Part 3

MEHERA'S TEAS

Mehera's Teas in the delightful atmosphere of Baba's dining room were occasions with a charm and intimacy not easy to describe in words. To be invited was always a highlight of one's day at Meherazad.

Twelve women (and occasionally two or three children also) were called each Tuesday and Thursday to have tea with Mehera, starting around 4:45 to 5:00 PM. During these days one of the Western residents helping at Meherazad would write down in a particular notebook the names of all women and young girls present. Goher or Meheru would check the list and decide on those who had just arrived, or who were leaving, as well as others according to how long they were staying, or how often they had already been to Tea. In the very crowded times pilgrims would be invited only once or twice at most.

It was always heart-warming to be told quietly in the early afternoon "You are invited for Mehera's Tea today!" and go across about 4:30 to wait on the porch until Mehera came out after her afternoon rest which Baba had ordered her to have every day. As always whenever she appeared, everyone on the porch would rise from their chairs to greet her. At teatime Mehera used to stop just inside the front doorway, and in a lilting voice and with a twinkle in her eye say, "Will you come and take tea with me?" Then she led the way quickly into the dining room and those invited stepped forward to follow her. Whether inside or outside she always walked with quick lithe movements, so anyone wanting to stay beside her had to be alert to keep pace with her.

The twelve women soon chose seats round the big dining table, and if children had been invited they sat at a small low table against the end wall near Baba's chair. Then Mehera stood in front of her chair and began spooning out the puffed rice or other delicacy from a round container onto small dishes, handing each one to the Western pilgrim standing next to her who had earlier been asked to help serve the food. In turn she would then add a couple of cookies and pass each dish to the one sitting in Mani's place which was directly opposite Mehera's chair. From there the dishes were handed on right round the table until all had one. Cups and saucers had earlier been set out on the table, with teapots of regular tea and mint tea, milk and sugar placed in the centre for everyone to help themselves. Mehera always liked all this to be done quickly. When her own cup had been filled she sat down, and the stories would begin.

Mehera

On some days Mehera would tell quite a few stories, or answer

someone's question with a comment or story. At other times, perhaps if she were more tired than usual, it seemed to be left to those present to make contributions to the conversation. But occasionally, and this was possibly due to shyness, no-one would say anything for a minute or two, and then Mehera would remember another story.

To sit at Baba's table in Mehera's company was always a touching experience. Apart from her delightful reminiscences there were other little reminders of Baba. Now and then Mehera would glance at His chair as though He was sitting there, or gently put her hand on the arm and very softly say "Baba darling!" A small glass bowl of fresh flowers was always on the table in front of Baba's place, a loving offering to Him.

When Tea was over Mehera would stand, and all did the same, remaining in their places round the table. Turning to the beautiful large black and white picture of Baba on the end wall behind His chair Mehera would say in a clear voice, "Beloved . . . Avatar Meher Baba Ki Jai!" three times with everyone joining in. Then she would say more softly, "Thank you for your most beautiful love, Baba darling. Help us to love you and serve you." or "May we all be worthy of your most beautiful love, Baba darling!" Such words were often spoken so quietly that they were hard to catch fully, even by those standing nearest her. Sometimes she would gently stroke Baba's hand in the picture, murmuring, "Your hands are so beautiful, darling!" Then she would put her fingers to her lips and transfer the kiss to the photo as another caress. At such moments it was almost as though no-one else was there and she was lovingly talking to Him by herself.

After standing there briefly with hands folded to Him, Mehera would turn round and walk quickly to the door. All followed, some softly talking to one another, others quietly leaving the room, and although no-one wanted to leave that gentle atmosphere in Baba's beautiful presence, they had to move out to the porch, say goodbye to Mehera, and walk across to the other side of Mandali Hall in response to Aloba's frequent ringing of the bell and his calls of "Board the bus!"

And so another Teatime in Mehera's company would be over, but these occasions would often be recalled and talked about by those who attended.

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Mehera

Mehera's stories at her Teas were many and varied, but at times in that

intimate atmosphere there seemed to be a subtle difference from the stories told on the porch. Perhaps Baba's Presence was just a little stronger in the room where He had sat so often at meals with Mehera and the women mandali. Yet regardless of venue, all Mehera's stories of Baba and her life with Him came alive as she told them. She obviously re-lived the occasions while vividly describing them, and her love for her Beloved always flowed through them all.

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A New Life Story

Sometimes Mehera would be in a very happy mood, talking animatedly, looking from one to another round the dining table while doing so. One day she talked of the New Life, remembering how very cold it was near Dehra Dun, and Baba would have them get up at 4:30 AM. They would quickly dress and wash their faces in the freezing water. Then they would heat some water for Baba to wash and shave.

She recalled that one morning they were moving on by an early train. Baba said they would have tea at the first big railway station so they were looking forward to this. At the first stop Baba said, "No, not here," and they had to wait a long time to reach that big station for the hot tea to warm them. But Mehera conveyed to those listening to her that she and the others were happy to wait like this in anticipation of the tea, because that was Baba's wish. Finally, when He said they could have some, it was so good, she said, to get that hot tea, and how warm they felt drinking.

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The Western Women On Meherabad Hill

Mehera then spoke of the Western women disciples in the late 1930s and how difficult it was for them to share the big room in the old water tank on Meherabad Hill, that is, the West Room, which is now the Museum. At that time it had no windows at all and was very hot with the door closed. Some of the older Eastern women also stayed in this room. Mehera, Mani, Khorshed, Naja, Khorshed's mother Soonamasi, and Valu

Mehera

Pawar stayed in the East Room at the other end of the building.

In 1938 Baba decided to have the upper story added, and the roof was taken off to do so. Padri and Pendu were in charge of the work and while it went on Baba took the women to Panchgani for the summer.

When completed, the building was named Meher Retreat, and the Western women stayed in the upstairs dormitory. Their beds were close together and they had no privacy to dress or put on their make-up, Mehera said. Rano's mother Nonny Gayley was a very shy and reserved person so Rano hung a sari around her bed to make a screen for her. It was difficult also for Norina, Nadine and Elizabeth who had been accustomed to having every comfort and many luxuries in their own homes.

The "tin shed"—the open verandah opposite what is now called Mansari's kitchen on Meherabad Hill—was also built at that time to provide a place for the Western women to eat and sit. Before this the area was completely in the open, and was used for badminton games which Baba often played with the women.

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Baba's Meals

Another time Mehera talked of Baba's meals. His favourite food was dal and rice. Because of so many long fasts this was all he would eat after breaking them—thin dal and rice is easily digested, and could also be eaten quickly. On the advice of the doctors Baba ate a small amount of fish and meat in later years for the protein, but He didn't like eating chicken. He said a chicken can be eaten by only one or two people, and that mutton is better because many people can eat from the one animal. The fish used were flounder, pomfret and Bombay duck.

Baba liked oily fried foods, not boiled. He ate eggs, but just the yolk. Mehera liked the white, so she would give the yolk first to Baba and then take the white herself.

Baba didn't like fruit very much, except mango and papaya, or fresh figs which Eruch's mother Gaimai would send to Guruprasad. These would be washed first, then peeled, and Baba would take a little taste with His finger while playing cards with the mandali.

Mehera again mentioned dal. There are many kinds, she said, and if it was spiced Baba would dip His middle fingertip in it to try—in a very delicate way, as Mehera carefully demonstrated for us.

Mehera

This talk of dal then reminded Mehera that when Mani was very small

she would have rice and dal, and when some rice was left she would ask for more dal, but then some dal was left, so she wanted more rice! Mehera laughed gently as she told this little anecdote.

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Baba's Tea

Someone had been asked at home if she knew whether Baba liked strong tea, so this was mentioned. Mehera said Yes, He did, with milk and two and a half teaspoons of sugar.

Then Mehera spoke of the way Baba liked to drink His tea. She would pour the whole cupful into a deep saucer. Baba would lift it up and gently blow on it, then take a tiny sip very quietly to see if it was cool enough not to burn His lips, and gradually drink it.

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Dancing

One afternoon Mehera told some brief stories of Meherabad in the very early years before Baba's Silence. He would sing, and also dance by Himself most beautifully. Mehera commented that although many years later He danced with Margaret Craske it was not as beautiful to watch as when He danced by Himself in the early 1920s—and that was at 4:00 AM!

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Mani's Trick

Another story that day was about Mani. When she was about eight years old she had come to Meherabad in the school holidays to be with Baba. She knew that Mehera's mother Daulatmai really loved the sound of Persian being spoken, although she couldn't understand it. So one day Mani started chattering, pretending to speak Persian and interrupting Daulatmai in her meditation given by Baba. But Baba heard her, came into the room and said to Mani, "Why do you trick her like that? It is not nice." And He put a big pot right over Mani's head and told her to stand in the corner.

Then Khorshed arrived, saw this, and began to giggle about Mani's

Mehera

plight. Again Baba came in and told Khorshed it was not nice to do that to

Mani. He put another big pot over Khorshed's head, and had her stand alongside Mani. So although He punished Mani, He didn't allow her to be made fun of.

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A Special Prasad

Tuesday 22nd September 1987 turned out to be a very special day for me at Meherazad. In the morning when Mehera came out she said that from inside the house she saw someone walking in the garden towards the porch, which reminded her that she had so often seen Baba walking there, and how He must have known that so many pilgrims would be coming to Meherazad in the future.

There were no special stories that morning but being in Mehera's company was as enjoyable as always. Just before going to lunch I told her that this was a kind of birthday for me—the 26th anniversary of meeting Bill Le Page in his Sydney office for a job interview, and seeing there for the first time a photo of Baba which had caught my attention although I knew nothing at all about Him at that point. Mehera wished me a happy anniversary, and so it turned out to be.

After lunch I sat for an hour or so in the garden on the seat outside the women's cottage writing up some notes. About 2:45 Kacy Cook came and said Mehera wanted me and that she was calling two others as well. I went over to the porch and soon Janet Luck and Raine Mormon arrived. Heather Nadel was already in the house, and Mehera called us all into the dining room “for prasad from Baba's table.” Various covered dishes were there, and she first indicated some small golden-coloured lightly spiced pieces, rather dry in texture but very nice. Then Mehera wanted us to try a kind of curry sauce which she poured into small cups. The other three exclaimed over it saying how good it was, but one tiny sip was fire in the throat for me! I had to tell Mehera that I just couldn't take it, but she didn't mind at all, saying “No, don't have it, just leave it there.”

By now we were all standing near the foot of the table. Mehera asked me to sit down but the others still stood, and she brought a plate with three portions of rava on it for them and another plate for me—it was delicious. Then Mehera went up to her end of the table, uncovered a dish

Mehera

with two long white rolls which she cut in half and gave each of us a piece.

These had been made by Rhoda Dubash's cook—a kind of white phyllo pastry, very thin, and a sweet mixture in the middle with some currants or similar small dark fruits, again very good. In fact we all kept eating and saying “delicious” while thanking Mehera. Finally there were four pieces of peeled apple “to clean your mouth” she said.

Mehera seemed so happy, and to be enjoying giving us these things. Aloba's tea-bell had rung when we first went in and now Mehera said to go over and have “nice hot tea.” She went to wash her hands at the sink in the corner using her Sunlight soap from a low shelf, then said to me to wash too and pointed to a green soap on the top shelf. Hanging right outside the back doorway there was a big towel which Mehera used and told me to use it too. The others also washed, and by then Mehera was standing at the other side of the dining room near the door.

I went across and took her hands. “Thank you very much Mehera, for the prasad, it was delicious.” She replied, “It's nice that you appreciate it, prasad from Baba's table,” and mentioned the message which Ted Judson had given at one time for what she had sent him—he said that even a crumb from Baba's table was so special. I felt it was too, saying that it was as though Baba had given it for my anniversary that day, and she answered, “Yes. He remembered you with love.”

We all stood in the main area beside the sitting room for a few minutes and Mehera again told us to get our hot tea on the other side. She came with us to the door, then smiled and said she would go now for her rest. As I left the porch she waved and I did also while walking away through the garden, looking back now and then.

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At Mehera's Tea That Day

To my surprise I was called for Tea that afternoon which I didn't think would happen because there were a good number of women present, and also because of the prasad Mehera had given me.

I thought of staying near the foot of the table this time but Davana Brown, one of the Western residents who helped the mandali at Meherazad, whispered quickly, “Go on, go with her, sit next to her,” and after hesitating a moment I did so. Mehera often turned or spoke directly to me. Some on the other side of the table talked quite a lot, but our side was quiet and sometimes I felt almost alone with Mehera. But soon

Mehera

afterwards when she was telling about her childhood she told me to sit

forward so that her voice would reach me.

Mehera's Childhood

As a small child her father put her up on an elephant, told her to hold on tight and not fall off—she indicated how she did this. Later her father made her get on a camel which was a very spirited one, with two men holding its head, one on each side. Her father got up behind her and she had to hold tightly. The movement was jerky at first but very smooth when it ran. Her mother was seated on a very quiet camel in a saddle made for her from an armchair, and worked away with her knitting needles. Because it was such a long ride she had to have something to do! They were moving camp, and everything was packed on the camel-train. Mehera remembered how nice the camels looked moving along in a line. Eventually they came to the place in the forest where their servants had erected a very big tent with scalloped trim round it and divisions inside for sitting room and bedrooms. “Very lovely it was,” she said.

Mehera asked me would I be afraid in the forest like that, with wild animals roaring close by. I said I didn't know, perhaps, (but thought later that I really should have said Yes!). Her father was absolutely fearless, and would tell her mother and herself not to be afraid, that he was there to look after them.

Butter

Because of the sweet dish with milk which we had been eating, there was some talk about buffalo milk. Mehera remembered that as a young girl she used to help shake the three days' collection of thick buffalo cream to make butter. She was not allowed to taste it and said, tantalizingly, “I can't tell you about that!” However, later on Baba allowed her to have “That much butter every day,” and she held up her hand with the thumb against two fingers.

In saying goodbye when Tea was over, Mehera again wished me a happy anniversary which it certainly was.

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Baba's Bedroom

During all my visits I always went to spend a little time in Baba's
Mehera

Room. It is such a lovely room, quiet and peaceful, the two side windows

looking out into the garden with fields and hills beyond it. Baba used to say one was His “TV window” because through it He could see a variety of things happening.

The furniture is simple, and still kept as it was when Baba was there. Neat plaques with “Baba’s Chair” painted on them are placed on the seats of the two which He always used, but pilgrims can sit on the other chairs and stools which were the women mandali’s places when they were with Baba in His room. A dressing table with a wide mirror is placed between the two side windows, a steel storage cabinet stands in the corner near the Harry Kenmore chair, and another low cupboard on the other side of the chair faces the end of Baba’s bed. The plexiglass stand containing Baba’s hair is kept on this cupboard.

Pictures of Jesus, Krishna, Zoroaster and Baba hang on the walls, and some photos of Baba are on the dressing table, as well as the beautiful bronze-like casts of His feet which are now well-polished by the caressing hands of many pilgrims. A small bedside cabinet is another focal point. On the lower shelf in a clear plastic case is the pair of sandals Baba was last using, and on the top is a photo of Baba when young. Beautiful roses and other flowers, all from the Meherazad gardens, adorn the room.

Baba’s bed is the most important place. On some days the floral cover is in soft shades of pinks, on other days it is in blues, and both have toning plain covers over the canopy. All are of specially-chosen fabrics and hand-sewn, always giving a fresh, cool appearance as one comes from the garden into the room through the side door.

When Baba was physically there in the room, the men mandali who were on night-watch duty with Him also used this side door to come and go. Beside the bed on the floor is a pink rug and a cushion where Baba’s feet rested when sitting there listening to Mani reading aloud Nero Wolfe, Agatha Christie, or other favourite detective stories.

In the centre of the bed a framed photo of Baba seated in a chair is placed near a square pillow which matches the cover. On the recommendation of the chiropractor Dr. Harry Kenmore, Baba used this square pillow to support His arms when He slept on His side. This was to prevent any stress or strain to His neck and shoulder muscles which had been affected by the whiplash injury in the 1956 car accident.

A garland of fresh jasmines or tuber-roses adorns the photograph. It is here beside the bed that pilgrims kneel to take Baba’s darshan, bow down and kiss the cushion where His feet used to rest when He sat on the

Mehera

bed. Baba’s Presence is very strong, making it easy to feel that one is

actually there at His feet, and that at any moment He will reach out to give a loving embrace.

Mehera herself, helped by Meheru, always took care of Baba's bedroom when He was physically present, and continued to do so after He left His physical form. Every day everything is cleaned, dusted, polished, and made glowing for Him, with fresh flowers adding to the atmosphere—Mehera's loving care created a tangible beauty in His room.

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On the last day of my 1987 stay I was invited to Tea. After Aloba's tea at 3:00 on Mandali Hall verandah, dark clouds were gathering quickly so I went over to the porch just before 4:00 and sat there to wait. Soon afterwards it began to rain. By 4:30 the wind was strong and it was very wet with lots of thunder. The lights went out just before Mehera came to the doorway to call us inside.

The Main House, Meherazad

To go into the house was always a happy experience. The warm welcome of Baba's Presence was there all the time, and to walk beside Mehera on the way to the dining room for Tea was an added pleasure. It is a lovely house; when the first small building was to be pulled down and rebuilt in 1948, Baba asked Mehera to design it.

Coming in from the porch, the front door leads into a central room which also acts as a passage area to all the other rooms. Along the same wall as the entrance door there is a tiny room with wash-basin, soap, towels and store cupboard which Dr. Goher and the others used when looking after Baba. And years ago when pilgrims would often go into Baba's bedroom from inside the house, Mehera would always like anyone who had touched their shoes to wash their hands before going into His room.

The interior door to Baba's bedroom is the first on the left-hand wall, and the second door leads to Mehera and Mani's bedroom. Occupying the space along the wall between these two doors in the central room is Dr. Goher's bed. She was on call 24 hours a day for Baba, so when He needed her in the night she could go to Him instantly.

On the right-side as you come through the front door is the sitting room which has no dividing wall, so it is actually an open extension of the
Mehera

central room, and defined by a beautiful carpet. There are casement

windows opening onto the front porch, and also along the end wall looking out into the garden. It is a much-loved and lived-in room, with simple chairs, small cabinets displaying Baba treasures and photos, and Baba pictures on the wall. Books, newsletters and other items in current use by the mandali are easily accessible on little tables.

The main piece of furniture is a graceful couch with a raised section as its head and a support at the side. An attractive printed cotton cover, hand-sewn like Baba's bed covers, is spread over it. The couch is placed along the wall, its head near the corner, and a beautiful painting of Baba reclines there supported by a cushion, with other smaller pictures against the side. This is Baba's couch.

Baba used the sitting room often, and here, too, His Presence prevails. To look at all the Baba items there you can enter the room, but first leaving shoes or sandals on the stone floor right at the edge of the carpet—Mehera liked people to step barefoot straight onto the carpet so that when slipping out of their shoes their feet did not touch the floor and carry any dust across. Baba Himself had walked on the carpet with bare feet.

To go to the dining room, you walk straight past the sitting room and turn to your right through the door in the corner. On either side of the door, in the right-angle formed by the walls of the central room, there are cabinets with more photos of Baba and small vases of flowers.

At the doorway, looking into the dining room and across the length of the large dining table which takes up most of the centre space, the eye is drawn to the very striking large black and white photo of Baba hanging on the end wall. Baba's chair is at the head of the table there, and it is to this picture that Mehera always turned after Tea. The end wall projects further out than the sitting room's outside wall, to allow for the sets of casement windows in the dining room, which on the right-hand side open onto the garden, and on the left-hand side look out to the back of the building.

There are one or two cupboards around the room, and also a refrigerator which was installed after electricity came to Meherazad in 1973. On the left of the doorway is a side table to serve food brought straight in from the kitchen in the cooking pots, to save extra work. In the corner is a small wash-basin, and next to it on the back wall is the doorway which leads out to the kitchen and food preparation areas. There the long-time Baba-lover servants first worked under the direction of Naja who cooked for Baba for many, many years. Now Katie oversees the cooking department. Meals for the men mandali are cooked here also, and carried

Mehera

over to the men's cottage, where they eat sitting round a long table on

the verandah there, screened by bamboo blinds let down for privacy on the days when pilgrims are at Meherabad. At Baba's dining table the women mandali have their own places given by Him—Mehera is the first place at the side, immediately to Baba's right hand, and Mani's is directly opposite her, to Baba's left hand, with the others further along. As with all the rooms, the dining room has its own unique atmosphere.

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Champa The White Donkey

To return now to the Tea on this last day of my 1987 stay. I sat opposite Mehera, in Mani's place. After the small dishes of sweets and cookies were passed round and all had taken tea, someone asked Mehera what was the story about the photo of Baba riding the white donkey.

Mehera recalled that it was taken on Meherabad Hill in the mid-1930s. Baba would take them out walking along the top of Meherabad Hill in the evening with Champa the donkey. Mehera mentioned to Baba that Champa was tall and strong and that He should ride on her when going up and down the Hill in the heat of the day, instead of walking on the scorching ground in His thin open sandals. With persuasion Baba agreed to it.

In the meantime, Baba agreed to sit on Champa for a few minutes. Then Mehera, Mani, Naja and Khorshed did so in turn, and Mani, who had brought her small Box Brownie camera, was able to record those moments with Baba and His women mandali, including Soonamasi and Valu. Mehera said what a fortunate animal Champa was, and how blessed to have carried the God-Man in His present Advent.

Baba In The Hammock

Then Mehera was asked about the photo of her watching Baba asleep in the hammock. This was also at Meherabad, and Mehera explained exactly where it was. On the lower Hill area near the level crossing close to Arangaon (where all vehicles driving up the Hill have to cross the railway line), there are a few villagers' houses with a couple of large trees behind them. Originally there was a mango orchard with many trees and it was very quiet and secluded.

Baba had suggested a picnic one day at Meherabad. They asked where

Mehera

to go as they didn't know a nice spot, and that was where He took them. It

was very shady and cool and they enjoyed the picnic.

Then Baba went for a walk, and Rano put up the hammock between two trees for Him to take a rest. He lay down in it and closed His eyes. Mehera was sitting by Him when the photograph was taken.

Mother Teresa

Next there was some talk about Mother Teresa because a small girl present at the tea table had been named after her. When this girl was only three weeks old, Mother Teresa had visited their town, and when talking to the family she had asked to hold the baby. This little story and other details of the occasion were told by the mother, and Mehera was obviously interested. All through Tea the thunder had been rumbling, and the kerosene lamps in use because of the power blackout provided a soft dull light. The rain had mostly stopped and it was quite humid in the room. Mehera got up and opened the windows at both sides of the dining room, saying that she found it hot and liked fresh air. She then asked if it was too cool for anyone, once again showing her thoughtfulness for others.

Afterwards all stood while Mehera, facing Baba's picture, led us as always in saying "Beloved . . . Avatar Meher Baba Ki Jai!" three times. She followed this with her own softly-spoken words "Help us to be worthy of your most beautiful love. Help me to serve you and love you always, my darling!" She went to the picture and stroked Baba's hand. There was silence for a few moments, then she turned and everyone began to move out.

A few minutes before the end of Tea the lights had come on again, and although it was still dark outside with heavy clouds, it was a warm and happy atmosphere there with Mehera in Baba's dining room.

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Saying Goodbye To Mehera That Visit

I lingered a little, glancing around the room, then went out to the porch to say goodbye. Mehera gave me the little packet of sweets as prasad to carry home, as she always did to each one who was leaving, and kissed me. I waited a moment or two—as usual, it was hard to leave.

I thanked Mehera for tea and all the wonderful stories she had given each day. She said "I am very happy you have come now," and I told her

Mehera

Baba had given me so much, it had been such a wonderful stay. She

murmured softly, “Wait a moment, I want to give you another prasad.” So I stood beside her while the last two or three said goodbye to her. Then she went quickly to her big armchair and came back with a small wrapped chocolate-bar held close in her hand, saying in a conspiratorial manner with a twinkle in her eyes, “Put it in your bag and don’t let others see it!” It was like an impish secret between us.

Then I had to go, and Mehera stood at the top of the steps waving, as I did also, turning every few yards to look back as I walked through the garden. She stayed there, waving with both hands, until I reached the bougainvillea arch next to the New Life Caravan, my eyes now filled with tears.

What a lovely picture of her it was to take away and hold in memory until my next visit. The soft green colours of Mehera’s simple blouse and skirt gradually merged with the mellow colours and shapes of the porch. How perfectly she belonged in Baba’s Home, always thinking of Baba, always loving Him, yet continually giving so much to everyone while she waited for His call to join Him. What a glorious gift Baba had given us all to spend time with His Beloved Mehera!

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Mehera’s Teas, February 1989

It happened that Wendy Connor, whom I had known since the East-West Gathering was amongst those invited to Tea one day, and we sat together at the dining table opposite Mehera.

Mehera’s Dream

At first everyone was a little quiet, but then Mehera was asked whether she dreamed of Baba even though she was with Him all the time. She said “Oh, yes, but I can only tell you one dream. It was after Baba dropped His body. In the dream He was lying down on the floor and I was near Him and said “Oh, why is there no pillow for Baba’s head?”

Then she said “So I took His head on my lap to make him comfortable.”

The love in her voice, words, and gestures was most beautiful, and hearing Mehera speak so intimately was deeply moving.

Mehera

France

Then there was some mention of Paris (a French girl was with us), and Mehera remembered being with Baba at the Eiffel Tower. “Was it cold there for you?” Wendy asked. But Mehera was thinking only of Baba and replied “No, Baba was wearing complete Western dress.”

Mehera went on to talk of one time when they were in Monte Carlo. Norina gave Baba her beautiful black cloak to wear while visiting the casino with some of the Western women. Mehera explained that Baba was doing work there amongst the people present.

She also remembered the lovely house they had at Cannes, looking over the garden and the house below. But now, she said a little sadly, the one which they stayed in has been pulled down and high-rise buildings are there.

Travelling By Sea To Cannes

The talk turned to travel by sea to the West in 1937 on their way to Cannes and Mehera was asked whether she liked sea travel. She described quite vividly the storm between Bombay and Aden, and remembered that in Bombay before going on board they had eaten good Indian curry dishes for dinner. After they had gone to their cabins Baba looked in and asked them had they noticed that the ship was already moving. At that moment Mehera became aware of the movement, and also the sound of the engines which was very distinct because they were travelling in Third Class on a lower deck. She told Him, “Oh, Baba, I don’t like it!” She climbed up into her bunk, and was seasick for the whole journey until they reached Aden and anchored out from the shore in calm water.

Then Baba came to take her up to the deck for some fresh air. He and Mani were on either side of her. She could see little boats everywhere in the harbor. Baba wanted her to have something to eat, and sent Rano to get some ice cream mixed with lemonade and told her to take it slowly to digest it. But her stomach wasn’t able to cope with it and she rushed off to be sick again. Rano and Mani helped to look after her.

She recalled going through the Red Sea during the next part of the journey, and seeing men on camels very close to the shore. Later they saw a volcano erupting, which must have been spectacular as she seemed to remember it very clearly. Finally, Mehera laughingly said how funny it was when they landed because then Naja got sick—with “land sickness!”

Mehera

Portofino

At Tea several days later someone began telling Mehera that in Mandali Hall that morning an American named Brian talked about his visit to Portofino, Italy in 1970. He was trying to find the villa where Baba and Norina, Elizabeth and other Western women had stayed in 1933.

Brian met a fisherman who took him to the coffee shop where “The Baba,” as He was referred to, used to go with the women, and the owner of this place remembered Baba well. He served Brian in the same way, delighting in the memory, and then called a young man to take Brian to the villa. This young man was the boy whom Baba used to call to run errands, and also the one who brought the rope to Baba to rescue Anita De Caro who was trapped on the cliff when Baba had a group of the Westerners follow Him on this very steep climb up from the beach. (The full and very graphic account of this occasion is given in C.B. Purdom’s book *The Perfect Master*.)

Mehera and the Eastern women did not go to Portofino, and therefore she did not quite follow all the details of Brian’s story. Even so, she seemed to like hearing it.

Poona Holiday

Then Mehera talked of Poona and the enjoyment of staying in the small cottage in the grounds of the Poona Club for the short break which she, Mani, Goher and Meheru usually took each year when the Pilgrim season ended on 15th March. She said how tired Mani would get with the amount of Trust work and her very hot office there. Mehera mentioned the number of people who came to the Poona Club for meals and tennis, and how she and the other three would so much enjoy a walk round the courts area in the evening after the men had gone home.

Mehera also said that it was always arranged in advance for them to go alone to pay homage at Babajan’s Tomb. They would go at an early hour in the morning to avoid the regular visitors, and had the place to themselves for that short time.

Mehera

Babajan

Mehera went on to speak of Babajan. “She was a very sweet lady, and spoke very softly.” She would be looking at a group of men round her, and then she would quickly look at Mehera and those women who were with her at the time.

One day Gaimai Jessawala and her sister Goola were also there. Gaimai already had three children, Eruch, Meheru and Manu, but she was rather shy in Babajan’s presence. Babajan had a fresh whole coconut which someone had offered her. She picked it up and held it out to Gaimai. Goola kept urging Gaimai forward to take the prasad from Babajan before anyone else did, and finally Gaimai did put out her hands cupped together, and Babajan straightaway dropped the coconut into them. Not long after this Gaimai’s youngest son Meherwan was conceived.

Again speaking of Babajan, Mehera said that Baba used to go often to visit her late at night, 11:00 PM or so, and on one particular night when others had gone away, Babajan gently moved aside the shawl around her shoulders and asked Baba to massage her neck and upper back with a kind of scratching movement—Mehera put out her hands, curling the fingers over to show how it was done. Baba would continue this for hours together, until 3:00 or 4:00 in the morning, and His fingers would be stiff from holding them in the same position for so long. Baba’s love for Babajan was such that He would do this for her whenever she asked Him. It was always very late at night under her neem tree, and in the quiet time when no-one else was there except Baba and one or two of His men mandali.

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My Last Time With Mehera

Tuesday 7th March 1989 was the last day I saw Mehera. On the porch before lunch I told her I was leaving next morning for Poona, and would go to Bindra House to see Gaimai, and spend some time at Baba House. Mehera asked, “Baba’s Room too?” “Oh, yes. I always like to stop a little while in Poona on my way home—it is special for me because that was where I met Baba.” She smiled and said “Oh, very good.” As I kissed her she said, “Good luck in your life with Baba, He is with you.”

In the late afternoon it was time to leave. Mehera said “You love Baba. He loves you. He is with you. Repeat His Name when you get up
Mehera

and go to bed. I am so happy you came this time. Keep well and happy in His love.” I told her, “I have had such a wonderful time!” and she replied, “Of course!”

At this point we were standing inside the house near the sitting room. Mehera embraced me several times, then gave me a large chocolate packet saying, “This is nourishing—Baba’s prasad from His House to your house.”

After thanking her for this gift, the moment finally came to say goodbye. I embraced her again, finding it so hard to go. Slowly I moved outside to the porch and looked back to her. Mehera waved often and blew kisses, coming out to the doorway as I went down the steps. Once more I looked back to catch a last glimpse of her, then in tears walked away through the beautiful Meherazad garden where Beloved Baba Himself had so often walked with her, His beloved Mehera.

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Mehera Joins Her Beloved

A little over two months later, Avatar Meher Baba took Mehera, His beloved, unto Himself at 9:45 AM on Saturday 20th May at Meherazad.

The following morning at Meherabad Mehera in her coffin was carried into the Samadhi to rest at Baba’s feet during the prayers and Arti, then taken outside and lowered into the grave next to the Samadhi at Baba’s right hand as He had specified long before.

On 25th May Mani wrote her most beautiful and very long letter, detailing all the events leading up to Mehera’s Day on 20th May, as well as the final ceremony at Meherabad when her sweet form was laid to rest beside her Beloved’s Samadhi. It is a most heart-touching account of Mehera’s going to her Beloved.

Within a very short time Sheriar Press printed this letter in booklet form titled:

MEHERA J. IRANI
The beloved of the Beloved
January 7, 1907–May 20, 1989

Inside there is a beautiful photograph of Baba and Mehera standing together:

Mehera

*When the lover and the Beloved are one,
that is the end and the beginning.*

Meher Baba

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MEHERA Part 4

AFTERWARDS

My next and last pilgrimage to Meherabad and Meherazad was in September 1991. After greeting Beloved Baba in the Samadhi on arrival, I saw for the first time Mehera's beautiful shrine. Her presence was so strong. As I knelt beside her I felt as though she embraced me, and memories of her came flooding back.

At Meherazad the next morning, I went to Baba's Room, then into the bedroom which Mehera and Mani had always shared. Looking in from the doorway, the head of Mehera's bed is beside the window which shows the Umar tree. Through the windows on the right hand side there is a superb view of Seclusion Hill with part of the garden in the foreground. Mani's bed is placed at right angles to Mehera's bed. Other cupboards and a dressing-table occupy the left hand wall.

It is a beautiful room, filled with the pervading gentle atmosphere which belongs especially to Mehera and Mani who loved Baba so much and who were so very, very dear to Him. Baba treasures and photographs adorn the room, and although Mehera always wanted only Baba photos there, later on Mani put out many lovely photos of Mehera too, some of them taken with Baba.

A few days after my arrival, Goher showed some of Mehera's special treasures to me and another pilgrim. The most heart-touching of these was what Goher called "Mehera's Altar." This is kept in a closed cupboard—two shelves filled with several rows of the most exquisite little pictures of

Mehera

Baba, many in hand-made frames. Gazing at this most cherished collection was an overwhelming experience—the fragrance of Mehera’s love for her Beloved just flowed out from them, filling the room with its purity and sweetness.

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Those who met and spent time with Mehera inevitably miss her sweet presence. And many of those who were not able to meet her also feel a deep sense of loss.

Mehera has left for all generations, present and future, an incomparable legacy. Her beauty and purity, her gentleness and humour, her one-pointed devotion, every moment dedicated to thinking of her Lord, serving Him, and pleasing Him, will ever remain an inspiring, perfect example of how to love Avatar Meher Baba as He should be loved.

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MANI - Part 1

Mani—Avatar Meher Baba's dear sister, His lifelong loving companion, and devoted tireless worker. She was unusually gifted—her many different talents and capacities endeared her to everyone, as well as gaining admiration and respect.

To entertain her beloved God-Brother, Mani wrote many skits and plays, poems and songs. She could act, mime, and mimic someone or something with delightful fidelity. She was artistically creative, even designed and made hand-puppets, manipulating them herself to present a particular show for Baba. She taught or encouraged the other women mandali to act in the plays so that all could help to lighten His burden. She was highly imaginative and innovative, quickly producing unusual or amusing effects and costumes out of whatever basic and often quite unlikely materials were available at the time for her plays and skits. She could sing delightfully, and played the sitar well. For Baba's enjoyment and relaxation in His Room, she often read aloud from His favourite detective or humorous stories, making the characters come alive by her clever voice changes.

During Baba's physical lifetime Mani did much secretarial work for Him, spending countless hours at the typewriter. She also wrote well and in a style inimitably her own. She composed the *Family Letters* for Baba's approval to send to Western lovers from 1956 to 1969. *God-Brother*, her book of sparkling childhood stories with Him, was published in 1993, and in spite of serious illness and pain she completed the manuscript for *Dreaming Of the Beloved* in May 1996, with the loving assistance of Heather Nadel and one or two others who did all the typing for her.

Mani was very witty with an infectious sense of humour, and her effervescent personality often helped to lighten and uplift the feelings of those around her. She was also very loving, wise and balanced in her comments and advice. She had an excellent memory and clear understanding of Baba's statements and messages, and wove these into her talks and beautiful stories about Him and her own life with Him.

As well as this, the many years she spent as Chairman of the Avatar Meher Baba Perpetual Public Charitable Trust brought out her impressive administrative abilities in the day-to-day constant workload of dealing with all manner of people and problems affecting the Trust, in addition to carrying on a large amount of correspondence with Baba lovers all over the world.

Mani was beautiful, and often a facial expression or head movement
Mani

would remind one most touchingly of Baba. She was of medium height

with a good figure, had a fair skin, lively brown eyes, and dark wavy hair which later changed gradually to a becoming grey. She moved quickly and gracefully, and one was aware of energy and purpose in whatever she did. For special occasions she dressed in lovely saris, but at Meherazad and in the Trust Office she wore attractive Punjabi outfits which were very practical and suited her admirably.

As one of Baba's two closest women disciples, Mani had the inner beauty, strength and purity of spirit which over countless lives finally brought her to be chosen by Him for that role in this Advent. Although she was more outgoing than Mehera, she too had a quiet presence, a gentle but distinct authority which was recognized and unreservedly acknowledged by all the mandali, pilgrims, residents and workers alike. At the same time she was very vivacious, full of fun, always natural, warm and generous, perceptive and thoughtful for others, ever friendly and approachable—a unique and delightful person to know, and spontaneously loved by everyone.

Her own total love for her beloved God-Brother and Lord was always there, shining in the clear depths of her beautiful eyes, felt in the circle of her embrace, enriching her actions and words.

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Meeting Mani

From the moment of meeting Mani for the first time at Guruprasad, Poona, on 31st October 1962 in Beloved Baba's presence, and also throughout the succeeding years, I always felt a very deep and strong connection with her as though I had known her in many previous lives. Even during the year before meeting her I had a vivid impression of her personality from letters she wrote to Bill Le Page and his family but mainly of course from her delightful Family Letters. In those days they were not yet published in book form, so each time a Letter came from her I used to love typing copies of it to send out to all the Baba people on Bill's lists.

The East-West Gathering

On the evening before the East-West Gathering actually began, three of us Australian women were introduced to Beloved Baba for the first time, and the others joyfully met Him again. Then Baba sent Eruch and
Mani

Bill out of the room, and called in Mehera and the women mandali.

Baba remained sitting on the couch in the big main room there at Guruprasad during the few happy minutes when we met Mehera, Mani, Goher, Naja, Rano and Meheru. I remember very clearly that first meeting with Mani—she looked so young and vital with her dark wavy hair, soft complexion, and eyes full of fun, her vivacious smile and the warmth of her recognition as I introduced myself.

When the last introductions had been made, the little gathering was over. Mehera and the women remained standing in the room near Baba as with quiet farewells and a last look at Him we went slowly out through the open doorway onto the verandah. I think I was the last one to leave, or perhaps just felt I was the only one still there. I didn't want to go, and kept looking back to Baba. I remember wondering, "Is it all right to wave to God?" hesitated, and then did give Him a little wave as I turned towards the door. I can still feel that wish to wave to Him and that hesitancy. I could not clearly see His face, but He was still sitting there as I left—taking with me an indelible memory, ever-precious and so often recalled, of this first quiet, incredibly beautiful meeting with Baba, and with His dear ones also.

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On the first afternoon of the East-West Gathering Thursday 1st November 1962 when all the Western women were called to the women mandali's rooms for changes of clothing after the sudden rain-storm, I did not talk to Mani or any of the others, being too shy and too overwhelmed by all that had already happened. But on Saturday afternoon I did see Mani and to this day I do not know how this touching encounter came about. I had not been at all well that morning and at Guruprasad after lunch was told to see the Indian woman doctor on duty there (not Dr. Goher). Somehow Mani must have heard I was sick, for she came and took me into one of the main rooms, telling me to lie down for a while. Everyone else of course was out under the big pandal at the back for the afternoon East-West programme. Mani left the room but returned after a few moments with a large square chiffon scarf which she gently spread over me.

A little later she came back to see how I was getting on. I said I felt better and would like to go and join the others for the programme. So she led me though the women mandali's rooms, that being the quickest way,

Mani

and to my amazement she told me that I loved Baba, that she knew this

from my photograph which had been sent over earlier in the year. She also said “It is easy to love Baba when you meet Him, but you loved Him before you met Him, and that is why Mehera took your picture and kept it.” I remember standing there looking into her eyes, just shaking my head—I couldn’t speak for the tears in my throat. She put her arms round me, held me lovingly, and a few moments later guided me out to the pandal. I was suddenly aware that on the platform, standing close to Baba, Harry Kenmore was reciting the Master’s Prayer in his booming voice. Then someone must have shown me where the Australian women were sitting and I went to join them.

The next afternoon, Sunday, we were called to say goodbye to Mehera and the women mandali. I always felt how fortunate we were to meet these close ones of Baba’s in 1962, and in the privacy and quiet atmosphere of their rooms, for Baba did not allow them to mix with or even to be seen by the thousands who attended the East-West Gathering.

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The Great Darshan

It was not until the Great Darshan in 1969 that Mehera, Mani and the women mandali came out into the large main room at Guruprasad to sit with the men and women who were gathered there to offer their love and obedience to Beloved Baba. And now it was not the physical form of the Beloved who waited for His lovers, but the all-pervading beauty and strength and power of His Universal Presence which manifested to each one.

There was a brief program, then came the long-awaited moments of taking Baba’s darshan, visiting His bedroom, and, for some of us, spending a short time with Mehera.

An Evening With The Women Mandali

That evening all the women in our group enjoyed two hours at Guruprasad with Mehera and the women mandali. Mehera shyly gave a brief anecdote; then asked Mani to talk to us, which she did, telling many stories in her own inimitable and delightful way, speaking quickly and easily with much detail and expressive gestures to illustrate different

Mani

aspects.

New Life Donkeys

There were stories from the New Life. She made us laugh over the trouble she and Meheru had getting the donkeys to move finally becoming desperate as they lagged further and further behind Baba, who was walking ahead. After noticing that truck horns seemed to have an effect on the animals, when the next truck passed by honking, they both yelled as well, and the donkeys took off with such speed that they were soon ahead of Baba!

Birds

Mani talked of various birds. There was the Mynah which Mehera had taught to say “Baba, Baba darling!” One day, while in a cage near the high ventilator in the East Room on Meherabad Hill, it caught a chill from the cold blast of a sudden storm. Not long afterwards, while the sick bird was being attended to in the East Room with Mehera, Mani, Naja, Khorshed, Valu around it, the bird managed to finally croak “Baba” and then it died.

And there were the three baby parrots at Meherabad, Mani told us, very ugly with outstanding red beaks, pot tummies, stubby quills for tails and plucked-looking flesh. These baby birds had fallen off the nest, were picked up by Baba when walking up the Hill one day, and given into the women mandali’s care. They were always hungry, and fed and fed until bulging. Baba loved to see His pets well fed, and said “Give them more, more!” Then of course they needed exercise, so Baba told the women to make them walk, which they did by nudging them from across the room at every step. It was very funny. Then He said they needed a laxative! But eventually when the birds grew up, they were very beautiful. One day Baba took them outside perched on His hand and let them fly away.

Peter

The much-loved cocker spaniel Peter was the next story. There is a photo of him in the small porch at Meherazad cottage, Mani told us, with two chipmunks climbing over him. Chipmunks are lively creatures, and Peter usually loved chasing them and barking at them. But these two were orphaned when very small and the women mandali rescued them, kept them in a little box, and fed them. Watching all this, Peter appointed

Mani

himself their “mother.” He would watch over them and let them play over him, pinch him, cling on to him, and he even tried to eat their food so that he could be one of them.

As with all the other stories, Mani’s telling was a delight for us all. Then there was some music. Mani played her sitar and sang which we loved.

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The wonderful Darshan days passed quickly—mornings at Guruprasad, visits to the Baba Places in Poona, an all-day trip to Meherabad and Meherazad, times spent with the mandali. All too soon it was over. In the morning on 20th May, we came to Guruprasad to take Baba’s darshan once more and to say goodbye to His close ones. I talked a little with each of them, finding it hard to realise we would be leaving Poona the next afternoon for the long journey home.

I don’t think it occurred to me to wonder whether I would be able to come again, whether there would be any opportunities to have the companionship of Baba’s dear men and women mandali in the future. My heart and mind that morning stayed in the present, and were just filled with Baba’s love, which was also expressed in the eyes, actions and words of each of the mandali—it was overwhelming.

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Meherazad, 1970s

Well, three years went by, and late in 1972 Bill Le Page decided that an Australian group should go to Meherabad for Amartithi 1973—and this began for me so many wonderful pilgrimages to be with beloved Baba in His Samadhi, and to spend happy days at Meherazad with the men and women mandali. My feeling of close connection with Mani was already established, and regardless of whether the time elapsing between my many visits was measured in one, two or three years, or merely a few months, there seemed to be no break at all in the companionship she always gave me.

On each visit to Meherazad I used to feel I had never been away. The actual intervening period simply telescoped. For instance, in January 1974 when I walked towards the long verandah again, Mani greeted me

Mani

with her warm embrace, saying with a lively twinkle in her eyes “It couldn’t be, it just can’t be a whole year since you were here!” I told her “No, Mani, it was only last week!”

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Mani’s Capacity For Storytelling

In the ’70s and ’80s in Mandali Hall Mani always had so many little stories to tell about Baba and her life with Him. Even the simplest or shortest episode would be relayed with such animation, such humour, such poignancy, or she would act a part so perfectly, mimic someone so cleverly but gently, or mime a situation so well, that I for one would feel I was actually experiencing the occasion, so alive did it become.

I can well imagine how much Baba must have enjoyed the skits and other entertainments Mani would produce for Him, and how much love and thought and ingenuity she would pour into every detail to please Him and to help lighten His burden.

“I have no story”

During my visits of only two weeks at Amarthi every year from 1973 to 1979, I did not manage to take notes of Mani’s stories. However, on one occasion I did record that in Mandali Hall, after Eruch had asked for the stories of new ones coming to Baba and many accounts had been given, Mani capped them by saying “I am envious of all who can tell how they came to Baba. I have no story, I was always there!” She was the youngest in the family, and Baba was 24 years old when she was born at Sassoon Hospital in Poona. He was waiting there, and picked her up immediately, holding her in His arms, even before she had been washed. “He welcomed me into the world,” she told us, smiling gently. Mani has given this story in full in her delightful book *God-Brother*.

Childhood

She then went on to talk about her childhood and school years when she spent all the holidays with Baba, her life revolving around those wonderful times. She always went back home with His “orders”—to be good, and work well at school.

Once when Mani was at Toka with Baba during her school holidays, Baba suddenly asked Mani and her friend Myna to tell Him what they most

Mani

wanted and He would grant their wishes. Myna's wish was for a good husband and a fine wedding, which came true; but she died within a year after it. Mani said to Baba, "I want to be with You, always." This she did—and with a radiant smile she told us she was very glad she had thought at that time to add the word "always" to her wish.

Meherazad, 1980

In January 1980 I went for my last Amartithi pilgrimage. Having had the good fortune to attend this wonderful occasion eight times, after that I decided to go for other special times such as Mehera's birthday, Christmas and New Year, Silence Day, and also in September which was always the "quiet" period for some years.

But during those January days at Meherazad, after listening to Mani's stories in Mandali Hall, I managed to write down these few fragments. Although brief, they give a clear little picture of each occasion which she described.

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Trimming Baba's Moustache

Mani said that Mehera would trim Baba's moustache, very, very carefully and gently. When the trimming was over, Baba would turn to Mani and ask how He looked. After scrutinizing Mehera's handiwork, Mani would point out that the left side needed a little more trimming and Mehera would attend to it. Again Baba would turn to Mani, and Mani would point that that now the right side needed a little trimming. This went on for a few times until Baba threw up His hands and said "Enough or between you two I will have no moustache left!"

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A Scent Of Roses

In the later years, Mani said, Baba didn't take a bath for long periods. Yet after days without a bath, or even after strenuous darshan programs when He would be drenched with perspiration, His sadra would smell of rose petals. When Baba would take off His sadra to change, the women would pass it around to one another, each holding it to her face as long as possible, while the others impatiently waited their turn.

Mani

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Baba's Purity

Mani spoke of Baba's love and purity.

“One afternoon Baba was resting in His room. He had body aches and He looked tired. He was lying on His bed, eyes closed, and gestured to us to press His hands and legs. We arranged ourselves on both sides of His bed, sitting on our little wooden seats. We began pressing His hands and legs—this massaging the elder of a household is not an unusual practice among Indian families. After a while, Baba, His eyes still closed, snapped His fingers and gestured to us to stop. We withdrew our hands to our laps, but we did not rise in case a creaky seat disturbed His rest.

“While silently sitting there looking at Beloved Baba's form, I felt wave upon wave of purity emanating from Him. I recognized this purity just as a blind man sitting in front of an ocean senses by the fresh tang of the salt air reaching him that he is facing the ocean. I was overwhelmed and awed by the experience and heard myself say inwardly, ‘So, God is not only supreme Love but also supreme Purity.’”

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Baba's 7th February Birthday

Mani recalled that at some point in time, Baba declared that His Birthday was to be celebrated only by the English calendar, on 25th February, and not any more by the Zoroastrian calendar as was being done.

In the last week of January 1969, when Baba was very ill and weak, Mehera expressed to Him her agonized concern and asked Him, “When will you get strong again?” Baba assured Mehera that after His birthday he would become very strong, emphasising it with His gestures. Both Mehera and Mani assumed, of course, that He meant 25th February.

But Baba dropped His body on 31st January 1969. He lay in the crypt of the Tomb at Meherabad, uncovered, for seven days, and thus was available to the many lovers who flocked to Meherabad for a final glimpse of their Beloved. His beautiful form was covered on 7th February, which actually happened to be Baba's birthday by the Zoroastrian calendar. And so Mehera realised what Baba meant when He had said to her that He would be very strong after His birthday—which came to pass in the flowering of His love in hearts all over the world.

Mani

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Baba's Business

"The world is Baba's business, our business is just Baba," Mani said. "Looking after the world is a God-sized job." To illustrate this, Mani gave us the figure of Baba sitting in His chair in Mandali Hall with His lovers seated before Him. "While everyone's face is turned towards Baba, over our shoulders Baba looks at and looks to each one. So what is truly important is to keep our gaze focused on Baba and leave everything to Him."

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A Pulao Treat

One day, Mani remembered, Baba promised them a pulao treat from a Baba lover in Ahmednagar (pulao is a rice dish cooked with spices and meat or vegetables), and they were all looking forward to it. When lunch time came, they were waiting at the dining room table with Baba and He kept asking, "Why hasn't it come? Why is it taking so long?"

At last the pulao arrived and they had it on their plates, fragrant and steaming hot. But they couldn't begin until Baba did, and Baba kept asking all sorts of questions, particularly whether enough pulao had been kept aside for the servants. Naja kept saying that she had done this, and finally assured Him by bringing in the big pot from the kitchen to show Him there was plenty kept aside for the servants. So it was quite some time before the pulao, which was cold by then, could be partaken, and when they got around to eating it their zest for the special treat was gone!

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Baba's Forgiveness

At another time Mani told the story of her father and the partner who had cheated him in his toddy shop business. There was a court case, but the partner won it, causing much hardship to Baba's parents and family. Mani's father immediately wrote to this young man: "I forgive you. I owe you nothing. Now it is for you to ask forgiveness of God."

Decades later, during one of the first darshans Baba gave at

Mani

Guruprasad in Poona, a woman came up to Baba and kneeling before Him burst into tears and sobbed for quite a while. Baba raised her head from His knees and asked her what was the matter, and she said, “My husband sent me to get your forgiveness. He’s bedridden and dying, but he’s hanging onto life because he says he cannot die until he gets forgiveness from God. You must forgive him.”

Baba looked into the distance for a few moments, and then gestured, “All right. I forgive him.” Mani said His beautiful gesture of forgiveness was like a huge wave sweeping over the shore, and when it receded it left the shore perfectly clean, taking everything with it—everything which Baba had forgiven the man for was swept away.

Mani never saw that woman again, but heard that her husband died within a few hours of receiving God’s forgiveness. He was the partner who had embezzled her father’s business and won the court case so many years before.

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Up to the mid-1980s I came once each year and sometimes twice, but again unfortunately there are no details of Mani’s stories in my notebooks. Yet I remember how much I loved sitting in Mandali Hall listening to them, letting them flow over me, enjoying just being there. Many of these stories, which were eventually printed in Mani’s book *God-Brother*, were told and re-told for the benefit of new pilgrims coming each year, but I never tired of hearing them again.

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Opening Of The Power Room, Meherabad

After the heart-touching time I spent at Myrtle Beach Center in August 1984, I came straight through to Meherabad. Three weeks later on 24th September I was among those present at the historic occasion of Mehera opening the new Power Room at Meherabad—the electrification of Upper and Lower Meherabad had just been completed after years of work by long-time Baba lover Minoo Bharucha. Several of the women mandali were there, as well as a number of Western residents and pilgrims, and also Minoo of course.

Mani gave out special prasad in the Power Room after Mehera had
Mani

thrown the main switch and the light came on, to the rousing accompaniment of “Avatar Meher Baba Ki Jai” from all there.

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MANI Part 2

Late in 1985 I had found it quite touching when Mani greeted me on arrival at Meherazad by saying “It’s so natural seeing you here again.” I could not go the next year, but on reaching the Trust Office in August 1987 Mani almost made up for that two-year break by telling me “At last you have come!”

Even so, it seemed an incredibly long time since I had sat in Mandali Hall listening to Mani. On that visit, however, getting a record of the stories which I heard her tell was made easy because one of the pilgrims who had tape-recorded talks given by different mandali, kindly lent me one of Mani. The following stories and comments come from it, with some editing changes and a few additions which dear Mani herself sent to me in February 1996.

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Insects

Someone asked about killing cockroaches and insects. Mani said that with anything that harms or hurts one, it is all right to kill it as long as one is not vindictive or cruel. For the insects it can be called a “promotion.”

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Our Inner Self

Mani told us that it is deplorable how much we neglect our inner self. We are so industrious about our outer self, going on diets, exercising, and so forth. But we are not giving our inner self attention, not exercising the little self-denial, neglecting opportunities for the day-to-day little sacrifices. There is the imbalance—we are all outward emphasis. We look away from our real selves.

Mani

Mani said that one of the radio programmes they listen to is of beautiful songs. Just recently a favourite of hers was sung, the words being “Once in a while, now and then, turn round and look at yourself.” She said we need to meet ourselves, have a nice talk. We are apt to forget that the inner self must be taken care of, that we must stop now and then in the race of daily living and remember the inner purpose of our being— remember Baba.

So on a *regular* basis, Mani said, turn and look at yourself, and remind yourself of Baba.

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Suffering

Someone mentioned suffering. Mani recalled Norina’s horror at the suffering in the Second World War. When she spoke of it to Baba, He looked *very* much God, His eyes very powerful, and exhorted Norina, “Do you think I would allow such a thing as war to happen if it wasn’t absolutely necessary?”

On another occasion Baba said that the time to come would be a period of love, peace, brotherliness, harmony. Baba’s face was so beautiful and eloquent as He said: “There is no doubt about it, that is to come.” And that is the opposite of war.

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The Stranger

Mani recalled how Baba would take childlike delight in little things, whether a story, a flower, a toy, exclaiming in wonder and admiration, “Look at that!” or “Isn’t this great!” She said that in a song Francis Brabazon referred to Baba as the beautiful Stranger, and how true it is in a sense. In each Advent, when the Ancient One takes form in creation He meets His earth anew after 700-1400 years. When God the Reality takes form as Man, He *is* a stranger to illusion, as light is a stranger to darkness.

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Mani

The New Life Caravan

Over different days Mani talked at length about the New Life, and at this point it seems appropriate for me to include a brief description of the Caravan which the four women companions used.

The New Life Caravan is kept in the garden at Meherazad, and it always had a special attraction for me. I am so glad now that I took a photograph in May 1969 when it was still out in the open and clearly visible. Later on, the roof which was built over it as well as the growth of trees and shrubs nearby all afford protection against weathering, but they make photographic records more difficult.

The Caravan is small, with a narrow bench each side and across the front end. Mehera, Mani and Meheru slept on these, and after the door was closed at night Dr. Goher slept on the floor. How cramped they must at times have felt—yet how grateful for the shelter and privacy it gave them.

This is how it was acquired. In November 1949 when Baba and the companions reached Benares after their month-long stay in Belgaum, Baba sent instructions to Padri in Meherabad to get a small caravan built and to bring it by rail to Benares, as well as two bullocks to pull it. Padri did so, arriving just before the companions left Benares on foot for Sarnath on 1st December. The Caravan was used only for the four women to sleep in at night. By day it was drawn by the two bullocks while all the companions walked.

But now, pilgrims visiting Meherazad can take a little rest in the Caravan at any time during the day, sitting or lying down on the benches which are covered with long thin mattress-type cushions. During the 1970s a stained-glass picture of Baba, designed and made by an American Baba lover, was fitted into the front window space. So when you look in while passing by, or mount the high step at the back to go inside, there straight in front of you is Baba's beautiful smiling face, His finger and thumb making the circle "perfection" sign.

I always enjoyed spending even a short time in the Caravan, especially if no-one else was there, revelling in its atmosphere, trying to imagine what it must have been like in the New Life with Baba, and remembering stories told by Mehera, Mani, and the others.

And I have a treasured photograph of Mani sitting inside, taken one day in December 1982. I happened to be walking through from Mehera's garden, camera still in hand, and it was so unusual to see Mani there. She looked so lovely I couldn't help asking if I could take her photo, and she

Mani

said Yes.

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Here are some of Mani's lively descriptions of the New Life, given in her own words:

The New Life – New Year 1950

There is one incident which I thought of the other day. It was the New Year of 1950 in the New Life, and it so happened that we had stopped for a few days at Moradabad. The place that had been reserved for us was a nice biggish room, a long room, and it had been cleaned. I think it was a place for travellers to rest. There wasn't a single piece of furniture, not even a nail on the wall to hang your coat. But *space* meant a lot to us. When we arrived we were so tired. You have no idea what it was like in the New Life—we thought it was wonderful that there were even *walls* here, and something overhead, because usually we camped out under trees. And this was actually a *room*—for us that was better than a palace!

As I said, it had been cleaned for us. That meant the floor was still wet, with puddles of water on the uneven ground, and it was very cold. But we were ecstatic because we had walls and a roof. For years and years and years I had suffered from monthly cramp pains, and it just happened to be that time, so as soon as we arrived everybody said, "Get Mani into a corner and let her rest while we unpack." There was no bathroom, no toilet, but it was a room. So my little bedding, which was very meager in the New Life, was rolled out in a corner on the floor, and that was heaven for me, I could lie down.

Now the architecture in India in the older places and houses and bungalows is such that we can never keep nature out. We don't try, we've given up. Through the cracks under the window sills you get rain coming in, draughts coming in, insects coming in, lizards, even a frog, although I don't know how it managed to come in. So all these things were in that room. And that lovely long room had *twelve* doors, with draughts coming in from every door so it was very cold! Of course I couldn't tell anybody because all were busy unpacking and settling in, and Baba would be coming soon.

Outside that place there was a path which the local people would use to walk to the village, and sometimes they would greet us with a few

Mani

words. There were two eunuchs, hermaphrodites, who had deep voices and wore women's clothes. They were very nice to us and would always ask if we were comfortable. We would have to go out to draw water from a little well, taking it in turns because there were not enough containers.

So on that 1st of January 1950 there was a most delightful surprise for us. Baba came over from the men's side—the men and women were always separate—and He brought a plate of sweets that looked like little pieces of cake or something. I can't imagine where they came from. All I know is that Baba had the sweets on a plate and He told me what to say on His behalf as He gave the sweet bits to each of us. I was to say "Happy New Life" and the recipient's name—not "Happy New Year," but "Happy New Life!" Then He gave me my portion and gestured that I should say the same to me. So I said aloud "Happy New Life, Mani!"

And it *was* happy. It is extraordinary when I look back how happy the New Life was. In spite of its bindings, there was still that effervescence and joy in just being with Baba. Nothing else mattered.

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A Difficult Order

Of course there were embarrassing moments when an order was one of the most difficult things to carry out. For instance, at the Kumbh Mela which was a most colourful occasion at Haridwar, Baba wasn't pleased about some arrangement made for Him by one of the local men who knew of Baba. Baba was annoyed and conveyed His displeasure to that man. But later when we were leaving the building Baba said to us that it was not right for Him to have done that in the New Life, and that therefore He must beg pardon of the man, whom we could see standing at a distance. Baba said to me: "Go and tell him that I beg his pardon. Tell him to forgive Me for being angry with him."

It was a very difficult thing for me to do, even though all I had to do was just go to him and give Baba's message. It was clear that he was mortified to receive this message and stood there with downcast eyes. I came back to Baba very quickly. The thought was in my mind that the man must be feeling so distressed to have Baba ask his pardon! And just to myself I said, "Oh, Baba, how terrible it must be for him!"—of course I could not say this aloud to Baba, not in the New Life.

Mani

An Amusing Story

One of the most difficult things in the New Life for us women was the lack of privacy. We did not expect or have privacy—I mean the kind of privacy for going to the bathroom, because we could only go out in the fields. When we arrived at a camping place somehow word went round the town or village, and many were drawn to come and look at this weird caravan with people and animals “on pilgrimage” as they were told. The women townsfolk would gather around us four women, curious, friendly, and wishing to help in any way they could.

So how to get privacy or manage to get beyond the caravan? It was obvious we would have to go very far away, but where? To reconnoiter, three of us would go—one would stay with Baba, and one of us always had to be with Mehera. So Mehera, Meheru and myself would go and find a place. Mehera and myself might come back, and Goher would stay at the caravan with Mehera, so then I would go again, and Meheru and myself would come back. That’s where the following incident happened. Mehera, Meheru and I went, Mehera and Meheru came back and I stayed. When I returned Meheru would then be able to go.

In the meantime I saw something which I felt the others had missed. It looked like a cannonball—it was an elephant’s dropping and it was perfect—symmetrically round and glossy, not a flaw in it, you could have put it in an exhibition! So I carefully carried it in my hand back to where the others were, quite some distance away, and wouldn’t you think they would appreciate it?

But unknown to me, while I was away there had been quite a little discussion between Mehera and Co. and some Brahmin women who had come over from the nearby town, along with the crowd our party always attracted wherever we camped. They were suggesting ways of cleaning up the ground where we would be resting. However, it was our habit, whenever we arrived at such a camping place, that we all gathered plenty of twigs and leaves to make a fire to warm some water to wash Baba’s feet, which were not only dusty but blistered. So Mehera said to these women “Thank you, but we have seen to it that it is quite clean.”

In the midst of this little controversy I make my entrance with the elephant dropping held in my hand, excitedly saying “Look, Mehera, look what I’ve brought!” It was very embarrassing for Mehera, and the others

were trying to shush me and push me behind them while I kept on entreating them to look at what I'd found!

There was much laughter from everyone in Mandali Hall, and Eruch said: "All this is not in the book." More laughter. Of course, Mani's humorous way of retelling this incident, with appropriate facial expressions and actions, delighted us the whole way through it.

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Dal and Rice

Still on the topic of the New Life, Mani told us of the plain dal and rice meals they had. Plain dal and rice happens to be everybody's favourite, and often Mani would say they would be happy with plain dal and rice every day. But in the New Life they were proved wrong when they had weeks of it day after day with nothing else to accompany it. Usually lime or chutney or a green accompanies a meal of plain dal and rice. But having nothing else with it was a whole different thing. So much so, Mani said, that after a while even when she was hungry, she couldn't face it—the sight of plain dal and rice would make her feel sick! And as they were feeling this way there was a lot of uneaten food left over in the vessels after their meals.

At Sarnath, the assistant caretaker of the place was a very poor man with a large family. So when he was offered this uneaten food he would take it very gratefully, very thankfully, with outstretched hands as if he were offered a feast to take home! And seeing this, Mani said, she felt it was a shame that she was unable to appreciate this menu in the same manner.

She ended by telling us how Baba always noticed these little things, these little claims that you could do this or that so easily. And in His own way He would arrange it so that you would end up having to do it years later, and it would always turn out to be much more difficult than you expected!

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The New Life Depth

Some days later, when asked for yet another incident from the New

Mani

Life, Mani smiled at us and said:

I've never been too keen on talking about the New Life. I could not sing the New Life Song even now, perhaps because I have had a momentary glimpse of the depth, the awesome depth, of the New Life. How can I describe it to you? Well, say you are boating on a calm ocean, enjoying floating along, and suddenly you look over the edge of the boat and are granted a sight through the fathomless deep, right down to the ocean floor, and you exclaim, "Oh, my God, what depth!" Since being in the New Life I'm always aware of its unfathomable depth.

During the New Life when we were so incredibly bound by its conditions, another feeling I had momentarily was the fabulous sense of freedom. It was not related to freedom from the Old Life, freedom from possessions and responsibilities—no, not that kind of freedom. This was a whiff of that *real* freedom, which made me exclaim, "If this is the Freedom that Baba talks about, one would do anything to attain it."

Baba said the New Life will go on living, it is eternal. It will go on living by itself even if there is no one to live it. It is a force. It has already been lived, and will continue to live because it has been lived by the Avatar. Baba walked the New Life—we simply followed in His footprints. Because He lived the New Life it will go on forever. It is not only relating to the mandali, or to Baba-lovers, not only relating to this country or that one, it is relating to the whole world.

I can feel the New Life walking inexorably forward soon to catch up with all humanity. No one will be able to escape it, any more than one can escape from an advancing flood. At the moment it may be at a distance, but you can see it advancing in the hopelessness and helplessness around the world felt by individual groups, nations—it is catching up, Baba's New Life is catching up.

But Baba has also told us of the time beyond, of the age to come when brotherhood will be a practical reality, when the lion and the lamb will eat together, when humanity will be one family.

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"I – Am – Buddha"

The following week in Mandali Hall Mani told us a Buddha story, after Eruch had been talking of Buddha.

Mani

A Blue Bus-full of women mandali went with Baba to Ellora Caves, Mani said. When they got to Cave No. 10, the Carpenter's Cave, which has a huge, beautifully carved statue of the Buddha, Baba and the women walked around the statue, then stood together facing it. That is when Baba pulled out His alphabet board from under His arm and Mani read out loud the message He spelt on it: "I – am – Buddha."

At the moment she experienced that the cave was empty—there was nothing and no-one around her and she was alone with Baba as she read out His words, "I am Buddha – I am Buddha – I am Buddha." Everything else faded except these words which welled up and reverberated and echoed in waves throughout the cave: "I – am – Buddha." It was so beautiful, so timeless. Then it faded away, and she was once more aware of all the group being there with Baba.

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A Little Flower

On another occasion Mani recalled this lovely little story which took place at Meherazad.

Usually after breakfast Baba went across to Mandali Hall to be with His men. They carried Him over on a lift chair. As He was allergic to cold air, when seated in the lift chair He would hold a scarf over His nose.

As many pilgrims know, in the centre of the garden in Meherazad there is an oval patch bordered with flowerbeds which Mehera would lovingly care for. On the morning of this story, Mani had gone down ahead to fetch some typing Baba had given her to do and was standing by the green bench under the tamarind tree facing the oval when Baba went by in the lift chair.

Mani stood watching as the men carried Baba across at a quick pace, and saw Him gesture clearly with His free hand "What a nice flower." Mani was astonished at this, for there were only young tender seedlings in the flowerbed He had pointed to. So she went close to it, searching with her eyes for where that flower was. She could see nothing but a blanket of fresh green shoots. She squatted down to peer at close quarters, but no flower. Then going down on her hands and knees, at last she spotted under a leaf the lone little flower which had not escaped Baba's glance, even when He was going by the oval at a brisk pace!

Mani stood there transfixed, realizing that what she had just

Mani

witnessed in this little episode was His love and compassion for His own, however insignificant. And she said to herself, “If He gives a simple little flower in His garden such personal attention, how can we ever think that He would neglect those who love Him!”

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One More Life

Mani said Baba told her she had one more life to live, which would be as a man. She mentioned that some people think this means it would be as a Perfect Master. But she said to us that she had no concern with that. She wanted only to become His perfect slave.

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With Mani At The Trust Office

We could go to Meherazad on Tuesdays when Bal Natu was there, and Thursdays when Eruch was there. On Saturdays and Sundays when all the mandali were available, Mani and Eruch and sometimes some of the others would be with us in Mandali Hall.

The big bus owned by the Trust was kept at Meher Pilgrim Centre, Meherabad, and on these four days it left the Centre for Ahmednagar at 10:00 AM and stopped on the main road close to the entrance to the Trust Compound for about fifteen minutes before going on to Meherazad. This gave an opportunity for pilgrims to hurry into the Reservation Office for any business needed there, or a quick trip to Sarosh Canteen. And best of all, on weekdays it was possible to have a few words with Mani, Eruch or Bal Natu in the Trust Office.

The car bringing Mani and the others from Meherazad to the Trust Office during the week arrived there by 10:00 AM, so they barely had time to put their things down, garland Baba’s big photo in Mani’s office and greet Him with “Avatar Meher Baba Ki Jai!” before a few pilgrims from the bus were lining up at the door wanting to speak to them. How patient and kind they always were, despite these interruptions to their busy work schedules.

I remember how good it was to get down quickly from the bus, hurry along the dusty roadway and turn right into the Compound through the open iron gates, there to be faced with brilliant bougainvilleas and other

Mani

flowering vines and shrubs growing in front of a group of tall trees in the central area, all offering their own glowing welcome. A few yards further in on the left-hand side, a garden archway at the edge of the verandah led to the open doorway of Mani's office. Her desk was just inside on the left and faced to the back of the room, which in turn led to another small verandah where Eruch worked. A desk diagonally opposite Mani's was used by Rano for some years to do typing and other work for the Trust. At this time Bal Natu was using it.

When there were a few pilgrims ahead of me I waited on the verandah by the door until Mani was free, then went in to greet her. She always looked so nice—her Punjabi outfits of a long tunic with pants which were tapered a little at the ankle, were made in matching or toning fabrics of soft colours which suited her light complexion and greying hair. Her lovely dark eyes, filled with warmth and humour, conveyed as much if not more than her words, and I always felt so glad to see her, even for a few minutes. Then after another happy greeting to Eruch or Bal, and also a word or two with the different ones, Eastern and Western, who helped each day in the Office, it was time to return to the bus and continue the journey to Meherazad. On Saturdays and Sundays I nearly always stayed in the bus, perhaps chatting with those near me, or else I just waited looking forward to arriving at Meherazad.

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Time With Mani In "The Parlour"

During the first half of my stay in September 1987 I had a bout of flu, and therefore could not go to Meherazad or see any of the mandali for some days. After recovering I was touched when Mani invited me to have lunch with her and several of the staff the following Monday at the Trust Office, and to stay through the afternoon tea with her as well. She said she felt she hadn't had a chance to talk to me as I had been keeping my distance because of the flu, which she appreciated anyway as she had always been susceptible to heavy colds which made her very sick.

So on the Monday morning I went into town in the Trust bus at 10:00 AM and spent a little time in the trinket shop and bookshop until Mani was free. She had told me to come an hour before lunch to give us time to talk together. She took me to the small room at the back which she called "the parlour," and told me she had taken over this room when it

Mani

became available a couple of years earlier. She and Rano chose the upholstery fabric for the big sofa, then put a cotton spread over it for easy washing. There was also a bed for resting. Mani sat on this and I sat on the sofa.

It was so private and quiet there with her. I felt able to mention some of my difficulties in relationships and work situations at Avatar's Abode, and she was very helpful. In all matters Mani always had such a balanced view, gentle and wise, and her comments straight away helped to bring things into a different perspective. For instance, that morning she said to me "Be like a duckling, moving in the water but letting it shake off." In other words, not to be so sensitive, or take things so much to heart. Just talking to Mani in this relaxed atmosphere made various problems much less bothersome for me, and I felt encouraged to try again to overcome them on return home.

Of course, so many times over the years I found that the world at home receded and lost much of its so-called importance and intensity while I was staying at Meherabad and spending time at Meherazad, and it often seemed possible, even relatively simple, while there to decide to do things differently, to change attitudes and actions after returning once more to normal life. But although I always came home refreshed and strengthened in purpose, it was never easy, nor was the path smooth, when attempting to carry out these resolutions. However, I consoled myself a little at times by thinking that at least the effort of *trying* perhaps helps in some small degree, because the realisation that I have failed to overcome a fault—and that I still do so—makes me turn again to Beloved Baba for His help. And any real changes must, without doubt, take a lot of time, even lifetimes most probably, so one just has to keep trying.

I talked about various thing during that hour with Mani, including my long-held wish to write about the women mandali and the stories they told of Baba, using my notes made over many years and my recollections of times spent with each one, plus some other material. She liked the idea and said to go ahead. I also mentioned the cataloguing and indexing work on Baba material that I wanted to do, which she said would be very useful. Mani then commented that she was herself trying to collect and arrange some early books and other items to put in Baba House, Poona, but it took time to do so.

Then the hour was over. At the doorway I gave Mani a hug and thanked her for giving me this opportunity to talk quietly with her.

In the lunch room we joined several Westerners who helped Mani

Mani

and Eruch in the Trust Office. The others chatted and told some jokes, but I just listened, enjoying their company as well as the salad and snacks which Mani had brought from Meherazad to share. Soon all went back to work, and I looked for a quiet place to sit, finally deciding to see if the “parlour” was still open, which it was. Here I sat again on the sofa and wrote up the stories which had been told at Meherazad at the weekend.

Tea In The Office

When I went to the office at 3:30 for tea with Mani, she called me to sit opposite her at her desk. Two others were already there and Mani chatted to us on various subjects.

Tea was brought in by Laxman, the old servant who had been there for so many years with Adi Senior. Drinking the tea, I sat listening to Mani, enjoying being there with her. Now and then she would interrupt her story-telling to read through and sign a letter, or carefully check a draft, making changes here and there. She picked up a postcard someone had sent her and chatted about the dog pictured on it. Then the woman sitting beside me began talking about her small child, and Mani listened as though it was the most important thing for her at that moment. I thought, “How *loving* she is always, to everyone!”

And how thoughtful too—Mani told me earlier she had arranged for Adi and Rhoda Dubash to drive me back to the Pilgrim Centre. They picked me up just before Eruch, Mani and Bal Natu were ready to go home to Meherazad. It was beginning to rain lightly, but by the time we got half-way to Meherabad it was absolutely pouring and there were big pools of water everywhere along the road. Many who have already been to Meherabad know that rain is thought of as Baba’s blessing. I felt it was indeed so, and a nice ending to a very happy day with His dear Mani.

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Peter The Cocker Spaniel

About a week later, when all were settled in Mandali Hall and Mani was seated on the floor beside Baba’s chair, she talked of the “four-footed mandali,” the dogs.

One story was about Peter. He was a jet-black cocker spaniel whom

Mani

Mehera and Mani acquired in the lovely hill-station of Mussorie in north India, where Baba and the mandali stayed for some weeks in 1953. Mehera and Mani often went for walks and when coming home, passed a solitary bungalow in which two elderly English sisters lived. Mehera and Mani would stop and pass pleasantries over the garden gate with one of the ladies, Mrs. Cooper. They came to know that her sister loved dogs, and though arthritic she wouldn't leave in the bitterly cold Mussorie winter as she would not leave her dogs to anybody else's care. One day Mrs. Cooper mentioned that her sister's dog had had puppies and all of them had been given away but one. This was a very special puppy and her sister would only give him to a very special family.

Mehera was tempted to go and "just look" at the pup. Mani, knowing that to see a cute puppy was to bring it home, tried to dissuade her. But after a while they both agreed to go and "just look." They fell in love with the adorable pup and came home with him. This was Peter, and that was how he became one of Baba's household.

At Meherazad, when Baba walked to Mandali Hall Peter eagerly accompanied Him, and when Baba settled in His chair Peter would lie down on the rug by His feet and fall asleep. Once Baba called Mani over to Mandali Hall and pointed at Peter who was loudly snoring. Baba gestured in mock exasperation, "Look at that!" "Yes, Baba," Mani laughed, "but shall I take him away?" "No," replied Baba with a chuckle, "let him be!"

Just a few days later when Mani was called again to Mandali Hall, she was confronted with the same scene. But this time Peter was not snoring—he was dreaming, making high-pitched sounds and moving his paws excitedly. Baba and the mandali were amused, and in eloquent, fluid gestures, depicting all that Peter was going through in his dream, Baba said: "Peter thinks he is chasing a wild animal, or a wild animal is chasing him. He thinks he's crossing a raging river, or going over a high mountain, running through a desert, and so on. But none of this is happening. He is not really going through any of these things. He is lying here, safe and sound at My feet."

It was after Mani returned to her desk that the depth of what Baba had said struck her and all she could say was, "Wow!"

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Mani

Mickey

In the afternoon, after Aloba's tea on the verandah at Meherazad, Mani was talking to someone about Baba's love and care for all His creatures, and about a little dog called Mickey who loved to eat sweets. I was sitting nearby and heard the story too.

The incident related by Mani took place during Gulnar and Jehangu Sukhadwala's engagement function at Baba House in Poona, where Mickey was the household pet. (Gulnar is Baba's niece and the daughter of Baba's brother Beheram and Perin.)

Baba was seated by the well in the courtyard of Baba House, handing out sweet prasad to the family and all the neighbourhood Baba-lovers who had come for Baba's darshan. Because the courtyard was so crowded, Mani was standing with her back right up against the wall. She was happily observing the scene, and then noticed that after giving a sweet to each person, Baba's hand swiftly swooped down between His feet. Rather mystified by this, she slid down the wall quietly to see what was happening. There she saw that Mickey, unknown to anyone but Baba, was under His chair. Mickey was trembling with excitement as Baba kept tossing one sweet after another towards him, and he caught them every time. Mani couldn't imagine how much of the precious prasad he had thus eaten, because by her count alone it was over nine pieces. How delighted Mani was to be in on Baba's and Mickey's little secret!

Years later when Mickey was old, Beheram kept the frail, sick dog with him in the darkroom next to Baba's Room whenever he worked on Baba-photos. One morning Beheram saw Mickey go out of the darkroom and walk over to Baba's Room. There Mickey laid down his head and breathed his last.

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Mysore Hospital

The next morning in Mandali Hall Mani talked of being in hospital in Mysore where she had an emergency ear-operation in 1936. In the days after her surgery Baba came every day, and tenderly fed her drops of soup from a teaspoon at first, then later thin pieces of apple until she was well enough to eat.

Naja stayed in Mani's room to look after her. As Baba wished His identity kept secret, Naja and Mani were told not to tell anyone who He

Mani

was. Even then the nurses were greatly drawn to Baba without knowing why.

A nurse asked one morning “Who is this Baba?” Naja replied, “The patient’s brother.” “And why doesn’t He speak?” persisted the nurse. “Oh, He’s very shy!” said Naja.

Every morning as Baba’s car pulled up, it seemed that all the nurses would be on the landing in order to have a glimpse of Him coming up the stairs. Then again they would come into Mani’s room whenever He was there, on some pretext or another, just to see Baba. One nurse popped in, her eyes on Him, asking “Is my thermometer here?” Naja said to Mani in her resounding “stage whisper,” “She never takes your temperature so how could she leave the thermometer here?”

Nurse Rose who worked in the nursery, would come pitter-patter into the room with each of the day’s newborn babies. Without a word she would hold it out before Baba. He would silently take the baby on His lap and “talk” to it in gestures and smiles, taking quite a bit of time with each one. This went on every day while Naja and Mani looked on. One day Mani counted twelve newborn babies that Nurse Rose brought to Baba one after another. So many were brought that Mani and Naja began to feel very impatient, and thought there would be little time left for them to spend with Baba. But He expressed no impatience whatever, and gave the full measure of His love and attention to each of these fortunate babies.

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A Going Forward

Later when we all got up to leave Mandali Hall, Mani recalled that at one time she felt compelled to ask Baba what would happen to a Baba-lover reborn after death. Would he or she have to look for Him all over again, seek Him and perhaps even miss Him. He replied, “You pick up from where you leave off. It is always a going forward. *Never* a going backward.”

“So you see how very important the present is,” Mani said. “The closer you come to Baba in this life, the nearer you will be on the chessboard in the next Advent. *This* life is when you have the opportunity to love Him and get closer to Him.”

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Mani

“Shadow Pictures”

Although on the different days Mani spent so much time with all of us and told so many stories, she also gave time to the children who were there. She would talk to them and tell them stories too, but one of her most popular entertainments for children of any age, including adults, was to make “shadow pictures” against a flat wall on a bright sunny day with ingenious movements of her fingers. One Sunday afternoon I happened to come to the end of the verandah just in time to see some of these pictures being made. I was enchanted, but only managed to photograph a “shadow rabbit.”

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“Au Revoir”

All too soon it was the last day of my 1987 visit and I was to leave early the next morning to return home. On the way to Meherazad I stopped at the Trust Office to say goodbye to Eruch and Mani. Eruch as always gave me a big hug and a warm smile. As Mani embraced me she said “Au revoir! You are so full, full, full! Baba is with you!” She gently touched my Baba brooch two or three times. Words always failed me when the time came to say goodbye, so I just murmured, “Jai Baba, Mani,” kissed her and moved to the door. At the end of the verandah I turned and we waved to each other.

I always felt sad when leaving, and said this to Mani at another time, but in the wonderful way she had of easing such a moment, she replied lightly, her eyes dancing in fun, “Oh, but you have to leave—so that you can come again!”

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MANI Part 3

Beloved Baba gave me a very touching welcome in the Samadhi on my arrival in February 1989. The next morning I went up for Arti, so

Mani

happy to be there again, and afterwards enjoyed walking quietly down the hill, gazing at the familiar scenery all the way back to the Pilgrim Centre in the clear early sunlight.

Meherazad, February 1989

How good it was to board the bus at 10:00 AM for the journey to Meherazad and arrive again at Baba's lovely Home. Aloba was the first to greet everyone on the verandah.

Soon I went inside for Baba's darshan at His chair. It had always been easy for me to imagine Baba sitting there—my memory of Him in the big main room at Guruprasad in 1962 was ever clear and strong, so each time I knelt before Him taking darshan in Mandali Hall it made me feel that I was bowing down with my head on His feet, and then, leaning forward a little, that I was resting my hands on His knees and looking into His eyes. These were special moments in His beautiful Presence.

Out on the verandah again that Saturday morning I found that Mani had a cold so she was not embracing anyone, but she gave me a bright smile and warm words of greeting. There were welcoming hugs from Eruch and Goher, Katie and Arnavaz. Soon I went over to Baba's Room and then to the porch to be with Mehera for a while.

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Meditation

When we were in Mandali Hall after lunch, Mani came in from the women's side and sat towards the back of the room.

After hearing a young American tell of his meditation involvement, Mani said, so gently and naturally, that meditation for the mandali was simply thinking of Baba all day long, regardless of what they were doing or how occupied they were. She said the sole ingredient for such meditation is *love from the heart*. When you love someone you can't help thinking of that one all the time, it is so natural and effortless, while the meditation of the mind requires much effort and concentration. That is not only difficult, but can even become a burden.

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Mani

The Samadhi

After Aloba's tea on the verandah we all went back into Mandali Hall and Mani began to talk about Baba's Samadhi. She said the stones used for the walls came from the old Post Office which had been erected close to the railway line in Lower Meherabad by the British military during the First World War.

Sometime in the early 1930s the Government sent a notice intimating that the Post Office must be pulled down as it was too close to the railway line. But Pendu and Padri ignored the notice since the Post Office building had played such an important part in those early days at Meherabad. They hoped the matter would be forgotten by the authorities. But the ultimatum finally came that unless Meher Baba's men took down the Post Office, it would be removed by Government people. Padri and Pendu set to work and dismantled the edifice with much care, stone by stone. These stones were later used to rebuild the walls of the crypt room on Meherabad Hill, which eventually became Baba's Samadhi.

The Dome

Mani laughed and told us a funny story about the double meaning of the word dome. After the domed roof of the Samadhi was completed, the structure began to be known as "the Dome." Shortly after its construction Shirinmai came on a visit to Meherabad. Eruch's mother enthusiastically asked her, "Mother, have you seen Baba's Dome?"

It so happens that in Persian "dome" means "bottom," and Shirin wittily replied, "Thank you, but I've seen quite enough of Merwan's *dome* when He was little!"

Then Mani recalled how the Swiss artist Helen Dahm was entrusted by Baba to do the murals in the Samadhi. In order to do that incredible painting inside the Dome itself she would climb up a bamboo scaffolding set up by Padri, and lying flat on her back, used long brushes to reach the ceiling. Every now and then Baba would go with Mehera and the others to see how Helen was getting on. Mani added that she admired the way Helen used uneven projections on the stone walls to highlight a cheek, a shoulder, or some feature of the figures in the murals.

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Mani

Easter On The Hill

Her thoughts still on the Samadhi, Mani recalled how one Sunday in the early '70s she and Mehera were on Meherabad Hill. There was hardly anyone around, and they decided it was the right time to go inside the Samadhi, close the doors and be alone with Baba in privacy. This they did, and to their delight they discovered on the inside panels of the doors the artwork by Helen Dahm showing sprays of pure white lilies with nun-like figures in the background. Normally this is not in view since the doors are kept open throughout the day. Mani said aloud, "Why, this is just like Easter," only to learn that it really was. What a lovely surprise they had from Baba that Easter morning!

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The following Saturday in Mandali Hall Mani related several stories of her childhood which have since been published in her book *God-Brother*. However, on different days she gave other stories which have not been published, they are included later in this section.

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The Tree Grotto

That same morning someone asked Mani about her "Tree-Grotto" dream, and she recounted it for us. It is very touching, but at her request I have taken it out of my manuscript as she has included it in her own book *Dreaming Of The Beloved* which she was able to complete in May 1996.

After hearing Mani tell this dream, I wanted to have a good look at the tree, so I walked the short distance along Meherazad private road at lunch time and took two photographs. Although these are rather dark because of some shadows and the colours of the tree, they show quite clearly this little grotto with its delicate framework and Mani's flowers.

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Baba's Prayer

Later when talking about schooling, Mani said education in her time was much simpler. "I don't mean easy," she said, "but simplified—nothing

Mani

like the load of learning children have to bear nowadays. But even back then the teacher would give a good amount of work to be done at home, which Mother was keen that I should do.”

But Mani would rebel, telling her mother that school was where any schooling should be, and home-time was for playing with friends. However, when exam time came Mani had a lot of catching up to do. So having no time to pray for herself and needing instant help, she would run to “Bobo” (her father) and implore him to pray for her.

Finally taking Baba’s advice that she also should pray for herself, Mani asked him to teach her a very short prayer, “a one-minute prayer,” as she didn’t have time for a longer one. “Child,” said Bobo, “I can teach you a simple prayer that is shorter than a minute.” Little Mani couldn’t imagine any time less than a minute, so she asked in astonishment what such a prayer could be. Bobo replied, “The prayer is never to think ill of anyone. This prayer takes no time at all and goes straight to God.”

Not quite understanding such a concept at her age, she insisted that Bobo give her a one-minute vocal prayer. So he recited to her the shortest elementary prayer in the Zend Avesta which is familiar to every Zoroastrian child, pausing after every word for Mani to repeat it to him.

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Fallenfluh, Switzerland

Breakfast time at the Meherazad dining table with Baba held intimate memories for Mani. While Mehera was attending to His needs, and others were busy helping in one way or another, Mani had the radio before her, ready to turn it on when Baba wished. To regale Him, she also kept beside her some notes and jokes and interesting clippings from newspapers.

“One morning at breakfast,” said Mani, “I had before me a letter from Max Haefliger of Switzerland with a question for Baba. Baba was finishing His tea while Mehera, standing behind His chair, was preparing to comb His hair—so gently and lovingly that each beautiful strand seemed to receive her special personal attention.

“Max had enclosed in his letter a 2” x 2” picture of Fallenfluh, the mountain in Switzerland where Baba had sat in seclusion for His work in 1934. Max wanted to know exactly where on the mountain Baba had done so. I placed the picture before Baba, and He looked pleased to comply with the request. But when He placed His finger on the picture to show

Mani

where He had sat, the end of His finger covered the whole mountain. Thinking that He hadn't heard me right, I repeated the request—'Where did you sit, Baba?' He looked surprised, and said, 'But, I just showed you,' and He did it again. Once more His finger covered the mountain." So in her reply to Max, Mani told him: "Baba was sitting all over Fallenfluh." So unlimited is His Presence!

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Deaf and Dumb Children, Dehra Dun

Mani spoke of the time with Baba in Dehra Dun when a group of deaf and dumb children from a Home known as "Little World" came to Him at a darshan programme. They had made for Him a flower garland of extraordinary length—the longest one Mani had ever seen. Each child helped to carry this long, long garland as they walked in double file up to Baba and garlanded Him with it. There was also a crown of fresh flowers the children had made for Baba, and bending over to their reach He helped them place it on His head. The rather bulky crown sat crookedly on His head which amused Him quite a bit and delighted all who were looking on. This scene is captured on a film taken at the time.

Baba also visited these deaf and dumb children at their Home, at which time they presented to Him a unique card. It was a slice from a tree-branch on which they had painted Baba's picture with the words: "O Silent Baba give us speech." Baba brought it home and gave it to Mehera who lovingly kept it in her cupboard. It is still there, Mani said.

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Mani's Childhood in Poona

After tea Mani stayed on the verandah outside Mandali Hall chatting with various ones. Vivacious as always, she then began telling little anecdotes about her childhood.

Life started very early in the morning in those days, and "early to bed, early to rise" was the general pattern as experienced by Mani in the Poona neighbourhood where she grew up. Iranis ran restaurants and teashops back then, just as her father and uncle did. These teashops would be open

for business as early as 5:00 AM and even the domestic servants came to work before dawn. As in other Irani families in the neighbourhood, Mani's father and mother had started their day by 4:00 AM.

When she was a child she was always the last one still sleeping in the morning and her mother had to call out to her often to get up. To avoid this, she would wrap herself in a blanket and curl up on a bed in the next room. Seeing Mani's bed empty, her mother would think she was up, while in fact she was snoozing elsewhere. When Shirinmai realised Mani had not yet come to brush her teeth, she would go and look for her. When she found Mani still in bed, she would shout her out of it reminding her about the little orphan girl next door who had to be up very early every morning to do cleaning chores and other jobs before getting ready for school.

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The Fakir

Mani then recalled another childhood memory. On many a still-dark early morning, Mani, who was still in bed, could hear the voice of a fakir (a wandering Muslim mendicant) who used to pass through their lane. He was totally blind and was led by a little girl not older than six years, his hand on her shoulder. The child held a lantern in her hand, an old type like a ship's lantern. Mani would be woken by the fakir's very melodious voice singing, "Mother, may your son live long! Give in the name of Allah!" And the little girl would pipe up, "Allah alone will give."

Mani sang an imitation of the man singing, and then the girl, alternately a couple of times. Then she said, "To Shirin the song was a prayer for her son Merwan and she would immediately rush out to put a coin in this fakir's bowl every time." All the while, Mani was still in bed, listening to the song and hearing the clink of Mother's coin. How happy she felt each time to have this evidence of her mother's great love for her Son.

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"An old woman"

Here is another little story from Mani which gives a glimpse of her childhood.

"Despite society's ban on Mother because Meher Baba was her son,
Mani

there were a few old friends who paid no heed to it and visited our home sometimes. One of these was an Irani lady who had migrated to India about the same time as my mother's family. I didn't like her for she was 'smoochy,' planting wet kisses all over my face whenever she came. Under Mother's eye I had to tolerate this, but as soon as the good lady left I would rush to a tap and wash my face clean. One day she asked me what I would become when I grew up. I gave her a blank stare and said, "An old woman, of course!" Afterwards I told Mother, "What a silly friend you have—she doesn't even know what one becomes after one grows up!"

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Saris

Quoting Baba, "Make others happy at the cost of your own happiness," Mani remembered that during one Amartithi a woman brought special saris for Mehera and herself. They were very bright, and not at all the colours that Mehera or Mani would have chosen for themselves. But they accepted them as a gift of love. Then the woman said, "You must wear them today!" Mehera and Mani looked at each other and murmured something about not having matching blouses, and privately feeling that they couldn't wear these saris.

But a little later they found blouses which would somehow go with the saris. They looked at each other again and said, "Yes, we must wear them today, they came with such love."

"And do you know," Mani said, "the saris really did suit us, and many said how lovely both looked. In fact mine became one of my favorites!"

The Two Drunks

Mani continued this theme by saying that as a child in Poona she was treated to a glimpse of the New Humanity to come.

Two drunks had wandered into their lane. One of them needed the support of a lamp-post. Mani's mother did not like drunks at all. Thieves and drunks she never liked, so Shirinmai closed the door. But Mani stayed on the steps of her house to watch them.

The two drunks looked at each other with great affection and respect, paying compliments to each other, the highest of which is calling someone your father. So one said, "You are like my father, so noble, so good." "No, no," the other protested, "I am not fit to wipe your shoes. I

Mani

am no good. You are the one who is my father.” And so it went on and on, each one refusing to accept the other’s compliment. At last one said, “If you contradict me one more time, I’ll beat you!” Not surprisingly, a fist-fight soon broke out and the neighbors who had crowded around were laughing so hard that they had quite a job to pull them apart.

Mani imitated the drunks’ way of talking all though the story, and it was very funny.

Then Mani went on. As we know from Baba, the world that is to come will be a world of love and brotherhood. It will be such a beautiful world. Man cannot change, the habits of thousands of lives cannot change. But what will change is the shape of our aspirations, actions and wants. Like those drunks, men will still fight, but for noble causes and high ideals.

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Village Children’s Darshan, Meherazad

The Thursday before Baba’s birthday was a lovely day at Meherazad. In the morning there was a fulfilling time with Eruch in Mandali Hall, and also with Mehera on her porch before lunch. Then just after lunch Katie called me and some others for a tour of the extensive and beautiful rose garden. She knows the names of so many of them—all were brought as small plants from Poona when the garden was established for Mehera four years earlier under the supervision of Falu Mistry.

The main event of the day was the Pimpalgaon Village Children’s Darshan programme for Baba’s Birthday.

It was such a delight-filled wonderful time, with Baba’s Presence so strong. The children with some of their school teachers arrived in groups and sat on the ground under the pandal which stretched from Mandali Hall verandah to the men’s cottage in preparation for the Birthday programmes. When called, the children walked in line around the side of Mandali Hall and came inside through the big double doors at the garden end. Under Aloba’s direction, one by one they came to Baba’s chair and bowed down, then came through the verandah doorway where westerners who wished to help took it in turn to give out the prasad of two ladoos (round yellow balls about golf-ball size, firm in texture and very sweet) to each child.

Throughout the proceedings Mani stood on the verandah near the doorway, watching and helping the smallest children, and embracing the few women with them as they came through. I was standing three or four

Mani

yards away, and Mani was facing me as she embraced the women. All her movements were so like Baba's that it was very touching to watch. I wanted to get photos of her taking the hands of the tiniest of the children, showing them which way to go when they were leaving, but it was too quick.

After a while I too got in line with the Westerners to give out the ladoos. Mani called me to sit first on the end of the right-hand bench, then move up to the huge paper-lined basket filled with these sweetmeats. In the doorway Jal Dastur would grab each child's hands, place them together with palms upwards to hold the ladoos which I then gave out while saying "Jai Baba!" and smiling into the child's eyes.

What an experience it was, and I felt very happy and alive to it all. With each one coming straight from darshan at Baba's chair it was as though I was enfolded in a continuous wave of His love flowing out from Him seated there. And the wonder, shyness, beauty and brightness reflected in the small faces passing by me was somehow momentarily stopped in time, so that each face was a picture, vividly expressive, and immediately replaced by another equally so.

When my turn was over I stood up, saw Mani close by and said to her, "Thank you, Mani, that was wonderful!" She smiled and embraced me, then went back to helping the smaller children. It really was a very special occasion, its beautiful atmosphere still clear and strong in my memory.

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Baba's Birthday—Saturday 25th February 1989

The Morning At Meherabad

It seemed as if everyone at the Pilgrim Centre began getting up soon after 3:00 AM, and there was a feeling of happy anticipation everywhere. I dressed in my favourite silk sari, was delayed a little while helping another woman to put on her sari, then hurried up the Hill. Arriving at the Samadhi at 4:30 I found a few pilgrims were already there, but there was still a space left inside. I slipped in quickly, feeling so glad to be there, and wished Beloved Baba "Happy Birthday" as I bowed down at His feet.

Rhoda and Adi Dubash moved up onto the platform, holding between them a very big garland, and quietly called me to help them lay it for Baba. I went back to my place. A few minutes later Roda Mistry

Mani

brought a lovely white garland with red roses entwined and also called me to help her lay it. It was so quiet and beautiful standing there in the Samadhi, waiting for the moment of 5:00 AM, thinking about Baba.

Many came in and out, some managed to squeeze inside, and then Nana Kher came and stood at his usual place at the foot of the platform on the left-hand side. At 4:55 Roda Mistry led the singing by all of “Meher Baba, Avatar.” By now I was standing right behind Nana Kher, and at exactly 5:00 AM he loudly called out, “Parvardigar Meher Baba Ki Jai!,” and simultaneously we all called out “Avatar Meher Baba Ki Jai!” seven times. It was a resounding chorus for Beloved Baba’s birth-time. Then followed the Master’s Prayer, Prayer of Repentance, Beloved God prayer, the Gujarati Arti and the Australian Arti.

I soon took darshan and went out. prasad was given of caramel toffees and a leaf plate containing a very rich sweet made by Roda Mistry and her daughter-in-law Meherrukh. Then I went to Baba’s Cabin and across to Baba’s gadi on the “tin shed” verandah, all beautifully decorated. There was tea for everyone, and greetings to exchange with various ones, and before long I was able to greet Mansari in her room. I asked her what time she had gone to clean the Samadi—which she always did by herself on the Birthday morning—and she replied that after her bath she went over at 2:30.

The time passed pleasantly, and gradually everyone went down the Hill, then returned after breakfast to greet the mandali who began arriving at 9:00. It was a happy morning filled with lively talk and laughter as all moved about or sat together on the “tin shed” verandah which had been decorated with balloons, streamers, pot plants, and above the gadi the large artistically-designed greeting of “Happy 95th Birthday, Baba” was displayed. This had been hand-made by a Canadian Baba-lover, Marge Liboiron, from a variety of coloured silk and cotton materials. She also made a similar greeting which was hung above Baba’s door at the Samadhi, and bright streamers, balloons and other decorations were added in the annexe there.

Mehera, Mani and all the women mandali, as well as most of the Eastern and Western pilgrims, were dressed in beautiful saris so there were vivid colours everywhere. There was always a line of people going into the Samadhi to greet Beloved Baba. And, as happened every year, the villagers from Arangaon came in procession up the Hill to the Samadhi, singing and dancing, holding high a large photo of Baba mounted on a specially-

Mani

decorated and colorful framework.

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The Birthday Play, Meherazad

The mandali left to return to Meherazad late morning, and the pilgrims went down to the Centre for lunch. At 2:00 PM two buses took us all to Meherazad. Mandali Hall looked wonderful with many colourful decorations, and especially the whole corner round Baba's chair. Large vases filled with masses of roses from the garden filled the room with their beauty and fragrance. Falu Mistry designed it all, and as always the Meherazad servants, all of whom were Baba-lovers of many years, had helped him earlier in the week to put up the high network of streamers, balloons, and sparkling decorative pieces which made a kaleidoscope of flashing colours as they moved in the light breeze. The verandah too was brightly decorated.

At 3:00 we had tea and a slice of specially-made chocolate cake, then everyone quickly sat down to watch the hilariously funny Birthday play—a skit on Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*—which was performed under the pandal. I remember laughing so much at different scenes that my eyes streamed and jaws ached. It was very hot but nobody minded.

Mehera, Mani, Goher and Meheru sat together in the front row and obviously enjoyed it very much—I looked across at them a few times and they too were laughing a lot. Mehera, Mani and the others greeted the various actors at the end, and I don't think anyone wanted to leave. But leave we all did in the buses at 5:30 as scheduled, taking with us our share of the fun-filled atmosphere of the "Happy Birthday, Baba" celebrations.

What a wonderfully joyful Day it was, filled from early morning until bed-time with Beloved Baba's love and ever-beautiful Presence which stirred the hearts of all His lovers at Meherabad and Meherazad.

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The Potter

When Mani saw the Australians' 1976 Amartithi film "God-Man" at the Sunday programme in Mandali Hall she said that the director, Mitch Matthews, had very artistically shown the atmosphere of India in the scene with the old potter shaping his pot.

Mani

Mani then commented that it is very important for us to understand Baba's working with His people. Again she referred to the potter in the film "shaping a pot with one hand inside it, and using a wooden thing to wallop the pot on the outside." She said that Baba works like that potter—one hand silently, unseen, sustains the "pot" by supporting it from within, while shaping it on the outside with the other hand.

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Yearning

"It is for us to yearn for Him," she said, "to yearn to be with Him when He comes again. How blessed we are in that we have been given the authority to love Him. Yearning is a Grace from Him. Grace is earned by your longing—your longing to serve Him, to please Him. To yearn for Baba is to earn your place with Him next time He comes."

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Two People

"We are each of us two people—an inner and an outer person." Mani said of herself that inside she is remembering Baba, and outwardly she is doing things. She commented, "When remembering Him inside yourself, you are really alone with Baba—it is like being in your own little church."

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Divine Love

Mani recalled a simple analogy Baba gave on the difference between human and divine love. He said that even the highest human love, when it touches the fringes of the divine (as did Majnun's when he saw Laila wherever he looked) is no more than an ant-bite compared to the scorpion-bite agony of divine love.

Mani added that she well knows from experience the excruciating pain of a scorpion-bite, as she is most allergic to its sting. At Meherabad as a child she would play with her friend Myna, the daughter of Sadashiv Patil, one of Baba's earliest mandali. One evening when playing outside, Mani was stung on the toe by a big scorpion. When one is stung, a tourniquet should be applied to keep the poison from spreading, but she

Mani

did not know this, and kept hopping and running, calling out “Baba! Baba!” and soon her whole leg was extremely painful. Crying all night, she kept everyone awake until morning.

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Another Scorpion Story

Mani then recalled another episode involving a scorpion. Here it is in her own words:

When I was a little girl, I talked rather a lot, and especially when I was at Meherabad with the women mandali during my holidays. I had so much to say to Mehera and the others that I couldn’t stop. Sometimes they were busy with the morning chores and for a break sent me over to Kaikhushru Masa, one of the old mandali, whose hut was not far from our quarters. Kaikhushru Masa, Khorshed’s father, looked as saintly as Baba said he was. I loved going there, for he had stories to tell about everything, about birds, colours, fairies, and of course, Baba.

For a while he would seat me in front of Baba’s picture with a rosary in my hand to repeat Baba’s Name non-stop. Once when I was doing exactly that I was bitten by a little scorpion. Although I’m very allergic to scorpions, it was not that which had me bawling at the top of my voice. Kaikhushru tried to calm me down, saying Baba had also been bitten by a scorpion. “But it isn’t *that*!” I said between sobs. “I can’t believe Baba would let a scorpion bite me when I’m repeating His Name! He says if you call out His Name all problems vanish. But while I was taking His Name, the scorpion bit me!”

Kaikhushru immediately grasped the situation and turned the trend of his talk. “Ahh, but don’t you see, that was a special message Baba sent you, and you alone! Did He send it to Naja?” In a watery manner I shook my head, “No.” “Did He said it to Khorshed?” “No.”

“Did He even send it to Mehera?” “No!”

That was all I needed. I stalked off to the women’s quarters and told them, “Baba sent *me* a message! *Me*! He didn’t send one to you, or to you, or to you . . .” pointing to each one there.

“Who brought the message?” they asked.

“It was brought by a scorpion, and it was painful because scorpions have a stingy language and it stinged me—only me!”

Mani

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Deafness

Mani told of a time in recent years when she caught a very bad cold. It happened straight after Amartithi, which she felt was Baba's perfect timing because she became completely deaf with the infection and congestion. In that temporary state of deafness, she suddenly realised how much one takes for granted the little sounds of everyday life—the sound of putting down your teacup, your clothes rustling when you move, the flip flop of your own footsteps. All these sounds are so much a part of one's life, that one doesn't realise what it means to be without them. After her cold cleared up, Mani said to Baba in her heart, "I will never complain about noises now—I can hear, I can hear!"

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"Hurry up!"

Over the years Baba took them to zoos, museums and other places. These visits were for Baba's work, and He wanted the mandali to walk through very quickly. Sometimes He would exhort them to "Hurry up, hurry up!" when they had momentarily stopped to look at some particular bird or animal which attracted them. They often had to run through such places.

One time Shirinmai was with them, and Baba was a long way ahead. Frowning, He kept gesturing to them to hurry. His mother said, "Merwan, I thought you were taking us to the zoo, not to a horse race!"

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Early Times at Meherabad

In the early years with Baba, Mani told us, the women mandali led a most cloistered life, their lives ruled by chastity, poverty, obedience. They never felt deprived. Their happiness was only connected with Baba, not with what they had or didn't have.

As can be seen in old photographs, in those early days at Meherabad they dressed extremely modestly, their clothes covering even their wrists and ankles. In accordance with Baba's order, they had to patch or mend

Mani

immediately any tear in their clothing so that no part of their person was exposed. Mani remembered that when they had nothing with which to patch their clothing they would use the best parts of two worn-out garments to make one good one.

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Mani's Jokes

From time to time Mani would tell some jokes. We all thoroughly enjoyed them, but unfortunately I did not write down most of them. However, here are two, although in the absence of Mani's inimitable way of telling them with appropriate actions, facial expressions and manner of speech, they inevitably lack much of their liveliness:

Which is the longest word?

"Smile" because it has a mile in it!

One day in the summer, a women who loved bargaining went into a shop to buy a fan. Pointing to one she asked the proprietor "How much?" He said "One dollar." Promptly came her reply "Too much!"

When she pointed to another she was told "50 cents." "Too much!" Another, "10 cents" "Too much!" Still another, "5 cents." "I'll take it."

She went home with it, but came back next morning, looking very cross and holding a tattered wreck of a fan. "Look at this fan!" she shouted at the salesman. "It's fallen to pieces!"

Surprised the salesman asked, "What did you do with it, Madam, to reduce it to this state?" "What does one do with a fan?" raged the woman. "I just waved it before my face as anyone would."

"Ah," said the salesman, "that's where you made the mistake, Madam. A 5 cent fan you don't shake in front of your face. A 5 cent fan you hold still in front of your face, and shake your head from side to side!"

When Mani told this joke, she acted the parts of each character, with different voices and mannerisms, and it was very funny indeed.

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Mani

Moments With Baba

After lunch one day I went to Baba's Room—and no one was there. This rarely happened in these days of many pilgrims coming to be with Baba, so it was another of His gifts to me this time. It was so cool, quiet, peaceful, and beautiful alone with Him there.

Afterwards I went to sit on the garden seat by the women's cottage to write up some notes. Suddenly a brief windstorm blew up—masses of leaves, small pieces of dried twigs, and a film of dust particles were whirling all round me, all over me. It was as though I was being doused in a “dry ocean spray,” quite gentle, almost translucent, yet it felt like a fleeting enveloping embrace from Baba. I was alone here in the garden, and for those brief moments there were dual impressions of being held “underwater,” and simultaneously caught in a pool of air filled with tiny leaves suspended and swirled around in the curtain of dust. I felt that I was at the same time borne within that veil of dryness, yet submerged in something more intangible. The impression was momentary, but remained in my memory for some days, and is still strong. The keynote was not a wild windstorm, but rather a symbolic and gently enfolding embrace from Beloved Baba in His Meherazad garden.

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Rules

How quickly the final week of one's stay at Baba's Home seems to pass! Almost before I knew it, I was sitting in Mandali Hall on the last Saturday morning, absorbed in all that dear Mani was telling us. She began by saying that we have to very wary about instituting rules, as “the law-makers can't be law-breakers.” When Baba would make a rule, He Himself would observe it thoroughly.

For example, Meherjee Karkaria gave a Persian carpet for the opening of Meherazad in 1948. “To keep the carpet clean,” Mani said, “none of us would walk on it with our sandals on, and Baba would also remove His sandals before stepping on the carpet—even years later when He was walking with support. Mehera would gently remonstrate with Him, saying that it wasn't necessary for *Him* to remove His sandals, but Baba continued to do so every time.”

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Mani

Three days later, on Tuesday 7th March 1989, at the Trust Office I said goodbye to Eruch and to Mani. She said, “Baba loves you. We all love you. Keep well and happy in Baba’s love.”

Then I went on to Meherazad to have time with dearest Mehera before saying goodbye to her—and unknowingly this was for the very last time. Just over two months later she joined her Beloved Baba forever.

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MANI Part 4

September 1991

I had so much looked forward to this visit, and without any inkling that it would be so, it turned out to be my last time at Meherabad and Meherazad. But what a wealth of happy hours Beloved Baba gave me to keep remembering, what wonderful memories to keep re-living now from all the notes I made nearly every day, which enable me to share so much with others in these chapters.

I reached Meherabad on 20th September, checked in to the Pilgrim Centre and went up to Baba. And what a touching greeting he gave me—I felt as though His arms went round me as I bowed down to Him, thanking Him for bringing me again after the two and a half years since February 1989.

For the first time I went to Mehera’s shrine, and again felt such a loving welcome as I knelt at her side. Soon afterwards Nana Kher greeted me warmly as always, then I went to Baba’s Cabin, and the long period between my visits just closed up—it was as though I hadn’t been away at all. Next it was of course natural to go across the compound to greet Mansari in her room, and after a few happy minutes with her I came down the Hill again.

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The next morning, being still very tired after the long journey I did not make it to Arti but spent a quiet and beautiful time with Baba after breakfast, then happily got ready for the day ahead.

Mani

Meherazad

How good it was to travel the familiar roads and at last turn in to Meherazad, quickly get down from the bus and walk to the verandah where the very first one to greet me was Mani who exclaimed, “Oh, look who’s here!” She embraced me and said, “At last you have come—it seems no time at all now,” and added that I had been remembered several times during the previous three weeks when she and Bill were talking about his new book *The Turning Of The Key*.

Then I moved on to Gaimai, Meherwan and Manu who were now living at Meherazad where they had moved when Bindra House, their home in Poona on Baba’s orders for many, many years, was to be pulled down to make way for flats. Gaimai looked frail, but remembered me, and soon afterwards Eruch also gave me a welcoming hug, saying, “So at last you are here.”

After greeting various ones I asked Kacy Cook, one of the permanent Western residents, if I could go to Mehera’s room. She told me she remembered the time when I was last there and saying goodbye to Mehera. She said she had often watched farewells between us over the years, but that she had never felt the flow of love from Mehera to me and from me to her so strongly before, and that it was very special. Tears came, and I really had to dry my eyes before going over to Baba’s Room, where I thanked Him once more for bringing me again, and felt His love unfold me.

Mehera And Mani’s Room

I entered the house through the porch, walked across to the door to Mehera and Mani’s room and went in. It was many years since I had actually been in their room, although I had stood at the doorway so often, looking through to the Umar tree on which Baba’s face had appeared in 1969. So it was sweet to go in now to touch Mehera’s bed, feel her gentle presence there, and then look round at all the photos, and Mani’s corner also. I spent a few moments in the sitting room, then went out to the garden.

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Roses

Returning to Mandali Hall, I sat in one of the chairs in the middle of the room. Soon Mani came in and sat behind me and a little to my right,
Mani

so I could turn easily to look at her when she spoke. An American girl in telling her story particularly mentioned the perfume of roses, and Mani again recalled how Baba Himself often smelled of roses, even when He had just returned from a mast trip without taking a bath.

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After lunch I went back to Mandali Hall, thinking Mani would also be there, but I found out later that on Saturday afternoons she stayed on the porch, so I missed all that. I could hear laughter coming from there, but thought it was for some other reason and so did not go across.

We left at 3:00 in the bus—early departure times were now the rule. As Eruch was saying goodbye to me he said to Dolly Dastur standing close by: “Look after this old lady—Kitty has now reached 100 at Myrtle Beach, and so Judith should break that record at Avatar’s Abode!” I laughed and said, “Oh, well, if Baba wants it, it will be, otherwise not.” Eruch just smiled and gave me another hug. It was a wonderful first day back at Meherazad.

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An Anniversary

Sunday 22nd September was the 30th anniversary of my seeing a picture of Beloved Baba for the first time—this was when I met Bill Le Page in 1961 at his office in Sydney regarding a job with one of his clients. I knew absolutely nothing about Baba then, and Bill did not mention Him on that occasion, but did so about a week later during my first visit to Meher House, Beacon Hill. I remember being very impressed by that photograph in Bill’s office—but little did I realise then that Baba had already set in motion the train of events to bring me to Him.

Taking darshan after Arti at Meherabad on this anniversary morning was beautiful, and Beloved Baba touched my heart so much that tears came, which continued when I knelt at Mehera’s shrine.

At Meherazad I mentioned my anniversary to some of the mandali. Goher later gave me a beautiful small locket, and Mani with a warm embrace said, “I loved your story in Bill’s book.”

In Mandali Hall for the most enjoyable music programme I sat behind Mani and next to Manu and Gaimai who was in her wheelchair. At

Mani

the end of the programme we all said quick goodbyes to the mandali and returned in the bus to Meherabad for lunch. The short Sunday was also part of the new routine which gave the mandali some respite. Pilgrims found it a good idea too providing a chance for rest and relaxation at Meherabad in the afternoon.

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Arti At Meherabad

Twice a month Mani and the other women mandali came to Meherabad for Arti. In the early morning of their next visit I was able to help clean Mehera's shrine, and was so happy doing this as Mani, Goher and Meheru were coming at 10:00 AM.

It was a lovely occasion. We all walked over with them from the East Room. At the Samadhi I was just outside the door and could clearly see Mani and Goher as they placed various garlands. After the Parvardigar and Beloved God prayers Mani and the other two came out and sat on the bench facing in to Baba. While singing went on we all stood in line and went in for darshan one by one, until everyone had been in and the last song was sung, followed by Arti.

Mehera's Shrine

Then Mani, Goher and Meheru went through to Mehera's shrine which is just alongside the Samadhi at Baba's right hand as He had instructed years ago, and all followed, men as well as women. In turn we were called to come and hold several garlands and help to lay them while Mani named those who had given them. Mani then took a handful of rose petals brought from Meherazad garden and sprinkled them over Mehera, saying, "May we one day learn to love Baba as Mehera loved Him," then knelt at her side and kissed the lettering. Mani passed the bag of petals to me and others to take some. I found it so touching to sprinkle them gently, thinking of Mehera's beauty and sweetness.

Mani then said to all there that some people may wonder about bowing down to Mehera, and made the point clear that one could not bow down enough to the depth of Mehera's love for Baba. Mani knelt at the foot of the marble, bowed down and kissed it. Goher and Meheru followed her, and then they moved back into the covered area again outside Baba's door.

Mani

Baba's Cabin

Soon afterwards in Baba's Cabin Mani called three of us to lay a garland over Baba's photo on the stretcher. Then she mentioned that a while ago an Indian woman "whose heart was bigger than her head" took away the small photo from the stretcher. They missed it, and got another one, but it made them realise that someone could get away with the stretcher itself, or the pillow on which Baba's head rested. So now the stretcher is carefully and discreetly chained to the lower edge of the wall, and the pillow covering is attached through the main cover and can't be removed.

Then Mani took some small flowers, and while saying that she always remembered how Mehera so lovingly caressed Baba's photos, she did the same, and tucked the flowers against the frames. I, too, recalled being there with Mehera so many times, watching her doing this and feeling her love for Baba. These memories brought my tears again, just as they had flowed at Mehera's shrine feeling the love that Mani poured out for her, and the love that Mehera herself gave to all there.

Mani pointed out the new large photo of Baba standing just inside the Cabin with His watchdog Chum behind Him. Then we moved over to Baba's gadi on the "tin shed" verandah where the garlanding of His photo again reminded all of Mehera doing this.

Goher was standing at the end of the verandah and I went to greet her. She said that at Meherazad she would give me something of Mehera's as a memento—they were doing this with all the women pilgrims who had met her. I thanked her, saying I loved Mehera so much. She said quietly, "You must miss her very much." "Yes." Goher embraced me. Thinking about this later I felt really touched, for they all miss Mehera infinitely more than any of us could ever do.

Then it was time to say goodbye to Mani and the others. They got into the car and drove through the big iron gates of the compound with everyone waving and calling out "Avatar Meher Baba Ki Jai!"

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Mani's Childhood in Poona

In Mandali Hall the next weekend Mani was reminiscing about her childhood days in Poona and the neighbourhood she lived in.

When she was a little girl, one afternoon during the usual rest hour
Mani

all the windows of the nearby houses were closed. Mani was running in the lane and suddenly tripped and fell over. Feeling humiliated, she stood up quickly, dusted herself off, and looked around, relieved to think that for once no one had seen her fall. But her luck was out. Her aunt, who happened to be down the lane, had seen her, and started calling out loudly in Gujarati, “Oh dear, oh dear! Child has fallen, child has fallen!” Whap! Every window flew open and all the neighbours peered down at poor Mani! “Everyone’s business was everyone else’s business in the alley!” she told us, laughing at the memory.

Even with such a simple little story Mani vividly conveyed the whole atmosphere of the alley and how she had felt on that occasion so long ago.

Her aunt, she continued, was a very plump woman with a big bulging stomach which would shake whenever she laughed. Mani said that even small children in India knew that a pregnant woman’s stomach would get bigger and bigger as the months went by. Seeing her old aunt’s stomach getting larger with old age, one day one of the little ones asked her “How many months are you?” Her aunt laughed uproariously, shaking all over, and Mani made us all laugh too with this funny word-picture.

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Speaking later of Rano, Mani remembered how she always went on sending letters about Baba to her family in America although there was no response. Baba told Rano: “Don’t worry. When you are all Mine, they are also in My orbit.”

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Here are some stories of Mani’s early days on Meherabad Hill, given in her own words:

Playing The Sitar For Baba

My powers of emulation served well in the service of my Master. In our early cloistered life on Meherabad Hill when Baba had gone overseas (to Canada I believe), one of the duties He gave me to perform in His absence was to play the sitar which I had learnt by ear from hearing my brother Beheram play at home. Baba gave me an old gramophone record of a classical sitar piece played by an Indian maestro of great renown, and

Mani

told me to learn the piece and perfect it to play to Him on His return. I learned it in tiny portions, playing it again and again, perfecting each little portion before moving on.

We six women were living in the one big room, the East Room, and whenever Naja came from the kitchen to the room, as she turned into the door she thought it was music by Ravi Shankar or some such musical master, so good was my imitation, and each time she would be freshly startled to find it was I who was playing. When Baba returned and I played the piece for Him, He was very happy, and kept turning to the others as I played, gesturing “Very good!”

Reading to Baba

This talent of emulation had even greater scope of giving Baba pleasure when I would read books to Him—stories of all kinds, spiritual stories, detective stories, adventure tales, fantasies, Wodehouse and other humorous novels, in short, an endless variety of stories. I used different voices for the different characters, and recall with pride that once when reading a Nero Wolfe story to Baba, I used twelve distinct voices to match the assorted characters. To read to Him was my greatest pleasure, and my highest award from Beloved Baba was when He turned around to Mehera and said, “I’m always happy when Mani is reading to Me because it makes Me feel that I’m watching a play.”

Shooting Practice

Another duty Baba had me perform in the early years on the Hill during His absences from Meherabad was one that we did not even try to fathom. As with His other orders, “ours was not to question why.” It was a strange duty. I was to practice shooting, inside the room, every day for half an hour. For this, Baba gave me an air-rifle and a lot of BB pellets. My target was a moving one: an old jam tin swinging from the big wooden beam in the centre of the ceiling. Dear Mehera helped by hitting the tin every now and then to keep it swinging. I unerringly hit the mark every time. The constant “ping” of the bullet hitting the tin was a strange kind of music in the hallowed East Room where Baba held court with His women mandali many a time!

A Different Order To Play The Sitar

Sitar-playing for Baba wasn’t always a thing of pleasure. In that cloistered period no man entered the gate or our fenced-off compound

Mani

on the Hill, except occasionally some workmen who came for emergency work. At such times we were usually doing our chores in the kitchen. As Mehera's orders were not even to listen to the sound of a man's voice, if the work was to be attended to by any of Baba's men mandali, they would keep silence and we would close the door of the kitchen and quietly attend to our duties.

But if the work was to be done by hired labourers like plumbers, they kept talking, and so that Mehera would not hear their voices, my duty was to play sitar loud enough to muffle the sound of the voices. So far so good. But sometimes the session was a long one, and I would play every tune I knew on the sitar, and change each blistered finger for a new one, until every finger was blistered. My refrain at that point was, "Please, Baba, help!"

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Baba's Nun

In answer to a question from one of the pilgrims, Mani said Shirinmai never pushed her regarding marriage. Her aunt and others would have liked it, but even at the age of eleven or twelve Mani said she didn't want to marry, she would be Baba's nun. Shirinmai respected that, and as Mani grew up her mother told her she could decide for herself, but she never wanted to marry.

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About a week later Mani invited me to have tea with her in the Trust Office. Two young women were there also, and we sat in front of her desk. Mani had brought some cookies from Meherazad, and while tea was poured for us from a kettle by one of the servants, she began telling stories.

Baba In The Old Water Tank

The old water tank on Meherabad Hill was built by the British during the First World War. At that time, to save the precious water supply from any sabotage, watchmen kept guard round the clock from a little room perched high up above what is now the Library—where the Study Hall entrance is. This little room also served as a narrow entry into the water tank. Iron rungs had been embedded in the wall in order to climb down for the purpose of cleaning it.

Mani

Mani's special memory was of a time in 1926 when Baba went to sit in seclusion inside one of the two rooms in the old water tank. Using her prerogative of being a child, she was among the group of men disciples who were up in the little room watching as Baba climbed down the iron rungs, so graceful and lithe. When He reached the bottom He stood looking up at them for a while, and then gestured, "Now go."

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Travels In Europe

From her desk Mani picked up a copy of the latest issue of the Meher Baba Association Newsletter and showed us photos of Baba at Venice and Lugano in 1932. I mentioned having been to both places in 1959 before I heard about Baba, and how beautiful they were. Mani spoke of Lugano and how huge the lake is. On their trip to Cannes in 1937, she laughingly recalled, they were offered "vin ordinaire," and the French couldn't believe they only wanted water to drink.

A Martini

This reminded her of the plane journey in 1952 when Baba with some of His mandali made His first visit to Myrtle Beach to inaugurate the Meher Spiritual Center. They travelled first class as Elizabeth's guests, and Baba told them they were all "free" on the plane—no restrictions or bindings, they could do what they liked. At first Mani thought, "Wow, free to do whatever I like!" Then it dawned on her "Wait a minute. What can one do thousands of feet in the air, strapped to a seat?" But as the hostess brought their meals, Mani also realised that they could eat meat or fish, whatever was served, for up to then they ate only vegetarian food, as per Baba's order.

Furthermore, when the hostess went round taking drink requests, Mani heard Rano ask for beer. "Oh," thought Mani, "I can order a drink! But I certainly don't want beer!" for she knew it was very bitter in taste. Having no knowledge of drinks, she tried desperately to think of what to order before the hostess reached her. Finally the word "martini" came to her from a detective novel she had read aloud to Baba, where one of the characters was often to be found leaning against the door frame with a martini in one hand. As far as she remembered it was Archie Goodwin, the right-hand man of Baba's favourite "fat detective," Nero Wolfe.

Mani

“Yes,” she excitedly decided, “I’ll order a martini.”

When the hostess came to her, Mani couldn’t let on that this was her very first martini, so she said in a blasé tone, “Martini, please.”

“I had no idea what it would look like or taste like, but I was not at all disappointed when it arrived. The martini was served in a beautiful crystal glass with an elegant long stem. But as I was admiring it, I noticed to my horror what looked like a green beetle in the bottom of the glass.”

Mani asked the hostess “What’s that?”, all sophistication gone. “Why it’s an olive!” she replied, looking surprised.

“Ah, yes,” Mani said, resuming her “bored” tone, “of course, an olive.”

“And do you know,” Mani continued to tell us, “I really enjoyed that drink. Not only was it delicious but now I could say that I’d had a martini! Since Baba had told us we were free, I could have ordered another one. Unfortunately it never occurred to me, and so what I had was my first and last martini.”

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Wine

The most wonderful drink of all was when Baba, on rare occasions, served them a spoonful of wine. Mani said she loved it. At one time there was a Muslim girl among them who had never had an alcoholic drink because of her religion. But she took the wine because Baba had given it—albeit holding her nose and tossing it down. At the same time, Mani, standing next to her, wished she could have had the extra. So for Baba’s sake one girl gave up her disliking of drink, and the other gave up her liking for more.

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The Trust Office Map

What an amazing amount of little stories and comments Mani could give in a short space of time! She was called to the phone for some minutes also, and while she was away I showed the girls where Avatar’s Abode is on the big map of the world on the wall next to Mani’s desk. When Mani returned she remarked that this map was given by Jack Small when she was first in the Trust Office as Chairman—“Oh, so many years ago!” she almost sighed. Rano had suggested hanging it in that place to

Mani

cover many holes in the wall, and Mehera chose the big beautiful photo of Baba which rests above it.

Garlanding Baba's Photo

This reminds me that every morning when the mandali arrived in the compound from Meherazad, those people and staff who were already there would run out to welcome them, then all would go into Mani's office to watch her garland this photo of Baba and join her in the rousing call of "Avatar Meher Baba Ki Jai!" I was lucky enough on several occasions to be one of those present for this. It really is a wonderful way for the day's work to begin.

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Continuing to talk about Baba's photos, Mani spoke of the one on His bed at Meherazad, and said that Baba definitely changed expression at different times when she looked at Him while she was kneeling there.

I mentioned my special photos of Baba and Mehera at home, and how I talk to them so often. "They are there," I said, and Mani seemed to like hearing that.

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A Fragrance Of Roses

Mani talked of the fragrance of roses. During the seven days in February 1969 when Baba's body lay in the Tomb, Mani said she would be trying so hard to help Mehera by not crying in front of her. Even at night she would put a blanket over her head to hide her grief, and then was careful not to let Mehera hear her blowing her nose.

But all through that week, night and day, Mani smelled a strong inner fragrance of roses—it came from inside her, she told us, and even pinching her nose did not stop it.

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Fragrance On The Hill

Then Mani mentioned the perfume Mansari had noticed coming
Mani

through the earth which covered Baba's body in the crypt. This was before the Marble was laid. I said that Mansari had told me the story many years ago, that it had happened in August 1969, and that some hours later the fragrance spread all over the Hill, remaining for two or three days. This wonderful story is included in Mansari's chapter.

I remembered my own experience, and told Mani that just before 6:00 AM one morning a few years ago when on my way to help with cleaning the Samadhi, I became aware of a beautiful fragrance just as I reached the top part of the Hill Road. It was still fairly dark, I was quite alone, and suddenly this delicate fragrance wafted round me while I stood there. Then, almost as quickly, it was gone. It seemed to be a token of Baba's loving Presence, and I still remember the haunting sweetness, the wonder of those few moments.

Fragrance At Mehera's Shrine

I went on to tell Mani that on arrival for my present visit, after greeting Beloved Baba in the Samadhi and being quite overwhelmed by His welcome, I then went to Mehera's shrine for the first time, and found that a most lovely fragrance was surrounding her. It was so beautiful, and I felt as though Mehera was there herself, and that she embraced me.

Mani was touched, because she hadn't realised that I had not been since Mehera rejoined her Beloved. "It's nearly three years, Mani, since I was here," and she replied that it didn't seem that long to her. Shortly afterwards, when tea was over and I was leaving the office, Mani thanked me for sharing with her those moments of being with Mehera. She added that she felt Mehera's presence was definitely at Meherazad too.

I embraced her and thanked her for the tea and stories, to which she replied "Thank you for your companionship." She always made me feel so close to her.

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Pavlova

One day in Mandali Hall when speaking of Shirinmai, Mani recalled that at one time the great Pavlova gave a dance performance in Bombay. The Zoroastrian community, who had put Shirinmai "in exile" because of her Son, did not invite her to go with them, nor did they even tell her about it. However, she got to know about it, travelled to the theatre early,

Mani

and bought herself one of the expensive seats.

“It was worth the hundred rupees to see their astonished faces when they saw me there,” she said triumphantly when she returned home. And she commented on how beautifully Pavlova danced the Radha-Krishna dance.

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Will And Mary Backett

Another day brought a further feast of stories from Mani in Mandali Hall. To begin with, she read to us an old letter from Will Backett describing a visit by Baba and party to a small cottage in Kent, England, which must have been Will and Mary’s home. The vehicle in which Baba came had to stop on the far side of the little valley as the track was too rough and steep to drive on, and they all walked to the cottage. On the way they met two children and Baba greeted them most lovingly. They were very drawn to Him.

At the cottage, tea and cakes, homemade bread and jam were served. Baba ate very little but drank some tea. The happiness of all there at that time came to us so clearly as we listened to Will’s descriptions of the occasion with Baba, the cottage, and the countryside which was very beautiful. The cottage was on a little hill with the valley below it.

Mani recalled that in England during World War II goods and foods of all kinds were of course rationed or very hard to get, and the women mandali used to send packets of Indian tea and also incense to Will and Mary to help them. But years later they found that this loving couple would keep the tea to use whenever they had visitors at the cottage whom they would tell about Baba. And so it was that many people heard of Baba over a cup of tea!

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Dr. Donkin

Eruch then commented that it was through meeting Will Backett in London that Dr. Donkin (Don) came to Baba. Will was an insurance agent, and Don was a medical student who came to know him.

It was only after Baba had dropped His body that Eruch thought to ask Don how he had heard of Baba, because with typical English reticence
Mani

Don never spoke of himself. But then he told Eruch that one day Will asked him if he would come to meet Meher Baba. When he did so and came into the room where Baba was sitting, he saw only a blinding light. He was dazed, didn't know who was with Baba, or how he got out of the room, he knew nothing except his awareness of this light. Thereafter his life was dedicated to Baba. Don wanted to join Baba at that time, but Baba told him to stay in London, complete his medical studies, and become an orthopaedic surgeon.

Baba told Don there would be plenty of work for him in Baba's service in India. He painted a rosy picture of the hospital to be built and the many patients Don would attend to. But when Don finally graduated and came to India to be with Baba, there was no hospital or patients, only general tasks.

Sometimes when Baba returned from a mast trip, He would call those who hadn't accompanied Him, to hear Eruch narrate stories of the trip. And Baba would intersperse the talk with comments and interesting tidbits about the masts. On one such occasion Don said to Baba, "There should be a record of your mast trips." Baba replied, "Well, why don't you do it?" and that was how *The Wayfarers* came to be written.

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Mani continued talking about Don. He was the only Westerner who went with Baba in the New Life; he represented the West, so to say. Walking was no problem for him in the New Life as he had been a mountain climber. But he had a constitutional weakness which caused him internal trembling if he went for long periods without food.

One time during miles of walking without a stop, this condition was so extreme that he could hardly keep going. But he could not do or say anything about it because of the New Life stipulations. While the party kept on walking, Baba suddenly stopped, turned around and walked back to the women. He got an orange from the small supply of food they carried, then again walked ahead to Don and handed him the orange to eat, which stopped his internal trembling—a nice glimpse of Baba's compassion.

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Mani

Dr. Ghani

Then Mani remembered another story of the New Life and Baba's old school friend Dr. Ghani. Baba had nicknamed him "Big Head" because of his wit and brilliance of mind. But he was extraordinarily averse to physical exertion of any kind. He was even known occasionally to go to bed with shoes on to save himself the effort of taking them off. So the mandali were surprised that Dr. Ghani said "Yes" to going with Baba in the New Life.

On the first day of the New Life they walked 17 miles, and Ghani used the walking stick which Baba allowed him to have. After a while, lagging behind the party he became so exhausted that he put the stick behind him and pushed himself forward with it. Once again it was Baba who responded to an unspoken need of a disciple. Turning round He went to Ghani, picked up one end of the stick, and with Ghani holding onto the other end, Baba walked in front of Him. And thus He pulled Ghani along the rest of the way.

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Mani's Birthday 1968

In the afternoon while sitting with us on Mehera's porch, Mani reminisced about her last birthday with Baba.

"As you may know," Mani said, "Zoroastrians have two birthdays—one according to the Zoroastrian calendar which falls on a different date each year, and an English birth date which is fixed. But we women usually didn't observe our Zoroastrian birthdays, and I, for example, always have my birthday on 15th December."

But in 1968, for some reason Mani felt a strong impulse to celebrate her Zoroastrian birthday which she noticed was to be on 3rd December. "By celebrate, I mean having the lovely opportunity to garland Baba and receive His embrace," she said.

She had a garland ready, and on the morning of the 3rd she mentioned to Baba that it was her Zoroastrian birthday. He looked very happy and gave her a specially loving embrace.

"As it turned out," Mani continued, "Baba was not at all well on 15th December, so that kind of special attention from Him would not have been possible on my birthday."

"I'm so glad I got the impulse to observe my Zoroastrian birthday that year. Baba must have put it in my head. For I had no idea at that

Mani

time that 3rd December was to be my last birthday with Beloved Baba physically present, and that it was to be my last birthday embrace from Him.”

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The Miser

Mani told us that to say God’s Name at the moment of dying is of great spiritual benefit, even if said inadvertently. She related a little story of an old miser whose son was named Krishna. As the miser lay dying, devils were on one side of his bed, gleefully waiting to drag him down to hell while angels were on the other side weeping in despair over the fate in store for the poor sinner. With his very last breath the old miser called out to his son, “Krishna, Krishna!” and died. So now it was the angels’ turn to laugh joyfully as they carried him off to heaven, while the devils gnashed their teeth over the miser’s lucky break.

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At The Circus

The next evening, Sunday, we all went to the Circus in Ahmednagar. A couple of the Western residents who were in charge of arrangements collected our names and money, made the bookings and bought the tickets beforehand for the best seats in the front rows. In the late afternoon we pilgrims boarded the bus at Meherabad, and each was given a large paper bag containing all sorts of goodies prepared by Alan Wagner and his kitchen staff for our snack evening meal to be eaten at the Circus. Curfew time for the Pilgrim Centre is 9:30 PM, so Mani gave special permission for all to return later at the end of the performance.

What a delightful feeling of anticipation there was as we drove into town, got down from the bus, threaded our way through the masses of people thronging the dusty area in front of the Circus, and entered the huge marquee. The large Ring was brightly lit, a brass band was playing loudly in a gallery above it, and strong smells assailed our noses as we were directed to our seats. Soon afterwards the mandali arrived. Mani and the women mandali sat in the centre of the front row. I was in the same row of the next block and could easily go and speak to them before the show started, or look across at them at times during the performance. The men

Mani

mandali sat in various places nearby.

There were a good variety of acts, some very clever and daring, others not quite so attractive to me. There were of course plenty of animal acts with monkeys, dogs, small horses, lions and elephants, not to mention clowns, daredevil bike riders, tightrope walkers and trapeze artists. It was all very enjoyable, and the whole audience was most appreciative.

After greeting Mani next day at the Trust Office, I mentioned the Circus of course, and how I had seen her a few times applauding or watching closely. I said I liked the elephants particularly, and felt they had saluted Mani, Goher and Meheru sitting in the front row. I thought their eyes were so expressive, and Mani agreed, saying that their eyes are the smallest part of them but reveal a lot, and they are very intelligent animals—she had always loved being close to them.

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The East Room, Meherabad Hill.

When Mani and the others arrived at Meherabad for Arti the following morning, I asked if I could go into the East Room with them, as they usually spent a short time there before walking over to the Samadhi.

Mani told the few of us there that she, Mehera, Naja, Khorshed, Soonamasi and Valu lived there for some years from 1933. They led a very cloistered life. There was no furniture such as the cupboards and cabinets which are there now, just their beds in a line, and their trunks. The tiny windows set high up are the only ventilation. Two steep steps lead down from the doorway into the room with its stone-flagged floor.

Here they would make things for Baba, or do whatever work He gave them. Mani pointed to the big board of photos with the embroidered edgings and lovely design work which was done when Baba went to America in December 1934 and on to Canada. Knowing He would be away some time and that they would miss Him, He told the women to make a very big frame displaying the twelve photos of Himself which He gave them. They did everything themselves except for cutting the glass. It still hangs on the rear wall of the East Room, and appears in a photograph taken there during the 1938 celebration of Baba's Birthday when Baba was sitting on the gadi with Mehera standing beside Him. In this photograph He is wearing an embroidered robe which Mehera and the others had earlier made by hand, and which is now on display in the Museum on Meherabad Hill.

Mani

Mani also showed us the beautiful little swing made by Mehera and herself. It has a satin cover edged with sequins, and a tiny picture of Baba reclining in it. The swing is suspended and is contained in a glass cabinet. The design and loving workmanship is wonderful to see.

Mani explained that the East Room became a treasure storeroom after they went to live at Meherazad in 1944. In the room were Baba's sandals and other items, some of which are now carefully preserved in the Museum. The trunks now mostly contain Baba's clothes and some of Mehera's. There are lots of Baba photos on the walls, and the whole room has such a beautiful atmosphere. I came up the steps when Mani was going out and we moved round to the "tin shed" verandah. She asked for her umbrella, as Baba told the women always to put something over their heads when going out in the sun, so they all invariably obey this order wherever they are.

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At Mehera's Shrine

After Arti at the Samadhi, Mani, Goher and Meheru went to Mehera's shrine. A flower-net and many garlands were laid. I was close to Mani as I stood outside Baba's window, and could feel her love as she bent and kissed the marble through the flowers, saying "These garlands and flowers are offered to Mehera's love for Baba."

Then Mani took some rose petals brought from the Meherazad garden, sprinkled them over her, and called us to take some also. Again I found this a very moving tribute to Mehera. Mani said, "Mehera, help us to love Him as He should be loved, help us to please Him as He should be pleased." She bowed down, then moved away, and we followed across to Baba's Cabin.

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Baba's Cabin—The Stretcher

The stone steps of Baba's Cabin were very hot for bare feet and I wondered that rugs had not been placed there as used to be done for Mehera. Inside, Mani called some to garland Baba's photo hanging opposite the door above the head of the stretcher, and others were asked to lay one over the photo on the stretcher. Mani knelt at the pillow, and

Mani

on rising told us, “My sister-in-law, Perinmai, told me of her dream the other night in which she saw Mehera kneeling at the pillow, and then lying on the stretcher.”

While relating the story of the stretcher, Mani told us that after Baba dropped His body, even inanimate objects responded. One such instance concerned the ambulance belonging to Booth Hospital at Ahmednagar in which Beloved Baba’s body was borne from Meherazad to Meherabad on the evening of 31st January 1969, reaching Meherabad as the sun was setting and the full moon was rising.

While the Tomb crypt was being prepared to receive the beautiful form of the Beloved, Mehera and the few other women from Meherazad sat in the Cabin around the stretcher on which He rested—it was their last private time alone with Baba.

After the interment, the thought of parting with the stretcher was painful. Dr. Donkin explained this to the administrators of Booth Hospital, and offered to replace it with a new one which he would arrange to get from his father in England.

The reply was: “What is the use of the stretcher when the ambulance itself is no longer functioning!” They went on to explain that as soon as the ambulance returned from Meherabad and drove into the hospital compound, the engine stopped dead and could not be made to start again. Eventually, three years later, the whole engine had to be scrapped and replaced by a new one as the mystified mechanics could not find the cause of the vehicle’s failure!

Mani said, “What other explanation can there be but that having served its ultimate purpose of bearing the Avatar’s form to Meherabad, the ambulance had died of a broken heart.”

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Mehera Offering Flowers

Just before leaving the Cabin, Mani placed single roses and other flowers on all Baba’s photos. She told us that Mehera would talk to the flowers and tenderly shape the rose petals until they were just right for her to offer to her Beloved. And it was amazing to see how the flowers always responded to her gentle persuasion, and would stay in just the position she placed them for Him.

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Mani

Baba's Watchdog Chum

Mani also spoke about the lovely photo of Baba sitting on the floor in the doorway of the Cabin. Baba was in seclusion, but His pet dog Chum could enter the Cabin to be with Him

Baba allowed the women to come in the evening to the Cabin where they would stand outside at the foot of the steps to see Him for a few minutes. They would bring over with them some of the homemade millet bread. At times they would be accompanied by another pet, a lovely white calf.

Chum was very possessive of Baba and didn't like Him to give any special attention to anyone else. So when Baba divided the bread, giving some to Chum and some to the calf, Chum would become very jealous. He'd rush out and chase the calf round and round the Cabin until it wasn't clear to anyone who was chasing whom!

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We all walked over to the "tin shed" verandah where Mani and Mansari had a long talk together. On Baba's orders Mansari stayed always on Meherabad Hill, never going beyond the railway line, so she could only see Mani on the occasions when she came there. Eventually Mani moved across to Baba's gadi and asked some of the women from Andhra to garland the photo hanging above it.

Goodbyes were said, and soon the mandali got into the car. It was midday by then and very hot, so I was glad to be able to shelter Goher with my umbrella until she reached the car. She sat in front, with Davana Brown next to the driver. In the back Kacy Cook was next to the left hand door, Meheru in the middle and Mani on the right-hand side. I reached out to touch Mani's hand through the window as the car was about to move, then walked quickly round to the other side to say goodbye again to Goher, Meheru and the two girls. We all stood there waving to them as the car slowly proceeded through the tall iron gates of the compound and continued down the road under the spreading trees.

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Mani

Dolly Bastani

I went back to the Samadhi for darshan again, then walked down the Hill, catching up with Dolly Bastani, one of the older Baba lovers. I asked her when she first came to Baba. She told me it wasn't until she had had six children and her husband had permitted her to go to Him, which was in 1944. She actually met Baba on the Poona railway station, and her children met Him a few days earlier. There was a crowd of people and she was for a few moments protecting Baba against the crush. Then He told her to take her youngest child and go. She saw Baba on many occasions at Guruprasad.

Then Dolly asked me how many times I had come to India, and when I answered 21, she said immediately, "You will make it 25!" I demurred, laughing a little and mentioned costs and other factors, but she said, "Baba will see to it!"

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My Last Day At Meherazad

Thursday 10th October was my last day at Meherazad. There was such a long line of Andhra people that it was some time before I could greet Eruch. In Mandali Hall he was much occupied with these Indian lovers, so I went across to the porch and then into Mehera's room. No-one was there, and after asking Meheru if it was all right to do so, I took a photo of Mehera's bed, which of course I am very happy to have now, as it is the only picture I have ever taken in her room.

Gaimai

After a little time in Baba's Room I went back to Mandali Hall. Just before lunch when Gaimai and Manu were leaving the Hall, I went to say goodbye to them. Gaimai was now over 90 and very frail. I felt sad to say farewell, thinking that I might not see her again, and this proved to be the case, for she died in June 1992, but I have many happy memories of her at Bindra House in Poona over the years.

Manu

Manu embraced me too, as did Kesar their long-time family servant who had moved to Meherazad with them. Later that afternoon in the Trust Office Mani told me that Manu is now very happy at Meherazad and
Mani

loves the peace and quiet and the open countryside—although at first it had felt strange to her after living for so many years in Bindra House which was situated on an incredibly noisy and busy road in the heart of Poona.

Bindra House no longer exists—like Guruprasad twenty years earlier, it was pulled down to make way for flats. As Baba said, referring to buildings in which He had done special work over a period of time, they served as scaffolding for His work, and so were not needed after the work was done.

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Meherazad Farewell

All too soon that afternoon it was time to take my last darshan at Baba's chair, and to say goodbye to Goher, Meheru, Katie, Arnava, Bal, Aloba and Eruch. As always for me the love which flowed out from each one's embrace caught at my heart and brought tears to my eyes. And their love remains with me over the years, ever-strong and beautiful, so that although I cannot go to Meherabad and Meherazad physically any more, yet I go many, many times on the magic carpet of imagination and memories—so my "visits" are already far in excess of the "25 times" mentioned earlier!

From the bus my last glimpse of Meherazad was characterized by the little group of Baba's close ones standing in the driveway, waving with both hands held high above their heads, and calling out "Avatar Meher Baba Ki Jai!" as we moved away. Then there was the drive along the Private Road, watching with tear-blurred vision Seclusion Hill rising serene against the sky, then the little farms, animals grazing on the hill slopes, some children playing here and there. Pimpalgaon Lake on the left at the end of the road shimmering in the sunlight, until, turning right onto the main road, we continued the journey into Ahmednagar.

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Saying Goodbye To Mani At The Trust Office

In the morning when I had gone from the bus to the Trust Office to say goodbye to Mani, there was such a long line of Andhra people waiting that I told her I would come in on the way back from Meherazad, and then take a rickshaw to the Pilgrim Centre because the five-minute stop on

Mani

the return bus trip would be just too rushed.

So on my arrival about 3:30 Mani embraced me, and said “Just sit there and be at home.” Soon tea was served, and three American women who had just arrived joined us. There was some talk over the tea, and soon the Americans left, but Mani asked me to stay on, and gave me a lovely Baba key ring.

Then came the time to say “farewell,” as she phrased it. Embracing her, I said quietly against her ear, “I love you, Mani”—I had never actually put this into words before—then drawing back a little I looked into her eyes, seeing love there too. With a gentle hug she kissed me goodbye, telling me to stay well and come back soon.

Earlier she had asked me how many times I had been to India and when I answered 21, she exclaimed, “Oh! You have come of age!” We both laughed, and Bal Natu at his desk opposite laughed too.

So finally my time with dear Mani was over. She asked one of the officer men to call a rickshaw for me, then went away to see someone else while Bal Natu came out with a handkerchief to wave me goodbye as I was driven out of the compound to return to Meherabad.

Thus my last moments with Mani were somewhat low-key—I was leaving as usual, hoping that I would come again before too long and be able to spend time with her then, enjoying her company as always. There was no sense of finality in this goodbye, no inkling of not seeing her again.

Now I dare cherish the hope that Beloved Baba will allow me, in a new form, to meet His dear Mani again in her next life—which He said would be her last—with opportunities to be with her, perhaps being of help to her, learning from her gentleness, wisdom, and humour, and above all, loving her always for her total love for God.

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Mani's Request To Check My Book At Meherazad

Three years passed after my last visit to Meherabad and Meherazad, and in November 1994 I began writing two small sections on Mehera which were published as booklets under the title “A Garland for Avatar Meher Baba.” During 1995 I was able to work almost continuously on my book as a whole, incorporating these first two sections and completing extra chapters about Mehera, as well as writing several about Mani and each of the women mandali.

When Bill went again to Meherazad in September that year, I sent a
Mani

letter to Mani telling her about this, and she sent back the message that she would like Meheru to go through the various chapters, particularly those on Mehera. Naturally I appreciated very much being given this wonderful opportunity for my work to be checked in this way, and over the next few months several Australian Baba lovers kindly carried batches of all the material to Meherazad for me.

When the sections were gradually brought back during the first half of 1996 together with typed copies of amendments, I was so glad and grateful to find the careful editing which Meheru had done on the Mehera chapters. As well as this, she and each of the mandali had lovingly checked their own chapters, making a few corrections and sometimes adding a couple of extra details to certain stories, thereby increasing their value.

In particular, I was quite overwhelmed and deeply touched to learn of the severity of Mani's illness and the pain and difficulties she was still experiencing after her operations. But in spite of all this she had spent so much time and precious energy in going over all her stories herself, revising and also adding to their content, deleting some, correcting others. Heather and Laurel worked with her, and did all the typing of the "Mani-ized retellings" which she had so lovingly done especially for me. In the letter which Heather wrote to me and enclosed with the material, she mentioned, among other special messages and comments, that "Mani says she believes in editing a talk before printing, because narrating a story spontaneously, and seeing it in print, are two different things."

Having completed all the alterations, I am indeed happy to know that those who read these Mani chapters will find much to enjoy in the truly accurate and beautifully expanded stories which bear the perfume and imprint of her deep love for Baba.

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Mani Rejoins Her Beloved God-Brother

At Meherazad on 19th August 1996 at 7:01 AM Beloved Baba called His dearest sister to leave her sweet form as Mani to be reunited with Him.

About 6:00 PM that evening her funeral pyre was lit at lower Meherabad. For all those present it was extraordinarily beautiful. It lasted for three days, an unusually long time, with many rare and meaningful occurrences. Her ashes were kept at Meherazad until Sunday 7th September, then taken to Meherabad and placed in the Samadhi overnight. During a touching farewell ceremony at 11:00 AM on 8th September

Mani

Mani's ashes were laid in her shrine next to the Samadhi at Baba's left hand, as He had instructed years before.

Several very beautiful tributes of Mani, and a long and touching account of her last days written by Eruch and the mandali, Meheru and Heather Nadel, were sent round the world by Fax and immediately printed in many Baba Magazines and Newsletters.

I know that everyone—the mandali, members of her family, staff, and thousands of Baba lovers around the world—all who were associated with her, who knew and loved her over so many years, will always miss her specially-warm and delightful company at Meherazad, Meherabad, the Trust Office and Poona.

From far-away Avatar's Abode I too miss Mani. I think of her every day remembering her with love, and continually thank Beloved Baba for allowing me to spend so much time with her on every one of my many visits.

Stories about her and her total love for her beloved God-Brother are already legion, and will continue to be added to over the years as people of all ages and backgrounds remember and talk about their times with her.

Mani held a unique place as one of the two women closest to Beloved Baba, and in her lifelong work for Him. She demonstrated most beautifully that work for Him was ever-synonymous with love for Him, and she will always remain the perfect example of the many attributes which grace a life of unquestioning obedience, one-pointed devotion and selfless service for the God-Man, Avatar Meher Baba.

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MANI Part 5

LETTERS

Over the years I wrote to Mani maybe two or three times a year, and she would write to me also. Getting a letter or card from her was always a delight, and invariably I felt she was talking to me as I read each one. It seems fitting to include a selection of these, for they convey vividly her warmth, cheerfulness and infectious humour.

Mani

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After my return from Amartithi in 1979 I spent ten days at Avatar's Abode staying with Robert and Lorna Rouse in the Farmhouse, and was also able to get to know Diana Le Page—she and Bill had just been married.

May Lundquist, a long-time and totally dedicated Baba lover whom I had known since 1962, died of leukaemia in a Brisbane hospital in July 1978 when I was still living in Sydney. She was buried in the Palmwoods Cemetery not far from Avatar's Abode, so I asked the Rouses to take me to see her grave and to deliver messages which the mandali had given me for her.

On returning to Sydney I wrote to Mani and to Eruch. This is the extract from my letter to him which Mani refers to in her reply.

14 Charlotte Street, Rozelle

12th March 1979

Dear Eruch, Jai Baba,

. . . As I had not seen the spot where May lies, I asked if we could go there one day. So Robert and Lorna took me on the morning of Baba's Birthday It was a lovely clear morning, not too hot, and everything looked so green after some recent heavy rains. Dear Lorna specially cut some roses, giving me a lovely red bud (just opening out) from you, another for myself, and again others for herself and Robert, all different colours. And so dear May received your loving message on her Beloved's Birthday, and I think she would have been happy thus.

I had been thinking of her a lot the evening before in the Baba House and at 5 AM. She seemed to be there with us all. And it is a beautiful and peaceful place where she lies, close to John Bruford and Rod Brown, on a gentle slope looking across to Avatar's Abode through the trees. So we left her there with the roses and our loving thoughts in the bright sunshine. Yet she is often talked of and remembered by so many different ones, and I sometimes wish she could have realised how many people did really love her.

Mani replied:

Mani

Meherazad, 19.3.79

Dearest Judith, Heart's greeting in Beloved Baba's Love to you

All that came in your dear letter made me very happy. I can say the same about Eruch who has just shared with me your letter to him, and it seemed the fragrance of the roses for dearest May wafted into this office as we read your description. . . .

So happy to know of your happy visit to Avatar's Abode and that Diana has fitted in so naturally and perfectly.

Much love dear one as always from us all, and a special JAI-BABA hug from
Mani

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Later I wrote a description of the wedding of an Australian Baba couple whom Mani had met in India, sent good wishes for Janet and Ted Judson's wedding on 8th June, and also told Mani of my move, after five years in the adjoining suburb of Rozelle, to the living quarters of Meher Baba Information Centre in Balmain, Sydney.

Meherazad, Sunday June 17, 1979

Dearest Judith,

Here the Baba Season has begun and in a few minutes the pilgrims will arrive—among this first batch there are about 20, and yesterday once again Meherazad was ringing with greetings of JAI BABA at the reunions when they came walking down the private road from the Meherazad bus stop. We have had a horribly hot summer, and as the rains have been delayed it is still very hot! The lake by Meherazad has become completely dry, and it seems our brains have too by this time.

It was wonderful to read and share about the wedding at Meher House (we didn't know it was the fifth wedding there!), and the sparkle that dear Jenny and Ross put into this Baba-occasion. . . .

And lastly, (but not by any means leastly) it gladdens our hearts to know of your lovely new "home"—it sounds happy and I can picture you in it, in Baba's beloved company.

Yes, Janet and Ted had a very quiet and happy wedding (she looked lovely in pink sari)—they are away for a few weeks vacation in Poona and

Mani

Panchgani. . .

Lots of love to you from a hot and feverishly fanning Mani

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Ahmednagar, 2nd Aug. 1979

Dearest Judith,

Your Silence Day letter (posted on 10th July) reached today! Looks like the postal service has been on “silence” too. . . .

I must tell you of the unexpected and bountiful blessings Beloved Baba has been pouring on us, in the form of RAIN, since the last week—more so in Meherazad. It happened a day after 300 villagers from Pimpalgaon, including many school children and Western lovers went up Seclusion Hill with Aloha to pray to Beloved Baba for rains to save the plight of the people. Our newspapers reported it as “freak rains” and said the meteorologists were stumped and were studying the charts to find out “the why and how of this sudden development” !!—why didn’t they just ask Aloha?!!

With much love, In His Ocean, Mani

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Ahmednagar, 17th September ‘79

Dearest Judith,

A joyous JAI BABA from us all to you each. Your welcome letter was delivered by dear Bill in person—and you can imagine how welcome Bill is here among us—having him at Meherazad is like “old times” and we’ve loved sharing the treasure of pictures he brought: of darling little Roshan, of the house Bill built at Avatar’s Abode (which Diana has made into such a warm lovely home), of the various property and projects at A.A. giving us a glimpse of the tremendous labour of love Bill has put in—along with the map and Bill’s graphic and patient explanations to us each—it was a great joy—plus knowing that our dear Judith will soon be joining the group up there. As usual Beloved Baba plans and times everything right. . . .

Looking forward to having you with us in December Baba willing—
an advance embrace in His Love, Mani

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Mani

A'Nagar 21.12.81

Judith dear, happily received your loving birthday greetings. My thoughts will be specially with you on your dear birthday—enclosed is an advance hug, the rest to be delivered in person soon, next year.

With this note Mani also sent me a card which she had made up with her own message: “A big gentle Happy Birthday hug to you in Beloved Baba’s Smile,” and added small stickers of these Baba sayings arranged around a central Baba photo.

I am the Divine Beloved who loves you more than you can ever love yourself.

The remedy and comfort for all is to constantly remember Me whole- heartedly.

I am the Unlimited Ocean of Love. Try to love Me more and more and you will know Me.

I am the One, all else is zero.

The Power House will never fail, provided the wires take care of their connection with it.

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Ahmednagar 6 October 1982

Dearest Judith,

With all these saucy Aussies about, you dear ones “Down Under” are up top on our remembrance agenda! . . .

I’m sure Bill and Diana will give you a firsthand feast of news from here—as always we love having them with us, and our dear Francis too, and all the other old and new “gems” of Baba’s that came this time. We’re all stowing away in their bags big “Jai Baba” hugs to you (in advance) and much, much love—we’re so happy you’re coming in December and can share Mehera’s Birthday on 19th and Christmas with us!

Rano’s calling me for lunch, so I’ll close with much love to you, dear Judith—you’ve been specially with us these days in thought and heart.
Mani

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Mani

For some time Mani had called me their “little starling” because I came every year to Meherabad and Meherazad. In July 1984 I wrote to Mani: “Just a quick note to let you know I am coming to visit you again—that “little starling” is spreading wings and this time taking a long trip to get to her Beloved’s Home in India.”

I had booked a round-the-world trip in order to have three weeks at Myrtle Beach, and then straight through via London to Bombay, Poona and Ahmednagar. I had wanted for years to go to Myrtle Beach but somehow something had always happened to prevent it. Now I was not only going there, but would have four months at Meherabad and Meherazad as well.

A’Nagar 26.7.84

A special welcome from Meherazad garden to our sweet starling—by Baba’s grace, happily awaiting your yearly visit. . . .

Mehera and all of us send you much love—we’re happy you’re flying round the world and at last visiting Myrtle Beach! . . .

Much love as ever dear Judith

Mani

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I went again to Meherabad and Meherazad for a happy month in October/November 1985, but I had to cancel my 1986 booking because of injury to my back. This delightful letter from Mani helped assuage the disappointment:

A’Nagar 10.11.86

dear BACK of our dearest Judith,

Please get well soon and behave yourself. You know how much it means for Judith to come on her yearly pilgrimage to Babaland—So you ought to know better than to go “out” at a time like this! Oh I know I know, it is one of Beloved Baba’s blessings in disguise, and it is Beloved Baba’s Will that she visit on His Birthday, I agree. But you might have come on earlier, as women don’t like to have their plans changed suddenly.

Oh I’m not blaming you, I’ve decided to be very sweet to you in order to put you in a good mood so that you pull yourself together and don’t give any more trouble to our gentle Judith—O.K? And please tell

Mani

Judith not to worry, as Meher Baba has said, and take it all as His dear wish. And while you're about it, you might convey much love and Get Well wishes from her Meherazad family.

Thank you and Jai Baba! Mani

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There was another reason for my feeling sad at the cancellation of this visit—I did not have the opportunity of spending some more time with two of Baba's close ones whom I also loved—Pendur died in November 1986 and Rano in December. On succeeding visits I certainly missed them, as well as Naja and Padri whom Baba had called in earlier years.

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I finally went in September/October 1987, finishing with a happy day in Poona visiting Guruprasad Memorial, Bindra House, Baba House, and Pumpkin House. I wrote to Mani about this visit:

Avatar's Abode, 10th November 1987

Dearest Mani, Jai Meher Baba,

At Bindra House it was lovely to see dear Gaimai and Manu and to feel Baba's Presence so much in the rooms He spent time in on so many occasions. We had about an hour there, then went to Baba House where dear Gulnar gave us such a warm welcome, took us to Pumpkin House where we sat a while as she told us a story or two, then gave us a delicious lunch at Baba House. Perin and Mehernaz were so sweet too, and it was a delightful visit all around. Baba House looks wonderful now, so spacious and full of light.

And I loved being able to go inside Pumpkin House. When I went up the stairs, just far enough to see all round the attic, I felt His Presence there so strongly that I didn't want to come down again. It just shows that it doesn't matter what has happened or who has lived there all the years the family didn't have it, nothing affects the fact that Baba lived there. I am so happy that the house is yours again, dearest Mani. And how fortunate are all the pilgrims who can visit these special places now and be with Him there. . . .

Mani

With much love in His Ocean of love to yourself, and to dear Mehera
and each one there at Meherazad, Judith

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Two months later, Mani sent me a greeting card for my birthday which had on the front a picture of two children holding large pumpkins. There were more pumpkins inside, around which Mani had typed this note:

Judith dear, these little pumpkins are filled with heart-greetings from your Meherazad pals—wishing dear you a very special day in darling Baba's Love.

Mehera and I will be specially remembering you on February 7th, with a rose offered to the Beloved on your behalf as it is also the day we unfailingly visit Meherabad every year!

With a big birthday BABA-hug to you Judith and lots of love from us each to our very dear Le Pages. Mani Ahmednagar 25 Jan, '88

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In July 1988 when Bill returned from a short visit to Meherazad he brought a most beautiful hand-made card from Mani. Inside is a very artistically-arranged group of pressed flowers and leaves from the Meherazad garden, with a tiny photo of Baba in the centre. On the opposite side Mani wrote:

Dearest Judith, JAI BABA from your Meherazad family. We send our love with a bit of Meherazad garden and much heart remembrance—as you know, the long silence has only been of the pen! Am writing this before our dear Bill arrives today, as this visit of his will be very short and sweet and during the great rush of Baba-lovers for the Beloved's Silence Occasion. May this find you in good health and cheer in Beloved Baba's Love always—with our united greetings of Avatar Meher Baba Ki Jai.

Mani

Meherazad 7.7.88

Later I had to cancel my 1988 booking due to ill-health, so it was almost as though Beloved Baba had inspired Mani to send this card filled

Mani

with Meherazad love to help me through the next few months until He made it possible for me to go in February 1989 to be with His beloved Mehera for the last time. How perfectly He arranged everything.

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After Mehera joined her Beloved Baba on 20th May 1989, I wrote a long letter to Mani. The next, sent with Bill, brought this reply:

Ahmednagar 9 July 1990

Judith dear,

Having Bill, Jenny and Michael with us is such a dear reminder of you. Your letter lovingly received and I am tempted to scold your Back for giving you trouble again! I know our Beloved is giving you His special company through it all—and I'm sure your patience pleases Him. We look forward to having you here with us in Oct. or Nov. or whenever the Boss brings you, which will be in His perfect time, of course.

Meantime, Bill is requested to give you all our news in person—specially in detail about our Gaimai. As you may know recently she had a slight stroke and had to be hospitalized. Just as I sat to write you, Meherwan phoned to say that Dr. Arvind has given the OK for Gaimai to go home to Bindra House on 12th July—wonderful welcome news! She is her sweet self through all this, though gone very thin and her heart is weak as is to be expected.

Just before Bill came, we interred Margaret's ashes on Meherabad Hill (according to Baba's instruction) on 29th June. We had a delightful morning in her remembrance, full of her love and obedience and humour and laughter! Four of Baba's dancers were here for it and their stories and love added a special touch to her "farewell."

Bill will tell you about the Samadhi restoration and our new Sunday timings. I also send with him heaps of love to you dear Judith, with a JAI-BABA heart-hug.

Mani

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Well, I had to wait until mid-September 1991 to be again with Beloved Baba and His dear ones at Meherabad and Meherazad—and this

Mani

turned out to be my last pilgrimage, but what a happy time Baba gave me!

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Over the next couple of years I wrote a few times to Mani, sent with different ones going to India, giving news of life and work at Avatar's Abode. It was always touching to receive a little card from Mani with a colorful picture on one side, and a note from her on the other, such as these two:

A'Nagar 30 Nov. 92

Dearest Judith --

These blossoms are special picked to convey sweet and gentle get-well wishes from each of us at Meherazad. I am so concerned to know about the recurrence of your back problem dear—but it's good to hear (from your note and Dear Bill Diana) that Baba has you home and you're slowly, slowly getting stronger and doing the little everyday things. How timely that Arvind was in Australia to give you help (in his speciality too?)—isn't it wonderful how Baba thinks of *everything*?

With our dear Bill and family here in Baba's Home, you are very much with us too dear Judith. Baba has planned your visit in His perfect time and love, and we look forward to embracing you in person. In the meantime, many Jai Baba hugs from us all,

Mani.

Ahmednagar, 4 October '93

Judith dear,

This love-you note is “hitch-hiking” with Goher's letter to you. This is how we picture you my dear: strolling up the slope from your cottage to Beloved Baba's Room at His Abode, through the perennial garden of His Love and care. Goher and I are crossing our fingers that your new treatment is helpful by Baba's grace.

How often I send you silent greetings too—and or course through dear BillDiana when we communicate. Now Baba's chauffeur dear Patricia ferries this note to you, and tucked inside is a loving embrace from my heart.

In BabaMehera's Lovealways, Mani

Mani

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In November 1993 I began typing up all the hand-written and shorthand notes I had made in Meherabad and Meherazad over so many years, in order to begin work on my long-cherished idea of writing about the women mandali and my times with them. I had previously talked to Mani about this project and she had said to go ahead, so I wrote in January 1994 to say I had begun working on it at last.

A'nagar 10 Feb. '94

Judith dear,

Very lovingly received your letter, it was like a personal little visit from you. Your book sounds just lovely!

You appear into my thoughts quite often my dear, and we will think of you and our dear Bill and Diana on His Special Day, when with His lover everywhere we sing "HAPPY BIRTHDAY darling Baba!" 100 times over!

With much love as ever in Baba-Mehera's Love, Mani

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Severe back pain put me into hospital on 1st June 1994 for some weeks so I missed Katie's visit for our Anniversary celebrations. Later when I was home again this note came from Mani, on a Get-Well card adorned with pink roses and a rainbow, under which she had added a tiny coloured sticker of Baba standing on Seclusion Hill.

Judith dear,

This is how I picture Beloved Baba standing on Avatar's Abode looking after you, as you rest and recover under the rainbow of His care and grace. We were indeed sorry to hear about your back condition (guess darling Baba wanted to extend His Anniversary presence to Nambour hospital!) Praying that your dear back is "back to normal" and you are back home by the time this Baba-greeting reaches you.

This bouquet of country-roses (favourites of darling Mehera) carry special Get-Well-Soon wishes from all your Meherazad family with lots and lots of love—and JAI BABA greetings to our dear Bill family also.

Mani

AVATAR MEHER BABA KI JAI! Mani A'nagar, 27-6-94

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After another few weeks in hospital in August/September, I was home again when Bill and Diana brought a further note from Mani which included the following:

Meherazad 14 Sept 94

Dearest Judith,

The happy family reunion at Meherazad with our very dear Le Pages included you in a special way for they definitely brought you along in their hearts. I placed your letter on His Chair in Mandali Hall along with a rose from His beloved's garden, and bowed down for you.

So happy to know from Bill that soon you'll be home-sweet-home in your lovely cottage at His Abode. . . . Bill and Diana will carry to you all the Home news with our fondest love and Jai Baba! . . .

A warm and gentle JAI-BABA embrace from Mani

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During this September visit of Bill's at Meherazad, he knew that I would no longer be able to work in the Bookstore at Avatar's Abode, nor use the heavy manual typewriter, and he suddenly had the idea of setting up a computer/word processor for me in my cottage to enable me to work without any physical strain in typing these chapters about each of the mandali.

So once again Baba took care of everything. In November 1994, after a few very basic lessons on how to use this remarkable equipment, I began to work, and have had a wonderful time writing it all. Apart from the joy of at long last doing this, I have been re-living to the full all the happy hours spent at Meherazad and Meherabad with each of the dear mandali in Beloved Baba's every-beautiful Presence.

The first sections Mehera Part 1 and Mehera Part 2, were finished and printed as two periodicals, with the overall title of "A Garland for Avatar Meher Baba," just in time for Bill and Diana to take them to India at Amartithi 1995, with copies for the mandali. I hoped very much that

Mani

they would like them, and so was very happy to receive Mani's letter:

Meherazad, 10 Feb. 95

Dear Judith,

JAI BABA!—our dear Bill is tucking this letter into his carry-bag along with a gentle embrace for you from our hearts. It has been lovely-as-ever having dears DianaBill with us sharing the joy of Amartithi. As you can see from the date of writing, it's passed now and we're racing towards Beloved Baba's 101st Birthday.

As for the "Garland" periodicals my dear, they are as beautiful to look at as they are easy to read! And being full as they are with the fragrance of Mehera's Baba-memories, you can imagine how we all love them. Forgetting my resolve to pick out and bring to your notice any little needed corrections I might spot while reading, I found myself reading it right through for my own sheer enjoyment!

We love to picture you tap-tapping away on your computer as you weave the Garlands for love of Beloved Baba and Mehera.

Keep on my dear—lots of love from us all—

AVATAR MEHER BABA KIJAI!!!

Mani

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GOHER

My first meetings with Dr. Goher were at Guruprasad, Poona—at the East-West Gathering in November 1962 in Beloved Baba’s presence, and the Great Darshan in May 1969. There was only the opportunity of introducing ourselves to each other the first time, but at the Darshan I remember being impressed with her quiet gentleness and found it easy to talk to her on the occasions when we Australians were with the women mandali.

She is a medical doctor but I did not use that title when speaking to her—in fact from quite early on I simply called her by the intimate “family” name which is pronounced “Guvvaire,” this being as close as I can get with a phonetic spelling. However, throughout this account I will use only her proper-name spelling, Goher. She said she never liked it, and the other was a softer alternative which the mandali always use, and somehow I was allowed to do so as well. My other term of endearment for her was “My favourite doctor,” and indeed she has always been so.

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At Meherazad in the 1970s and ’80s, on Saturdays and Sundays Goher would be there on the verandah with the other mandali to greet everyone. But on weekdays she was so busy in the Meher Free Dispensary that we did not see her very often at all. She always had other duties to see to in the house as well, and even at weekends rarely came into Mandali Hall when we were listening to Eruch or Mani. But at Aloba’s afternoon tea time she sometimes came to sit on the verandah with various ones for a talk, and usually joined the other women mandali for the entertainment and film programmes in Mandali Hall on Sunday mornings.

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Goher’s contacts with pilgrims were more in the nature of personal chats—she was not a teller of stories and anecdotes like the others. And of course in the early years before the Pilgrim Centre was built, and sometimes later on, she gave medical advice to pilgrims when needed.

She tended always to be rather reserved and shy, and this was often brought out in stories of the early days with Baba which the other mandali would tell. For example, when Mehera and Mani were producing a skit or

Goher

performance to entertain Baba on His return from travel or seclusion work, because of her shyness Goher found it very difficult to do the dance or act the part assigned to her.

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My own contacts with Goher, especially in the 1970s and early '80s were nearly always connected with all sorts of sewing for her which I really enjoyed doing. She had charge of all the household linen and furnishings such as sheets and towels, curtains and covers, and sometimes there would be new ones to make up, or alterations and mending needed for items in current use. As well as these, now and again there was work on some of her own clothes, and occasionally a little mending job which she wanted done for one of the men mandali.

So I would find out when she wanted me to come, then get a rickshaw to Meherazad early in the morning and spend the day there, using the old-fashioned but efficient foot-treadle sewing machine, or doing hand-work. It was always so nice to have the opportunity to do some work for any of the mandali, which gave them just a little more time for something else in their very busy lives.

It was also nice to offer to get, or be asked to buy at home and bring next time, various sewing aids and other household items not available in the Ahmednagar bazaar. Apart from the fun of doing this, there was the added enjoyment of further time in Goher's company before and after completing the assignments.

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The Meher Free Dispensary is a large building opposite the entrance to Meherazad, and hundreds of Indian patients come from miles around for treatment there. In the 1980s when we pilgrims arrived in the bus to spend the day at Meherazad we would see them waiting on the wide stone verandah, or sitting close-packed on the grounds in the shade of the beautiful spreading Gulmohar (Poinciana) tree.

But during the 1970s when our Australian groups first came to Meherazad the Dispensary work was carried out by Goher and one or two others in a small room off the end of Mandali Hall verandah, and the patients would sit just outside this room while waiting for their turn to be

Goher

treated. Goher would make sure that we all stayed further down the verandah at those times so that there was no risk of infection for us.

Then the new Dispensary was built. Sometime afterwards a laboratory was added at one side, and later again the main treatment area was extended out to the back. Goher showed me round at different times, and I was always immediately aware of the atmosphere of loving service throughout the whole building. Baba's work from the very early years at Meherabad is still carried out in a free dispensary there, and has also been operating regularly on a wide scale at Meherazad.

Katie, Goher's sister, has worked there since she came to live permanently at Meherazad in 1978 after retiring from her long-time job with the Japanese Consulate-General in Bombay. Pendu also used to help with registration of case papers for some years before his death in 1986. A band of dedicated Westerners, who are qualified in a variety of medical fields and are residents at Meherabad, come to Meherazad to help Goher and her team of Easterners with the very large number of poor villagers treated there every year.

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Goher often had to go back and forth between the main house and the dispensary during the day, so to save energy and time she began years ago to use a bicycle, with a basket attached to the handlebars to carry whatever was needed for either place. But more recently, because of her health problems, the familiar bicycle was replaced with a small motorized chair, donated by some pilgrims.

For years Goher suffered greatly with an osteoarthritis condition, and in 1995 she spent months in America at Atlanta, Georgia, undergoing operations for shoulder replacements. Beloved Baba certainly seemed to put His closest ones "through the mill," sometimes for very long periods—but it never diminished the loving welcome they always gave everyone coming to Meherazad and Meherabad. They put aside or successfully hid their own difficulties, presenting only sweet words and smiles and warm embraces which conveyed their deep love for Baba, so that one often felt it was Baba Himself giving the greeting.

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Goher

I have always loved Goher and felt very close to her. Although there never seemed to be time or opportunity to talk with her in detail about her own life and how she came to Baba, this is her story as I have gathered it from material lent to me which I carefully edited, and which she herself checked for me in 1996. It is given in her words to keep the narrative personal.

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GOHER'S OWN STORY

I have been living with Baba continuously since 1947, but I have known Him since my childhood. I was about six or seven years old when Baba came to my parents' house in Quetta, now part of Pakistan, with some of the men mandali. Mehera, Naja and Khorshed were among the women mandali. My parents had rented the house next to ours for Baba and the mandali to stay in. I remember Baba used to serve food to all of us Himself—we would go to Him with our plates, He would serve it, and tell us, “You must eat every bit that is on the plate.”

With children He behaved like a child and played games with us. One was a game of five fingers—He would hold His fingers together in a certain way, and ask us to pick the middle finger, but we were never able to do it!

At that time Baba was known as Sadguru (a Perfect Master), and our friends who followed Him used to ask us to say our prayers to Him. Of course we said our prayers to Zoroaster, but at the same time we were asked to pray to Baba.

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Childhood Visits to Ahmednagar

At times I used to come to Ahmednagar to my mother's maternal home for holidays. Most people in the family did not accept Baba as the Sadguru at that time, especially Sarosh's father who was very much against Baba. There was a joint family system in those days—everybody lived together, Sarosh's family, Sarosh's brother Dinshaw's family (his wife is my aunt—my mother's sister), so naturally we stayed with them when we came

Goher

for our holidays.

Sarosh's father was so strict that he would not even allow Baba's name to be mentioned. But also living in the same house were Gulmai and her son Adi, who were staunch followers of Baba (Gulmai was Sarosh's aunt; Adi was his cousin). Sarosh's father could not say anything to them, but he was very strict with his own son. In spite of that, whenever Gulmai, Adi or my aunt visited Baba at Meherabad, or when Baba came to Ahmednagar to Khushru Quarters, now known as Meher Nazar, we used to go quietly to see Him. Naturally He would embrace us, kiss and play with us, but we were told we must not mention Baba when Sarosh's father came home.

But that old man was very cunning. He would bribe us in a way, with sweets or something, and gradually got out of us whether Baba had come to the house and who met Him. As children, sometime we would blurt it out. And then he would create a row, demanding to know why we had met Baba. Gradually as we grew older we had more sense, and understood that he did not like us to meet Baba—but we would still meet Him quietly.

From our childhood days Baba was like a teacher to us. He played with us and was like a loving father to us, but at the same time as we grew up He gave us strict orders how to behave in life.

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Living In Quetta

I think it was in 1931 that we were getting several earth tremors in Quetta. We had lived in tents for nearly six months, and when we came back to live in our house it was not in a very good condition. Baba came that year with a few of his men mandali: Chanji, Raosaheb and one or two others. I was about 15, my sister Katie was about 11, and other children were also there. Baba and His men stayed in our house for nearly a month. He used to play with us. He was very fond of Katie and would call her to His room when all the mandali were there and play Carrom or other games. Once He took us to the cinema.

Baba was very playful and had jokes with us. He used to get up at 4:00 o'clock, and would come into our room, put on the light, shake the beds, and naturally when we saw Him we would all jump out. We never felt strangers to Baba because He was so loving and approachable.

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“You become a doctor”

One day when I was going out in my Guide costume, Baba called me and said, “What are you going to study further?” I didn’t know. Baba then said, “You become a doctor.” Since that time it was always in my mind that I would be a doctor.

Baba Tells Goher’s Father To Leave Quetta

At that time Baba told my parents, actually my father, that he should sell up his business, which was a huge concern because Quetta, being on the frontier, had a very large military camp of British forces, and naturally the business included a bar, billiards, a toy shop, a restaurant, confectionery and jewellery shops. Baba said he should sell the business, he would get a very good profit, and he should leave Quetta with his family.

After this warning Baba left, and my father was thinking about whether he should sell or not—he had been established there for twenty years or so. My mother was more on the practical and materialistic side, and my father was a more simple person and would have done what Baba told him. But my mother said, “If we sell everything and go away, how are you going to bring up all your seven children? There won’t be enough money, and how are you going to start business all over again?” Other friends in Quetta did not believe in Baba then, and persuaded my father not to sell. Two years went by, there were some more earth tremors at times, and the business was not running so well.

Her Mother’s Dream

One night my mother had a dream in which she saw a grey-bearded person in a white robe who said to her, “I am waiting for you to leave Quetta. Why haven’t you gone? I want you to go away, and when you have left I want to destroy Quetta.” On waking next morning my mother felt this was a warning message from Baba. She told my father immediately, and said they must sell the business and go away, whatever happened.

So they started to do that. They sent all seven of us children to Ahmednagar for our schooling and stayed back themselves trying to sell the business, but there were no prospective buyers. If my father had sold when Baba told him to, he would have profited much by it. Prices went down because of continuing earthquakes, and after two years he sold at tremendous loss—it was just like giving it to someone. He would have got

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one lakh of rupees (100,000) earlier, which in present money terms would mean millions, but in the end he gained only a small fraction of the value for the whole of his business.

They move To Ahmednagar

Anyway, he sold it and my parents came to Ahmednagar, and then Adi's father, Sarosh and his brother all helped him, because Baba had told them that they must get him settled in business somewhere. So my father opened a canteen at Sarosh's cinema.

And a couple of years after that we heard there was a terrible earthquake in Quetta when 35,000 to 50,000 lives were lost in one night. Then we all realised that Baba had saved the whole family from the catastrophe.

But my father did not have that zest to start all over again in a new business. My brothers were still too young, and there was nobody to help him in the business. Perhaps he did not have enough inspiration for the work, and he did not earn well. We were all at school in Ahmednagar, and after finishing there we were sent to college in Bombay

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Goher At College In Bombay

After one year of studying my mother told me, "It is very expensive. I can't afford to pay your fees." I was staying with some relations, at first with Sarosh's sister, then with my married sister. My mother felt that in a couple of years I would get married anyway, so she said she could not afford the fees.

Baba must have come to know about it, or I must have told Him, because he used to visit our house in Ahmednagar—our family was now living separately in a small house, and Baba used to visit quite often. Then He told my mother, "Let her go to college and I will pay." After my graduation in the Arts college, I had to join the medical college, but then I did not have anywhere to live, so again I was going to give up the medical career. While staying with relations I did not have to pay for board and lodging, but if I had to stay in a hostel it would be very expensive.

Living With Arnavaz's Family

Baba called me to Meherabad, and that was the first time I met
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Chanji. Baba told him, “She has to stay at Arnavaz’s parents’ house.” Arnavaz and Nargis Dadachanji and the rest of the family of seven children were very young then, still in school, and their father was not earning much—but I have never known a more contented family, a family full of love, I have never seen so much love.

Baba sent me there alone—just gave me the address and told me to tell them, “I have come.” I didn’t know any of the family. I travelled by train to Bombay, went to the house and knocked at the door, which Arnavaz opened, and told her, “I am Goher.” She said, “Yes, come in, come in.”

They took me in like one of their own, and they gave me so much love that I never felt I was a stranger but belonged to the family. They were not rich and had only simple meals, one vegetarian dish in the evening or one in the afternoon. But Bachamai, Arnavaz’s mother, would see to it that I had more than her own children had. And sometimes it used to bring tears to my eyes because I knew that my own mother would never have done that for another child.

Baba used to visit their house very often as if it was His own house, because there was so much love there. When Baba was coming Bachamai would be so happy, and she would clean the whole house, make preparations to receive Him, prepare food for Him and for the mandali whom she would receive with the same love.

Whenever the family visited Ahmednagar or wherever Baba was, I would go with them. After a couple of years in their house I went to stay in a girls’ hostel and Baba gave me very strict orders. No men must come to visit me, I must not touch men or go about with them. Baba said I should write to Him every week, or once a month, whichever it was, and He replied to every letter.

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Holidays With Baba

Four years passed. Baba said whenever I had a holiday I could go and stay with Him. Naturally we were more drawn to be with Baba than to our own parents’ house, and wherever He was, Blue Bus Tours, Meherabad, anywhere, every holiday we spent with Him. Once in Bangalore there was a question of my marriage. Baba told me: “Don’t worry. You should not think about it, don’t ever marry. You have to

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come to Me after you have become a doctor.” So that was always in my mind, and I knew that Baba would call me some day to live with Him permanently.

Baba’s Sign For Goher

In 1939 during one of the holidays I went with Arnavaz to Panchgani where Baba and the women mandali were staying. I had a very sore throat and a high fever, but in spite of that I went, and as soon as we entered the house Baba enquired after my health. He was displeased and said, “You can’t stay here. Go back to Bombay immediately and have your tonsils operated on,” and He sent me back the same night. Ever since then Baba’s sign for me was tonsils—Baba would put His hand on His throat to indicate the tonsils—and that was my sign when He wanted me. Right till the end this was my sign.

During 1938 when I started my college career, my sister Katie joined Baba permanently in the ashram. She would write to me about all the activities there and on the Blue Bus Tours, and Baba would read these letters, sign them Himself, and always sent His love to me.

The monetary question was always difficult for me—I didn’t really like it that Baba was burdened with my tuition fees and also the hostel fees which were very expensive, and it made me uneasy.

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Graduation

After my graduation in 1944 I came to my parents’ home in Ahmednagar because Baba was away travelling. He returned before long to Meherazad so I sent word that my studies were finished and what should I do. Adi Snr. came and drove me to Meherazad. At that time Baba was using the room which later became Aloba’s. There was no furniture, no chair. Baba was sitting cross-legged on the floor on a small carpet, and called me in. He said He was happy that I was a medical doctor now and I should come to stay with Him permanently, and to tell my parents this.

Well, my mother made so much fuss about it, saying, “I won’t be able to meet you, and why should you go permanently—you can go and visit Baba when you like.” There was such a row about it, so I wrote to Baba, and He said, “Don’t come now.” I felt very hurt and sad, but I knew that I must leave home, and wrote back to Him: “No, I am coming,

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in spite of my mother's protest I am coming." Baba was quite happy then and said, "I'll call you. So you must be ready whenever I call you."

After a month or so Baba was going to Raipur, and He told me to meet Him in Bombay at Kaka Baria's house. Baba with Mehera, Mani, Meheru and myself all went to Raipur. Jal Kerawalla was there then, and we lived in a separate bungalow with Baba. A couple of months later Baba sent me back to Bombay to get more medical experience as an intern in the hospitals, and I was there for quite some time.

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Goher Joins Baba Permanently

Finally, in 1947 at Satara, I joined Baba permanently.

Norina and Elizabeth returned from America and came to Satara.

Norina was not well, she had heart disease and high blood pressure, and Baba told me to stay in the bungalow with them and look after her. At the same time Baba told me to go and work in a missionary hospital as a volunteer without pay. He also sent me to a leper colony twice a week to give them treatment. In the evening we used to visit Baba and Mehera, Mani and the others in their bungalow.

Living At Meherazad—Chickens And Messages!

After Satara I came with Baba to live at Meherazad with Mehera, Mani and Meheru. Rano and Kitty also came at times. In those days Baba used to sleep in a small room in a field nearby. He did not give me any medical job—He had a poultry farm made with different varieties of hens and ducks, and told me, "Now you have to take care of these!" And I was so frightened—I had never held a hen in my life and was afraid they would peck me. But I did it because Baba told me. I had to see to their feed, that the pen was kept clean, and that they would lay eggs, but Baba never let us eat that poultry.

In those days Baba saw to *every* detail—anything that came to Meherazad, any bazaar for whatever we needed, and the food we had. So when the chicken feed was finished I had to go and tell Baba. I went over to the mandali side. Baba was sitting in Kaka's room on the bed, and He was talking to Moorty from Calcutta about the sixth and seventh planes. I just entered the doorway, and without thinking, or listening to what Baba was telling Moorty, I immediately said "Baba, the chicken feed is finished."

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And Baba looked up at me so surprised, so seriously at first, then started laughing, and said, “Here I was talking to this man about the sixth and seventh plane and was so engrossed in it, and suddenly you come and tell me about the chicken feed!” And Baba laughed so much. Even to this day Moorty remembers this and often reminds me. For years afterwards Baba would also often remind me.

There were no men on the women’s side of the ashram. I was a sort of messenger, a go-between for the men and women mandali. All day long the bell would be ringing. Kaka would go to the gate and ring the bell—I had to come and take away bags of vegetables, or I had to convey any message that was to be given to Baba if He was on the women’s side. If Baba was on the men’s side and had to call me, the bell would ring, then I would have to convey the message to Mehera if He wanted a glass of water or something, and then I would bring it to Him from Mehera. So all day long that was my job, plus looking after the chickens.

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The New Life

Then Baba started meetings about the New Life, and we had to go to Meherabad every day. At a meeting of all the women held on the first floor of Meher Retreat, Upper Meherabad, Baba announced that besides a number of men, He would take only four women with Him in the New Life. Although I was staying permanently at Meherazad with Baba, Mehera, Mani and Meheru, I thought, “Well I came only recently and of course Baba will never take me—He will take only those who have lived with Him from their early teens.” Mehera and Mani were definite, and I thought perhaps Khorshed who had lived all her life with Baba, and Masi, or Meheru or Naja who had lived with Baba from their early teens would be the fourth person.

We returned to Meherazad with Baba in the evening and I was all the time very sad and depressed. Later on I was watering the garden at the far end, very slowly and sadly. Baba came out on the front verandah of the house and Mehera was standing beside Him. Baba clapped, and that was the sign for me to go there, which I did. Baba said, “What are you thinking about?” At first I didn’t say anything, then Baba told Mehera, “She is mad.” Again He said, “What are you thinking about?” I said, “Baba, I was feeling very sad because now that you say you will be going away in the

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New Life, there is no chance of us ever seeing you. And I don't know what to do with myself. I thought I'd end my life. I thought I couldn't live without you, and I know that you won't take me because I have just recently come to live with you."

Baba then told Mehera, "She is a fool. Tell her that she will go with me." And I think that was the happiest moment of my life. I had tears in my eyes, and I was so happy that Baba had already thought of taking me with Him. Later He announced which four were going, and gave us a list to make preparations for the New Life.

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Baba was very strict with the companions in the New Life. We had to obey Him implicitly. I was told to call the nightwatchman at 5:00 in the morning, but one day it was five minutes past 5:00. When Baba asked what time did I send off the nightwatch, I said "Baba, it was late by five minutes." He was very displeased with me and said, "If this happens again I will send you back." We were so happy to be with Baba all the time that we tried our best not to displease Him at all. We were always afraid that He would send us back, away from Him.

When walking in the New Life, Baba's feet, which were always so delicate and tender, developed very large blisters on the soles. In spite of that He kept on walking. Then Mehera would persuade Him, "Baba, your feet should be bathed in warm water, and something should be applied." So He permitted that, and Vaseline gauze bandages were put on. In spite of the blisters Baba would be ready to walk again the next day. It would not have been possible for an ordinary man to walk all those miles like that. Baba was wearing very rough sandals and we knew it was very painful for Him. Later on Mehera made Baba wear soft woolen socks, and she put some felt soles underneath so that the blisters did not hurt Him.

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Acting For Baba

I was very shy always, and when I came to join the ashram at Meherazad in 1947 Mani and Mehera wanted to produce a humorous play or skit to amuse Baba, because He used to come out of His seclusion so tired and strained, and that would lessen the burden. They wanted me to

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take a part in the play, and what a lot of botheration I gave to Mani because I could never act, and she used to get so tired of me because I would say, “I can’t do this, I can’t do that.” She’d make me do a little dance, a few simple steps, and I would say, “No, I can’t move my hands and feet at the same time!” But when she dressed me as a man and added a beard, then I forgot myself and started playing the part very well.

When I acted like that in front of Baba for the first time it was a Persian play—Mani was an old woman and I was an old man, and we did a sort of dance to a Persian record. It was at Upper Meherabad, and all the women mandali and the Westerners were there. Mehera said how funny I was, and Baba had quite a good laugh.

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Baba’s Physical Suffering

Since the time I came to live permanently with Baba I’ve seen nothing but His physical suffering. All the close ones living with Him saw this. One can’t compare Baba’s physical suffering with that of any ordinary man. Baba would not complain much, but we could see how much He suffered. One main problem was heartburn. For so many years Baba had been on so many long and severe fasts, and had such irregular diets due to His travels and mast work, that I was afraid of a peptic ulcer, but He would refuse any investigation or checkup. And we felt so helpless because we knew He was suffering with this constant pain and uneasiness in His stomach. Then He would make light of it and make us forget that He had any pain.

Whilst He was working, either mast work, poor work, universal work, or during seclusion, Baba did not spare His body. “My work comes first,” He would say.

Like so many who do not know about Perfect Masters or the Avatar, when I first came to be with Baba I assumed that He as the Avatar, being the personification of Perfection, was beyond being affected by ill-health or the usual things that affect ordinary human beings. In Raipur in 1944 Baba told me He had pain in the heart region. I did not understand then how Baba as God could have this pain. He then explained that Perfect Masters assume illness, while He being the Avatar must undergo all the physical pain and discomfort and illness which the ordinary human body

has to undergo. In the earlier days Dr. Donkin (Don) and Dr. Nilu were there, and from 1947 I was there also. But naturally when the damage was done, treatment could only be palliative and not a cure.

“We felt so helpless”

There were times when Baba would let the illness run its course, but at other times due to His particular work, we would find an ailment suddenly and miraculously vanish, and Baba would be His radiant self. This we have seen happen so many times. But Baba would always tell us, all three doctors who would attend Him, to do our best to give Him the right treatment. We always felt so helpless in Baba’s presence, and knew that we could never really do anything to help Him or to alleviate His pain or His suffering. We tried our best, and Baba would take the medicines we prescribed. On several occasions we have seen Baba look so ill at one moment, and at the next He would look completely well, and we would be baffled. But then we knew that it was not what Baba was showing us externally that was happening.

Baba seemed to take more bindings on Himself, visible and invisible. Many times He would complain of something, and then we would just fold our hands and stand in front of Him feeling so helpless. If it was any ordinary human being, we knew that we would have been able to do so much. But for Baba we felt that we could not really do anything to lessen His pain or suffering.

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Baba’s Rapid Changes In Health

Baba was very reluctant to have any investigation or checkups done. Until 1963 He would not permit it, but then Don and I would persuade or tell Him that it was very necessary, and He would permit us to consult some outside doctors. Sometimes Baba would be so restless and in so much pain that we would call the doctors, but when they came Baba would look so cheerful and healthy, and the doctors would look at us and say “Why have you consulted us? Baba is looking quite all right. What is wrong with you? Are you mad?” They would think we were emotionally upset and imagining Baba was not well.

An example of this was in December 1956 after the second accident when Baba’s right hip joint was injured. Colonel Chatterjee, a very well-
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known military orthopaedic surgeon in Poona, used to come to treat the fracture. After some time he removed the traction and Baba was in bed. Once Baba complained of very severe pain in the hip joint, and said He was not able to move about, that He could not sit up.

Don called Colonel Chatterjee, but when he arrived Baba was smiling and started asking him so many questions about his wife and children. Then Colonel Chatterjee said, “Well, where is your pain?” and Baba said, “There is no pain, I am all right.” Baba sat up, then sat across the bed, moving His legs. Colonel Chatterjee made Baba stand up, and still there was no pain. Then he looked at me: “What’s wrong with you, madam? Baba is all right, he has no pain, He is even standing on this injured leg. Why are you becoming so emotional? Why do you make up these stories that Baba has such severe pain?” Baba would make us look like fools in front of these doctors.

Baba’s physical suffering was not like that of an ordinary human being, because in a second Baba would look healthy, hale and hearty, and the next instant it would look as if He was again in severe pain.

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1952 Accident, USA

During the 1952 visit to America when Baba began the journey from the east coast to the west coast, some of the men mandali had already gone ahead, and we women were in two cars—Baba, Mehera, Mani and Meheru were in the first big car with Elizabeth driving, and in the other car with Sarosh driving were Rano, Delia, Kitty and me. Baba had told us our car must always keep very close to His, but sometimes that did not happen and He would be very displeased.

I used to feel very sad and cried to myself because Baba did not take me in His car which had plenty of room. Whenever we stopped at hotels Baba would say to me, “Well, you are having a very fine time in the other car. You are laughing and joking and smiling and having such a good time, eh?” I would feel so hurt, and said, “What is there to talk about? Baba, why don’t you take me in your car?” “No, no, I don’t want you in My car.”

On 24th May early in the morning I was feeling very depressed, and even wrote in my notes: “Why didn’t Baba take me in His car?” But when the accident took place I realised why He had not done so.

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When we reached the accident spot, Baba and Mehera were lying on the ground, but Mani and Meheru were still in the back of the car, and Elizabeth whose ribs and wrists were injured was pinned behind the steering wheel.

There was a lot of blood from Baba's nose. He could not move, but with His right leg He pointed to the left one, and then I saw that it must be fractured because of the uneven surface of the bones. When the ambulance finally came and the men were lifting Baba, we told them to be very gentle because the left leg might be fractured. Sarosh also helped them to lift Baba who was suffering all the time in silence—He made no sound at all.

Prague Hospital

Baba, Mehera and Elizabeth were all taken to the hospital in Prague. It was a very small town and the hospital was very nice, but I didn't know if Dr. Burleson was capable of handling these serious cases. Don and Nilu were not there because Baba had sent them ahead to California. So I went and talked to Dr. Burleson, asking if he could manage, and told him we needed an orthopaedic surgeon for Baba and a neurosurgeon for Mehera. He said he would send for them from Oklahoma City which was only 50 miles away.

In the meantime Dr. Burleson set Baba's leg in plaster and did it very well. He seemed drawn to Baba—he couldn't believe that anyone who was so badly injured did not utter a sound. With the extra cases the hospital was full, so Dr. Burleson vacated his own office for Baba, put a special bed in there and made Him comfortable.

But with His left leg in plaster and His left arm bandaged and strapped because of the fractured shoulder, and being in silence, it was so difficult for Baba to express whether He was in pain or if He was uncomfortable. Baba lay there very quietly, and the doctors were very good and did their best to help and to lessen His pain. When the specialists came they again took X-rays. The technician was a very fine man. He was able to lift Baba alone, and carried Him so lovingly and gently from His room to the X-ray table.

When the neurosurgeon came from Oklahoma he examined Mehera, and although she was unconscious she answered all his questions about her condition, and also when he was examining her to find out how much damage there was to her brain. He was quite surprised that Mehera could answer while unconscious.

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Return To Myrtle Beach

After many days in the hospital we went back to Myrtle Beach to Elizabeth's home, Youpon Dunes. There was a heatwave and Baba was very uncomfortable in the plaster cast in spite of the air conditioner installed in His room. A few days later Don thought that Baba should have a checkup, so he arranged for Him to go to Duke University in Durham, North Carolina, to see a good orthopaedic surgeon. Mehera, Mani, Meheru and I went with Baba and Don to Duke University. Mehera also had certain checkups there, and everything was found quite normal. We returned to Youpon Dunes.

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New York

Later Baba was asked to go New York to give some darshan programmes. Filis Frederick was able to arrange for a nice house in Scarsdale through her friend Mrs. Ferris. Baba was given a bedroom on the ground floor, and Mehera, Mani and all of us stayed in rooms on the first floor. From that house Baba went twice to Ivy Duce's apartment in New York to give darshan. Even with His leg in the plaster cast, He gave darshan there.

Then Don was sent ahead from New York to London. Baba was very uncomfortable in the cast, so He asked me to consult an orthopaedic surgeon in New York. With Ivy Duce's help I consulted one, but he said the cast could not be removed yet because Baba would not be able to put His weight on the leg.

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London and Zurich

Then we all went to London. Don took Baba to Sir Reginald Watson-Jones who was a great orthopaedic surgeon. He removed that cast and put on a U-shaped cast for Baba which was more comfortable. Don and the other mandali were all the time attending to Baba and nursing Him.

Baba saw many lovers in London. Then we went to Hedi Mertens' home in Zurich, Switzerland. Delia, Charmian Duce and Anita Vieillard

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also stayed with us there, and all the men mandali stayed with Max and Gisela Haefliger. Most of the time Baba was in bad health, and Don would attend to Him. We used to visit a hospital there, where Mehera's wound on her forehead was being treated. And Baba would be taken out for drives.

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Mass Darshan, India

From Zurich we went to Geneva and came back to India, reaching Meherazad about the third week in August 1952. It was only three months since the accident, and the fractured leg was not strong enough for Baba to have full weight-bearing on it. He still had to have the U-shaped cast with an elastic bandage.

In spite of this, in November Baba went to Bombay, Hamirpur, Gujarat, Navsari, and later to Andhra, giving mass darshan programmes until late in January 1953. They were not easy journeys because travelling in India is not at all comfortable, yet Baba was in trains or cars for days together, and even distributed prasad to thousands with both hands, although His left shoulder had also been fractured in the accident.

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Satara

In June 1954 we went to stay at Satara and remained there, although from July to August 1956 Baba and the men mandali went again to Europe, London and America, and for the first time to Australia.

1956 Accident, Satara

Baba's second car accident happened at Satara on 2nd December 1956. Baba and Vishnu returned to "Grafton" bungalow in a taxi at about 6 o'clock, and of course we were so shocked to see Baba injured. This time it was the right side—the whole of His right side, His face, shoulder, hip joint. Although we could imagine what terrible agony Baba was going through, there was not a groan or a moan, He did not utter a single sound.

Dr. Nilu died in the accident, but Don was there to help all the time, because he had not gone out with Baba that day. Baba must have specially

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kept him back to be of use. Even Eruch and Pendu were seriously injured, Pendu very seriously, and there were actually very few of the mandali who could help.

The civil surgeon of Satara was a good doctor who respected Baba. Don went to speak to him and he came over. With Don's help he examined Baba's hip joint and said that Baba should be taken to the hospital to put on a plaster cast. The journey there with all this injury was torture for Baba. The roads were bumpy, the ambulance was hopeless and the whole thing was rattling and hurting Baba so much. It was in the middle of the night that the plaster cast was put on, then Baba was brought back in the ambulance to "Grafton" bungalow to His room.

Of course the cast was very, very uncomfortable and Don and I thought that perhaps this was not the right treatment. But it was so difficult—Baba suffered silently, and we felt He must be going through intense pain all the time. So Don went to Poona, consulted a good orthopaedic surgeon and brought him to Baba, but he said that Baba must go to Poona for the treatment.

Thus, after eight days, Baba was taken to Poona to that surgeon's hospital where he took another X-ray and changed the plaster. Baba went through a great deal of pain and discomfort. Later Don consulted an Army doctor, Colonel Chatterjee, who was a well-reputed orthopaedic surgeon. Don was not satisfied with what the local surgeon did for Baba and thought that the cast was somehow not the right treatment. So then, "Silver Oaks" bungalow near Meherjee Karkaria's house in Poona was rented. Colonel Chatterjee came and examined Baba, removed the plaster cast and put Baba's leg in traction which was a tremendous help and a great relief. Don stayed with Baba all the time and Colonel Chatterjee would visit whenever it was necessary.
(Goher's personal account of her life with Baba ends at this point.)

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Darshan Programmes, India, America, Australia 1957-58

In February 1957 Baba returned to Meherazad, and in spite of the severity of His injuries He undertook a number of darshan programmes in various places in India over the next year, culminating in His last visit to America and Australia for the Sahavas of May and June 1958.

Goher

Over the next ten years, when Baba was at Guruprasad in Poona every summer and for the rest of the time at Meherazad, Don and Goher continued to look after Him until He dropped His body on 31st January 1969. I do not have any details of these years in Goher's life.

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An Andhra Story

Here is a heart-warming story told by a Baba lover from Andhra, and later re-told by Goher.

This man had resisted meeting Baba—but then had a wonderful experience with Him. He heard that Baba was coming to visit his home town of Sati [sic], and that people wanted to go to the railway station to see Baba. He said, “What fools they are! Why do they want to go and visit this Meher Baba?” But in spite of that, his curiosity led him there. He thought, “So many thousands are wanting to see Meher Baba, let me just go and see what sort of person He is.”

So he also went to the railway station and stood on the platform, a little apart from the rest of the people who were Baba lovers. The train was scheduled to halt there, but because Baba and the mandali were going on to Eluru they would not be getting down at Sati. It so happened that when the train stopped, Baba's compartment was right opposite where this man was standing, and he could see Baba. The Baba lovers had been told they were not allowed to enter that compartment, but somehow this man managed to get in. He shut the door and stood at the extreme end of the compartment, and Baba was sitting at the other end.

As he stood there, Baba looked at him, and he looked at Baba and saw Him in His full glory. Baba was so beautiful, there was so much light around Him and immediately he was convinced that Baba was God. He was transfixed, looking at Baba, and forgot to get out of the compartment. The train started moving but he wasn't aware of it, just kept standing there looking at Baba.

The train reached the next station, Eluru, where Baba and the mandali were to get down. But because he had no ticket, the man thought he should not get out onto the platform. Instead he got down from the other side of the train, and thought that nobody had noticed him. But as he was walking along past the compartment, he saw Baba's hand come out of the window holding a fruit. And then Baba handed him that fruit. He

Goher

was so surprised that tears came to his eyes. He felt very happy that he knew in time that Baba was God, and that he had not missed this opportunity.

Later when Baba came back to Sati to give darshan, this man also joined in the programme, and requested that Baba should visit his house. In one of the rooms he placed Baba's photo on a big chair, and said, "This will be my centre, I will worship here." He then moved the photo and asked Baba to sit in that big armchair, and performed Arti with his wife and the mandali and other Baba lovers who were there.

When it was over, Baba began to get up from the chair, and the man moved forward attempting to help Him. But the mandali and others there said, "No, no, you should not do that." Baba noticed this, took his hand, and arm in arm with him, stood up. Not only did Baba do that, but then He told the photographer, "Come and take My photo with this man and his wife," and that touched his heart so much. He had felt very hurt when the others told him he must not touch Baba. Baba knew this, and overcame that hurt with His loving action.

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Baba's Compassion

Goher also told of another compassionate side of Baba. This happened on several occasions, she said, and described a typical incident.

After giving mass darshan programmes to thousands and thousands and embracing so many, at the end of the day Baba would be drenched in perspiration, and so tired after the programme was over. When He retired to His room Mehera would remove the drenched sadra and wipe His body with soft towels. Then she would put on a dry sadra, and Baba would just be relaxing when a message would come in from the mandali side: "Baba, there is a lover who has just arrived who said he couldn't make it on time, his train was late, or something had happened to delay him and he could not come, and it is impossible for him to stay here for the next day." And Baba would again go from His room to that hall and give darshan to the person, or perhaps two or three, or however many were left there.

And this would happen at so many darshan programme—one person, or two or three, would be left out for some reason. We would remonstrate and say, "Tell the person to come the next day. Baba has just come in and He is so tired." But no, Baba would not listen to us. He

Goher

would only listen to the love of His lovers.

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A FEW LETTERS FROM GOHER

Over the years I wrote now and again to Goher, and she wrote also, occasionally finding time to send some Meherazad news.

Jai Meher Baba
Dearest Judith,

Meherazad, 8th July '83

A happy Silence day to you. This letter is long due, pray excuse me. These three months have been so busy for us specially with Eruch's cataract surgery. It will be exactly two months now. You know how horrible the hospitals in 'Nagar are. We have to take everything from linen to drinking water glasses etc. Then M'zad after eight days, but then one is exposed to the elements all the time, extreme heat, glare, dust and dryness. Eruch had to be confined to a dark cool room during day till sunset. Now of course the weather has cooled but no sign of rain, strong winds drive away the clouds. The situation looks very bleak. Thank you most lovingly for sending all my requests—everything was right and I have been using it all for the general household.

Hope this finds you well. Love to you, dear Diana Bill. . . .

My Baba-filled hugs to you. Lovingly yours, Goher

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Nearly every year Goher used to send me a little note with greetings for Christmas as the celebration of Baba's Jesus Birthday. This one, sent in December 1987, is typical.

Dearest Judith,

Xmas time is the right time to let you know how much you are remembered the whole year thru. With warmest thoughts and a huge Baba hug to you at this time of celebration of beloved Meher Baba's advent as the Christ Child.

Much love from Goher

Goher

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Meherazad
23 September 1993

Jai Baba dearest Judith,

We are all so happy to hear of the wonderful visit you had with Meheru while she was in Australia. News has come from all over the world about her talks and how they bring Beloved Baba and dearest Mehera so close to all who hear them. I know how hard it has been for you dear not to be able visit with our family at Meherazad, so I can imagine how happy you must have felt having Meheru with you there.

Mani is enclosing a card for you with her love wishes to you. And this letter comes filled to the brim with love from all your family here. I hope that you continue to keep well and stay happy in Beloved Baba's dear love.

With a huge hug from Goher

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From June to September 1994 I had a number of weeks in hospital, but this letter gave me such help and encouragement.

Jai Meher Baba
Dearest Judith,

Meherazad, 27th Sept '94

We were all very disturbed to hear about your hospitalization, but now are happy to know that you are home again with someone to take care of you. You are so much in our thoughts and prayers and we know beloved Baba has His sweet nazar on His dear Judith. He is holding your hand and makes your pain bearable. You know dear Mehera loved you and her love for you will sustain you during these difficult times. Of course we all miss not having you with us at Meherazad, but know that we love you and send you Babaful hugs and kisses.

With a cheery Jai Baba, Goher

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Goher

In December 1994 Goher wrote again, and I was very touched at this as her handwriting showed the increased pain and difficulty she was now experiencing because of the severe osteoarthritis in her shoulders.

Jai Meher Baba

Dearest Judith,

We were so happy to know through your letter that the pain is less and you are able to look after yourself. And now you are working on the computer word processor and writing all your time spent with beloved Baba and the mandali. I am glad there is someone during the day to help you, such a wonderful facility. You must still be very careful with yourself—not lifting weights etc. Once the pain is less we forget and keep on doing, so take care dear one. My arms are the same, hundreds of treatments I have taken, ultrasound, laser, injections, different pills—well, I am trying anything that is suggested. Even writing has become difficult. Our season here is very busy. Cecily will give you all the news from here. There is water scarcity.

Well, dear Judith I pray you have a joyous Christmas and a happy New Year with good health and cheer.

Much love and a gentle embrace from Goher

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Meherazad

21 September 1995

My dearest Judith,

We were delighted to receive your letters and hear the news of how much better you are doing. Truly it is Baba's miracle, and the beauty is that in the midst of your difficulties you have surrounded yourself with memories and stories and thoughts of Him and His dear ones. I feel happy picturing you at the computer reliving all the wonderful times you have had with your Beloved. It is His Grace that heals the body and the heart and you so lovingly share this through your writings which have and will touch the hearts of those who read them. . . .

My shoulders are doing much better. The surgeries are a success and my pain is only a fraction of what it used to be. . . .

I have shared your letters with everyone here and all send their love and Jai Baba to you dear Judith. We think of you often and always with

Goher

much love in Him.

With a warm embrace in Beloved Baba's Love to you, Goher.

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Gentle Memories

Goher was always so loving, thoughtful and generous. She too, radiated Beloved Baba's love, and in such a gentle, sweet way. I remember being very touched at different times during my visits, or when saying goodbye as I was leaving for home—she would embrace me, and almost surreptitiously reach down into the depth of her “doctor's pocket.” Then from her closed hand she would quietly slip into mine a lovely little picture of Baba or perhaps a necklet, murmuring, “This is for you,” Needless to say I treasure these gifts.

Over the years I took some nice photographs of Goher—at Meherazad standing beside her bicycle in the garden, with Katie near the Dispensary, and at Meherabad with the other mandali during Mehera's birthday celebration, and walking to the Samadhi on Baba's Birthday.

I very much enjoy looking at these remembering so many happy times with her, the warm welcome she always gave, and remembering, above all, her lifetime of devoted service to Beloved Baba, and the depth and strength and beauty of her love for Him.

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MEHERU

Meheru, the daughter of Freni and Rustom Irani, is Mehera's niece (Freni was Mehera's only sister). She is the youngest of the women mandali, and I first met her on the eve of the East-West Gathering at Guruprasad, Poona, in Beloved Baba's presence. I remember Meheru that evening as a rather quiet, slender, attractive young woman with dark wavy hair. Like each of the others, her friendly smile and warm embrace formed for me an immediate personal link in Baba's love which continued to strengthen throughout the succeeding years.

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At Meherazad, Meheru was always somewhere near Mehera, or helping her in looking after Baba's bedroom and washing His clothes, or occupied with other duties in the main house, so she did not give talks in Mandali Hall. She would greet us on Mehera's porch, talking with different ones and sometimes telling a story or two while waiting for Mehera to come out before lunch.

Often Mehera's stories would run on, and neither she nor any of us would be aware of the time—until Meheru stood up, saying in a lilting voice, "Now it's lunch-time!" Even so, when a story at times continued and we were loath to move, Meheru had to remind us again. Then, almost with a sigh, we said goodbye to Mehera and Meheru, and walked away through the garden to Mandali Hall verandah to enjoy our lunch of appetizing snacks prepared that morning in the Pilgrim Centre kitchen and brought with us in big containers in the bus. Mehera and the women mandali, sometimes with an invited guest, always had their lunch in Baba's dining room.

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During the 1980s I used to help Meheru at various times with some sewing. She would have items ready for me to machine or finish by hand, and often commented that my knowledge of sewing was very useful because she did not have to take time to explain what to do. Occasionally there was something to make or alter for herself, but usually she wanted bedspreads, canopies or pillow covers made for Baba's bedroom. These were changed weekly, so a good supply was always needed.

Meheru

I remember one day being able to take a pink canopy for Baba's bed into Mandali Hall to hand-sew the hems as I listened to Eruch talking. On such occasions, Meheru would always carefully fold the item and wrap it in a cloth to keep it clean and free from any unnecessary contact. Mehera, Meheru and the others were always most particular about the handling of anything for Baba, and it was good to be shown the way to continue doing as they did. I always enjoyed so much having the opportunity to help Meheru with any sewing she needed, apart from the very special delight of making something for Baba.

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One day in September 1987 after sitting a while in Mandali Hall listening to Bal Natu, I went across to Baba's room. Coming back past the porch I saw Meheru sitting there alone writing a letter. She called me and I went to greet her, apologizing for not sewing that morning because of the heat and my sticky hands. She did not mind at all.

Meherazad Buildings

I commented on some repair work being done on the women's cottage, and Meheru told me that this was the first building there, constructed in the early 1920s for the engineers in charge of nearby Pimpalgaon reservoir. It had only two rooms then, with a very small verandah in front. In 1944 when Baba came to stay in Meherazad (then known as Pimpalgaon) with a few of the women mandali and Kaka and one or two of the other men mandali, Baba stayed in one of these two rooms and the other was kept as a sitting room. In 1948 when Meherazad was expanded on a more permanent basis the cottage verandah was widened and two small rooms added, one on each end of it.

Where the main house is now, Meheru continued, there were originally some foundations. A very small place was built first with only two rooms and a kind of pantry where the women cooked. Then Valu Pawar, who stayed there with Mehera, Mani, Meheru and Margaret, built a kitchen behind this, using another old foundation and doing a lot of the work herself with the help of two village women. She discovered along the boundary all the stones which were required, working like a mason. Meheru said she was really good at working with stone and mud.

During brief periods spent at Meherazad over the next four years,
Meheru

Mehera, Mani, Meheru, Valu and later Naja and Margaret Craske used these two buildings, and Baba stayed once in the cottage and later in a room on the men mandali's side. The rest of the time the women were away travelling in India with Baba and some of His men mandali. When Baba decided that the present main house should be built, He asked Mehera to design the layout. The small building was pulled down, the new one in its place was finished in 1948, and that was when the original cottage was expanded.

There is also a small old cottage still standing in the garden at the back which was used by Baba for seclusion work in January 1944, because at that time He wanted a place which was quieter and more secluded than Meherabad. Vishnu remembered hearing about this property being auctioned. Baba liked it and stayed there for His work for a time, then brought Mehera and Mani. They liked it very much too because of its serene location and the coolness of well-established trees. Later Baba named it Meherazad, which means "Meher free." Meherabad means "Meher flourishing."

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Mehera's Garden

Mehera herself with Valu and other women mandali established the garden. It was very hard work, especially at the beginning because of their frequent absences while travelling with Baba during the first years, plus the poor soil, and the continuing scarcity of water. Now it is very beautiful with lots of shrubs and plenty of flowers which create wonderful areas of colour as well as providing fresh blooms each day for garlanding photos and decorating Baba's Room, Mandali Hall and the Blue Bus.

Badminton

The trees are tall and shady, and during the '80s often in the late afternoon Meheru and a few enthusiasts played badminton with the net stretched across a gravelled area beside the women's cottage. I used to enjoy sitting on the porch watching them, especially Meheru who is a fast and accurate player. She told us that in Mahabaleshwar before the New Life, when circumstances permitted, a badminton court was chalked out, and Baba would play a game or two with the women and tell them to continue playing while He went to the men mandali's side.

Meheru

1989

I enjoyed Meheru's company many times during February 1989 when she was on the porch with Mehera, or when she was talking there with a group late morning or afternoon while all were waiting for Mehera to come out. Meheru often sat in her big chair just outside the main door of the house, but when there was a crowd, she would move elsewhere thus allowing someone to sit nearer to Mehera.

Meheru's Letter, May 1989

Soon after Baba called His beloved Mehera to Himself, Meheru wrote this beautiful letter. A copy was sent to Baba lovers around the world, along with the items returned to each one. It also reflects the love which all the women mandali always had for Mehera, a love which continues to manifest in talking about her, in keeping alive the memory of her beauty, humour and gentleness, and in the care they take in looking after all the Baba things she had cherished through her life.

Meherazad, May 1989

Avatar Meher Baba Ki Jai

To Baba's dear ones who are equally dear to His beloved Mehera.

Beloved Baba has given us such an emotionally mixed time—and every moment, thankfully, busy. In dear Mehera's passing we are happy for her, knowing that she has returned to the loving arms of her Beloved where she had so longed to go these many years. Yet so beautifully she had fulfilled the role her Beloved had asked of her. But we, we miss her every moment of the day.

Going through dear Mehera's effects has been so heart-rending. Every article or photo of Baba's, the way she cared for it, reveals so poignantly her deep love for Baba.

The many lines she wrote for herself, of her innermost thoughts and feelings, of her love for her Beloved bring tears to our eyes.

Much of the mail that would come to Mehera from our ever growing Baba family, she would keep and for lack of time often read at night. We now feel it will be doubly precious to each of you who have written to her

Meheru

and brought warmth to her heart, to have some of these letters again as a loving gift from Mehera.

Much, much love to you dear ones from all your Meherazad family—
ever in Beloved Baba's all sustaining love,

Meheru

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When my small packet arrived I was very touched to see the few little notes and cards I had sent Mehera over the years. But what moved me most was to find among them the photo of myself which had been taken at Meher House in Sydney early in 1962 and sent to Mani by Bill, together with some photos of his family. Holding it, I recalled Mani at the East-West Gathering telling me she knew from this photo that I loved Baba and that was why Mehera took the picture and kept it. So it was really overwhelming to learn that it was still among her things after all those years.

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Meheru At Avatar's Abode, 1993

It was wonderful having Meheru with us at Avatar's Abode as our special guest for one week in June 1993. We all reveled in her company on a number of occasions, apart from the four-day celebration commemorating Beloved Baba's visit here in June 1958. She told us many beautiful stories about Baba and her life with Him, a number of which are re-told here, together with some I heard in India, as well as others from various sources where she herself gave details.

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Her Childhood Years

Meheru's parents were close followers of Baba from the early 1920s and loved Him very deeply. So she and her brothers and sister grew up in that atmosphere, and learned from their parents' example of always loving Baba, the importance of obeying His orders, always accepting Him as God, and of course delighting in being with Him all the time whenever He

Meheru

visited their home.

Nasik

Freni and Rustom had been married in 1923, and the family lived in Ahmednagar, then moved with Baba to Nasik where Rustom was engaged in a motor vehicle business. In 1929 Mehera and the women mandali came to stay in Nasik [and Baba would visit from time to time]. Under Baba's order, Daulatmai, (Freni and Mehera's mother), observed silence. He told her to live with the family to help look after the children. So Meheru, being a baby then, has no memory of hearing her grandmother speak, but she could understand the simple sign language she used.

Meheru was placed in a boarding school at four years old. Mani, who was still schooling, also came there as a boarder. Her presence was so reassuring to Meheru, who felt very lonely and could not speak English at the time.

On a number of occasions at home, and in her mother's presence, Baba asked Meheru, "Whom do you love best in the world?" "You, Baba." "How much do you love me? Just a little?" "No, Baba, a lot." Her mother would say nothing at all, but she was happy about this. Baba asked Meheru what she would do when she grew up, and she immediately answered, "I will live with the women mandali and do your work, Baba." Again her mother quietly accepted it. These answers were so pleasing to Baba and He would embrace Meheru warmly.

When the Westerners came to stay in the ashram at Nasik in late 1936 and the first half of 1937, Meheru, her sister Nergis, and their brothers were not allowed to go into those quarters. Meheru, Nergis and their brother Falu at Baba's orders were now day scholars in their school. The family's cottage was part of the Retreat, so on Saturdays and Sundays when the children were at home, Freni had to plan their occupations carefully to make sure of keeping them very quiet during those parts of the day when the Westerners, under Baba's directive, were meditating for an hour every day.

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Meheru's family of course attended Baba's 1937 Birthday celebration in Nasik, and in 1938 Meheru and Nergis came to Meherabad with their mother Freni for Baba's Birthday celebrations there.

Meheru

Panchgani Holidays

In the summer of 1938 Baba went to Dilkusha in Panchgani with all the Western and Eastern women mandali, and Meheru and her sister were allowed to spend their first holiday with them. At that time Baba would celebrate the birthdays of the different women of the ashram. There would be the traditional special sweetmeat of rava at breakfast, and everyone would give a little gift they had made. These were collected together, Baba would hold up each packet asking who had given it, and then hand it to the one whose birthday it was.

Plays and Skits At Meherabad

Mani would often write plays and skits—always amusing for Baba’s entertainment. Meheru remembered seeing one performance in Meherabad—the women were dressed and acted as playing cards. Rano drew the designs and painted the cards for their costumes, and Margaret Craske choreographed their movements. All that they created for Baba was done with love and care, and was really beautiful, Meheru said. Their reward was to see how much Baba enjoyed these efforts.

One year Mehera’s birthday and Christmas were celebrated together and everyone attended in fancy dress. When the screen was pulled away, there in front of Baba and the audience was a beautiful shining Christmas tree standing up in a large pot—until it came to life and Mehera (dressed as the tree) stepped right out of the pot. Baba was so pleased and happy—it was so realistic.

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Meheru Joins Baba Permanently

Towards the end of 1942 when Meheru was about 15 years old, her Uncle Adi (her father’s brother, Adi Snr) came to take her and her sister home from school for the holidays. Meheru knew that Adi was going on to Lonavla to be with Baba. She didn’t want to go home to Nasik, so she insisted that they both go with Adi there and then in the train, without waiting to pack anything. They had to change trains at another station. It was wartime, travelling was very difficult, and the second train was so overcrowded that Adi couldn’t find a seat anywhere, but Meheru managed to get two places in the ladies compartment and pulled Adi in. When others complained she told them he was her uncle so she was giving Meheru

her seat to him and she climbed up into the luggage rack!

On reaching Lonavla she told Baba she didn't need any more schooling, she just wanted to live with the women mandali and be with Him. He allowed her to do so, and that is how she came to stay with Baba permanently.

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An Elephant Ride In Poona

During one of their stays at Guruprasad in Poona, Baba sent Mehera, Goher and Meheru to Peshwa Park, and also Katie who had come from Bombay for the weekend. Mani was not feeling well at the time and did not go. Seeing Sumitra the elephant whom they fed, Mehera said it would be fun to ride on her. So they did. Goher did not attempt to mount, but Katie on Sumitra's back kept on imagining that this or that could happen and that they should get off. When they approached a pond, for example, Katie was sure the elephant would run amuck right into the water and they would all get wet. But Mehera and Meheru convinced her they were safe, so they enjoyed the ride in spite of Katie and teased her about it.

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Horses On Meherabad Hill

In June 1943 Baba had three horses kept in a stable in the women's compound on Meherabad Hill. They were cared for by Irene Billo, the young woman from Switzerland who loved horses. She had helped with the cooking when Baba and a large group of Eastern and Western disciples were in Cannes, France in 1937, and in 1938 came with Countess Nadine Tolstoy to be with Baba and the women mandali at Meherabad. She stayed with them through the war years, travelling on the Blue Bus tours to many other places, and eventually returned to Switzerland in 1946 after the war.

Baba Tells Meheru To Run Beside the Horses!

During the time of this story, Irene used to groom and feed the horses, looking after them well. Mehera and Mani rode on the hillside in the morning, and Baba told Meheru she was to keep watch over them both by running along beside them. She didn't stop to think whether she

Meheru

could or could not do this but just said, “Yes, Baba.” So she went on running, although naturally she couldn’t keep pace with them.

Before long, Mani’s horse decided to go towards the village where it had come from, but Mehera continued to ride on the hill, so Meheru, after running a short way with Mani, chose to stay alongside Mehera as best she could. Later when Baba came to hear of Mani’s horse going village-wards, He asked why Meheru was not with Mani. She replied she had turned towards Mehera. “Were you tired?” He asked. “No,” said Meheru, forgetting how tired and breathless she had been and not realizing the impossibility of the task of keeping up with not only one horse but two! She did not realise that Baba was testing her obedience, and teaching her that His orders should be strictly carried out.

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Meheru And Katie Ride A Skittish Mare

Then Baba told Meheru and Katie to ride another horse. Meheru was to ride for five minutes and Katie for five minutes. The mare had been mild when she arrived, but because of staying in the stable and eating well she had become temperamental, prancing and bucking. Katie was called from the kitchen and was really nervous, but Baba had told her to ride and so she did for her five minutes, and Meheru had her turn also. They never went forward, but only round in circles, managing to keep on their mount who was not wanting either of them there and showing it very markedly by rearing this way and that! Apart from immediate obedience to His orders, Baba was also teaching them to get over their fear of riding, as well as showing them that while others might have and enjoy certain things, it didn’t mean that they themselves should expect to do so.

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Srinagar—“You are not to buy anything!”

Baba also made Meheru aware of this point about a year later when He took Mehera, Mani, herself and Rano to Srinagar, Kashmir. They went to an exhibition of Kashmiri arts and crafts—beautiful woolen shawls, jewellery, wood carving, and other items. Baba would tell Mehera to buy whatever she wanted, but she would only think of what would be nice for

Meheru

Baba, or useful to carry His things, or take back to the others at Meherabad. So Mehera would choose a warm shawl for Baba, frames for Baba's photos, or a carved box, warm sweaters for the others, a small handbag so that she could carry things Baba might need on the journey.

Meheru would get excited and point out things, saying, "Mehera, what about this?" And then Baba would turn to her and say, "You are not to buy anything!" She was sensitive and would feel hurt, but nodded. Baba again said to Mehera, "Take what you want. Isn't there anything you like here, something you need yourself?" When Meheru began pointing out more things, Baba would tell her, "Remember, you are not to buy *anything*!"

She could not help feeling hurt at His attitude. Being very young she did not realise it was really a form of discipline—Baba wanted to bring home to her that even if other people were receiving things, it didn't mean she should want them also. He was not only testing her, but showing her how much He loved Mehera.

Meheru commented that in big things we know what Baba wants us to do—but it is in small things, such as this situation, that obedience is difficult.

However, there is a little more to this story. Meheru had noticed a pair of earrings which she liked very much but did not ask for them. Mehera saw her looking at them and told her to buy them. "But Baba's order is not to get anything." Even so, Mehera again said to get them, so she did. Immediately Baba turned and asked why Meheru had the earrings, and when she told Him that Mehera had insisted, Baba then said it was all right, she could keep them.

Finally Mehera did buy a pair of shoes, and Baba was very pleased that at last she took something for herself, just as He had wanted her to do.

Later on, when Mehera was distributing gifts to all the others of the ashram on their return, Khorshed asked Meheru what she had bought and was surprised at the answer: "These earrings." But Meheru realised that she had been with Baba during that lovely time in Kashmir, and it didn't matter that she didn't have any of these gifts.

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Obedying Baba

Still on the theme of obedience, Meheru related another instance.
Meheru

Baba was in the East Room on Meherabad Hill at the end of June 1943 and called everyone. He began by praising them, saying how obedient they were. So they knew they were in for something which would be difficult for them to do. It was when He told them they were hopeless that they felt things were normal!

Baba asked if each one was willing to obey Him 100%, and said that those who were willing to do whatever He wanted would be coming with Him wherever He went. Naturally they all promised to obey.

Lahore, July 1943

Then He announced that they were all about to go to Lahore, and there would be a bungalow for the men mandali, and two bungalows for the women. Half of them would be staying with Him in one house, but those in the other house must not even try to see Him from their compound at any time. Those with Him could visit the others once a week. The second household could visit those in His bungalow once a week. Often He was away so they were not always able to see Baba when they visited. However, if Baba was in the house at the time, then the visitors would have an opportunity to see Him and be with Him for a short while. When in their bungalow they were not so much as to cast a glance towards His bungalow. He knew they would feel hurt by such restrictions, but those were His orders, and it was their obedience that He appreciated.

They stayed in Lahore for five months. With Baba were Mehera, Mani, Meheru, Valu, Kitty, Margaret, Rano and Naja later on. In the second bungalow were Katie, Irene Billo, Mansari, Kharmenmasi, Pilamai and her daughter Silla, Soonamasi, Khorshed, and Naja and Tara [a servant] for a time.

It was mid-summer and extremely hot even according to Indian standards. The temperature would regularly soar to 120 degrees. When walking to the men mandali's house, Baba would have a wet napkin on His head plus an umbrella. Rano would accompany Him there, and one of the men would come back with Him, making the round twice daily. Baba was also frequently away on mast trips with the men mandali in that extreme heat.

Swimming Lessons

Baba arranged for Mehera, Mani, Margaret and Kitty to go for short periods over some days to a swimming pool at a girls' school. Here,
Meheru

Margaret and Kitty continued teaching the other two, and they both mastered all the swimming strokes.

There was also an Olympic-size swimming pool in the town and later Baba allowed the women from both houses to go there together by bus a number of times. Margaret, Kitty and Rano taught them some swimming strokes.

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100% Obedience

Meheru gave another story of obeying Baba. He asked her: “Are you prepared to obey Me 100%?” “Yes, Baba.” “Are you quite sure?” “Yes.” Then He said, “Even if I tell you to walk naked through the streets? Are you prepared to obey Me?” She told us that she said to herself, “Just don’t start thinking about it, say Yes.” And she did. “All right,” He told her, “start taking off your clothes.” Without letting herself think about it she began to pull off her dress. Baba clapped and said, “That’s enough.” He was happy she had been prepared to obey Him, and embraced her warmly.

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Bringing Out Weaknesses

Baba brings out our weaknesses, Meheru commented, wanting us to face them and overcome them. She said that when she was young she was very shy. She didn’t mind climbing trees or climbing hills, doing anything dangerous, but to stand in front of anyone and sing—well, that was a different matter, because she knew she couldn’t carry a tune and the others would laugh at her. Baba would on occasion call her and tell her to sing. Once or twice she couldn’t, but gradually managed to overcome that shyness and did so, whether she sang well or not.

At The Theatre In Lahore

Then Meheru told of a time when she just couldn’t obey Baba because of her shyness. It was in Lahore in 1943. He took them to see a film about Rama and Sita. The second-bungalow group were seated on the ground floor where they couldn’t see Baba. He sat upstairs with Mehera, Mani, Meheru and the others from their house. They came early to the

Meheru

theatre. Meheru commented that Baba was always most punctual—in fact if He arranged to give darshan to anyone He was always ahead of time, waiting for them.

In the theatre just before the film started a group of women and one elderly man settled into seats about four rows in front of them. The man was wearing a big turban which Meheru saw would block Baba's view of the screen. She pointed this out to Baba and offered to change seats with Him. But instead of doing this He said, "You go and tell that man to change his seat."

To speak to a complete stranger like that was very difficult for Meheru but she went. First she asked, "Do you speak English?" The man looked at her blankly so the women didn't respond. Then plucking up her courage, in broken Hindi she asked the women, "Can the gentleman change his seat because we in the back can't see?" She didn't like asking because he was an elderly man, the head of the family, and also she didn't know enough Hindi to speak really politely. Anyway, he did move, but to a seat which then blocked Mehera's view. Meheru offered to change seats with her, but Baba said, "You go again and tell him to change his seat."

She just didn't have the courage to go a second time, and felt unhappy throughout the film, not enjoying it at all, because she knew that Baba was displeased with her. She now realised Baba wanted her to overcome her shyness, so He gave her these orders on purpose, but she could not obey Him. Something which was easy for others was difficult for her, and He was telling her to face this difficulty, but on this occasion she could not do so. Baba was also showing her that it is not easy to give Him the 100% obedience He wants of us.

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Raipur

In 1944 Baba had been staying for about a month at Raipur in a large bungalow arranged by one of His close disciples Jal Kerawalla. With Baba were Mehera, Mani, Meheru and Goher who had just passed her MBBS and was certified as a doctor. Goher felt that for her to be useful and confident in herself as a doctor she needed to return to do her six months internship and asked Baba. So she was permitted to go back to Bombay, and Rano was called to join Baba.

Meheru

Chanji Dies In Kashmir

Shortly after this they left for Kashmir. First Baba travelled by car to Badnera for mast work, then by train up to Rawalpindi, now in Pakistan, then on by car to Srinagar. It was a long, tiring journey. Amongst the mandali Chanji was there as usual, responsible for travelling arrangements. Baba had told him to come from Bombay to Raipur a few days earlier.

On the start of the trip Chanji was running a fever and was not at all well, but in spite of this, every now and then on the car journey whenever Baba halted and Chanji was needed for any job, Baba would call him. He was always ready and willing, and managed to carry out the orders. Baba would suggest that he take milk and soda to counteract the heat of the fever, but Chanji did not look after himself on the journey at all, and continued to be on his feet serving Baba.

Then Chanji became really ill with what everyone thought was typhoid fever because his temperature never came down. Baba's care and concern for him was very great. As soon as they reached Srinagar, Chanji was hospitalized. Baba stayed in a hotel nearby and visited him. After a week in the hospital Chanji died of septicemia, to the very end serving his Beloved. He was buried there in Kashmir. He was greatly loved by all and everyone felt his loss. But Baba had given him every opportunity to serve Him to the last.

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The White Mare And Victoria Carriage

Another afternoon on the porch at Meherazad Meheru gave us this little anecdote. When Baba came to Lahore in July 1943 and stayed till the middle of November, it was the hottest time of the year. Being wartime, petrol was scarce and strictly rationed. So for practical use, a carriage called a Victoria and a white mare to draw it were acquired. Both were housed in the garage of the bungalow where Baba stayed with Mehera, Mani and some of the other women mandali.

An elderly groom was kept to drive the carriage and take care of the mare. The garage-stable was on the west side of the house and cool in the morning shade, but in the afternoons the western wall became very hot and Mehera, ever caring for the animal world, would have the mare brought round to the backyard where it was considerably cooler, and Valu would give her a pail of water to drink.

Meheru

Although big in size this mare was very gentle and allowed the women to handle her. One afternoon she got loose from her stable and ran ahead, not allowing Meheru or the others to catch her. The faster they followed the faster she trotted, till she came around on her own to her place in the shady backyard. They realised how astute she was, and how much she liked this change of place.

Inside the Victoria, under the hood which could be drawn back when required, there was space for five people. Outside there was a seat up top in front near the driver. Mani and Mehera always took turns to sit up there as they both enjoyed it. Before they left Lahore the horse and carriage were sold. Meheru remembered that they had become very fond of the mare and felt they were parting from a good friend.

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A Special Swimming Pool At Aurangabad

The same afternoon Meheru told us about two places, different from those already mentioned, where Baba allowed them to swim, and how much they enjoyed it. In early 1944 Baba came to Aurangabad for a few months with Mehera, Mani, Meheru, Margaret and Valu. The women stayed in a small house of unusual design. The backyard had two or three mango trees and a high wall around it, which was ideal for them as it was so private.

The front verandah bordering two front rooms overlooked a small garden with a nice view beyond. From Margaret's room, two steps down led to a back verandah, then a further four or five steps led to the yard and kitchen area. The wall opposite the verandah divided the women's quarters from the small house where Baba and one or two of the men mandali stayed. (The rest of the men were in another house in the neighbourhood.) Through a door from the women's back verandah a narrow, walled, shady path led to Baba's cottage. From another door at the side they could step into an open area showing the walls of an old fort of great size surrounding the whole area, from which there was a view down over the countryside.

Baba took them to see His room, and pointed out an enormous swimming pool near the house that a stream had probably flowed through in a bygone era. Baba asked Mehera and Mani if they would like to swim there as it was so private with the high walls of the fort around. He said a

Meheru

wall could be built to dam the stream pond so that a smaller pond could be created for their use.

Within a month the wall was built and the pond cleared and filled with water brought by tankers. Looking back, Mehera and the others always felt that in spite of the restrictions, Baba had given them so much in so many different ways and they never felt shut in or cooped up. His love and care were so great.

Every afternoon for one hour at the appointed time when no men mandali were there, the women came over to swim and practice their strokes under Margaret's guidance, and they began feeling confident in the water. After some days green algae began to form in the pond. Undaunted they took a sheet with them to use as a filter then scooped up the algae with Baba's basin, and in this novel way they let the clean water run through the sheet in the pond again. And Mehera would tell them to squeeze their costumes when they stepped out so as not to lessen the water level.

Mani Learns To Cook

It was at this house that Mani, under Mehera's guidance and with help from the others, for the first time began cooking for Baba and all the women. The kitchen was very primitive with no facilities at all. It was just a small area with walls on three sides and the open side looking out onto the backyard. There was a small "chula" (earthen stove) of brick and mud, to which Valu added another one on the ground where cooking was done and afterwards the chapatis were made there. Later Baba asked if they would make chapatis for the men mandali also, which they most willingly did. The food would be carried to the back verandah where Baba and they ate it sitting on mats on the floor.

In spite of the primitive conditions Mehera always tried to make things comfortable for Baba in every detail, keeping His drinking water at hand and also the jug of water, soap and washbasin (yes, the same one used in the pond) for Baba's hand-washing before and after His meals.

The Landlord's Family Are Drawn To Baba

The side door where the women would step out on occasion to roam around in the open came under Mehera's scrutiny as she would see a young girl, daughter of the landlord, quite often near the door and felt she was taking an unnatural interest in them. Once she asked the girl what she was doing there but she walked away. Nearby was a cottage where her

Meheru

grandmother lived. Mehera felt that even with the door closed the girl was probably peeking at them through cracks in the panels thus encroaching on their privacy and that the grandmother was behind it all. Mehera blocked the cracks by wedging paper in them, thus thwarting the attempts to snoop.

Just a week before departure, Baba allowed darshan for any and all who wished to come. Naturally the landlord who had been so helpful came with his family, including his mother. They were all so touched, and Baba mentioned how overcome the grandmother was, weeping with emotion.

Much later when Baba celebrated Mehera's birthday in Meherazad, the whole family were invited for the occasion. The grandmother wept at having to leave the Home of the Lord. She apologized for her unseemly inquisitiveness, saying she was so drawn to Baba who was so radiant and so beautiful, that she could not help herself.

Learning To Dive At Hyderabad Pool

In the summer of 1945 Mehera and the women mandali were staying in a bungalow in Hyderabad which had a good pool. It was here that Margaret taught some of them to dive, and Mehera became very good at it. Baba called some of the other women from Meherabad for short visits so that they also could enjoy swimming. Meheru remembered that most of them didn't have proper swimming costumes and wore what they had. She also recalled the interest that Mehera took in teaching Mansari and Kaikobad's daughters how to swim.

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Playing Cricket

Baba gave so much care to all of them. Meheru remembered the time when as a child she was playing cricket with Baba and the men mandali. He hit a sixer, and she saw her brother who was in front of her miss the ball. She was sure she was going to catch it, but it came down so fast that it slipped through her fingers and hit her on the nose which bled a lot. Baba was concerned, asking if she was all right, was she in pain, and made sure she was looked after.

Meheru

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Pendu's "Drum"

Always Baba impressed on them all that obedience was greater than love, that it was very important to obey Him. He was very strict in the early years, and when Meheru made a mistake He would gently pinch her ear saying, "Remember not to do that again."

There was a time when the men mandali were there, including Pendu. From an early age he had a bald head, and Baba would tease him about it, once saying to Meheru, "What do you think it looks like?" She replied, "Baba, it looks like a nice drum." "Well, go ahead and play it!" She wondered how she could do that, and looked at her mother who was standing nearby, but there was no reaction from her. Then she wondered what Pendu would do. Baba said, "I told you to go on and do it!" She stood behind Pendu and played the "drum." No-one said anything to her. She rather liked doing it, so she began again, but Baba immediately said, "You don't do it unless I give you the order."

Thinking about it much later she realised that there are so many points to obedience. In this incident there was Pendu having to accept that humiliation, herself having to carry out the order, and her mother standing by without any reaction, taking no part in it as though she wasn't there. "Baba's actions are too subtle for us," Meheru commented to all of us listening to her.

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An Unusual Order

Often it was a case of "not to reason why." One day Baba gave Meheru an unusual order. "Go and see what everybody is doing. Don't let them know. Then come and report to Me." So she went and looked around to see what was happening. Sometimes when going into a room she would ask, "Where is so and so?" making it seem like a normal question. She had to remember everything to be able to tell Baba. She noticed that her grandmother Gulmai was lying on her bed with her feet in the air.

Naturally when Baba heard this He called for Gulmai and asked how she was. Gulmai later asked Meheru why she had told Baba, and Meheru said, "Baba wanted to know what you were doing, so I had to tell Him!"

Meheru

The New Life

On 16th October 1949 when Baba left Ahmednagar on the New Life He took with Him as His companions sixteen of the men mandali and four women—Mehera, Mani, Meheru and Goher.

A number of stories, anecdotes and comments about that very special part of their lives have been told at different times by the women mandali. Here are three items:

At one time Meheru was asked whether the women ever became irritated with each other during the New Life years. She said that they avoided this sort of thing because it was Baba's order, and they always tried to obey Him 100%. It was the New Life, and they were always loving towards each other then and at other times, but if some mistake happened they would remind each other, and keep cheerful and not be affected by circumstance or the lack of proper food or other comforts.

When they were in Sarnath, Baba took them to the Buddhist temple which was very beautiful inside. There were murals painted in colour on the walls showing scenes from Lord Buddha's life. Baba pointed out some particular scene to Mehera, or explained some of the stories depicted as they walked slowly along looking at them. When they came to the central figure, a very large and beautiful statue of Buddha, Baba told them to bow down to it in turn and then leave. After they moved away Baba stood there for a few moments, face to face with Himself as Buddha.

Towards the end of the New Life wandering, Baba began His Manonash work by staying at a saint's shrine on a hill, a secluded spot outside the city. After a certain period He began His journey from there to Seclusion Hill, Meherazad to continue the Manonash work. Baba left the women companions in Hyderabad, and arranged that they be brought to Meherazad by car on a specific date while He and the men with Him continued on foot. Late in 1951, after reaching Imampur and spending the night in the mosque there, Baba and the men finally walked the last few miles to Meherazad the next morning. Baba called only Mehera and Mani to see Him for a few minutes at the foot of Seclusion Hill, then He walked on up the Hill to continue His seclusion work, staying in the cabin which had been built there some years before.

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Meheru

“No Noise”

Meheru recalled that in the 1960s Baba was often working in seclusion at Meherazad. The work He did in 1967-1968 was a very crucial time and He said it was vitally important that no noise should disturb Him. All the mandali and the servants should do their work as usual, but there must be no noise at all, no clanging of pails and dishes, no sound of talking, nothing. Baba pointed to Meheru to see to this and told her to tell the servants about it, which she did. She also had to warn their neighbour, a family with five children living in the hut nearby. Meheru explained to the mother that by keeping quiet they would be helping Baba with His work. The children were very young so she told them they could play, but not to call out loudly or anything like that.

Once they did make a noise. When Meheru went to the mother later on she explained that she had not been there and the eldest son about eight years old was the cause of it. Meheru asked him why this had happened as he was looking after the younger ones. He replied, “What can I do? I even slapped them and still they made a noise!” After that their mother made sure they played far away at the other end of the field near where she worked.

Baba would hold Meheru responsible for any sound. Even the crows and other birds had to be quietly shooed away for the three hours in the morning when Baba was working intensely. He told them that any disturbance at these times would affect His work. His health was very frail and the strain of the work on Him was great. But when the bell rang to let the mandali know His work was over for the time being, Baba allowed the pet dog Rammu to come in.

Rammu

When he was a small skinny stray puppy Rammu had wandered into Meherazad one day. Meheru found him, and called Mehera who thought he would make a good pet and decided to keep him. With regular food and care his condition rapidly improved and Mehera began teaching him some tricks, begging and jumping over a stick. Baba had named him Rammu from “playful.” He loved Baba and would rush to be with Him in Mandali Hall whenever he was allowed to do so. Baba very much enjoyed holding up tidbits for him to jump for, saying that after His intense work periods, seeing Rammu’s antics provided relaxation and brought Him back to the gross world. So the mandali had a very soft spot for Rammu who

Meheru

helped Baba in His work.

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Baba's Room, Guruprasad

Speaking of the intensity of Baba's work at Meherazad reminded Meheru of times at Guruprasad in Poona. She told us that while there in 1968 Baba always worked in His bedroom, using a special chair placed in the middle of the room facing the bed. None of the women was allowed to touch it or even brush it accidentally with their skirts. Baba was most particular about this, emphasising it so much that when coming into the room, Meheru said, they were first conscious of the chair and then of Baba.

One day when she and Khorshed were placing a table for Him, Khorshed happened to push it and felt such a vibration but kept quiet so that Baba should not be disturbed. Baba started scolding Khorshed, then turned to Meheru and asked if she had touched the chair. Meheru said yes, her ankle had brushed against the edge of the upholstery frill. He looked at her for a second and then said, "All right. I forgive you," and forgave Khorshed also, telling them how important it was that none of them touched the chair.

When Baba came through the house early in the morning for His breakfast Meheru would rush to make it for Him, then while He was having it, she rushed back to tidy the bedroom. Naja had to be there to make sure the servants did not touch the sofa. Baba's bedding had to be taken out so quickly, the room cleaned so quickly, and as well as all that, they could not make a sound because the night-watchman was sleeping nearby and must not be disturbed. It was summertime and the bedding had to be aired, so Meheru used to hang all the sheets outside, then she and Mehera would make the bed later, after Baba's work was finished.

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The Intensity of Baba's Work

After breakfast when Baba went back to His room to work He would go through the men mandali's room and walk across the verandah, Francis on one side and Eruch and Bhau on the other. The women were conscious of what pressure was there, what a weight Baba was carrying. He would go so fresh and come back so tired from the work. They

Meheru

couldn't fathom what He was undertaking, and yet He would say to them, "Today I have worked so well that it cannot be repeated." And sometimes the next day He would say, "I have surpassed that work. I have surpassed even what I did yesterday." And Meheru said this told on Baba's health—it told on Him very much physically.

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Skits For Baba

Sometimes on the porch at Meherazad Meheru would tell us about different skits the women mandali performed in the earlier years to entertain Baba when He came back tired after a long journey, or after He had been working in seclusion or with the masts.

On one occasion Rano and Kitty played the parts of a Parsi couple. Rano imitated Gujarati perfectly although she did not know the language at all, and this would amuse Baba very much. Another time Mani created a puppet show, writing the story and making the hand-puppets herself. The show was presented in the upstairs room (now the Study Hall) on Meherabad Hill. There was a curtain across the archway to conceal Mani while she worked the puppets above it. The women had planned that after this part of the show was over, Mani would bring the puppets to Baba, asking Him to bless them. Therefore they would "come to life"—and this was the cue for Mehera and Goher to come out through the sides of the curtained section where they had been hiding, and give a "live" performance as the puppet characters come to life.

I never cease to be enthralled at the ingenuity and scope of the performances which the women produced so lovingly, with such imagination, and such attention to detail to entertain Beloved Baba. Apart from their obedience and service to Him—which will ever remain a superb and enduring example for us—I feel that their total devotion to Him, always keeping Him the Centre of their lives, always trying their very best to please Him and lighten His burden in whatever way they could—all of this just shines through the little stories of these wonderful and delightful entertainments so joyfully presented for Him. When even brief descriptions make them come alive for us now, how completely captivating and heart-warming they must have been in actual presentation.

Meheru

Sanskaras And The Ego

In answer to a question on one occasion about the amount of thought given at times in the West to sanskaras and the ego, Meheru replied that in the ashram they didn't think about these things, because they knew Baba was looking after all that, and He saw to it that their egos didn't flourish.

Giving To Others

What Baba wanted was that they should think of Him more, love Him more, and by loving and serving others, to know that they were serving Him. He wanted them to act kindly to others, to give to others rather than keep something for themselves.

And Baba Himself provided an example of this—if any sweetmeats or foodstuffs came from outside, they would think of serving it first to Baba, then they could have some, then the servants. But while Baba was eating it, He would ask, “What about the servants?” Will they be having some?” So the mandali found that when they kept a portion aside for the servants before serving Baba, then He would enjoy it more.

Serving Baba

Baba was happy when others were happy, Meheru continued, especially the poorer people. When the boys who lifted His chair at Meherazad came He would ask, “Have you eaten? Were you disturbed at your lunch when you were called?” And then He would ask, “How much have you eaten? Have you had a whole bhakri?” And Baba would pat hardest the one who had eaten most, so there would a competition among them to outdo one another in eating. All the boys would be patted, but once Baba said He would embrace the one who ate most. So they had that nearness to Him. They weren't just paid for their services, they felt that love and closeness of being able to serve Baba. It was something personal because He took an interest in them. Baba was happy that people served Him, and in His happiness they also were happy.

Meheru

Mehera's Grief

When Meheru was with us here at Avatar's Abode she spoke often about Mehera, and how even in the depths of her grief after Baba dropped His physical body on 31st January 1969, Mehera still went on obeying His last order to her. On that morning Baba had told Mani to tell Mehera, "Don't worry. Be courageous. Be brave."

All of them were broken-hearted, and even then Mehera was trying to be brave. She would say to the others, "I am not worrying but how can I stop thinking?" Meheru told us that in their language the word for worry and for thinking is the same.

When Baba's body was lying in state in Meherabad and many Baba lovers had come dazed and grief-stricken, so many women seeing Mehera there would break down and weep, and Mehera would console them. Later she would say to the women mandali how ironic it was that she should be consoling others when she herself was the one most affected and in need of consolation.

Mehera's First "Jai Baba" To Men

When men came wishing to say "Jai Baba!" to Mehera in their respect for her and to convey their awareness of her grief, Meheru told us that Mehera at first wondered whether she should see them, what Baba would want. Then she realised that the answer to this had already been given by Baba.

On 31st January 1968, exactly one year before He dropped His physical body, Baba had asked Mehera to stand beside Him on the porch at Meherazad, and told her to say "Jai Baba!" to the men mandali of Meherazad, Ahmednagar and Meherabad whom He had called specially for this purpose. By this action Baba paved the way for Mehera to speak to men when He was no longer there, and this she continued to do throughout the rest of her life as a part of the role Baba desired of her. As time went on she was able to talk more easily with men on the Meherazad porch, or at Baba gatherings at Meherabad. And in talking to all, men and women, about Baba, Mehera was able gradually to come out of her own sorrow, re-living her life with Him while she told so many wonderful stories about Him.

Meheru

No Man Could Touch Mehera

The rule which always remained in force was that no man could touch Mehera. The women mandali and other women near her at any time were always on the alert to ensure this, protecting her from the possibility that some man might not know of this strict order of Baba's.

Wherever there were large crowds of people such as at Amartithi at Meherabad, several women would form a circle around Mehera when she was walking anywhere so that there was not the slightest chance of any man accidentally coming too close. I remember that one year I was called to be one of these "guardians" walking with others close to Mehera all the way from the Dhuni platform right up to Meherabad Hill, and how awed I felt at this responsibility, yet how privileged to help her in this way.

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Caring For Baba And Baba's Things

In Meherabad and Meherazad after Baba dropped His body Meheru and the others spent much time helping Mehera to look over and take care of Baba's things stored there. Meheru told us that Mehera had a wonderful mind for detail. She was a perfectionist, did everything for Baba with so much care and love, and wanted Meheru and the others to do the same, teaching them to be meticulous.

Meheru gave us a couple of examples: always dust away from Baba's bed; always wash your hands after touching shoes or sandals. This last instruction actually came from Baba Himself. One day after Mehera took off His sandals she placed them at the foot of the bed and turned to do something else. He told her to wash her hands first, and she said in surprise, "But they are your sandals, Baba." He still insisted, so ever since then Mehera reminded everyone who came to His room to wash after touching their shoes, pointing out how dusty and dirty the roads are.

Baba was very clean Himself, Meheru told us, and liked lots of water for His bath, luke-warm but never hot, and more when His hair was washed. His hair was very fine and soft and Mehera would comb it with such care. Meheru washed Baba's clothes. Sometimes when Baba had a head bath there would be three or four sheets, pillow cases, towels and

Meheru

His clothes all to be done at the one time, and Baba was very particular and would ask if they had been seen to.

“I taught you everything”

Although Mehera was her aunt, Meheru said she never felt the age gap and they would talk on the same level. Sometimes if they had a slight argument about something, Mehera would get impatient and say to Meheru, “What did you know when you came? Nothing. I taught you everything.” Meheru would think to herself that she had had a good education, she knew this and that when she came to the ashram. But thinking things over later on, especially after Mehera’s going to Baba, she realised that Mehera had indeed taught her so much about looking after Baba and His things with proper care and love, and how important it was to be careful and gentle in all the work one did for Baba.

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Cleanliness

Baba wanted outward and inner cleanliness from them all. When He was coming over to the house from the men mandali Meheru would rush to wash her hands, and keep her fists clenched so that she touched nothing until He arrived. Then she could handle His things, perhaps take His coat and hang it up, or whatever He wanted her to do. He would sometimes ask her if she had washed her hands.

Inner Cleanliness

Baba specially wanted them to have inner cleanliness—purity of mind and heart, and also in their thoughts and actions in their relationships with one another—never to harbor hatred, anger, ill will. When there were clashes Baba would say to the ones involved to free their hearts from ill feeling, to forgive and be friends again. “It is all over now, embrace with love and be free from ill will.” Baba’s gesture for forgiveness came from His heart. He would say, “Remember, don’t do that again.” There was always a feeling of true cleanliness within when He forgave them.

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Meheru

Baba's Work With The Masts

Recalling the times when Baba returned after mast trips, Meheru said she would be aware of His happiness with the work done. He would be tired and dirty from travelling. He always wanted a good bath first and clean clothes, then He would tell them something about the trip and the masts He had seen. Once one of them gave Him a copy of *The Perfect Master* which he had pulled out of a pile of rubbish, but the book was absolutely clean!

The masts often lived in squalor and filth, but Baba knew their true worth as no-one else could, seeing their inner purity and love for God. Baba had shown a few of them to the women at different places. What was always so striking, Meheru said, was that despite their dirty and disheveled appearance, the masts lived in a world of their own, and their eyes were so impressive, shining with an inner beauty that was unforgettable.

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Mohammed-mast

Meheru's first memory of Mohamed-mast was at Lower Meherabad when she was a child, and over the years she saw him now and again. But it was one day after Baba had dropped His body that she became more aware of Mohammed's perceptiveness. She and Mehera had been to the Samadhi for darshan. After coming down the Hill they walked through Mandali Hall. Mohammed was sitting there seemingly unaware of his surroundings, but as Mehera moved past him, Meheru heard him say distinctly, "Baba's favourite one."

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Cleanliness And Godliness

Meheru smiled at us all, ending her talk on that last evening of the Anniversary programme by repeating her earlier comments that cleanliness is next to Godliness—and emphasising that it is the inner cleanliness of purity and faith which brings us closer to God.

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Meheru

Meheru At My Cottage

This visit of Meheru's to Avatar's Abode was a very special time for Australian Baba-lovers. For myself, having already accepted the fact that I could no longer travel to India, it was wonderful to have her company here. I invited her to come and see my small cottage, and it was a happy moment when she stepped through the front door saying, "Avatar Meher Baba Ki Jai!" She went into each room asking a few questions, and then said how nice it was, finally exclaiming, "It is like a doll's house, Judith!" She also liked my garden, and a lovely photo was taken of the two of us standing there in front of the cottage.

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Baba's Presence At Avatar's Abode

Meheru's love for Baba just radiated from her, and throughout her stay here I took every opportunity to keep near her. One very lovely memory is on Friday, the first day of the Anniversary celebration which begins each year at 11:30 AM with the raising of Baba's Flag on the tall flagpole in Baba Square close to His House, as that was the time of His arrival on 3rd June 1958. Meheru was asked to do this. As usual we all gathered there to call out "Avatar Meher Baba Ki Jai!" three times while the Flag was being raised. It remains there until lowered on the last afternoon, marking the end of the celebration.

On each of the four Anniversary days we also keep silence in this area from 12:00 to 12:15. Soon after raising the Flag, Meheru sat nearby on the wooden seat under the tall old macadamia-nut tree which was growing there when Baba came, and I sat beside her. It was a lovely clear sunny day, the lawn was smooth and green, and the small gardens glowed with their winter flowers. I felt very happy sitting there thinking about Baba, and His Presence seemed specially warm and strong.

When the silence-time was over Meheru told me that she had seen Baba walking towards us on the grass! No-one else saw Him, and I have always felt sure that He was answering Meheru's deep love for Him and welcoming her to His beautiful Place here.

And on Sunday evening she began her talk by saying that when she was with all the children gathered to sing in Baba's Room, she felt that Baba was there, sitting on His bed and smiling at them all.

Meheru

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How beautiful is Beloved Baba's love, how sweet His gift of sending His dear Meheru to Avatar's Abode to share so much of her life spent in His loving care, obeying Him and serving Him with such love, and telling us at the same time many stories about Him and His beloved Mehera.

It was enriching for everyone here, men, women and children, to spend so many happy hours in the company of Meheru, one of Baba's close women mandali.

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RANO

My meeting with Rano at Guruprasad in 1962 on the eve of the East-West Gathering was so brief that it wasn't until the days of the Great Darshan in May 1969 that I had the chance to talk to her. Looking back now I seem to remember that she was perhaps a little reserved with us Australians who were all strangers to her. But I was shy and reserved myself, and so overwhelmed with all I was experiencing during those days that it was probably my fault we didn't have more time together then.

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Rano's Visit To Australia

Anyway, there were wonderful opportunities in May 1970 when Rano came to Australia on her way to America and Europe, and spent several days staying at Meher House, Beacon Hill in Sydney, as well as at Avatar's Abode. I was then living in Manly Vale about three miles away from Meher House, so I made sure of arriving right on time (or even a little early), for all the evenings with Rano.

In the beautiful atmosphere of the Big Room at Meher House, where Baba Himself had first stayed in August 1956 and again visited for one day in June 1958, Rano sat and talked about Him and her life with Him, giving us so many wonderful stories. There were not a great many Baba lovers in Sydney in those days so it was more like a good-sized family gathering, and Rano looked perfectly relaxed sitting there on the lounge. I vividly remember happily sitting on the carpet right in front of her, absolutely enthralled with all she told us.

A few days later, in a letter to Lorna Rouse at Avatar's Abode, I wrote: "We have just had three super evenings at Meher House with Rano there, and I thoroughly enjoyed each one of them. As you will find, she is a good story-teller, and has a wonderful stock of them: it has been a real feast. And apart from being a delight listening to so many and being able to visualize the happenings and 'seeing' Baba in the pictures drawn so vividly in Rano's clear speaking—apart from all this there is so much to think about and learn from the stories. . . ."

Of course I wish very much now that I had had the sense to write down at least some of Rano's stories, but unfortunately I did not do so. However, I feel sure that most of them appear in her wonderful book, *Because of Love*, which also includes detailed descriptions and reproductions of her drawings and paintings.

Rano

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Two Letters

On my return after being at Avatar's Abode for the June Anniversary, I wrote to Rano at Myrtle Beach, and was delighted to receive this reply from her there:

10th July 1970

Dear Judith,

I received your lovely newsy letter on my arrival at the Center on the 8th July.

It was sweet of you to write to me and tell me of all your lovely Anniversary program. I am sure that everything went off very beautifully, knowing what a perfectionist Francis is! Having now been to Avatar's Abode and to Baba's House there, I can picture the whole scene so vividly described by you. How nice to have been there with you at that time. I have such lovely memories of Avatar's Abode and Meher House—and of all the love and care I received from His dear lovers there. I will always treasure the memory of my stay.

I have been having a happy time with Baba lovers as I travelled across the States to New York, and a lovely reunion with my family after I reached New York.

I am at the Center here for a few weeks, then back to New York, and the end of August I will wing my way to England and gradually back *home* to *India*. It will have been a marvelous trip and a great experience for me. In the hustle and bustle of this seemingly very material world it is beautiful to find so much Baba Love and love for Baba. May these youngsters come ever closer to the Beloved in their love for Him.

Much love to you Judith and Baba's dear ones in Sydney and Woombye.

Jai Baba to you all!

Lovingly,

Rano

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We exchanged very few letters, and this is the last one Rano sent me:

Rano

JAI BABA

Ahmednagar, 23-2-1981

Dear Judith,

I had meant to write to you some time ago but you know how it is! So many things interfere—but at last I am getting down to it.

What I wanted you to know is that Bill brought the photo of my drawing and it is beautiful. . . . I am always amazed when I see photos of my drawings and thank Beloved Baba for His loving guidance in helping me to portray Him in all His beauty. . . . It might be that I would have use for that negative, so I am thanking you now for your help in this matter . . . I can't criticize others for being absent-minded for I have become so and it bothers me no end, especially as I had such a good memory for remembering things! Ah me! that is what happens when the years go by!

We are anticipating a very Happy Baba Birthday. The Centre is quite full and the afternoon of the Birthday, Heather and Alan have prepared a play (I believe it is a comedy) for Baba's and our entertainment at Meherazad. In the morning we will be, as usual, at Meherabad. I am sure you too must be having special preparation for a fine Baba programme at Avatar's Abode.

Just another two and a half weeks and peace will reign at Meherazad and Meherabad. It has been a very busy year and we are looking forward to a good three months of rest and relaxation! It is already warm so we anticipate a hot summer.

Wishing you all the best until we meet again. My love to dear Francis and all those joining him in celebrating Beloved Baba's Birthday.

JAI BABA

In His Love

Rano

With Rano At Meherazad, June 1982

One Sunday at Meherazad, afternoon tea was just finished, and all had gone into Mandali Hall to listen to Aloba. I stayed in the garden trying to get a photograph.

Coming back to the verandah, I went to greet Rano who was standing there alone. I asked if she was going inside and when she said "No," I added, "Let's sit then?" And we did so, just the two of us, and were uninterrupted for quite a long while. This was the first time I had spent quietly with her for years, and she just went on from one thing to another, recounting incidents from her early years before meeting Baba.

Rano

Her Work In The Trust Office

It all began with my asking her something about the details we had been sending with the Trust donations, and the work they had to do in the office at that time. Rano said she didn't do much typing nowadays—mainly notes on Mani's behalf, or drafting up Mani's handwritten or scribbled notes for a particular personal letter which one of the others would then type formally, or making typed copies of Mani's own handwritten personal notes to different people. Most of the typing work, she told me, was done by Craig Ruff or Peter Booth, or Heather Nadel on her scheduled time in the office, or by others in the busier periods, helped out by herself now and then as needed.

I said I supposed no-one did shorthand. She replied that of course Mani did, and that she was very fast on the typewriter—Kitty taught her to type. Rano recalled that Kitty in the early days also took shorthand notes. I commented that she must have had good speed to take down Baba's talks. Rano said she also put down some funny things—hard-to-read outlines which I gather had to be puzzled over at times. (I hate to think of anyone trying to read my own shorthand!)

Then I asked Rano how she had learned typing. "Self-taught," she replied. In the early days in the Trust Office they had no staff except a boy who did some typing but who was an atrocious speller because of his lack of English. They couldn't employ anyone as there was no money, so one day Rano asked Mani if she still had a typing instruction book. From that she taught herself, making up her own exercises, eventually being able to type quite well, and also did much work for Francis at Meherazad, as well as at Guruprasad when they were in Poona.

Francis was a task-master, she recalled. He would often bring something to her just before they were due to leave for Guruprasad. Everything would be packed! She would say, "But Francis, all the paper is packed ready to go, can't it wait till we get to Guruprasad?" He would not give in, and so there was nothing for it but to get the paper out and do it, grumbling just the same!

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Early Years—Music And Drawing

Rano laughed at herself as a jack-of-all-trades. She recalled her music, and piano-playing when young. She didn't want to be practicing
Rano

exercises all the time. The friend who taught her theory and chords told her to write her own pieces, and she enjoyed this. One day she came into

the home and heard her friend playing something which she liked—it sounded familiar, but she couldn't place it. When she asked, the answer was "That is one of your pieces, I just added some extra touches!" But in the years with Baba she didn't have time or opportunity for playing, and she couldn't sing.

Then Rano told me how she began her art studies. When she was young her mother wanted her to draw, but she said she couldn't. Nonny put a box on the table and said, "Now don't tell me you can't draw that!" She began to do so just to please Nonny, but she wasn't interested in this type of drawing.

Working With An Interior Designer

She loved colours and had a very good colour sense. A friend was an interior designer and asked Rano to help her. At first the friend would do the design and take Rano with her to choose fabrics, giving her opportunities to help in this. Then she would send Rano to the suppliers to get samples, choosing the colours and patterns. These her friend always liked, and eventually sent her to buy the fabrics.

Rano was nervous about this at first, saying, "What if I buy yards and yards of something and it isn't what you like?" But the answer was that she always liked the samples Rano had chosen before, and she had no qualms about her buying the right things now. So Rano enjoyed doing this, and did some design work too.

Art School

All this took place in New York in the early 1920s. It was this friend who kept wanting her to go to Art School. Finally she agreed to go for a term in 1924 to see if it was worthwhile, that she wouldn't be wasting her time, and to find out if she had an aptitude for it.

So this was the beginning. She worked hard, and it was this grounding which enabled her to do the fine work and figures which later Baba wanted her to do. Then an artist friend told her to start painting boldly. "Where can I do this?" "Haven't you got a wall in the house where you can paint?"

Finally she decided to use the bathroom wall over the tiled area, and painted it like an aquarium, but still doing fine work. She wanted to put a

Rano

beautiful bird in one section, and was working with fine brushstrokes to paint every feather of the plumage accurately and in detail. "Why are you

doing it like that?” her artist friend asked. “Do bold designs, sweeping strokes, make it big!” But she continued to do much detailed work.

And at the Art School she was still doing particular shapes and forms. At the beginning of the third year she told the teacher that she didn’t want to continue with this, although she had been getting credits for her work all along—she wanted to do her own designs. Finally he agreed, although this should not have been done until the fourth year. She worked very hard—and took out all the prizes.

I am glad that Rano gave me these details, because there is only an extremely brief reference in her book to a little of it, and none at all to the rest.

Nasik

Rano continued painting. And so it was that when she came to Nasik she brought a box full of brushes and paints. Baba put her to work, using all that training and talent and colour sense she had. But she worked now under His specific direction, and was able to do the fine detailed work and the figures and forms He wanted in the charts and paintings she produced over the years.

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Two Paintings In The Museum

Rano’s two largest paintings—the full-length portrait of Baba, and the Ten Circles Chart—hang in the Museum on Meherabad Hill.

In her book *Because of Love*, Rano’s descriptions of working on these under Baba’s explicit instructions, as well as the print of her preliminary sketches and information about them and other work, all make fascinating reading.

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Another In The Rahuri Cabin

A third painting is hung in the Rahuri Cabin at Lower Meherabad. This painting of Baba has a very interesting, but probably not widely-

Rano

known history, which was recently given by Mani. After Charlie Morton’s painting of Baba was finally set into the central widow of the Samadhi in

March 1993 there was some correspondence concerning it. This is an extract of the letter Mani wrote to a Baba lover on 22nd November 1993:

“ . . . Did you know that in 1938, when Helen Dahm painted the Murals on the ceiling and walls inside the Samadhi she also painted a portrait of Beloved Baba (on wood board) which was placed in the central window (where Charlie’s painting is now)? This portrait of Him was painted by Helen Dahm as the centerpiece of all the murals, the central jewel in the crown of her creation, the natural focal point for all the adoration being offered by the figures on the surrounding walls.

And did you know that when Helen left India for Switzerland, Baba Himself had this portrait removed, leaving us facing a blank space in the central window, just as it has remained all these years! As the empty space looked very odd, Rano asked Baba if He wanted another painting to be created for the blank space. And I was there when Baba told her, “No, not now—later on.”

And did you know that Baba then gave Helen’s painting to Rano with instructions that she paint another picture of Him over Helen’s? In her total obedience to Baba, Rano did so, and that is the Baba-portrait you see today in Rahuri Cabin, before which Baba performed Arti in the 1950s. The reason you probably have never heard this story is that Rano felt very embarrassed to have painted over another artist’s work, and did not want to let it be known. So you see how natural it was for Rano to be totally involved in the Samadhi window project when we first initiated it with Charlie over twenty years ago”

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Rano In Mandali Hall

Over the years I remember Rano coming to sit in Mandali Hall at Meherazad when Eruch or Mani were talking to us, and very occasionally she would make a brief comment on some point but otherwise did not give talks there, preferring informal chats with just a few pilgrims sitting with her on the verandah.

The exception was the time when Eruch was away in Poona helping

Rano

to look after his brother Meherwan who was very ill in hospital. Rano was asked to come and fill in for him one day in Mandali Hall and I recall that

she sat on the “hot seat,” the big round pouffe under the window next to Eruch’s place on the floor—it was laughingly given that name by pilgrims because Eruch would at times suddenly ask a question of whoever was sitting there, drawing that person into the limelight as it were.

Well, Rano sat down there, looking rather nervous and protesting that she did not know what to talk about, but of course as soon as she managed to get started we were treated to a fund of lovely stories. Like all the mandali, she had a delightful sense of humour, and never hesitated to tell in a lively manner stories against herself, showing how Beloved Baba worked with her, teaching her how to change attitudes and faults.

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Rano’s Room

Another memory I have of Rano is the day she invited me to come and see her bedroom at Meherazad. I do not remember when it was, but probably in the early 1980s during the so-called “quiet” times of September or October, because I have no recollection of other people being near us that day. Her room was at the left-hand end of what was called Mani’s porch—that is, the small verandah area of the women’s cottage which used to be Mani’s office with a small desk and typewriter where she would do all her secretarial work for Baba, and which she continued to use for years afterwards.

So Rano opened the door and took me into a delightful little room, with most attractive cotton curtains and bedspread, the pleasing design of the fabric giving an immediate impression of freshness, light and colour, which also somehow added a feeling of more space than there actually was. Everything in the room was beautifully neat and tidy, and a number of her drawings and paintings were hung on the walls. Some in smaller frames were placed on low cabinets. I immediately loved being in that room, so artistic, so ordered, so bright with gentle colour. And as with every room at Meherazad, its atmosphere was filled with its occupant’s deep love for Baba. I felt happy to spend that short time with Rano in her own special corner which showed me another and very personal glimpse of herself.

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Rano

Rano And Nonny

Rano's mother's given name was Estelle, and Rano's was Madeleine. But Madeleine was too long for signing paintings, she said, and she certainly did not like the shortened version of "Maddy" which some people called her. In the late 1920s when they were still living in New York, her mother was interested in letters and figures, and from these she worked out for them both the new names of Rano and Nonny. So from the time of hearing about Baba in Paris in 1933, and meeting Him for the first time later that year in London, they were always known as Rano and Nonny Gayley.

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Rano Herself

Rano was tall and rather thin, with short grey hair cut in a simple style which suited her, and she wore glasses. She had a great sense of humour and a lovely smile. She dressed almost invariably in slacks and long-sleeved shirt, often adding a jacket and scarf, even in weather which was warm or almost hot. In fact I remember her saying to me on several occasions to go and put something extra on because it made her feel cold to see me in such light clothes!

I realise now, looking back, that I did not spend as much time with Rano as I did with Mehera and the other mandali. Yet there was always an affinity between us, and she was ever warm and loving when we were together. Of the close women mandali living permanently at Meherazad with Baba, she was the only Westerner. She was always there, waiting to greet and embrace everyone on arrival, and I have a happy photograph of the two of us on such an occasion. But the last of these times turned out to be in October 1985. I had to cancel my August 1986 visit due to ill health, and did not see her again.

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Reunited With Her Beloved

Rano died on 5th December 1986. This is the message which went out from Meherazad to Baba lovers all over the world:

"On 5th December dearest Rano Gayley, Beloved Baba's artist/disciple and our much loved American sister-companion for 50

Rano

years, has passed on to re-unite with her Beloved Lord and Master Avatar

Meher Baba.

Like the title of her wonderful book, Because of Love, she served Baba long and faithfully till the end. Meherazad mandali salute Rano and her life of love and service totally dedicated to her Beloved Baba.

Mehera, Mani, Meherazad mandali”

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As Baba had instructed, Rano’s ashes lie beside His Samadhi on Meherabad Hill. Mehera is buried first on Baba’s right, then to the right of her shrine, and encased in four small stone monuments set in a line, are the urns of Naja, Rano, Masi and Kitty. Their names engraved on the simple marble plaques placed over them commemorate their lives of love and service for their Beloved Baba.

NAJA

My lasting memory of Naja, whom I first met at the East-West Gathering, was her sweet nature, her wonderful smile, her loving recognition and warm embrace, and her deep love for Baba which just flowed out as a further embrace. She did not have as good a command of English as the other mandali, but this never seemed to matter—a few words could convey essentials, then her twinkling eyes, expressive face, and the warmth of her love filled in the rest.

In the 1970s I would see her on Mehera's porch, and in Mandali Hall for the entertainment and film programmes. She had some eye problem, and when in Mandali Hall she used to sit with one hand to her eye holding a small black cylinder with fine holes punched in it which somehow helped her to see what was going on. If she didn't happen to have this with her, she would make a little tunnel with her curved fingers to look through, treating it all as a joke.

Cooking was her specialty, and she cooked for her Beloved Baba and the mandali for so many, many years, in so many places, and mostly under very difficult conditions, particularly at Meherabad in the mid-to-late 1920s when there were several hundred people to feed—the children attending Baba's schools and their teachers, itinerant poor, and others. And in the 1970s the amount of time she spent in cooking and supervising the kitchen staff at Meherazad was the reason we pilgrims did not see much of her.

Naja also trained the dear old Arangaon village woman, Shev, to cook for the pilgrims who could stay at Lower Meherabad in the '70s, twelve at a time, for four wonderful days there. I remember the meals were always delicious. And Shev got to know some of us who came regularly, and would always greet us joyfully. When the Pilgrim Centre was opened she was employed in the kitchen there, and every time she saw me throughout the '80s she would still come and give me a hug and a big smile, just as Naja used to do.

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Because I did not have the opportunity to spend much time with Naja, and cannot therefore recount a great deal about her from my personal contacts, it could perhaps be of general interest to give here an outline of how and when she, and some others, were drawn into Beloved Baba's orbit in the very early years.

Naja

Naja's Childhood

Naja and her brother Pendu were Baba's cousins—their mother Piroja (sometimes also called Aunt Pila) was a sister of Baba's mother Shirinmai, and she loved Baba very much. Piroja married Rustom Irani, later always known as Masaji, who also loved Baba dearly and became one of His mandali. The word masa means uncle on the mother's side of the family—and "ji" added to any name is a term of respect.

From earliest childhood both Naja and Pendu also loved Baba very much. Their family at that time lived very close to Pumpkin House, Baba's family home. He would visit them frequently, play games, and tell them wonderful stories from heroic and religious tradition which although already well-known, became more beautiful and meaningful through the manner of His telling and explanations.

Baba loved His aunt, and after 1914 would always tell her where He was going even when He didn't tell His mother, and would also go to see her on His return. Piroja was asthmatic, so she spent a lot of time on her bed, and always longed to see Baba. She wanted Him to take her to visit Upasni Maharaj but was never well enough to make the journey.

Piroja Dies

One night in 1917 when very ill, she sent for Baba who came and gave her some sweet water and put a pinch of Maharaj's Dhuni ash on her forehead. She died that night, and Naja was very sad and upset, but Baba told her to be glad because her mother was now happy and free from pain. He said, "Why do you cry? Am I not here? I will look after you." Naja felt secure then, and knew that she need not worry. He took care of all the arrangements for them.

Soon afterwards Naja and Pendu, who were then 10 and 14 years old, went to live with their mother's other sister and her husband—Aunt Dowla (known as Dowlamasi—masi means aunt on the mother's side) and Uncle Faredoon Irani. Naja stayed with them for some years.

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Pendu At Quetta

In 1919 Pendu met Rusi Jehangir Irani, a restaurant owner from Quetta who had come with his wife and children to Ahmednagar for a family wedding. Rusi offered Pendu a job as a cashier in the restaurant,
Naja

which he accepted, and travelled with them to Quetta where he stayed until

1922. Rusi was the father of Goher and Katie—see the delicate pattern of connecting links which Baba was already forming so that in due time He would contact and draw to Him those who were destined to be His close ones.

Pendu Joins Baba At Manzil-e-Meem

When Naja visited Quetta in 1922 she gave Pendu news of Baba who was living in His hut on Fergusson College Road in Poona. Soon afterwards Pendu heard that Baba had walked with forty of his men disciples from Poona to Bombay, and that they were established there in a large building called Manzil-e-Meem (the House of the Master). Pendu was now 19. He travelled to Bombay, went to see Baba, asked to join him, and was allowed to do so. Thereafter as one of the close mandali he spent his whole life loving and serving Baba. Pendu's given name was Aspandiar, but Baba nicknamed him Pendu, short for Pendulum, because he used to sway back and forth while sitting meditating at Manzil-e-Meem.

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Rustom And Freni's Wedding

On 9th May 1923 Mehera's sister Freni was married in Ahmednagar to Rustom, brother of Adi K. Irani. It was a very large wedding. Among the guests were Naja with Baba's family members from Poona including a little 4-year-old Mani. Rusi with his wife and family including Goher and Katie came from Quetta, and from Bombay came small Khorshed with her father Kaikhushru Masa and mother Soonamasi who was later simply called Masi. All these, as well as many others there, already loved Baba who was also present with some of His men including Pendu. Baba had earlier approved of this marriage, but Rustom told Him he agreed to it only if Baba would come to the wedding, otherwise he would not get married.

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A year later, May 1924, Baba called Mehera, her mother Daulatmai, and His aunt Dowlamasi to be the very first women to stay with Him at

Naja

Meherabad. The two older women cooked for Him during this initial brief

period.

With Baba At Quetta

At the end of that month Baba decided to go again to Quetta. On this second visit He took with Him a number of His men including Pendu, who had suggested going there, and Mehera, Daulatmai and Dowlamasi, Naja, big Khorshed (Baba's brother Jamshed's wife), and Gulmai (mother of Rustom and Adi). They all stayed in a house next to Rusi and his family, so the whole group were together every day with Baba. A month later they left Quetta and went back to Bombay where the women stayed with Baba at Soonamasi's house in Dadar for a short time. Then Baba sent Naja back to her aunt Dowlamasi's home in Poona, and told Mehera and her mother Daulatmai to stay at Khushru Quarters in Ahmednagar, where small Khorshed soon joined them. Baba travelled in India with the men for a few months, including some very brief visits to Meherabad and Bombay.

Naja Is Called To Stay At Meherabad

Towards the end of 1924 Baba stayed again at Meherabad. It was at this time that He called Mehera, Daulatmai, Naja, small Khorshed and big Khorshed to stay there permanently with Him. They lived in the old Post Office building.

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Bharucha Building, Bombay

In December 1924 Baba again took the women and His men mandali to Bombay. They stayed in Bharucha Building in Dadar, not far from Manzil-e-Meem. Baba was of course still speaking at this time, and He would quite often be in a fiery mood if something displeased Him. This happened one day there, and He suddenly told the girls to leave, "At once!" Naja had to go first, to the railway station, and then Mehera, who rushed out of the house not knowing what to do. But soon afterwards Baba followed them, and allowed them to come back. They had instantly obeyed Him, which pleased Him, and that was what mattered.

After a couple of days Baba took the girls to see Victoria Gardens while He had a long walk. Another day He took them to the cinema

Naja

owned by Chanji—Framroze Dadachanji who had recently been drawn to

Baba, and who was destined to become His life-long disciple and secretary.

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Return to Meherabad

In January 1925 Baba returned to Meherabad where He stayed for the next two very busy years. Mehera, Daulatmai, Naja, Khorshed, her mother Soonamasi, and big Khorshed all stayed in the Post Office building again. Dowlamasi came sometimes, and Mani joined them on her school holidays from Poona.

Baba had a bamboo-matting fence built round the Post Office to give them complete privacy. No men could go there except Baba, and Gustadji to get to his storeroom on the verandah. The women did not leave their compound—this was the beginning of their secluded life which continued with increasing restrictions for the next eight years in Lower Meherabad, Toka, and Nasik.

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Baba's Birthday 1925

Life did not always run smoothly. Baba would at times be upset by some happening, or lack of obedience, and then He would make His displeasure very clear. In February 1925 for Baba's Birthday celebration, Masaji and Dowlamasi did the cooking. At one point a stray dog came by and put its nose into a bowl of curd. Dowlamasi quickly sent it off but it looked very funny with the curd all over its mouth. Many men and women were there, and although sitting near Baba they were talking and laughing among themselves. Naja happened to walk by and laughed, and it seemed as though she had laughed at a man present, but actually it was at the dog.

Baba Makes An Example Of Naja

Immediately Baba called her, slapped her so hard she fell down, and spoke harshly to her in front of all there. "Why did you laugh at that person? I don't like all this talking and laughing, men and women together. When I am here, people should not behave like that." Everyone became

Naja

subdued, realizing their discourtesy to Baba.

Later, after all had gone, Baba again called Naja, kissed and embraced her, and said: “Don’t worry, it was not your fault. I had to make an example. You are my cousin, who else could I use? And now am I not embracing you?” Naja had been crying, feeling she was often the one to be reprimanded for something she had not done, but now all was explained, and Baba told her to sit down and press His feet.

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Naja Begins Cooking For Baba

Shortly after this Dowlamasi became ill and had to go away. Masaji and big Khorshed also went. Baba said: “Now who will cook for the mandali? I don’t want women to stay unless they cook for the mandali. If they help and work then they can stay!” Naja was hesitating—she knew there were very strict orders, and sometimes Baba was in such a fiery mood and then would throw everything out, even partly-cooked food. She thought, “If I say No, He will send us away and we don’t want to go.” Mehera and the others were telling her: “Say Yes. We will help you. You know a little cooking because you have done some under your aunt’s supervision, and only plain dal and rice is needed. We will help—but you say Yes!” So she told Baba, “Yes, Baba. I will do it.”

First Fireplace Built At Post Office

And that was when Baba had the small fireplace made in the corner of the verandah platform. So they started to do the cooking. Only Naja was allowed to stay on the platform, and sometimes Daulatmai. Mehera stayed inside in the room, and if Baba wanted to be there to talk only to men, all the women would go inside.

Often when Naja was cooking on the platform, Baba used to come and taste it. He would say, put this in, or, add that much of something else. He would teach her, telling her not to be afraid, that the food would be fine. Baba’s special name for Naja was “Najari” which He used when asking her about the food she was cooking for Him.

Sometimes Baba would come and ask, “Is it ready yet?” Naja would reply, “No, Baba, it’s not quite cooked.” “It doesn’t matter, give me a little bit and some bread.” Gulmai used to bring bread sometimes from Ahmednagar. Baba was always up very early and never ate breakfast. By

Naja

11:00 when all the food was ready He would call the mandali and the

women, all sitting apart, and serve them Himself. They ate only dal and rice, nothing else with it.

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Prasad For the Villagers

Baba wanted prasad to give to the villagers, so He asked for sackfuls of baked rice and channa (a type of chickpea)—the dry grains were baked and Baba gave a handful to each person. Naja recalled that Baba used to sing beautiful Tukaram bhajans which He taught to the villagers also.

Baba Looks After Village Boys

The patil, the head man from Arangaon, told Baba that two very poor and ragged-looking boys who came with the villagers at that time, had no parents or home. Baba said, “I will keep them,” and told Naja, “Cook for two boys more.” But gradually more and more boys came, and Baba told Vishnu to get clothes for them all from the bazaar. Then He bathed and cleaned them, dressed them in the new clothes, told Vishnu to get slates, pens and books and teach them to write.

A School Is Started

Baba wanted to start a school, and Daulatmai gave money for it. At first there were only a few boys, then the numbers went up and up. Naja didn’t know how to cook in large quantities, so at first she would make two lots each of rice and dal. Then Daulatmai showed her. Baba didn’t allow Daulatmai to cook. Instead He gave her other things to do—meditation and repeating God’s Name. Mehera and Khorshed and others helped Naja with the food preparation work.

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Baba Talks On The Post Office Verandah

Among the men mandali there were Masaji, Pendu, Vishnu, Gustadji, Buasaheb. People would also come from Ahmednagar and sit on the Post Office verandah. Sometimes Rustom was there from Ahmednagar. Naja remembered that Baba used to explain spiritual stories so beautifully to

Naja

them all, and often He would say, “I am talking too much, no? I am

talking too much?” He would also sing bhajans and qawwali (devotional and spiritual songs). Naja could hear all this while she was cooking there on the corner of the verandah. Then Baba would come and ask her, ‘Have you done the cooking? When will it beready?’”

One day He said to Naja, “We will make patties,” and asked for potato, then taught her how to make them. Another time He said ,We will make chapatis,” asked for flour, and made one. The girls said “We must keep it separate—we must ask to eat that chapati!”

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Baba Begins His Silence

The major event in 1925 was Baba beginning His Silence on 10th July. He was then staying in the tiny one-room stone building, called the Jhopdi, which had recently been built for Him across the road from the Post Office where the women were living.

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The Gopis

One day in August Baba came to their verandah and called Mehera and the others to come to Him. Naja later described the occasion:

Baba told them, “You are like gopis (the Lord’s women disciples)—like Krishna’s gopis. Christ had Mary Magdalene and Martha.” He turned to Mehera and said, “You are like Mary Magdalene, you are like Radha.” And He told the others, “She is My Radha.”

“You are like Martha”

Then He said to Naja, “You are like Martha, because Mary always used to sit near Christ and talk with Him, and Christ wanted Mary with Him. Martha used to cook for Christ. He called her to Him and told her, “I also love you, but you do different work for Me—you have to cook, and Mary has to sit near Me.”

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Naja

Naja Cooks For Many People

During 1925 Baba opened the Meher Charitable Dispensary and Hospital, and the Hazrat Babajan School for village boys. He also gave darshan to crowds who were coming weekly to see Him, and provided food for poor people. When the school started, Baba called teachers from Poona and Bombay, and it was growing bigger and bigger.

A New Kitchen Is Built

With the continually increasing numbers to cook for, the fireplace on the verandah was too small. In July Baba had a temporary kitchen with bamboo walls and tin roof built within the Post Office compound. It had five fire-places where wood was burned. The women used very large bagulas (cooking pots) to cook the huge amounts of dal and rice or vegetables needed to feed more than 100 people every day, and the meal had to be ready by 10:00 AM.

Naja was the cook with Mehera and the others assisting her. Big Khorshed, Adi's sisters Dolly and Piroja, and Vishnu's mother Kaku also came to help. Daulatmai supervised it all. She showed Naja and the girls how to work out the proportions required for so many people, and how to cook accordingly. All the ingredients were bought in the bazaar by the men mandali and brought to the Post Office.

Cooking Under Difficulties

In the heavy monsoon rains the kitchen leaked badly and became flooded. The women had to build earth round the fireplace, and used a huge bagula for cooking with a big tray on top to keep the water out. They had to put gunny sacks over their heads which soon became soaking wet. At this time their dress on Baba's orders was a cotton sari with long-sleeved blouse and always a kerchief tied over their hair. There was no furniture in the Post Office building—no chairs, or table (and no beds either—they slept on the floor on their bedding rolls). To keep Baba's vessels out of the mud in the kitchen they made a makeshift bench by using a tree branch propped against something else.

They had no running water, only a tub with a tap in it placed in the compound but not close to the kitchen, so for washing rice and other items, they had to run back and forth many times. When the five fires were in use the kitchen would get very, very hot and smoky. Baba was most particular that the rice and dal for the children was always lovingly

Naja

and properly cooked. Baba served the food Himself to the children and

the people who came. Then Baba asked for a vegetable dish and chapatis to be made in the evening for the school children and the mandali.

Thus the women were working very hard all day long behind their bamboo-matting fence, unseen by anyone, but so happy to be there at Meherabad with Baba. He was their world, they wanted nothing else.

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Bhajias

At one time Baba had retired for the night in the Jhopdi, and the women mandali had retired to their quarters. Suddenly Masaji came knocking at their place calling out to Naja. Baba had called the men mandali, telling them that He was hungry and wanted bhajias. These are made from chickpea flour (or channa dal flour as it is called) mixed with water to form a soft batter in which onions, coriander, chopped green chillies, cumin seed powder, and salt are added, then fried in hot oil.

Baba had told the men that whoever made them and brought them to Him first would make Him very happy, so they all dashed in different directions. Masaji, knowing that not only would the ingredients be available at the women's quarters but also their assistance, headed straight to them. Excitedly the women all helped to get everything ready and the primus stove going. Naturally with such a head-start Masaji was able to bring the hot bhajias to Baba in double-quick time, and was rewarded with Baba's appreciation of his efforts.

On another occasion when Baba wanted bhajias quickly, Rustom came to the women. They all rushed to help Naja, one cutting onion, one grinding masala, everyone busy preparing the ingredients.

In the meantime Baba had sent the other men mandali to different family houses close by to ask them for the same thing. The bhajias and food from Naja and the women came to Baba first, followed later by that sent from other families.

Baba said: "Look how they made it fast in a few minutes, and how everybody else was very late. See how they do it—a little example of how to keep ready for the Master. You never know when the Master will want something, or what He will want, and you must be ready and so quick." Baba waited until everybody's food had come. Then He mixed everything together, and gave some to each of the mandali, and ate a little Himself.

Naja

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“Nothing but Baba”

Naja said, “We didn’t know *anything* of the world, we had no thought of what was happening outside. For us there was nothing but Baba, and the work there for Him. Really, that time was just so different. Even though Baba used to get angry with us sometimes, and also with the men mandali, yet they were such wonderful days there. Baba was so beautiful, and He would immediately forgive and forget, He was so kind.”

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Prasad For The Children

On Krishna’s birthday, or Rama’s, Baba wanted the school children to be happy and take part in ceremonies according to their religion. He would get them to do a play as part of their celebration. He would send a message to Naja to make tea and sweet ladoos quickly and have them ready by 4:00 PM. So the girls would rush to mix buttermilk, sugar and gram flour together and make the big baskets-full of these sweet ladoos, which Baba Himself would give to the children. Sometimes He would arrange for jalebis (another special sweetmeat) and things to be brought from outside to give as prasad.

But Naja and the women were not allowed to even taste such treats—unless Baba Himself gave them—on their own nothing could be eaten.

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Changes Of Mood

At one time when Shirinmai was there at Meherabad, Baba got very angry over something and said, “All women go!” Heavy of heart they immediately began to walk away, but soon afterward Baba followed and called them back. When in these moods, sometimes He explained His actions to them, but at other times He just said, “Don’t ask me!”

On a different occasion the reverse happened. Baba said sharply, “I am leaving!” He began walking, then said, “I am going alone, no-one is to come!” They were all scared, the women as well as the men mandali.

Naja

What to do? Mehera told Naja to follow Baba and she did so. Baba turned and saw her, picked up a stone and called out, “If you come near

Me I will throw this stone!” She replied, “It doesn’t matter, I will come!” Then Gustadji and Buasaheb who were on the road a long way back could see them near each other. Baba sat down under a neem tree, still angry. Naja pleaded with Him. She was crying, begging Him to come back. Finally He said, “I will come,” and called the mandali, who had gradually been moving along the road, to walk back with Him,

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Meher Ashram

In May 1927 Baba opened the Meher Ashram boarding school for boys which was located for the first two months in the Family Quarters in Lower Meherabad. Then Baba moved the school up to the rooms in the old water tank on Meherabad Hill. Baba stayed in the make-shift room over the crypt which years later was rebuilt and became His Samadhi. He spent five and a half months there fasting and in seclusion. In March 1928 He divided Meher Ashram, naming one part of it Prem Ashram for the boys who were more spiritually inclined, and to whom He gave special attention.

Toka

The whole ashram, hospital and schools were moved to Toka mid-1928, where Naja continued to cook for a greatly increased number of people, helped as before by the other women disciples whose numbers had now been increased to about 25. They were accommodated in a separate row of rooms in a compound enclosed as before by a tatta (bamboo matting) fence. However, before the end of the year Baba moved everything back to Meherabad. Again He stayed in the crypt room on the Hill, and the boys lived in the water-tank rooms as before.

Schools Disbanded

Baba sent the women mandali to Nasik early in 1929. Over the next few months the schools were disbanded and the boys sent back to their homes. Baba went again to Quetta, and soon afterwards to Srinagar, Kashmir. Then in November 1929 Baba and His men mandali also went to Nasik, and this place was His headquarters for the next two years,

Naja

although He travelled in India, and made His first visits to England in 1931 and 1932.

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Mani Joins The Ashram

Mani was now 14 years old, and in 1932 she came to join Baba and the women mandali permanently. Early in 1933 Baba called His Western women disciples to India for the first time, and took Mehera, Mani, Naja and the other Eastern women to Bombay to meet them.

He sent the Eastern women back to Nasik, but took the Westerners to Kashmir for a short time and then unexpectedly sent them all back to their homes.

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Cloistered Life On Meherabad Hill

At the end of November 1933 Baba instituted a complete change in the lives of His closest women mandali. He sent Mehera, Mani, Naja, Khorshed, her mother Soonamasi, and Valu Pawar to stay in Meherabad in the East Room of the water-tank building within its completely screened compound. Cloistered from the outside world and obeying Baba's very strict rules, they lived there until the Blue Bus tours began in 1938.

Naja continued to cook for them and for Baba, as well as for the Western women disciples whom He brought on visits from the Nasik ashram at regular intervals early in 1937.

Later that year, during their stay of some months with Baba in Cannes, the Swiss girl Irene Billo cooked for all, helped by others. But sometimes Baba would tell Naja to cook a particular Indian dish.

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Naja's Illness

After Baba and the women mandali returned from Cannes in November 1937, Kitty and Rano joined the ashram on Meherabad Hill and Baba told Naja to teach Kitty Indian cooking. During 1938 Naja became

Naja

seriously ill with jaundice, and Mehera then cooked for Baba. Naja was very weak and frail despite varying treatments, and actually remained

unable to work for some years.

The top floor dormitory was added to the water-tank building during the summer of 1938 while Baba and the women stayed first in Panchgani and then in Ahmednagar. When it was completed this new dormitory became the living quarters for many Western women disciples, and the original six Eastern women continued to live in the East Room there, with other Easterners staying in the West Room which is now the museum.

Blue Bus Tours

When the Blue Bus tours were about to begin in December 1938, Naja was still not at all well. Baba said she must come, and she also said Yes, she must come—"If I die on the bus you can just throw me out." So she went on all the Blue Bus tours, and very gradually her health improved to a degree, but she could not work. Katie and Eruch's sister Manu became the cooks on Baba's orders.

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The New Life

At the beginning of the New Life Baba sent Naja as well as Katie to live with Arnavaz and Nariman Dadachanji in Bombay. I have no details of Naja's life then, except that in February 1950 when Baba and the companions were in Dehra Dun, He sent Don (Dr. Donkin) to bring her there, and she cooked for Baba again at that time.

After the New Life, Baba went to Myrtle Beach in April 1952 with Mehera, Mani, Goher and Meheru, but because of the car accident on 24th May they did not return to Meherazad until August. In February 1953 Baba moved to Dehra Dun with most of the men and all the women mandali, then to Mahabaleshwar at the end of the year.

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Satara 1954-56

In June 1954 they moved to Satara where they stayed over the next two years. Throughout this period Naja cooked for Baba and the

Naja

household, and for a time she also had to dress up as some personality or character in costume each evening to entertain Baba, and if she was good

He appreciated it.

Baba with His men mandali were away a lot during this period, including His visits to America and Australia. Then the second car accident happened in Satara in December 1956. Baba and the women mandali left for Poona for His orthopaedic treatment.

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Return To Meherazad

In February 1957 Baba was able to travel and returned with the men and women mandali to Meherazad, which remained His home for the next twelve years. Mehera, Mani, Goher, Meheru, Naja and Rano lived there with Him, and continued to do so after Baba left His physical form on 31st January 1969.

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Naja's Last years

Naja's health was not always good, and in her later years she had heart problems. While Mehera, Mani, Goher and Meheru were away in Poona for their short annual holiday break in April and May, 1982, Naja had a heart attack, but she would not allow those caring for her to tell Mehera because she did not want their much-needed holiday to be interrupted. Naja died on 20th May at Meherazad, after their return.

Mehera, Mani and the Meherazad family sent out this message to Baba lovers round the world:

“Our beloved companion Naja has left us to be eternally with her Lord and Beloved and cousin Avatar Meher Baba whom she adored and served selflessly all her life. We will miss you darling Naja, but cannot grudge you your well-earned happiness of reunion with Beloved Baba. Our salutations to your supreme love and service to Him.”

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Naja

As instructed by Baba, Naja's ashes lie beside His Samadhi on Meherabad Hill. The four small monuments containing the urns for

Naja, Rano, Masi and Kitty are placed in a line beside Mehera's shrine. Their names carved on the marble plaques remind all who go there of the dedication, love and service which each gave totally to her Beloved Lord.

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KATIE

Katie is Dr. Goher's younger sister. She has known Baba since she was about three years old when the family lived in Quetta and Baba first

came to visit there in 1923. She also remembers happy hours with Him when He came again in 1924. I met her about 1974 when she came to Meherazad during her holidays from her job with the Japanese Consulate-General in Bombay. She began working there during the New Life in December 1950, continuing until she retired twenty-seven years later and came to live permanently at Meherazad.

From then on she has been working with Goher in the Meher Free Dispensary on the several days a week when hundreds of villagers come for treatment. After Naja died in 1982 Katie took over cooking for all the mandali and supervising the kitchen staff. So I did not see a great deal of her during many of my visits, except at weekends and short times on Mehera's porch when she was free from one job or the other, also at Amartithi, Baba's Birthday, Mehera's birthday, or when the women mandali came to the Samadhi for Arti.

In the later years Katie sometimes sat in Mandali Hall at the weekends, telling stories and singing beautiful songs unaccompanied. She has a lovely voice, with the gift of conveying the qualities of the song straight to the heart, even when the words are in an unknown language. She would often translate during the song or after it, but the magic was there without the actual meaning.

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At Avatar's Abode

Katie came to Avatar's Abode in June 1994 for our Anniversary celebrating Beloved Baba's visit here in 1958. Again I had been looking forward to spending time here with one of the women mandali, but unfortunately I was in hospital for three weeks and missed the Anniversary celebration. However, just before that happened I enjoyed her company for morning tea at my cottage. She liked the place so much she said she wanted to take it back to Meherazad for herself. I said, "But what will I do, Katie? Where can I live?" She replied, "Oh, you must come too." Obviously Baba had not planned that!

I saw Katie again briefly when she came to visit me in hospital on three occasions, typical of the love and thoughtfulness for others which all the mandali show so often.

Katie

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Although I did not hear Katie relating stories during her visit to Avatar's Abode, later on others told me a few little anecdotes which were new to me. I have woven them into my own notes from India days along with details which she herself gave at other times. All these help to provide a picture of her life with her Beloved Baba.

Baba At Meherabad 1927

Katie and Goher used to come to Ahmednagar in their school holidays to stay with relations there. But some of these relations, especially Sarosh's father, were very much against Baba, so those of the family who wanted to see Baba had to do so quietly, and without talking about it. Katie said that in 1927 they went to Meherabad for Baba's Birthday, and she recalled seeing a lot of tents, as well as some buildings which she thought were the women mandali's quarters. It was dusk. She vividly remembered Baba standing there. He was wearing a white sadra, His hair was open, and she bowed down to Him. The next morning when Sarosh's father asked where they had gone, being very young and excited about it, she told him. "So I got a good spanking from my aunt for blurting it out like that" she said.

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Quetta

In 1931 Baba came to Quetta for the fourth time. He asked the children to bow down to Him and embrace Him before going to school. They looked forward to this, and to being with Baba as often as they could, for they loved Him very much. In the evening Katie would show Baba her homework even asking Him to help her with some of it. He also played games with them—"Baba would be a child with a child"—and it was such fun.

Plums

One day there Katie was told to carry a plate of lovely big plums to Baba. He picked up one and held it near her mouth, but she refused to take it, exclaiming, "No, no, Baba, it is for you!" He was very annoyed.

Katie

Chanji was there and Baba told him to tell her, "Never refuse anything I give, or say or do!" She began to cry, and promised to obey

Baba. Again He picked up a plum and held it near her mouth which she opened wide—but then He put it straight into His own mouth! As she stood there staring at Him, He laughed and told her, “See, this is how you obey Me!”

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When going to England for the second time in 1932, Baba wanted to take Katie with Him, but her mother did not allow it. Nor did she allow it when Baba wanted Katie to be in Nasik, when the Westerners came to the ashram there in December 1936.

Katie Asks To Join Baba

But in 1938 when Katie heard that Baba was going on the Blue Bus tours she told her mother, “How nice, I wish I could join Baba.” “We’ll ask Him,” her mother said. “Would you really like to go?” “Yes if He will take me.” Baba’s comment was: “Well, life with Me is full of difficulties and hardship. Sarosh and Viloo are going to Delhi and Agra. They will travel in comfort, so Katie would be happy with them.” But she wasn’t interested in that, saying she only wanted to be with Baba. He was very happy to hear this, and said “She can join Me In Hyderabad.”

A Short Stay On Meherabad Hill

Not long before this, at Divali time (the Hindu Festival of Lights), Arnavaz and her sister Nargis, Katie and Goher all had holidays together and Baba called them to stay eight days with Him on Meherabad Hill. There were fireworks at night, and in the daytime they played table-tennis with Baba—He would call them in turn, and gave them hard games as He was a very fast and strong player. Katie said that Mehera and Mani played well, but she and the other girls were novices.

Also at that time Baba’s maternity hospital for poor women was there. Nadine Tolstoy was in charge. Mansari and Eruch’s sister Meheru helped with the nursing duties. Dr. Nilu and a woman doctor looked after the patients. Katie remembered how she and the other girls also helped to roll bandages and sew gowns for the women who were very poor villagers. In the evenings Baba would take all the girls to see the new-born babies

Katie

and mothers—He was very interested in their welfare.

Afterwards, when the evening meal was over the women mandali and

the girls would gather round Baba sitting on His gadi on the “tin shed” verandah. Then all sang Arti, He embraced each one and they walked with Him to the compound gate, saying goodnight as He went across to His cabin.

In the mornings when they were having breakfast on the “tin shed” verandah, Baba would come and ask had all slept well. If He saw no food on anyone’s plate He would add a chapati saying, “You must eat more. I don’t like to see you hungry.” Katie said that He always gave them all so much love and affection, so much care.

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Katie Joins Baba At Hyderabad

The Blue Bus left Meherabad on 8th December 1938 and Katie met them at Hyderabad as instructed by Baba. The building was an old palace. Baba was standing there, so Katie went and bowed down to Him as she had always done before. He permitted it, but then said, “On this trip everything is changed. Nobody is to embrace Me or bow down to Me or touch Me, so you must follow this order from now.”

By this time Katie was very tired, so she found a place to open her bedding roll and was just going to lie down when Baba told them all: “We are not staying here, so pack up again, we are moving.” They went in the bus to a huge new palace with marble floors, chandeliers, beautiful staircases and many rooms. Baba took them round and told each one where to sleep. But Katie was so exhausted that the moment she saw a bed in one of the rooms she stretched out without waiting for Baba’s order, and immediately fell sound asleep. Baba let her stay there. In the morning she apologized to Him for not waiting.

While in that palace their food was supplied from outside. Baba asked them all to bring their plates and He served them. Katie’s plate was small, and Baba said: “How can I give you enough food on such a small plate?” He put a big pile of rice on it. She said, “Oh, Baba how can I eat all that?” Then He added two more spoonfuls and told her she had to finish everything. And she became so hungry she didn’t leave one grain.

Katie

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A Special Skit For Baba

In May 1939 they were in Jabalpur in the north of India. Baba called Mani, Rano and Katie, telling them to produce a skit, something funny to make Him laugh—Mani was to be Hitler, Rano was Chamberlain, and Katie was Mussolini. Mani was very clever at writing skits, and they practiced every day on this one which was all in mime, as well as doing a small play in Gujarati. Baba had a good laugh, enjoying both performances very much. When war broke out in September they realised what were the actual roles of these three men. Baba often prepared ahead something that was to take place later.

Katie mentioned that when Baba laughed, He did not make any noise but His cheeks would go pink and His body would shake. Sometimes He'd say: "Stop, stop, it is too much!"

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Cooking For All At Jabalpur

It was also in Jabalpur that Baba gave Katie her main role—to cook for the 35 to 40 people there. Eruch's sister Manu helped her. They had very little equipment. There was a wood stove, but the fuel was cakes of cow dung. The first day it had been raining and everything was wet. Trying to start the fire with camp fuel made lots of smoke, and it kept going out. They had to get close to the stove, blowing on the fuel to get a blaze, so their eyes smarted and became red with the smoke.

Then they had to decide how much rice and dal to cook. Having no experience in cooking for a large number they kept running to Naja, who was not well at that time, to ask her advice because she had cooked for the schoolboys at Meherabad in the mid '20s. Katie said they made mistakes, and there were complaints, but Baba always encouraged them saying, "You must do better." They tried very hard, did their best, and eventually became very good cooks.

Katie added that in the 1960s at Guruprasad during holidays from her job she cooked new and special dishes for Baba which He liked, and she felt her ability in this was due to His training and encouragement in those early years.

Katie

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Bangalore—Baba's Mast Ashram

From Jabalpur they returned to Meherabad for two months. Then all the men and women mandali, Eastern and Western, embarked in August on the second Blue Bus tour to Bangalore in the south, where they remained until April 1940. Some travelled in the bus, others went by train with equipment and various animals. They stayed in a big bungalow called "The Links," opposite the golf course. Baba said, "No servants," so they had to do all the work, cooking, cleaning, laundry, latrines, everything. There was a huge compound for Baba's mast ashram—Chatti Baba, Phulwala, Mohammed and many others were there.

Baba worked very hard with all the masts, and occasionally He would take the women for a brief visit to see the different ones in their special moods. Katie particularly remembered Chatti Baba who had such a pleasant personality. He was fat with a big stomach, and had a very lovely benign face. She spoke too of Phulwala—*phul* means flowers—who was always covered with garlands. He had long hair and his head was wreathed in flowers like a turban. All the masts used to look at Baba with such love in their eyes. There was no recognition of the women, they only looked at Baba.

"A zoo of pets"

From Meherabad they took absolutely everything with them to Bangalore, including a veritable zoo of all the pets—a lamb, pigs, monkeys, a deer, many dogs, chickens, guinea fowls, ducks, a peacock, a pair of turkeys. Everyone had specific jobs to look after them all. And Katie and Manu who still cooked for everyone had to prepare food for the animals as well, cooking vegetables for some and making a mash of scraps and peelings for others.

In the evenings Baba would walk round and feed each of the animals Himself. The monkeys would leap out and take from Baba's hands, and those in charge of different animals would bring them forward so Baba could give them His loving attention.

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Katie

Creating Plays And Skits

To ease Baba's burden when He was working so hard with the masts,

the women would produce a play. Mani as usual would write the whole thing including the music. Mehera, Norina and Margaret would all contribute with costumes, ideas, dances, and all the women took part, practicing every day.

Occasionally Baba would ask for a play or skit to be put on for Him, perhaps also giving the theme, at other times leaving it to them. He would thus give opportunities for creativity, inspiring them to act or sing even when they had never done so before. Without them being aware of it, He would bring out their latent ability, letting it have free expression, giving them confidence. Often those who said they could not do anything at all turned out to be really good actresses and singers when performing through love to please Him.

Sometimes on the spur of the moment Baba would ask them to put on fancy dress. So they would rush to find something, anything, and came out in the funniest dresses they could manage. Mani, looking wonderful as a scarecrow, won first prize on one occasion.

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Blue Bus Tours

The Blue Bus tours, five altogether, lasted until the end of 1941. Baba took them all over India, from Quetta in the north to Ceylon in the south, Calcutta in the east, Karwar on the west coast, and through the central areas, always coming back to Meherabad for short stays in between.

The bus, meant to carry about 16, frequently carried more than 30, as well as a few small pets, food, stove and cooking items, even brooms to clean the rooms on arrival at their resting places. Huge amounts of luggage, including their bedding rolls, were tied on top. Often when they arrived late at night Baba would ask if they could manage to sleep without their bedding rolls to save unloading them all and then re-loading in the early hours of the morning, because they would leave at 3:00 or 4:00 AM and He always wanted to be on the move again without delays. So they got into the habit of carrying a sheet in their hand bags to lie down on. And wherever they went there was always a shortage of water, so each was allowed only a restricted amount for bathing, washing and cooking.

Katie

Sometimes they would travel all day long in the heat and dust. The Easterners would be amazed at how the older Westerners like Nonny,

Norina and Elizabeth, who had previously lived in comfort and luxury, were able to cope with such conditions. Katie recalled: “Rano’s mother Nonny somehow always managed to look spick and span, as if she had stepped out of a bandbox, while we all looked as if we had been in a flour mill and were covered with dust!”

So the Blue Bus tours were tough on the whole, but very enjoyable and most memorable because Baba was with them.

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War-Time Self Defence

Then followed different travels, with different conditions to be accepted, and new orders to be obeyed.

Early in 1942 they went to Dehra Dun in the far north for seven months. While there, because of the Japanese invasions near India, Baba told Margaret to teach the women self-defence. They had to practice this every day, and then demonstrate their progress to Baba on His return from mast trips.

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Rishikesh

In June 1942 they went from Dehra Dun for an intervening period to Rishikesh where it was very hot. They stayed in a lovely house on a hill near the Ganges. One day Katie was cooking, but feeling upset about something and exhausted with the heat. Baba came to the kitchen. “What are you thinking about?” “Oh, Baba, I am so tired, I feel like running away and sitting alone in the hills like all the sadhus.” He said: “It is very easy for them just sitting there, meditating. They can do what they like. It is very easy. But to live with Me, stay with Me and face all the difficulties, that is the real thing. There is no escape. You can’t run away from things. To live with Me, and lead the life I want you to lead, that is the true thing.”

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Katie

“How lucky you are”

Back in Dehra Dun again, Baba would often call everybody in the evenings to sit round Him. Once He composed a song of four lines and asked Mani and Katie to sing. It was in Persian, and Baba explained it to them:

“Although I am a sinner, I am very lucky
And although I am poor I don’t mind being poor
Please have mercy on this poor beggar
So that I may one day become one with you in your love.”

Baba specially gave them this song to emphasise how lucky they all were to be with Him. He told them: “You are all like second-hand furniture, and all old stock, but still the important thing is that you are all with Me. Remember that, and how lucky you are. There are so many people all over the world, but I have chosen you few to be here with Me.”

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Lahore

At Meherabad in July 1943 Baba told them they were going to Lahore, and would be staying in two bungalows. “For My own special work and reason, a few women will stay with Me, and the rest will be in another bungalow. So if any of you have any objections and don’t want to accompany Me, you are free to return to your homes and I don’t mind.” No-one wanted to leave Baba, so they accepted His orders which were very strict.

Those in the second bungalow could not even look across to Baba’s bungalow. Katie said that every Sunday He would go to the men mandali’s house, and then the women could visit Mehera and the others. They stayed five months in Lahore. Baba allowed all the women from both bungalows to go swimming in a beautiful pool some distance away. They went together in a bus several times, enjoying it very much because of the intense heat.

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“Obedience comes through love”

Katie reminisced about various times in the ashram on Meherabad

Katie

Hill. Frequently Baba would tell them “If you don’t like to do what I say, be ready to leave. If you are living in the ashram, you are to obey Me, and

do 100% willingly whatever I tell you to do.” Sometimes it was very difficult to do so, but it was their love from Him which made them try their utmost.

Baba would always say, “I am happy with those who obey Me, because obedience is greater than love.” It was only through their complete surrenderance that they could do all He asked them to do. And He told them: “Obedience comes through love—only if you love can you obey.”

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Meditation

Being with Baba, they never had to do any meditation unless He gave them a specific order at a specific time. Once a copy of an article on meditation was given to each one and every day they had to read this for half an hour, and then meditate for half an hour. The article was difficult to understand, but they had to read it.

At times while they were meditating Baba would ask what they thought about while doing so. Katie told Him, “Baba, I can’t meditate at all. All sorts of people I don’t normally think about crowd into my mind, even Hitler and Stalin!” Baba laughed, and said, “Don’t worry, let them all come. Do not try to check your thoughts. The more you try to check them, the more forcefully they come. While meditating keep on repeating My Name—Baba, Baba, Baba. That is like a mosquito net, and your thoughts are like the mosquitoes outside the net. So don’t worry, keep on repeating My Name, even if the thoughts come crowding. Baba’s Name always pushes everything away.

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The Seven Names Of God

In 1940 another order at Meherabad Hill was that they all had to get up at 5:00 AM and sing for about 15 minutes the Seven Names of God which Baba compiled for them with the music. Following that, for another 15 minutes they had to sing a couplet on the Names of God which Baba

Katie

also compiled. There was no electricity, so every morning they would walk across with kerosene lanterns to sing in Baba’s Kitchen, and Mani

accompanied them on the harmonium. About 35 women singing as one voice was very beautiful. This order continued when they were in Jaipur and Ajmer during the 4th Blue Bus tour.

The seven Names of God are: Hari, Paramatma, Allah, Ahuramazd, God, Yezdan, Hu.

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Silence For One Year

Four women in the ashram were given silence by Baba for one year—Irene Billo, Kharmenmasi, Nadine Tolstoy and Mansari. So besides their work, the others had to stand and read signs from one or another of these four, working out what they wanted to say. Sometimes one of them would be in a mood to convey a long story, so patience was called for!

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Differences

With so many Eastern and Western women staying on the Hill, some 30 to 35, there were petty differences of course, but the central figure was always Baba and they could look forward to being with Him for whatever time He gave them. He was there, and taught them how to love Him, to be with Him, and to tolerate everything, forgetting their little differences.

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Cooking For Shirinmai

Baba's mother Shirinmai would often come and stay a month or more in the ashram on Meherabad Hill. Baba always told Katie to cook meals specially for her because she liked only very hot and spicy food. No chillies were allowed in the food for everyone else and this was much too insipid for Shirinmai. Katie would quickly make dishes just for her, and she was very happy to be so well looked after.

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Katie

Groups Of Three

Katie remembered a period of a few months in the ashram on the Hill when Baba divided them all into groups of three. The dormitories were partitioned, each group of three sharing one room. Within their own group, they could talk to each other and move about together, but could not talk to those in the other groups, nor visit the other rooms. If there was a need to communicate with someone in another group for some particular reason, then Kitty was the go-between for all. They all ate together on the “tin shed” verandah, keeping in their groups.

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Living Harmoniously

At all times all those in the ashram had to try to live together harmoniously and do what Baba said. He gave each one a different job to do—for example, Katie was cooking, Kitty was looking after the household, some were working in the garden, some looking after pets and animals. There were no servants, so there was always work of all kinds to be done. Each was doing something for everyone, never for herself, and all were serving Baba by doing what He wanted them to do.

The compound on Meherabad Hill was not very large for the number of women living there and they were never allowed to go outside, unless Baba Himself occasionally took them for a walk in the open fields behind the ashram. But He made sure they had exercise by playing various games—volleyball, table tennis, cricket, badminton, even flying kites.

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Pets

Over the years many pets were kept, wherever the women mandali were living—Meherabad, Nasik, Panchgani, Mahabaleshwar, Bangalore, Meherazad, to name some of the places. Sometimes Baba brought the animals or birds, sometimes they were given to Him, sometimes soft-hearted Elizabeth who loved animals would ask Baba’s permission to keep a dog needing care. They were looked after by various ones, and all the

Katie

pets had characters of their own.

Pets At Meherabad—Jumpu

Katie remembered Jumpu the little monkey who had blue eyes and would trill like a bird. When she was cooking, she had to tie him up outside the kitchen and feed him later on. He was very sensitive just like a human. If he felt neglected he would show it by turning away from her when she did come to him. He had a very peculiar strong smell always, even though he was washed daily with Lifebuoy soap or Phenol, and when Kitty cuddled him or let him sleep with her, she would have his smell too.

Moti The Peacock

Moti the peacock also made his presence felt. Katie said the women used a long bench on the “tin shed” verandah as a table for their meals, where all sat on their own small stools to eat, bringing their enamel mugs and plates. When lunch was ready Katie would ring the bell—and this seemed to be the signal Moti was waiting for. He would rush up, running, and jump onto the table, spreading his tail, dancing up and down. Katie would go behind him, grab his fluffy backside and push him off. He would get so mad, she said, screeching angrily at her. He would also take up his stance in front of the toilets, strutting and spreading his tail so that they couldn’t get by, until Katie pushed him away by the same method.

In the evening when the bell rang to signal that the bazaar had arrived with the fresh vegetables, coriander and other items, Moti would come into the kitchen and start picking at everything. To keep him occupied they would rush to chop his vegetables first then put them up on the roof. He would immediately fly up there to eat, leaving them free to get on with the cooking.

Moti had another strange habit. Whenever a train whistled in the night, he would screech back at it, waking them all. Although he should normally have had a long life, apparently a fox or dog caught him on the ground, for they found him dead one day. He is buried among the pets’ graves under the big banyan tree near Baba’s Samadhi.

All the pets, Katie told us, were given so much love and affection from Baba, and they were all so sweet. Baba said they would become humans next life, missing out the usual intervening animal lives.

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Katie

The New Life

During 1949 Baba announced His plans for the New Life, telling

them He was disbanding the ashram and that everything in Meherabad had to be sold. They were feeling very sad that Baba would be going away and that most of them could not accompany Him in the New Life. To cheer them one day He said they would play “dumb charades.” Baba, Mehera and Katie were in one group, and acted the book title—“Gone With the Wind.” Katie felt it was very apt because everything was now gone with the wind—the ashram, all possessions, all of them.

When Baba told them they would have no connection with Him and might never see Him again it was a terrible shock for them. To help them and to lighten the atmosphere He jokingly said, “What will you all do when I send you out? You could start a big hotel, Katie can do the cooking, Naja can be the manager. You will be your own bosses and it will be fun.” But they felt as if the end of their world had come—they would no longer see Baba and be with Him as they had been doing for so many years.

When He set out in the New Life with the four women and sixteen men companions, Baba also sent the others out to live their New Life. He told Katie to live in Bombay with Arnavaz and Nariman Dadachanji. She was to work, earn her own living and be independent, and obey certain orders. Katie said that obeying Baba’s orders was relatively easy when living in the ashram because they were enclosed in those four walls. But out in the world it was very difficult. Even so, being away from Baba yet constantly under His orders, meant they were not apart from Him. He told them: “Although you will be away from me, you are still part of My ashram, and under My wing.”

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Katie’s Job

When sending Katie to Bombay for the New Life Baba made His gesture for the Chinese or Japanese, indicating to her that she would work with them. She thought this meant Chinese, and because of her cooking experience, asked Him would she work in a Chinese restaurant? Baba said, “No, you will get a good job.”

After a year of various temporary jobs, this good job turned out to be with the Japanese Consulate-General in Bombay, and although she knew nothing about office work, had never even seen a file, this is how she came

Katie

to be given that job. She had taken a quick course at Montessori and met there a girl who was half Japanese, half Parsi. They became friends. This

girl was going to Japan to be married. She told Katie there was a wonderful job for her in the Japanese Consulate office, and took her there.

Because of the war stories Katie was not keen, but she put in an application although she was already working in another job. Five days later at 10:30 PM the Consulate-General office phoned, wanting her to come immediately, but she told them she had to give notice and would join them on 1st December. This was in 1950, and she stayed with them until her retirement in January 1978, 27 years later.

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Falling Over

In Mandali Hall at Meherazad in February 1989 Katie laughingly told us that in those years in Bombay she would fall over nearly every day. She entertained us with a number of lively and amusing descriptions of these calamities. Here are very brief versions of a few of them.

Once Prime Minister Nehru was passing by the Japanese Consulate. Katie was wearing new shoes, the office floor was highly polished. She slipped and crashed into a partition, cutting her ear and the side of her face. Her head was throbbing so much she asked to go home but they wouldn't let her. And to cap it all she didn't even see Nehru pass by.

One wet morning in the bus coming to work she was putting her coat on ready to get out when the driver braked suddenly. She fell flat on the floor, purse and lunchbag scattered, apple here, banana there, and people were helping to pick things up. She had many bruises, everything hurt, and now she was also late which they didn't like in the office.

When at the movies one time with Arnavaz and Nariman and dressed in her best sari, she slipped on some ice cream someone had spilt. They all began laughing, and Katie was glad to find that although her knee was bruised her sari was not damaged.

Katie also recalled that in Bombay many drivers seemed to like going through puddles and splashing people. One day when backing away to avoid this she fell into a cactus bush growing near the house. Manu, who was staying with them, had to pull out the prickles with tweezers.

Katie

"Just say 'Goodbye, Baba!'"

When Baba was visiting Bombay later on He told her: "Next time

you fall, send me a telegram and I will know Katie is falling in Bombay!” He thought for a moment and then said, “No, that is not practical. Just say ‘Goodbye, Baba!’ and I will know you have fallen.”

After that, whenever or wherever she happened to fall, she immediately said this. One unusual occasion was when she was visiting Japan in 1970, attending an official reception at the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo. And although so many years have passed since His order, even if she falls at Meherazad she still says “Goodbye, Baba!”

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Baba Leaves His Physical Form

When Baba dropped His body on 31st January 1969 Katie was at work in the office and heard the news late that afternoon. She rushed home to “Ashiana” where she still lived with Arnavaz and Nariman. The three of them hurriedly packed a few things, immediately got into the car, and drove straight through to Meherabad, arriving well after midnight. By then only Padri and a few of the men mandali were still at the Samadhi.

Katie said that she just could not believe that it was Baba lying there in the crypt. No-one was prepared for it, and the shock for everyone was overwhelming. Baba as God had taken a human form to be with them, but it did not occur to them that He would leave it at some time, and that they would remain unable to be physically near Him ever again.

All the mandali had no words, just embraced one another, knowing the depth of what each was feeling. There could be no consolation. They felt lost—the Centre of their lives was no longer visible there among them.

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Life Without Baba’s Body, Physical Presence

Beloved Baba’s body was so lovingly and continuously cared for during the following week. He was revered and glorified by thousands coming night and day. And finally His beautiful form was covered for ever on 7th February.

Then the mandali’s love for Baba, strengthened by His love for them, enabled them to return to day-to-day living, knowing in their hearts that

Katie

He would want them to continue doing whatever He had been asking them to do over the years.

From the West in the 1970s and '80s waves of lovers, young and old, kept coming to Meherabad and Meherazad, longing to hear everything possible about Baba. In telling stories hour after hour about Him and re-living their lives with Him, the mandali gradually found their grief to some degree assuaged. Baba was there, His presence strong and ever-beautiful, He had never left them. And in Mandali Hall they began to say that they were also seeing a new Baba in the loving hearts coming from all over the world to be with Him at His Home in Meherabad and Meherazad.

Beloved Baba works in all ways at the same time—the depth and beauty of the mandali's love for Him is constantly shown to everyone, and surely gives a glowing example which each pilgrim can aspire to follow. Some day, some lifetime, by His grace each one's longing to be totally His, will enable them too, to love Him, to serve Him and to obey Him. The way to do so has been beautifully demonstrated by His close ones throughout their lives with Him.

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“Just live for Baba”

In one of her talks at Avatar's Abode Katie said one doesn't have to make an outward show to please Baba, and she gave a few pointers to think about in daily living:

Baba liked to see a smiling face. Be cheerful. Help each other. No fights, no malice, no back-biting, no slander. Try to see one's own faults and overcome them. Make Baba happy by doing what He likes. Just live for Baba.

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ARNAVAZ

Arnavaz Dadachanji was at the Great Darshan, May 1969, at

Guruprasad in Poona with all the women mandali, but I had only very brief chats with her then. It was during my visits every year from 1973 onwards that I came to know her, spending quite an amount of time with her at Meherazad. She was so easy to talk to, understanding and practical.

One Sunday morning in the early '70s after the Amartithi celebrations were over, I spent a couple of hours with Arnavaz in her husband Nariman's room in the men's cottage at Meherazad while she told me some of her story. Then we joined Mehera and the other women mandali, sitting with them for the entertainment programme in Mandali Hall.

The next morning I travelled to Meherazad in a rickshaw, in those days commonly called a "bumblebee," and again sat with Arnavaz in Nariman's room. Then she arranged for me to have lunch on the verandah outside. Bhau Kalchuri was there, also Francis Brabazon who had come with our Australian group for Amartithi, and Arnavaz sat with us. I was given an omelette with vegetables, a chapati, and a type of thick bread with home-made butter and cheese, ending with an orange which Arnavaz peeled for me herself. Then telling me to rest for 15 minutes on Nariman's bed, Arnavaz went to the women's side for her own lunch. We spent the afternoon together while she continued talking of her life with Baba, then I walked down the road with a couple of others and we caught the local bus back to the hotel.

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Arnavaz's Story

Here is Arnavaz's story as she told it to me, with some extra details which she gave at other times. Because my book would not be complete without it, I sent the section to Arnavaz in January 1996 asking if she would go through it for me. In spite of her own state of health, the concern of all over Mani's severe illness, and many day-to-day pressures, she most lovingly did so, and returned it to me in May with a few corrections and comments. I am so grateful for this because it is now accurate.

But my attempts to portray Arnavaz can only be taken as a simple sketch—*Gift of God* is the full, beautifully-written, heart-touching story of her life with her Beloved Baba, and also contains many letters, photographs

Arnavaz

and other absorbing material.

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Her Family

Arnavaz's uncle, her father's brother Framroze Dadachanji, met Baba in 1924, and was the first to do so of the large group of Dadachanji families, some of whom lived in Bombay and some in Karachi. Baba called him Chanji, and he was thereafter known to everyone by this name.

Arnavaz's own family lived in Bombay, but early in 1927 they came to Poona for about a year. Her father Naoroji was a building contractor and was working on a particular building there. Meherjee Karkaria, who was a relative of Arnavaz's mother Bachamai, also lived in Poona. It was Chanji who took them all to Meherabad to meet Baba. Arnavaz was eight years old then, and they all gathered round the couch where He sat. She recalled that Baba sent a message to the women mandali to cook rice and dal for them.

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After returning from Poona to Bombay the family lived in a house in the suburb of Byculla with Arnavaz's grandparents. Baba often visited the house, staying a day or two with them. Her grandfather was a very religious man, a saintly person and gracious in manner to his guests. He believed only in Zoroaster. Not accepting Baba as a Master, he refused to bow down to Him, but would always shake hands most courteously. At this time he had a cancer and could swallow scarcely any food, even sips of water were difficult for him. Baba told him to eat fish for four days. Arnavaz's mother had such faith in Baba that she persuaded the old man to eat the fish, and although for the first three days he could neither keep it down nor sip water, on the third night he was able to drink a whole glass of water. Thereafter he became much better, could eat food again, and lived for a short time longer.

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Arnavaz

School Years

Arnavaz was the eldest child, then came her sisters Nargis and Roda, and her four brothers, Tehemtan, Dara, Homa and Nozer.

At school Arnavaz always did well and was first in her class, but early in 1934 Baba said she should leave school. Her father did not want this as he was planning a higher education for her. Baba then told her to stay at home for a year without any schooling. Thus began, she said, her life in Baba, obeying His orders.

He allowed her to return to school in April 1935, but during the first month her mind was a blank and she couldn't learn anything. She was constantly in tears, her teachers were in despair. Then one of them told her to read in English even though she couldn't understand the meaning, and with the third novel her previous knowledge returned and also her concentration. In six months, she was one of the three best students in the school. She sat for matriculation exams and although she expected to pass, Baba told her she would fail. This was so, but she did pass in 1936 after appearing the second time.

Teaching

Arnavaz went to Nasik, for Baba's 1937 Birthday celebrations. When she asked Him if she could now go on to college, He said, "You have learned so much, what need is there for any more studies?" But He did agree to her request to get a job as a teacher, and she returned to Bombay. Later that year Baba took Mehera, Mani, Naja, Khorshed, Soonamasi and Valu from the ashram on Meherabad Hill to Cannes for some months where they were joined by Western women and men. Nariman Dadachanji, Arnavaz's cousin, was also called from England to spend a short time there.

At Baba's Birthday in Meherabad, February 1938, Arnavaz found herself weeping all the time, and even after returning to her teaching job in Bombay she still wept. She felt totally disinterested in everything, and couldn't study for her Teaching Diploma exams. She sat for them anyway, and later was astonished to learn that she had passed, because out of the four papers she handed in, one was almost completely blank.

Then Arnavaz had a nervous breakdown and was put into Dr. Alu Khambatta's hospital which was downstairs in the building where the family lived. Alu and Goher looked after her. She was seriously ill, but pulled through.

At this time Baba was staying in Panchgani, so she wrote to Him for
Arnavaz

permission to convalesce at a hotel there in order to be near Him and

perhaps have the chance of seeing Him sometimes. She felt quite incredulous but very happy when He immediately replied “Don’t go to the hotel, come and stay with Me.”

Panchgani—Literal Obedience.

This was the beginning of her ashram life. She said that Baba was so loving, so caring, gentle and kind. It was here that Arnavaz learned the importance of literal obedience. Baba liked to sit in the garden in the late afternoon, and on the second day she was there He told her to put on a coat after sunset, but instead she put on a long-sleeved silk blouse. Baba very gently said: “Didn’t I tell you to put on a coat?” She said, “I put on this blouse Baba.” Again very gently He said, “But I told you to put on a coat.” She began to weep and when He asked why, she answered, “Because I disobeyed you, Baba.” He told her not to cry, comforted her, and said she should always carry out His orders. She realised then that *literal* obedience was absolutely necessary, there could be no compromise. “Baba’s care at this time was that of a loving mother to a small baby,” she remarked later.

Happy Times With Baba

Arnavaz stayed there for about a month. They all played “dumb charades” every day with Baba also joining in, and they always dressed up for their parts. She vividly remembered Baba as a sheik on one occasion and how magnificent He looked. Rano and Kitty were learning Marathi and Kitty was cooking for them as Naja was very ill and unable to work.

During this time at Panchgani Baba was in a very happy, wonderful mood with everyone. One day when they were all sitting with Him, He said, “Have you any idea how lucky you all are? I am sitting with you, eating with you, joking with you, when there are so many living in the mountains who are so old, just breathing, who don’t want to die because they long to see Me.” He also told them: “It is not easy to be with Me, so close to Me. For so many, many past lives you all have been meditating, repeating God’s Name—and now you are able to sit in front of Me.”

When Arnavaz at last had to leave Baba and return to Bombay, He gave her a standing order that on every holiday she had from the school she was to come and stay with Him, wherever He was. In this way she took part in some of the Blue Bus tours, or travelled to be with Him at a place such as Jabalpur or Bangalore where He was staying with the mandali

Arnavaz

for a period.

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The Question Of Marriage

On one of these occasions Baba asked her whether she would like to get married. She replied that she only wanted to love and serve Him. Baba told her: “Well, to love Me and serve Me is great, but to do what I say is the greatest. So will you do what I tell you?” “Yes, Baba.” “Will you marry if I tell you to?” “Yes, Baba.” Then He told her about the Hindu saint Mirabai—she did not want to marry, but Krishna told her to, so she did. Again Baba asked: “So if I tell you to marry, will you do so?” “Yes, Baba.”

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Nariman Dadachanji

Nariman Dadachanji was born and bred in Karachi and was also educated there. He met Baba in the late 1920s when in Bombay on holiday, and Baba saw him again while on a visit to Karachi. Nariman was very clever, always first in class, but as there was no money for fees, he put himself through college in Benares by tutoring. There he gained a four-year scholarship to study for two years in Manchester, England, and two years in Germany. He also won a scholarship at this time to go to America, but chose England in order to further his interest in colours and chemicals.

Before he went to England in 1937, Nariman and Arnavaz met a number of times and liked each other very much. In Manchester he gained his MSc in April 1939, and wrote to Arnavaz that he would go on to Germany about July or August. Arnavaz received the letter in May while she was in Jabalpur with Baba. Seeing her reading it and learning it was from Nariman, Baba asked that she read it to Him. Baba told her to write straight away, telling Nariman not to go to Germany, or stay anywhere in the West, but to return immediately to India. However, Nariman did not leave England at that point, and War was declared on 3rd September. Although he was told it was impossible to get a berth for at least six months, miraculously after two or three weeks, and at a moment’s notice, he was allotted a ticket and reached India safely in October.

Arnavaz

Nariman settled in Bombay. He wished to start a business and bring

his mother and three brothers from Karachi but he had no money. His line was colours and chemicals, so for experience he got a job with I.C.I. (Imperial Chemical Industries) for a year, after which a wealthy friend put up the money to start a business with him on a partnership basis. He saved hard, and as his friend had other interests and did not wish to continue in the business Nariman was able to buy it, taking his brother into it with him.

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In the four years from 1939 to 1942, Arnavaz was teaching in Bombay, or being with Baba on the Blue Bus tours, or staying with Him for periods of time. Prior to 1939 Baba had been coming to Bombay three or four times a year and visited their house. In March 1939 He told them He would not be coming to Bombay again for a very long time. In 1943, in reply to a question from Arnavaz's mother, Baba said, "When Arnavaz has her own house I will come and stay with her," but it was some time before this happened.

"I want you and Nariman to be engaged"

Baba was in Lonavla with all the mandali from September to December 1942. During September Arnavaz went there for a few days. On the verandah of the bungalow Baba suddenly said to her: "I want you and Nariman to be engaged very shortly. I will fix the date." He decided on 21st December for the engagement ceremony, then called Nariman and Arnavaz and the two families from Bombay. Baba Himself put the rings on their fingers, "making Nariman and me one," as she described it, but it was not until two years later that He told them to get married.

Meherabad Meeting And Mehera's Birthday, 1942

The day after the engagement, 22nd December, the families went back to Bombay, while Arnavaz went with Baba and the men and women mandali to Meherabad in the Blue Bus, because Mehera's birthday was to be celebrated for the first time on a grand scale on 27th December. Within a day or two of this there was also the special "secret meeting" at Meherabad to which Baba personally invited 99 men including Nariman, as well as Margaret Craske to represent all the women. What happened at this meeting was not revealed.

Arnavaz

During that time the weather was very cloudy, windy and chilly, with

rain and storms. The pandal built for the meeting was blown down. Baba was upset and said there was no time to build another one so He told Pendu that he should cancel the meeting. Pendu replied, “No, Baba you must hold that meeting,” and said that he would do his best to repair the pandal, which he did. Mehera was also not well then, and with these setbacks Baba said, “Maya is coming in the way of my work.” But the meeting and Mehera’s birthday celebration took place and were a great success.

At the time when Baba announced Arnavaz and Nariman’s engagement, she had bought a full set of clothes as a gift for Mehera, not realising then that Baba was planning the large-scale birthday celebration. So when Arnavaz presented the set to Mehera, Baba said, “She will be wearing it on her birthday.” It was a white sari with very light silver and gold embroidery, and Baba told Arnavaz she was to put the sari on Mehera because she was not used to wearing the style. “And Mehera looked so beautiful, so very beautiful, like a white angel,” Arnavaz recalled.

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Five Avatars

Arnavaz stayed at Meherabad for a week or two, and during this time Baba told the women on Meherabad Hill, “I am the combination of five Avatars and I have the quality of each one of them—I am full of mischief like Krishna, I have the truthfulness of Rama, the purity of Zoroaster, the gentleness of Christ, and the fiery nature of Mohammed.”

It was also at that time that Baba said one day there will be a railway station at Meherabad, a river will be flowing, and a big town will spring up on the Lower Meherabad site.

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Tehemtān Dies

In August 1943 Arnavaz’s brother Tehemtān died of typhoid fever. Baba called Bachamai to Poona for darshan and consoled her. She told Him, “Baba, Tehemtān’s horoscope says that his life span is 70 years and that he would be a very prominent doctor or an engineer. How is it that he has died at just 17 years old?” Baba replied: “Yes, he would have

Arnavaz

lived that long, but his life was a very miserable one so I cut it short.”

There is a nice sequel to this. Arnavaz's sister Roda married Jim Mistry in 1948, and their son was born the next year in Bombay, looking like a "carbon copy of Tehemtān." Baba told them to name him Merwan, and played with the week-old baby in Arnavaz's house. Ten years later Baba was again in her house with the boy there, still looking the image of her brother, and Baba said, "Your Tehemtān is now amidst you all." Another interesting point is that Merwan became a doctor, and has been well established for many years in a busy practice and hospital work in America.

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Baba says "No" to Learning Sitar And Driving

Throughout the early years they always asked Baba about everything they wanted to do, so Arnavaz wrote to Him in 1943 as to whether she could learn to drive and also learn to play the sitar. Baba said "No" to both. She felt sad about the sitar, but realised later that because of the feelings this instrument evoked with her, her feet would not have been on the ground and she could not have carried out the work Baba wanted her to do for Him over the years.

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Chanji Dies

Baba was to give a darshan programme in Nagpur in November 1944, and in May when He was deciding which of the mandali should accompany Him, Chanji's name was not mentioned. All were surprised at this and asked why, because for so many years Chanji went everywhere with Baba throughout India, Europe and America. Baba replied, "He can come if he is alive." Some were struck by this, others thought Baba was joking.

In August Baba went to Srinagar, Kashmir, and told Chanji to travel from Bombay to meet Him there. Baba also said that Chanji should take most of his belongings because he would not be coming back to Bombay for a very, very long time. The family were not actually told where he was going, but on 25th August they received a telegram that Chanji had died of typhoid fever in Srinagar and had been buried there. He was only 52.

Arnavaz

Everyone who knew him, Easterners and Westerners alike, were shocked

and sad for he was much loved by all. Baba did not give consolation to family and friends, saying, “Why do you feel for Chanji? He is a loss to you, but you have no idea what a loss he is to Me.”

The mandali asked: “Why did you have to let Chanji go? He was indispensable to you.” Baba replied: “Yes, he was indispensable to Me, but I saved him twice.” Then they remembered that Baba had saved him from committing suicide in Bombay in 1924. The second time was during the late 1920s when Chanji fell into deep water in the river at Toka. He could not swim and was drowning. He went down twice, and actually underwent the experience of death. As he was going under the third time He shouted BABA! at the top of his voice, then felt a big hand raising him to the surface of the water.

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Arnavaz And Nariman's Wedding

In October 1944 Baba called Arnavaz to Aurangabad, and while she was there for a few days He told her that her marriage should take place on 21st December in the Ahmednagar Zoroastrian Fire Temple.

About 100 to 150 came for the wedding, and when they arrived on the day before the ceremony, they were told that Masaji had died of a stroke two days earlier—he was Baba's uncle and Pendu and Naja's father. Although an old man he was very strong, and had gone to Poona the day before his death to do marketing for Mehera's birthday which was to be celebrated on 28th December.

Baba called Nariman, Arnavaz and her mother Bachamai to Meherazad on the 20th. Arnavaz took all her wedding attire, showing everything to Baba. He took her wedding sari in His hands, and for her the memory of His radiant face and smile was unforgettable. He touched all her clothes and jewellery.

Then Baba showed Bachamai round Meherazad, asking if she liked it, and in ecstasy she replied that it was so beautiful. Baba told her, “I will bring you here for always.” Arnavaz did not understand this because there were five children still to be looked after at home, and her youngest brother Nozer was only eleven years old. So Arnavaz thought that maybe in years to come when they had grown up Baba would bring Bachamai to

Arnavaz

Meherazad. However when her mother died of cancer just a year and a

half later in September 1946, she realised the significance of Baba's words.

Baba also came to Ahmednagar on the 20th December and gave darshan to all there, then told Arnavaz and Nariman that they should come to Meherazad with her sister Nargis at 5:00 PM on the 21st—their wedding evening. The marriage ceremony was in the morning and at 4:00 PM when they were ready to go to Baba, Nariman's aunt had a heart attack. They sent for the doctor which took a little time, so they were ten minutes late reaching Meherazad. When Baba asked why and they had explained, He was not angry but made them realise that even that shortcoming was not permissible. In those days He was so strict, not allowing anyone to get away with the slightest deviation from His orders.

Baba embraced Arnavaz and Nariman. Mehera and the others gave them presents, the most beautiful one being a photo of Baba and Mehera in a small silver frame. Arnavaz was so touched and surprised at this because Mehera's photo had never been given to anyone before.

Arnavaz and Nariman stayed with Baba—she in the women's quarters and Nariman in the men's quarters on their wedding night.

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Chanji's Bedding Roll Ceremony

The third day after the wedding Baba and all the men and women mandali and a few intimate ones from Bombay, Poona and other places went to stay at Meherabad. All the women were on Meherabad Hill, and the men in Lower Meherabad.

On 23rd December Baba performed a ceremony there in the area between the main road and the railway line—Masaji's body was placed in his grave as well as Chanji's bedding roll. All the mandali were gathered around Baba, and as each name was read out from a long list of His close ones who had died over the years, Baba threw a rose on top of the bedding roll in the grave. Then everyone left, and the grave was covered with earth.

Baba's Nephew Dara Is Born

On the 24th morning Baba's sister-in-law, Adi Jnr's wife Gulu, was in a serious condition giving birth to their son Dara. Baba was informed, and He went to see her at Sarosh and Viloo's bungalow in Ahmednagar.

Arnavaz

Gulu died shortly afterwards and her funeral took place late that day.

There was a big qawwali programme that evening in Lower Meherabad.

A Gift For Mehera's Birthday

On 28th December Mehera's birthday was celebrated on a grand scale. Arnavaz had brought a lovely pink sari for Mehera with silver embroidery and when she presented it to her Baba was very happy. Mehera said, "This is such a beautiful sari, but where can I wear it?" So Baba told her: "Wear it on your birthday, then give it back to Arnavaz and she will wear it." And He told Arnavaz she was to put the sari on Mehera on her birthday. She looked so beautiful in it. Then Baba told everyone there: "This is Arnavaz's sari which Mehera has on, and Arnavaz will wear it henceforth."

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In telling about that time, Arnavaz said: "I cannot describe the feeling of turmoil, sadness and heartache of those ten days. There was the death of Masaji loved by all; the marriage ceremony; Chanji's bedding-roll ceremony; the birth of Baba's nephew and the death of Baba's sister-in-law; and then the birthday of beloved Mehera. I felt peace and serenity and joy in the evening when I came to Baba on my marriage day, and on the next morning when He left me alone in Meherazad while He and the women went to a movie—Baba said to me: 'You are very tired, so you stay here.' And that was the time when I really felt peace."

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Arnavaz's Health

Baba had wanted Arnavaz and Nariman to find a house before the wedding, but it was wartime and impossible to get even a room in Bombay. Arnavaz's health was very poor because of all the stress and emotional upsets, so a week or so after the wedding Baba told them to stay in a guest house in Ahmednagar for about a month. They used to see Him at Meherazad, but she did not improve. Then He said they should stay with Him a few days, and during that time He took great care of her. Arnavaz commented that when Baba is putting one through an emotional

Arnavaz

experience He takes care that the physical body does not crack up.

Finding “Ashiana”

Returning to Bombay, they stayed for a time in a rest house. Then in May the Maharaja of Gwalior’s English jockey who had been living in Bombay for the four-month racing season was leaving. Nariman learned through a friend that this flat was available for lease, went to see it and took it immediately. It was new, with a frig, telephone, and fully furnished with everything in excellent taste and of the best quality. The lease was held by rich friends of the Maharaja. They wished to be recompensed only for what they had spent on the furniture and decoration—all that Nariman and Arnavaz needed to do was move in with their clothes. And soon Baba began visiting them in their flat which was named “Ashiana” meaning “nest.”

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Bachamai Dies

During these months Arnavaz’s mother Bachamai had become very ill with cancer. Because of its advanced state the operation was not successful and she suffered greatly. Three days before she died in September 1946 she would often say to the family: “Baba is here, Baba is standing there. Look, look, see Baba.” Then for two days the physical agony increased and she pleaded with the family to send a telegram asking Baba to come. They did so. During the last night, she would continuously shout BABA! BABA! BABA! She had no consciousness of any of them around her, and although Arnavaz’s father took Baba’s photo to her she was unable to see it. Then she became quiet, and died about 5:00 AM. Arnavaz told the family that Baba would not like them to shed tears. So none of them wept, and were very quiet and poised. Outsiders remarked they had never seen such a funeral.

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Nariman’s Brothers

When Baba was coming back from a mast trip in 1947 He sent a telegram to Arnavaz to have three cars at the station to bring Him and the men to “Ashiana.” At this time Nariman’s brothers respected Baba, and

Arnavaz

came to see Him in Bombay to please Nariman, but they did not have faith

in Him.

On this occasion Nariman's youngest brother Hoshang was 18, and drove Baba in one of the cars to the flat. While he was outside helping with the luggage, Baba asked Arnavaz about him. She replied, "Baba, he is a very sweet boy." Then Baba said: "He is all mine, but there is still time. When the time comes, he will come instantly," and He clicked His fingers. Arnavaz realised that the time feature is so important, and when it is the right time people will be ready for Baba. And within ten years all Nariman's brothers and their wives came to Baba with love and faith.

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The New Life

For the last nine days of June and the whole month of July 1949 Baba was in seclusion in the Blue Bus in Meherazad. He gave orders to all His lovers everywhere for one month's complete silence in July. Then Baba went into the New Life on 16th October 1949.

During the months leading up to this momentous day everything had to be disposed of, and all arrangements completed. Meherjee Karkaria accepted the responsibility of Meherabad land and buildings.

Nariman took over the Meherazad property. Baba told them: "These properties are now yours, not mine." From that time onward Nariman continuously owned and maintained Meherazad until his death in July 1974. Then Arnavaz took over this role.

Arnavaz and Nariman also retained "Ashiana" in Bombay, living there permanently throughout the New Life period and the succeeding years. Baba sent Katie and Naja to stay with them in October 1949 to live the New Life there under His strict conditions.

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Baba In Bombay April 1952

After the New Life and the Manonash period were over, in April 1952 Baba was to go to Myrtle Beach Center in America with Mehera, Mani, Meheru and Goher as well as some of the men mandali. He came to Bombay more than two weeks before the departure date, and Arnavaz said He was so restless He would think often of cancelling the trip.

Arnavaz

Then He asked Nariman, Sarosh and Meherjee to find a flat for Him

somewhere in the suburbs of Bombay, and with great difficulty they located one owned by a Christian widow. Baba and the men, the four women and Arnavaz went there. But He was so restless He wanted His bed changed from one room to another three or four times, and finally went back to the first one at 2:00 AM. The next morning was Good Friday, and He said He had passed the worst night of His life—it was the night of the Crucifixion. Although Baba had planned to stay there for a few days, they all returned to “Ashiana” after breakfast.

Baba still wanted somewhere quiet and secluded to rest. Nariman found a place 35 miles from Bombay on a lonely beach called Marve. They stayed a week. The women could swim and Baba enjoyed long walks on the beach where no-one disturbed them.

Arnavaz Begins Learning To Drive, But Soon Stops

One day while at Marve the talk turned to driving and someone asked Baba, “Why don’t you allow Arnavaz to learn driving?” Reluctantly, he agreed.

Baba and the mandali left by plane for Europe and America on 18th April. Arnavaz started learning to drive. Two weeks later a cable arrived telling them of Baba’s car accident on 24th May. The next day they were very depressed to see newspaper reports that Mehera Irani was critically injured. Arnavaz felt very strongly Baba’s reluctance in giving the order for her to drive, so she stopped learning and never touched the car wheel again.

Later, when she and Nariman were on a holiday trip someone wanted to read her palm. She had never before allowed this, or a horoscope, because she knew her destiny was entirely in Baba’s hand, and He could change or mould it in whatever way He wished. But the person insisted, and told her never to drive a car because she would meet with a fatal accident.

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Gabriel Pascal

On return from America Baba went to Hamirpur and Andhra for large darshan programmes in 1953 and again in 1954. For the first time since 1938 in Meherabad, Baba’s birthday was celebrated on a grand scale

Arnavaz

during the second visit to Andhra. Baba wanted Gabriel Pascal, the

prominent Hollywood film producer who loved Him, to come to Andhra with cameras to take a movie. He sent many messages to Pascal who agreed to come, but at the last minute didn't make it. Baba was very displeased, and said, "He should have come, he should have come." Some months later Pascal died, and Baba's comment was: "He would not have died if he had come when I called him."

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Repetition Of Baba's Name

Arnavaz remembered that in 1955 Baba gave an order for a continuous "Jap," the repetition of His Name, in relay 24 hours a day for three months, March, April, May, in Bombay. Three houses were selected in the city as Centres—north, middle and south—so that people living in the areas could conveniently go to one or another. At the end of May Baba sent a telegram to continue through June and July if they could, and they all did so.

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Good Or Bad?

In August Baba again stayed at "Ashiana," and one day gave a short talk—What is good, and what is bad?—with this story to illustrate the subject.

There was a thief who would steal, and the error of his ways would be pointed out to him. One day he went out again to steal, getting into a house to do so. But he found there a woman in pain, at the point of childbirth, and there was no-one else in the house. Looking around he noticed the place was empty—there was no food, no clothing, nothing.

So first of all he helped her to deliver the child and made her comfortable. Then he went out and stole food and clothing from other houses, and gave it all to the woman. He helped her for a few days until he felt she was able to manage by herself, then he went on his way.

Then Baba asked those present, "Would you call that man good or bad? There is nothing like good or bad." He went on: "But there are three things that I don't like that are bad—lust, greed, and anger, and anger is the worst."

Arnavaz

Nozer Dies In Plane Crash

The following month, on 13th October 1955, Arnavaz's youngest brother Nozer, then 22 years old, died in a plane crash. He was a flying officer in the Air Force which he had joined in 1951. Six months after joining he had a very vivid and horrifying dream in which a most ugly creature tried to snatch away the string of beads which he used each night when saying Baba's Name before going to sleep. Nozer was so distressed about the dream that he wrote of it to the family, and Arnavaz sent the letter to Baba. Baba gave Nozer an order always to say His name when getting into his plane.

Four years later the plane crashed, and after two days' continuous search it was eventually found embedded in a lake at Secunderabad, but Nozer's body was not recovered until the fifth day. The close family was in frequent contact with Baba during these days, and when another relative in the meantime began insisting that Zoroastrian rituals be performed, Arnavaz asked Baba about this. He sent a message reminding them that He had come to do away with all rituals and ceremonies, but if Nozer's body could be moved it should be brought to Meherabad. When this proved to be impossible, only a brief Zoroastrian prayer was said. To avoid further rituals as wished by Baba, and to prevent misunderstandings with orthodox relatives and friends, the family simply indicated that ceremonies were being arranged in Bombay or in Secunderabad.

Two weeks later Baba called the family to Bindra House in Poona for His darshan, embraced and comforted them, helping to ease their pain by telling them that Nozer, in obeying His order to take His Name when getting into the plane, had come to Him and was happy.

Baba's Second Car Accident

On October 1956 Baba went on a long mast trip in Nariman's car. Dr. Nilu who was also in the car was quite exhausted and said, "Baba, when are you going to stop all these mast trips?" Baba replied, "This is your last mast trip."

During that year Baba had been on several long trips and scarcely allowed Nariman and Arnavaz to use their car—He always wanted it for
Arnavaz

His work. Then on 2nd December, when travelling in the car near

Satara, Baba's second accident occurred. Dr. Nilu died instantly, and Baba sustained severe injuries to the right side of His body, particularly His right hip which caused Him so much physical suffering for the rest of His life. Eruch and Pendu were also injured. Vishnu, who had been sitting in the back, called out, "Baba, are you hurt?" and then when Baba turned His head Vishnu was amazed to see such a radiance on Baba's face and a bright shining light about Him. Throughout His life Baba took on great suffering indicating that it was for the sake of humanity, but never explaining about it in full, even to His closest ones.

On hearing of the accident Arnavaz was deeply shocked, and recalled the story of their car. It was a 1952 two-tone blue Chevrolet which they had bought that year in Bombay. She hadn't yet sold their green Oldsmobile because of sentimental value, and asked Baba when He came to visit them which car they should keep. Baba took His alphabet board and flung it in the air, and then said, "Keep the blue Chevrolet." Although she had never liked that car from the beginning, it was kept because Baba had said to do so, and the Oldsmobile was sold. It was in the Chevrolet that the accident happened.

Baba came to Bombay in September 1957 to consult a doctor and stayed in their flat until the end of October. His hip was so painful that a carry-chair was used for Him as the flat was on the first floor. He allowed only the family and very few intimates to see Him. One of them said, "Baba, get well soon" as she was leaving, and He called her back, saying: "Whatever is destined will take place."

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Gustadji

During that stay, whenever there was a good movie being shown in Bombay Baba would tell Arnavaz to take the women mandali to see it. About 26th October He said, "Today is the last movie you all will be seeing because we have to leave on 1st November." But on 30th October morning to their surprise, Baba told Arnavaz to take the women to a matinee show from 4:00 to 6:00 PM. On their return Baba called Goher and Arnavaz to His room and gave them the news that Gustadji, His very first disciple, had died that day. Once again Baba did not allow mourning or sadness when a close one died.

Arnavaz

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Baba Saves Arnavaz

Baba left Bombay on 1st November, saying He was coming back on 17th December to celebrate Mehera's birthday. Then He told Arnavaz that she and Nariman were to come to Meherazad on 4th December for ten days. She was surprised at this, for He would then be coming to Bombay three days after she returned, and there was always much to do in the flat preparing for His visit. But later she understood the meaning of it.

Arnavaz and Nariman were to take the night train on 4th December to go to Meherazad, and at 4:00 PM that day Arnavaz was being driven in the car on an errand connected with Baba—she had two Baba photos in frames, some eatables and other things for Him, and was surrounded by all these. Then the car was involved in an accident. She was not hurt, but the car bonnet was crushed, and she heard a very loud noise of breaking glass. She thought every window in the car must have broken, but this was not so. What had broken was the glass in the two Baba photo frames, both of which were smashed into small pieces. She realised then that Baba had taken the full impact of the accident.

On their arrival at Meherazad Baba asked her, "Did you sleep well?" She said, "No, Baba," and then told Him about the previous day's happening. Baba called Goher: "At what time did I have the prayers said yesterday?" She replied, "Baba, it must have been at 2:00 or 3:00 PM." Then Baba told Arnavaz to have tea and relax.

Goher related to her what had happened. Baba usually retired to His room at 5:00 PM, but yesterday it was at 2:00 PM. He was very upset, had the prayers read, and was very restless. They felt He was striving to save someone from some disaster, and thought of Harry Kenmore who was flying back to America at the time, but now they realised it was Arnavaz He was saving.

When the women were all with Baba having lunch in the dining room, He turned to Arnavaz and said, "You have no idea from what you have been saved," repeating this to her, then saying the same to the others.

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Arnavaz

Free To Work For Baba

Arnavaz and Nariman had no children, and although in their earlier years of marriage they would have been happy to have a family, and though Baba now and again indicated they could be blessed in this way, it did not happen.

As time went by Baba called on both of them to do so much work for Him. Their home was His headquarters in Bombay, He came and stayed with them so often, and was able to give darshan there to many hundreds of lovers over the years. Whenever Baba wanted Nariman to accompany Him on travels in India or overseas, he immediately made himself available to do so. In the same way, Arnavaz always made the flat ready and comfortable for Him and the mandali to stay for every visit, whether long or short.

Looking back in later years, Arnavaz said she was continually so very grateful to Baba for keeping them both completely free at all times to work for Him in whatever way He wished them to. If they had had children, Baba would not have come nearly so often to their home, and there would have been far less opportunities to serve Him in the ways He needed.

In this role, apart from all Arnavaz did for Him when He was physically present, she has continued to serve Him in many ways in the years since He dropped His body, particularly in giving helpful counsel at Meherazad to young Baba lovers concerned about coping with stressful family life in the western world.

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My Last Times With Arnavaz

During my last two or three visits to Meherazad I saw Arnavaz only briefly as she was not at all well. But before leaving for home I would always ask if it was convenient to spend a few minutes with her to say goodbye. So in October 1991 when I was called into her room in the cottage, she was lying down resting, but gave me a very welcoming smile, then embraced me and asked me to sit beside the bed. I felt happy to be with her in the warm atmosphere of her pleasant and simply-furnished room, and looked around at the wealth of Baba photos smiling at us. The windows open onto the garden, and one door leads in from Mani's porch, so even while lying in bed she has a pleasant outlook.

I remember very clearly an earlier visit when Arnavaz had been quite

Arnavaz

ill. She told me she was not at all concerned about it, nor about having to

stay in bed all the time—she just lay there thinking about Baba continually and all the wonderful years she had been with Him, so she was completely happy. What a lovely example of untroubled acceptance and resignation to Beloved Baba's Will!

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KHORSHED

Khorshed is Adi K. Irani's cousin—her mother Soonamasi and Adi's

mother Gulmai were sisters. When I met her during Amartithi 1973 she and Soonamasi were living in Khushru Quarters in the Trust Compound. Sometimes Khorshed came out to Meherazad in the ST (State Transport) bus when our Australian group was there. But if she could get away early in the morning she came in the chartered bus which was arranged for us when we were all staying in the Ashoka Hotel nearby during our first three visits for Amartithi. I remember her coming with us in February 1973—it happened to be my birthday, and she sat next to me, talking to me very warmly.

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Except to greet her at Meherabad during Amartithi, or on Mehera's porch at Meherazad, I saw very little of Khorshed during the 1970s, but from December 1980 onwards, when I began to come for Mehera's birthday, Christmas, Baba's birthday, and at other times in the year, I did see her a little more often.

Usually this was at Meherabad, walking with her between the "tin shed" verandah and the Samadhi, or to the open air theatre for the special plays for Mehera's birthday, or to the Samadhi for Arti when all the women mandali came. Because of arthritis she had to walk very slowly and liked someone's arm to lean on, so I was able to offer her mine at different times, but these were not occasions when one could talk much or ask for stories.

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"A tasty dish"

However, one morning in September 1987 when I was in the Trust Compound, I saw Khorshed sitting outside her room there and went to greet her. I don't remember how the subject came up, but she told me this delightful little anecdote.

In the early days, she said, someone asked Baba why He had so many personalities with Him who so often clashed with one another, and didn't He find this a trouble. Baba replied: "I am the Cook. I need some salt, some chillies, some onions—they make a 'tasty' dish! I need all the
Khorshed

different ingredients."

The Krishna Robe

Whenever I went into the Museum on Meherabad Hill I always enjoyed looking at the richly-embroidered cream silk Krishna robe and crown, and the garland of hand-made roses displayed in one of the glass cabinets. They had been made for Baba during the 1930s while He was away on one of His trips to the West. The embroidery is magnificent—it covers the full length of the front of the robe and the wide cuffs, as well as the entire crown. I used to stand there marvelling at the delicate design and fine stitches done with such love for Him.

Baba wore the robe at the time of His birthday celebration at Meherabad in 1938. Hanging in the East Room, which is at the opposite end of the building from the Museum, there is a lovely large photograph taken on this occasion—Baba is sitting on a bed in the East Room with Mehera standing beside Him.

I asked Khorshed about the embroidery. The robe, crown and garland were designed by Mehera, and she and Khorshed as well as Naja and Mani did the embroidery. The silver thread came from Khorshed's Kusti (the long cord wound round the waist given to Zoroastrian children at their Confirmation or Thread ceremony), which was very thick with many strands. The small fine sequins came from an elaborate sari, and embroidery threads were also carefully reused. Khorshed said that some of the embroidery silks were brought for them from Poona—being in the ashram they could not go and get anything themselves. They made use of what they had on hand there, and cut up another silk sari to make the flowers for the garland—small pink roses and buds with touches of green for leaves, each flower so carefully fashioned. Truly these were gifts fit to adorn their King.

Khorshed's Health In Later Years

At this time of my being with her in 1987, Khorshed did not seem in good health and spoke slowly. She also said that her eyesight was now affected by cataracts. She could not see the Baba films very well when they

Khorshed

were shown in Mandali Hall in the Sunday morning programmes, but she came anyway, whenever she could. When she was young in those years

during the 1930s in the ashram on Meherabad Hill, her eyesight must have been very good—her work on the Krishna robe and crown was beautiful.

And in Mehera's bedroom at Meherazad in 1991, Goher showed me a photograph-frame which Khorshed had embroidered. It was exquisitely worked.

Also during this visit, after having tea with Mani in the Trust Office one afternoon, I specially went across to see Khorshed. She said she didn't walk about much now because a year before this she fell in her room, fracturing her hip, and was still feeling the effects of it. Two Americans were there with me, and Khorshed seemed a little tired so we only stayed about ten minutes before sharing a rickshaw back to Meherabad. I am so glad now that I did see her that afternoon because it turned out to be my last time in India. How nicely Beloved Baba arranges things for us all!

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Khorshed's Childhood

Khorshed Irani was about ten years old when she first saw Baba in 1922. Her father, Kaikhushru Masa (masa means uncle on the maternal side of a family) was a jeweler in Bombay. He was a devotee of Upasni Maharaj whom he visited frequently in Sakori, and his wife Soonamasi and her sister Gulmai Irani also began to follow Maharaj. Gulmai had two sons, Rustom and Adi Snr and two daughters, Piroja and Dolly. Khorshed was the only child in her family.

Upasni Maharaj's Birthday Celebration

In May 1922 Baba arranged a very grand four-day celebration at Sakori for Upasni Maharaj's birthday. Baba travelled by train from Poona to Sakori, accompanied by His mother Shirinmai and sister-in-law big Khorshed who was Jamshed's wife. On the same train were many of Maharaj's devotees from Poona and Bombay, including Kaikhushru Masa, Soonamasi and Khorshed.

Some time earlier Khorshed had heard her mother telling her father that there was one Parsi boy who loved Upasni Maharaj, and that Maharaj loved Him. On visits to Sakori Kaikhushru Masa saw Baba, and Khorshed wanted to see this boy herself. She did so for the first time on

Khorshed

the Poona train—I felt in my heart so much peace,” she said. The others on that journey likewise felt drawn to Baba.

Gulmai with her son Adi and nephew Sarosh also came to Sakori for Maharaj's birthday celebration, as well as Mehera's mother Daulatmai with her sister Freinymasi who was Padri's mother. All of these were destined soon to devote their whole lives to Baba, because over a period of time Maharaj told them to leave him and follow Baba.

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Manzil-e-Meem, Bombay

At the end of May 1922 Baba and forty of His men walked from Poona to Bombay, where He established Manzil-e-Meem, the House of the Master, in the suburb of Dadar. Khorshed and her parents lived nearby, and one day Baba came unannounced to their house to see them. Kaikhushru Masa was not at home, but the two women immediately recognized Baba, receiving Him reverently. He asked that Masa come to see Him at Manzil-e-Meem every morning at 7:00 AM to attend the Arti, that Khorshed come every afternoon after school at 4:00 PM, and Soonamasi could come any time during the day. They were all so happy about this because without Baba's orders no-one could go there.

Gulmai's daughters Piroja and Dolly—Khorshed's cousins—came to Bombay for their studies, and the three girls with Khorshed's other cousin Mani (with her parents knowing) saw Baba in the afternoons. He would ask them what they were learning, and sometimes played a game with them.

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In the following year, 1923, Soonamasi and Khorshed came to Ahmednagar for the wedding of Rustom and Mehera's sister Freni on 9th May.

Quetta 1923

At the end of May Baba took Gulmai, Soonamasi, Khorshed and a number of His men to Karachi where they stayed with Pilamai Irani for some days, visiting the Taj Mahal and touring Mathura with Baba on the way. Then they travelled to Quetta where they all stayed in a house next to

Khorshed

the one where Pilamai's brother, Rusi Irani, lived with his wife Khorshedbanu and family including daughters Goher and Katie who were

then about seven and three years old. In this way Baba's intricate design of connecting links continued to widen, enabling Him to begin contacting more of those who would later become His close mandali.

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Ahmednagar and Kaikhushru Masa's Illness

They left Quetta on 25th June for Ahmedabad where Baba asked Sarosh to take Gulmai, Soonamasi and Khorshed back to Ahmednagar, telling the women to stay there until He sent for them to come to Bombay. In July while they were still in Ahmednagar, Kaikhushru Masa became very ill in Bombay. Three telegrams were sent to Soonamasi to go to him, but she did not do so because of Baba's order.

In the meantime Baba had returned to Meherabad. He called Soonamasi and Khorshed there and told them that if they had gone to Bombay against His order, Masa would have died, but now he would be all right. He then sent the two women to Bombay to see Masa and he did recover. Baba and the men also returned to Bombay, staying in a small building behind Manzil-e-Meem called No. 6 Irani Mansion.

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Sakori and Bombay

In August 1923 Mehera and Khorshed were at Sakori where they were helping to build huts for Upasni Maharaj. In October Baba was leaving Bombay for Sakori, and told Kaikhushru Masa and Soonamasi to move into No. 6 Irani Mansion.

"Forget Sakori"

Later that year when Baba was trying to make arrangements to go to Persia, Mehera's grandmother was with Upasni Maharaj at Sakori. Baba was in Poona then and when Mehera asked Him if she and Khorshed could go to Sakori, Baba said for 15 days only. When they asked Maharaj about leaving he said to stay.

Baba was now staying at Bharucha Building in Dadar, Bombay and

Khorshed

sent Gulmai three times to bring the girls to Bombay to be near Him. Maharaj had again ordered them to stay, but Baba said, "Forget Sakori."

Mehera and Khorshed went with Gulmai the third time. This was in January 1924, and they stayed with Khorshed's parents, where Mehera's mother Daulatmai joined them.

Baba called Mehera and Khorshed every day for darshan at Bharucha Building, and on one occasion He visited them at Irani Mansion where He asked the girls to sing for Him. Mehera was too shy, but Khorshed sang a song about Krishna which Baba liked.

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For the celebration of Upasni Maharaj's birthday at Meherabad on 19th May 1924, Baba called several of the women including Mehera and Khorshed.

Quetta 1924

At the end of the month Baba asked Gustadji to bring Mehera and Daulatmai, Naja, big Khorshed, and two other women to Quetta. Baba went first to Bombay, staying at No. 6 Irani Mansion where Soonamasi and Khorshed looked after Him. He told them to stay there because He would not be taking them with Him to Quetta this time. Khorshed was upset, and said that she wanted to go to Sakori instead. But Baba wanted to show her it was important to do what He wanted, so He did not relent, and went to Quetta with His men.

At the end of July Baba returned to Bombay and again stayed at No.6 Irani Mansion which made Soonamasi and Khorshed very happy. Mehera also stayed there, and this was when she and Khorshed for the first time tried making a dessert for Baba.

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Early in August 1924 Baba left Bombay to travel in India, and sent Mehera and her mother Daulatmai to Khushru Quarters, Ahmednagar, where Khorshed and her cousin Dolly later joined them.

Khorshed

Meditation, Writing God's Name, And Sewing

After returning to Meherabad Baba called many for darshan. He

asked the girls how they occupied themselves, and then gave them orders. Baba told them to get up at 6:00 AM and take a bath, meditate on Baba's photo for an hour, write for one hour the name of Yezdan in tiny writing, cut off each name of Yezdan for one hour, and to sew on the machine three sizes of shirts. These they made on Baba's instructions for Him to give as prasad to the poor villagers of Arangaon. They sewed the shirts after lunch and tea, but after 15 days only 100 were sewn. When a much larger number were done Baba said that was enough, and the shirts were sent to Meherabad.

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Khorshed Called To Stay Permanently At Meherabad

At the end of 1924 Baba called Mehera, Daulatmai, Naja, Khorshed, and big Khorshed to stay with Him permanently at Meherabad. They lived in the Post Office building. The two Khorsheds had good singing voices, and Baba one day taught them a beautiful Krishna song. He was still singing and speaking at that time. His Silence began on 10th July 1925.

During these two years the women remained in the Post Office. Baba had a bamboo-matting fence built round it for privacy to screen them from the outside world and they did not go beyond it. For exercise Baba taught them to play cricket in their compound which they enjoyed for an hour every day.

Baba had by now started the Meher Free Dispensary and the Babajan School for village boys. Naja, helped by Mehera, Khorshed, Dolly and others, cooked for all the children in the makeshift kitchen which had also been built in the compound, and they were kept very busy.

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Baba Moves To Meherabad Hill

From the time the Jhopdi was built in Lower Meherabad in 1924 Baba continued staying in it. But in November 1927 when the schools were increased, He moved the boys to the water tank rooms on Meherabad Hill. Baba then stayed close by them in the crypt room which years later was rebuilt and became His Samadhi. While there, Baba allowed

Khorshed

Khorshed's father Kaikhushru Masa, who was not in good health, to visit Him.

Making Oleander Garlands For Baba

The girls were still living in the Post Office, but as Baba did not come down from the Hill they had not seen Him for some months. So one day they decided to make a garland to send to Him with Masa. They could not leave their compound, or send to the bazaar, so how to obtain the flowers? Then they thought of asking Valu to try to find some growing nearby and bring them back to the Post Office.

Valu Pawar

Valu was a wealthy landowner of Arangaon. She had married when a girl and was widowed while still very young. When Baba came to Arangaon she was very drawn to Him and wished to be with Him and serve Him. In those early days she would work hard all day at Meherabad carrying water from the well to the Post Office compound, sweeping and doing other duties, returning to her home in the evening.

At this time when Mehera and the girls wanted to make a garland for Baba, Valu finished her work, walked some distance to a creek bed near the village and gathered many flowers from the oleander bushes which grew there. Although it was getting rather late, she went straight back to the Post Office carefully carrying the flowers in her sari and gave them to the delighted girls.

There were so many flowers that they sat down straight away, happily able to make a garland, bracelets, and small crown which they wrapped in a damp cloth to keep fresh until they could send them to Baba. In the morning the girls asked Kaikhushru Masa to take them to Baba when going up the Hill to visit Him. Baba sent back a message that He had put them on, and that He was happy with their loving thoughts for Him.

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Toka and Nasik

In mid-1928 Baba moved everything and everyone to Toka, but six months later brought all back again to Meherabad. In 1929 He again moved, this time to Nasik, and Soonamasi stayed with the other women in
Khorshed

the ashram there. Kaikhushru Masa stayed with the men. Baba gave an order that no-one was to leave the ashram area.

Khorshed's Father

Kaikhushru Masa was a jeweler and quite wealthy. Khorshed loved him dearly, and he loved her very much too, for she was his only child. He was rather absent-minded, and liked to stroll by the river in Nasik, sometimes playing with local children.

Kaikhushru Masa's brother and others of the family were much against Baba. They were afraid that Kaikhushru would give all his wealth to Baba, so they plotted to kidnap him and make him sign a will in their favour. They came in a car one day, saw Kaikhushru strolling by the river, and took him back to Bombay where they held him prisoner.

Because he had not returned from his stroll by 8:00 PM that evening, Adi's brother Rustom looked for him, but learnt from the local children that he had been taken away in a car. Rustom said that they must go and find him, but Khorshed said No, Baba's order was for no-one to go away from the ashram, and although she loved her father so much, nothing would persuade her.

Baba was away at this time, and on His return they told Him what had happened. He said not to worry, it was His responsibility. Sometime later Baba sent Khorshed and her mother to Bombay to do some work for Him, with the order that they were not to stop anywhere. When passing the house where her father was held prisoner, Khorshed saw him walking on the balcony but could not go to him because of Baba's order.

After being held by his brother for a year, Kaikhushru Masa finally gave in and signed over his property. He was then released, but his health was broken. Baba allowed Soonamasi and Khorshed to bring him to Nasik to give him constant care. Shortly afterward, in mid-January 1931, Baba came to the house and stayed there overnight. He went into Masa's room frequently during the night, telling the sick man not to worry but to remember Baba.

In the morning while Khorshed and her mother were sitting in the next room and Baba was with Kaikhushru, Baba told Khorshed to sing to her father. She did so, and he died hearing the devotional songs which he loved. Baba said to Soonamasi and Khorshed not to worry about Masa's wealth going to the relations, telling them that He was responsible.

The end of this story is that in October 1949 Baba sent Khorshed and her mother back to Bombay to live their New Life there while

Khorshed

following His orders. They continued living there, and late in 1959 Khorshed heard that her uncle was dying and went to see him. She asked

him to say Baba's Name and then he died.

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Western Women's First Visit To India

Returning now to Nasik. When the Western women came to India for the first time in April 1933, Baba took the Eastern women mandali and some others to Bombay to meet them, and it was a happy time for them all. Afterwards Baba sent the Easterners back to Nasik. He took the Western women to Kashmir but after a short time there He sent them back home again.

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Cloistered Life On Meherabad Hill

Then began the complete change in the lives of His close ones. In November Baba sent Mehera, Mani, Naja, Khorshed, Soonamasi and Valu to live on Meherabad Hill in the East Room of the water-tank building which had previously been used by the Prem Ashram schoolboys. For the next few years these six women lived a life of loving obedience to Baba's very strict orders, completely cloistered within the fully-screened compound there, seeing only Baba when He came to spend time with them, and the very few visitors who were permitted—Shirinmai, Gulmai and Mehera's sister Freni.

In 1936 Baba took them for a visit to Mysore, and while there Mani had to have an emergency ear operation. The others felt this was why Baba had taken them there, because there were no facilities in Ahmednagar to deal with such a situation. Their secluded life was still maintained under Baba's strict orders.

When the Western women were staying in the ashram at Nasik at the end of 1936 and the first half of 1937, Baba brought them at regular intervals to Meherabad Hill to visit the six Easterners, as well as the older women, Daulatmai and Freinymasi, who were living nearby in Lower Meherabad.

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Khorshed

Cannes

And then followed in mid-1937 the wonderful time when Baba took

the six to Cannes for a few months. Some of the Western women travelled with them, and various Eastern and Western men were called at different times by Baba, but the Eastern women mandali remained secluded throughout the stay. Even so, when travelling to Paris for sightseeing, driven by Elizabeth Patterson in her car, and also on their return journey to Cannes, they were able to enjoy picnics with Baba. Various group photographs show Khorshed amongst them looking happy and relaxed during that period.

Coming Home In The “Circassia”

Returning to India from Marseilles in the “Circassia” on her maiden voyage they had very comfortable accommodations, in strong contrast with the voyage to France. Mehera, Mani and Khorshed shared a large cabin, and all the others were close by on the same deck. Meals were served in the cabin, and Baba had His meals with Mehera, Mani and Khorshed. The weather was perfect and no-one was seasick. This was again a happy contrast for Mehera who had been very seasick on the outward voyage.

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Blue Bus Tours

After the upstairs dormitory was added to the water-tank building on Meherabad Hill during the summer of 1938, a number of the Western women and some Easterners were permitted to join the ashram. In December 1938 Baba began the first of the Blue Bus tours which for the next three years took them all over India. Khorshed naturally went on these tours, and at some of the stopping places she helped Mehera cook Baba’s meals.

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Dehra Dun Cooking Roster

In 1946 when Baba, His men mandali and some of the women were in Dehra Dun, Katie, Indu and Khorshed took turns weekly to cook for everyone, with Kitty, Rano, Mehera and Meheru helping to cut
Khorshed

vegetables. Khorshed and Katie did the same in Mahabaleshwar later that year.

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Baba's Mast Work

During the 1940s Baba travelled a great deal in India for His work with masts. At times He allowed only Mehera, Mani and Meheru, and sometimes Rano or Kitty, to come to some of these places—but He and the men mandali were fully occupied going out to find masts, with whom Baba spent much time. The other women stayed behind in the Meherabad Hill ashram.

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Lahore

When they all went to Lahore for five months in July 1943, Baba divided the women into two groups, some staying with Him in one bungalow, Khorshed and the others in a different house. This was a very difficult time for the second group who were under strict orders not to see Baba at all nor even to look in the direction of His house. He certainly tested their promise to obey Him 100% during that period, and also on so many other occasions during their lives with Him.

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The New Life

The biggest test of all was the New Life, when Baba told everyone that He would take only sixteen men and four women with Him, and that no-one else could have any contact with Him, or expect to see Him again. He sent different ones to different places to live their New Life by obeying the orders He gave them, saying that by doing so they were still a part of His ashram even though they were physically away from Him. Soonamasi and Khorshed were sent to Bombay for the New Life, but I have no details of that time.

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Khorshed

Guruprasad, Poona

Khorshed and her mother were still living in Bombay during the

1960s, and Khorshed came to Guruprasad in Poona each summer to help in the household when Baba and the mandali werethere.

In 1968 Baba, then in strict seclusion, called Khorshed to stay at Guruprasad until He returned to Meherazad. Baba ordered both Khorshed and Naja to keep silence for those two and a half months, and had them cook kitchri [rice and dal] and bhaji [vegetables] for His evening meal.

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Khushru Quarters, Ahmednagar

In the early 1970s Khorshed and Soonamasi came to live in their rooms in Khushru Quarters in the Avatar Meher Baba Trust Compound.

Soonamasi died during 1973. Khorshed continued to live there, later on sharing with a young protégé named Sudam, his wife Asha and their two small children.

This family has helped Khorshed ever since.

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MANSARI

Mansari came from Navsari, Baroda State, North of Bombay. Her

family name was Mani Desai but to avoid confusion with Baba's sister Mani, He gave her the name of Mansari—a mix of her own name and the city she came from. And to me there was also the association that Baba told her she should always wear a sari.

Small in stature, energetic, quick-moving, bright-eyed, she often seemed bird-like in the early years of my knowing her. She was a good storyteller, and her delightful sense of humour always appealed to me. But most of all, her love for Baba came through all she did.

I think of her always as the custodian and carer of Baba's Samadhi—just as I remember Padri as the custodian of Lower Meherabad. Baba called him one of the four “pillars” of Meherabad, and although he was surprised that Padri said “No” to joining Him in the New Life, Baba said He was also glad because if anything happened to the other three who were going with Him, then Padri would be the one in reserve.

Mansari and Padri always conveyed authority in a subtle but no-nonsense manner, both having strong personalities which were demonstrated when necessary. Each followed Baba's orders to the letter, and each holds a unique place in the history of Meherabad. At the beginning of the New Life, Baba granted Mansari's request to stay on Meherabad Hill, but told her she must stay there permanently, never going beyond the railway line except for dental or optical necessity.

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The Samadhi

In November 1962 and again in May 1969 when our Australian group had a one-day trip by bus from Poona to Meherabad and Meherazad, we spent just a couple of hours at Beloved Baba's Samadhi. Mansari would have been with us there, but I do not remember talking to her then.

We came to Amartithi for the first time in 1973 and just after the celebrations were over, our group was driven in the bus from the Ashoka Hotel in Ahmednagar to the Samadhi, arriving at 6:00 AM, and Mansari welcomed us there.

We all sat outside at first, then Mansari said, “We will now clean the Tomb”—it was not then generally referred to as the Samadhi. But before we began she told us that Baba decided its size. At that time Sarosh said,

Mansari

“It is very small, Baba, it should be bigger,” but Baba said No, that was

what He wanted. I asked, “Did Baba say how He wanted everything?”
“Yes, everything.”

Mansari continued: The stone slab in the floor in front of the Marble now covers the steps which used to lead down into the crypt. The slab was originally five feet long, but was made six feet when they brought Baba’s body there on 31st January 1969.

Baba’s Seclusion In The Crypt Room

At one time in the late 1920s Baba spent six months in seclusion in what was then known as the crypt room, fasting and taking only coffee each day which was brought up the Hill by one of the boys who secretly drank half of it on the way. Originally this room, which later became the Samadhi, was only the height of the line round the top of the present stone wall, with mud-brick walls and galvanised iron roof which used to make a noise in the winter, so one of the mandali would stand outside with his hands up to the roof, holding it firm for hours while Baba was working inside.

An athlete came to Baba at this period and Baba asked would he do exactly as He told him for six months. The man said yes. So Baba told him to eat 45 chapatis every day, 15 for breakfast, 15 for lunch, and 15 for dinner. These were very thick, the size of a large dinner plate, and filled with vegetables. Breakfast was early, lunch was at 11:30, and dinner at 5:00 or 5:30. Half an hour before each meal the man would become so hungry that he would go round to the kitchen and wait for the food Baba told Him that he must eat, otherwise Baba would go hungry.

Baba’s Cage Room

Mansari also told us about the long building at the back of the Samadhi, built in 1938 and used first as a maternity hospital for the poor. Nadine Tolstoy was in charge of it. Then Baba began using it for His mast work, and His cage room at one end of the building is still there. The cage was made by Padri from bamboo slats when the sixth-plane mast Karim Baba was being brought here from Calcutta in mid-1940. Karim Baba was a very fierce man, Mansari said.

Later Baba used the cage room Himself for periods of seclusion work, and a canvas covering was fixed over the bamboo so that He could not be seen while in there. A small aperture was cut in the cloth-covered

Mansari

bamboo wall so that only Baba’s hand on the alphabet board was visible

when He wished to give instructions to the mandali. Mansari recalled that while Baba was working there the outside gate was locked and no-one could go through until He clapped to indicate that His work was done.

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Cleaning the Samadhi With Mansari

Then the Samadhi cleaning began. Mansari called us in turn and explained what was to be done, starting with picking up from the Marble the covering cloth with the previous day's flowers on it, taking it outside and shaking them into a basket. All the flowers and garlands were kept each day, dried, and used in the Dhuni fire on the 12th of each month. Next the central window and stone ledge, the side-window wooden shutters, mesh screens, and stone ledges were dusted.

Baba's photo was cleaned with a special small cloth of seven colours like Baba's Flag. Another soft cloth was used to dust very gently with a light flicking motion all the gold letters on the Marble, then the remaining flat surface was carefully polished with this cloth. Both sides of the platform and the floor were swept, then washed with a lightly-moistened sponge. From a brass pot Mansari had poured a little water over the sponge just outside the Samadhi, and then squeezed it so that it would not make the floor too wet.

Finally the raised step of the Threshold was washed. The pilgrim called to do this was asked to kneel down facing it, and into his or her right hand Mansari poured a little water which was gently spread over the top of the step and down the front, any excess water then being smoothed away to the sides with the fingers. To be called to wash the Threshold was always very special, and each morning Mansari made sure that those who had just arrived, and particularly those were leaving soon, were given this opportunity. When there was a crowd of pilgrims, she would "divide" the Threshold area into portions to share among three or four. As soon as the floor was dry inside, all the mats which had earlier been taken out and vigorously shaken, were replaced.

Then we all could go in and stand along both sides of the platform, or in front on the floor level, until Mansari came in with another embroidered cloth, each of us taking hold along its edges and lowering it

Mansari

gently onto the Marble, saying "Avatar Meher Baba Ki Jai!" A bottle of

perfume was brought in, and passed along both sides, each one in turn spraying the edges of the cloth for a few inches. Pilgrims could sit on the platform alongside the Marble or on the floor until Arti-time at 7:00 AM, and afterwards take darshan and sit outside to join in the singing if they liked.

Later Changes

To digress for a moment—over the years a number of things mentioned above have changed for one or more good reasons—for example, during the 1970s perfume-spraying was stopped as it could mark the Marble; a little later, pilgrims were asked not to sit on the platform because this was distracting to others on the floor or outside who wanted a clear view of the Marble.

And when all the restoration work was done in the Samadhi during the summer of 1990 and 1991, the cleaning routines were altered for the wall murals to preserve the new paint work, and the Threshold is no longer washed with water spread by the hand but just wiped with a damp cloth, because the thick dark brown paint which had covered it for so many years was removed, and the magnificent timber is now finished with a clear coating to show the beautiful grain.

In March 1993, when Charlie Morton's wonderful painting of Baba was finally set into the central window space after his twenty years' work on it, the large black and white photo of Baba which used to stand against the window was taken out.

Also, to accommodate the ever-increasing numbers of pilgrims, in the early 1980s the covered area outside the Samadhi was extended and sheltered against wind and rain with bamboo screens round two sides. Some years after this was built, a wrought-iron railing fashioned in a delicate heart design was added at the other edge of the open approach-side as a guide-line for those waiting to go in to Baba.

The Threshold

During my visit for Amartithi in 1980 I asked Mansari about the significance of the Threshold of Baba's Tomb. She told me that Baba did not say this, but the Threshold is very important because it is the boundary—the dividing line which one steps over, leaving the world outside and coming to Baba inside the Samadhi.

Mansari

It takes 84,000 lakhs of lives to reach Him (one lakh equals 100,000),

Mansari continued, so the Threshold is very fragile and must not be walked on. To approach Baba, one offers one's head by bowing down at the Threshold, and then one can go in to Him, carefully stepping over the Threshold.

Then she mentioned that the Perfect Master Kabir said he approached the Threshold to reach God, but God had already reached out to his heart.

Washing the Threshold with one's hands is in respect, Mansari told me, and commented that "a cloth is a cloth." It is said that one lover wished to sweep the Threshold with his eyelashes—it is an offering.

She said that the sides of the door-frame to Baba's Samadhi are often touched and kissed by one and another, but this is just sentiment, it has no significance. Only the Threshold itself is important.

Mansari also commented that in India the threshold of one's own house is respected too, and one always steps over it. In a minor way it is also the boundary between the outside world and one's home, one's place—it is symbolic of the distinction between outside and inside.

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Mirabai

A few days before Mehera's Birthday celebration at Meherabad in December 1980, Mansari mentioned that Mirabai had said that a lover of God benefited 71 generations—35 back, 35 ahead, plus one which is the present generation. Mirabai, a Hindu saint, was an Indian queen whose love for Krishna was so great that she gave up everything to be totally free to worship Him. She suffered many trials and tests but Krishna always protected her. The many beautiful songs she composed in His praise are still sung in India today. Baba spoke of her love for God on a number of occasions.

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Several times over the years I had heard about Mansari's story of the *Fragrance on the Hill*, but whenever I asked her, there did not seem to be a suitable time for her to tell me. However, at the end of September 1981

Mansari

when I went to see her to say goodbye the evening before I was leaving

Meherabad, the opportunity did arise. In the plane coming home I wrote down all I could remember, typed it out later and sent it to Mansari to check for me. During my visit the following year she very kindly went through it with me, and this is the story, narrated in her words:

THE FRAGRANCE ON THE HILL

It was on 5th August 1969 that Dr. Donkin came to Meherabad to visit “The Boss” as he always called Baba. After spending time in the Samadhi, he came and talked with me for about two hours on this and that, again went to Baba, and then left. He looked so completely well and healthy that day.

The next morning when I got up I was already ten minutes late. I took my bath quickly and got ready to go to Baba. I had a strong feeling of urgency—inside me something said: “Come quickly, some soon.” It was not like a physical sound. I said to myself, “Yes, Baba, I know, I’m ten minutes late!” And I took a lantern and hurried across. I do not take my glasses when I go in the morning to Baba, but that morning I took a lantern although it was not very dark.

I came to the doors of Baba’s Samadhi, and lifted the lantern. Even when the doors are closed and locked they do not exactly meet, there is a crack, a slit between them. When you are standing at the doors you can see a little bit inside, just in front of this crack. As I raised the lantern I caught a flash of something white moving by that crack—like a white sadra—just the hem, I could not see any feet. I thought, “Oh Baba, will I find you sitting there, or standing, or what?” I undid the lock and opened the doors. Nothing was there—just the crypt with its earth, and the platform round it.

At that time of course the Marble was not there—just the earth in the crypt, which was level with the platform. We kept a heavy sheet over the earth—because at first the people coming would take a pinch of earth to put on their foreheads, but then they began to take some away, and we wouldn’t know where it would go, or how it would be used. So we covered the earth with a sheet, and to stop them lifting this up, I used to put a pile of incense ash at the foot.

But as I went in that morning I saw there was a hollow: the sheet was depressed just over Baba’s feet, exactly where we put our heads when we

Mansari

bow down over the Marble. And the top part of the sheet over Baba had

been moved—it looked as though it had been pushed aside, just as a bed looks when one gets out of it in a hurry, and that pile of incense ash was put to one side, carefully.

I thought: “Could someone have come in? But how could they get in?” I went quickly up on to the platform and looked at the windows: they were all securely closed, and the door had been locked. I said: “I must go for my glasses, and make sure I am seeing it all properly.” So I closed the door and hurried to get them. Yes, that depression in the earth was there under the sheet. But no-one could have got into the Samadhi, it had been properly locked. What had happened? What to do?

I called the watchman, the old man who was there then, and asked him had he seen or heard anything in the night, but he had seen no-one and hadn’t heard anything. I sent him hurrying down the Hill to find Padri to ask him to come immediately. I wanted someone to see it all before anyone else came, and Padri was the best one to see it with me, and he was also a Trustee. So I latched the doors again, and paced up and down, up and down, waiting.

A boy came to me and said Padri was taking his bath, and that he would come soon. I sent him down the Hill again: “Tell Padri that Mansari says come immediately, it is very important.”

After a few minutes Padri came, and I opened the doors and we went in. “What could cause this?” I asked him.

“Termites!” he said. But I knew it could not be so no ants would be disturbing that earth.

Now that the two of us had seen it we agreed we should restore it to normal. Padri was on the platform at the head side, and I was at the foot—where the steps which led down into the crypt used to be, the spot where we all now come to bow down to Baba. Together we worked—and as I leaned over the earth a wonderful fragrance came up to me—so sweet, so beautiful it was. I kept quiet. Was it really there?

Then Padri came down from the platform, and I watched him. Suddenly he said: “Did you put perfume?” “No.” He looked at me. “Did you smell it?” “Yes.”

He stood there for a moment. “Keep the windows closed, don’t put any flowers. Let’s see who are the lucky ones today.”

We went out—and by 10:00 AM people were coming up the Hill. All that day, and the next, and the next, they came. That old man, the watchman, had been telling his story, and it had gone on from one to
Mansari

another in Arangaon, had spread like fire to Ahmednagar, and to other

places. Some even asked: “Is it true that Baba ran out of the Samadhi and has gone away?”

For four days that beautiful Fragrance was there, wafting all over the top of the Hill, around the back, and down to where the path has a flat part. The crowds kept coming each day, those fortunate ones, and all experienced it.

Then some time on the 9th August, in the same way that the Fragrance had come, it was gone. It was on that date that Dr. Donkin died.

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Padri

Going through this story with me in July 1982 and talking of Padri’s part in it was all the more poignant for Mansari because he had died very suddenly of a massive heart attack on 13th March. She had a great respect and admiration for him, and felt his loss very much. She said to me: “Padri’s grave should have only one word on it—Selflessness.”

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During the 1970s and early ’80s I would always go and greet Mansari on arrival, and I spent a brief time now and again with her in her room in company with others, but unfortunately I did not keep any records other than what I have just written here.

Amartithi 1970s

Looking back on those days I realise that each year from 1973 to 1979 when we came for Amartithi, we were away from home for only two weeks including travelling time, and after the two to four days of Amartithi celebrations were over, we would be at Meherazad from 8:30 to 6:00 most days, or taking part in other activities, such as full-day trips to Ellora with Eruch, or involved with making the 1976 “God-Man” film, so there was little time really to spend with Mansari.

Another factor was that until the Pilgrim Centre was opened in June 1980, we all stayed in Ahmednagar at the Ashoka hotel or the Sablok hotel,

Mansari

or Viloo Villa—except for the much-prized, strictly rostered, four-day stays

in various buildings in Lower Meherabad which were limited to only twelve pilgrims at a time.

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Some Delightful Moments With Mansari

I have happy memories of little incidents in Mansari's company during the 1980s which remain vividly clear for me:

At night after Arti was over, everyone had to leave the Hill by 8:00 PM. The Samadhi was closed and the double wooden doors securely locked with a special large padlock. This was inserted into a strong staple fixed in the overhead section of the thick wooden door frame, and carried through the links of heavy chains set into the top panels of the two doors.

Every morning, perhaps ten or fifteen minutes before 6:00 AM when the cleaning began, Mansari would come across from her room, a lantern in her hand. Being small she had to stretch up to unlock the padlock, then she opened the doors and took darshan, prostrating full length before Baba. I loved to be there at that time, particularly if I was the only one present. It was sweet to go into the half-dark, warm, gently-perfumed, intimate atmosphere to greet Baba. His Presence seemed specially strong at that hour.

Then, regardless of how many came to help, Mansari began the cleaning routine, and if no-one came, she did it herself. Sometimes I was lucky enough to be the only one with her, and that was wonderful because then I got to do almost everything, and there were a number of jobs which I always loved doing. I particularly remember one occasion when I was standing on the platform waiting for Mansari's next instruction. She came in and handed me the cloth to clean the Marble, saying with a delighted laugh, "Today you have the whole Chocolate-Box all to yourself!"

Mansari would always greet me with a wave and a smile when she saw me coming towards the Samadhi, and often called me "a regular customer." But one year she didn't recognize me at first. I used to have very long hair and wore it in a long curl down my back, or pinned up in a bun which she liked—she always wore her own hair this way. Because of ill-health I had mine cut short in the early 1980s which was quite a change. Mansari told me she knew it must be me because the long skirt I was

Mansari

wearing was familiar to her—I used to keep certain clothes for India and

wore them on many visits. But the hair-style confused her—she preferred it long, saying it was more dignified—and so she began calling me “old friend in new disguise!”

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Mansari's Teas

In the '70s if we were at Meherabad in the afternoon we could go to Mansari's room at 3:00 PM for tea. This was made Indian-style with milk and sugar in the pot. Deo, the elderly village woman who came every day from Arangaon to help Mansari, would sometimes be there to hand the cups round, and when all had finished she would collect them and wash them under the cold-water tap in the corner of the kitchen-end of the room. There was no sink or basin, just a little wall built about two feet high around the tap and drain so that water did not splash everywhere.

This room, originally known as Baba's Kitchen, was built in 1933 just before Mehera, Mani, Naja, Soonamasi, Khorshed and Valu came to live in the East Room. After the top story was added to the water-tank building in August 1938, Mansari, Naja, Kitty, Gaimai Jessawala, Katie, and various others at one time or another cooked in this kitchen for Baba and the quite large group of Eastern and Western women disciples who were living in the ashram on Meherabad Hill.

Sometimes Mansari would give us a special treat with our tea. Her eyes twinkling, she would offer a plate of rather strange-looking cookies which she laughingly called “plastic cookies.” She had made them herself, stirring the concoction in a pot over the primus stove which stood on a crowded part of the ledge beside the original fuel stove on the end wall. I think the mixture was made from some kind of tapioca, and when it was spread on a plate to cool, it became an opaque, brittle substance with a kind of bubble-like texture—hard to describe, but it certainly looked like plastic! She would also at times give us a little dish of what seemed like ice-cream, although it was not cold, made no doubt from buffalo milk, and very sweet.

However, with the increasing number of pilgrims the strain on Mansari's resources as well as on herself, as she was sometimes not in good health, became too much, and so these delightful little interludes with her did not continue. But with the opening of the Pilgrim Centre in June 1980

Mansari

pilgrims could have tea there at 4:00 PM every day, so we were all well

looked after, even though the unique atmosphere of Baba's Kitchen, now known as Mansari's room, was missing.

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Saris

Day to day Mansari always wore a very simple cotton sari, usually white or cream with a narrow coloured border, and invariably a long-sleeved white cotton blouse, no matter how hot it was. In cold weather she added a cardigan with a warm shawl over her head. But for occasions such as Baba's Birthday, Amartithi, or Mehera's Birthday, she would wear her best bright sari and blouse, looking very colourful.

When I first bought myself a sari to wear for such occasions, I remember getting help to put it on. Then later I asked Mansari to show me how to do the pleating and so she closed her door, pulled her sari out from her waist, held it in front of herself, and then began pleating it with such a quick lithe movement that I was fascinated watching her. But although she explained the method as she went along and it looked easy while she did it, I still wasn't able to manage it by myself.

However, on my next visit, Dolly Dastur taught me very carefully, making me put the sari on over and over again while she was there with me, and I also wrote it all down. So that is how I learned to put it on properly, and why I always loved to wear a sari for many occasions, often being complimented by Mehera and the mandali as well as others on how nice it looked.

But I always remember Mansari's fingers moving so quickly and effortlessly that day. No doubt in the early years of living on the Hill she literally had to race to get dressed very fast and be ready for whatever Baba wanted—a perfect training ground.

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Electricity And Lanterns On The Hill

I remember that in the '70s there were no electric lights on the Hill road, and one had to use a torch all the way up and back again in the evening, and also in the dark winter mornings when going up early for cleaning. After a time power was connected for that road, and later again it

Mansari

was supplied for various buildings.

Mansari did not like the change at all at first—the long bright fluorescent tubes along the edge of the road between the spreading trees seemed harsh in their intensity after the quiet darkness. But of course she admitted after a while that it was helpful with so many more people coming and going, and also for herself in the night when there was no-one else on the Hill except the watchman.

Even so because power blackouts could occur quite frequently and unexpectedly, there were always kerosene lanterns hung at various strategic points, such as outside Mansari's door, under the roof of the "tin shed" verandah close to Baba's gadi, and at the Samadhi—these were left burning all night. And just before dark another lantern was always brought into the Samadhi, placed on a special stand on the platform beside the Marble, and kept there during evening Arti. One of Deo's tasks was to clean and fill all the lanterns every day—I often saw her squatting on the earth outside busily wiping out the smoke marks in their glass funnels.

At Amartithi during the 1970s a generator was installed on the Meher Retreat Tower for extra lighting, and also for the bright flashing lights at the top of the Tower which could be seen for miles. During the celebrations, Mehera, Mani with some others stayed in the East Room, and the rest of the women mandali slept in the library room. I remember Rano saying how incredibly noisy the generator was, keeping them all awake. But the erection of additional power lines and the opening in September 1984 of the Power Room which was built down the hill between the railway line and the main road, gave permanent power and lighting all over the Hill and also the now extensive Lower Meherabad areas.

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A Tour With Mansari

In the early '80s Mansari would now and then take a few pilgrims on a tour of the Museum and other special places on the Hill. Kaikobad's daughters Jalu and Gulu live in the main part of the long building behind the Samadhi, and when Mansari took us to see Baba's cage room at the other end she would first ring the bell at the tall gate there so that one of them could let us in.

Mansari told us that the very small room which leads into the cage room was originally used by Elizabeth and others when preparing issues of the "Meher Baba Journal." So much was done so lovingly for Baba by all

Mansari

the women in those early years on the Hill in cramped space with sparse

equipment.

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Pets

I remember once going with Mansari round the graves of Baba's pets, sheltered under the huge old banyan tree close to the Samadhi, and listening to a few stories about them.

There was always a dog or two tied up outside Mansari's room—she kept them as friends as well as watchdogs, and looked after them well, feeding them on a vegetarian diet—on Baba's orders no meat is eaten at Meherabad by people or animals.

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Slowing Down

For many years Mansari would be at the Samadhi before 6:00 AM every morning without fail, taking charge of the cleaning, and staying until well after Arti. But during my last two visits I noticed that most times she did not come early, and sometimes when she was sick with a heavy cold she would not even be there for Arti. Several of the Eastern and Western residents now share the duties between them. But for me all the time at the Samadhi with Mansari had a very definite quality and although others do the work so well and so lovingly for Baba, no-one really takes her place.

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Baba's Gadi

Late one afternoon in February 1989 I went up the Hill and into the Samadhi to greet Baba, staying for just a few minutes as there was no space to sit on the floor inside. Then I walked over to the women's graves and across to the pets'. I thought about going to see Mansari, but she wasn't in her room, so I walked all round the compound after stopping a while besides Baba's gadi. It was always a happy occupation to walk in that area so filled with Baba's Presence and think about all the women who were

Mansari

there with Him.

Before long I started walking again in the direction of the Samadhi to be in good time for Arti, and met Mansari bringing lanterns for the “tin shed” verandah. I walked across with her, and as we reached it she said something about the date, and I commented it was only a week to Baba’s Birthday. The 95th she said, and I mentioned having been there for the 90th which was a wonderful occasion.

Arti With Baba At His Gadi

While Mansari was hanging the lantern near the gadi I said I always loved being near it, and she told me how they all used to sit round Baba there. She said, “He would tell stories, crack jokes, crack the ego!” and gave her characteristic little laugh at this. When the lanterns were lit, Baba would say, “Here is My light, now we will have Arti.” They would stand around Him with the platter and sing—always the Gujarati Arti—then He would call each one to bow down to Him and He would hug them, that was all.

They would all walk together to the compound gate where they would wave Him goodbye as He walked to His cabin, went up the steps to the doorway, turned and waved to them again. It was a lovely word-picture she gave me.

Mansari said they performed Arti every day on the Hill, using the small tray with a wick in ghee and camphor which was lit and then waved during the singing. Khorshed’s mother Soonamasi prepared the tray and lit it, and Gulmai waved it in front of Baba. They never had Arti in the mornings. But on the Blue Bus tours they had to take the Arti tray in case Baba would ask for it, and Mansari recalled that He did so on various occasions but not regularly.

While at Arti in the Samadhi I thought a little about all she had told me, and wrote it down when I returned to the Pilgrim Centre.

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With Mansari In Her Room

While Mansari was taking a rest in the afternoon, her main doors inside the screen doors would be closed so that no-one disturbed her. Later on, if you came by and the doors were open you went up the step

Mansari

and knocked or called to her because it was not always possible to see

through the screens whether she was busy with other people. Usually Mansari called you to come in, and so you sat down on one of the rather battered old wooden chairs or a metal folding one, and listened to whatever might be going on.

Sometimes she would be talking with another of the older Indian residents in the appropriate language, so you just waited. If it wasn't a business matter Mansari would switch to English and perhaps fill you in on the story. Sometimes there was a group of pilgrims telling her about something or someone she knew, and there was general talk. The best times for me were when she was alone, or maybe only Vishnu's cousin, Sushila, would be there, and then I could ask Mansari for stories, or she would spontaneously start talking about various events. This happened quite a number of times during my 1991 visit, and I was able to write them down in the evenings at the Centre.

I always enjoyed being in Mansari's room, with its atmosphere of Baba-times gone by, and its simplicity and sparseness indicative of her own way of life, and indicative perhaps, of Meherabad itself. Sometimes Mansari would offer her chair to a visitor, sometimes she would continue sitting in it herself—a folding canvas deck-chair in which she could lie back and rest her head, her feet propped on a low stool. I remember her telling me once that in the summer when it was extremely hot, she did not go to bed in the very small adjoining room, but stayed all night reclining in this chair. As with many Indian buildings, the windows are not very big and are set high on the wall, so with the doors closed it must indeed have been very hot inside. But for Mansari the only thing that mattered was to live there on Baba's hill and follow His orders.

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Mansari's First Contact With Baba

Not long after my arrival in September 1991, I went to see Mansari before evening Arti. She told me that it was in 1927 through Kaikobad, one of Baba's earliest disciples, that she first came to Meherabad with some of her family to see Baba. From childhood she had suffered with a severe skin complaint which no treatment seemed to relieve. Baba gave her some Dhuni ash and said to take a pinch every day at home for a month. The disease was cured and did not recur.

Mansari

Baba called Mansari to stay permanently at Meherabad on 16th June

1938. She was then twenty-nine, and it was at this time that Baba changed her name from Mani to Mansari.

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Pilamai

Mansari talked of Goher's Aunt Pilamai who used to be a society lady in Karachi where she lived with her husband, but Baba told her to go out and give to the poor, which she did for a long period. Baba liked her very much because although she could be very angry at times with various ones and slap them, she would then instantly embrace them. She had two sons and a daughter who all live in Bombay. In the early 1920s Baba told Pilamai that she was His spiritual sister.

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Baba's Talk Of Future Suffering

Then Mansari recalled a time when all the women were sitting round Baba who was on His gadi on the "tin shed" verandah, Meherabad Hill. He told them that India would suffer greatly, and that the whole world population had to be reduced.

During Avataric periods so many souls come from other planets and the population increase is very great. He said that wars and accidents account for the deaths of many, but there would come a time when there was no food, and people would be eating their clothing. Baba then told them that He would provide just a tiny amount for His own people.

Mansari held up her hand, fingers together, and marked off the top parts with her thumb against them: "This much."

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Sushila

When I went to see Mansari late one afternoon only Sushila was there. She is Vishnu Deorukhkar's cousin. Vishnu was one of Baba's earliest close mandali, and spent his whole life serving Him. His mother, Kaku, first met Baba in Poona in 1920 when Vishnu joined Baba. Later

Mansari

she came to Meherabad, and used to keep watch in the small water tower

just outside the compound on Meherabad Hill in the early 1930s to alert the women mandali when a man was approaching so that Mehera would not see him nor he see her.

Kaku died while Vishnu was with Baba in the New Life, and there is a touching story about this. They were in Dehra Dun, and after speaking to some of the companions on the subject of their reaction to news about the loss of dear ones, Baba asked Vishnu how he would feel if his mother, whom he loved very much, were to die. Bound by the New Life order to remain cheerful and not show inner emotion, Vishnu said he would not be disturbed. Baba then told him a telegram had come stating that Kaku had died. Vishnu did not express any emotion outwardly but went on attending to all his duties as usual. Later Baba praised his attitude and embraced him for his brave acceptance.

Sushila told me she came to stay at Meherabad in 1938. Mansari came on 16th June that year, and Eruch with his family joined Baba on 1st August 1938. [Sushila came briefly in 1938 but didn't move there permanently until after Vishnu's death in 1962.]

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The Ice Cream Story

I was confined to the Pilgrim Quarters with a dose of flu and so it was a whole week before I could see Mansari again. No-one was there when I came to her room, and straight away she told me her delightful "ice cream story":

Baba called her to the May 1965 Darshan at Guruprasad, Poona and she was told to be in the pandal. She was sitting some way back. Eruch, on Baba's instructions, called for her to show where she was, so she raised her hand. Again Eruch announced, "Baba says to wave." Then, "Baba says you are so small you should stand up so He can see you." She did so.

After darshan she was told to come to see Baba in the mandali room at exactly 12:30 (or whatever the time was). On coming she found a row of men sitting on one side, and women on the other. Baba told her: "Stand there, be still, don't laugh, and open your mouth so I can flip the ice cream in!"

At the very idea she laughed—"because what if it hit my forehead or
Mansari

came on my sari?" Baba said, "I told you not to laugh." So she stood

there. Baba took a spoonful of ice cream and flipped it straight into her mouth. Three times He did this, once asking what flavour she wanted.

She told Him: “Flavour is nothing—you are giving it to me, that is all!” After the last mouthful Baba said, “Now go!” and she left.

While telling me about it she laughed happily at the memory of that time.

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Elizabeth

I asked Mansari where did she stay in 1938 when the dormitory top story was built and the Westerners came. She said, “With them.” She was the only Indian woman upstairs, and her bed was on the left hand side coming into the room.

Downstairs, in the room which is now the Museum, were the older ones who couldn’t climb the steep stone stairs to the dormitory—Shirinmai, Gulmai and others. Then Mansari spoke of Elizabeth, and how she would toil up and down those stairs without complaint although it was difficult for her. Mansari said she had heard only a few years ago that Elizabeth’s injury to her back had been caused by a nurse dropping her as a young child but doing nothing about it.

Mansari recalled that Elizabeth’s thoughts were always for Baba. If she was at a meal and knew it was time to get the car out and go for Baba, she would leave her food and go straight to the garage so as to be ready for Him.

Mansari commented that Elizabeth was a perfect example—she was so loving always to everyone, and she loved Baba so much.

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Narayan Maharaj

A few days later Mansari told me a story of Narayan Maharaj. There was a movie theatre in Bombay, and for a long time the owner had found that it did not pay. He invited Narayan Maharaj to come and see the movie “Lanka is Burning” [*Lanka Dahan*]. Narayan was seated in a special chair, and called out loudly when the film started. The other people there wondered about him. He told the owner, “The trouble is that

Mansari

large pillar in the centre of the theatre—it is resting on my chest,” and

told him to remove it. But the man said if this was done the whole place would fall down, so he did nothing.

After a time he sold the theatre and the new owner heeded Narayan Maharaj's advice. He pulled the place down, re-built it without any obstructing pillars and gave it the same name as before. It seems that the theatre flourished after that.

Talking of Narayan Maharaj reminded Mansari that in 1945 he travelled to Bangalore for some special ceremonies, but died during this time and was cremated. Then his ashes were taken back to Kedgaon near Poona where he had come from, and were placed in his shrine there.

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Margaret

Mansari mentioned Myrtle Beach and asked if I had been there. I said, "Yes, in 1984."

"Did you meet Elizabeth?"

I told her, "Yes, here on Mehera's porch about the mid-1970s, and I met Kitty here several times too, as well as spending time with her at Myrtle Beach. And I met Margaret Craske at Myrtle Beach while she was there on her summer vacation from New York. What a lovely sense of humour she had. She was still teaching ballet then, and what a great teacher she was. All her pupils loved and respected her, they always called her Miss Craske."

Mansari remembered Margaret bringing Meheru's schoolboy brother Falu from England at the outbreak of World War II, and how she then stayed here with Baba for the duration of the war. She was not in good health for some of the time. One day, talking jokingly to Baba about the war, she told Him, "It's all your fault!" and Baba turned up His hands saying, "What can I do?" Then in 1946 He sent her to America, and what wonderful work she did in bringing so many to Baba.

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Mansari's family

Then Mansari spoke about her own family.

Her father had two brothers who followed Baba. One of them was her Uncle Sorabji. He was a Clerk of the Court (not, she emphasised, an
Mansari

editor, as Bhau states in *Lord Meher*) but he loved writing. [Actually, *Lord*

Meher refers to him as a well known author and scholar—which was how Baba knew of him.] He had had a guru who died, and he had been searching for years for another. He said that when he found one who touched his heart he would follow him.

I known Baba sent some of His mandali to Sorabji with a lot of notes about Upasni Maharaj, saying he should write a book. Sorabji said No, he was busy with his job, and anyway why was someone unknown to him telling him to do this. Again the material was sent, and again he said No. Finally Baba said it was to be left on Sorabji's doorstep.

Mansari's father said to him, "You are searching for a guru and here is one. You should accept the material." So Sorabji said, "All right. Put it in the storeroom."

Six months later he began to look at it, and was touched to the heart. So he began working on it. Baba had earlier told him he could take what time he wanted, six months, a year, not to hurry.

Mansari said she lived with her Uncle Sorabji from the time she was fifteen until twenty-nine, when she came to stay permanently with Baba in 1938. She would help her uncle with proofreading, which was always at the dinner table because he would never just eat at that time. The book is in Gujarati, and Mansari said it is now in the possession of her only niece, Dr. Meher Desai. It hasn't been translated into English.

Mansari commented that Navsari people were against Baba in the early years, but now all follow Him—90 came to Amartithi in 1991. Dr. Hoshang Bharucha heard of Baba from her Uncle Sorabji.

Continuing about her family, Mansari told me that when her brother Minoo was to be married in Navsari at the end of December 1937, it was to be a really big wedding. But Baba said, "No, cancel the invitations, it is to be quiet. I will come."

At this time Uncle Sorabji was dying, lying on his bed. Baba came to see him. Sorabji wanted to bow down to Baba, but Baba said he was not to get out of bed until He told him to. Baba came again four days later and called for Sorabji who was helped to walk to Him, and Baba told him then to bow down, which he did.

Her uncle died very soon after this, on 27th December 1937, and as instructed by Baba a telegram was sent to Him in Nagpur where He had gone to stay a few days with the Jessawala family for a darshan programme. But just before the telegram arrived, Baba said to His mandali, "My old man has come to me." Baba's sign for an old man was

Mansari

to stroke His chin like a beard.

Mansari mentioned that there was only her niece and a cousin left in the family—the cousin was not interested in Baba and didn't know where Mansari was. "No connection," she commented to me. Her brother died in 1986, I think she said.

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"Tukaram" Movie

Mansari spoke of the movie "Tukaram." In 1974 or '75 Bill Le Page arranged for the women mandali and the Australian group to see it in a theatre in Ahmednagar. It was a beautiful movie, Mansari said, and I agreed. I remembered going on that occasion, and sitting just behind the women mandali. I think it was Arnavaz who translated a lot of the dialogue for me—she was sitting nearby. Bill arranged for the movie to be shown again in 1977—an American Baba lover who was in Mansari's room that morning told us that he saw it then.

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"No more roaming"

Just before we left to go down to the Pilgrim Centre for lunch, Mansari said "If you are not tired I'll tell you one more story."

2000 years ago a Jew spat on Jesus, but instead of being angry Jesus said quietly, "Until I come again you have no place to stay."

In 1947, Mansari continued, Baba was sitting on His gadi—she couldn't remember the month. He was looking very sad, and said, "Now you will be no more roaming."

Four days later Kitty brought the newspaper and read out to Baba, and all of them there, that Israel had been given to the Jews. Thus God fulfilled His word.

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"Thank you, Baba!"

As I was leaving her room I said to Mansari, "Thank you very much for all the lovely stories." She immediately but gently corrected me. "Thank

Mansari

you, Baba!" At different times when I thanked her for anything at all, she

would always say this, and I would then repeat it after her. It was just another little instance of her turning aside from herself and acknowledging Baba in everything.

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Rooms On The Hill Where Mansari Stayed

The next afternoon Mansari again mentioned that in 1938 she stayed upstairs in the dormitory with the Westerners. At the beginning of the New Life she stayed in Baba's cage room in the building behind the Samadhi where Kaikobad's family was living. In 1961 Baba told her to stay in her present room which was originally called Baba's Kitchen. It is now usually referred to as Mansari's kitchen.

I asked if Baba had slept there in the small room leading off the kitchen (which was Mansari's bedroom). She said, "No, He ate in there, and Kitty did the cooking on the big fuel stove in the kitchen." Mansari cooked for the Easterners in another room next door as she didn't know Western cooking.

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Temper

Mansari said she had a *hot* temper, and that Mani would tell her she used such cutting words. One time Baba mentioned it, and told her that she must learn to control her temper. If she didn't, she couldn't be with Him next time, He wouldn't allow her to come. She replied that she would make a parachute from His daaman and land beside Him! He smiled at her spirit, but still said she must control her temper and that He would help her.

She admitted that with the residents she would still speak out if something was wrong. She laughed and said that some were even a bit afraid of her!

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Mansari

Changes At Meherabad

“I am 17th Century” Mansari told me, and that she didn’t like all the changes, such as using Baba’s Cabin in Lower Meherabad for residents’ quarters, and also the electric lights on the Hill. I remarked that I knew she, and Padri too, didn’t like the lights, but that now it was good, and she agreed. “Of course with so many coming you have to have these things.”

I recalled how wonderful it was in the 1970s before the Pilgrim Centre was built, when twelve of us at a time would have four precious days at Lower Meherabad, staying in various buildings with few amenities but reveling in the happy atmosphere of just being there with Baba. One of the older Indian women who had come into the room shortly before this agreed. But now of course it is even better to be able to stay at Meherabad all the time in the Pilgrim Centre and Hostels.

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Padri

Mansari spoke a lot of Padri, how much he loved and served Baba. Padri could be very hard and fiery, but also very gentle. She remembered that if a villager told him that her husband wasn’t giving her money he had earned but spent it in drinking, Padri would beat that man. But on the other hand, he would go out immediately on his bicycle in the middle of the night when called to help some sick person.

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When Baba Dropped His Body

Mansari said that she wanted to tell me how she heard that Baba had dropped His body on 31st January 1969.

That morning she was sewing in her room and singing happily, making a cover and pillow-cover for Baba’s gadi. About 2:30 PM she suddenly felt what she described as “a slash, such a sharp deep slash inside myself,” and knew this was a sign of very bad news. She dropped her sewing and paced up and down the room, but didn’t know what it could be—and because of the association with that time she never afterwards felt

Mansari

able to finish making those covers for the gadi.

Soon men came and began digging up the tiles in the Samadhi. She asked why. They just said, “Padri is coming.” Padri came at 4:30, and she asked him what was happening. He took her to her room and said to give him all the keys, which, he told her later, was because he thought she would faint. Then he told her about Baba. But she didn’t cry, she didn’t faint. She felt numb. Padri asked her to prepare the rooms for Mehera and the women.

At 6:30 PM the ambulance came with Baba’s body, and the men mandali laid Him in the Cabin on the stretcher. She said Baba looked so very tired, and she creased her forehead, showing me how He was almost frowning.

It had been decided the interment would be next morning. She still hadn’t cried, although so many others had come who were crying. Sushila had come at 4:30 with Padri. Mehera and the others came later.

It had been Dr. Donkin’s thought to take up the tiles in the crypt, otherwise the melting ice would not have been able to drain away. Late that night when all was ready there, the men mandali carried Baba’s body on the stretcher out of the Cabin and laid it on the platform in front of the meditation cells where Baba had so very often stood, or sat, or played cards, or in other ways spent time there with the women and men mandali. Then they took Baba into the Samadhi and laid Him in the crypt. One lantern was placed on the platform by His body.

Mansari said Padri was so strong, so clear-headed in arranging everything—there was soil at the base of the crypt, a plank was laid on that, then Baba’s body was lowered onto it with a shawl over Him given by Mehera, and ice was packed all round Him.

Mansari still hadn’t cried. Next morning when she looked at Baba there in the crypt He looked so *beautiful*. It was *then* that she cried. She hadn’t touched Him when He was lying in the Cabin, and later she thought, “Oh, I could have touched Him then,” and felt very sad that she hadn’t done so.

On 1st February morning Sarosh came. He and Viloo were in Bombay when the news was phoned on 31st January. Some days earlier they had been concerned about going to Bombay, but were told by Baba everything was all right and they should go. When Sarosh returned on the 1st he was angry with the mandali—“Why didn’t they carry Baba’s body through Ahmednagar for all to see and pay homage?” Mansari said Baba knew that, and so sent them away for the 31st. The mandali brought

Mansari

Baba directly to Meherabad, and everyone came to Him there.

Mansari spoke of the final covering of Baba's body at 12:15 PM on 7th February. She said again how *strong* Padri was: "What a head he had, and how clearly and well he thought out all the details." He arranged for a wood box-cover to be made to place over Baba, and laid rails for it to rest on so that it did not touch Baba.

The Hindu custom was for all to file past and throw earth on the body, but Padri arranged for ghamelas (shallow metal dishes) to be filled with earth. He said all should go past and just touch the earth. Then the men mandali kept spreading the earth over the box-cover until the crypt was filled.

Padri kept his grief within himself, Mansari said, and went on with all that had to be done. Then he walked alone out into the fields and wept for Baba.

Mansari remembered that Mani told her later that at 6:00 AM on the 31st January Baba had said to Mehera that this was His crucifixion and that He would suffer for the next seven days but not after that.

Finally Mansari told me that when Rano travelled to America, Australia and Europe in 1970, she also went to Italy where she chose the marble to be placed over Baba in the Samadhi. The gold for the lettering of the words engraved came from Goher whose father had given it to her from their Quetta days.

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Helen Dahm

The next afternoon I clarified with Mansari one or two points concerning all she had told me the previous day. She added that the walls of the crypt had been beautifully painted by Helen Dahm in 1938—there was an elephant, cows, and flowers around the sides.

Helen was a very nice woman, Mansari went on, and recalled how hard she worked for Baba there in the Samadhi. She was Swiss German and spoke no other language. She heard of Baba in the early 1930s and met Him at Hedi Mertens' home in Zurich. She also saw Him in 1937 at Cannes. Helen gave up everything in 1938 to be with Baba in India. This included giving up the bottle and the cigars she smoked. She came by boat, travelling with Nadine, Hedi and Irene Billo all of whom spoke German.

Mansari

On her arrival Baba straight away told Helen that she had given up

drinking and cigars for Him, but now she should have two cigarettes a day, one after breakfast and one after dinner. Mansari told me that when Helen began painting the murals with the paints she had brought with her, she would go out into the field after breakfast for her cigarette and then start work. Baba would come often to see progress. She was then 60 years old and quite a big woman, but used only the simplest of ladders and platforms to work from. She stayed in the upstairs dormitory with the Western women and Mansari.

Helen also came on the first Blue Bus tour, but because of ill health returned to Switzerland early in 1939. Her life there was difficult for some time, but eventually her work was recognized, and she was honoured as a great artist. She died in May 1968 a few days after her 90th birthday.

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Valu Pawar

One afternoon I asked Mansari about Valu. Her name was Valu Pawar and she came from Arangaon. Her father was the first one there to accept Baba when He came to Meherabad in 1923 with His mandali—whom the other villagers thought were bandits! [Probably it was Gangaram Pawar, a different villager, who first accepted Baba.]

Valu just wanted to serve Baba. Although comparatively wealthy, she gave away her jewellery and fine clothes and became an extremely hard worker for Baba in the 1920s and '30s. She did everything well—cleaning, washing His clothes, serving Him. She would be aware of things which needed to be done, and would quietly do them before being asked.

Noticing how hot it was for Baba walking up and down the Meherabad Hill road, she decided to plant trees along it to give Him shade. She dug all the holes herself, planted the trees and regularly carried bucket after bucket of water to keep them growing. And now after all these years, the beautiful tall spreading trees lining the road still give their welcome shade to all of us as we go up and down the Hill.

Valu was one of the group of women mandali whom Baba told to live in the East Room on Meherabad Hill in 1933—Mehera, Mani, Khorshed and her mother Soonamasi, Naja and Valu.

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Mansari

An Unusual Story Of Rama

Mansari asked me did I know why the British held sway over India. “No,” I replied. “It was all due to Queen Victoria,” she began. It is a charming story, though perhaps more of a folk tale—for I wonder how there could be a minor Advent of Rama so many thousands of years later! However, this is what I gathered from Mansari.

She said that Upasni Maharaj had told them that one of the girls who looked after Sita also loved Rama, and wanted Him to marry her after Sita was rescued and they had come home again. Rama told her that it was decreed He would have only one wife, Sita. But He also said that at some future time, during one of His minor Advents this girl would be reincarnated, and He would marry her then.

The end of the story is that Prince Albert was this minor Advent of Rama, and Queen Victoria was the girl reincarnated. Albert was a gentle, kind man, but unobtrusive in public life. Victoria loved India, and it remained a British possession throughout her reign.

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Then Mansari told me the touching story of Khorshed and her father’s last years (included in Khorshed’s chapter). As I stood up to leave her room I thanked Mansari very much for all her lovely stories, and this time she said: ‘I thank you, because you ask me and I can talk about Baba.’

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My Last Afternoon With Mansari

On each of my last two afternoons at Meherabad several others were with Mansari when I went to see her, and so there were no more stories.

But what a feast she had given me during this whole visit. And once again how grateful I am to Beloved Baba that He arranged things so beautifully, and gave me that little push to record all that Mansari related to me.

I always enjoyed her company so much, admired and loved her for her wonderful undeviating strength of purpose, her delightful sense of humour, her deep love for Baba. At different times she would tell me that she called Him “The Sneaky Sweetie”—and I still remember her warm

Mansari

smile and twinkling eyes as she shared with me this distinctly personal title

for her Beloved.

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Saying Goodbye

Straight after Arti on my last morning I went over to Baba's Cabin, then across to say goodbye to Mansari in her room. She gave me a palm-leaf fan edged in green fabric which I am sure she had made herself, and a little packet of prasad which invariably she gave to each one who was leaving.

Walking away, I felt sad as always to say goodbye, and turning now and again I waved to her as she stood there, a tiny figure outside her door, continuing to wave to me also. In my mind's eye I can still see her there, an enduring picture of love and service in her one-pointed devotion for her Lord.

Blowing kisses once more to Beloved Baba at His Cabin and Samadhi as I passed, I could not help the few tears which came as I went down the Hill.

An hour later I was sitting in the Trust's brown mini-van, affectionately known to all as the "Hoopoe" because of its colouring. As it moved out onto the main road to begin the journey to Poona, I caught one last glimpse of the Hill, and perhaps unconsciously knew that this was the last time I could be with Beloved Baba at His Meherabad Home, or listen to Mansari's stories about Him. Yet how often in clear memories do I again spend so many happy hours there.

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Baba Calls His Dear Mansari

Long after I had written this chapter I began hearing that Mansari was not well. But she recovered for some time, and I remembered her resilient spirit.

Then late in 1996 news came that she was very ill again, that she did not want to go to hospital but stayed in bed in her room, and that she was being looked after round the clock by the many residents and pilgrims who loved her and wanted to do all they could to help her.

In the early morning on 12th January soon after the Prayers and Arti
Mansari

in her room, she peacefully left her tiny form, answering the call of her

Beloved Baba whom she had totally loved, devotedly served and obeyed throughout her long life with Him. She was cremated that afternoon in Lower Meherabad, and her ashes will finally rest beside the Samadhi among those of other women mandali on Baba's left, according to His instructions given years before. Her permanent home on Meherabad Hill is now truly her Home forever.

The lively form of Mansari, bright custodian of Beloved Baba's Samadhi, will naturally be missed, but stories of her unique personality and presence will live on in the hearts of all who knew her, and will assuredly delight those who hear about her in times to come.

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GLOSSARY

Amartithi: The Eternal Day, commemorating the day Meher Baba

dropped His physical form, 31st January 1969.

arti: An ancient Hindu method of concluding worship.

Traditionally, at the time of arti, small lighted lamps of camphor are slowly waved in a circle before the person, idol or picture of the deity, saint, Man-God or God-Man being worshipped, while a special song with a theme or refrain of offering oneself to the One worshipped is sung. Meher Baba's lovers do not necessarily do this when His arti is sung.

ashram: A place of residence for spiritual aspirants.

Avatar, the: "God-become-man." The incarnation of God the infinite, in a finite human form. The God-Man, Messiah, Christ, Rasool.

Babajan: An ancient Mohammedan woman, and one of the five Perfect Masters whose preordained role was to unveil Merwan Sheriar Irani, later called Meher Baba, as the Avatar of this Age.

bhajan: A devotional song, or the singing of devotional songs.

Buddha: The Enlightened One, the Avatar who lived in India around 560-480 BC.

chapati: Flat, unleavened bread.

daaman: The hem of a garment.

dak bungalow: A traveller's rest-house.

dal or dhal: A common preparation made from any of several types of lentils grown in India.

darshan: Literally, "seeing." Taking darshan implies approaching a saint or a Master, offering presents (flowers or fruit etc), paying respects by bowing down, and receiving blessings and love. Meher Baba said that to have His real darshan is not easy: "To have My real darshan is to find Me. The way to find Me is to find your abode in Me. And the only one and

Glossary

sure way to find your abode in Me is to love Me. To love Me as I love you, you must become the recipient of My grace. . . ."

Dhuni: A ceremonial fire using sandalwood and ghee. It is known as a purifying fire when lit and used by a Master. Meher Baba permitted or ordered the lighting of the Dhuni at Meherabad for special occasions, and later on a regular basis: the 12th of each month.

fakir: One who lives the life of poverty in the spiritual sense.

gadi: A seat or throne.

ghazal: A short love poem. An ode. A special poetic composition in Persian, Urdu, or Hindi.

ghee: A semi-fluid clarified butter, usually made from buffalo milk.

gopis: Literally, milkmaids. Krishna's women companions.

Gujarati: A language spoken in the state of Gujarat, India.

Hafiz: 14th Century Perfect Master and poet of Shiraz, Persia.

jap: Repetition of a name of God or any sacred word.

jhopdi: A hut

Kabir: 14th century Perfect Master from Benares, India.

kamli: Coarse woollen blanket.

ki jai: "Literally "Victory to," "hail to." In a greeting such as "Jai Baba" or "Jai Ram," it is used in the sense of calling on the name of the Avatar, or in remembrance of the Avatar.

Krishna: The Avatar famous in literature with His consort Radha,

Glossary

associated with India, dates unknown.

kusti: A sacred thread worn by Zoroastrians.

ladoo: A sweetmeat in the shape of a ball.

mandali: The intimate disciples of a Perfect Master or the Avatar.

manonash: The annihilation of the mind (self).

Manzil-e-Meem: The house in Bombay which Meher Baba used for work with His mandali in 1922-1923.

Marathi: A language spoken in the state of Maharashtra, India.

mast: (pronounced “must”) A God-intoxicated person on the spiritual path.

Maya: Literally, illusion—that which does not exist. The principle of Ignorance which makes the Nothing appear as the everything. In a general sense, false attachment.

Mohammed: The Avatar known as The Prophet, born in Mecca, Arabia, about 560 AD, whose teachings are embodied in the religion of Islam.

Namaste: A greeting of reverence.

Narayan Maharaj: One of the five Perfect Masters who unveiled Meher Baba as the Avatar of this Age.

nazar: Literally, glance. A glance of protective grace.

pandal: A large temporary pavilion, erected on upright poles with a roof of cotton cloth and open sides.

Parvardigar: Vishnu—The Preserver, The Sustainer.

Glossary

prasad: A gracious gift, anything, usually edible, given by a saint, Perfect Master or the Avatar to followers as an expression of His love.

Also anything, usually edible, that is first offered to a saint , Perfect Master or the Avatar and then distributed in His name.

Prayers: Meher Baba gave several Prayers, three of which are regularly said by His lovers: “The Master’s Prayer” (“O Parvardigar”), the Prayer of Repentance, and “Beloved God,” a prayer first given to His mandali but now also widely used by His lovers.

qawwal: One who sings qawwalis.

qawwali: A characteristic type of singing, usually in Urdu, accompanied by musical instruments. Often these songs are addressed to the Beloved in a very intimate way.

Radha: The consort of Krishna.

Rama: The Avatar who lived in India, dates unknown. His consort was Sita.

Ramayana: The ancient Hindu epic recounting the life of the warrior-hero Rama, the Avatar.

Rasool: The Christ, the Saviour, the Avatar.

Sadguru: A perfect Master, Man-God.

sadhu: A pilgrim, possibly an advanced soul.

sadra: A thin, ankle-length muslin shirt.

Sahavas: Literally, close companionship. An opportunity given by the Avatar to spend time with Him and to intimately feel His presence. A gathering held in His honour where His lovers and followers meet to remember Him. Meher Baba said: “Sahavas is the give and take of love.”

Sai Baba: One of the five Perfect Masters who unveiled Meher

Glossary

Baba as the Avatar of this Age.

Samadhi: A place where the body or the last remains of a saint, a Perfect Master, or the Avatar is interred.

sanskaras: Impressions. Also impressions which are left on the soul from former lives and which determine one's desires and actions in the present lifetime.

sari: A garment piece some six yards long, draped or pleated in a specific fashion so that the major part forms a full-length skirt, and the remainder a head and shoulder covering. It is worn over an underskirt or petticoat, and with a choli or close-fitting short blouse.

Silence Day: On 10th July 1925 Meher Baba began His Silence which He maintained unbroken to the end of His physical life. To commemorate this and in response to Meher Baba's wish given for 10th July 1968, many of His lovers annually observe complete silence for 24 hours from midnight 9th July to midnight 10th July, which is now known and recognized as Silence Day.

Sita: The consort of Rama.

Tajuddin Baba: One of the five Perfect Masters who unveiled Meher Baba as the Avatar of this Age.

Upasni Maharaj: One of the five Perfect Masters who unveiled Meher Baba as the Avatar of this Age.

Vishnu: The Preserver.

Yezdan: Almighty God.

Yogis: Souls who are traversing the spiritual Path. Those who practise yoga.

Zoroaster: The Avatar of ancient times who lived in Iran, dates uncertain.