

Because of Love

Part I

By Rano Gayley

Edited by Ann Conlon

An Avatar Meher Baba Trust eBook

Copyright © 1983 Avatar Meher Baba Perpetual Public Charitable Trust, Ahmednagar (M.S.), India.

The Ten Circles Chart © 1980 Avatar Meher Baba Perpetual Public Charitable Trust, Ahmednagar (M.S.), India. Reprinted by permission.

Quote from *Stay With God*, Copyright © by Francis Brabazon. Reprinted by permission.

Source:

Because of Love

by Rano Gayley

Edited by Ann Conlon

Publisher

Sheriar Press

N. Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, U.S.A.

Copyright © 1983 Avatar Meher Baba Perpetual Public Charitable Trust, Ahmednagar (M.S.), India.

The Ten Circles Chart © 1980 Avatar Meher Baba Perpetual Public Charitable Trust, Ahmednagar (M.S.), India. Reprinted by permission.

Quote from *Stay With God*, Copyright © by Francis Brabazon. Reprinted by permission.

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication Data: Gayley, Rano, 1902.

Because of Love. Bibliography: p. 117 1. Meher Baba, 1894- 1969.

2. Gayley, Rano, 1902- . 3 Meher Baba, 1894-1969--Portraits, etc. 4. Avatars--Biography.

5. Religious biography--India--Biography. I. Conlon, Ann. II. Title.

BP610.M432G39 1983 299'.93 (B) 83-9845 ISBN: 0-913078-45 X.

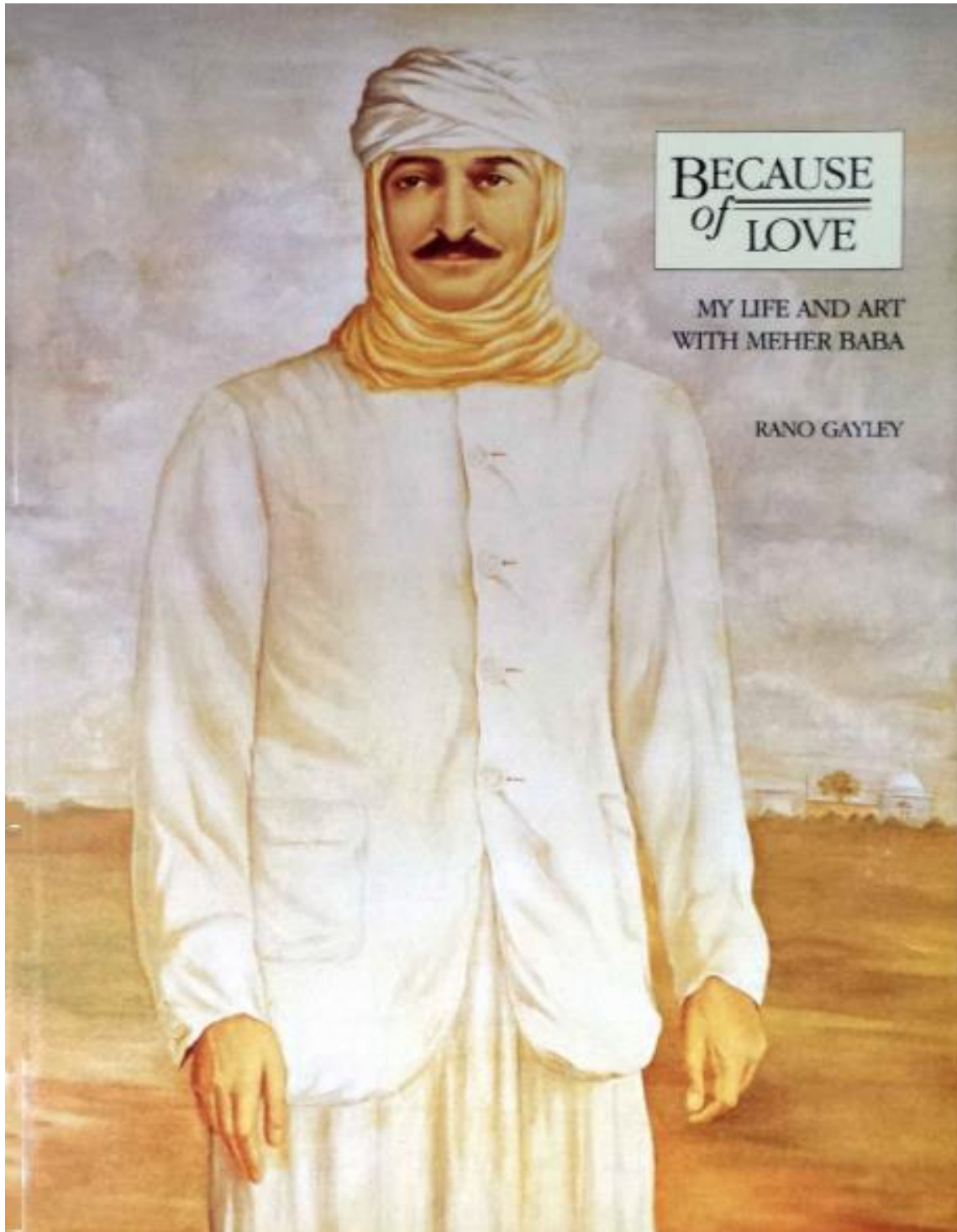
eBooks at the Avatar Meher Baba Trust Web Site

The Avatar Meher Baba Trust's eBooks aspire to be textually exact though non-facsimile reproductions of published books, journals and articles. With the consent of the copyright holders, these online editions are being made available through the Avatar Meher Baba Trust's web site, for the research needs of Meher Baba's lovers and the general public around the world.

Again, the eBooks reproduce the text, though not the exact visual likeness, of the original publications. They have been created through a process of scanning the original pages, running these scans through optical character recognition (OCR) software, reflowing the new text, and proofreading it. Except in rare cases where we specify otherwise, the texts that you will find here correspond, page for page, with those of the original publications: in other words, page citations reliably correspond to those of the source books. But in other respects-such as lineation and font-the page designs differ. Our purpose is to provide digital texts that are more readily downloadable and searchable than photo facsimile images of the originals would have been. Moreover, they are often much more readable, especially in the case of older books, whose discoloration and deteriorated condition often makes them partly illegible. Since all this work of scanning and reflowing and proofreading has been accomplished by a team of volunteers, it is always possible that errors have crept into these online editions. If you find any of these, please let us know, by emailing us at frank@ambppct.org.

The aim of the Trust's online library is to reproduce the original texts faithfully. In certain cases, however-and this applies especially to some of the older books that were never republished in updated versions-we have corrected certain small errors of a typographic order. When this has been done, all of these corrections are listed in the "Register of Editorial Alterations" that appears at the end of the digital book. If you want the original text in its exact original form, warts and all, you can reconstruct this with the aid of the "register."

The Trust's Online Library remains very much a work in progress. With your help and input, it will increase in scope and improve in elegance and accuracy as the years go by. In the meantime, we hope it will serve the needs of those seeking to deepen and broaden their own familiarity with Avatar Meher Baba's life and message and to disseminate this good news throughout the world.



BECAUSE
of LOVE

MY LIFE AND ART
WITH MEHER BABA

RANO GAYLEY

BECAUSE OF LOVE

Copyright © 1983 Avatar Meher Baba Perpetual Public Charitable Trust,
Ahmednagar (M.S.), India.
The Ten Circles Chart © 1980 Avatar Meher Baba Perpetual Public Charitable Trust,
Ahmednagar (M.S.), India. Reprinted by permission.
Quote from *Stay With God*, Copyright © by Francis Brabazon. Reprinted
by permission.

All rights reserved.
Printed in the U.S.A. by Sheriar Press, Inc.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form without permission in
writing from the publisher, except by a reviewer who wishes to quote brief
passages in connection with a review written for inclusion in a magazine,
newspaper or broadcast. For information contact: Sheriar Press, Inc., 801 13th
Avenue South, North Myrtle Beach, South Carolina 29582. '
Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication Data: Gayley, Rano, 1902.
Because of Love. Bibliography: p. 117 1. Meher Baba, 1894- 1969. 2. Gayley,
Rano, 1902- . 3 Meher Baba, 1894-1969--Portraits, etc. 4. Avatars--Biography.
5. Religious biography--India--Biography. I. Conlon, Ann. II. Title.
BP610.M432G39 1983 299'.93 (B) 83-9845 ISBN: 0-913078-45 X.

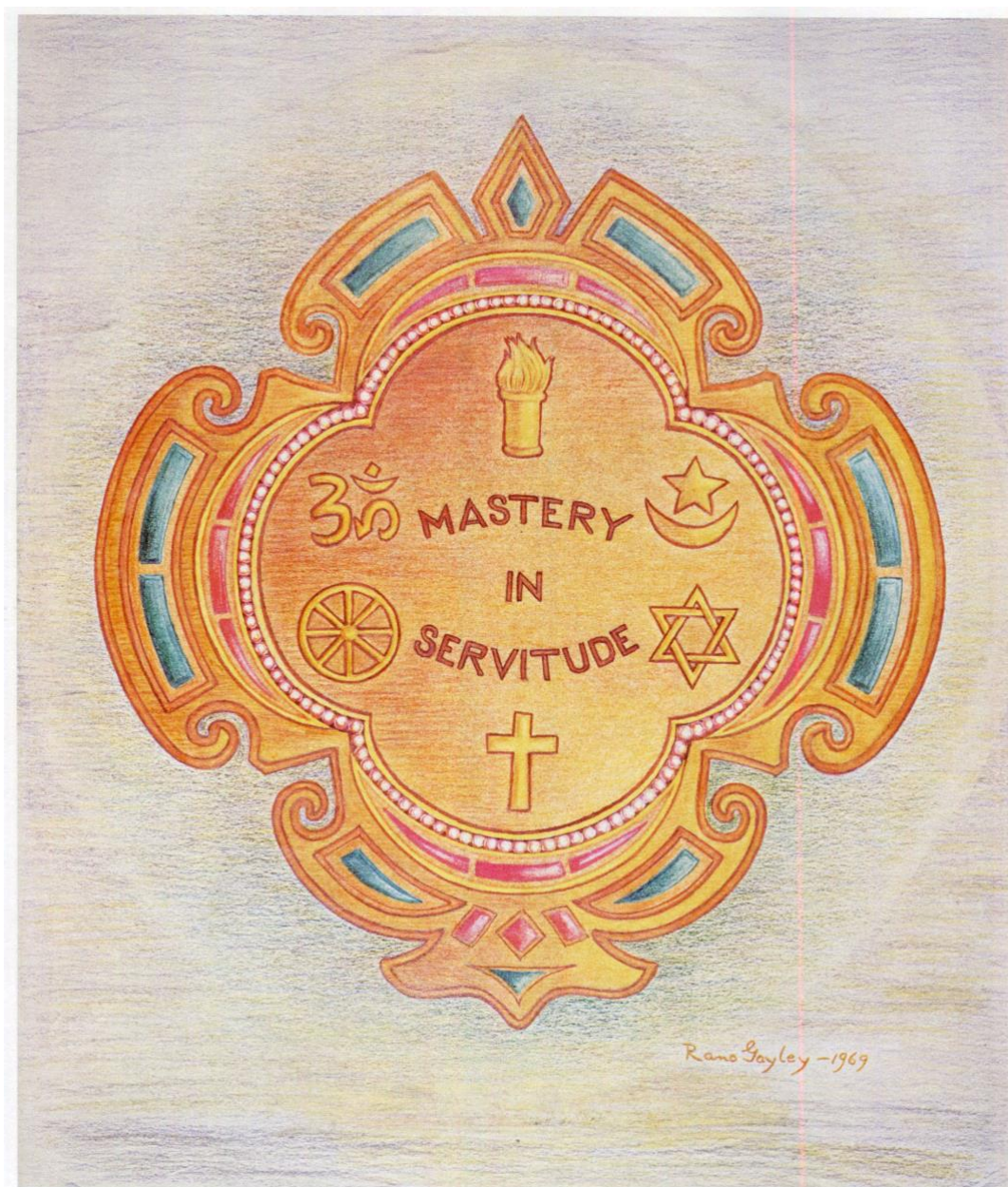
BECAUSE
of LOVE

MY LIFE AND ART
WITH MEHER BABA

BY
RANO GAYLEY

EDITED BY
ANN CONLON

Sheriar Press



The Mastery in Servitude Emblem done in 1969 by Rano Gayley for Adi S. Irani, Meher Baba's brother

DEDICATION

*To Avatar Meher Baba,
the Eternal Beloved
whose love fragrance
permeates our hearts.*

Introduction

Rano Gayley, the only one of Meher Baba's early western disciples still living in India, thought her move to his ashram in 1937 would mark the end of her preoccupation with painting. As this volume shows, it instead led her to focus her art - and her life - on him. And for Rano, the art became the expression of that life.

Plans for this book began in 1971 when a young Baba follower, Ron Dillman, proposed the idea, and James May began gathering material by taping long interviews with Rano and photographing the art work: the oil portraits of Baba, the series of symbolic watercolors, the early pencil head studies, and the enigmatic Ten Circles Chart done under Meher Baba's strict direction and for which there still exists no explanation. This book confines itself, however, to a selection of the pencil studies, most of which now belong to Baba followers around the world, and to a detailed presentation of the Ten Circles Chart, from its pre-painting sketches signed and initialed by Meher Baba, to color enlargements of finished details.

The text is selective as well, since Rano kept no diaries and the narrative is confined to her strongest and clearest memories: her first, somewhat awkward, but charming meeting with Meher Baba in London; the touching spiritual "courtship" and the beginnings of learning instant obedience to her master; her long struggle with a hot temper and a consistent stubborn streak, and Meher Baba's patient efforts to make her see it and change it; her New Life sojourn as an inexperienced art teacher in a Bombay high school; highlights of the four Blue Bus tours of the length and breadth of 1940's India; the heart-rending accident in America in 1952; the last embrace. These accounts show clearly the changes in attitude and personality that took place in one of the diverse personalities Meher Baba drew to him in the early days, and show that at the core of all these relationships is the love that binds them all, theirs for him and his for them.

Although most of the material for this volume had been gathered by 1974, the project languished for various reasons until 1980, when Rano asked me if I would be willing to edit all the taped and written material into a workable manuscript. That work has taken 2½ years, and has included two trips to India to gather more material. It has been one of the great pleasures of my life, as it is always a pleasure to have any part in bringing into print the ever changing story of lives lived with and for Meher Baba. For with each account, Meher Baba, as he was and as he is, becomes clearer to our minds, and especially to our hearts.

Ann Conlon
Myrtle Beach, South Carolina
January, 1983

Acknowledgements

This book has been a long time in the making and many people have had a hand in its completion: James May, who photographed much of the art work and compiled hours of taped interviews on which the narrative is based; Ron Dillman, who originated the idea; Pat Sumner, who organized photographs and drawings and never gave up on the idea that the book would be completed; Elizabeth Sacalis, who saw an opportunity to help and seized it; Jane Turner, who supplied moral support to the editor; and Ann Conlon who edited the manuscript into its final form.

— R. G.
Meherazad
October, 1981

Table of Contents

Introduction	vii
Acknowledgements	viii

SECTION I

1. Everything That Was Beautiful	1
2. Love Alone Is The Keynote	7
3. Boiling Jam	13
4. But Not For Me	19
5. Into His Keeping	24
6. The Traveling Ashram ..	29
Maps of the Blue Bus Tours	
1. Meherabad-Delbi, December 8, 1938 to March 25, 1939	43
2. Meherabad-Bangalore, August 2, 1939 to May 3, 1940 and Ahmednagar-Calcutta July 3, 1940 to July 25, 1940	44
3. Kandy-Quetta, November 1, 1940 to June 18, 1941	45
4. Meherabad-Karwar, September 3, 1941 to November 28, 1941 and Meherabad-Dehra Dun, February 2, 1942 to December 20, 1942.	46
7. On My Own	47
8. Only An Overcoat	54
Epilogue	61

SECTION II

Art Is An Act of Love: The Ten Circles Chart	63
The Ten Circles Chart	83-84

SECTION III

Head Studies ..	87
List of Plates	88
Plates 1 – 27	89-115
Footnotes	116
Bibliography	117

*"Art is an act of love in likeness of itself - Spirit
moulding matter into lovely form; God's compassion
as Avatar unto men; and men's devotion to Avatar
as God, by God - for devotion is by grace alone. "*

*from Stay With God
by Francis Brabazon*

SECTION I – CHAPTER ONE

Everything That Was Beautiful

I was not looking for God, nor had I any interest in spiritual matters, when I first heard Meher Baba's name one lovely spring day in Paris 50 years ago. What I was doing was enjoying a leisurely walk down the Rue Cambon after lunch at the Ritz with my mother, Nonny, and an old friend, Ruano Bogislav. Ruano was an actress whose given name was Frieda, and when on that walk I heard a voice behind us persistently calling, "Frieda, Frieda," I interrupted Ruano's conversation with my mother. "Ruano, do you know that man?"

She turned back as the man came running towards us, and they embraced each other enthusiastically. He was Quentin Tod, a young English friend of Ruano's. He had been looking for her, he said, to tell her about a man named Meher Baba whom he had just returned from visiting in India with a group of other English people. Very excited about this meeting, Quentin came that night to the apartment my mother and I shared with Ruano, showed us pictures of Meher Baba, and spoke glowingly of how wonderful he was.

At that time, in the spring of 1933, Meher Baba was not yet known as the Avatar, but as a Perfect Master; and although I did not know what a master was, I was interested in Meher Baba's picture. Beyond that I refused to commit myself, for I had too often been disappointed in other people's enthusiasms and I would have to see for myself if Meher Baba was all Quentin said he was.

But my mother's reaction was one of instant excitement the moment she saw Baba's picture: "Why, I've seen that man's face before." Several years earlier, she said, she had seen a picture of Baba, without any identifying caption, in an American newspaper and, very taken with the photograph, had said to herself, "Someday I'm going to meet that man."

Our unexpected encounter with Quentin came as Nonny and I were planning to return to America to see our family after being away more than two years, traveling in France, Egypt and Italy. My father had died in 1920 when I was 18, and I had spent a year at Miss Porter's School in Farmington, Connecticut; but not having any affinity for study, and preferring sports to intellectual pursuits, I decided there was no point in going on to college. Instead I went to work for an interior decorator who developed such confidence in my sense of color and design that she allowed me to handle assignments without first consulting her. It was her idea that I should go to art school in 1924 and I followed the suggestion, spending two years on preliminary work, watercolors, perspective, still life and design at the New York School for Applied Design for

Women, and then doing the two years of advanced work in a year and a half. After graduation, I went to work as a designer for a rug company. They didn't welcome original designs so I soon gave that up, going on to study oil painting with an artist friend and then a bit of figure drawing with a sculptor who took beginners. I was forever annoying my instructors by insisting on my own ideas and style. My artist friend tried to change my habit of doing everything in fine detail by setting me to do some large-scale murals. But much to his disappointment, some very exotic birds I attempted on the bathroom walls in our apartment still turned out to have great detail, even though done with a large brush.

I also never stuck to anything for very long in those days, as I was constantly changing plans and traveling here and there. So I ended up in the late 1920s with a little training in oils, a little in figure drawing, and my diploma from the commercial art school. At about the same time, I decided to change my name from Madeleine (I was sick of being called Maddy, and Madeleine was too long to put on a painting) to Rano, devised because of Nonny's current interest in numbers and letters.

In the fall of 1930 Nonny and I decided to do some extensive traveling, so we gave up the apartment in New York and headed for Europe, leading us eventually to our meeting with Quentin Tod. Shortly after that meeting, Nonny and I did return to the United States to spend the summer of 1933.

We soon received a letter from Ruano saying she had finally met Meher Baba in Portofino and, the most intriguing thing, had spent 10 days weeping. I thought, "How extraordinary to meet someone and spend 10 days weeping about it!" Ruano also said she had told Meher Baba about us and that he said we should come to Europe to meet him in the autumn. I don't remember that there was any decision-making involved at this point; we simply planned to sail to France because Ruano thought Baba might be in Paris. But the day before we were to leave we received a cable that Baba would be in London instead. Luckily our ship had cancelled its French landing anyway and was due to put into Southampton.

The ship was very slow and Nonny became frantic that we might miss Baba. I tried to calm her down: "Look, if we're going to meet Baba, we're going to meet him. But we can't push the boat, so we might as well relax." We sent a radiogram to Ruano asking her to meet us at Victoria Station in London, but when we arrived, no Ruano. Where was Baba? How could we possibly find him in all of London? We went on to our hotel and I called the only number I had for Ruano. It was the English Speaking Union, and when I asked for Ruano they gave me her telephone number at the Hygeia House Hotel.

Ruano answered immediately: "Where are you? In Paris?"

"Heavens, no, we're in London. Why didn't you meet us at the station?"

"I never got the message."

"Why did you think we were in Paris? You cabled us to come to London."

It turned out that she had checked each day with the English Speaking Union and when they reported she'd had a call from Paris, she assumed it was us and so had left her telephone number with them in case we should call again. A near miss, a coincidence it seemed at the time,

as I hadn't yet learned that nothing with Meher Baba is a coincidence.

We were given an appointment to meet Meher Baba at Hygeia House, where he was also staying, at 4 o'clock in the afternoon of October 18, 1933. Now that the meeting was actually at hand, I became very nervous. What does one do when one meets a master or saint? And since he's silent¹, how does one talk to him?

When we arrived at the hotel, someone came down to tell us our appointment had been postponed because Baba was too tired to see us. Worried as I was, I felt reprieved and began to relax as we talked to some of the people gathered in the lobby. Abruptly there came a second message: Baba would see us after all, since we had come all the way from America just to meet him. We could just go and look at him, but we were not to speak. All my nervousness came back and it had time to strengthen as Nonny was taken to Baba first and I was left to cool my heels in the hall. Finally my turn came. I walked into Baba's room and just stood there. To this day, I do not know who else was in the room. There were only hazy figures, but clearly in their midst was Meher Baba, with the most beautiful expression I have ever seen. Sweetness, love - everything that was beautiful - was there in his face. I stood staring at him until someone finally removed me from the room.

I lay awake all that night, Baba's face before my mind's eye. "Well," I thought, "I've never looked for anything, never thought about anything like this, but somehow Baba seems to be the answer to all the things I didn't know I was seeking." I was fortunate, really, that I had not been searching, as then there was nothing to undo, no misconceptions of life with a master to rectify. I didn't know anything, so Baba could start from scratch with me.

The next morning, a message came that we were to see Baba again. In the meantime, we found that two small rooms were available at Hygeia House, so Nonny and I took them in order to be closer to Baba. I am not a demonstrative person and I did something that day that was for me extraordinary. As we arrived at the hotel and I was paying the taxi driver, I saw a flower vendor, his cart full of huge bouquets of gold and copper chrysanthemums on three-foot stems. Without thinking, I bought an armful and carried them into the hotel lobby. Only then did I realize what I had in my arms.

I said to Ruano, "What am I doing with these?"

"You've bought them for Baba," she said.

"Oh, have I? Oh, I think they're much too many for Baba; I'll give half to Nonny!"

I sat on the stairs clutching my flowers while Nonny again went to Baba first. At last I was called in, but instead of gracefully handing Baba the flowers, I simply dumped them in his lap like some shy child. He told me to sit next to him, and every time he looked in my direction, I'd look quickly away. Then when he wasn't looking, I'd turn back to catch a glimpse of him. That didn't last long, however, and I was soon more at ease with him.

Baba stayed a number of days in London, and Nonny and I were allowed to join him and his English disciples on several outings. Just before he left London, Baba asked Ruano, Nonny and me to come to India for his birthday, February 25, 1934. We all said yes and Baba put out his hand, gesturing, "Put it there that you will come." We each put a hand in his, and promised that

we could come.

When the day came for Baba to leave he embraced each in turn, and when my turn came, Ruano in her effusiveness said, "Baba, kiss Rano." I was most embarrassed, but Baba looked at me, gave me a beautiful smile and put out his cheek for me to kiss. That made me very happy and the embarrassment disappeared.

Baba left London for India and, being at loose ends until the following February, Ruano, Nonny and I decided to winter in Morocco. We could then catch a boat at Tangiers in February, go through the Mediterranean and the Suez and be in India for Baba's 40th birthday. There was such a charm about Morocco and we had a delightful winter in the sun, looking forward to being with Baba again. I spent much of my time painting. Ruano and Nonny wrote occasionally to Baba, but he hadn't told me to write, so I didn't. In his letters to Nonny, Baba would often ask, "How is your dear daughter?" I was irked at the "dear daughter" term, little knowing that it was Baba's way of making me think of him, and therefore drawing me closer.

Baba's first letter to Nonny, dated December 16, 1933, reads:

My dear Nonny,

Your sweet letter from Paris has made me very happy. My thoughts are always with you. I am near you all the time, and you are ever in my heart.

I had told you in London to come to India with Ruano and Rano in February, but you should not do so unless I cable you. I may call you in February or later. You should wait till you receive my instructions by cable. Give my love to your darling daughter.

All my love,
M.S. Irani

A week later another letter arrived, warning us again that there might be some delay in our trip to India:

December 22, 1933

My dearest Nonny,

You write that one must earn and deserve happiness to enjoy it. In the ordinary course of life, it is so, but once a Perfect Master's grace falls on one, Divine Bliss is imparted without the recipient necessarily earning it - the only way to deserve it lies in surrender and obedience.

You have grown very dear to me, Nonny, and one day I will make you realize the goal, the greatness and perfection of which you can never imagine.

You must have received my last letter. Due to a slight change in my plans, I do not want you to start for India until I cable you. That does not mean you should abandon your preparations, for rest assured, I will call you, if not at the time I told you, a month or two later, probably earlier.

All my love to you and dear Rano,
M.S. Irani

When the next cable came, two days before we were to travel to Tangiers to board ship, we took it in our stride: "Stay where you are or go to Paris, but don't come to India." It was our first experience of Baba's habit of changing his mind.

We stayed on in Morocco until the spring of 1934 when we returned to Paris. Shortly afterwards, Baba cabled that he was again coming to Europe in June and that Ruano, Nonny or I should meet him when his boat docked in Marseilles. We decided that Ruano should be the one, since she was the most conversant with French ways.

Things changed, however, the morning Ruano was to get her train ticket. Nonny needed a check cashed at the bank so I took it and left the apartment with Ruano, with every intention of returning to the apartment. But once the check was cashed, the money started burning a hole in my pocket and thoughts of Baba in Marseilles beckoned. I turned to Ruano, "I'm getting a ticket to Marseilles, too."

"But Baba said only one of us is to come."

Rationalization set in: "I'm not going for Baba. You need someone to accompany you, to look after you. That's the reason I'm going. But I'd better phone Nonny; after all, I'm spending her money." Nonny remonstrated with me, but I gave her the same excuse and told her whatever she said would make no difference, I was going to Marseilles.

Ruano and I spent the night in Marseilles and the next morning took the hotel bus to the docks where we saw Chanji, Baba's secretary, on deck beckoning to us. We went on board and down to Baba's cabin. I suddenly realized I might be in for it, but in those days Baba was still very lenient with people he was drawing to him. Nevertheless, I pushed Ruano ahead of me and Baba embraced her first. When I went to embrace him, I whispered in his ear, "I'm not supposed to be here."

He smiled, embraced me and all was well. Because I was usually so reticent, Baba did sometimes let me get away with a bold move.

We had a day with Baba in Marseilles, and then Ruano and I with Baba and the three mandali (intimate disciples) - Chanji, Kaka and Adi Jr. - boarded the third class carriage of the evening train to Paris. Luckily there was an empty compartment next to Baba's for Ruano and me, and the three mandali shared Baba's compartment.

When the train started, Baba told us to go to our compartment and sleep. Ruano and I lay down on the hard wooden benches, huddled in our coats as the night was chilly, but neither of us could sleep and we both started feeling very hungry.

I sat up. "I know where there's something to eat."

"Where?"

"In Baba's compartment."

"But, oh, Ruano, how can we get it?"

"I know just where it is on the rack I'll just pussyfoot in; I'll be so quiet Baba won't know I'm there."

I entered the other compartment very quietly, sure that I had made no noise, certainly none that could be heard over the rattle of the train. Baba was stretched out on one bench, a shawl

over his head as was his custom. The box of food was on the rack just above Baba's feet.

Being careful not to disturb either Baba or the mandali, I reached up for the box.

Baba instantly came out from under his shawl: "What are you doing here?"

"Baba, I'm so sorry. I'm sure I couldn't have disturbed you."

"Well, what are you doing here?"

"Ruano and I are so hungry we can't sleep."

Baba got that lovely twinkle in his eye. "All right. Take the food and don't come back in this compartment again."

Ruano and I ate our fill and had just laid down again when there was a knock on the door. It was Kaka, carrying two black velvet pillows, about a foot square. Baba had sent one to each of us with the message that we should sleep well, keep our pillows, never let anyone use them and never part with them.

CHAPTER TWO

Love Alone Is The Keynote

After a few days in England, Baba spent 10 days in Switzerland, taking us and the English group with him. Baba and his mandali stayed at the home of Walter and Hedi Mertens in the small town of Feldmeilen overlooking lake Zurich. The house was on a hill, and Walter, a landscape architect, had devised a series of terraces dropping from the house down to the lake.

Ruano, Nonny and I stayed at the tiny Hotel Raben at the foot of the Mertens' hill, ate our meals there and then walked up the hill to be with Baba. Sometimes he would give interviews inside and at other times he would gather some devotees informally in the garden. On these more casual occasions, he sometimes would be in his dressing robe, his hair loose around his shoulders, the epitome of beauty.

It was at Feldmeilen that I came to understand what Ruano meant when she said she had wept for 10 days after meeting Baba. I didn't weep for 10 days; rather I didn't sleep for 10 nights. Uncommonly restless, with everything inside in turmoil, I would get up every night after the others were asleep and sit by the window to watch the moonlight on the lake and wonder what on earth was happening to me. What was Baba doing? Outwardly, Baba simply acted as if to him I were still just "Nonny's darling daughter," so that is how I behaved. But Baba knew exactly how to play me on his line. The more casually he acted toward me, the closer I was drawn to him.

One day we were walking in the hills with Baba and as was his habit, he strode out ahead, seeming to float effortlessly up the hill, with everyone else, even the mandali, struggling along behind. Suddenly I felt I must catch up with Baba. I put on extra speed, walking very fast. As I came up alongside him, he turned to see who was there and then put out his hand to catch mine. I wasn't breathless; I didn't have to hurry to keep up with him. I just went floating up the hill hand in hand with Baba.

From Feldmeilen, Baba went down to Marseilles in mid-July, 1934, to board his ship for his return to India, and he allowed a few of us to come along to see him off. It was in Marseilles that I first saw what it meant to disobey Baba.

We had gone out into the city with Baba and were passing the bird market when Baba said, "I must have some birds." We bought two or three medium-size birds and brought them back to Quentin Tod's room at the hotel.

The next day, Baba called us all to Quentin's room because he wanted one bird moved from its cage to another. Quentin, who was in his bathroom making tea, was called to do the job.

He said, "I'm coming," but instead continued making his tea. He was called a second time, and a third. We could see that Baba did not like the lack of response.

Adi Jr., Baba's brother, seeing Baba's displeasure and wishing to help, leaned down and opened the cage to remove this particular bird. As soon as he put his hand in the cage, the bird gave him a nip. Adi jerked back his hand, the bird flew out of the cage and straight out of the window that none of us had noticed was open.

Baba's eyes shot fire. We all stood perfectly still, wondering what would happen. Quentin came out of the bathroom. Baba said, "If this is the West's idea of obedience, you can all leave me; I don't want any of you!"

We were all stunned and even though we had done nothing, we were feeling as guilty as Quentin must have. How could it end like this? But after giving us a bit of time to absorb his displeasure, Baba forgave Quentin, forgave and embraced us all. With Baba, once a situation was over, it was over.

Baba had us return the birds and buy one large cage full of colorful tiny island birds and these he took on the boat to India. We received no explanation for the incident. We didn't ask for one, as sometimes Baba would give you an explanation that would make you happy, but which wouldn't be the real explanation at all.

After Baba's departure for India, Ruano, Nonny and I returned to Paris. We were still there when Baba cabled in the fall of 1934 that he was planning a trip to America that winter and, to our joy, that we should be ready to travel with him. Baba came to Paris, went on to London and boarded the *S.S. Majestic* at Southampton on December 5. We joined him at his wish when the boat put in at Cherbourg.

The voyage to America took eight days in rough winter seas, with waves constantly crashing over the boat so we could not go out on deck. I am usually a fairly good sailor, but I think that weather would have sent me to my bunk if Baba hadn't had other ideas. Each morning I had to play table tennis with him on the enclosed upper deck. He didn't "play" table tennis in the usual sense of that word, rather he simply swatted balls at you as hard as he could and you had to be alert enough to return them. Whatever Baba's internal work was at the time, it must have been particularly strenuous, judging from the force he put on the ball.

During the voyage I also did a great deal of thinking. Here I was with Baba and yet my life could have gone in so many other ways. One morning I said to Baba, "Now I know why all the things I hoped would happen didn't happen, because if any of them had, I would not have come to you. My life would have gone in another direction, I would have been satisfied with what I was doing and I probably wouldn't have made the effort to come and be with you."

"No," Baba replied, "It had to be, because you had to come to me." I was quite content with that.

After a very rough voyage, we at last arrived in New York Harbor on December 13 and Baba said to me, "You quickly go in the line of Americans, see about your passport and then come back to me as soon as possible."

I did so and, in the meantime, Baba and his party had joined the line of foreign visitors. As I returned to them, the immigration officer was beginning to interview Baba and Baba delegated

me as his spokesman. I explained that this gentleman was observing silence, that he was quite capable of speaking and he could hear everything the officer was saying. I told him that Baba would reply to any questions by dictating on his alphabet board.

The immigration officer would have none of that. I explained that Meher Baba had been in America two years previously, and that I had a letter from Elizabeth Patterson inviting Baba for this visit. He didn't put much stock in that either. His main objection was that Baba refused to speak.

I said Baba wouldn't speak, but that didn't mean he couldn't speak, so there was no reason to send him to Ellis Island, where immigrants or foreign visitors of doubtful status were held at the time. But the more we talked, the more unpleasant the man became. Ruano became very indignant and I nudged her in the ribs, "For heaven's sake, keep quiet; don't make it worse!"

Suddenly one of the ship's officers came on the scene. Nearly everyone else had left the ship and he came over to inquire why we were being delayed. I told him the immigration officer was being very officious and explained to him about Baba's silence and that Baba was visiting the United States by invitation. He took the immigration officer to task and told him to approve Baba's papers immediately and to allow Baba and his party to go. The man complied, I thanked the ship's officer profusely, and we left the ship.

Baba stayed two days in New York meeting people and attending a reception, and then went by train to California, where he spent some time contacting people in the movie world during late December 1934 and early January 1935.

At the time, Baba was planning a film and was seeking a writer to do the script. One script, "This Man David," was done, but it wasn't forceful enough for Baba. On January 18, 1935, Baba left Hollywood for Vancouver, from where he sailed for India. Before he left California, he told me to return to New York after celebrating his birthday in February, and "to keep ready for Baba's work"

Back in New York, time hung heavy on my hands. I spent much of my time painting. If I had had even an inkling that I would be going to India, I would have at least tried to learn one of the Indian languages, but the thought never entered my head. I did correspond regularly with Baba during that period, having graduated from the "Nonny's-darling-daughter" stage after Zurich. All of us received personal letters from Baba during certain periods and the letters I quote here are typical of those Baba wrote as part of the "spiritual courtship," heaping praise upon what deep down we knew were our undeserving heads. But we cherished them and responded to the love in them and they served their purpose, drawing us closer to him in love.

Baba's lovely reply to one of my letters follows:

Meherabad
Ahmednagar
March 10, 1935

My dear Rano,

I received all your loving messages of love, and your very sweet and loving letters.

The depths of the feeling conveyed therein, and which I know you do feel every moment, are clear indications of how much closer you have come to me in love. The last contact of being in close company with me all the way from Paris till the moment of departure from Hollywood has helped much to develop those latent faculties that needed such a contact for their expression.

What you have been feeling already is so splendid, yet there is still much to experience, and so marvelous, too! And you will realize all. Love alone is the keynote, and you have that. With my love and help, all will reveal itself in time, and you will realize everything, and will then be able to help others much more, through art.

Meanwhile, go on with that beautiful art work that is one of the noblest and finest means of bringing out the Divine within, and with my help which will always be forthcoming, you will work wonders.

Remember all I have told you and never feel depressed or despondent. And don't forget that I am always with you, wherever I am, wherever you are. Be writing, as usual, and I too will be communicating and in touch with you always, wherever I am.

Feeling now as you do for your friends and relations, is what is called 'living in the world, but not of it' and is a very good sign of rising above the ties and connections of things mundane.

It is a very rare gift of love, and would be envied by many an advanced soul on the Path of Spirituality and Truth. But Love includes everything, helping and teaching things that are otherwise so hard to grasp intellectually, much less to understand. And you will feel and learn many things still.

Give my love to all the dear ones of the group.

All my love everlasting,

M.S. Irani

When Baba wrote of my feelings for my friends and relatives, he was referring to my telling him that when I spent time with them after being with him, I felt as if I were merely an onlooker and no longer a part of it. I couldn't understand it at first, but it didn't upset me and I was quite content to just stand and watch. It was the beginning of a detachment from the life I'd led before Baba.

At this point I gave some thought to getting a part time job to pass the time, but we had arrived at that stage where we couldn't really do anything without informing Baba. So I wrote to him about seeking a job, and he replied:

Mount Abu

July 10, 1935

Dearest Rano,

I have all your loving letters - beautiful expressions of a heart that is so

loving and lovable. I know how you feel - growing in love and devotion every day, and getting closer every moment to the only beloved of your heart - your Baba.

Never worry about repetitions of the same things in your letters to me. Love never tires of repetition - rather repetition makes words of love all the sweeter. What is there for those who love but only to say, "I love you" over and over again till the very end of life, and it includes everything which more than satisfies both the lover and the Beloved! So, dear Rano, go on repeating the same loving tune in all your letters. I love nothing more than love and its expressions, even if repeated millions of times.

Painting. This must be continued. I want you to, for it keeps you thinking always of your Beloved, and is one of the noblest expressions of love. With the depth of feeling and love you have for me, you will bring out something that will be marvelous, being the expression of Love Divine. And don't ever think of any other work but mine whatever it may be - of helping dear Nonny in her work for the picture in any way you can or of painting the picture, thinking of me and inspired by the love you have for me. For I want you to be always connected with and thinking of my work - in one capacity or another - and keep yourself "free" from any binding of other outside work - to be able to join and be with me whenever I am at your end in the West and always at my disposal for any of my work I would like you to do. My dear ones should be exclusively mine, and bound by none. Do you understand?

Never mind the smoking! I know you don't do it intentionally, disregarding my wish. It is only a force of habit that keeps you smoking while you work, and it will gradually diminish and disappear. And finally, dear Rano, there is only one thing I want to tell you - your letters so vividly convey the depth of your feeling and love for me, which I alone know and appreciate and it makes me so happy to see you growing deeper in love and getting closer to me in love every moment.

Dear Nonny writes so lovingly of you, and she is so happy to see the great love you have developed within - for your Beloved Baba - and also for those who are dear and near to him at heart. I am so happy to see dear Nonny refer to it in glowing terms of love that she feels and finds in you.

Give my love to all the dear ones of the group.

All my love,
M.S. Irani

Nonny and I spent the summer in Connecticut and then moved back to New York for the winter, attending occasional meetings at the home of Elizabeth Patterson, where Princess Norina Matchabelli gave spiritual discourses. I also kept in close touch with Baba and in the spring of 1936 he wrote to say we would see him soon again:

Mysore
March 28, 1936

Dearest Rano,

I have your letters and although I didn't reply by letter, you did have the reply through inner communication which always continues, wherever I am, whatever I may be doing. No call of love ever remains unresponded to, much less from those who love me and think of me constantly as you do.

I have seen the photocopy of the interpretation of the Spirit Dance² done by you. It is splendid indeed. It was the living spirit of love that did it so beautifully, though not quite perfect for visualization, as perfection would require it. But how could you do it better than what you have already done! Art alone, however perfect, couldn't do it, unless inspired by love. And it is because of this rare combination of art and love that it has been done so beautifully.

I am indeed glad to know about the other, the Realization Scene³ which you have started. I don't like it done by one who is a mere artist, however great, but would prefer it done by one like you, who has the art as also the love that is ever so essential in painting things of this nature, where inner vision is the first indispensable element required. And it has made me so happy to see you do it, who loves me so and who would combine art with Love so magnificently. Remember, Baba watches every little act of love, listens to every little note (voice) of love, and responds to every little cry given for love, no matter where these come from, and when Baba's dearest Rano desires help in her work for her Beloved, it never fails. The fountain-source of love is ever pouring forth, directing its course into different channels wherever needed. And for those of my dearest who love me as you do, its course is ever open to pour out any moment, anywhere.

I know how anxious all you dearest ones are to see your Beloved, being separated for more than a year. That is why I am coming and also bringing good news of some surprise for you dearest gopies.⁴

All my love,
M.S. Irani

The surprise was, finally, our Master's call to India.

CHAPTER THREE

Boiling Jam

That long-awaited call to India came in a letter late in the summer of 1936. Baba said he was establishing a western ashram in Nasik and was inviting 15 of his devotees to join him there for a period of five years. From America, he called Ruano, Nonny and me, Elizabeth Patterson, Princess Norina Matchabelli, Countess Nadine Tolstoy, Garrett Fort, and Malcolm and Jean Adriel Schloss. From England, he called Kitty Davy, Margaret Craske, Delia Deleon, Will and Mary Backett and Tom Sharpley.

We of the American group were to go first to England to see Baba and to receive instructions. He would then return to India and we would follow. We arrived in England in November and saw Baba for a few days. He told us we should not get to India before a certain date and that we should bring linen and blankets and other general necessities. We weren't sure of exactly what we should bring as Baba hadn't told us what conditions would be like at the ashram - were we to have a house or were we to camp out? Would we travel or stay in one spot? No one knew and Baba was keeping it all a secret.

Six of us arranged to sail together from Marseilles: Nonny and I, Norina, Elizabeth, Malcolm and Jean. We half expected to receive another cable cancelling this trip, but there was no word at Marseilles as we boarded ship. We put in at Port Said: still no word. Here we bought flashlights and pith helmets and leather poufs to sit on, hoping to be prepared for whatever conditions we would meet in India. On to Aden and Karachi, and no cable appeared to stop us. At this point we could allow ourselves the thought that this time Baba really meant us to come.

We arrived in Bombay in early December 1936 to be met by Rustom, Adi K. Irani's brother, and members of the Dadachanji family. Baba was at Meherabad, some 150 miles south of Bombay.

My first glimpse of India was disappointing. I had expected it would be even more exciting and eastern than Morocco, which had such a colorful charm about it. But Bombay was just another big sprawling city. We were tired from our days of being tossed by the boat in rough seas and were ready for bed. Rustom, however, met us with instructions from Baba that we were to register at the American Consulate, go sightseeing in Bombay and then - of all things - go to a movie that night. An odd way to spend one's first night in India, we thought.

Because the Nasik ashram wasn't quite ready, we journeyed the next day to Bhandadra where we were to stay at a dak bungalow for about a week. Baba met us there. We had been used

to seeing him in the West dressed in a business suit or with a dressing gown over his sadhra. But here we saw Baba as his natural self, dressed in his white sadhra and pants and an old rust-colored coat, its pockets bulging with mail - he called it his "post office."

That first week, Baba took us to Nasik to see the ashram where we were to spend an unknown amount of time, and we were entranced.

Baba had provided every western convenience on the 24 acres. A main house consisted of a large double room and bath for Elizabeth and Norina, two small rooms and a shared bath for Nonny and me, and a large sitting room and dining room where the entire group could gather. Another long building, called Sarzat, fronted by a verandah, contained 12 rooms, every two rooms having a bathroom with hot and cold water shower, wash basin and western toilet. Each room had a night table; dressing table, cupboard and a bed with a mosquito curtain. Sarzat had a flat roof where we could walk in the evenings, and it was surrounded by a lovely garden.

Baba was of course very pleased to show us his surprise, and we moved into the ashram a week or so after our arrival in India. After the English group had joined us, Baba called us together and said, "I've given you for now all the luxuries; this is the luxury ashram. Later, one by one, I'm going to take all these things away from you." And in some respects he did, at least for some of us. Still later he made each of us put a hand in his and promise to stay for five years.

During the first six months of 1937, Baba spent his time among three centers of activity: the Nasik ashram; Meherabad, where his eastern women disciples lived on the Hill and the men lived at Lower Meherabad, a quarter mile below; and Rahuri, where Baba had a "mad ashram" for the mentally disturbed and the masts, or God-intoxicated.

When Baba was not at Nasik we each had daily duties assigned by Baba and we took turns at fasting or silence, as ordered by Baba. I'd never fasted before and my first effort brought on a terrible headache.

Baba also had Ramjoo give us Urdu lessons, a difficult task for him because we all had different ideas of what having Urdu lessons meant. Ramjoo's patience was tried to the utmost as one westerner wanted only enough words to be able to communicate with the cook, another wanted the grammatical reason for everything and still another wanted to know why something was spelled this way one day and that way another day. With all our fussing, we learned practically nothing and whenever Baba looked in to see how we were doing, he shook his head and gestured, "This is hopeless!" And it was.

Many times Baba would give us discourses, but he didn't want them written down, so they're lost except for people's memories which aren't that reliable. Other times we played games with Baba or just sat and talked with him. One night we put on a fancy dress skit with prizes for the best and funniest costumes - Baba always loved that sort of thing.

Occasionally Baba would tell Kaka, who helped look after the household, that he must give the westerners a talk. Kaka did not speak English fluently, and Baba would admonish us before the talk to listen very seriously to Kaka's speech and not to laugh, not even to smile. We would assemble in the dining room with Kaka standing at one end of a long table and Baba sitting at the other end. Kaka spoke very forcefully of how we should behave with the master: "No discuss. No

argue. Obey master."

Baba, of course, would sit and shake with laughter. But if we so much as cracked a smile, Baba gave us a stern look. And so we sat very solemnly and tried to absorb what Kaka was saying. It was all very beautiful, even though said in stilted English, and he spoke very much to the point, warning us not to be so haphazard, but to have respect for the master, and telling us how we should talk to Baba.

When Baba left us from time to time to go to Rahuri or Meherabad, we wanted to hear Baba stories from those who had been with Baba in the earliest days. An evening's spree for us was a gathering with whoever happened to be at the ashram at the moment - Rustom, Adi Jr., Kaka. We would use somebody's room in the long building and listen to stories until 10 or 10:30 at night. One of us would bring some toffee and another would bring sweet drinks. Norina and Elizabeth went to bed very early and Nonny preferred to retire to her room. Since Norina liked to keep the door locked at night, she had to get up and let me in after each story-telling session. She remonstrated with me several times, which irked me, and finally I brought up the subject with Baba. I didn't see why I should miss out on the Baba stories. I wasn't leading a wild life down there and I wanted to absorb as much about Baba as I could.

I told Baba what was happening and added, "After all, Baba, I'm a responsible person and if Norina leaves the door unlatched, I'll be very careful to lock it and I'll disturb no one. But I can't climb through a window; they're all shut. And I'm not so late."

Baba agreed, said I could stay out late and told Norina she should think no more about the front door. So then I was free to come and go and to enjoy all the Baba stories.

It was a fairly minor incident, but one of many which came up around Baba and which he used in his own way to show us all how he wanted us to live and how he wanted us to learn to control moods and temperaments.

Baba celebrated his 44th birthday in Nasik by giving bundles of grain and cloth to thousands of poor and lepers. It was a very long and strenuous day for Baba, but he followed it up the next day by giving darshan to all who came. As there were so many, he was still giving darshan when evening came on. It was getting cool and Baba was wearing a sadhra and thin shawl. Concerned that he would be chilled, I asked one of the mandali to put over Baba's knees my nice blue and white checked shawl.

Baba was so preoccupied that at first he didn't notice the shawl, but I was feeling very happy that Baba was nice and warm. After awhile I saw Baba talking to some devotees, when he suddenly picked up a corner of the shawl and asked "Where did this come from?" Someone told him and he looked over in my direction. Then he took the shawl and gave it to the devotees.

I said to myself, "Oh, no, I give that to Baba to keep him warm, and he gives it to those people. They don't look as if they need a shawl."

I inquired afterwards about the incident and was told that Baba had sent the shawl as prasad to one of his lovers who was too ill to come for darshan.

It was at Nasik that I first realized that Baba was more than just the flesh and blood being that I could see. One night - it must have been toward morning - I was awakened by a

blinding light, and in the light was Baba's face. My heart was beating very fast and everything was twirling, radiating pinwheels of light. With the light and the vision, there was such a feeling of ecstasy that I was no longer myself, but was just absorbed into Baba. Then the light and vision went and slowly, slowly, my heartbeat went back to normal. I tried to recapture the moment, but it was gone.

The next day I was alone with Baba and he turned to me, "What were you dreaming last night?"

I tried to hedge, to make out I didn't know what Baba was talking about because I didn't want to verbalize what I'd seen and felt. But Baba gradually brought it out of me.

I said, "Yes, Baba, it's something I'll never forget."

Baba tried to get me to tell the others, but I just mumbled about it, and they didn't really understand. I wanted to keep it to myself.

Nasik, like any place where people of varied temperaments are together, often was the scene of personality clashes. They were stupid things, not worth arguing about, but they always came to Baba's ears.

He would straighten things out and make the people involved give each other a heartfelt embrace, and tell them to forget and start again. Later on we would learn to control our moods and temperaments, but in those early days we were still egotistical enough to think only of ourselves. So if we felt moody, we just gave vent to it.

Of course sometimes I think we'd do it just to get Baba's attention. I remember one time at Nasik when one of our number became very moody and then just disappeared. We looked all over the compound, in all the buildings and rooms. We knew she wouldn't leave the property because we had strict orders not to for a certain length of time. But we couldn't find her anywhere. Then someone thought to look in a small grass hut which had been built for Baba. And there she was. She was coaxed out and Baba wooed her out of the mood and she was all right.

We all went through these things. Sometimes it was simply caused by an overwhelming feeling for Baba that one couldn't express. If I felt something very much but didn't want to give vent to it or show it, I would hide the feeling by being gruff and abrupt with other people.

Learning to do what Baba wanted instead of what we wanted was a painful process. We had to learn that every thought and every feeling should be centered on Baba. We would try, but naturally our little egos would get in the way and we'd want to assert ourselves. Baba would tell me I was arguing when I'd say I was just trying to explain something. There was a delicate balance to all this as Baba didn't want us to be namby-pamby; he had no use for that. But at the same time, we had to differentiate between a situation where we could stand up and one where we should say, "Yes, Baba," and not even attempt to discuss the matter.

After we went to live at Meherabad, the atmosphere around Baba changed completely. We had had so much freedom with Baba and now we had to realize that the time of freedom and of just loving Baba and expressing that love outwardly was over, giving way to a period of obedience and of feeling Baba inwardly.

We knew Baba loved us just as much as ever, even though he didn't express that love. And he used all the clashes and misunderstandings that arose to work out our moods. Sometimes differences were compounded by language difficulties. Other times there would be clashes among the westerners because of wanting to do certain things in certain ways.

And if Baba found things going too smoothly among the westerners and easterners, he created a situation to see how we'd stand up to it. I call that the "boiling jam" period: when jam is boiling, there's a certain point at which the froth comes to the surface and it has to be removed before the jam is pure and edible. Baba would point out this "froth" to us, but we were the ones who had to remove it. When we had altercations, Baba would make us see and hear ourselves. In time, and with his infinite patience, we learned that our shortcomings must be faced and removed, no matter how painful the process.

But it took a long, long time to boil that "jam." I've now reached the stage where I don't fly into a temper. I can get annoyed about something, but I'm always sorry afterwards. In those days I was never sorry; I'd just be annoyed. Everyone in the ashram was aware that I had a temper. Baba had to get that out of my system, and the only way was for me to work it out on others, and then hear myself and learn to control that temper. That's what Baba did with all of us. It was difficult for me at first, because I hadn't realized I had such a fiery temper. But Baba brought it all out.

I remember one of the hardest times was when I was in charge of packing the Blue Bus on our tours of India in the early 1940s. Everything was very tightly packed, and I had a specific place for everything, and I knew exactly where everything fitted because of having to pack in the early morning without any light. Then someone would come along and put their bundle in a place I'd reserved for something else. My temper would flare up and of course those were the times Baba would appear on the scene and tap me on the shoulder. I'd think, "Now why did I do that just when Baba came along?" I'd be so annoyed with myself and resolve that the next time it wouldn't happen. But the next time it would be something different and again I'd be caught out. Baba would always get you when you were tired and out-of-sorts.

During our travels, Kitty sometimes cooked the dal in the morning and we took it with us. We never had big meals but Baba always had Kitty keep a little something extra, tomatoes and cheese say, for Elizabeth who had been driving the car, and for the men mandali, who had to drive the bus and do other heavy work.

One day we arrived at a dak bungalow for the night and found that the dal had gone sour. There was a bit of tea and Kitty got the caretaker of the bungalow to get some milk and we had bread and butter with us. Not a satisfying meal if you were tired and hungry.

I saw some tomatoes and cheese set aside for Elizabeth and the mandali. My temper let go and I said to Kitty, "I'm hungry and I worked as hard as anyone else and I want something to eat."

Poor Kitty couldn't just give me something on her own so she went to Baba. If I'd known she was going to do that, I would have thought twice. As it was, having let off steam, I was cooling down and wishing I hadn't said anything. But it was too late, of course.

Kitty reappeared: "Baba wants to see you."

"Oh, Kitty, why did you go to Baba?"

"Well, I couldn't give you anything without asking Baba."

I went to Baba. He looked at me, "Ah, so I hear you're hungry." But the expression on his face said, "Ah, you're hungry; as if nobody else is hungry."

"Well, I did say something to Kitty about being hungry."

"All right," he said, "I've told Kitty to give you something to eat. See that you eat it."

Of course, by that time, just the thought of the food choked me and I thought, "Rano, you've put your foot in it again."

Each little incident like that was a step on the way, something to remember when you were feeling calm and could try to profit from the experience.

CHAPTER FOUR

But Not For Me

While we were at Nasik, Baba took us for our first visit to Meherabad, situated west of Ahmednagar.

We all had to be ready by 3 a.m. so we would be at Meherabad at 7 a.m. When we arrived we women were taken up the Hill to meet Baba's close eastern women disciples, and as we walked up to a compound enclosed by a hedge, I wondered at how these women lived, at the utter simplicity of their daily lives.

Living strictly under Baba's instructions, they could not leave their small compound, except at certain times, and had seen no man except Baba for many years. Their home was a large rectangular stone water tank formerly used by the military and converted to living quarters. Despite the severe restrictions, these women conveyed for their master a spontaneous love that imbued the atmosphere with the purity of a beach swept smooth and clean by the ocean. Their love and vitality soon dissolved any impression that life on Meherabad Hill was not as exciting as in any European city. Yet, I knew I could not live at Meherabad. I had been out in the world and could not imagine living in seclusion with a group of women on a hilltop, never able to go out nor to do as I pleased. I thought it impossible.

A few days after that visit, back at Nasik, Baba called us individually to ask how we liked Meherabad. When he asked me, I replied, "Oh, Baba, it is very nice, but not for me." Baba smiled and said nothing.

Although Baba told us all we would be at Nasik for five years, the ashram actually lasted only about six months, until June 1937.

Garrett Fort was sent back to the West first, then the Backetts, then Kitty, Margaret and Delia.

Baba had decided he wanted to spend part of the summer in Cannes, taking with him the eastern women from Meherabad Hill, some of the men mandali and Norina, Elizabeth, Nonny and me. Kitty was to go first to England and then on to Cannes to find two villas: one for Baba, the eastern women and a few of the western women; and one for the men mandali and the married couples. This second villa would also be used by Baba to give darshan to people coming from outside.

We four western women were to reach Bombay ahead of Baba and the eastern women and to meet them at a hotel. Because Mehera, Baba's closest woman disciple, at that time was not allowed to even see a man, Baba had given me strict instructions: there must be no men in view when he arrived with Mehera and the other women. They would come very early in the morning

and I was to meet them at the hotel door, take them to their rooms and make sure everything was all right.

When I got up that morning and opened the door to the hall, my heart sank. There were bodies all over the floor of the hallway - people covered by sheets, sound asleep. As I wove my way through the crowded corridor, my mind was racing, "What will I do? What will Baba say? How will I get rid of these people? If I wake them, then what will I do with them? They won't know what I'm talking about because I can't speak their language and it may cause more confusion. At least now they're quiet and they're asleep and they're under their sheets. Baba, Baba, don't let any of them come from under their sheets until you get here!"

Baba arrived, and the moment he stepped out of the car I said, "Baba, there are bodies all over the floor."

Baba just looked at me.

"You know, Baba, people with white sheets over them and I didn't dare wake them because I didn't know what to do with them and I haven't been able to obey your order. I can't remove them, but at least they're not visible. They're under sheets, so is it all right? We can get Mehera upstairs before any of them get up."

Baba gestured, "It's all right, it's all right." He simply had wanted me to do my best. On July 31, we boarded the *Strathnaver* for Marseilles. My idea of being on ship is to be up on deck, enjoying the fresh air and the view.

But Chanji had been told to provide seclusion for the women, and his idea of that was to choose cabins in the bottom of the boat, at the stern - right above the propellers. As we departed, the monsoon was raging in the Arabian Sea and the high, choppy waves tossed the stern of the boat up out of the water, the propellers made that terrible grinding noise, and then the boat sank back again. To make matters worse, the portholes had to be kept closed because of the weather.

I went up on deck that first day and was looking out over the water thinking, "Will I ever see India again?" when Baba came along.

"What are you doing here?"

"Enjoying the fresh air, Baba."

"Well, you go down to the cabin."

"But, Baba there are so many people down there."

"Never mind, you go down."

So of course I went down again. My job was to sit in the passage and guard Mehera's door.

Norina took over sometimes, but I always had that duty in the evenings. Even though I was a fairly good sailor, I feared that without some fresh air I'd start getting sick and then what kind of a job would I be able to do? I called the stewardess and asked, "What do you do when you're feeling queasy and you still have to take care of all these people?"

She said, "I always take a big tablespoon full of Worcestershire sauce."

"All right, bring me a bottle of Worcestershire sauce and a tablespoon."

There was no place in the passageway to sit except the floor, so I sat with my legs out and

my back against the bulkhead facing Mehera's door. I thought I'd better have some sauce before I got sick, and was just pouring out a big spoonful when I felt someone watching me.

I looked up and there was Baba. "What are you doing?"

"Trying not to be sick, Baba."

"All right, drink it down."

I managed not to be sick the entire trip, and Baba started allowing Norina and me a couple of hours on deck each day to get some fresh air. Although I didn't yet realize that I would later on be with Baba, that trip was the beginning of my training.

When we arrived at Cannes to be met by Kitty, Baba found one of the two villas unsuitable. Another was found to his liking and I stayed in that villa with Baba, Mehera and Mani (Baba's sister), Khorshed and her mother, Masi, Valu, Naja, Norina, Elizabeth and Kitty. Each day I walked with Baba to the villa where the men mandali, Nonny and Ruano and occasional guests were staying. For the first few days I stayed awhile to chat, having a nice time, and then wandered back to our villa.

Baba must have seen or heard me because the next thing I knew, Baba was saying, "You are not to talk to anyone here. You may say 'Good morning' if you want to, but as soon as you have left me, you are allowed 20 minutes to see Nonny. Then you must go back to the other house." Poor Nonny, she had to make a list of all the things she had to say to me, so she could get it all in within 20 minutes.

"But why can you only stay a little while?" she would ask.

"Orders," I would reply.

This was the beginning of toeing the mark!

I lived on the third floor of the villa, as did Elizabeth and Norina, and Baba's room was at the end of the corridor.

Every night Kaka would come up the back stairs to do nightwatch duty in a small room adjoining Baba's room.

One night I was sound asleep when there was a knock on the door.

"Yes, what is it?"

It was Kaka. "Baba wants you."

I put on my dressing gown and went to Baba's room. He was lying on his bed under a mosquito curtain.

"Were you asleep?"

"Yes, Baba."

"Now, tomorrow, you remind me that I want four bottles of soda water."

"Yes, Baba."

"Now you can go."

I went back to my room, snuggled into bed and was almost asleep when again came the "tap, tap, tap" on the door.

"Yes?"

"Baba wants you."

Again I went to his room and he gave me instructions about something else I should remind him about the next day.

Baba did this at intervals and although I thought it very funny, I couldn't understand why he would get me up in the middle of the night to tell me something that he easily could have told me in the morning. A long time afterward, I realized it was all just a test to see what kind of disposition I'd have in the middle of the night. I seemed to have stood the test all right.

Another night I was awakened by Kaka saying the house was on fire and I had better go down and see what was happening. I came out into the hall and the whole place was full of smoke, but I saw no flames. I made my way to the ground floor and found that all the smoke was coming from the kitchen. Someone had forgotten to open the flue on the old-fashioned French coal stove.

Baba came downstairs with Kaka and we opened all the windows, aired the place and made sure everything was all right. Baba and Kaka returned to their rooms and I to mine, and I had just settled down when Kaka was again at my door.

"Baba says go downstairs again and see that everything is still all right."

So again I went down, checked everything, came up and reported to Baba.

Sometimes one wondered why Baba did certain things. Other times one just accepted the fact that this was Baba's way of doing things and if you wanted to be with Baba, you might as well conform to his ways and not quibble about it.

I spent a good deal of time in Cannes gazing out the window as October approached and there were rumors that Baba was soon to return to India. I wondered if I'd ever see him again after he left Cannes.

Toward the end of October 1937 Baba made his decision - he would return to India in November. I knew Norina and Kitty were going with him but there wasn't a hint about anyone else. And I felt Baba would not be coming often to the West.

Then one day he called me to his room: "How would you like to come back to India with me?"

"Would I!" I cried.

"But what will Nonny say?"

"This time Nonny has no say."

"Will Nonny pay your fare?"

"I know Nonny won't refuse."

"Don't worry. If Nonny won't pay, then I'll pay your fare."

When Baba said that, I knew he really wanted me to come.

It was only some days later that I realized that I - who had been brought up in New York City and who loved to travel - had signed on to live a life of utmost simplicity, cloistered on a semi-desert hill six miles outside an Indian town on the Deccan Plateau. I remembered my first visit to Meherabad and wondered, "What ever happened to 'not for me'?"

We spent a night or two in Marseilles before boarding the ship for India. Baba had not been feeling well and he sent Norina out to a pharmacy to inquire for certain medicines. Norina then

telephoned to the hotel to say, "I've found such and such a thing. Shall I bring it?" I'd ask Baba and Baba would say yes.

Norina would come back with a number of medicines and then Baba would send her off to another pharmacy. One pharmacist said to Norina with some concern, "Why don't you go to a doctor?" In the meantime, I had to read the directions, translating them from French into English. I was new at this and Baba knew that I was wondering what was going on, as I had to keep on repeating the directions.

He looked at me and gestured, "You don't really think I'm doing this for myself, do you?" I replied, "I hardly thought so."

A Perfect Master can simply assume an illness, but the Avatar actually has to be ill to experience the illness in his human body as an ordinary person. Nevertheless, there were times when Baba would have a fever one minute and the next minute appear quite all right.

Another such incident occurred when Baba was in Raipur and he sent word to me at Meherabad that I should join him there. I arrived at Raipur to find the house in gloom: Baba wasn't feeling well. Baba was feeling giddy. I saw a table literally covered with medicines. None of the bottles had been opened.

Of course when Baba was like that, you had to get into that mood too. To make matters worse, Baba was to give darshan the next day.

"How am I going to give darshan when I feel like this?" he asked.

It was suggested that the darshan be postponed, but Baba always said no to that kind of suggestion.

The next morning Baba was still feeling giddy, but he was going to see it through and he went to the room adjoining ours where he was to give the darshan. We had seen that the room was packed with people and we thought we'd take a peek. There was Baba looking simply radiant, enjoying the music, smiling at the people coming up to take his darshan.

We heaved a sigh of relief - everything was going to be all right. When he came back to our quarters he was still radiant.

I removed all the medicines without question and without expecting any explanation. Baba had needed them for some purpose unknown to us.

CHAPTER FIVE

Into His Keeping

When I sailed back to India with Meher Baba in November 1937 I had no idea that except for two brief visits to the West in 1952 and 1970, I would be spending the rest of my life in India. My only thought when he asked me to come was that I wanted to love and serve him as best I could.

Meherabad was not a typical ashram. The usual eastern ashram or western monastery has a pattern of service chalked out for its members. After the first few years of training within the ashram, the novitiate is sent out as a sannyasi (renunciant) or sent to a hospital or mission, or is called upon for social work. Later, the aspirant returns to the ashram or is sent to a new ashram with new duties and increased responsibilities.

The daily routine, from dawn to dusk, is pre-planned and the aspirant must discipline himself to meet the day's requirements. He awakens at a certain hour. Prayer, work, instruction, meals and meditation all have their time and all must be done. The routine becomes established, there are no sudden changes and one who follows this path can know what to expect.

With Meher Baba, there was no such surety. There was no preconceived channel for stewardship and no activity was established for long before it was disrupted or abandoned for something else. From day to day with Baba I was as unsure of what my future would bring as an initiate was sure of what was in store for him. There were no guarantees for me or the others with Baba. Perhaps tomorrow Baba would send me packing back to the West; I never knew. Yet if one wished to remain with Baba, then one could not worry about it; one must forget that aspect. Coming to Baba meant that the future - and whatever it held - was given to Baba for his keeping. As a result, if one wanted to stick to Baba, one had to let go of one's self. Thoughts about security, likes and dislikes and one's moods all had to be put at the feet of the Master. This was a painful process. Ashram life with Baba became the day-by-day experience of Jesus' call:

"Leave all and follow Me."

Meher Baba never wished for outer conformity. The discipline he expected from his disciples was an inward willingness to obey his wish. In a traditional ashram the head may be shaved or special robes worn as a sign of renunciation of the mundane for a certain ideal. But Baba gathered such a potpourri of individual temperaments and unique personalities, one could never imagine them, on their own, living with one another, and certainly never acquiescing

to a rigid standard of outward conformity. Each one had a definite character and Baba himself said, "I don't want stones around me." It was only because of each one's love for Baba that each made the effort to live and cooperate with the others. Many times there were quarrels, and on such occasions Baba asked the ones concerned to try to live in harmony and asked that each be the one to "give in." Baba never minimized these differences, but rather brought them to the surface.

Kitty, Norina and I arrived at Meherabad in November 1937 late at night and there was no chance to greet my new surroundings visually before moving in. Oil lantern in hand, I walked into the west room of the converted military water tank on the Hill. The room was about 40 feet long and 15 feet wide with a very high ceiling. We would be living with six of the eastern women who occupied the large east room. When I went to the far corner of the west room that first night, I found a spring bed, a wooden bench and a piece of mirror. This was home. As Baba had promised, all the luxuries of the Nasik Ashram were now gone.

At Meherabad and in later years traveling around India and living at Meherazad, I was given every kind of household chore except cooking. I have done the sweeper's job and secretarial work; I have washed clothes, done carpentry; and I have been a doctor's assistant, a watchman, a dressmaker, a porter and a painter. The important thing with Baba was flexibility.

I remember one experience regarding this point which made a strong impression on me. Very early one morning at Meherabad, Baba called me into the kitchen. I never liked getting up early, especially when it was still dark, so I was always the last one up. On hearing that Baba wanted me, I hurried to finish dressing and went running to the kitchen. As I entered, Baba looked at me sweetly and said, "Listen to the kettle sing."

I thought to myself, "Baba has called me here just to hear the kettle sing!"

My face must have given me away because Baba said, "It is not the fact of the kettle's singing that is of importance, but that I thought of you to call you."

I felt very small and very contrite. It showed me that with Baba I must never judge things by their outward appearance. Baba always meant something more than appeared on the surface and I would have to be quick enough to realize it.

I had such grand ideas of being on Meherabad Hill with Baba. That would be where perfection lay: nothing would go amiss, there would be no angry words, no misunderstandings in an atmosphere like that with Baba.

And then one day something happened and I was very upset. Just at that point Baba came by and I ran up to him and threw my arms around him and cried, "Oh, Baba, everything's spoiled, everything's spoiled!"

He calmed me down and I soon realized that the Hill was a miniature of the world and these things had to happen, even as they did out in the world. I couldn't expect that it was just going to be beautiful and wonderful. This incident had to happen at the beginning of my life at Meherabad or I would have just gone on in a rosy haze, oblivious to the opportunities to change the very core of my life.

I never cried much until I came to Baba. Baba didn't have to say anything to me, but if I did

something that he disapproved of or something that disappointed him, all he had to do was give me one look. That look so annihilated me that I would weep for hours.

Then Baba would say, "Stop crying."

"Baba that's easy for you to say but I'm only human and unless you turn off the tap, I can't."

Then Baba would tell me to forget it; it was over.

Since Baba was Baba, all this was nothing to him, but a little nothing became such an important thing to us, especially when it was connected with Baba. Disappointing Baba was not like disappointing anyone else.

Baba did do things in ways one couldn't always understand. One time I said something to Baba in all innocence, but Baba took exception to it and became so annoyed with me that he said, "I never want to see your face again."

I was dismissed and I was devastated. I thought, "Oh, God, Baba never wants to see my face again and he's going to send me off tomorrow."

I saw myself packing. I wondered where I would be going. Maybe I'd end up in Myrtle Beach (at the Meher Spiritual Center). It was going round and round in my mind all night. How could I go to breakfast the next morning? I hardly felt I could face Baba, but if I didn't appear I thought Baba would say, "Where is Rano? What is she doing?"

So I forced myself to go to breakfast. Baba acted as if nothing had happened. Well, I thought, if this is the way Baba wants it, I'll just forget it ever happened, too.

By the time Baba's birthday came in February 1938 Elizabeth and Nonny had joined the ashram. Baba decided on a public birthday celebration, so although Kitty and I never came down the Hill, other women could join us on the Hill.

I remember one woman who sat near me. Baba had turned on the "powerhouse" and he glowed. All present were basking in his radiant smile, including me, as this was a luxury for us in the ashram.

This woman turned to me and said, "Isn't it wonderful to sit at the feet of the Master?" She seemed to think this was all we did.

I replied that it was indeed wonderful, but I thought little does she know what it is to live with the Master! I don't think she would have understood even if I had told her. It had to be experienced to be understood.

Baba very often used to give us different types of orders. Through them all we learned that no matter how difficult or even impossible an order might seem, if Baba wanted something done, then we had to do our best. He'd take care of the rest.

During one period of travel, I had an order not to touch men. I was on board a train with Baba and the women when we arrived at a station at night, and there was, as usual, a large throng of men on the platform. Baba told me to go down to the men mandali's compartment, several cars away, and to give them a message and come back.

"Come as quickly as possible," he said, "because the train will go."

Here was this milling throng of men and I was supposed to get through without touching any of them. But all I could say was, "Yes, Baba." I got down on the platform and thought the

only way I was going to get through was to make myself as small as possible. I started off with my arms clasping my body so I wouldn't hit anyone. All the way to the mandali's compartment, I kept repeating to myself, "I'm not bumping into anyone; I'm not touching anyone. If anyone's touching me, it's not my fault, Baba." A few people did bump into me, but I wasn't doing it.

I reached the men's compartment, gave the message and went through the same process coming back. Baba never inquired how I managed it. He knew I had to obey his order. If I had quibbled and said, "But I'm not supposed to touch a man," Baba would have said, "What's that got to do with it?"

It was the most recent order that had to be obeyed, regardless of what Baba had told you before.

Another time, I was again on a train and in a compartment with Mehera, Mani and Meheru, and Baba was in another compartment with the men. Baba had instructed me firmly that not even a small boy could be in the women's compartment, although at other times women had brought small boys into the women's compartment and Baba hadn't objected.

Everything went smoothly until we arrived at one station and a large group of women came into the compartment. With them was a big boy.

"But this won't do," I said. The women couldn't speak English but the boy's father was standing on the platform and he did speak English. I started having an argument with him. "Look, this is the ladies' compartment. There are ladies in this compartment and they don't want any boys in here. We can't have him here; take your son with you."

He said the boy had to be with his mother.

I said, "He can't be with his mother; he's too big. We don't want him here. It's like having a man in the compartment and this is a women's compartment."

We went back and forth and he was getting angry and in the end none of my arguments worked. Finally there was nothing more to say and I thought the only thing left to do was to take the boy by the scruff of the neck and throw him out. But I was sure Baba didn't want me to do that.

I said to Mani, "You all stay in the corner there and I'll go down to the other compartment and tell Baba what's happened. I've done everything I can. If I throw the boy out, it'll involve you people and the father will probably have the guards coming in." I told Baba the story and asked, "Now do you want me to take the boy and throw him out? Because I'm willing to; I'm at the end of my tether."

Baba said, "No, no, it's all right now. You just go back quietly. Don't worry. It's all right." When I got near our compartment, there was the whole group of women - with the boy coming out and going off in another direction.

"Mani, what happened?"

"I don't know; they just got up and walked out."

"Well," I said, "that's Baba's doing."

Usually when Baba gave an order not to touch men, he also gave an order not to touch money. That almost never applied to me because I was spending all my time on Meherabad Hill

in those days. Still I had to remember it.

One day I went to Ahmednagar with Elizabeth and on our way home we stopped at the post office. While she was taking care of one piece of business, I suggested that I take her change purse and get the stamps she wanted. She handed me the purse and I went to the stamp window at the other end of the post office.

I was just opening the purse to take out the money when I heard the ever discreet Elizabeth in a frantic voice calling to me in French, "Ne touche pas! Ne touche pas!" I dropped the purse at once and the coins spilled out across the floor. All these strangers started picking up the money and Elizabeth came along to help while I just stood there in shock at how close I'd come to breaking Baba's order. I had completely forgotten it.

CHAPTER SIX

The Traveling Ashram

During the summer of 1938 (mid-March through May) Baba moved the ashram from Meherabad to Panchgani, a hill station much cooler and more comfortable for unacclimatized westerners.

While we were in Panchgani Baba had a second story added to the Meherabad water tank to house new arrivals, and on our return to Meherabad, more easterners and westerners joined the ashram.

In the fall Baba decided to go on tour - what was to become known as the Blue Bus tours - and to take all the women with him. This meant Mehera, Mani, Naja, Khorshed, Masi, Valu, Mansari, Gulamasi, Gaimai and her daughters, Meheru and Manu, Norina, Elizabeth, Nonny, Kitty, Nadine Tolstoy, Hedi Mertens, Irene Billo, Helen Dahm, who painted the murals on the inside of Baba's tomb, myself and, from Hyderabad, Katie Irani. There were 22 in all, although the Blue Bus was meant to hold 14.

During the Blue Bus tours, the ceaseless river of Meher Baba's energy had four main estuaries: mast work; internal work; establishment of a spiritual center in India; and running the ashram. By far the greatest amount of Baba's time went toward his masts, either working with them in the ashram, wherever that might be, or searching them out on incredible tours which took him the length and breadth of India. Eruch Jessawala, a close disciple who accompanied Baba on these tours, says of them, "If we thought we had a good mast, there was not one instance where Baba spared himself. He did not care for money, food, distance or sleep until he contacted that mast. Compared with mast work, Baba's other activities were secondary."⁵

About Meher Baba's internal work, we could have no idea. Since Baba was spiritually perfect, the fasts and seclusions he underwent were not for his own benefit, but for the spiritual awakening of humanity; for Baba has said, "I have come not to teach but to awaken."

The Blue Bus tours coincided with World War II and there can be no doubt that Baba guided that war. However, apart from the very few utterances (by alphabet board) Baba has made concerning his work, we stand myopic on the shore, seeing only the breaking wave, but nothing beneath it.

The third direction for Baba's energy in that period was the establishment of a spiritual center in India. The center was to have six departments: spiritual academy, house of advanced souls, abode of the saints, mast department, solitary quarters for meditation, resting place for the

afflicted. This projected center at Byramangla, 24 miles from Bangalore, never became operational, although several buildings were erected on the property.

The fourth aspect of Baba's activities, the ashram, was run very closely. Each was given specific duties and Baba expected these duties to be carried out. The smallest chores became time-consuming projects, as only orders from the Master can. It has always amazed me how Baba's tiniest order, something that appeared quite ordinary, could turn into a major test.

One such incident started just before we were to leave on the first Blue Bus tour.

Valu, one of the household, was out in the field and decided to burn some brush. The wind came up suddenly, the fire turned, came on Valu and burned her legs. She staggered back to the compound in shock. We did not have a doctor then, so someone suggested applying Burn-All ointment to the burns. The ointment was put on and nothing else was done. Within a short while, both legs went septic.

Baba called for Padri to come up the Hill. Padri, who was well-versed in homeopathy, examined the burns and said Valu would not be able to go on the tour as the burns were quite serious.

But Baba said she must come on the trip, that Padri should do what was possible and that the nursing could take place on the journey.

Baba sent for me and said, "You will have to bathe and dress Valu's legs everyday. Can you do it?"

Whenever I saw blood I immediately became sick and faint and turned away because I knew I'd be useless. So after seeing Valu's legs from a distance and then hearing Baba ask me to nurse the burns, for a moment I didn't say anything. I just looked at Baba.

I must have turned green because Baba said, "Are you going to be sick?" I looked at him steadily, "No, Baba, I am not going to be sick."

The remarkable thing is that from that moment on, I had no trouble in dressing Valu's legs.

Every day Valu sat in the cramped bus with her legs across someone's lap. When we reached a dak (traveler's) bungalow at night, two stoves were lit. Kitty would heat our meal on one and I used the other to boil water for a boric solution for Valu's injuries. I found, much to my own astonishment, that after caring for Valu and cleaning up the bandages, I could still eat a hearty meal.

Well, I thought, this is all Baba's doing. If I had said, "No, I can't do it, Baba; I'll be sick," I'd probably still feel unable to cope with that kind of situation. But because I made the effort, as Baba wanted me to, he helped me to the extent that such situations ceased to phase me.

On December 8, 1938, at Meherabad we all piled into the Blue Bus and the tours began. Elizabeth drove the top-heavy six-wheeler out of Lower Meherabad, past the mandali who stood waving goodbye to their beloved Master.

We accommodated so many people by placing stools in the aisle and smoothing small beddings across them from one seat to another, so five people could sit in each row instead of three. Usually I rode in the back of the bus with Kitty, among the cooking vessels, baskets and pails.

After traveling 140 miles over rough roads that first day, we reached the dak bungalow at Sholapur by 6:30 p.m. Since the halt was only for the night, no bedding was brought down from the top of the bus, something that thereafter happened frequently. Everyone was left to find their own accommodation. Some chose the floor, others took tables or chairs. By 7:20 the next morning we were off for Hyderabad where we picked up Katie Irani, bringing our number to 22.

Indian roads are not four-lane highways nor for that matter are most of them even two-lane highways. The country roads are for the most part 1½ lanes wide, with hard-packed dirt shoulders on either side. A good Indian driver never wants to waste his tires on stones and dirt so naturally when another vehicle approaches, he establishes position by moving to the center of the road. If the other driver is experienced, the matter is not concluded until, by some means not discernable to a casual observer, one driver defers. Indian roads are also the scene of what the western world confines to the farm, pasture or playground: bullock carts, cyclists, troops of pedestrians and beggars, herds of goats and sheep, stray cows. To maneuver an over-loaded bus around such obstacles requires a skill rare in the West. On later tours, Elizabeth's Buick joined the Blue Bus. Usually Baba, Mehera, Mani and someone Baba chose led off in the Buick with Elizabeth driving. Eruch, with Nilu or another mandali, drove the Blue Bus.

In one instance on a troublesome return journey from Bangalore, there were 43 of us to be transported, so the caravan included three cars as well as the Blue Bus. That trip back to Meherabad from Bangalore was quite an affair. All the furniture from Meherabad had been sent down to Bangalore because Baba had said this was now to be our permanent headquarters. At Bangalore we stayed at a huge place called "The Links," which overlooked a golf course. In the rear, Baba had a separate compound constructed as an ashram for the masts. It was made quite lively by the presence of Chatti Baba, Phulwala, Chinnaswami, Shariat Khan, Chaddar Baba, Ramshish and other masts. Most of Baba's time was taken up with caring for these God-intoxicated souls. He bathed, shaved, fed and clothed them and also cleaned their latrines. And the mandali had to see to the masts' every wish and whim. There was even a mast hotel - a mock tea shop where everything was a little dusty and a little crooked and where the masts could purchase cha (tea), beedies and pan.

After eight months in Bangalore, Baba announced we were returning to Meherabad, and all the luggage and furniture had to be made ready. Besides those in the ashram and the masts, we had also acquired some animals which would have to be transported. Some of the luggage and animals and people were to return by train and some on the Blue Bus.

At this point, Kitty and I went through one of those strange things we did every now and then. We suggested to Baba that we could go back by train if he liked. That would make more room for the others on the bus and we assured him we really would not mind. If the two of us went, it would be all right; we would keep each other company.

"Oh," said Baba, "You want to go by train. You do not want to travel with me. You prefer going back by train."

"No, Baba, that is not what we mean. We mean that everyone else would be more comfortable and we really do not mind going by train."

"No," said Baba, "You prefer going by train instead of traveling with me. That is how I understand it."

This went on and on during a session with everyone present. When the meeting was over and we were dismissed, Kitty and I were still sticking to our point that we really meant it out of the goodness of our hearts to go by train.

Then Baba called Kitty and me to his room. Again we went through the whole thing. Again we stuck to our point. Three days went by and the situation remained unchanged. Again Baba called us. Again an impasse, and Baba dismissed us in disgust.

Of course, we knew Baba had to win in the end and we didn't have a chance against him. Finally we wept and said, 'Yes, Baba, of course we want to go with you; of course we don't want to go by train.'

Then Baba was quite happy and he embraced us and the atmosphere was all clear again.

When we did travel by train, we usually reserved an entire third class bogie. In those days, it was possible to switch a bogie from one train to another at a pre-arranged junction. For instance, on the journey from Meherabad to Ceylon, it was possible for Baba and the women to change trains at Dhond and catch the *Madras Mail* without leaving the compartment.

The train journeys often took two or three straight days, and train travel during the war years was even more hectic than usual, as more British troops moved in and out and other Allied troops came to India for rest and rehabilitation.

On one occasion in 1940, we were in route from Calicut on the southwest coast to Jaipur and when the reserved bogie supposedly waiting for us at Madras was found to be already occupied, there was a mad dash to change trains and compartments within 15 minutes. The weather was cold and cloudy as the train rattled across the grey, flat countryside at dawn, just south of Nagpur. We were all shivering and I was tired and dozing after a sleepless night.

Then Baba came through and in a very sweet way distributed cakes to all. It was Christmas morning.

Another time we were traveling to Kashmir in two cars, both of which kept breaking down, and finally Baba decided to continue by train.

We arrived at a station at night and Baba said, "You women go to a women's compartment as soon as the train comes, because it will stop for only a few minutes." We did so and I began knocking on the door to one compartment over and over and saw there was a woman sleeping there. I started banging on the window so hard that it came down. Still the woman didn't awaken, so I leaned in and started whacking her. She woke with a start and I said, "Let us in, let us in, the train is about to go."

Half asleep, she opened the door and we piled in. The next morning Mehera, very concerned for what the woman might think, told Mani to talk nicely to her. So Mani introduced me as their American friend who was traveling with them.

It had been arranged that when we arrived at our destination Meheru and Mani, with Mehera between them, would step down from the compartment and go as quickly as possible to the ladies waiting room in the station. I would find a porter, get the luggage off and follow them.

When the train stopped, I helped the three women off, shouted for a porter and started throwing the luggage out the window to him. I counted everything, smiled at the woman and walked away.

Mani had turned back to see if I was coming and that everything was all right and saw the woman hanging out the compartment window with the most fantastic expression on her face. Here were those three women talking about their American friend and then they just walk off and leave her to deal with the luggage.

Traveling by bus with Baba meant frequent stops. In order for everyone to alight, all the stools and bedding had to be removed. We stopped for a variety of reasons. Perhaps Baba wanted to show us an unusual banyan tree stretching itself to cover both sides of the road. Perhaps it was "lunch" - an onion and banana handed to each by Baba. Sometimes it was a beautiful view - a waterfall, a spectacular stretch of the Ghats. Minutes later Baba would signal and we would file back into the bus and re-establish our positions, and the journey resumed.

Of course, there were the countless tire punctures, engine problems and wrong directions. Sometimes the Buick would get well ahead of the bus and then double back to look for us. Sometimes we missed each other and then the bus would turn back in search of the car, reminding one of scenes from old movie comedies.

In the late 1930s and 1940s, the dak bungalows at which we often stayed were sparsely furnished rest houses maintained by the British for travelers and officials.

They varied in size, commonly consisting of two or three small rooms with flagstone flooring, tiled roof and fieldstone walls. There was a verandah in front and separate kitchen and latrines in the rear. Dak bungalows were often located in secluded scenic areas and the rates were reasonable. When the bus was unloaded at the end of the day, all scattered - every woman for herself - to find sleeping space. One time three tried to share a bed, sleeping three across. I usually carried a thin mat, a sheet and a coat which, when doubled over, made a fine pillow. Often I and a few others slept on the verandah which, if one could stand the cold, afforded more space. Life on the road was a simple affair.

There were varied hazards, mechanical, natural and human! On August 2, 1939 - the first day of the second Blue Bus tour - we were on our way to Sholapur when the bus became mired in a river bed. What to do? The bus could not be pushed out and where to find a tow truck? There were no cities nearby. Finally local farmers hitched up 20 bullocks and managed to free the bus.

A similar situation occurred on the way to Meherabad from Jubblepore. At Toka we all had to alight and wade across the Godavri River while teams of bullocks pulled the bus and car across. Imagine the picture we made, a ragtag line of women of every description - Parsi, Hindu, Irani, English, Italian, Russian, Swiss and American; some tall and thin; others short and stout; each dressed according to her own fashion, all sporting an occasional patch.

During our first stay in Panchgani, Kitty suddenly decided she should go to church on Easter Sunday, and there was a church a short distance from where we were staying. I had no desire to attend church but I thought it would be nice to get out of the bungalow and have a walk. How we went without telling anyone, I don't know, but we did.

We walked the distance to the church and, to Kitty's utter disappointment, it was closed. A side door was open, however, and we went into the empty church. We sat down for a while to rest and suddenly a heavy thunder storm came up. We had to wait some time for it to end and I was wondering what Baba was going to say.

When we finally returned to the bungalow, we saw Elizabeth's car half in a ditch on the side of the driveway. Baba hadn't known where we were and had sent Elizabeth to look for us. Her car had skidded on the wet road and slid into the ditch.

Baba called us. "So you wanted to go to church? All right," and he looked at me, "you can go to church every Sunday."

"But, Baba, I don't want to go to church," I said. "I was just keeping Kitty company."

We didn't go to church again and Kitty never again expressed a desire to go.

The most memorable tour was the journey from Jaipur to Quetta, located near the borders of Iran, Afghanistan and Russia. No one at that time, late 1940, traveled the Baluchistan roads because the native tribes were so fierce. Only the British troops moved unmolested, and then only because the Viceroy paid a handsome royalty to the local chieftains.

The journey was uneventful until we reached the Indus river. Baba had gone ahead in Elizabeth's car, leaving Eruch in charge of the bus with instructions that the women were not to get down for any reason. Spanning the river was a very shaky pontoon bridge usually only used by the military. As we reached the tollgate after dark, the guard stopped us. The bus weighed five tons and the bridge would hold 2½ tons at most. The guard would not take the responsibility and wouldn't let us pass. Eruch argued that we must pass, as half our party had already proceeded. The guard grudgingly agreed, but only if the women would get down and walk.

Eruch, under strict orders from Baba, could not yield to this demand. He argued so persistently and persuasively that the guard finally threw up his hands and agreed to lead us across by lantern.

We started across the pontoon bridge. "C-r-r-rack, c-r-r-rack" went the planks as the wheels went over each section. The bridge swayed. It was raining and the Indus was flowing full only inches beneath the bridge. The bridge creaked and groaned and the bus rang with fervent shouts of "Meher Baba, ki jai!" Slowly we crossed to safety.

Recalling the incident later, Eruch claimed he never heard Meher Baba's women disciples take his name more vigorously or sincerely than on that day.

After the crossing, the bus and car pulled in for petrol at Dehra Gazi Khan. The place was cold and flooded and we left as quickly as possible for Khar. In British times, Khar was no more than a very small outpost in the mountains, 5,600 feet above sea level. There was no human habitation for 12 miles around and the area was known for its bandits.

As our bus pulled up to the dak bungalow in Khar, we saw the caretaker - a huge, towering Baluchi with his fanlike turban and a big mustache. We all stared as five-foot three-inch Kitty, undaunted and taking the situation as a matter of course, walked up to the giant and, in her best Marathi (of which he could not understand a word), began explaining our requirements.

The mountain air gave all of us huge appetites and we enjoyed the view of the mountains, a

lake and a river running through the valley below. We took a lovely walk with Baba, and in the afternoon Kitty built a wood fire and we all sat near Baba. It is impossible for me to put into words the feeling of those quiet, intimate times with Baba.

The next morning precisely at 7:20, the bus and car moved out again, and an hour later we were in Rokhni where we saw a wild, wonderful horse race by the natives. Baba gave the winner five rupees. We hired an escort of Baluchi guards as no one recommended we go any further without them. Two of them, armed with rifles, crouched on the Blue Bus front fenders while others sat on top of a following public bus. Cecil B. DeMille could not have staged anything more authentic for these 20th century badlands. The bus moved away from the village onto the open road behind Elizabeth's car, but the car was soon far ahead of us. In an effort to catch up, Eruch quickly lost the Baluchi rear-guard. Much to the disappointment of the more adventurous passengers on the Blue Bus, there was no holdup and not even a sign of bandits.

It was very cold in Quetta and a very heavy frost occurred while we were there even though technically winter was over. We stayed in Quetta a month. Baba sent Norina to Karachi to lecture. Elizabeth gave Mani driving lessons. And, of course, Baba used the opportunity to contact masts. But one mast, Nadi Ali Shah, whom Baba said was the spiritual chargeman of Quetta, refused to see Baba. Even when cajoled, persuaded and enticed by Eruch and Baidul, Ali Shah continued to refuse, saying, "My boat will be drowned in that ocean."

So many in the ashram have said that it is either a feast or a famine with Baba. If so, then traveling with Baba was the famine and the halts were the feast. "The Links" bungalow at Bangalore and the large bungalows at Jubblepore, Ajmer, and Dehra Dun attested to the fact that Baba settled in on a large scale. Seemingly then, we would have all the comforts we missed on the road. But with Baba comforts could become nuisances and hardships, blessings. In the ashram, doing for Baba meant the "I" no longer mattered. Daily life, either on the road or during the halts, was not our own. It was Baba's. Having come to Baba meant both the happy times and the hardships were his. For those in the ashram, there was only this: obey Baba implicitly, and be cheerful.

One night after a long day's journey, we pulled into a hotel at Jaipur. I was exceptionally tired and grimy, and especially happy to discover that the hotel had a European style bathtub. I made up my mind to be last, so I could soak leisurely in the hot water without the others becoming impatient. I thought I would relax a bit.

Everyone else finally finished, and I made the hot water ready. No sooner was I settled than there was a loud rapping at the door: "Baba wants you!"

I let out my breath slowly, stepped out of the tub, pulled the plug, got dressed and hurried downstairs to see what Baba wanted.

Baba smiled and gestured, "Sit outside until Kaka comes; then you can go."

When longer halts were made, Baba invariably renewed his mast work with full force. The mandali were called from Meherabad and the mast experts were sent out on preliminary expeditions scouring the countryside for masts. Then Baba would go traveling with the mandali and contact the masts. Only those who actually traveled with Baba have any idea of the hardships

of those tours. We would only catch a glimpse of Baba on his return: worn, tired, barely recognizable. At times, a few masts would be brought back and, as likely as not, a mast ashram soon would be in full swing. Washing and bathing these masts, seeing to their food and daily needs, having the mandali see to their slightest fancy, Meher Baba showed in day by day fashion that truly he is the slave of the love of his lovers.

Once in Bangalore, I walked into the room where Baba was having his meal to deliver a message, and Baba was very indignant. He said, "When I'm having my meal you're not to walk in on me like this. I will not attend to anything when I'm having my food."

I apologized and walked out. A short while later it was announced that a mast had come. Baba immediately left his food to attend to the mast.

But Baba would not buy anything for the masts. Bath towels, blankets, everything needed was taken from us by Baba, so that his masts would be well cared for. At one of our stops, Baba decided very early one morning to go with Kaka in a tonga to contact a certain mast.

I saw Baba sitting in the tonga, wearing a short coat and his thin sadhra. I thought, "Oh, it's such a chilly morning, I must cover Baba with something." I got a lovely shawl which Nonny had brought back from Europe for me. I covered Baba with it and I was quite happy because Baba was nice and warm.

Towards noon, Baba returned. Sitting in the tonga with him was the mast, and draped around the mast was my shawl.

When Baba came to me later, he said, "You know you're not going to get your shawl back."

"Yes, Baba, I know."

One of the mast ashrams was established during our stay in Ajmer in 1939. My duty at the time was to wash the masts' clothes, consisting of long kafnis and lunghas, as well as the towels Baba used to dry the masts after bathing them. I was also responsible for bringing hot water whenever Baba needed it for them.

Baba was then contacting Chacha, a seventh plane majzoob. Each day, Kaka would go out and try to bring Chacha to the house because Baba wanted to bathe and feed him. I had strict instructions that I must have plenty of hot water ready when Chacha came. But no one knew when Chacha was coming. Every day Kaka would go and every day Kaka would come back empty-handed.

At the rear of the compound we had a very large samovar over a small fire of wood and coal to keep the water constantly hot. The samovar was equipped with a spigot. While I was keeping the water hot in case of Chacha's arrival, other people still wanted to take baths so I was allowing each one the bare minimum of hot water. I was sure that if everyone took all the water they wanted, the 'bumb' (as the samovar is called in India) would be emptied and at that moment Chacha would come.

Days went by and Chacha didn't come and everyone was getting very irked with me because they couldn't get proper baths. At last I said to Helen Dahm, "All right, Helen, take your pail of water and I'll quickly fill the bumb again."

She had just carried the pail of water to her bathroom when a cry went up, "Chacha has

come! Chacha has come!"

Before Helen could shut the door I rushed in, grabbed the pail and ran with it to Baba, leaving Helen gaping in astonishment.

More than one pail of water was needed as Chacha's clothes were caked on him, so while I was running back and forth between the bumb and Baba with 10 or 12 buckets, Mehru Jessawala was refilling the bumb and stoking the fire. I kept on running until Kaka finally said, "Now there's plenty." I was able to relax and everyone else could have as much hot water as they pleased.

It was a particular delight to have that experience because Baba usually did not allow us to work in any way for the masts.

Even throughout the Blue Bus tours, I continued to have to deal with my stubborn streak, and Baba continued to provoke it. In Ceylon, we had a special treat of cut up pieces of coconut sprinkled with sugar. Just as I was taking my first piece of coconut, Baba, who obviously had nothing to do at the moment, said, "That's not good for your throat."

"But Baba, I love coconut. I've eaten a lot of coconut and nothing ever happened to my throat."

It went on and on and I refused to give in. In the end, I had to; I knew Baba wasn't going to let up until I did.

I said, "Yes, Baba, you're quite right, it's not good for my throat."

So whenever I eat coconut now, I remember that it's not good for my throat.

For a number of years after I came to the ashram, I received a small fruitcake, sent by my brother and sister-in-law just before Christmas. When I was young, my father had always asked Nonny to have a special cake for me at Christmas and they thought it would please me if they continued the tradition.

But in those days, India charged duty on foodstuffs and each year the cake was sent, the duty increased. So when another cake arrived just before Christmas of 1946 at Mahabaleshwar, Baba sent for me and asked why I always had this cake sent and did I realize there was duty to pay?

I tried to explain that it had sentimental value for my family. Baba couldn't see why my brother didn't pay the duty on it and that bothered me very much. Someone suggested I tell my family to stop sending the cake and someone else made another remark and I got more and more upset. I never liked anyone interfering in my private affairs and I felt this was between Baba and me.

I left the room and went down into the woods and just let myself be upset. When teatime came, I knew that if I didn't go, Baba would send for me and there would be another set-to. I pulled myself together and went back to the house to find everyone sitting at the table with a bit of cake in front of them. Baba happened to be with us at teatime that day, sitting at the far end of the table. I went to the other end, helped myself to tea and ignored the cake.

A voice next to me said, "Baba says have some cake."

I muttered to myself, "I don't want any cake. Why should I eat that cake? But I'll have to do

it." I looked at the cake and found the smallest piece, hardly more than a crumb, slowly picked it up between thumb and forefinger, looked down the table at Baba, and popped the little piece in my mouth.

I know I saw a twinkle in Baba's eyes, but he said nothing. I had done as he said and I always felt that if you were goaded by Baba, it was all right to retaliate a bit, as long as you didn't do it aggressively. It tickled Baba; he liked some spunk.

While we were traveling throughout India in those years, Baba occasionally took us sightseeing. But sightseeing with Baba was an uncommon affair. We moved very rapidly from one sight to the next, staying in one spot only long enough for a quick glimpse. One time he took us to the Arts of Different Nations Museum in Jaipur and as soon as I entered it I was entranced. The museum was not overwhelming as so many are in the West. Here the artworks were displayed with the utmost attention to allowing the viewer to grasp the beauty of each in a perfect setting. But Baba didn't allow us time to stop and admire. He made the rounds, surveying each room with hardly more than a glance here and there, and then quickly walked on. I still remember walking backward, trying to catch a last glimpse.

We saw the Taj Mahal in the daylight and the moonlight; we saw the Red Fort and all the Moghul Empire ruins which surround Delhi; at Mysore we saw the Dassera procession with the beautifully caparisoned state elephants and bejeweled horses; and we toured the Brindaban Gardens with its many fountains and colored lights.

In Ceylon, we enjoyed what westerners would think of as "jungle India": the coconut palm forests, black-faced monkeys, elephants, tropical birds brilliantly attired, spacious tea plantations, lush, verdant valleys filled with wildflowers. Here we enjoyed walks and many lovely outings with Baba.

To celebrate a disciple's birthday, Baba would buy sweets or ice cream, and we would sing the arti and take Baba's darshan. Sometimes there would be a holiday mood and Baba would plan as a special treat a picnic or a trip to the zoo. In Calcutta, Elizabeth treated everyone to ice cream at Firpo's and later we all went to see "Typhoon" at the Regal Cinema.

Baba also took us to the sacred places of pilgrimage. On the first Blue Bus tour in January, 1939, we arrived at Benares on the Ganges to see endless streams of Hindus making their way to the sacred river for ablutions. Here Baba told us that the false priests and "saints" numbered 7,000 while his real "soldiers" were 7. He said the spiritual atmosphere of Benares was due to all the great souls who had spent time there and that this atmosphere would not be defiled by the false priests, saints and sadhus.

In Rishikesh, Baba took us to see all the people who spent most of their lives in different attitudes of devotion and meditation in their attempts to reach realization. We were impressed and fascinated with the suffering they seemed to be undergoing, and Katie remarked on it to Baba.

Baba looked at her and said, "You all don't know what you've been through."

We went on a one-day excursion to Sarnath, where Buddha first initiated his disciples, and then proceeded to Mathura, associated with Krishna.

In Brindaban, we were all walking with Baba when a man with a flute approached us. He gazed at Baba and one could see in his eyes his love and joy at the meeting. He danced and sang sweetly of the lover and the Beloved as we walked along. Sometimes he broke off his song with cries of, "Look! Look! Lord Krishna is come. The Flute Player has returned!" Bystanders took him as a mad fool, but Baba said the man was an advanced soul and one of his real lovers.

One day near Ajmer, Baba decided to go up a hill called Taragadh where there was a shrine. Instead of just taking the men mandali, he said he wanted to take all the women too, entailing quite a lot of trouble. Baba kept emphasizing the fact that there was a great deal to do in preparing for the excursion. He would have to arrange for coolies to carry up our bedding. Food arrangements would have to be made. Lift chairs were needed for Elizabeth and Nonny who could not walk that distance uphill. Over and over, Baba kept telling us what a lot of trouble it was and what expense he was going to.

We thought, "Oh, dear, Baba is doing all this for us." So Kitty and I put our heads together and decided really it was all right if Baba didn't take us up. Indeed, why should Baba go to all this expense and trouble for us?

We went to Baba's room: "Baba, we appreciate so much all the trouble you're going through to take us up the hill to the shrine and for us to stay there but Baba, don't do it on our account. If we don't go, it's all right."

Baba gave us one look and said, "If you think I'm doing this for you, you're mistaken. My work comes first; you are only secondary."

We walked out of the room with our heads down. Baba had made it very clear that his work did come first, and it was something that we had to experience.

We had been on the Blue Bus tours less than a year when Nonny died in Bangalore on October 14, 1939.

Nonny's relationship with Baba was different from the relationships the rest of us had with him. Baba would needle us, pick holes in us, but never once did he do that with Nonny. Whatever was Baba's wish was her wish, so Baba never found fault with her. Somehow, Nonny had no need for the tests and trials.

Nonny had been having quite a bout of arthritis in her hands and feet, but she was always very stoical about it. She was taking a slight turn for the better as we began to pack to go down to Mysore with Baba. She was taking an interest in what I should pack for her when suddenly her health took a turn for the worse. One night she was mildly unwell and the next morning she was in an oxygen tent.

She was like that for a day and a half. In the afternoon of the second day Baba went off to inspect the property for the planned spiritual center near Bangalore. It was 7 o'clock that evening when he returned and as he walked in, Dr. Nilu and Dr. Donkin came to say that Nonny had just died.

Baba went to Nonny's room. Her eyes were still open and he went up to her and gently closed them. As he did so, I heard her give a sigh, and I realized that although clinically dead, she actually was just waiting for Baba, for that one touch. When I saw that, I knew there was only a

shell there; Nonny was with Baba.

The next day she was cremated. After the cremation had been going on for quite a while, I said I wanted to go back, so we left. Later, one of the other western women gave me a lecture: how could I think of leaving when the pyre was still burning and Nonny was still there.

"Nonny's not there," I said. "Nonny's body is there. I see that the pyre is burning well and that's all now. It will continue until it's finished."

Later, Baba told me he had given Nonny mukti (bliss).

Besides covering much of India during those years, I twice went to Kashmir with Baba. A foreigner entering Kashmir at that time had to have a special permit. A small group of us were driving to Kashmir and stopped at the border station to see if my permit had arrived. The officials said no.

Baba said to me, "We're not going to sit here in a dak bungalow and wait for you. We're going on to Srinagar and as soon as you get your permit, you can follow."

Baba had taken me on this trip to look after Mehera, Mani and Meheru because I'd never been to Kashmir and Margaret and Kitty had. Mani and I were sharing a bedding so we took everything apart and divided it up so I'd have some bedding while I was waiting for my permit. As soon as it arrived I would take a bus to Srinagar.

But just before Baba was due to leave, he said, "We'll go down to the telegraph office. You and Chanji make inquiries and I'll come with you." That seemed very strange; Baba would usually send you off on an errand and then you'd just report to him when you returned.

We walked the short distance to the office and Chanji asked, "Has any telegram come for Rano Gayley giving her permission to enter Kashmir?"

The man shuffled through his telegrams. "No, no." But he looked at Baba with an odd expression.

Baba said, "Go on. Look again, look again."

"Well," the man finally said, "this is against regulations, but as you seem to know that the permit has come, I'll acknowledge the fact that it has. But it hasn't been sent to the border office yet."

We thanked him and returned to the bungalow. If Baba hadn't come with us and convinced the man that we felt the permit had come and that he was holding out on us, I would have been delayed a day unnecessarily. But Baba turned the key and I went along with him into Kashmir. The Blue Bus tours ended in 1942, but this didn't mean Baba stopped his travels and contact with the masts. This actually continued until the New Life period began on October 16, 1949.

However, after 1943, Baba did not take all the women with him - only Mehera, Mani and Meheru, accompanied by Margaret or Kitty or me. In early 1946 Baba decided to close the ashram. The westerners were to go back to the West and some easterners were to return to their homes. Mansari elected to stay at Meherabad and the families of Baidul and Kaikobad were also to stay there. Kitty, Margaret and I were supposed to return home, but instead Baba called us to join him in North India. From there, we used to take side trips with Baba and he also continued

his mast work.

On one of these trips, I had developed hepatitis. I had been given a warning, although I didn't understand that at the time. Margaret, Kitty and I were traveling by bus with Donkin to join Baba in the north. We stopped at a wayside station and they all decided they wanted sugar cane juice. A man sitting in front of me on the bus overheard us and turned around. He looked directly at me and said, "I wouldn't drink that if I were you."

I thought that was a bit silly. Why pick on me when the others were also drinking it? So I drank it. I thought no more about it but about a month later, as we were to leave on another journey, I developed a fever. I thought it was just a cold and took a number of the horrible specifics we had in those days. Nothing worked.

We started on the trip and I was feeling miserable, only able to drink a bit of milk and eat an egg. Baba was getting quite disgusted. Here he was taking me on a trip and I could hardly lift the bags or do anything else.

We arrived at a charming little bungalow in the foothills of the Himalayas, and Baba said, "I'm sick and tired of this milk and egg you're eating all the time." He put a heaping plate of rice and curry in front of me and said, "You have to eat every bite that's on that plate."

I was feeling too miserable to do anything but look at it, but Baba pointed to the plate: "Eat it all."

Somehow I did, and of course it made me sick, but the important thing was that I did what Baba told me to do. We continued on our way and when we reached our destination, Katrayan, Donkin said I had infectious hepatitis.

"What?" said Baba. "You can't stay here in the house with us; you'll infect everyone. You'll have to go back"

I thought of the long, hot journey back to Dehra Dun and knew I'd never make it.

Then Baba said, "If Kaka doesn't mind, you can stay."

Kaka, who was in charge of the food, didn't mind at all, even though he would have to do special cooking for me. The problem of where I should stay was solved beautifully. There was a cowshed where Donkin had a room at the top, and there was another empty room up there and that's where I stayed. We were in the mountains and the room had a beautiful view of the Kulu Valley and the snow-capped mountains. Baba couldn't have chosen a nicer place for my recuperation.

Donkin said he had never seen such a light case of hepatitis. Then Baba told me, "If you hadn't eaten that meal when I told you that day, you would have been very sick." Because I obeyed him, he mitigated the illness; and by the time he was ready to leave the valley, I was quite well again.

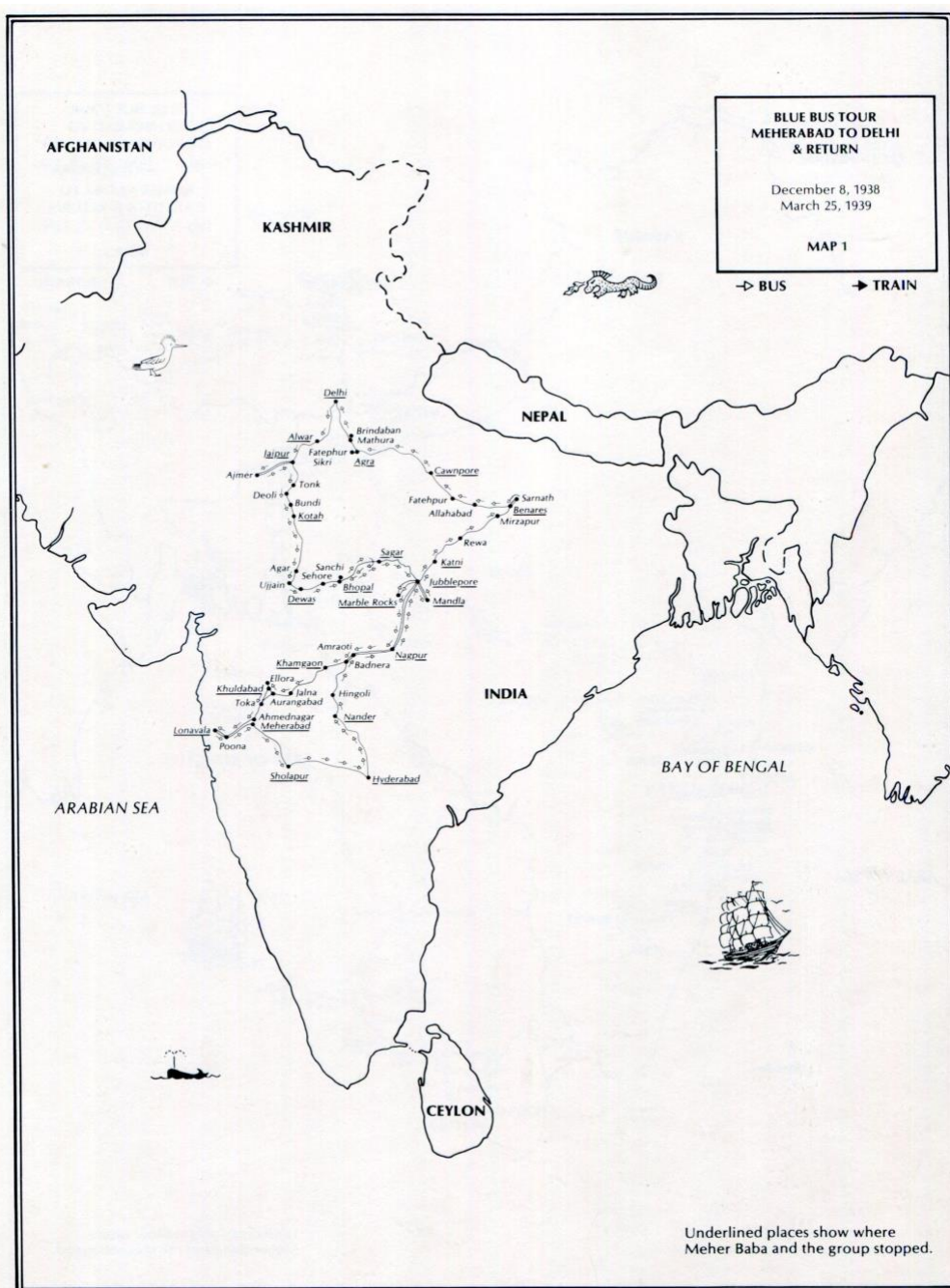
The real substance of those years traveling with Baba cannot be put into words, pictures or stories. Baba's traveling ashram was unique because of his love and because of the obedience that love inspired.

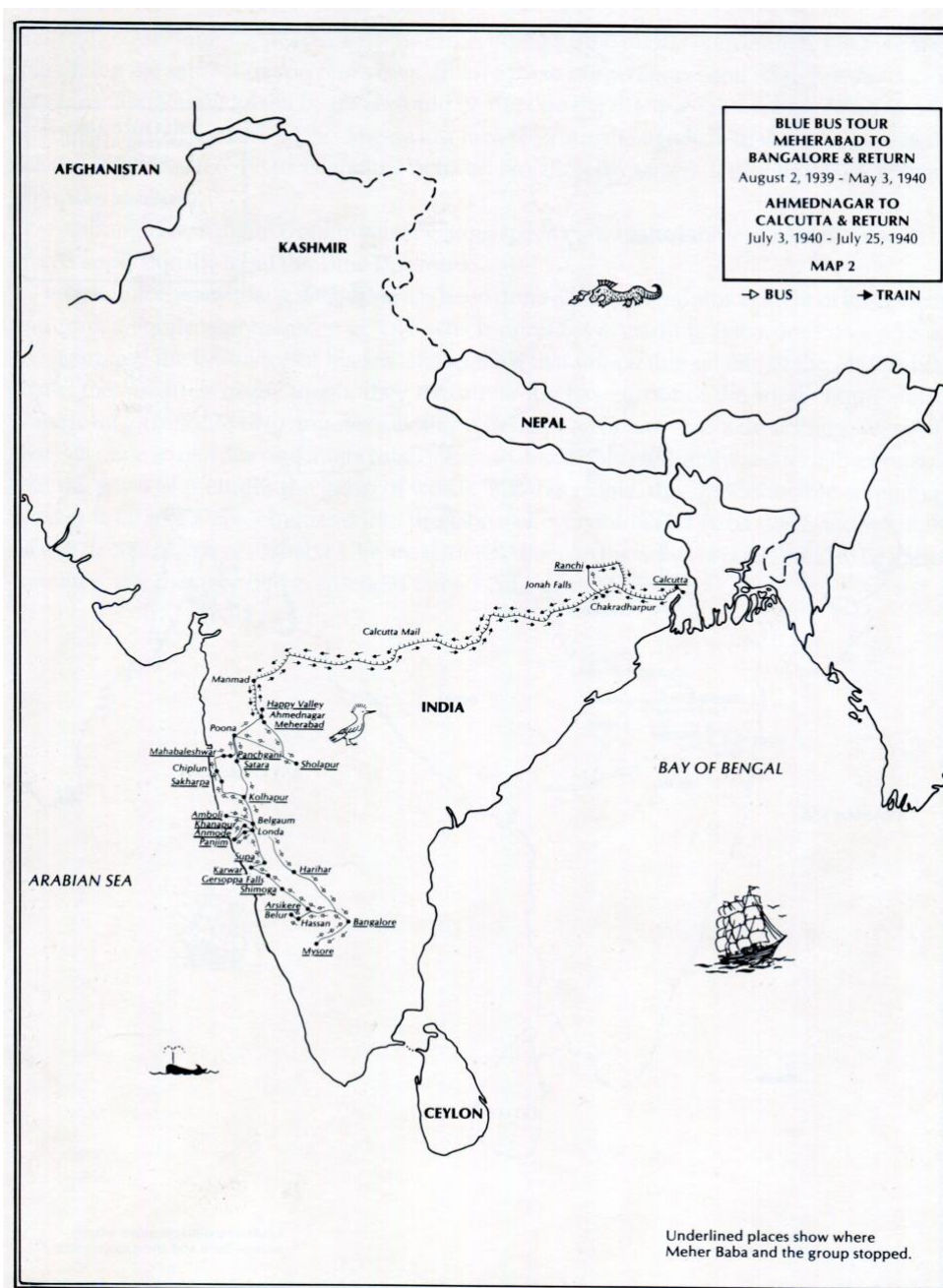
Many of the details presented here are from every angle ordinary and probably quite similar to what any other party of travelers might encounter. Yet ashram life was different. Although the

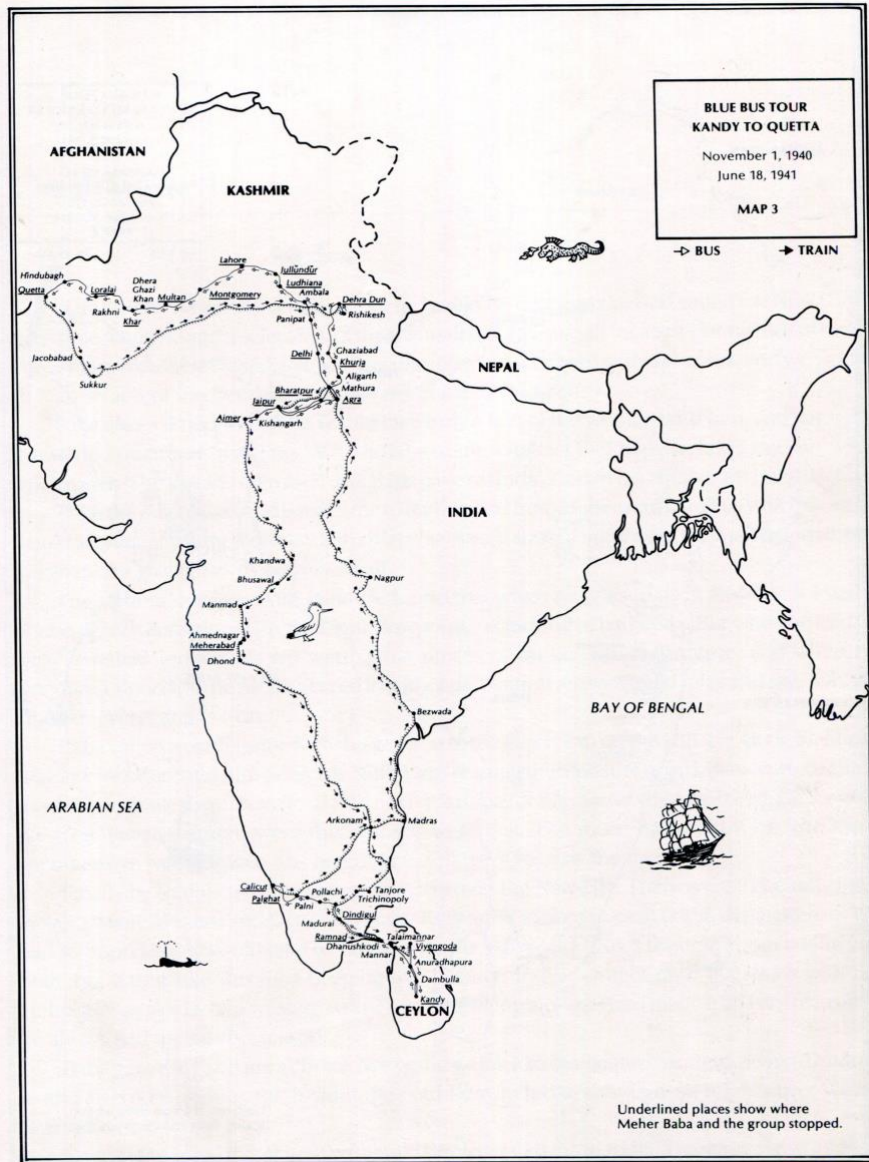
external activity might appear exactly the same, doing for the master is an entirely separate affair than doing the same thing on one's own. In love there is obedience, and often just the duty or particular assignment given by Baba would be the one the disciple felt least qualified to cope with. The master, for love's sake, knows just how to prune the ego. It is in this process that the relationship between the lover and the beloved has all its paradoxes, trials, impossibilities and glimpses of union.

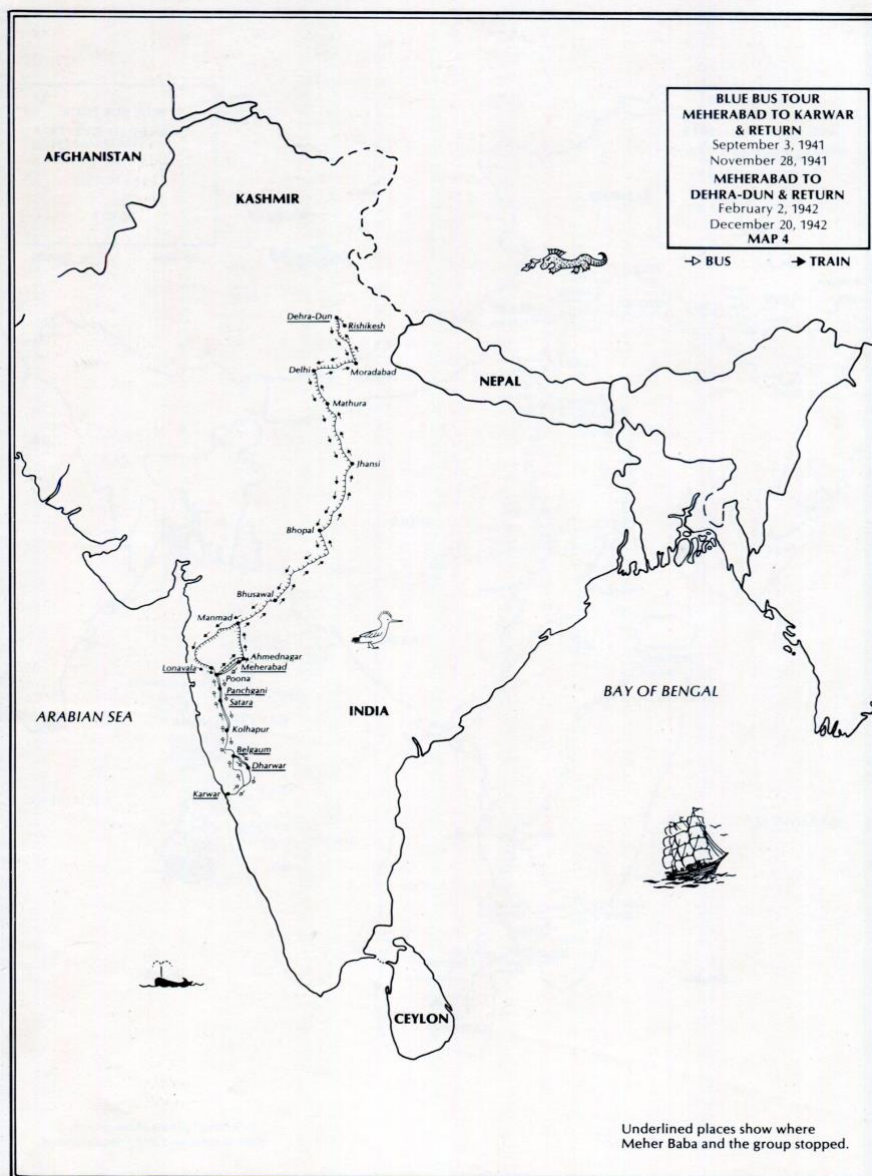
Although Dr. William Donkin was speaking specifically of the Jubblepore mast ashram, his words apply equally to all the Blue Bus tours:

"It is unfortunate that scant justice has been done to the general atmosphere of this ashram, and to that subtle quintessence of love which pervades everything Baba does. His physical presence and the brilliance of his leadership have that impossible quality of the philosopher's stone, that, by their magic touch, they transmute the base metal of the most commonplace routine into a treasure of loving service. This is perhaps an ornate way of describing something that is at once so real that one might think it easy to describe quite simply, and so transcendental that the spirit of it eludes the grasp of words. But this magic, this imponderable something, weaves itself like a golden thread into the fabric of everything that Baba does, and when the factual details of a phase of Baba's life are buried so deep in the ashes of one's mind to be almost forgotten, the memory of this splendid thing is still there."⁶









CHAPTER SEVEN

On My Own

In mid-1949, Meher Baba told us that he would be entering a period called the New Life, a time when he and a select few of the mandali would leave all for a wandering tour of India. The ashram would be closed, many of the disciples would return to their homes, and we would all have to accept the fact that we might never see Baba again.

Baba also warned us that he would take only a few of the women with him, and naturally that started our minds whirling. "Who is Baba going to take? Oh, I hope he takes me. Oh, what will happen if he doesn't take me?" But Baba gave no indication of his choices for quite a while.

Then the day arrived and Baba came to Meherabad from Meherazad to tell us which women would accompany him. We knew Baba was choosing a sizable number of the men mandali, but the women's group was to be very small.

Throughout our lives with Baba we found that when he praised us in any way, it usually boded ill and there would be, from our viewpoint, some kind of bad news. But when he told us what hopeless individuals we were, what pieces of broken-down furniture, and when he wondered aloud why he had bothered to gather us to him at all, we would relax and say, "Oh, it's all right; everything is okay."

Baba called a conference with the women in the East room on the Hill. He sat on Mehera's bed and we sat around him on stools. With Mani reading the alphabet board, Baba started telling us what pearls we were, how he would not have done for his master what we had done for him. We were jewels and we were this and we were that. The more Baba laid it on, the more apprehensive we got. What was he going to tell us? What was the bad news?

Finally he told us which women were to go on the New Life. There were to be only four:

Mehera, Mani, Meheru and Dr. Goher Irani. Kitty and I looked at each other, disheartened. We had so hoped Baba would take us on the trip. But Baba said, "No. I thought about taking you both, but a tour like this - a begging trip through India - might raise questions with the authorities as to why two western women were coming along." Baba made it all very plausible; he always had the perfect reason.

Baba gave Kitty and me a choice. We could go back to our respective countries and his love would always be with us. Or, he said, we could stay in India, although we might never see his face again.

Kitty and I agreed that at least we would be closer to Baba in India. Therefore we would stay

in India. Baba accepted our decision and told us to go to stay with Meherjee Karkaria in Bombay.

There were many preparations for the New Life. My job was to make for each person lists of what should be taken along: one or two towels, so many changes of underwear, so many clothes, shoes, sandals, coats, woolens. Kitty and I still clung to a small thread of hope and each kept one trunk ready for herself. That way we would be ready at a moment's notice if Baba changed his mind about taking us. Of course, the moment never came.

Baba gave us several restrictions for our life in Bombay: we were not to touch men and we should not buy anything on our own. If we needed anything, we were to ask Meherjee's wife, Homai. We also could not accept food from anyone, including Baba people, although we were allowed to accept liquid refreshments. When we left Meherabad, Baba came from Meherazad to see us off, which, as wonderful as it was, made the parting even more difficult.

We arrived in Bombay in October of 1949, the first time in 12 years that I was on my own outside the ashram. But this was what Baba wanted so I would have to make the best of it.

We moved into Meherjee and Homai's house and every evening we took walks in the hanging gardens nearby. We walked all the different roads until we knew the area quite well, and on our way we managed to stop at the home of Arnavaz and Nariman Dadachanji. Then we returned to Meherjee's for dinner.

Kitty and I passed our time in this way until December, when a letter arrived from Mani making it final that we were to stay at Meherjee's. Baba would not be calling us to join him. Baba added that we should either help Homai in the house or, if she did not need help, we should get jobs.

Homai did not need help, so that meant getting jobs. Neither Kitty nor I were young women and unemployment was high among Bombay residents themselves. How were we, as foreigners, going to get jobs? We went to the YWCA, to the consulates and we looked at the newspaper want ads. We were getting desperate. Baba said to get jobs and we weren't getting them.

Homai, seeing our determination, said to Kitty, "You used to teach piano, didn't you?"

"Yes."

Homai suggested that Kitty go to Queen Mary High School where Homai's daughter was a pupil and see if there was an opening. The school's headmistress was an English woman, Miss Groom, and was very charming, Homai said.

Kitty went off and came back sometime later, beaming. I said, "You got a job."

"Yes."

"Teaching piano?"

"No," Kitty said, "Miss Groom was quite satisfied with her music teacher, but she offered me a job teaching English."

"Did you take it?"

"Yes."

"Can you teach English?"

"Why, of course," said Kitty.

She had that funny glint in her eye that meant Kitty had been up to something. I had not lived with Kitty all those years in the ashram without learning to spot that look.

"Kitty, what have you been up to?"

"Well....." she said.

"Come on, out with it."

"I told Miss Groom about you."

"What did you tell her?"

"Well, I told her I had a friend who is an artist and that she is also looking for a job."

"Kitty, you didn't!"

"And she wants you to come down and see her."

"But that means teaching. I can't teach. I've never taught. Kitty, how could you have done that?"

"You need a job, don't you?"

"Yes, I need a job. But not teaching. It's all very well to do something on your own, but to try and impart it to others, I mean, you have to have the knack, the feel for it. And I haven't."

"Well, where is the job coming from? You need a job and here's one being offered to you."

I thought it over. Here's this woman offering me a job sight unseen and I'm acting like this about it. This isn't what Baba would want. All right, I'll go down and see her. I took my portfolio with a few old paintings and went off to see Miss Groom. She offered me the job immediately.

I said, "Miss Groom, I might as well be frank with you. I don't know the first thing about teaching. I've never taught. I've never wanted to teach, but I do need a job while I'm here in Bombay, although I don't know how long I'll be here."

"But I'm willing to take you, and I want you to come," she said.

"Miss Groom, the idea of these pupils frightens me. It's difficult enough with a few pupils but with a room full - 20 or 40 children - looking at me, my throat would dry up. I never can do anything in front of a group."

But nothing would stop Miss Groom. "All right, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll give you the best pupils in each class. Will 10 or 12 be all right?"

"Of course," I said. "At least I can try that much."

She introduced me to the other drawing teacher and I sat down and listened to what she had to say about the art classes. The more she talked, the more upset I became. Then Miss Groom came back and asked me to come to her office. She sat me down and said, "And now what is it?"

"If I have to teach like that," I said "then don't engage me. Although I don't know how I'm going to teach, I know I can't teach like that."

"I give you carte blanche to do whatever you like."

On the strength of that highly unusual offer, I had to accept.

"You take it on for a term," Miss Groom said, "and if you find that it isn't what you want to do, then I'll understand perfectly and we'll call it quits. But at least take it on for a term."

On the first day of school I kept saying to myself over and over, "Baba, Baba, Baba...." What

made me nervous was the very clear memory of a new teacher arriving when I was in school: she would come into the classroom and we'd start sizing her up. How much could we get away with? What's she going to be like? And I visualized all this going through the heads of the children at Queen Mary High School. It paralyzed me. But in my heart I kept saying to Baba, "Baba, you said to get a job and now I've got one and I'll just have to see it through."

Little by little I built up my confidence and managed gradually to get the pupils to do as I wished. In the beginning I was teaching only half a day, because I was only giving drawing lessons. Kitty was teaching full time - English grammar, composition and literature - mostly to the upper classes.

We had been at the school some months when we received a letter from Mani saying that Baba was calling us to Satara, on one condition: we had to keep our jobs or we couldn't come. Mani didn't say exactly how long we were to be with Baba - a matter of weeks - but our jobs had to be waiting for us on our return.

Kitty said, "Here we've just come, we've just started a term, and now we're going off into the blue. What is Miss Groom going to say?"

Off we went to Miss Groom's office to find out. "Miss Groom, we've received a very important letter and find that we'll have to be away for some time. But of course we'd like our jobs back when we return."

"Of course you can go. And of course I want you to come back." She never asked why we had to go nor how long we would be gone. She only asked if it was important, and said, "I know you wouldn't ask if it wasn't important."

She put our workload on all the other teachers, another unheard-of thing. Usually if a teacher took leave, it was up to the teacher to find a replacement. Where would we have found replacements? So Miss Groom handed our work to others and off we went to Satara to be with Baba. We were there for some weeks and when we returned to school, our workload was increased. Miss Groom started giving me more classes. I taught beginning French and other subjects and my drawing classes increased. Suddenly I was teaching full time. Kitty's responsibilities also increased. She became a homeroom teacher and that meant a lot of extra work, including roll call and report cards. Kitty was also very particular about giving a great deal of written work on the theory that this was the best way to teach English. Of course this meant extra work to correct. As my classes were easier, I used to help Kitty correct the papers and fill out the report cards. We made it a team effort and this impressed Miss Groom very much. She told us that the whole atmosphere of the school had changed when we joined the staff, and we assumed that was why she had wanted us to come back after Satara.

We had not told Miss Groom anything about Baba. Queen Mary High School was a mission school and Miss Groom's life revolved completely around Jesus Christ. We didn't want to upset her so we didn't talk about Baba.

In the autumn, Baba called us again. And again Miss Groom let us go without a murmur. Once more she gave our workload to the other teachers and off we went to be with Baba, this time at Mahabaleshwar. Baba had stepped out of the New Life at this time for 24 hours. We stayed

for awhile and then Baba said, "Now you have to go back."

"Baba, how many times are you going to send us back like this?" I asked. "Why can't we be with you?"

"No, you have to go back For me you have to go back."

"Oh, Baba, why?" And I started to cry.

"Don't cry," Baba said. "You've got to go back."

Back we went and again there was a bit more work, a drama class. Kitty and I collaborated on this too and it turned out very successfully.

Summer holidays came and we went to Mahabaleshwar to spend them with Baba. I was relieved that it was summer as then we would not have to ask Miss Groom for a third leave of absence. One day Baba called us and said, "Now from here I am going to Hyderabad. Are you so immersed in your work and satisfied with your jobs that you want to stay on in Bombay or do you want to come with me to Hyderabad? But mind, you will have to find jobs there too."

There was no having to even think about it. I said, "Never mind Bombay; we'll find jobs somehow in Hyderabad. Why would we stay in Bombay a minute longer?"

Kitty suggested to Baba that since Miss Groom had been so remarkable in her acceptance of us that we should give her at least two months' notice. Baba agreed, and told us to be in Hyderabad no later than July 28, 1951.

When we returned to Bombay, we moved into a lovely double room in the school itself, Baba having made new arrangements about who would stay at Meherjee's. This was a real gift as the move coincided with the monsoon and we would now not have to go back and forth in the heavy rains.

The time for our departure from the school approached and when our classes heard about it there was weeping and wailing. "Oh, what are we going to do without Miss Davy? What are we going to do without Miss Gayley?" They were very upset and would not even come down to morning prayers. Miss Groom and the other teachers had to go up to Kitty's classroom and quiet them down. The children loved Kitty very much. I was very fond of the children, but I knew I didn't want to spend the rest of my life as a teacher.

A short while before we left, I told Kitty I thought we must tell Miss Groom about Baba. "Up to now we've said nothing, since this is a mission school. But now that we're leaving, at least Miss Groom should know why she has done all these things for us."

Miss Groom was about to leave the school herself, only waiting for her replacement to come from England. In the meantime, Miss Groom's sister was staying at the school. She had little to do, was bemoaning the fact that her sister's replacement hadn't arrived and in fact was quite lonely. Kitty and I invited her for tea on several evenings after school and little by little, I worked Baba into our conversations. I showed her books about Baba and the photographs I had on the dressing table. I told her that Baba was our master and that was why we were in Bombay and had to have jobs. I knew perfectly well that she would tell Miss Groom everything, which she did.

One day, a servant came up and said Miss Groom wanted to see me. I went to her office and

she said, "My sister has been telling me such interesting things."

"Do you mean about Meher Baba?"

I proceeded to tell her how we had come to know about Baba, that we were following him as our master and that we had come to India to be with him. I explained that our whole lives were devoted to him and to his wishes. "That's why," I said, "when we were called we had to leave the school for awhile."

Miss Groom appeared interested, but I couldn't tell whether I was making an impression or not. So I said, "The best way for me to describe Baba to you is to say that he has all the Christ qualities." Saying that he had the Christ qualities was just about implying that Baba was as Christ was. But if I had come right out and said, "Baba is the same One as Jesus," it would have been very difficult for her.

When I said he had all the Christ qualities, she said, 'Yes. He must be a very wonderful person.' She wanted to hear more, so I talked and showed her some photos and she was really quite interested.

"But, Miss Groom," I said, "you're the remarkable person. We had no references of any kind and you took us in. You took us on faith."

She replied, "I live on faith."

On our last night at the school, Miss Groom started the evening prayer with "Miss Davy and Miss Gayley...." Just as she uttered our names, a commuter train went roaring by, and the wheels drowned out her voice. She ended her talk just as the end of the train went by and we never did find out what Miss Groom said about us. Kitty and I decided it was Baba's crowning touch, for if we had heard something nice about ourselves, our little egos would have reared their ugly heads, and Baba would have none of that. Nonetheless, it must have been a very loving prayer, because Miss Groom was fond of us.

The next day, the children were allowed to come and see us off. They brought bouquets of flowers and there was much weeping. It was the end of a unique experience, one might say a miracle of Baba's. What else could it have been? On our own we would have gotten nowhere in Bombay, and Miss Groom, not knowing a thing about us, took us in on faith.

The Bombay experience reminded me of a conversation I once had with Margaret Craske in the early days of the ashram.

Margaret said, "I'm here because Baba wants me to be here. If Baba says, 'One hundred per cent I want you here,' how can I say I want to go? But I don't feel Baba here. When I'm out in the world, I feel Baba."

I didn't understand at all and said, "Oh, Margaret, I cannot think of being anywhere without Baba."

But when Baba sent us to Bombay, I understood what she meant. Bombay was like purgatory to me and if I had not felt Baba constantly with me, I don't know how I could have stayed there. There are a few lines which Baba gave at the beginning of the New Life, which I clung to throughout the Bombay period: "Treat your conditions like a life buoy and stick to it, and I will not let you sink." All that time in Bombay, I felt Baba was my life buoy and I knew I

couldn't sink.

We left Bombay for Hyderabad at the end of July 1951, hoping to obtain jobs because of a contact we had made during the summer holiday.

Nargis Dadachanji was taking care of the child of a Parsi couple at the Mahabaleshwar bungalow of the Nizam of Hyderabad, and an official of the Nizam was visiting there. Baba gave us permission to speak to the man about jobs. The official told us he would do what he could.

But after we arrived in Hyderabad, it was some days before we heard from the man. He was very contrite and said he had done his best but there were no openings in any of the schools. Then he said there was one thing he would like very much - to have Baba's darshan.

Baba was still in the New Life period and was not seeing people, but I went in and spoke to him and he agreed to see the man. Baba came out, a few words were exchanged and the man left.

After that there was no more mention of jobs for Kitty and me. I felt that Baba wanted to contact this man, and Kitty and I were the instruments Baba used to bring it about.

A few months later we returned to Meherazad and the New Life was over. Baba immediately went into seclusion on Seclusion Hill, a quarter mile from the Meherazad compound.

In the meantime, I had to go to hospital for an operation and wanted it done quickly so I would be back at Meherazad when Baba came down the hill. Baba heard about it and sent word to me, "You should not worry in the least." I had never had an operation before, but because Baba said, "Don't worry," I just didn't. The operation went smoothly and as I came out of the anesthesia, I was murmuring in Gujarati to a young Baba lover at my bedside, "Don't take my Baba ring off my finger."

By the time I returned to Meherazad, Baba was making plans to go to the West, a trip which actually didn't take place until 1952. Dr. Donkin said to me, "Well, Rano, if you're going to the West, you'd better go beforehand and get further diagnosis from doctors in America."

Baba said, "No, no, what is this? Rano's perfectly all right."

I said, "If Baba says I'm all right, I'm all right. I'm not going to waste my time with more diagnosis."

"Anyway," Baba said, "Rano has to handle my trip and I've got to have her here. What do you mean by wanting to send her ahead?"

I assured Baba that I did not want to go ahead, but wanted only to be with him.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Only An Overcoat

We flew into Idlewild Airport in New York on Easter Sunday in April 1952, our party consisting of Baba, Mehera, Mani, Meheru, Kitty, Dr. Goher and myself. Adi Sr., Sarosh, Meherjee, Gustadji and Dr. Nilu had arrived earlier and gone on to Myrtle Beach.

As we passed through customs, one of the officers said to me, "Ah, I see that you have brought your friends with you. Isn't that nice? Now see that you have a good time." We were met by Elizabeth Patterson and Margaret Craske and went directly to the Meher Spiritual Center in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. This was Baba's first visit to the Center established by Elizabeth and Princess Norina Matchabelli at his request. I was there only a short time because Baba had given me permission to visit my family, whom I had not seen in 15 years, in New York. Baba even granted my request that there be no restrictions.

When I returned to Myrtle Beach, Baba had been giving darshan to his lovers. Then a public day was scheduled and many people from Myrtle Beach came to meet Baba in the Barn, the large gathering place erected near the lower end of Long Lake. Delia De Leon and I were in charge of ushering people in to meet Baba. We stood near the door and waited for a signal from Baba and then let people in one at a time. Baba was seated in a big chair near the fireplace in the center of the room. Among the crowd which came that day were a number of black people, some of whom worked on the center, and their friends and relatives. As they were shown into the Barn, Baba rose from his chair and came halfway across the room to greet them, an unprecedented thing for him to do. Shortly after that incident, desegregation became a burning issue in America, and I've always felt that the seed was planted that day in the Barn.

When the darshan was completed, we set out on May 21 in two cars to cross the United States to stay with Agnes Baron at Meher Mount in Ojai, California. Elizabeth drove her car with Baba, Mehera, Mani and Meheru as passengers. Sarosh Irani was driving Elizabeth's station wagon with Kitty, Dr. Goher, Delia and myself.

The first part of the trip was uneventful, although the station wagon was having difficulty keeping up with the faster car and we were not being as alert as we should have. Baba reprimanded us thoroughly and stressed that we should be constantly on the lookout, particularly at certain points where we might easily miss Elizabeth's car. He said, "You five keep alert. All eyes must watch every crossroads we come to."

We passed near the town of Prague, Oklahoma, and I noticed a sign, "Hospital this way." I said, "What a delightful place to have a hospital." Some little distance beyond Prague, there was

a gradual rise in the road and then quite a hill. When we had almost reached the top of the hill, Sarosh said, "There seems to have been an accident." We saw two cars and people lined up along the road.

Sarosh said, "It's Elizabeth's car."

"It can't be," I said.

"It is!"

I said, "Oh, my God," and rushed out of the car before Sarosh brought it to a full stop. All I could think of was, "Where is Baba?" I ran to the car to find Elizabeth pinned behind the steering wheel, both arms broken and, as it turned out, some ribs as well. She kept saying over and over, "Take care of the gentleman." Then I saw that someone had lifted Baba up on the side of the embankment along with Mehera. Baba pointed out that he had a broken arm and leg and his nose was bleeding profusely. Mehera appeared to be badly hurt with a head injury and Meheru was also hurt. All three had been thrown from the car. Mani, who had been leaning back with her eyes closed, was unhurt.

An ambulance, the town's only one, arrived along with a hearse because there were so many injured. Goher and I accompanied Baba and Elizabeth in the ambulance to the small Prague Hospital run by Dr. Ned Burleson. Naturally I wanted Dr. Burleson to look first at Baba. But he said it was "the lady" (Mehera) who had the concussion and a bad cut on her forehead and needed attention first. As it turned out Mehera had a severe skull fracture. I stayed with Baba - he was conscious all the time - until Mehera had been tended to and Dr. Burleson returned. He set Baba's leg and arm and treated the cuts on his nose and mouth.

We practically took over the little hospital. Sarosh telegraphed the other men mandali who had gone on to Meher Mount, and they returned immediately. Baba sent for Margaret Craske and Ivy Duce and her daughter, Charmian. Sarosh felt so bad, even though we kept assuring him it was not his fault. But he felt the other mandali would say to him, "How could you let this happen to Baba?"

The first night, Goher, Sarosh and I stayed with Baba, and after the men mandali arrived the next day, Baba divided up the watch. Dr. Nilu and I had watch duty from 7 p.m. to 7 a.m. We were not allowed to so much as nod, and we kept an eye on each other to make sure we didn't fall asleep. I was filling myself with so many pills to stay awake that at the end of 10 days I was feeling very shaky. Because I took the pills, I couldn't sleep when I got off duty at 7 a.m. and I was averaging about an hour of sleep each day.

I wept all the first night. At the scene of the accident I didn't have time to react emotionally - everything was in disarray and my duty was to see to Baba. But that night, with Baba in a hospital bed, his leg in a cast, his arm in a sling, his nose and mouth badly injured, the immensity of it hit me. I cried and cried, but tried not to let Baba hear me. In the morning, Baba looked at me and laughed, "Why are you going through all this? Everything will be all right." I felt so embarrassed to have given way to my feelings that I leaned down and hid my face against Baba's cheek.

None of us ever imagined an accident that would involve such injuries to Baba. As Mani said, "Baba is in the car, so nothing is going to happen." But as Baba had said many times, it was

meant to happen. The man whose car collided with Elizabeth's was a young amputee driving for the first time a car especially equipped for him. He and his wife were not injured at all. Yet Baba had to be hurt like that and others had to share in it, even Mehera.

At the end of 10 days, Baba sent Dr. Donkin and me to Myrtle Beach to prepare for his return there to recuperate. It was decided that Baba and the other injured and the rest of the women would stay at Elizabeth's house, Youpon Dunes, instead of the Center.

By midsummer we had moved to a house in Scarsdale, New York, just north of Manhattan. I had an experience there which made me realize once again how difficult it can be to always obey Baba and to obey him at the right time.

Cooking for us in Scarsdale was a woman who had previously worked for Elizabeth in New York. She was an extremely good cook but rather temperamental. One day she took exception to some small thing I'd done and began to make a big issue of it. I was staggered, as it was so unexpected and unwarranted. I started sizzling and in the end just walked away, feeling it was the only thing to do.

But as usual it all came to Baba's ears. "What's this? What happened? Why?"

When Baba asked you something, you could not gloss over it. You had to answer. I told Baba exactly what had happened, but I still had not calmed down.

Baba spelled out on his alphabet board, "Go and apologize to her."

I blurted, "If anyone should apologize, it should be...." I heard myself and stopped in midsentence. I said, "I'll go and apologize, Baba." But it was too late.

"No," said Baba. "If you had gone immediately when I said go and apologize, there would have been some meaning to it. Now your apology would be meaningless." The expression of disappointment in his eyes said, "Again you have failed me."

When we went on to London on our way back to India, there were more incidents of my doing the wrong thing. My nerves may have been still on edge from the accident, but whatever it was I could not seem to do anything right. The incidents piled one on the other until I was frantic. Finally I said to Baba, "We're not far from America and as everything I do is wrong and you're not pleased with anything, what is the point of my going back to India with you? It would be much better if you sent me back to America." I was not going to leave Baba; I was putting it up to him.

Baba simply gestured, "What is this nonsense you're talking?"

We arrived in Switzerland and, according to Baba, I was still doing everything wrong. Baba was having a massage, I was standing outside his room and happened to laugh at something that was said. I was called in and scolded by Baba for being light-hearted when Baba was suffering so much. I was very upset. Again I said to Baba, "Now we're only as far as Switzerland should you want to send me back. You don't want someone around whom you don't like the sight of."

But again Baba gestured, "What's this rubbish you're talking?"

I still didn't understand but obviously Baba wasn't going to send me away, at least not at that point.

Irene Billo had a young nephew in Switzerland and she thought Baba might like to have him do night watch duty and help take the pressure off Dr. Nilu, who had been doing it.

constantly. Baba said yes, he seemed a nice, bright boy.

It was my job to be alert in the morning for the sound of Baba's bell, to inquire what he wished and later to see if Mehera was awake. This particular morning it was still dark when Baba rang the bell, and I was still in my pajamas. I hurried to his room.

Baba said, "What's the matter? You're not dressed. Look at the clock, look at the time!"

I looked at the clock and said, "But, Baba, this clock is a whole hour ahead. It's not 6 o'clock; it's only 5." I couldn't understand it because each evening I checked his clock against my watch.

Nothing more was said, but a few days later the same thing happened and Baba was very annoyed. "What is this?"

I finally figured it out. Irene's nephew probably wanted to do for Baba with all his heart, but toward morning he got very sleepy. Due to leave at 5 a.m., he simply set the clock ahead one hour, and went home to bed at 4:00. Baba was much amused at the explanation.

Just as we were ready to leave Switzerland for India, Air India went on strike. Baba said, "I want to leave as soon as possible, and we must all go on the same plane."

Kitty was in England, on her way back to the United States to help Elizabeth at the Meher Center, at Baba's request. So there were six of us to get onto a flight: Baba, Mehera, Mani, Meheru, Goher and myself. I said to Baba, "It will be very difficult to get all six seats unless you wait a few days, and even then it isn't likely."

Baba would not listen. "You have to get me six tickets as soon as possible." He sent me off with Donkin to the ticket agents. All the airline offices were on one street. We applied at the first one. The agent got on the telephone; he telephoned here; he telephoned there. Maybe two seats on this plane, possibly three on that. Perhaps after a few days we could get other seats. Don and I went to a cafe to talk over the situation. Don said, "Well, that's that."

"What do you mean, that's that? We've only just begun!"

"You heard the man," Don said. "We can't get seats except after a few days and then we won't be able to get them together. All these airlines are associated with each other. Each one phones the other and you'll only get the same reply."

"Yes, Don," I said, "but I can't go back to Baba empty-handed. 'That's that' means what?"

"That means we have to go to every airline down the whole street."

"Oh, no, I'd feel like a fool. I'm not going. After all, you have your answer from the first office."

"All right, but I'm beyond the stage where I care if I'm thought a fool. I've got to do something."

Don was right. I went from office to office, collecting the same reply at each one. Finally I reached the last one - Air France - and went in. I explained the situation to the agent in my best French and said we wanted six seats to Bombay.

"I can't give you a reply off-hand," he said, "so you go and come back after an hour."

I walked by the lake, watched the ducks and swans, sat on a bench, wandered about, all the time thinking, "Oh, Baba, now is the time for you to take over. There are no more airlines to try." I gave the agent a good hour and then slowly wended my way back to his office. When I walked

up to the counter there was a smiling Frenchman with six tickets. "Voila," he said.

If the counter had not been so wide, I'd have leaned over and kissed him. "I'm sorry I can only get them as far as Karachi," he said, but that was fine with me as I knew once we got to Karachi, Minoo Kharas and Adi Dubash would handle things.

As for Baba he took it all as a matter of course. After all, it was what he had expected me to do.

We could have taken a late afternoon Swiss Air flight to Paris to meet our Air France flight, but Baba insisted on going early with the result that we sat at Orly Field all day. Baba wouldn't eat anything, but from time to time he would send me for soda water. He also sent me repeatedly to inquire whether the plane would be on time, whether the wheelchair would be there and if there would be a chair at the plane steps so he could be lifted into the plane. This went on all day and I almost succeeded in not asking the same person twice, not wishing to exasperate the Air France officials.

Finally evening came and an official came to tell me that he had the wheelchair and it was time to go. They took Baba out ahead of the other passengers and we followed at a little distance and around a different way. Usually they would bring the wheelchair to the steps of the plane, transfer Baba to a straight chair and then three men would carry him up into the plane. As I reached the steps, I heard the men say they needed one more person to help. A huge French stevedore appeared and against the sunset he looked like a giant. They enlisted his aid and he said, "What? Carry monsieur up in a chair?" And before anyone knew what was happening, he gently swooped Baba up in his arms, Baba put his arm around the man's neck and the man carried him carefully up the steps and deposited him in his seat.

Baba said, "He doesn't know how fortunate he was."

After recovering from the accident, Baba went on tour throughout India in the early 1950s, giving darshan to thousands of his lovers. It was as if the floodgates of his love were opened, and he went again to the West in 1956 and 1958.

In December of 1956, Baba had his second accident, near Satara, and it was more severe than the one in the States. Baba's tongue was badly cut and his hip was smashed. Dr. Nilu was killed, Pendu was crippled, Eruch had a concussion and broken ribs. Only Vishnu was unscathed.

It was Vishnu who told us that when he scrambled out of the wrecked car, he saw Baba in a great light with a triumphant expression on his face. How the accident happened was a mystery, because the car simply went off the road. But Baba had said he had to spill his blood in India and he had to spill his blood in America.

Doctors said Baba would never walk again because the hip socket was so badly damaged. But Baba did walk again, although it took years for the socket to heal.

In 1959, Baba said of that accident, "Baba got his physical bones broken so as to break the backbone of the material aspect of the Machine Age, keeping intact its spiritual aspect."

After 1958, life with Baba started a slower pace. He was working in seclusion and was seeing very few people. His health was not good as all the fasting and the mast work and the two accidents were beginning to tell. Our lives adapted themselves to Baba's pace.

In 1959, Naja and I were staying at Bindra House in Poona with Eruch's family. I was taken very ill after eating a mango. A doctor came and went and the next morning Dr. Goher came. I was too sick to care about anything, but after a few days I was aware of a certain amount of activity in the house. Whenever Naja came into my room, I'd ask, "Naja, who are all those people milling around outside?"

Naja said, "Oh, it's nothing."

The next day I was feeling slightly better and Baba came to see me. "You know, last night was a toss-up between you and Papa (Eruch's father)."

Not realizing what Baba meant, I laughed.

Baba said, "Didn't you know that Papa died last night?"

"No, no one told me." Naja had been afraid she'd upset me and no one had told me in the morning either. Papa had not been seriously ill, but he hadn't been well either. He had told many of his friends how worried he was about the western lady who was ill at his house. When his friends heard there was a death at Bindra House, they thought it was me, and very few came to Papa's funeral.

I was again at Bindra House in early 1960 when Baba did one of those things he sometimes did just to take you by surprise.

He came to the house one day and greeted everyone, but when he came to me he walked right by as if I were paper on the wall. I thought, "This is very strange; I'm standing here and Baba hasn't even given me a look. He's embracing everyone and even greeting the servants and it's as if I'm not even in the room."

This happened several times and I thought it was a terrible situation but realized I'd have to work it out because obviously I was going to have to live with it. I knew there must be a reason, but I couldn't ask Baba about it because I was nonexistent. So I worked out a very happy solution: the very fact that Baba was making an effort to ignore me meant Baba was conscious of my presence. As soon as I solved the problem Baba once again started taking notice of me.

It was just one of the tests Baba gave to see how I would carry through. He had told us repeatedly that one must be aloof from pleasure and praise as well as from disapproval.

Among our visitors in the 1950s was Irene Conybeare, author of *Civilization and Chaos*.

She was called to Mandali Hall at Meherazad every day to see Baba, and would question him about many things, some occult things and many intellectual subjects.

I sometimes walked with her in the evenings and one particular evening she said, "Rano, I can't understand why, with all the brilliant people in the world, Baba has surrounded himself with...." And she paused.

"You mean us," I said.

Being a very forthright person, she said, "Yes."

"Well," I said, "when you look back through the centuries and you think of Jesus, there must have been many wonderful and brilliant people then, too. And look who Jesus surrounded himself with. It's the same with Baba. He doesn't want intellectual or brilliant people telling him how to do things."

"Baba told us that the intellect has to go before the heart can really be filled. We aren't

inclined to ask Baba anything because we know we're here to serve Baba and to love Baba and that we are actually Baba's tools. Tools don't decide what they have to do. It's the master of the tools who has the whole say."

In November 1962 Baba broke a continuing seclusion and called all his lovers to the East-West Gathering at Guruprasad⁷ in Poona. When one thinks of the many westerners who come now, one realizes it was only a handful then, about 180.

For four days Baba saw the westerners in the mornings and both westerners and easterners in the afternoons, by his own description a unique gathering.

One day just before going to greet his lovers, Baba gestured to me, "How do I look?"

I said, "Baba, I see you looking tired now, but when you go out in front of all your lovers, you, being the powerhouse, will turn on the works full blast. No one will ever know how you feel." And this did happen, not just in 1962, but every time Baba gave darshan.

Throughout the 1960s, Baba's work in seclusion became more concentrated. Before each session of work he seemed to be more withdrawn; and after the session, more tired. And when he started fasting as well, the atmosphere became very charged. The intensity of work reached its climax in 1968.

When we were at Meherazad, Baba would work in Mandali Hall, seated in his chair by the window. As soon as word was passed that Baba was going to work, all activity in Meherazad ceased. The garden boys put down their watering cans and turned off the taps. The household workers stopped washing clothes and kitchen utensils. The men mandali remained quiet in their quarters and we women in ours. Only the birds went on warbling their sweet songs. They were indeed privileged, as Baba said their singing did not disturb him. So in the midst of this man-made silence there were only the song of the birds and in the distance the muted barking of a dog. However, should anyone inadvertently sneeze or cough, or one of the workers carelessly drop a lid, then there would be a loud clap from Baba and one of the mandali would go to him. "What was that disturbance?" The culprit would be tracked down and scolded, then again silence. This continued until Baba finished his work and clapped, and word went out that we could resume our daily activities.

The same procedure took place at Guruprasad. There, however, Baba would do his seclusion work in his room. A yellow sofa-chair was brought in to make Baba more comfortable and Baba gave us all strict instructions regarding this chair. Under no circumstances should anyone touch the chair and no part of their garments should even brush against it. Only Mehera was allowed to touch it. Whenever we were called to be with Baba in his room, our focus was constantly on the yellow chair. In spite of so much care, one day someone's skirt just missed touching the chair and Baba noticed. He again instilled in us the importance of the yellow chair, saying if anyone touched it, all his work would be undone. From that day on, a cord was put around the chair to protect it.

Each day Baba would shut himself up in his room and, as at Meherazad, all activity ceased for the time being. When the session was completed, Baba would clap and Eruch and one of the other mandali would go to him immediately. Eruch told us how Baba would be drenched with perspiration and his thighs stiff and bruised from the pounding he gave them to keep the

physical link while doing his universal work. Before leaving Guruprasad in 1968, Baba told us that his work was finished 100 per cent to his satisfaction.

Baba gave us no indication in late 1968 and early 1969 that he would drop his body. Some person asked me later, "Didn't Baba give you some inkling or clue?" Imagine if Baba had done such a thing. How could we have carried on? We could not have taken it. By taking us by surprise, he knew we would have to make the effort, because, as he says, "This (body) is only an overcoat that I am wearing; this is not the real me."

We were so used to Baba's presence that at first there was a void, but now we feel Baba even though we don't see him, and that is what makes things bearable.

A week or so before he dropped his body on January 31, 1969, I took to Baba a watercolor of the Mastery in Servitude emblem I had done for his brother, Adi Jr., in England. I thought that Adi would be happy if Baba touched the emblem. Baba did touch it and pointed out each religious symbol and made a circle of his thumb and forefinger, his sign of pleasure. Then he gestured, "Come and embrace me."

He looked so fragile then that I was almost afraid to touch him, so I touched him very lightly. But when he embraced me, it was the strong embrace of the old days.

It was the last embrace I had from Baba.