

Seekers of Love

by Amiya Kumar Hazra
and Keith Gunn

An Avatar Meher Baba Trust eBook

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by Amiya Kumar Hazra and Keith Gunn

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SEEKERS OF LOVE



Amiya Kumar Hazra
Keith Gunn

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by

Amiya Kumar Hazra and Keith Gunn

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Photograph of Avatar Meher Baba at the Poona Darshan of May 1965
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Avatar Meher Baba in Poona, May 1965, giving darshan to his Indian Seekers of Love, assisted by Eruch Jessawala. This darshan was attended by many of the writers who contributed stories to this collection



*In Memory of Gauri Hazra, devotee of Meher Baba and faithful wife to
Amiya Kumar Hazra*



*Amiya's mother, whose stories appear in
Memoirs of a Zetetic and also in the web
site www.trustmeher.com/zetetic. She was
a devoted Baba lover, and first attended
Baba's Sahavas in 1958. Seeing Baba, she
fainted and was carried to the medical
tent, taking no more part in the Sahavas,
as she remained sick for its duration. She
had seen Baba as the infant Krishna, an
experience that stayed with her for the
duration of the Sahavas.*

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Introduction

This book has been years in the making. Amiya had observed that there were many persons whose stories have yet to be told, and he wanted the stories to be saved for posterity before those persons passed from the earth. So, his particular focus was on elderly Baba lovers of his acquaintance whose stories he knew would prove interesting to the Eastern and Western Baba communities.

He knew that the chances were small that many of these stories would be in circulation in the English-speaking media (books, web pages, etc.) since many of the persons whose stories are in this book would not normally choose English as their preferred language in which to converse, though they might speak English. Most of these stories were recorded in Hindi, and the translation was performed by Amiya. Some stories of persons no longer living are told directly by Amiya in their honor.

As we proceeded with the project, we took the opportunity to capture stories from westerners whose stories hadn't been in print. Although he has not been out of India, Amiya had encountered many westerners in Meherabad on his visits and had been visited many times by westerners at his home in Jabalpur, MP. Several residents and numerous pilgrims have given us their stories, and we plan to publish them in the second volume of Seekers, Baba willing.

The Indian stories have a flavor (flavour!) all their own, and they present to non-Indian readers some perspectives that may expand upon those the mandali have spoken about. For one thing, upon reading some of these stories it

will be clearer to the reader why it wasn't easy to be a follower of Avatar Meher Baba in the larger Indian society. Mani has remarked on how opposed the Parsi community of Poona was to her family, because of the family's conviction that Baba was the Avatar of the Age. But for Hindus to say to their co-workers or social contacts, "We follow a Parsi master" was to court quite a bit of harassment. Sectarianism often reared its head almost immediately, and the rejoinder would come, "Why did you have to look outside our community? There are so many saints and masters - there is Aurobindo, there is this one, there is that one, why do you have to follow a Persian?" It appears that to some Indians, Meher Baba wasn't even accorded the status of being an Indian, though born in Poona.

Radicals, whether political, social or religious, often have no compunction about taking human life to advance their cause. There was more than simply a threat that a vocal Baba follower might meet with personal peril, as the reader will discover from two of these stories.

Another curiosity of several of these stories is that the persons in the stories took various occult realities for granted. This topic does not appear often in other literature about Meher Baba and His people. In these stories, the reader will see strange occurrences, be introduced to the Deva associated with the River Narmada, encounter tantriks with powers unknown in the West, hear about a saint who performed his own death through an act of will alone, hear about rains that don't fall when or where they logically ought to, and a number of other kinds of curious events that are readily accepted by the Indian perception (though

various aspects of these events may be understood to be miraculous).

Up to now, only one of these stories has appeared in print: the story of Rajanikant Upadhyaya, given by us to the Love Street Lamppost upon Rajanikant's passing in 2004.

Amiya conducted many of the interviews in this collection, and he often asked the speaker to give a message to posterity. The interviewees were not volunteering a message - they had been requested to give one. Where there are editorial comments in the text, they were contributed by Keith, with Amiya's concurrence.

Thanks are due to many who contributed stories, and whose names at the head of the stories will identify them. In addition, both Amitabh Mukherjee and Sankalpa Srivastava prepared Hindi tape transcriptions and then read them to Amiya so that he could translate them without taxing his failing eyesight, and Mintoo Mukherjee kindly provided working space for us in Jabalpur for many sessions. Pradeep Raj has helped us in countless ways in Jabalpur and his delightful family entertained us, as did Niket Kale and his family.

But of course, we have principally to thank the Boss Himself for permitting us to collect and ultimately publish these wonderful stories.

Avatar Meher Baba Ki Jai,
Keith Gunn and Amiya Kumar Hazra

Some Stories of Rajanikant Upadhyaya

This great Baba lover deserves a book of his own. The text presented here is taken from an interview with him in 2001 when his memory was failing, from interviews with his son, daughter-in-law and wife, and from reminiscences contributed by Amiya. Readers of Memoirs of a Zetetic will recognize Rajanikant as "RKU".

The story makes reference to the Narmada river, a river taken by many Hindus to be of special spiritual significance. Possibly affirming this belief is the fact that Beloved Baba dipped His hands and feet in the Narmada, a rare occurrence.



With wife and son Sharad 1950s

The facets of Rajanikant's life presented here fit into three phases: childhood, time leading up to his letter to Beloved Baba, and his later life, in which he proved himself to be a tireless worker for Beloved Baba's cause.

His youth contains one great incident: his chance meeting with Beloved Baba. In 1939 when this incident took place, he was only 14. He no longer remembers, but his son narrates the story he heard from his childhood:

"My father and his mother were at the Narmada river in Mandla. A replica of Baba's Samadhi called Meher Kuti is there, and standing near the building my father saw a Persian man, very beautiful. He said to his mother, 'See how beautiful this man is. I have never seen such a beautiful man. Let us go near the man and find out who He is.'

"My father asked the people standing there, 'Who is He?' and they responded, 'He is our elder brother.' My father went to the man and asked him for water. My father put his hands together, and Beloved Baba poured water from a pot into his hands. That was my father's first darshan."

Rajanikant was greatly interested in what he perceived to be spirituality throughout his youth. One form the interest took was in making connections with the "spiritual masters" whom he encountered, including various tantriks. Eventually he came to regard one of them as his guru. Rajanikant sought siddhis ("powers" is the closest translation). A diversion on this topic is in order.

In India, there are so many who assert their status as "masters." How does one tell the real from the false? According to Beloved Baba, if one is in the presence of a Great Being, one feels something special - the atmosphere is charged with a feeling that people may not be able to describe, but it is attractive. Another common experience is that the radiance of the great being is such that one can't look directly into his or her eyes. It's simply past the ordinary

devotee's ability to take in the radiance from the divine one - the experience is too overpowering.

But this sort of contact with spiritual greatness is uncommon. The more common experience is of the miracles that a so-called saint may perform. These miracles ensnare the people, causing devotees to flock to the so-called saint. But what are the miracles? Beloved Baba made it clear that there are hidden facets to the illusion we call "reality" and that there are various ways one can manipulate "reality" if one becomes aware of the hidden "strings." One way these methods of manipulation become revealed is a by-product of progress on the spiritual path. Thus the power to alter people's perception of reality is latent in one's advancement toward God.

Another way, the way of tantra, lies in breath control, certain mantras and some unsavory practices. This has nothing to do with the Path, and in many ways is antithetical to spirituality. But, through these practices, one can gain various siddhis (powers), such as telepathy, the ability to hear people from long distances, to see them at long distances, to contact occult beings, and so forth. One may even gain the ability to take or give life; though this is beyond most tantrics it is not beyond the high saints, as the story of Ganj-e-Shakkar from Lord Meher (American Edition, page 1126) will attest.

One may also attain siddhis through the whim of a Great One. This actually happened to Amiya. Beloved Baba gave him some powers. Unfortunately, Amiya did not understand the negative consequences of revealing that he had them. The main such consequence was that he was hounded by

various people either to use the powers for their benefit, or to give the powers to them, and no amount of explaining that they would have to get the powers from Baba Himself sufficed. Eventually the burden of fending off disagreeable persons was so great that Amiya prayed fervently to Beloved Baba to remove the powers, which in the course of time He did.

To resume our story, Rajanikant joined the ashram of a famous occultist, Ram Sanahi Maharaj. Picking up the story verbatim from Rajanikant:

"Once we were talking about occultism and somehow Ram Sanahi Maharaj came to the spot and he all of a sudden ordered me to come to him. He addressed me as 'Babu.'

"'Babu, you come here.' I thought there was something wrong. 'You go to the bank of the Narmada [River, one of the few bodies of water into which Beloved Baba dipped His hands and feet].' He gave me a cloth towel and told me to request the River Narmada to give him two fish. 'I would like to have fish for my evening meal,' he said.

"So when I went with the cloth, some persons followed me. I was in a fix - what to do and what not to do. I was irritated - he had shown such lack of common sense and I found myself thinking, 'He is such a big sadhu and so experienced. Why would he take this risk?'

"But somehow I went there. It was evening. I spread the cloth on the side of the bank of the river and sat down and I started praying to Maharaj, 'Baba (means Maharaj), see that my master's reputation is not lost in vain.' Then I did what he wanted me to do: I went down to the river and started praying to the river, 'Please help my master because

he wants fish for the evening meal, and I have come to get it, so the fish should jump out of the river into this cloth.'

"What happened was very strange. Suddenly, two fish jumped out of the river onto the cloth! One was a middle-sized fish. The other was a small fish. I wrapped them in the cloth and took them to the ashram. I was happy to bring the fish with me, and he looked at me, very happy, and he said to me, 'Well, you have been doubting me, and do you know that it is doubting that destroys a person? You should not doubt. Anyway, at last you have been sincerely praying and that is why the river has yielded up the two fish for me.'

"Once he and I went walking in Amarkantak forest, which was very dear to him. He used to take me to different places, and tell me that great saints used to be there meditating and praying to God, and he also told me about certain other very important places of pilgrimage there. On this occasion, we had lost track of time. It was evening and we didn't have any food with us and we felt hungry. I didn't know Ram Sanahi Maharaj's intentions, of course, but though we were in the depths of the forest suddenly a girl came who was just about 15 years old. She was exceptionally beautiful. When I saw her I was very much enamored of her. But Ram Sanahi Maharaj said, 'Do you know who she is? She is the River Narmada herself.'

"So I said, 'Maharaj, as the story goes Narmada herself is unmarried, but this girl looks like she is married.'

"He simply said, 'Oh, you think so?' After that, the girl looked at me and said, 'I have brought a tiffin [food container] for you both for your dinner.'

"Why have you brought it?" I asked. I simply couldn't understand how she could have brought the tiffin when she didn't know us. I was still thinking her to be just an ordinary person.

"Then she said, 'My mother was making food, and then she said, 'let's make a bit more, because there will be two persons coming to this place, and they will be needing food.' So I brought that food for you. So please take this food.' We took the food, we ate it, and when she started to go away, I saw to my great astonishment that her height had diminished. She had become just about 6 or 7 inches less in height. She looked so glowing, and now she looked like a virgin. When I looked at her in this way, I had to ask Maharaj, 'What is happening?'

"He said, 'Let her speak for herself.'

"Then she said, 'I am Narmada. I have come to feed you. And, you should not have doubted me. I know everything about you, right from your very childhood. You're a fool for one who loved me from childhood. Don't you know that I am a virgin?'

"I was inspired and I fell at her feet, and said, 'It is my mistake.' I said that I had indeed worshipped her from childhood, but that I had never seen her before.

"All this happened in Amarkantak - a special place."

Rajanikant continued:

"At the time I was very much impressed by Ram Sanahi Maharaj, but in time I came to understand that I had confused spirituality with these simple tricks. I came to

understand that this tantrik cult was actually a means to strengthen your personality so you could overpower other people and make them your devotees. I was eventually very irritated that these persons wanted to be worshipped. But first I had to get it all out of my system, because I had come to wish very much that people would worship me! How did I come to my senses? It happened because I began to get some good advice. First to advise me was Girinari Maharaj, another person who had attained powers.

"When I came in his contact, I started serving him, and then I started wanting to create my own personality. One day, this temptation of becoming a person of occult status started emerging in me, and it did not go unnoticed by Girinari Maharaj, and he became very angry with me.

"He said, 'You have not come here for spirituality. You just want to be worshipped by others.' He was saying exactly what I was inwardly wishing for.

"Then I argued with him, 'When I see you, when I see people coming and worshipping you and you are my master, is it very much more to expect that I should also be worshipped by people? Should it not be done by them? What do I lack when you are there and you can help me up to some of the siddhis and I can become very powerful.'

"Girinari Maharaj looked very angry still and he said, 'Do you know how difficult and dangerous this road is?'

"I said, 'Well it may be a dangerous practice and a dangerous road, but then you have been traversing it.'

"Girinari Maharaj then said, 'But do you also know that there is a lot of competition and rivalry on this road of occultism?'

"I asked, 'Competition?'"

"He rejoined, 'Other people will be trying to put you off the road and maybe harm you through using their siddhis and you may be damaged. That is the reason why I do not want you to go into this path. You should go only for pure spiritual practices and never deviate from that.'"

"That was how Girinari Maharaj explained things to me and I was uncomfortable with it, because he was saying something that he was not doing himself. He was after attaining occult powers. I told him that I had not attained any of the powers, and when I had attained some I would think of spiritual progress and all that. At present, I said that I was only interested in my fame and the occult attainments.

"Soon after, I found another saintly person, whose name was Atma Ram. He gave me a fatherly love, and he explained everything in a very beautiful way. He said, 'You are quite young and you will definitely get trapped in the powers that will come to you, and that is not a good thing for your future.' At that time I was hardly 24 years old. He also gave me some instruction on how to control the senses. You have all said that I have a powerful way of speaking and a powerful bearing. That is the gift of the practices that he taught me to do. In the process, these practices made me absolutely fearless."

For the moment, the story moves away from Rajanikant's personal account to some background. The time is early 1950s, a few years later, and Rajanikant has taken a job in the electrical power generation plant of Jabalpur, working as the "attendant" to a turbine that generates electricity.

He has met Amiya and his friends since he plays various sports at their playing field, and has discovered that they are all outspoken atheists - men of science. He has offered to take them to Ram Sanahi Maharaj, whom he continues to serve and regard as his guru but Amiya isn't having any of this guru talk, and their friendship is confined to sports, though he has impressed Amiya's circle.

There is a break in this pattern while Rajanikant goes away, and when he returns and meets them again he discovers that Amiya has become mad for Meher Baba - a complete about-face, and that Amiya's ensemble of friends are all really excited about spirituality. Rajanikant initially finds this quite annoying. He has studied Ramayana, knows it from end to end, has apprenticed with all these spiritual persons, and yet these former atheists, spiritual beginners,, are telling him that they have found God in human form. Implicit is their assertion that they know more about spirituality than he does. Rajanikant gets wild, and he says to Amiya, "You guys are lovers of sports, lovers of cinema, lovers of this and that and you never thought about God. And now you think you have discovered an Avatar? This is absurd. You are not fit. You are not spiritually worthy to understand what spirituality is. You must have been misled. I have been all my life chasing after spiritual persons and had lots of experiences with them."

Soon after this, he decided to write a letter to Meher Baba to express his scorn. His first thought was to put down a line from a song in a Hindi film, which translated goes, "If I had known your address, I would have written you a letter. Here I've got a five paisa [e.g., a penny] postcard which I can send you." The spirit of this communication was

mocking - it's so easy now that you've announced you are an incarnation of God, so I can send you a cheap card and be on your mailing list. Ironic. What kind of God can be contacted by a five paisa postcard?

He wrote a draft of these thoughts, but he didn't write them on the postcard itself. After a time he thought, "This is not very polite. Let me make it more polite." So he wrote another draft, but still he wanted to criticize Baba for misguiding people like A. K. Hazra and others. "Why do you call yourself Avatar and things like that? I am a worshipper of Ram Sanahi Maharaj and I have seen miracles and many occultists..." Again he rejected this draft. It went on. He used to tell Amiya in those days, "Hazra, every time I wrote a letter to Baba, I waited, and then I thought that this was not the right way to address Him." Suddenly, in the middle of one night, he saw an intense red light. The whole room was filled with red light, and he was scared. That was the first experience Baba gave him. He took the red light to say, "Stop, don't proceed further." Baba knew that he was going to be one of the precious gems, and a most powerful speaker on Him.

Finally, after some more experiences, he wrote his letter, in a very mild tone, very polished and polite because he was very good at Hindi. He went to the letter box and put it in. The very next morning the postman came to his house to deliver him a letter of the same date, responding to his letter. This is impossible. It takes four days for a letter to transit to Ahmednagar from Jabalpur, and four days to return. The return letter was dated the same date as the letter he had sent.

He started shaking all over, as the miraculous nature of the response was totally unexpected. He showed the letter to Amiya. It said that he was a very good person, and he should do this thing and that thing, and so forth. Then a series of incidents followed. And then finally he fell in love with Baba. Suddenly he started talking of Baba, and composing poems in the form of songs, calling Baba "Beloved Meher." Amiya set one of the poems to music and began singing it at gatherings.

Rajanikant stopped going to Ram Sanahi Maharaj, who became furious. This all happened in the twelfth year of his discipleship to Ram Sanahi Maharaj. Ram Sanahi Maharaj had promised Rajanikant to make him his chageman - give him charge of the ashram and give him all the occult powers. All he had to do to get the power was to stick with Ram Sanahi Maharaj for one more year. But instead Rajanikant changed his affiliation completely.

When he went to Ram Sanahi Maharaj for the last time, Ram Sanahi Maharaj criticized him. Rajanikant even argued with Ram Sanahi Maharaj, even though he knew how powerful Ram Sanahi Maharaj was, and said, "You may have occult powers, but here is perfection. I am in love with Him (Baba)."

"No," said Ram Sanahi Maharaj, "you should not go to anybody else. Do you know what I am going to give you, and do you know what I can take away from you in case you follow somebody else? Many Avatars have come and gone, but I can give you something that nobody else can give."

Rajanikant said, "I don't care for any of the occult siddhis, and I think I will stop coming to you." So Amiya suggested to him

that he ought to write a letter to Baba, and try to find out what Baba says about all this, because he was in a fix.

Baba's reply said, "Do not disrespect your guru. Be very cordial to him, but remember one thing - that he is your guru and I am God." So Rajanikant went back and to some extent he was able to make up.

So now Rajanikant was a Baba lover, but his initial enthusiasm was so intense that his entire life was thrown out of balance. He had a wife and children to look after, but he was not going to the electrical plant to his job. Turbine maintenance is a job like milking cows: if you forget to do it, great disaster results. He was supposed to be working, but he was not. And, he was not taking care of his dress; he was disheveled and he was not eating. Complaints were coming in. Amiya, his friend, took it upon himself to chide Rajanikant for it. Amiya told him that loving Baba does not mean neglecting duty. He said, "No, I can not rest. You do not understand. I have got the most important prize of my whole lifetime by coming in contact of Baba, but I have not been called by Him. If he does not call me, I will die. I must meet Him, I must have His darshan." Amiya told him not to be desperate, that one day Meher Baba would call him.

Within only a short period, he received a letter from Beloved Baba that said, "I have come to know from sources that you are not taking care of your duty, and are neglecting your family. You should not mistake this for loving me. You go back to doing your duty and being part of your family, and at some later time I will ask you to come to me."

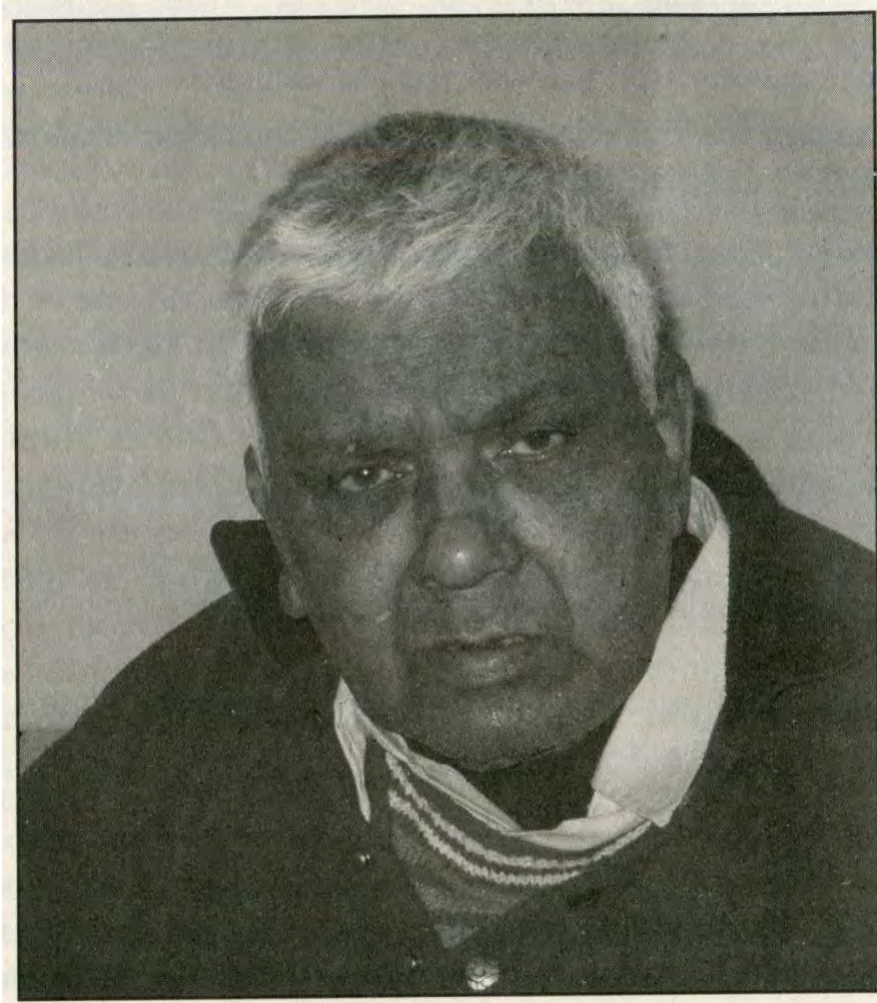
Rajanikant's first darshan came soon after, in 1958, on the tenth of July, the gathering at which Baba gave His

Universal Message. When the list of people invited to attend reached the Jabalpur Baba group, Rajanikant's name was on the list for Baba's darshan. Afterwards, Rajanikant told his friends that when Baba's car came and he looked at Baba, he saw Baba as Ram.

Rajanikant started taking care of his job thereafter, because he didn't want to disobey Baba. And he became one of the staunchest Baba lovers, so self-sacrificing in Baba's work, and so convinced of Baba's Avatarhood that he would go anywhere and tell anyone that Baba was God in human form, and they should rush to see Him. He was a very magnetic speaker - he could attract audiences, because he was a great scholar of Ramayana, and he knew how to start a speech on Baba. Amiya remembers reading a letter from Baba to Rajanikant in which Baba said, "People will remember you for many hundreds of years," and another letter in which Baba said, "You are my precious gem (nagina)."

He was dedication personified for Baba - one of the rarest Baba lovers who had turned into the perfect worker. Amiya recalls Rajanikant's going six miles to a Baba meeting with a fever of 103 degrees. When Amiya asked him not to go, to take rest, medicine, he said, "It's okay, I must go, people will be waiting there for me."

In response to a question of how village programmes would come to be organized, Amiya explained that the starting point for such a programme was always a local village person or headman who had found out about Baba. That person might visit Jabalpur, typically for business or purchases, and might inquire whether there was a Baba



The great man, a month before his death; his gaze was striking

group there, and would come in contact with someone from the group, attend a Jabalpur meeting, and then invite the Jabalpur Baba lovers, speakers and musicians to come to the village and give the programme.

After a while it seemed that the Jabalpur troupe was invited mainly because the villagers wanted to hear the renowned Rajanikant speak. He would always talk in a way that would enthrall them.

Amiya continues that they specialized in visiting the scheduled castes - the untouchables and tribals - who were downtrodden and rejected by Brahmins. Rajanikant Upadhyaya has done untold work to spread Baba's love. Because of him, hundreds of persons went for Baba's darshan who wouldn't otherwise have.



Long time companions Amiya Kumar Hazra and Rajanikant Upadhyaya in February 2003 at Rajanikant's house.

The Mustache of Kanchhedi Lal Narad

Amiya relates this story. He worked frequently with Rajanikant Upadhyaya and he heard the story from Rajanikant directly.

There is a town called Gotegaon (recently renamed Sridham) on the Jabalpur-Mumbai road. In that town lived a man with a large, luxuriant mustache, Kanchhedi Lal Narad. He was a devotee of Lord Ram, and together with some other fellows he organized a big programme on Ramayana, the collected stories of the life of Ram. It so happened that our Rajanikant Upadhyaya was an expert on the Ramayana, and Narad invited Rajanikant to speak at his programme. You see, Rajanikant had vast knowledge, you may say scholarship of the first order, on the topic of Ramayana, and in addition he was a mesmerizing speaker.

The speech did not turn out as Narad wanted. By the time that Rajanikant arrived to give the talk, he had already metamorphosed into a Meher Baba lover, and he could not help telling the people there, "Meher Baba is the reincarnation of Ram."

When he said this, Narad was absolutely infuriated, and he did not allow Rajanikant to go on with his lecture. He stopped the lecture then and there, and said, "None of that, you know. We don't believe in anyone except Ram, and we do not have any faith and caring about persons like Meher Baba so please you stop immediately."

After that humiliating scoffing from Narad, Rajanikant

wisely kept quiet. But, when the meeting was over, Narad came up and said, "You did not do a good thing for us. We called you as a scholar on Ramayana, and you talk of someone we don't know and care for."

Rajanikant knew that he was a minority there, so he simply said, "I am speaking on my own, and the responsibility of saying whatever I said is mine. Still, I maintain that Meher Baba was Ram and it is unfortunate that you do not seem to understand."

It made Narad all the more angry, and he said, "Now we are not going to host you any more and you can now leave for Jabalpur. You see, if anybody called Meher Baba would be Ram's incarnation, I would shave off my mustache." Among Hindus, Rajputs and that sort of people, shaving off the moustaches is like a humiliating experience that you might undergo if you lost a big wager. It was a sort of challenge, meaning I will accept defeat if He happens to be Ram.

Rajanikant said, "Okay, sir, I'll take your leave," and he went back to Jabalpur.

Upon his return, Rajanikant told us about the incident, and we made a note that other towns might be more fruitful places to speak and sing about Meher Baba's divinity for the foreseeable future. But look what happened! One morning shortly thereafter, Kanchhedi Lal Narad found that one side of his mustache was giving way. Hairs were falling off from that side of the mustache. He was a little

worried. He applied creams and oils to see that the mustache stayed as luxuriant as formerly but the hairs kept falling off. One morning, he discovered that almost all the hair on one side of his mustache had fallen out. Only the other side was intact! People who came to his home sort of controlled themselves from laughing, since it was such a ridiculous sight. Even his servants and his own wife and daughter could hardly control their amusement. In utter humiliation he covered himself and called for the barber. He told the barber to remove the other side of his mustache. Thus, he became clean shaven.

Just after this, a different group in Gotegaon wanted to hold another programme on Ramayana, and they invited Rajanikant to address them, without any explicit request that he not mention Meher Baba. So Rajanikant went, and he saw Narad sitting in the assembly with a handkerchief in front of his face. He thought there might be a fight - heated arguments and humiliation - but that fellow said nothing, and Rajanikant went on talking about Ram and Meher Baba and arguing that Meher Baba ultimately is Ram for us in this century. There was no protest from Narad.

After the meeting was over, Narad came up to him, apologized and took Rajanikant to his house. Then Rajanikant got a clear look at Narad's face and realized that he had removed his mustache. Rajanikant asked, "What about your mustache?"

Narad rejoined, "What has happened is very much intriguing, and this is what I have brought you here to tell you. Do you think that Meher Baba had any hand in this?"

Rajanikant said, "Without doubt. You have challenged His divinity and said that you would shave off your mustache, so He did that to make you believe in Him. So now it would be better that you change your mind about Meher Baba. He is the *Quick God*."

"What do you mean?" said Narad.

"I mean He is the one who gives you quick punishments for doubting Him and quick rewards for believing in him!" rejoined Rajanikant. "So now that you know, why don't you come along for a darshan?"

They did go to Guruprasad for darshan, and after Baba's darshan Narad was so much charmed. All the way back on the train, Narad was saying, "He looked so wonderful. All the time he looked every inch a God. Now I have no doubt."

It now happened that Narad realized that he had boarded the Bombay-Howrah mail train with Rajanikant without thinking. This train stops at Narsinghpur and goes straight to Jabalpur without stopping at Gotegaon. He looked at Rajanikant and said, "I've made a mistake. I should have gone for another train. How should I get down?"

Rajanikant said, "Why don't you pray to Baba? This is the time. You've just come from Baba's place, have just seen Him, so ask his blessing and pray to him. Let's see what happens."

Sure enough, a big surprise took place. The train, which was not scheduled to stop at Gotegaon stopped, a little in advance of Gotegaon station! What's more, Narad's house lay just across the rail tracks! So Rajanikant said, "See, Baba has stopped the train just for you. You can simply climb down onto the train tracks and walk to your home."

From that point onward, we were welcome at Gotegaon. One of the stalwart Baba lovers there is Kanchhedi Lal Narad, who sports a very commanding mustache.

The Sarpanch Saves the Baba Lovers

Amiya and a troupe of Baba lovers went to Bedu village in Madhya Pradesh to give a talk on Beloved Baba. Here is the gist of the story, which does not exist on tape. The voice speaking is thus that of Keith, recalling what Amiya said.

Amiya and his friends used to go to villages to give talks, sing songs and tell about Beloved Baba's life. These visits could be arduous and prolonged; the troupe of speakers, singers and musicians might have to walk for hours to get to a village. As Amiya has explained in his comments on Rajanikant's life, an invitation would come from someone in the village, and that person would publicize the visit by sending a notice to other villages nearby, and an audience would assemble. The speaking and the singing and so forth would go on, sometimes past midnight.

On one such occasion, Amiya was accompanied by some friends from Jabalpur, including Pankhraj, Muniraj and Rajanikant, all of whom will be familiar to readers of *Memoirs of a Zetetic*. As the party was walking toward the village along the narrow path that led there, a figure appeared on the path approaching them from the direction of the village. They could see that it was the village priest, who was wearing robes and whose face was painted with markings distinctive to priesthood. "Ochre robes won't do," said Muniraj quite loudly addressing the priest, "Likewise, that vermillion paint won't do. Because the Avatar of the Age has come. So you should close down your shop!" Amiya was taken aback. It is true that the village priest tends to be a parasite on the villagers, and Beloved

Baba had criticized priests and priestcraft. But this seemed unnecessarily confrontational to Amiya, as well as somewhat out of character for Muniraj. For his part, the priest said not one word, but turned on his heels and headed back toward the village ahead of them on the path. Amiya was struck with a sense of foreboding.

When they arrived at the village, they found a spot set aside for the talk, a kind of stage, and the village sponsor had arranged tea for them. It was in the mid-afternoon by this time, and the talk was scheduled for just after the dinner hour. Amiya and his friends were given tea with milk, and invited to take rest on the spot, awaiting the gathering of the villagers later in the day. But, Amiya noted that the priest appeared to be going around from hut to hut, and lots of whispering seemed to be going on. Nevertheless, they were tired and they took the opportunity to rest.

Just before the talk was to start, the host again appeared with tea, but this time. it was milk-less tea [either an implicit insult or a failure of hospitality] . "So sorry, sirs, but the cow kicked over the can..." or some such, as Amiya remembers. Moreover, when the villagers assembled, they did not appear at all friendly. Most were carrying a lathi - the long bamboo stick a villager uses as a weapon. Those not carrying sticks were carrying ancient carbines and belts of cartridges. Amiya was quite frightened, since it occurred to him that the host might not have chosen to waste milk on persons who were soon going to be unwelcome, to say the least.

The truculent crowd settled down to hear the talk, and the first speaker started out, "Meher Baba has given ten

ways to realize God..." Immediately a rejoinder came from someone in the crowd, "That can not be. Lord Krishna gave only nine." Tempers seemed to be on the point of boiling over. Amiya first stood up and said, "Well this is such an unspiritual age that Meher Baba offered us one extra!" This attempt at humor didn't work, and Amiya continued, "Come, brothers, in the spirit of friendship I would like to embrace each one of you." He moved out into the audience to try to offer love to any and all of them in the hope of averting catastrophe.

Just as things were about to become violent, into the clearing walked a person no one was expecting: the Sarpanch. A Sarpanch is the head of a group of villages - the man to whom the village heads report. He is the most powerful figure the villagers could imagine seeing. Immediately, the Sarpanch said, "When the newspaper arrives with a story in it you do not like, do you kill the paper carrier?"

This had the effect of quieting down everyone, and the crowd, which had been edging toward the stage, moved backward, leaving breathing space for the Sarpanch and the Baba lovers. But, to everyone's amazement, the Sarpanch continued, "I found out about this meeting just this morning. The notice reached me, and I was wondering about this Meher Baba. The notice said that He is God in human form. So, I said to myself, if He is, then He should let me know. There are some persons who have owed me money for years, and if they come today to repay me, I will take it as a sign from Him that He must be who He says He is."

"I am telling you, those persons did come to pay me back today, and I must reach the conclusion that Meher Baba is who He claims to be. Now I think you had better listen to these people, because if they come from God, what you were planning to do would not have been wise."

So saying, the Sarpanch settled into the audience and began listening. Amiya was wonderstruck, and very thankful, and very relieved. And, as the songs and the stories and the entertainment began to work their magic, he knew that Baba did not leave His workers or the villagers in the lurch, but on the contrary had provided a perfectly charged atmosphere for sharing His love with the villagers. Shortly, tea arrived, this time with milk. The event went on until after midnight, and many persons from the village came up to them and said, "Oh, we are so sorry for what we might have done. Please forgive us."



Maniraj with Beloved Baba

Irshad Ahmed Khan's Story



A shy Irshad appears to the right of Hazra's sons

My name is Irshad Ahmad Khan. At one time I was known as "Nepali Baba" and I was one of those "false saints" with whom Beloved Baba warned His followers not to become entangled. Here's my story of how Beloved Baba graced me with his love.

From childhood I worshipped the idea of good men more than God, going freely from temple to church to mosque to synagogue, staying above the idea that I had to belong to one or the other. But I was very interested in miracles, magic, tantra and occultism. After watching so-called saints presenting their skills in these areas to the public, I started learning magic - the art of theatrical deception, you may call it. I went really deeply into it and became very competent at illusions. Some of the illusions I learned happened to mimic some of the tricks I had seen so-called saints doing as "tantra."

It was at that point that I realized that much of "sainthood" was the practice of magic tricks, which duped both the learned persons and the ordinary persons alike. By this time, I was of college age and, having the spirit of youth and its arrogance, I went out to the same people who had worshipped at the feet of the latest trickster and performed the same tricks, showing them how they were done and showing them that they had been fooled.

To my great surprise and dismay, I discovered that this was welcomed by neither audience nor entertainer. The saints threatened me with bodily harm because they thought me capable of ruining their livelihood. No surprise there, but the people were also furious with me for exposing the saints, because they had been hoping that they had found someone (in the person of the saint) who had the power to help them. The role of the saint, you see, is to give hope that the intercession of God will lift people out of their difficulties, and I was ruining that hope.

Well, from arrogance I turned to cynicism - a short trip. I donned the name of "Nepali Baba." I look rather like a person from Nepal, and there was something mystical about Nepal. I started doing the same tricks, people starting to rally around me with great worship and faith, and I started exploiting them. Not only did people bow down to me, but I used to make them wash my feet and drink the water.

But fortunately this didn't last. I was sick at heart from this and my cynicism gave way to pity. But, I longed to know if there was anything real about miracles, magic, tantra and all that.

At this point, in 1979, I met Professor Hazra. I could see instantly that he was an honest and noble man. When he told me about Meher Baba, I had some interest because I felt Professor Hazra would not be taken in by a false saint. Professor Hazra gave me some books to read, and I read.

As a child, I had had an experience. In a dream that seemed quite real, I saw the word "meem" appear superimposed over a sunset. In Urdu, "meem" means "Ultimate Reality." I was amazed to find that Baba had named his first ashram "Manzil-e-meem." But, coincidence or not, it didn't carry as much weight with me as the real love I felt in the story of Meher Baba. I also felt that it was the mission of my life to convey love to others. I felt that Baba was the personification of pure love, unselfish love, all-embracing love - you may even say ennobling love.

By 1981 Amartithi, which I attended with Professor Hazra, I was pretty sure that Baba was the One, but it was mostly intellectual. Baba had also not indicated that He accepted me. The stage was now set for one of Baba's wonderful jokes - a miracle for the person who used miracles to delude others.

Professor Hazra and I entered the Samadhi (in those days, even near the time of Amartithi, we could enter and remain for some time) and stood on the left on the upper level, also something that is no longer permitted. There was a large photograph of Baba where today there is a painting, and on top of the frame of the photograph someone had placed a number of roses, with one very large rose just at the middle. I prayed to Baba, "I have accepted you, but how do I know that you have accepted me?" Then the

thought came into my mind, "Why don't you make one of those roses fall off the frame of the photo, so that I will know that you have accepted me?" My magician mind said that because of natural vibrations, the wind, footsteps, any flower could fall and it would not be real evidence. At the center was a quite large rose, pink, and I said inwardly, "Well, Baba, if this one drops down I will take it for granted that You have accepted me as Yours."

Hardly had I finished thinking about it when it dropped down. Not only that, but it bounced like a ball and rolled to just in front of me, where Baba's right hand would have been if He had been lying face up where the marble is today. Was it a token of acceptance for me, and should I pick it up, or maybe somebody else had been praying for it, and it was Baba's gift to someone else (?) So I came out of the Samadhi without picking it up or touching it, though it was quite beautiful. But then I thought, "Maybe it is for me," so I turned to go back in. The moment I felt that I should have picked up that particular rose, before I could even finish the thought, one man came rushing to me with the rose, telling me that I should have it.

Now see Baba's wonderful joke. Here was a magical occurrence to reassure the magician that real magic, magic of the heart, does happen. And, it confirmed to me that Baba really does care for me and has accepted me. Many wonderful, unusual things happened during that Amartithi, but I do not want to give importance to these things. It was enough that Baba loved me and accepted me. That was all in all for me.

Baba Takes Possession of Subhadra

This story comes partly from a written account of the event, and partly from taped reminiscences of it gathered in 2001. Subhadra (Bundellu) Pund was known to lovers of music as the wife and constant companion of the great Madhusudan Pund, author of many great Baba songs that will be sung by posterity. Madhusudan and Subhadra both composed Baba songs and sang before Beloved Baba many times, and had an open invitation to Guruprasad. Many incidents involving them are recorded in Lord Meher; starting in the year 1948 (see American Edition, page 3291). Subhadra has now gone to Beloved Baba.

Subhadra grew up in a well-to-do family of low caste. Throughout her life leading up to her time with Beloved Baba, she was sickly. The family didn't want to pay her constant medical expenses, and she was viewed by all as "around their necks," a phrase also used by Beloved Baba to denote unwanted dependency.



By 1957, her whole family knew about Baba, and (some nominally and some wholeheartedly) felt Baba to be God. She had a large family; her middle brother, Krishna, was cunning and grasping - in her words, a politician. Krishna obtained an audience with Baba at Ganeshkhind Gardens and unveiled his latest cunning stratagem. "Baba," he said, "I want you to arrange for the distribution of the family property." In effect, this meant that he wanted Baba to be the executor of the estate and the constructor of the will, in Western terms, and in addition to take those actions prior to the demise of those members of the family who were property owners. Krishna was hoping to manipulate Baba so that he could come into possession of all the property.

The property was substantial. Subhadra's father had two houses, and her eldest brother Venkat-Swamy was also well off, living in Bombay. Krishna, by contrast, had nothing at this time. There was also a younger brother, Narayan. In addition, Venkat-Swamy's wife held some property in her own name, acquired upon the death of their mother.

Beloved Baba appeared to accede, saying, "You bring all the people from your family before me."

Krishna half-complied. For tactical reasons, he invited only certain members of the family to attend a gathering in the company of Beloved Baba, but he didn't tell them the reason. Prabhavati, Venkat-Swamy's wife, was not invited. Subhadra, her father and her three brothers, and Krishna's wife were the only ones invited by Krishna to attend.

When the gathering had settled down before Beloved Baba, He said, "Where is Prabhavati? After your mother's death she is the owner of some important property."

Without Prabhavati I can not proceed."

Venkat-Swamy responded, "Baba, Krishna told me that you were calling so of course I came."

Baba turned to Krishna: "You told everybody this much only?"

Krishna said, "Yes, Baba."

Then Baba asked Krishna to stand up and tell all the people that he had requested that Baba decide the disposition of all the family property, and that Baba had agreed, telling Krishna to summon all the people.

Baba again turned to Venkat-Swamy, reiterating that without his wife's presence he could not proceed with the case. Venkat-Swamy became very much afraid, and the atmosphere grew very solemn and tense. After some time, Venkat-Swamy responded to Baba that he would have brought Prabhavati if he had realized the matter to be decided before Baba. After a little more thought, he spoke up, "Baba! Even if Prabhavati is not here, Baba you are here and when you are present Everything is here. Even Prabhavati is here."

At once Baba became very happy with his answer, and Baba told Venkat-Swamy, "I am very happy to see your faith in me, and even though Prabhavati is not here I myself will represent her interest in the case."

Then Baba turned to Subhadra's father. Baba told Krishna to stand up and inform their father that Krishna wanted Baba to decide the disposition of the property.

Her father, perplexed until now, finally grasped what was going on, and he became very angry. He said, "Baba, who are you to decide what becomes of my property?"

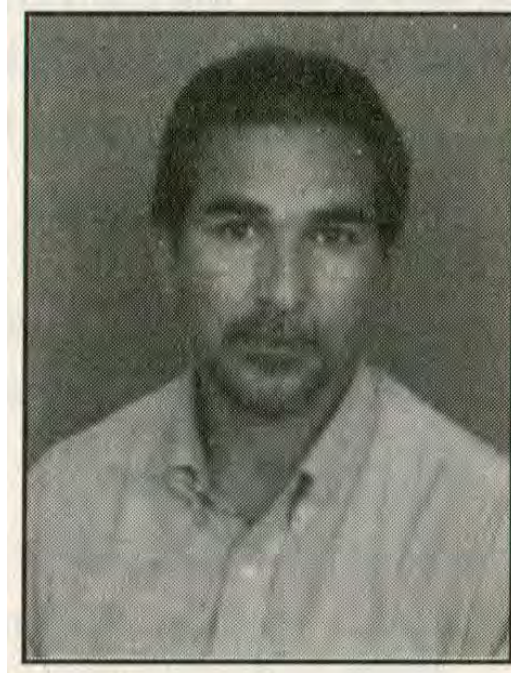
Baba took the wind out of his sails by immediately agreeing: "I agree. Who am I to decide the distribution of your property? It is your property, not mine. It was Krishna's doing that this meeting took place. Now the property discussion will stop from this moment, and you give your property to whomever you like."

Then Baba pointed to Subhadra, and asked her father, "This is your daughter?" Her father agreed. Baba continued, "Are you ready to accept her into your property [That is, are you willing to be responsible for her and take care of her]?" Her father did not assent, and Krishna and his wife did not assent when Baba looked to them. Then Baba said, "You want me to want what you want, but you do not want what I want." The Baba looked directly at Subhadra and said, "From today this child is Mine. God is the father of those who nobody wants." Baba added, mysteriously, "When I was Avatar Krishna, I performed the marriage of Subhadra [the historical figure for whom Subhadra Bundellu was named]. And now in this Avataric advent also I will perform Subhadra's marriage."

Becoming part of Beloved Baba's family in this way was not merely symbolic. Baba gave Subhadra everything she needed - food, clothing, medicine and education. She became His in both inner and outer ways.

The Scent of Roses

Arun Kant Rai came to know about Beloved Baba from Amiya on the same initial visit as Irshad Ahmad Khan. He is married, has children, and he and his wife come from time to time to Meherabad.



This incident happened in 1983. I was in Balaghat in that time, studying in the Polytechnic. There was no dormitory there for us students, so we had to rent a house. I took the house with a few other students. C. L. Vyas was one. Vyas had a job at the same time as he was studying. He was married and his wife was with him.

In our college there was a garden full of roses. One day, his wife said to me that I had never offered her a rose, though my college had a rose garden. I told her that I would bring one certainly. Thereafter I plucked a beautiful rose from the garden and I returned home with it. I called her to take the rose. She was taking her bath in the bathroom at that time. She said, "Keep it somewhere and I'll get it from you later on." So I took the rose, went upstairs to my room and I started thinking what I should do with the rose.

I had Baba's picture on the table, and I filled a glass with water and put the rose in it, and put it before Baba's picture. Then I got involved in my daily activities and went off to college. I had forgotten that I had brought the rose. On the third day after this incident, my friend's wife suddenly remembered about the rose that I was supposed to give her, and she asked me about it. She said, "Where is the rose you brought for me? You never showed it to me." I told her that I had kept it in front of Baba's picture. She said, "Come on, bring it and show it to me." She saw it, and she was satisfied, and told me to keep it before Baba's picture as an offering. The rose looked as fresh as if it had been plucked just that moment.

Soon after that, Mr. Vyas came to his room in the ground floor and exclaimed, "Why is there such a fragrance of roses here when there is clearly no rose present?" Then I also came down and smelled the powerful fragrance of roses in that room. Mrs. Vyas also experienced the same fragrance. It was quite intense, as if there were dozens of roses there. We felt as if there were baskets of roses in that room. Then we went from one room to the next. There were three rooms on the ground floor, and two rooms upstairs, and all the rooms were full of the fragrance of roses. We three were experiencing it everywhere. I told Mr. Vyas that I had brought one rose, and I had shown it to Mrs. Vyas and then placed it before Baba. There were no other roses anywhere. I plucked the rose from the glass. We all smelled the rose to check if it could give out such a tremendous fragrance. But its fragrance was very weak. And suddenly, the fragrance of roses was gone.

I was very much surprised at this event, and when I went to Jabalpur, I asked Mr. Hazra what could have happened. He replied that once he asked Baba, "If you are not physically present some-

where, how shall we ascertain that You are there?" to which Baba replied, "You will get the fragrance of roses in that place, and that would mean that I am there." I believe that Baba must have come to that house. It was a common sense thing - one rose could not have produced enough scent to fill an entire building. It must have been because I didn't offer the rose to the lady, but first to Baba, and Baba returned the fragrance of many hundreds of roses as a token of Grace.



Rama Pankhraj, originally from Nagpur, later the secretary of the Jabalpur Baba group. He traveled with Amiya and Rajanikant to outstations with the singing and speaking party that used to spread Beloved Baba's name and message.

A Remarkable Escape

We have met Arun Kant Rai in the previous story. Here he narrates the curious incident that took place following a Baba meeting - the first meeting of his parents with Baba lovers. This meeting seems to have been doubly fortunate, since his father did become a Baba lover.

On 15th August, 1984, a Baba programme was being celebrated at Niket Kale's residence. I was to go and attend the programme along with my parents who were going for the first time. The programme ended at the time scheduled, and I had to leave at once for Balaghat. The train was about to arrive. I was in a hurry, and I had to leave at once. But my father had met Professor Hazra for the first time, and he was having an animated conversation with the Professor. This discussion continued for quite a while. I told my mother that I had to hurry back and catch the train, so I asked her please to convince my father to wind up the discussion. My mother said, "Since they are talking about Baba, let us not disturb them. You postpone your trip to Balaghat and take the train tomorrow." I was a little disturbed at this suggestion, but because it was a matter concerning Baba, I agreed. The next day, I came to know that the train by which I was to have gone had fallen from a railway bridge into a river at 3 a.m., drowning several hundred people. One of the cars of the train, in which I had obtained a reserved seat along with my friends, had also fallen into the river, killing my friends. I did not know

how to swim, and I would surely have died. I still believe that it was Baba's compassion that saved me.

My message to those who have newly come to Baba and have missed seeing Him is that they should not worry at all. They can contact old Baba lovers, read all the literature they can by and about Baba, please Him by following His instructions for mankind, try to visit Baba places like the tomb shrine as often as practicable, and above all clarify their concepts about spirituality. Then they will find the smooth road to life. Believe with full confidence that Baba is there to guide them to the right path and ultimately to the Goal.

Complex Web Weaved at Khajuraho

Amiya tells what happened to his friends Madan Prasad Sinha ("MPS") and Genda Lal Varma ("GLV") on a trip they took with him to the famous temples at Khajuraho. The time was summer of 1957, CLV was already a prominent artist, and MPS was GLV's student. MPS's skills in drawing were rudimentary and CLV wondered if MPS would ever amount to much. By this time, Amiya was passionately seeking Baba's darshan and was actively telling everyone he knew about Baba's status as Highest of the High. CLV believed in Goddesses Durga and Saraswati with great devotion and often undertook fasts, but was entirely unsure that Baba was who Amiya felt He was. We join the story in progress at Khajuraho, Amiya speaking:

I was interested in convincing GLV about Baba, but he made a condition. He said, "Well, if your Baba is all you say He should be able to cause an unusual event to happen ,just now, in our presence. So I prayed to Baba that he should join in the fun.

One of the temples we were then visiting was built on top of a mound of earth that itself was elevated above the ground level. MPS, GLV and I were standing on the mound of earth staring at the statues, and MPS was entranced. Attempting to gain a better perspective, MPS walked backward, staring at the statues. Completely unconscious that he was nearing the edge of the mound, he took one too many steps backwards. Before we could alert him to stop, he fell backwards off the mound, and landed on his back on the ground level, a distance of ten or twelve feet.

I was horrified. I realized that if he had landed on a rock it might have broken his spine, and at the very least we might

have to carry him home because he would have a concussion or some such thing. So my surprise was great when he got up unaided, dusted himself off and displayed a small scratch that was the sum total of the damage.

I looked at GLV, who looked back and said, "Perhaps I should go see Baba with you the next time you go."

But that was not the whole story. MPS reports:

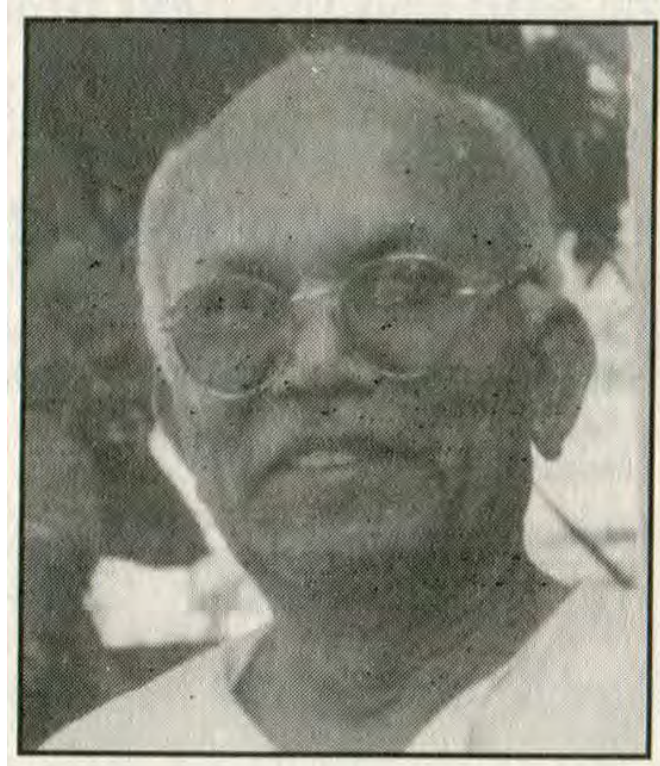
"I developed fever in the night because of the trauma. In a dream I had while in that feverish state, I saw myself, but very, very old. People were walking beside me carrying umbrellas. Some people were fanning me and some people were doing art work – sculpting - and I was guiding them. To one person I remember saying, 'This statue has gone wrong, put it away.' To another I said, 'Make a fresh start.'

"At just about 5 a.m., I awoke from this dream. I was perspiring and the fever had gone. The dream had helped me to understand the proportions and anatomy of a statue, and suddenly there occurred a marked improvement in my drawings, even surprising Varma himself, who inquired if it really was my work. Looking at me, he exclaimed, 'Up to yesterday you were sketching and you were one Madan. Today you are another Madan. What is this?'"

This instant transformation in MPS' artistic skills turned out to be the thoroughly unusual event that I had hoped Beloved Baba would create for us. GLV did go for Baba's darshan at the 1958 Sahavas, did become a Baba lover and gained additional artistic skills through Baba's touch, but that story is already told in *Memoirs of a Zetetic*.

MPS and His Mother Go for Darshan

Madan is known as MPS in Memoirs of a Zetetic. He is an instructor in sculpture, an active sculptor in his own right, and sculpts Beloved Baba to this day in Bhalaghat, the town in Madhya Pradesh in which he has lived since 1958.



Madan Prasad Sinha in Bhalaghat

The first time I went for darshan was in 1959. I had heard about Meher Baba from a circle of friends, and I had been put on Adi K. Irani's list of people in contact with Beloved Baba.

At this time, I had been called to Bombay to demonstrate my craft, sculpture, at a government emporium, a demonstration for which I was getting paid. I was busy with this work, when I received a card inviting me to attend Baba's darshan. I decided to go, and shortly thereafter my wallet was stolen from me. All the money I had earned in the demonstration was taken, but the thief threw the wallet aside and I recovered it. He didn't realize that I had concealed 75 rupees in a hidden pocket of the wallet.

Train



*Madan Prasad Sinha and his wife at their beautiful home
in Bhalaghat taken in 2003.*

fare to Poona was only Rs. 5/ in those days, so I had enough money in spite of the theft to attend the darshan. I left Bombay on my day off, a Sunday, and planned to return that very evening.

When I arrived at the gates of Guruprasad, there was an immensely long queue for darshan. I despaired, because I might have to choose between either darshan or catching a train back to Bombay that night. I began praying, "Baba you are God and you should arrange for me, because I have to go back to Bombay tonight, and there will be no opportunity for me."

Just then, a volunteer came, shouting, "Who in this queue is from MP [Madhya Pradesh] or far away?" I said that I was

from Jabalpur, and he said, "Why are you standing in this queue? This is the queue for local people. For persons who have come from far away, there is another queue that is much shorter."

So by Baba's grace, I had the opportunity to bow down to Him. When I reached His chair, I began to reach down to touch His feet, but he raised me up and hugged me to His heart and kissed me. In His way, I felt He was saying, "Your place is up here." I got a very nice prasad of toffees and chocolates, and a cold drink from the volunteers.

I went again in 1961 and stayed for three days. That time, I was permitted to enter the Guruprasad gates after the darshan period of 10 a.m. till noon. One day when I arrived I joined the game of Larisque. There were about 20 players and, of course, Baba Himself playing. I drew a pair of aces, and someone looking over my shoulder at my cards said, "Baba he has got a very good hand." Baba called me, exchanged His cards with me, and the game proceeded. To this day, I have no idea how to play the game.

In 1962, I was again in Bhalaghat, and I had no commissions. "Why sit here in Bhalaghat by myself when I could take an interesting trip," I thought. With no idea where I would go, I packed my tools, a little statue I was working on, and my bed roll. I went to the railway station at the time of the Bombay mail train, still with no idea. When I got there, it was a mess. They had stopped selling tickets at that time, because there were so many people waiting on the platform for the train. I bought a ticket that allowed me to enter the platform, just because I wanted to see the excitement.

As the train pulled into the station, I happened to be standing near the train itself, and just opposite me a man threw his luggage out of the window of the train and followed it out. Again with no idea, I threw my luggage into the train through the same window and got into the same car. Today you couldn't do it, because they have put bars on the windows, but in that time you could. People grudgingly made room for me in the car. I thought that I would decide where to go when the ticket collector came through, but he never came.

At about 4 a.m., I heard someone in the car say that we were nearing the stop for Ajanta and Ellora temples. I was interested, because these temples are sculpted out of the native rock of the place, so I got down. I spent some days in the temples, and broke pieces off the statue I was carrying to make raw materials for some models I sculpted in the manner of the sculptures in the caves.

After this I decided to go to Bombay to show these models to some people. The caves are near Aurungabad, and the bus route from Aurungabad to Bombay goes through Poona, so I decided to stop there, and have a wistful look at Guruprasad. The bus left at midnight, and was so full that I had to stand the entire way to Poona.

When I went casually to see the Bungalow, imagine my surprise to find that Baba was giving darshan. I stayed in Poona for three days. Now that I look back on it, I realize that in a natural way Baba called me for that darshan.

After this, whenever there was an opportunity for going for Baba's darshan I used to go. But at a certain point, I felt that my relatives should also have the opportunity. I sent my

brother Dileep Singh, and thereafter my mother. I wanted that they should also share the same pleasure that I was having. Then I sent my own servant for Baba's darshan. I married later, or I would have brought my wife as well.

At the time when I urged my mother to go for Baba's darshan she had been suffering from acute cough and awful phlegm. It was so bad that she used to be forced to leave any gathering when a coughing episode struck so as not to disrupt it, but she told me that she would go for darshan in spite of this malady. She made lots of sweets for Baba out of cocoanut, and she had already started loving Baba. As she was going to the darshan, somebody stole all the sweets and she became very depressed, and thought that her idea of taking the sweets could no longer be fulfilled, but anyhow she went there and stood in the line for darshan.

When she came up to Baba in her turn, Baba said to her, "You see, I am very hungry. Where are my sweets? Have you brought something for me?" Then Baba looked at her and said, "You do have my prasad - something for me." Through Eruch, Baba said, "You have brought what you were supposed to offer to me. You did bring it."

Then she was reminded of one thing, that she used to keep a small icon of Lord Vishnu with her and used to worship that icon daily at home, and used to keep a small box containing molasses and basil leaves that she would offer to Lord Vishnu every day. She had the box with her, and she gave it to Baba. Baba took it and put it in His mouth and I then returned the rest of the sweet to her, telling her to distribute the rest of it to all.

She explained to me, "I was always offering this molasses to God with basil leaves. It was unnecessary to make the coconut sweets. Baba asked for it and I was so happy to give it to the living God." While at Guruprasad for the programme, which lasted for five days, she sat near the door, so that she could make an unobtrusive exit if she felt the need to cough, but to her surprise she found that she didn't need to cough for the entire duration of the darshan - those five days.

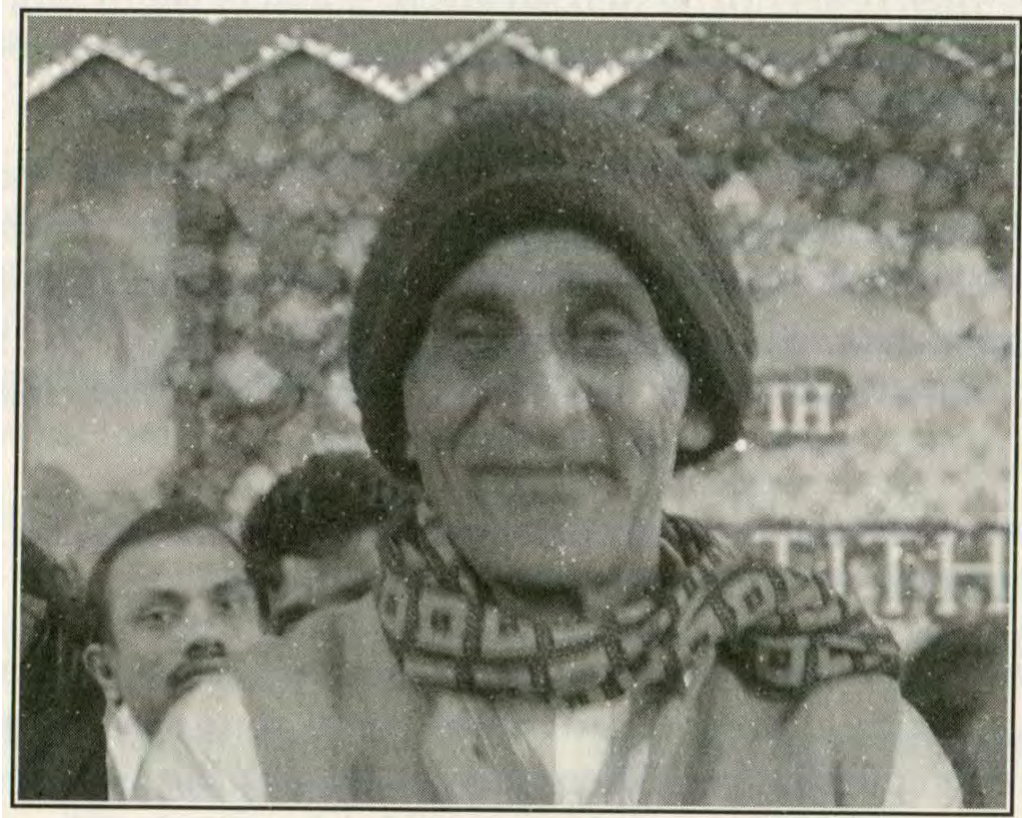
She used to just look at Baba all the while when she was in the room. Then she told me that whenever she saw Baba she saw a great light behind Him, and she used to feel that there was some great source of light close by Baba. She said that only those could have that darshan who participated in regular worship.

After returning to Jabalpur, she said to her son that he had helped her to go on the greatest pilgrimage.

I didn't have the financial capacity to send her on different pilgrimages, though it is desirable for a son to support his parents' pilgrimages. Thereafter, as long as she lived, every moment, every day she always said that her life had become absolutely fulfilled - "I have seen God." Whenever she went for meditation, Baba would appear before her.

Travelling with God

Gita Ram is a familiar figure today at the Samadhi of Meher Baba. Because he has only a few words of English, few have heard his story, and equally few may connect the name with the familiar face. However, his story deserves this circulation, as you will see.



Gita Ram Tiwari

I come from the village of Teigiya (means three villages in one) in Uttar Pradesh. My father, mother and grandparents were all great devotees of Ram.

In 1952, Matti Dutt Shastri, an eminent Baba lover, had told me that Meher Baba was God and He was going to give His darshan in Nauranga. He told me that I should go to

see Him. At that time I didn't believe that Baba could be God. Coincidentally, the Kumbha Mela was being held at Allahabad, and all the members of my family left for the Mela. I was left alone to protect the house, and didn't see Baba at that time.

In 1954 or 1955 Baba sent Bhau Kalchuri to Hamirpur with His wish that the jap, "Satchitanand, Paramanand, Meher Baba Vidyanand" should be performed all over Hamirpur. At the behest of Matti Dutt Shastri and Pukarji, I also arranged this jap and acted as the person in charge. In 1958, my last family member, my father, died; that compelled me to think that since all the family members have gone from this world, what was I to do? The conclusion was that I should now devote myself to God and not waste my life, which might end at any moment. I thought I must go out in search of God.

I remembered that Matti Dutt and Pukarji were constantly telling me that Meher Baba was God, while according to the Ramayana Ram was God, and he had been to Chitrakut and people said that His presence could be felt even now. As Baba was in Poona, going to Him meant an expense of Rs.100 while going to Chitrakut meant only the expenditure of Rs. 25, so I decided to go to Chitrakut. In the back of my mind was the idea that if I did not find Ram in Chitrakut, I might burn the entire Ramayana of Tulsidas to ashes.

In Chitrakut, I went from temple to temple, pilgrim place to place and I was thoroughly tired by 11 p.m. I returned to my lodgings. Some people were going to recite the Ramayana there. I joined them. As I began chorusing in the Ramayana

gathering, I saw Meher Baba appear before me. He was wearing a yellow dress, His hair flowing down upon His shoulders; if you have seen Dr. C. D. Deshmukh's photograph of Meher Baba you know how Baba looked when He appeared to me. Baba said to me, "You have come in search of God to this place, but I am at present in Poona. Therefore you should try to see me there." This was not a dream or a vision; it was a reality. "You will not see anything here except the trees and the shrubs. Therefore, if you have really come in search of God, go back to Hamirpur and meet Keshav Narayan Nigam."

I could not sleep for the rest of the night; I decided that even if He is not God, He is somebody special. When I was going back to Hamirpur to do as he bid, we had hired a tonga and already we were eight persons in it. A very beautiful person came and requested us to take him along with us. Other passengers objected, as the tonga was already overcrowded, but I thought he could be accommodated and I squeezed myself and offered him half of my seat. No sooner did the tonga start, than a strange experience came to me in which I felt he was Meher Baba himself accompanying me on my way back. This mysterious passenger accompanied me and we eventually reached the Betwa River.

Unfortunately, the river was running very high because of recent rains, and the District Magistrate had banned any navigation of the river during this state. This beautiful passenger had to stay somewhere. I also, but to get a small accommodation would cost 25 paisa. This passenger came to me and said, "Why not share, so that I can also get some rest?" I agreed, and he paid his share of money. Morning came and we both went for easing ourselves to the banks of

the Betwa. I sat down and he also sat down some 50 feet away from me. But after easing myself when I got up I didn't find him anywhere. He simply seemed to have disappeared into thin air. I searched for him everywhere, but he wasn't anywhere. Then I almost felt convinced that it was Meher Baba accompanying me to Keshav Narayan Nigam.

I now went to Hamirpur, but I had no idea of the location of Keshav Narayan Nigam. In the crowd of persons I encountered in Hamirpur, there was one small boy who had a bag full of vegetables, and he seemed to be going home. I don't know why I chose him to speak to, but I asked if he knew where Keshav Narayan Nigam resided.

To my surprise he replied, "Not only I know him, but I am staying with him. He is my uncle. And there is another gentleman there, in some sort of seclusion for three hours." I asked the name of the gentleman, and the boy responded that his name was Mattri Dutt Shastri of Teigiya. As I hailed from the same village, and I knew one Mattri Dutt Shastri, I was eager to meet him. The boy agreed. When we reached the house, the boy arranged a place for me to sit, explaining that he would emerge from his seclusion presently. On my prompting, the boy explained that Shastri was under orders from Meher Baba to do some spiritual practice daily for three hours in a secluded place.

I sat for the entire period anxiously waiting to see the man. When he saw me he shouted with joy, "Oh Gita Ram, how wonderful of you to have come here. I was wishing this to happen and praying to Baba for your coming here, and now you are here." I learned to my surprise that Shastri was my mother's sister's husband. When Shastri was telling me

about Baba, an evil thought came to my mind, which I must disclose here. I thought, "If Meher Baba is found to be God, that is well and good, but if He turns out to be an imposter then also there would be no harm in becoming His follower because He has numerous rich disciples." I concluded that it wouldn't be so bad to become a Baba lover either way.

Then we walked to Keshav Narayan's place. He came out and embraced me so lovingly that I found myself dissolving in tears. Such a profound love I had never experienced and my mind, with many tongues, shouted out, "Meher Baba must be Ram, when His devotees have such love." I began to ask Baba his forgiveness for my meanness. Then I asked Keshav Narayan Nigam for a photograph of Meher Baba for me to treasure at home. He told me that he had no photographs with him. I was very much disappointed to hear this. Then he remembered that there was a Baba lover who had recently obtained three photographs of Meher Baba and was preparing to get them framed. He instructed his attendant to go to that Baba lover's residence and fetch all three photographs so that I could choose one of them. When I saw the three photographs, I found them so charming that for more than thirty minutes I was simply looking at them, unable to make a choice. Then Keshav Narayan Nigam asked me to make a choice, and I had to tell him in all honesty that they all appeared so dear to me that I could not make a choice and I only wished that he would give me all three photographs. I was so crazy at that moment that Keshav Narayan Nigam was visibly moved to see my condition and with a half-choked voice he said, "Take them, take them all with you."

Thereafter, I took some literature from him and bought a subscription to Meher Pukar, his monthly magazine. After calculating the price, Keshav Narayan Nigam returned me 4 annas. I didn't want to take this money back, but I had never seen a man so strict with his accounts. He refused to take that money. Then I requested him as an alternative proposal that he give me some other literature worth 4 annas. Hearing this, he relented and gave me a bundle of messages of Meher Baba and told me to distribute them among the people who lived in my neighborhood in my village.

The Universal Message given by Baba was also to be distributed and Keshav Babu had made teams of seven persons each to do this work throughout the district. Now I too was included in one of these teams called the "Mandals." Keshav Narayan Nigam sent a report to Baba about the activities of spreading His message and Baba instructed him to send his men twice every week for this work. But I, instead of going twice every week, went only once every week for distributing the leaflets. I was also supposed to send written reports to Keshav Narayan Nigam twice every week. Finding that I was sending only one report every week, Keshav Babu became very annoyed with me. He sent me a message severely chiding me for this lapse in obedience. I got a letter written to him explaining that I was illiterate and could only send him a message when some literate person would kindly write it out for me. The reply that Keshav Babu gave me was quite amusing. He wrote to tell me that whatever letters I could form in my report I should make them and he would understand what I meant!

One day it so happened that there was a gathering of Baba lovers at Keshav Babu's residence and my letter full of non-sense marks reached him. He took the letter in his hand, showed it to all present, and said, "Whosoever deciphers what is written in this letter will be rewarded by me with five rupees." In those days, five rupees was quite a sum. With Rs. 20 we could go as far as from Jhansi to Poona. The whole village of Teigiya became a strong fort of Baba lovers and they all started saying, "Jai Baba."

There was a man called Bhagwan Das who was a Baba lover, and he sent a request to Baba that he wanted to celebrate Ramnavami [Ram's birthday] as Baba's birthday. Baba was pleased and He gave His permission. The news spread all over the district. I was also to participate in that rather novel function. In order to reach the village of Bhagwan Das, one had to go to Rath, which was the junction place for six or seven routes. But when we reached that place, a dismal spectacle greeted us. Hundreds of high and middle caste people were standing at the junction point stopping every traveler and asking him where he was going. These people held back anyone who said that he was going to attend the celebration at Bhagwan Das' place.

They said, "No. You cannot go there. He is Bhangi by caste, a person who cleans toilets and sweeps conservancy roads. How can you ever think of going to such a person's house?"

They succeeded in making most of the persons go back. It was my turn to be held up by these persons and they scorned me for going to a Bhangi's place who would be keeping pigs with him. Since I was of the Brahmin caste, they did not dare

to oppose me, and I forced my way ahead, saying, "I am not going to a Bhangi or a Brahmin's place. I am only going to a place where Meher Baba's birthday is being celebrated." They abused me, calling me saleh [social curse with sexual overtones] and also said your father was a fool to have given you the name of Gita, the holy book. You, saleh, have become a cougita [cou means bad]. I shouted, "I am glad that I have come out of this cougita business" and went ahead. There, at Bhagwan Das' place, a message had arrived from Baba in which He said, "My special love-blessing to all those who have gathered in My love to attend this function." Out of the several hundred people who lived in that area, we were only forty persons attending.

When I returned home from the celebration, I found an infuriated mob surrounding my residence, including my own relatives. They shouted, "He has been to a Bhangi's place. We'll not touch him from now on, nor will we eat in his home any more." This was in 1960. Even my grandfather condemned me. As a punishment, they told everyone to non-cooperate with me. The washerman wouldn't come, the barber wouldn't come, the agricultural laborer wouldn't come, and the shopkeepers would drive me away. The whole village stood against me. Then I became, in my turn, hostile. My body was strong enough, those days, and I started beating people right and left, specially the laborer who was refusing to work in my fields. Finding that they would not be able to tackle me, these persons lodged a report against me at the police station. The inspector came with his troupe of constables to my home.

Meanwhile a wonderful thing happened. I had requested Baba to give me two foundation stones for a centre for my

village. Baba stood on one and sanctified it, while He touched the other one to His forehead. Baba told me to put one in the foundation and put the one to which He had touched His forehead for people to take darshan of it. Ultimately, I made a throne, and I put the stone touched to Baba's forehead on the throne. I was getting the centre plastered.

At that time the inspector was very pleased with my enemies because they had helped him to recover some goods that were being smuggled to Madhya Pradesh, and as he got some money out of that deal, he decided to back my opponents, and now he was arriving with his force.

When the inspector came, he asked, "What are you all doing here? Are you raising a school?" looking at the plastering.

"This is not a school sir, this is going to be a Meher Baba center," I replied.

"Who is making it?" he asked.

The villagers said, "No one else but this same villain - Gita Ram."

The police officer replied, "If he is doing this and he is a man of Meher Baba, he cannot do whatever they have said about him. All your reports (addressing the crowd of 150 people who were accompanying the police) must be false. He must be a good person." Now the tables were turned against these persons.

Later, the police officer requested darshan of Meher Baba's photo. Those antagonistic villagers didn't have even one between them. I was the only person who had one.

One of my cousins came. He said, "The police officer wants to have the darshan of Meher Baba's photo so please give me one of the pictures."

I said, "Take one to him."

The villagers also took the darshan of the picture. The police officer now called me and said, "Is there any message from Meher Baba?" There was a message I had memorized, because I could not read it. I delivered the message verbatim.

The police officer said that there were many complaints against me from the villagers, that I was bullying them. In utter modesty I said, "Sir, look at my body and look at the body of those guys. Do you think I can bully them, or do you think they can bully me?"

The officer was convinced and said to me, "Mr. Tiwari, if they trouble you again, I'll send them to jail and we'll see that they don't even get water to drink." Thus ended that affair by Baba's Grace.

In 1959 I had the opportunity to go to Ahmednagar on the eve of the inauguration ceremony of the Ahmednagar Avatar Meher Baba Centre. So when I reached Nagar, I found an enormous mass of people filling everywhere. Baba came, but since I was a small-statured person I could have only a fleeting glimpse. However, Baba knew how eager to see Him everyone was, so He said, "I know all of you are not able to see Me, because you are far behind. But never think that I am not with you. I am seeing everyone wherever he or she may be." Thereafter Baba left, and I

had to remain satisfied with only a glimpse from Baba. This was my first darshan of Meher Baba.

We arranged for a very big mela in Hamirpur and Baba was very happy to know about it. Many persons were to come from different parts of the country to participate in that mela. But to our dismay, we saw black clouds arriving from all directions, blackening the entire sky. It was a threat from Nature's side to us, and the great stalwarts like Pukarji, Keshav Narayan Nigam and Sripat Sahai felt that if it would start raining the entire mela would be ruined. The mela was over on the 28th, but the participants were to depart on the morning of the 29th.

So, in our anxiety, a communication was sent to Baba about the threat from the sky in the shape of rain, requesting no rain through the 28th. Surprisingly, Baba sent a message telling us not to worry, and a special instruction to Pukar in which he said that whenever the clouds would start even drizzling or coming closer, Pukar should take Baba's name loudly and tell the clouds that they should not harass Meher Baba lovers and get away from this place. It was a strange duty that Pukar had to perform, and every time the clouds came closer Pukar had to perform this strange duty.

To our surprise we found that every time Pukar was summoned to drive away the clouds and he shouted out to them, they really drifted away. Hundreds of pilgrims were coming with their luggage and it was so necessary that they should be in comfort and their belongings undamaged by the rains. He used to shout, "O Clouds. This is a Meher Baba gathering, and for His sake go away!" And to our sur-

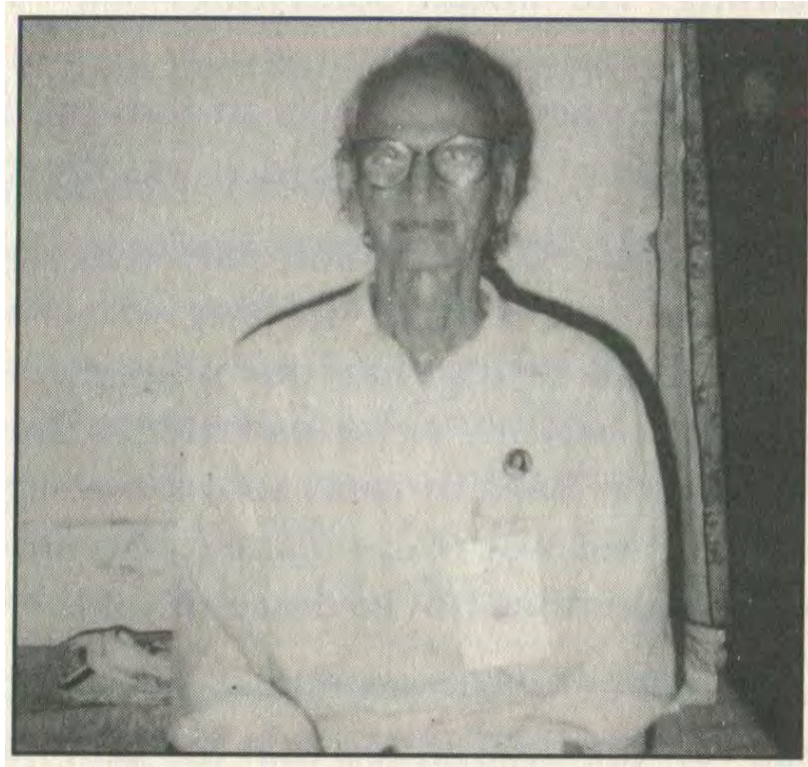
prise and amusement we saw that the clouds did go away without raining. He would sometimes say, "This is the order from Meher Baba, that you should go away." It never rained for all the days of the mela in that particular area right up to last day of the mela, which was the 28th.

At 12 midnight of the 28th, rainfall started in right earnest, and it was now incessantly raining. So they sent a telegramme to Baba saying that lots of luggage of lovers is lying in the pandal waiting to be loaded into the buses, and it is heavily raining. Baba in reply sent a message in which He said that He was not to be blamed, because they had only prayed for the rains not to descend on the mela up to the 28th.

When Pukar saw the devastation that the rain was wrecking upon the mela area, involving the luggage and participants, he again came out and with a very loud voice started shouting at the clouds, "Don't rain here - get away," but the clouds did not listen to him at all, and with great vigour it rained like elephants from the sky. Pukar felt very helpless and knew that it was Baba who had really driven the clouds away to make the mela successful, and not his shouting.

Such is the divine game of Avatar Meher Baba. Avatar Meher Baba Ki Jai!

God Visits a Child



*Shaligram Sharma, a frequent visitor to
Meherabad, and recently to the West*

I was born in 1928 in the village of Magarpur, District Jhansi, UP, India. I was the third of four sons. My parents were simple, generous and religious by nature.

From my infancy I was not contented and used to look at the sky and horizon for something, someone unseen, feeling lonely; I developed a reserved nature. Loneliness was further aggravated when my mother, the only person who loved me, died when I was hardly six years old. Other family members were absorbed in their own personal affairs. In short, I unknowingly felt discontented with the present and longed for something lasting

One day while I was standing in my primary school and looking at the sky in a thoughtful mood, Sri. L. R. Bajpai, a Social leader and spiritualist who regarded Swami Ramtirtha and Vivekananda as his ideals, arrived. He saw me looking at the sky attentively and observed a great resemblance in my look and way of standing to a famous photo of Swami Ramtirtha. He requested the name of my father from the headmaster and called him. In the presence of the headmaster and teachers, he requested my father to give me to him for a greater cause as he had seen a glimpse of Swami Ramtirtha in me. This did not remove me from my present circumstances, and was more principle than practice.

My father felt honored to hear it and gave his consent. Without any transfer of property or status I began to lose my family affiliation.

The school headmaster had regards for my father. He asked him to let me live with his children and study. My father agreed, which further separated me from the family of my birth. For my part, I felt as though the whole nation should be my family, as it had been Gandhiji's. Sri L. R. Bajpai also had no family, having not married. His intentions were to spend his time in selfless service while devoting himself to yogic practices. It was this aspect of his life that cultivated respect for him in my heart.

After passing the basic classes up to fourth standard I got my admission in fifth standard in middle school at Barwasagar. There I had to pay school and boarding house fees, cooking charges, etc. My family refused to help me pay these fees. Luckily I got a scholarship.

I was so anxious to learn the spiritual way of life from Sri L. R. Bajpai that I used to go during holidays to his village, Binwara, or his farm at Devantpura. He in turn used to observe and magnify my faults; he complained that I didn't sweep properly, failed to think of others, failed to clean the lantern glass, rested during the daytime, and he used to ridicule, chastise and even abuse me for these faults. He wanted me to remain alert, dutiful and serve others with food, etc., and used to treat me so roughly if I failed. But I was happy to swallow his tough treatment probably with an inner faith in the God-ordained plan to reshape my mentality in a spiritual mode of tolerance, service and disintegration of my ego-self.

Two special visits to him were significant. On my first visit after coming into his contact, I went from the boarding house of Barwasagar with a friend to Bajpai's farm, about ten miles away, hoping to meet him and hear something spiritual from him. But he was not there. On a corner of the property there was a well and a tree and a canvas bag. Both of us could barely pass the cold winter night with the help of the canvas bag and returned back in the morning to attend our classes. My next visit, after some time to this farm was by myself. This time I went there on foot during the daytime, with the same anxiety to learn the aim of life and other spiritual topics from Sri Bajpai. I felt that I really had been assigned to Sri Bajpai the day my father gave me to him, and I had taken it quite seriously, feeling that I had crossed from one phase of life into another for my onward journey.

In this second visit Bajpai also was not there. It was daytime so I went to the nearby huts of the cultivators. Those were the days when Brahmins were not expected to consume

the cooked food of other castes. So they provided me uncooked flour and dal. I cooked a coarse meal with my bare hands. After taking the food by noon, I went ahead to Bajpai's village, about six miles further. Mr. Bajpai with two companions was just getting ready to return to the farm, so I walked back the way I had come.

But dinner that night was a different story. Mr. Bajpai asked me to eat food cooked by the cultivators. I hesitated but could not refuse, and at the very hut where, at lunchtime I had cooked following the Brahmin tradition, that night I took dinner cooked by an untouchable hut owner. It marked the day of dissolution of racial discrimination in my daily life. Sri Bajpai unknowingly taught me discipline that helped me in eradicating my ego and practicing forbearance. Thus some unseen power was changing my life from day to day, in other ways as well.

After a year of study at Barwasagar middle school when I passed class five, the feeling of renunciation nourished from my very childhood grew stronger. Lack of love and lack of a mother probably both fostered this feeling. Day by day, I was growing more anxious to renounce ordinary existence and go to the Himalayas in search of God - the source of Love itself. I lacked either the means or the knowledge of the route to go on the great journey. Still I resolved to do it at the cost of my life. I revealed my determination to a friend who opted to join me in this venture on June 28, 1940. Not too far into the journey, we experienced an improbable chance meeting with a member of my friend's family. This forced him to abandon the trip, with my blessings. I, with all my belongings, (a hand-made edition of Gita, Ramayana, a rosary, a coarse meal of "Sattu" made with gram, purchased

from the village shop and a few coins and above all with the company of the invisible and unknown one), commenced my journey for the Himalayas without a ticket.

In the long bogie [railway car] of primitive order, I was sitting on the extreme end of one of the two middle berths. When the train arrived at Gwalior station, a blind saint with long hair, a shining face and white dress entered the bogie, came to its end and sat facing me.

He inquired, "Boy, where are you going?"

I rejoined, "Father, my heart finds no solace in the world, hence I am going to the Himalayas in search of God, renouncing the world."

The saint said, "What will you gain there? There is even more immorality in the places of pilgrimage. If you go there at this tender age, you may be cheated, misguided and subjected to beggary."

In the course of the journey from Gwalior to Agra he convinced me of the futility of seeking an abode for peace at the religious places and assured me that since God is so overwhelmingly present in my heart, He would one day meet me in my family life itself. Ultimately, he persuaded me to get down at Agra for a return journey to my home.

Passing the night on the Agra railway station platform, I started the journey for Jhansi early the next morning, traveling on the Pathankot Express. From Jhansi I walked a distance of about 20 miles to my native village Magarpur on foot, following a railway track through thick forest, hills and crossing over [dangerous] railway bridges. A boy of twelve years of age could hardly do so without His will. For

me, it was almost a miracle to accede to the persuasion of the saint and renounce the very object of renunciation itself and return to my home. Who was this saint, where had he come from and where did he go?

I knew 100%, when I saw Beloved Baba for the first time; there was a very strong resemblance between Meher Baba and that saint. Ordinarily saints advise you to go on pilgrimage, but here was this saint advising me not to go, and convincing me in short order. I very much think that it was Baba who, upon the death of my mother, had taken over supporting me.

Surrendering to Beloved Baba

The preceding story described Shaligram Sharma's childhood aspirations to find God. This story picks up where the earlier one left off, with Shaligram in school.

A very poor child from a very poor family, I studied and worked exceedingly hard, with the result that, Baba's grace being much apparent in hindsight, I passed through all my schooling and obtained a degree in Law in 1954. Again with His grace, I obtained a job in the office of the assistant public prosecutor in Allahabad, and married a pious woman indifferent to all worldly comforts, decorations and pleasures. Indeed, she only longed for God realization, and to such an extent that she seemed indifferent to me and such a feeling created an added pressure on me to renounce everything and seek union with God.

While my wife was visiting her parents, the urge came upon me from within to put my life itself at stake for a radical change - to find God. I began a prolonged fast on April 10, 1960, living on fruit only. I sought self-purification for God realization through this fast. While performing my duties as a public prosecutor, I devoted most of my time to the scriptures and lived in virtual isolation, gradually withdrawing from social interaction. It seemed that God sanctioned my actions, since after a couple of months I was transferred to Hamirpur, a place where solitude was prevalent and of course a place ordained for lovers of Meher Baba.

During my stay at Hamirpur, I tried to keep it a secret that I was fasting. However, my officer, on seeing my calm and lonely nature grew curious to peep more deeply into my solitary life. He invited me for a walk on the bank of the Jamuna River. One evening we went down to the river near an inspection house at which Meher Baba had stayed during His two earlier visits to Hamirpur. Although I did not know it at the time, I nevertheless felt the peaceful atmosphere. Mr. Sharma was interested to hear my views on spiritual matters and the goal of life.

On another such evening my senior enumerated the various officers posted in the district, informing me about each one. When he came to one he said, "His wife is very much devoted to Meher Baba." The moment I heard the name of Meher Baba, a beautiful smiling divine person wearing a white sadra and pink colored coat, sitting on a sofa, appeared in my vision. But since I had neither heard His name nor seen any of His pictures, I could not make much of it, although the sensation accompanying the vision was thrilling.

A few days later I chanced to visit Munshi Barelal, the then-manager of Narayan Press (eventually to be Meher Pukar Press). He told me that the press printed Hindi language literature on Meher Baba.

I inquired, "Who is Meher Baba?"

He said, "Meher Baba is the incarnation of God in this Age." This made me very anxious to know about Meher Baba. I requested some literature about Him. He gave me the *Universal Message*, *Meher Baba's Call* and *The Highest of the High* to read.

Meher Baba's authoritative disclosure and claim to be the same Ancient One reincarnated again, inviting all to come unto him to attain Godhood, the goal of life, created immediate acceptance in me, along with an intense desire to know all about Him. Therefore I sought others who might tell me more about Meher Baba.

My first interview was with Parmeshwari Dayal Nigam ("Pukar"). Our meeting lasted past midnight. Pukar narrated some details of Meher Baba's life to feed my inquisitive mind about Meher Baba's divinity, and also described the life of Pleader, a disciple of Meher Baba. Pleader's life had been led under Baba's instructions to undergo extreme austerities of fasts, seclusions and prolonged silence. During the last phase of his life, Pleader had undergone extreme suffering, and the final scene, in which Pleader sees a glimpse of Meher Baba's universal body, and praises Meher Baba while breathing his last at Meherabad thrilled me [see *Lord Meher*, American Edition pages 5688 ff and the account in this volume]. The dedication and obedience of Pleader and the divine way Baba gave his promised glimpse at the last to Pleader created a deep impact of Baba in my heart.

I immediately read everything I could, without stopping. Reading *God Speaks*, in eight days while fasting convinced me of His Avatarhood. It gave me the conviction that my search for the path and the goal of life was over. This gave me a new life in which all desires and longings contracted into the solitary longing to find Meher Baba. But Baba had gone into seclusion on July 1st, 1960 and His darshan and correspondence with Him was prohibited. Nevertheless I was very restless to see Him.

Coincidentally, Pukar and others had organized Meher Melas [fairs] from 17th to 27th November 1960 on a grand scale at the various places visited by Baba during 1952 in Hamirpur district. Many prominent speakers and singers came and participated in the huge love gatherings. I felt a deep affinity with the visitors and the whole Baba family, and was drawn to attend all the functions organized at various places. Mostly these programmes were held during the evening, and I attended my official duties at Hamirpur city in daytime, attending the various programmes at the respective places in the nights. At every opportunity I would serve the lovers as a volunteer, serving food, asking if they wanted tea and seeing to their comforts. I was very much restless to see Baba, although everyone was receiving me with love. At this time I was an assistant public prosecutor, but I was so restless to see Baba that I was getting disinterested in performing my duties.

Madhusudan and others saw that I was restless for Baba's darshan. Madhusudan suggested the possibility that I might meet Baba on 4th December 1960 when He was going to hold an important meeting of some selected ones from the whole country. He explained that I should arrange to be in the vicinity of the Sarosh Cinema in Ahmednagar on the morning of the 4th. However the meeting that had been called was a secret meeting and I had no invitation. Somehow, Jal, Baba's brother, became aware of Madhusudan's subterfuge. Jal expressed his displeasure to Madhusudan that he had revealed the secret about the meeting to me, and further was greatly annoyed because I should not have been invited by Madhusudan to attend. I was shocked, and told Madhusudan not to worry

further for me. I told Madhusudan, "Please don't intervene. If it is my fate to be seen by Baba, that is fine; otherwise leave me to my fate." I also told Jal, with a heavy heart, "I realize I have no right to go and you have the right to ask me not to go." Thereafter I remained indifferent to the party, sitting quietly in one corner.

When the party was over and almost all the visitors had departed, I made ready to depart. As I passed out the door, I felt a hand on my shoulder. It was Jal's. He had been watching my gloomy mood. Again he explained that since I was not on the list of the attendees, even if I went there was a great chance that Baba would cause me to be sent back without darshan, which would perhaps make me even sadder. I said, "Brother Jal, I have accepted Baba as God. If I go a hundred times and am rejected by Him a hundred times why should I feel anything?" These words touched Jal's heart, and he fell in with the plan, agreeing to take responsibility for getting me before Baba. Thus my drooping bud was restored to bloom. But who could fathom Baba's ways? Baba canceled the meeting! Jal wrote to me that he was going to see Baba on December 25th. It was his plan to place a report on the mela and the film that he had taken of the mela before Baba at this meeting and would speak directly to Beloved Baba about me. At his request I sent my photo that he planned to show to Baba at that meeting. Jal did see Baba; here is an extract of Jal's letter to me dated December 31st, 1960:

"I had been to Meherazad recently and saw Baba for a few minutes. Even under restrictions I showed your two letters to Baba which you had sent me and the telegram. He was much pleased to hear about you. Also I produced your

photo and He looked at it lovingly. He gestured smilingly that you should not worry the least, and be happy as He knows all about you. He gestured that He will one day call you of His own accord at a proper time after the seclusion is over, shortly. So be happy about it, dear Sharma. You are really fortunate His nazar is on you."

This letter, sent to me during a time in which correspondence with Beloved Baba was suspended, overwhelmed me with Beloved Baba's love and grace and the longing to see Him grew all the more. In the meantime the compassionate Beloved sent a circular on November 25th entitled "Meher Baba's Wish" in which Baba wanted His lovers to repeat any name of God five hundred times a day from December 26th through January 15th while fasting for at least 24 hours. I repeated Baba's name during this period and fasted for four days while performing official duties and on its conclusion sent the required card to Adi K. Irani with my name and address. And thus another link was established with the Beloved prior to His darshan and during His seclusion. While in Bhopal for Meher Baba's Birthday function on 24th and 25th February 1961, it came to my mind that Pukar had said that a birthday greeting telegram could be sent to Baba even during His seclusion. I rushed to the telegraph office and sent the following telegram:

AVATAR MEHER BABA, AHMEDNAGAR

BY YOUR MERCY I SURRENDER MYSELF TO
YOU AS BIRTHDAY GREETINGS

SHALIGRAM SHARMA

At this mela (fair) and others, I delivered talks on Baba and received the love of His cosmic family. But the more the thirst was quenched, the more it was on the increase. I also feared that He might break His silence and drop His body prior to my turn to take His darshan. This kept me all the more restless. ·

Ultimately, with His compassionate response to my deep yearning for His darshan, Baba sent the order that I was to resume my normal diet, while assuring me that darshan for me would come soon.

Soon the message did come that Beloved Baba's darshan would be open for the 15th through 31st May, 1961 with the following restrictions:

1. No one should touch Baba's feet,
2. No one should offer any presents,
3. No one should pose any questions to Him,
4. No one should seek private meetings with Him, and
5. Once a person comes he should not come again and should stay for at most three days in the Poona area.

Pukar got that circular, and I was at some other place in Hamirpur. He came to me in a very joyous mood, and said, "Oh Sharma, there is very good news for you."

So I said, "Has Baba opened His darshan?"

He said, "Yes" and we embraced each other.

My joy was now beyond limits. A separate message from

Eruch was also received, inviting me to take advantage of this opportunity for Baba's darshan. I took fifteen days' leave from my job, and I wrote both to my father at my native village and to my wife at her parents' place to suggest that they attend. Of those I invited, only my father decided to attend. Since he came from my native village, we had to rendezvous, and we arranged that he would meet the train carrying the Hamirpur Baba lovers as it passed through Jhansi.

The evening before the morning when the train carrying us would pass through, my father reached the railway station platform. Immediately he had a problem: he was a very orthodox Brahmin and his practices required that he take bath, worship and then cook his own food. But he also had his possessions with him, and felt he couldn't leave them on the platform unattended while he went to the place set aside for cooking and bathing.

Apparently coincidentally, he encountered another person on the station platform who claimed to be a pilgrim on the way to Baba's darshan in Poona and offered to stand guard so that he could go to the bathroom. This all worked out perfectly, and later the same person offered to guard the luggage while my father slept. When my father awoke, the person who had so helped him was nowhere to be seen, but everything was intact. Hearing this story, we reached the conclusion that my father had already obtained Beloved Baba's darshan and His help.

The train reached Poona on 14th May, in time for the start of darshan on 15th, and on the platform we were greeted by Bhausar, one of the close lovers of Meher Baba, with the

news that Baba had called the Hamirpur group for a special Darbar [Court of the beloved] on the 14th at 4 PM. We were overjoyed. However, a huge mess developed with our accommodations and our luggage. This was sorted out with the help of K. K. Ramakrishnan of Poona, but I had great difficulties right up to the hour of darshan, and it was raining like anything, and traffic was awful, and I greatly feared that I would not be in a position to appear before the Lord at the appointed time. However, by chance Ramakrishnan and Bhausar and I managed to get a rickshaw and luckily it was still yet five minutes to four when we reached Guruprasad. In the meantime God had inquired, "Have all the persons come?" He was told that almost all the persons had arrived. Just within five minutes of my arrival, exactly at 4, we were asked to come in.

We joined Beloved Baba in a side room of Guruprasad. Baba was sitting on a chair, and a carpet was spread, so I went right up to the corner of the carpet near Baba's feet and sat before His feet. As soon as my eyes fell on him, my mind stopped. I felt extreme joy, peace and a divine, wonderful intoxication.

Baba pointed His finger towards me, so Pukar gave my introduction, "He's Sharma, Public Prosecutor at Hamirpur."

The next question from Baba was, "Has he started taking cereals [ceased fasting]?"

Pukar said, "Yes Baba, a telegram was sent to him through Adi K. Irani and we persuaded him to start taking cereals."

Baba inquired, "Why did you leave off taking the cereals?"

I had no clear memory why I did leave taking the cereals, but this much was there, that I was leading a lonely - almost a half-renounced life, but I was just hesitating as to why Baba put this question. As soon as this hesitation came to my mind, Baba immediately got up and ceased seeking the answer to the question. Baba told us all, "Now, since there are so many persons here you all come to the hall." Between our Hamirpur group, some Dehra Dun people and some foreigners who had come by then, the room was now no longer sufficient. Moreover Baba was going to hold a Darbar. Baba left the group to enter His private quarters.

Baba had been wearing a sadra for the gathering in the small room, but He put on His pink coat for the Darbar in the main room. When my eyes fell upon him in the large room, His face was very much glorious, loving, charming, as if many times more than the moon, and my mental faculty was stopped and I was feeling extreme joy.

Baba sat on the sofa in the same position in which I had a vision of him in Hamirpur when I first heard His name. Now, the Darbar was truly in session.

Baba inquired again about my name and my profession. Then Baba asked, "To which particular village does he belong?" (He asked this, even though Pukar had already announced that I was a public prosecutor in Hamirpur).

Pukar said, "Village Magarpur."

Now, when Baba asked me what I wanted, in this special setting of his Darbar, immediately the reply came to my mind, referring the contents of the telegramme, "I want to be absolutely true to my surrenderance to Baba."

In reply to that, Baba responded in Hindi with a phrase that translates to, "No one like that have I met until today. Such a position has come that I feel that I must surrender Myself to the world."

I took this with a heavy heart, became gloomy, disappointed and silent, since I thought that He didn't accept my attempt to surrender to Him. After a pause, Baba resumed, "Sharmaji, why do you want this? If you are given this, you will become useless for the world."

I said, "Baba, I don't want the world. I don't want anything, I have seen the world."

Baba now started explaining the significance of surrenderance. He said, "Do you know the hardships on the path of surrenderance? Imagine a log. If you hollow it out from within, it becomes a drum. You can play a good tune on it. Like that, you have to become empty from inside. Do you know what a stone is like? From head to feet, it has no thinking, and you have to become like that. Do you know, the dust is there on the ground, whether you walk on it or you put it on your forehead, it has no feeling of praise or abuse, nothing. Like that you have to become, so why do you want that? You will become useless for the world."

He turned to one person present who knew Persian for a quote from Hafiz to the effect of "Ever since my eyes met Him, I became useless for the world."

I said, "Baba, I don't want anything, I want to become useless for the world." .

Then He said to Pukar, "Where are his children?"

Pukar said, "Baba, he does not have a good, loving family life. His wife lives with his parents and he is living alone."

Baba inquired, "Is your wife opposed to Baba?"

I said she was not, "but Baba, I invited her and she could not come." Now see that Baba has remembered our family circumstances, and is determining whether others would be disadvantaged by His accepting my surrenderance.

"Now what do you want about the family and the children?" said Baba. I said that I left all that to Baba.

"Now," Baba said to Pukar, "How is his voice [strictly, the Hindi word 'gala' means 'throat']?"

Pukar said, "Baba he has got a very sweet voice. He sings well."

So Baba said, "Now ask him to say something, whatever he wants to." Pukar recollected that I had composed a poem on 21st November 1950 while going to attend Baba's celebrations at Meherastana, and in the poem there were two lines that translate to:

*Oh God, I have been searching and searching for you but I
could not find your address
How could I find you since this illusion is surrounding me.
Oh God you have given me everything, what else could be given.
Now take everything from me and make me so that I become
only yours.*

Pukar suggested that I should sing these lines before Baba. This gave me a shock. I was not thinking that this is the right time to sing lines of poetry, because Baba is deciding my fate, and I was desperately hoping that He would grant me the privilege and power to surrender. I felt that Baba

and I were in a conversation about life itself. Immediately Baba raised His hand and said that this was not the time for that, and I agreed.

Now Baba said, "Tell me something that you feel from deep within your heart."

These words do not suggest that Baba is inviting me to ask for something, but my heart took it that he actually was, and so I said, feeling very pathetic, very emotional, "Oh Baba, if at all you want to give me something, give me total surrenderance to you, the capacity to do it, and your shelter." When I uttered this sentence, Baba raised his hand with two fingers pointing upward, there was a big clap of thunder, as if cannons were exploding, and I saw lightning inside the hall! Pointing with his other hand to the two fingers He had raised, Baba gestured, "Khuda [God] heard your voice and it is granted. This is the proof of it." My happiness was beyond words.

This was the fulfillment of my life's longing. My joy knew no bounds. On my very first appearance before the Divine Beloved the unique grace of surrenderance was bestowed on me. I could never imagine what was going to happen to me that day, and on my part I had no gift to offer, not even a flower garland. Still, my entire being, so to say, itself had become a garland for Him, and I must remain full of His gratitude for giving everything I aspired for, from the core of my heart. Rather it was He who prepared me and prompted me to offer myself to Him and His compassionate acceptance of my limited individuality into His unlimited Divinity. These, of course, were the most precious and happy moments of my life and much more than that, as I

noted the extreme happiness of Baba Himself to accept the offer of my surrenderance to Him in His surcharged Divine mood.

In this happy mood Baba asked Madhusudan to sing one of his ghazals that used to make me weep at the melas. After this song a drama was staged by some small children, and this special Darbar concluded.

The next day, May 15th, was the day of our darshan. On this quite hot day Baba gave me the opportunity to serve Him by fanning His divinely beautiful and delicate body.

Baba permitted us all to embrace Him, and as I approached to touch His holy feet He swiftly held me, lifting my head by placing both of His hands on my cheeks. As soon as His palms touched me I received a shock as if touching a high-voltage electric wire. Baba told me without words or gestures with His eyes on my eyes and without any sound, "Are you happy now?"

I also without words said, "Yes Baba, I am most happy." He gave me five chocolates as prasad.

Baba told all of us, "Those who are present today must leave Poona, but they may come again on 31st May if they wish." It was an exception, since the rule for this darshan was that persons were supposed only to attend for one day and then return to their homes.

So I did go back to Hamirpur, not in a mood to resume my office duties but simply to comply with Beloved Baba's instructions to go back and return. I therefore extended my leave from my office, planning to return to Poona in time for the meeting on the 31st. We - the Hamirpur atten-

dees granted this second darshan - wanted to reach Poona by the 30th, but on the way there was a train derailment. The wheels of the railway car in which we were traveling came off the track and it was a miracle that our car did not overturn. Although this stopped us and we could not proceed further on this train, a relief train came up and we proceeded thereby to Poona and reached Poona late at night on the 30th - far later than we had planned on arriving (a consequence of the train accident). Of course we arrived after the afternoon darshan hours had finished. But the Compassionate Beloved called us specifically at 9 a.m. on May 31st as an exception, saying that it would have been better if we had come the previous day

When we arrived to see Him on the morning of the 31st, He said, "How did you feel when the train derailed? How are you performing your official duties? Are you doing your duty 100% honestly?"

I said, "No, Baba. So many false cases are coming up before us. It is difficult to discriminate between false cases and correct cases. Justice is therefore sometimes not done." I felt that I could not do my duties honestly.

Baba said, "Do you accept bribes?"

I said not... "but it is a different thing. The police people come, they try to entertain us, we may take some tea from them without ourselves paying for it..." Baba made it clear He did not care for that. Now Baba gave me instructions:

1. Perform your duties 100% honestly.
2. See that the guilty ones are punished and the innocent let off. I explained, "I do not know who is guilty and who is innocent, though I try, but I don't have the insight." Baba said, "Don't worry. When it is time to give you that knowledge, I will give it in a split second. Now do as your heart says."
3. See Me in everyone, as I am in the judge, in the criminal and all others.

Again I said, "Baba, I do try to see you in everyone, but I do not have that sight."

He said, "Don't worry. When I would like, I would give that sight in a fraction of a second."

4. Don't worry, but even if you can't do that, don't worry about even your inability not to worry.

These orders were so significant that I am continuing to depend on His mercy to fulfill and follow them in their totality and I seek His mercy to enable me to obey them.

After the First Meeting

This story by Shaligram Sharma completes the series

In the East-West Gathering at Guruprasad, Baba gave His darshan to my wife and children. My wife Kaushalaya is so fortunate that she has seen Baba in her visions very often since then. I was fortunate to have served as a volunteer at melas and Darshans from the East-West Gathering onward.

I went to Guruprasad Poona on May 25, 1963 for a few days of darshan as Baba had allowed darshan on Saturdays and Sundays. Baba asked me how long I planned to stay. I said, "Baba, I intend to stay up to June 3rd."

But Baba said, "Stay up to June 9th, as qawaal Shankar Shambhu will be on that day; subsequently He asked me to stay up to June 10th. Initially I was to go to Guruprasad on Friday, Saturday and Sundays, but He extended my darshan day by day, and He called me for 14 days out of my stay of 16 days at Guruprasad. Even during the days when I was supposed to remain staying at the place of our lodging my companion Sri D. Y. Nafde was allowed to go to Guruprasad. I accompanied him from our lodging to the gate of Guruprasad to see him off, and returned back, as I was not permitted to attend on those days. But Baba inquired about me from Nafde. When He was informed that I had come up to the gate and returned, as I was not allowed to take darshan for those days, Baba sent Nafde on a cycle to find me and bring me back there. Similarly on another occasion Baba again sent Nafde with Nariman's car to take me to Guruprasad. Really they were the moments when I was too gloomy to stay at Poona without

seeing Baba. Then after the sudden arrival of the car and my going there, Baba felt so happy that He asked me to put my head on His feet, and I did it. Then He said, "Come every day."

The very next day Baba introduced me to Dr. Harry Kenmore, saying about me, "He is My ardent lover. He had left taking cereals [been fasting] for me. At the East-West Gathering he was going to travel on foot from Hamirpur to Poona. But I asked him not to do so." Then Baba suddenly asked me, "What do you want?" I said, "Baba, the 14th and 31st May 1961 on which your grace was showered on me are so much that they are the very treasure and shelter of my life."

Baba rejoined that they were the real thing, but added, "Do you want anything more?" I said, "I want only Baba and nothing else, not even my life." On this, Baba said, "Wait for 10 months." Then He commented to Dr. Harry Kenmore that I was honest in what I said. He further remarked that to surrender is the highest of all gifts. In the meantime, a letter from Dr. G. S. N. Moorthy had come to Baba in which he had written in reply to an invitation from me to come to my native village to attend a marriage as a Baba programme. He wanted to seek my permission not to attend the marriage, as he wanted to visit Baba instead. Baba asked me the details. I explained that this was the second marriage of one of my relations. The first had enjoyed a Baba programme and I wanted a nice Baba programme for this niece's wedding so the two weddings would not show preference to one or the other. Baba directed Eruch to write to Moorthy to go to my native village to attend the marriage and not to come to Guruprasad. Baba was very

much pleased with this attitude of mine expressing, "You have got such a heart simply because I love you and you love Me."

In summer 1965 all returned to Poona for the Poona Centre darshan and the programmes at Guruprasad. But there was such a rush that we could not go in*.

Because of this overcrowding, the Kanpur group was unable to enter the Centre for Baba's darshan. Baba called us during His rest period and gave us a separate darshan in which we saw Baba in His suffering and compassionate form. He looked very weak and said a bit about His suffering. Then in the afternoon session and Guruprasad, He appeared to be totally different - a very strong and energetic person giving darshan from morning to evening sitting on one chair. In the darshan He looked very healthy, but away from our sight He was suffering terribly for humanity; hence He looked very weak and full of pain. During the years 1965 through 1968 I received several letters from Baba at Kanpur and Allahabad that were full of love, blessings and happiness.

On January 14, 1966 on my birthday, I had sent a letter to Baba from Kanpur. Sri Eruch's letter dated January 21 incidentally written with red ink was so significant on many points. Extracts are as follows:

"Beloved Baba wants you to know that He loves you, that you are dear to Him and that you are close to Him and that He is proud of your love for Him. He wants

* Mr. S.D. Lalit's story about this darshan shows just how crowded the conditions were at Poona Centre leading up to this darshan.

you to be worthy of His love for you and of the full trust He has reposed in you. He wants you to march ahead shoulder to shoulder with the love and cooperation of all lovers of Baba around Him to spread the message of love and truth of the Avatar."

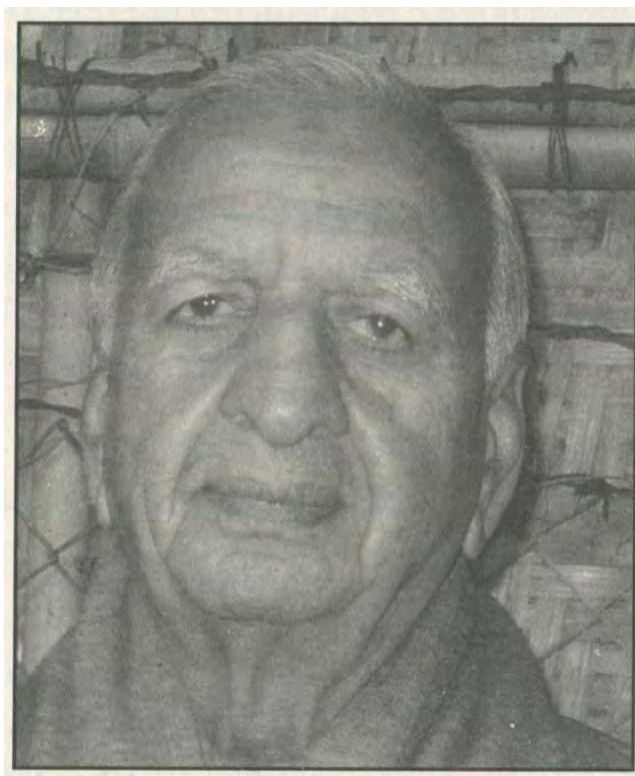
Bhau Kalchuri sent a letter dated July 26, 1966, which said in part:

"Baba says that He is always with you and your love for Him does not enable Him to be away from you. What to say of distance? Nearness itself does not present the real meaning of nearness. Your love has brought you so near to Him.

"Your service has laid down the foundation of your house in His eternal heart. Your love has started the house construction and your faith is anxious to install a roof on this house. This is in short the description of your fate."

S. D. Lalit Comes to Baba

Mr. Lalit's story begins with his marriage. For Western readers, Indian marriage (arranged) has some commercial aspects. Money changes hands in the form of a dowry, and the parents of the bride make various representations about the girl to the parents of the groom, who choose or reject her on the basis of these representations. After the marriage is entered into, of course, it is up to the couple to reach an accommodation.



I am S. D. Lalit. I was born in West Pakistan in 1934, and we migrated to India in 1948. I got a master's degree in Physics, and became a mineralogist specializing in x-ray diffraction methods for identifying mineral concentrations. My first posting was to the Indian Bureau of Mines at Nagpur, in 1960.

In 1961, my parents contracted for my marriage. Within two weeks of the date of the wedding, I felt that it was not possible for me to carry on with this marriage - the qualities of my wife had been misrepresented, and I wrote to my father-in-law to demand that he take her back. Though he wrote to her telling her to return, she did not. Instead, she and her sister harassed me at my office, creating a scene there every day. This caused me to experience much humiliation from the lower staff; it continued for two years.

My landlord was my friend. On one lunch break, he came to see me to invite me to attend a talk on Meher Baba by Madhusudan, the famous singer, songwriter and lover. At this point, my landlord told me all about Meher Baba, but I was not initially impressed. The claims made for Baba's divine qualities by my landlord and Madhusudan seemed to me to be overly romanticized. Like a proper scientist, I asked for some books to look at, and received a life sketch of Beloved Baba. It seemed to me not much different from many similar books, and I was not impressed. Then, they obtained a copy of *God Speaks* for me, from renowned Baba lover Puran Singh.

I remember sitting in my lab, and starting to read the first two or three passages. I felt that this book was very difficult, very tough. But, somehow I had the self-confidence that I had mastered many complex physical theories. Then, how is it possible that I can't understand simple English? I took it as a challenge, thinking that I would understand this book. I brought the book to my home, and early in the morning I used to devote an hour or more to reading *God Speaks*. I became quite engrossed in it. At a certain stage, my landlord asked me whether I had finished the book. I

explained, "I have read only 69 pages of the book and it has taken me one and one half months' time. It's a very difficult book, but somehow I can say this much, that the author who has written this book, if he is not God, he is in no way less than God." Eventually, after another month, I finished reading the book. It was time to correspond directly with Baba, and I wrote, "Mentally I am convinced of your Godhood, but still my heart does not believe you as God, and I would like to come to your place and stay with you permanently. I would like to leave this world, if you would permit me to do so. When would you like me to come there?"

The reply, from Adi K. Irani, directed me to contact Mr. Nana Kher of Nagpur, and promised darshan at some future date. This was good fortune for me. I spent many hours in the company of senior Baba lovers of Nagpur learning more.

Two years later, I left Nagpur to join the Geological Survey of India in Calcutta. Baba's darshan became available, and I resolved to go. Darshan at Guruprasad in Poona was scheduled for 1st through 5th May of 1965, and Baba was also to be giving public darshan on April 30th to open the Avatar Meher Baba Poona Centre.

I arrived in Poona ahead of schedule. Upon my arrival on 22nd April, I joined the volunteers who were preparing small packets of prasad to be given by Beloved Baba to the attendees. While serving as a volunteer, I chanced to meet Mr. Ramanaiah from Guntur, a great Baba lover who had brought some materials for Baba. Baba invited Mr. Ramanaiah for five minutes of darshan the following day.

My friend Nana Kher, who knew I was in Poona, asked Baba if it would be possible to include me in the darshan. Baba agreed, and I arranged with Mr. Ramanaiah to meet him at Guruprasad at the appointed hour.

The following day, 24th April, I walked to Guruprasad, arriving prior to the appointed hour. I was chatting with mandali people, who were asking about me, when word came from Baba that I should go in to Him. Following the customary practice, I went to the bathroom, washed my hands and entered.

I found Beloved Baba sitting in his underwear, with a small cushion under His feet. Mr. Ramanaiah was already there along with Mr. Harish Chandra and his son. I was seated on Baba's left side, and Eruch was sitting across from us reading the gestures. As I entered, I prostrated myself before Baba's feet, and then took my seat. Baba made some gestures, and Eruch translated, "When have you come here?"

"I have come yesterday, no, day before yesterday."

"Why have you come so early?"

I explained that I was involved in a court case in Nagpur, and had come from Calcutta to Nagpur and thence to Poona. In replying, I was looking at Eruch and replying to Eruch, but Eruch directed my attention to Baba. The minute I did so, I saw His eyes and they were so piercing that I shivered with fear. I felt that He has seen me through and through, and each and every cell of mine has been surveyed by Him. I was just trembling, shivering. Baba immediately said, "Yes, you can't come before first of May when the official darshan is to take place."

Then immediately He said, "Five minutes over." I got up, and immediately Baba asked Harish Chandra's son, "Can't you tell me some story of a sardarji?" [Sardarji jokes are about bumbling Sikh fools - they are the Indian version of Polak jokes.] The boy began to narrate the old joke that Bal Dev Singh is going on an airplane with Nehru for some talks with British people, and on the plane, Nehru says, "Something is wrong. I smell a bad odor." Bal Dev Singh says, "Yes, sir, I have not changed my socks for the past week." And Nehru says, "What is this, you must change your socks daily!" When they reach London, they are again seated together, and Nehru says, "Still I am experiencing that bad smell. What is this?" and Bal Dev Singh says, "Sir, just I have changed my socks, but my old socks are in my pocket."

Baba had a great laugh over this, and I noticed He had no teeth, and still He was laughing with an open mouth. Immediately Harish Chandra said, "Tell another one." Perhaps Baba gave a signal to Eruch, but Eruch said immediately, "No more. No more and no less. You do exactly what Baba tells you." That was the end of my first darshan. I got up, I again prostrated to Baba and I came out. After coming out, I asked my friend Nana Kher, "Oh, Baba has gone so weak! You people - can't you take care of Baba? Why don't you send Him to me? You send Him to me and I'll see that Baba has a glow on His face in just a few days time."

"Oh," says Nana Kher, "you have seen Him today. Wait until you see Him on the first of May!"

I said, "What difference will it make? It is only six days - today is the 24th."

He rejoined, "You will see on April 30th."

On April 30th, Baba was scheduled to give His darshan at opening ceremonies for the Poona Centre.

As I was leaving, Eruch told me that if I'd like to come there to Guruprasad I could always come. I thought Baba had prohibited it, but Eruch said that Baba had only forbidden me to have His darshan, but it would still be possible to come to Guruprasad to converse with the mandali.

On April 30th, early in the morning, I went to Guruprasad to visit the mandali. While I was there, Baba told Eruch to drive over to Avatar Meher Baba Poona Centre to see that all the arrangements were correct. So Eruch took Pendu, and both of them came to Poona Centre; Eruch casually invited me to accompany them. I was wondering how fortunate I was to be traveling by the car used by God Himself.

Upon our arrival, we saw a mile-long queue; the entire compound was full of people - a huge crowd. But since Eruch and Pendu were VIPs, passage was made for them. I followed in their wake. We surveyed everything - how they would bring Baba, what route they would follow, and they planned the whole procedure in my presence. Upon his departure, Eruch asked me, "Are you coming with us?" I said I'd stay, because the crowd was so great that I was afraid I would never get back in. There was so much noise, and we were afraid that people would break the doors of the Poona center, and so the volunteers called out, "Avatar Meher Baba Ki Jai, you all please come in order, and make a line..." and all that. They decided to block off the doorway so that only one person could pass through the door at a time.

Soon thereafter, Baba came, and they conveyed Him in a chair to the dais. When I saw Baba, I would never have recognized that this was the same person I had seen a week back. His stature seemed immense, His face was glowing with light, and He was so radiant!

I was the first man in the hall standing there. The names of 150 Baba lovers were announced on the microphone to come and occupy one chair and sit there. In that list, the name of A.C.S. Chari was called, and I was standing just near the door leading into the office of the center. All these people came and sat in chairs facing Baba. Then the line began, and the people came to Baba one by one.

In the line there was a former major in the Indian Army who had some spiritual inclinations. He had left the Army and had taken up the guidance of Swami Shivananda of Rishikesh. The major had gone so far as to take disciples himself, the chief one of whom happened to be my boss in the Indian Bureau of Mines in Nagpur! My boss had told the major that there was this great soul Meher Baba, and he has a disciple Lalit posted in Calcutta. He suggested to the major that he should write to me, and that I would give him *God Speaks*. The major came to Calcutta, and I gave him not only *God Speaks*, but also Baba's *Discourses* and many other books. I had suggested that he attend this very darshan, and here he was. The major had a black blanket over his shoulders, and he had his followers with him dressed in ochre robes. As he passed he looked at me; he had brought some tuberoses to give to Baba and he separated one off from the bundle and gave it to me.

I told him that he had brought those for Baba and he should give them all to Baba, not to me.

"What do you think?" he said to me, "I can't give you anything?" He was annoyed with my attitude. At Calcutta, he had said to me, "Ask me for anything you want." I said, "I don't want anything."

At that point, the host's daughter brought a glass of lassi, buttermilk, to give the major, and he said to her, "You see this man, if he wants I can give him a Rolls Royce at his door, but he must have been a yogi in his past life, because he says he doesn't want anything."

I was very curious to see how Baba would greet this fellow. When this man bowed down to Baba, there was not any expression whatsoever on Baba's face, and he just passed on like any other person. I immediately concluded that this man was a shadow man, and didn't have anything special. I was curious, because there at Calcutta, when I had given him so many books on Baba, the major had sent me a letter, enclosing a picture in which Swami Shivananda was sitting in a chair and the major was sitting at Shivananda's feet with the hand of Swami Shivananda on his head. And in his letter, the major had also included a photograph of himself sitting on a white horse with a sword in his hand, suggesting that he was the Kalki Avatar. I had forwarded the letter to Eruch with all the enclosures. Eruch had sent back to me a letter saying that not only the major, but 72 other persons were on file with them as claiming to be the Avatar of the Age.

Darshan continued, in all, for six days, 8 to 11 a.m. In the queue was an elderly, frail man who could only step a few

inches with each pace. I escorted him up to Baba. I looked at Baba constantly, and Baba did not give me so much as one wink - not the smallest of looks. I was very distressed.

I was standing right by the door, within 20 feet of Baba. Another man came and stood just outside the door, behind me and to one side of me. From there, he saluted Baba, and Baba enthusiastically returned his salutation, in spite of the fact that it looked to me as though Baba could hardly see him from where His chair had been placed. This man had been in the Meher Ashram early days, a teacher at Baba's school. Baba could see me quite well but He was ignoring me completely. I felt awful. At 11 a.m., at the close of that day's darshan, A.C.S. Chari, the venerable old Baba lover and head of the Calcutta group came and said, "You go and have Baba's darshan."

I said, "No," because there had just been an announcement that only those who were leaving today should come for Baba's darshan, and those who weren't leaving could have Baba's darshan in Guruprasad Bungalow from tomorrow to the 5th. So I rejoined that Baba had made this announcement, that I was not leaving today, and that therefore I felt I should hold back.

Chari said, "Don't hold back. You must go there immediately. You do not know the importance of having Baba's darshan on the very first day. It is very auspicious."

Since I respected this man so much and held him in such high regard, I got in the queue and had Baba's darshan. But this was also a disadvantage, since those in the queue were forced by the queue discipline to leave the hall, where I had stayed for the entire time of darshan. Now I was

being forced out. I was feeling miserable that I had to leave - But when I was just a few feet from the door, immediately Eruch announced that all the doors should be closed, no man should go out, until Baba leaves the hall. I was so happy to hear that announcement! I stood there, and they took Baba in the chair and I was just standing beside and was seeing Baba's skin that was scorched because of the heat, and the small black spots on his arms. I was looking at Him so closely. People were shouting Baba's Jai over and over again, but He again did not give me a single glance. He did not look at me once.

From next day onward, the darshan shifted to Guruprasad, and I got there much earlier than opening time. I went to Nana Kher and asked him if I could become one of the volunteers. He told me to place my request with Bhau, who was in charge of the volunteers. He said, "Yes, yes, why not?" So he gave me a badge and I became a volunteer. Some benches were being kept clear for very old and sincere Baba lovers. Bhau assigned my duty, which he told me was to see that the benches were not occupied by any people, so I was guarding those benches.

This duty was no picnic. One elderly gentleman from South India seated himself on a bench. I went to him and asked him politely not to sit there. Politely he responded by beseeching me to allow him to stay. I said, "Sir, if my father himself were to come before me to occupy this bench I would have to drive him away. I am so sorry, but you must go." So I had practically thrown him off the bench and asked him to go, but what could I do? Orders were orders.

A still worse thing happened. A.C.S. Chari himself came and sat on one bench. What to do now? Here is Chari whom we respected so much that we used to call him not only Chariji but Chari Baba. I rushed around searching for Bhau to ask him to save me. Fortunately, I found him.

"Oh," he said, "It is for just the like of A.C.S. Chari that those benches are reserved. Good that you didn't throw him off. You should have been using your discretion in permitting persons to occupy the benches."

Afterwards I came to know that as he entered the hall, Chari had saluted Beloved Baba and Baba had directed him to sit on the bench, so I could have made a huge mistake. As it was, I was miserable about having treated the elderly gentleman from South India as roughly as I had.

The beauty of becoming a volunteer was that I could see Baba from very close quarters, and I could walk the entire pandal of about a furlong's length - 200 yards. I could see, but I could never decide whether Baba looks more beautiful from the close quarters or from the farthest point. And during this gathering, I spotted our Puran Singh, sitting in one of the chairs there. Being a volunteer, I had all the freedom to move everywhere, and I went to his side. I was just slowly whispering, "Jai Baba" in his ear, when the man sitting beside him left his chair. I took the chair and sat with Puran Singh, allowing me to chat with him. Now Puran Singh was a very advanced soul, and he had told me that he had contacted very many saints in India and he had lot of literature on spirituality and all that, and he was so advanced that people say that some of the departed souls used to visit his house and he used to guide them, or some-

thing like that. So, I used to tell Puran Singh, "Whatever you have got, just give some of it to me, also." He used to say, "We shall go to Poona, and we shall ask Baba. If Baba says, then I immediately give you." Now when I saw Baba, I never saw the necessity of requesting Him any more, and I said to myself, "I don't need anything from you or anyone else, because now I have God." So all these five days, from first to fifth, I was a volunteer, not just for the morning programmes, but also for the occasional evening programme that Baba permitted from 3 to 5 p.m.

During these hours, Baba told Adi to have some talk with me. Adi passed this message on to A.C.S. Chari, because he and I were staying in the same lodge. Chari came and told me, "Lalit, you show so much enthusiasm and all that, now see, Baba is calling you!"

"Oh," I said, "I am very happy."

Chari said, "You don't know, He is fire, He may burn you."

I said that it was for that fire that I had come. I went to Guruprasad, and met Adi. I told Adi that I was given a message by Chari that Baba wants me. Adi said, "No, Baba told me to speak to you."

"What can I do for you?"

He asked me a point-blank question, "Don't you feel sorry for your rough treatment of your wife?"

I said, "No, not at all. Her family cheated me. They overstated her qualifications, so many things they have concealed from me, and unless somebody takes a stand these things will go on. People misrepresent their daughters,

and the recipient has to suffer his entire life, and I am not going to permit that."

Perhaps these comments were passed on to Baba. Now it so happened that my wife and her sister used to come to my office and harass me almost regularly. Once, they talked to a colleague of mine, and he told them, "He is a difficult man. He will not budge; whatever you say, he will stick to his point. He will never listen to you, and you should forget about it. But there is one way I can tell you. He loves Meher Baba, he is a devotee of Meher Baba, and if Meher Baba tells him, he won't refuse."

My wife's sister wrote a letter to Baba that I had done wrong. Baba wrote back to them that He doesn't interfere in the personal life of His lovers. But, she wrote a second letter to Baba requesting that He should mediate in this affair. Upon its receipt, Baba wrote to me through Bhau to request details of the entire affair. I think I wrote back six or seven pages giving the full story. Baba sent a similar letter to my wife, but they did not reply.

Baba wrote to me through Bhau that Baba is very much pleased with your letter, and whatever you decide, Baba's blessings are with you. This had been a sword of Damocles above my head - I just didn't see how I could accept her even if Baba ordered me to.

So many times in the past I had thought on this subject that perhaps Baba will say that you have two choices: become a leper or take back your wife, and I would chose leprosy.

Perhaps some correspondence was going on between my sister-in-law and Baba, since some time later I received a letter from

Bhauji asking, "If Baba orders you to accept your wife, would I comply?" I responded, "Yes, whatever Baba says I will try to obey him implicitly." Then something strange happened. Once, I went to my office and I saw a letter waiting at my table. I opened the letter and I saw that it was from Baba written by Bhauji. It said, "Do what you think will be just, right and honest" - Meher Baba

Next day when I went, again I saw a letter on my table. When I opened it, I found the same message.

Third day, the same. Fourth day the same, the fifth day the same.

I immediately ran to the post office close by, to the telegraph office and I sent a telegramme to Baba saying, "I do not know what is just, right and honest. I will try to obey you implicitly. Kindly direct."

After some time, the reply came. Baba wants you to call back your wife. This was the most difficult thing for me, and that was the day I felt the sword of Damocles falling on my head.

My father and sister had been taking my case against my in-laws. I immediately wrote letters to my father and my sister that I want to call my wife back. My intention with these letters was to allow them to save face. I thought I would allow them to go to my in-laws and tell them that they convinced me to take my wife back. But it so happened that neither letter reached its destination. I waited for fifteen days for their reply, but no reply came. Unbeknownst to me, my sister-in-law was always praying that there should be no mediator, and Baba heard her prayers and my letters never reached my father and sister.

The fifteen day time lag was so long that I felt I could wait no longer to obey Baba's order, so I immediately wrote a letter to my wife that she could come to Calcutta, and to send me her train timings so I could receive her at the railway station. I received a return telegramme that she was coming, and I went to the station and brought her home.

She had been reduced to a skeleton - haggard face and she looked much older than she was. So many bad words had passed between the two families, but now Baba ordered us to lead a normal married life, and we both had to somehow comply.

In the end our relations became loving, peaceful and normal. We are now best of friends as well as married people. We have two children. In one of the letters, Bhau wrote me that Baba had said to me, "You will go on getting through this married life all that you need." To me, this seemed as if God had given me Himself on a platter. It seemed that only through this married life would I get Baba's grace. For me, Baba had shown me the spiritual path with the addition of sexual life. Whenever a thought of having some reservations was there, I never gave it countenance, because it would go against the orders of Baba.

Mr. Lalit Survives an Attempt on His Life

I had many experiences where I could see that His hand of blessings and protection was with me. One incident:

In June, 1964, I was continuing my career as a mineralogist at Calcutta, at the offices of The Geological Survey of India. For ten years, my relationship to my colleagues was very peaceful, as we continued on the survey. They called me "Babaji" because I used to have Baba's picture in front of me at work. Everyone knew me, and I used to translate *Listen Humanity* into Hindi during my free time in the office itself, so everybody respected me.

But, in 1975 an accusation came from above that the number of assistants in my service division was excessive - many more than the number of officers. My boss called me (I was an officer) and told me that, for the purposes of answering this inquiry, I was going to have say that I had two assistants. Actually I had only one. I said, "Sir, this is difficult for me. I can not do it."

He immediately flared up against me, "What is this? You are so honest that you can't tell even this much a lie?"

I said, "Sir, I avoid telling lies."

"You get out from my sight."

I turned away, and he said, "This man boasts as if he is 'Satyawadi Harish Chandra*', - he boasts that he is spiritual person."

* A figure from Hindu mythology noted for his honesty.

I attacked him back, shouting at him, "Do whatever you like. You call anyone you like. I'm standing here, I'll face you."

Though I was tolerated by these people, they belonged to a different community and I was not one of them. They stuck together on that account, and the boss said to them, "This man is against our community and wants to snatch your bread and make you starve!" All this because he needed subterfuge to explain why he was employing too many assistants! But now, all of them turned against me, the moment he made the dispute into a communal battle cry.

I used to go to work at a certain hour and return at the fixed hour for quitting work. They knew that, and they decided to get rid of me! It so happened that some man told them that there is one boy in engineering college and he has done some murders, and if we call him he can do the job. So that boy was called.

One day I was passing through the corridor to the lavatory when I saw a strange man sitting in the passage. One peon [office boy] was telling this person, "Yes, this is the man," pointing to me. So instead of immediately turning my face away, I kept looking at this fellow, and when I came back I also looked directly at this man. I saw that he was a short, well-built boy, 22 to 24 years old, and I understood his intention. I sat in the chair in my room, and a friend, a geophysicist, came to see me. I told him, "Today you may be seeing me for the last time. You may not see me tomorrow."

Then he said, "What is the matter?" I told him about the plot they had fabricated - that the boy seated there has

come for this purpose.* My friend said, "Then why are you sitting there? You had better leave early and take a long leave."

I said, "No. Better I face the situation. After a long leave, I would only have to come back to the same circumstances, so whatever has to happen, let it happen today."

So, when it was 4:30, the time to leave the office, I took my bag and started to leave. At the main gate of the Geological Survey of India, I began to take my customary route home. As soon as I turned in this direction, I immediately felt unable to proceed; I could not move a step. I realized that I was the beneficiary of some help, so I relaxed completely. I felt the force turn me around as surely as if it were a strong man doing it, and I set off in the direction the force led me. I can not tell you the path I followed, through which lanes I went - it was so different from my usual path to my house that I became hopelessly lost. The force brought me out to a main road, and there was a communist procession passing down the road. Although ordinarily they would oppose the passage of anyone through their procession, they let me through with no difficulty.

Eventually I encountered an old lady, who asked me in Bengali where I was going. Though I don't speak Bengali, still I could communicate with her, and she told me the way to my house. At this point I ceased to depend on outside control of my body and went home with no further difficulty.

I did not tell anything to my wife, since I thought it would

* Murder is not unknown in Indian society. Dev Narayan Kharate also withstood murder attempts, as he tells in his story.

scare her. The next morning, I kissed and caressed my son, with the idea that perhaps this would be my last opportunity to do this, but I did not disclose anything. I went to the office without incident, I did my duty, and in the evening I again started for home. At the gate to the Geological Survey, I saw a peon who worked only for my boss, and my boss' son, and they said, "Today he can not escape." But now that I was alert to the danger, I took a completely new route and was not threatened.

On the third day, I came the usual way without incident, but at quitting time I went down the back stairs and out the back door. My path took me past the open window of my boss' office. This man was sitting with some of his peons and lower staff, and I heard him saying, "You see, this man is again passing via a different route." This confirmed that my boss was behind the plot.

The next day, when I arrived, I was told that there had indeed been a murder two days before. One of the peons who worked for my boss was accused of murdering another peon who owed him some money. The body had been thrown into a pond adjacent to our building, and the body had come to the surface in spite of a weight attached to it. Now there was a big hubbub about this man's murder. Lots of police inquiry was there, and the suspect had been put behind bars.

Moreover, my boss came to see his name on the police board linked to the name of the suspected killer, and it embarrassed and scared him.

This moved the problem that I posed to the back burner, so I escaped their fury. It so happened that after a month

or two, my boss, who had high blood pressure, had a stroke. I went to see him in the hospital, and I saw his condition. I could not stand the sight - his arms and legs were tied to the bed, he was laboring to breathe in spite of oxygen, full of needles and his state was extremely pitiable. After two or three days, he came to some consciousness. When I visited him, he said, "I have faith only in you. We are going to have another laboratory in Hyderabad, and I want you to go there and run the laboratory." He gave me directions about how to grow the facility. After two days, that man expired. The entire department went there to the hospital. I was the only one from the lab who was weeping bitterly to see his son and wife, who were also weeping. I could not stand that scene. I felt that Baba had given a little too much - I never wanted that he should suffer so much.

To the younger generation of Baba lovers, I would only suggest that one has to choose between two things: the material life and the spiritual life. If you want to prosper materially, follow materialism. But if you want to pursue the spiritual life, you must study hard and give all your attention to your studies. Work hard. At the back of the mind, this is only for our livelihood, but this is not the end of our endeavors.

Baba says, "God is 100% honesty." You be honest with yourself, because when you are young you will have so many temptations. It is your job to fight these desires boldly and see that you are always victorious, that you never succumb and you always resist them as much as you can.

When you are free, you should go on repeating Baba's

name inwardly rather than outward. Your lips should not move, but silently you should repeat His name, and He will give you the inner strength to fight your desires.

Growing Up In India

by Rabindra Nath ("Roby") Battacharya



Amiya to the left, Roby in the center, and Suren Bhatnagar to the right.

This Baba lover of Jabalpur was always behind the camera and rarely before it.

This story is about the family's habit of visiting saints. Of course, Beloved Baba discouraged his followers from visiting saints. Eruch used to describe them as servants in the house of the Lord, and does it make sense to patronize the servants when the Lord Himself is available? Still, particularly for Western readers, some of the charm of India as it used to be is presented in this story by our able correspondent.

Roby, one of Amiya's oldest friends, is mentioned in Memoirs of a Zetetic. At Roby's brother's wedding Amiya began his graceful descent into Baba's net, though kicking and screaming at the outset.

I grew up in a spiritual household. My father was a devotee of the saints, and my mother was like him, and there was a spiritual atmosphere at home. I was a Bengali.

Let me start by telling you some things about Varanasi in the 1940s, which had so many saints. This is before I came to Meher Baba. There were two or three saints of Varanasi that stand out in my memory. One was Shankar Baba, a wild man whose hair resembled a lion's mane. His seat was just near the famous Vishwanath Temple near the Daswashwamedghat and he wore only a loin cloth, a langoti. His age at my time must have been more than 80 years. One of his disciples was the Rajah of Kashi.

I met Shankar Baba when I was ten years old. My father was a devotee of Shankar Baba. He sent me to Shankar Baba every day, as a duty, to offer to the great saint whatever he might give me. It was an order from my father. So I went daily. Shankar Baba was fond of yoghurt, poories (bread) and cooked vegetables and I had to give those things to him as an offering. But if I gave him, for example, four poories, he would take two, put them in a metal pot, and the same for the other things - he would take half, and then would instruct me, "Take this and go." In this way, he would take half the food and leave half for us as his prasad. I would daily bring it back to my family. After doing this, I would go on to school.

Just one or two months after this period commenced, my father sent an office boy to where I happened to be, bringing a letter telling me that Shankar Baba was going to leave his body. The exciting part of this letter was that Shankar Baba could apparently bring about his own death volun-

tarily. I was to bring my mother and sister and come immediately to the seat of Shankar Baba.

I was just ten years old, so I did not know anything, but I did as bidden. Lots of people were there, and as soon as we reached the place and met my father, we got into the darshan line, all went up to him and touched his feet. He blessed me, my father, my mother and my sister, everybody else had darshan, and we went to see what would happen. Photographers were there also, taking his photograph. While just sitting, he dropped his body. We saw him tilting towards one side, and people caught hold of him but he was dead. After that his body was kept in a wooden box. People had brought flowers and garlands and they put it all on Shankar Baba. They had also brought sandalwood, which was also placed alongside his body. They closed the box, took the box down to the Ganges, tied heavy stones to it, and sank the box in the river. He was something like a mast, judging from my perception of Mohammed Mast at Meherabad.

The second darshan of a saint for me was when I met Harihar Baba in Varanasi itself. He always used to sit in a sort of houseboat, totally naked. Somebody had offered him the boat and he used the boat, which had a covered cabin, as a house. He gave darshan for the whole day, and then he would sail over to the other shore in the early morning for his ablutions. He never got off the boat. Sometimes he used to retire into the cabin in the nighttime. He would be giving darshan, but he would never speak to us directly, but only give his blessings. An offering was allowed. His boat was tied up near Asighat.

We used to go for his darshan periodically. He was above 80 years old at that time, and I was thirteen or fourteen years old.

One day I went to the Ganges and took my bath. On my way back I met a sanyasi (ascetic) who was wearing serpent clothes. I was just near him and he caught hold of me. He looked at me for a second and said, "You are very fortunate. You will meet a very great being." At that time, I did not pay much attention to what he said, which was a sort of blessing. I told my mother about it, but we all took it quite casually. But if you read the story of how I came in Beloved Baba's orbit, you would have to agree wholeheartedly.

Baba's Leela with Roby Battacharya

In Jabalpur there were at that time (late 1957, early 1958) some disciples of Meher Baba, including New Life companion Dr. Murli Kale, Sardar Pritam Singh Meher and Suloo Meshram. After our interest in Meher Baba deepened, these were invaluable friends to have. Whenever Pritam Singh started talking about Meher Baba, he was so full of love with Meher Baba that his eyes would well up with tears. He told us that when he used to meditate on Baba, Baba would appear before him. Then, as he would speak to us about it, the fragrance of roses would come out of nowhere and spread throughout the room. He told us many, many stories of his association with Baba. Because of him, too, my inclination toward Meher Baba developed. Eventually the time came for the 1958 Sahavas, and I learned that I had an invitation to attend.

I had a job in Jabalpur Municipal Corporation, and when the invitation came, I told my friends that I had no money, and no accrued time off. But, I started arranging for money. The entry fee was only Rs. 30; however the travel cost would outweigh the registration fee. Finally I decided to quit, using my accrued salary at termination to pay for the trip and the registration. At this point I was not yet committed to Baba, and I must have gone because I was raised to believe in saintliness, as in my previous story.

The atmosphere of the sahavas was very congenial. I felt well taken care of. Baba used to tell us, "Take enough food, and do not worry about anything. Nothing will happen to you all." Baba used a crutch, or would sit on a chair that

would be carried from place to place, because He was still recovering from the automobile accident.

While I was in the queue for darshan and the queue was moving toward Baba, I suddenly had a wonderful experience. I saw Baba's face becoming larger and still larger, until it became so large that I had to close my eyes. His face had become one and a half to two feet in diameter. I was now a bit frightened. I did not want to look at it any more. When I opened my eyes, the face had become normal sized. In my turn, I bowed down to Baba, and this was my first darshan, I was at the same time very surprised.

On my return, though I was not a staunch Baba lover, I remained attracted toward Baba, and was sure there was something there, different from the saints I had seen.

I had become the cashier of a corporation in Jabalpur. One day the cash box was stolen. We rushed out and found the cash box, but between two thousand and three thousand rupees were gone from it. Immediately, since I was the cashier, I was suspended and a court case was lodged against me. I was terribly nervous about it, and I sent a telegram to Baba seeking His guidance. Baba replied, "Don't worry. Be happy. Eat well. Sleep well." Before the telegram came, I was unable to eat or sleep, but after the telegram came I really felt as if much of the worry had gone. I was worried and sad, but some magic was wrought by the telegram that relieved and comforted me.

The case went to the Revenue Board of Gwalior. I was suspended, along with some other workers of my section. My lawyer Mr. Atul, a retired judge, was pleading for me. When we went to the revenue court, I started feeling, "Why

should I worry? Let us see what Baba does." The case was called. My lawyer took me in and said, "You keep sitting by my side. Whatever talking is to be done will be done by me. You do not speak."

After the preliminary hearing, Atul told me to go back to Jabalpur, to rest, and be assured that he could successfully fight my case. I asked if I would have to come back to Gwalior. He said I wouldn't need to do it. My brother had given me Rs. 500 for advocate's fees. I tried to give it to him, but he refused it, saying, "Are you not my son?"

I said, "This is not given by me, but by my elder brother."

"Okay," he said. He took the money, put it in his pocket, then took it out of his pocket and said, "Now I give this money from my side to you."

I started going to the office. The law was that even if you are suspended you have to attend the office every day. All this was in the month of August. On 31st December the case was decided. On 1st January I got a telegram from Atuljee. He wrote that this result is a New Year's gift to you. The judgment copy would be sent to me after a few days. As I read, I realized that the case had been decided in favor of me. I submitted the copy to the office. It all happened while I was taking Baba's name, because Baba had written to me, "Remember My name continuously. Don't worry, be happy." All the time I was taking his name. From that time on I was with Baba.

Battacharyas Take a Most Unusual Trip

This story comes from Roby Battacharya.

In the year 1971, after Baba had dropped His body, my sister-in-law got married in Kabihaar. My wife Pratima and I left Jabalpur by train on the first leg of the trip. That train deposited us safely at the transfer station of Moghulserai, where we had to catch the Assam Mail, the last train to Kabihaar that would allow us to attend the wedding.

The Assam Mail arrived at Moghulserai at one thirty in the morning, and to our astonishment the station platform was very crowded. A helpful porter searched the train from the engine backward for us, but did not find any space. I prayed to Baba, "What should I do, Baba? We have to reach just this afternoon to Kabihaar. The ceremonies will be taking place so somehow we have to reach there. Baba, please do something for us."

It was pretty cold at the time, and we in desperation were drinking fountains of tea, and I was continuously praying. Suddenly we saw a mastani [female mast], with a huge body. She was totally naked, only one cloth on her body, and she had very long hair. She smelled awful. I don't know how many days it had been since she took a bath.

She came before a railway car, and she started pushing away all the people with her hands while dancing in front of this car. She was shouting, "Move away, move away." She went into the car. So the porter said to me, "Quickly, come behind me and I will take you in there now." We entered the car, and now I thanked Baba that at

least we had entered the car, so we could now hope to reach Kabihaar on time. I said to Baba, "It doesn't matter if we have to stand for the whole passage, or if we get a place to sit."

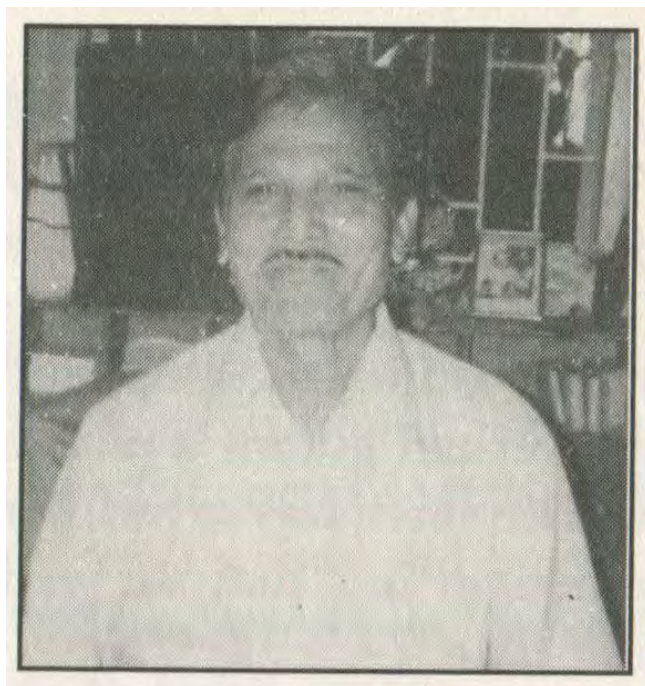
She went into the car, and she moved into the space between two benches. We were standing there. I told my wife to get up onto the luggage rack, where she could at least recline.

There were some ladies - girls and married women - who were sitting there, and they were feeling a bit shy because the female mast was half naked and we males were also sitting before her. They were also going to some marriage party. So three or four ladies stood up, and they left their seats. Miraculously, we had gotten a place to sit, and that just by the window. The smell was so awful my wife felt a bit nauseous. I explained to her that we were just going to have to live with it.

Just at this point, the mastani got up and left the cabin! You see how the mastani saved us, but really it was Baba Himself taking care of us. Now I no longer challenge Him. I have only one way left - that is to be resigned to His will.

Pratap Ahir Describes Many Baba Incidents

We interviewed Pratap in September 2002. While telling us, in English, the stories you will find in this chapter; he expressed to us that he had told many of these stories during his visit to the West. With apologies to those who have already heard them, here's what he told us.



I was born on 16th October 1935. In my youth, prior to the beginning of my story, there was not much organized effort to follow Beloved Baba in Poona. As you know, Poona is the birthplace of Baba and Dr. Ghani had been living in Poona, and one Ramchandra Gadekar was also living there with his family, and then Khaksaheb and Baily Irani were also in Poona when I was growing up. Still there did not seem to be an organized activity as such. These people used to talk to people, especially Gadekar used to go to his acquaintances and tell them about Baba and they used to have small gatherings. At certain times, Dr. Ghani would give talks to the Theosophical Society. Even Gadekar used to visit that society and give occasionally some talks

about Baba's philosophy of the sanskaras and all that. That was the time.

But then some people came from other cities. One such was Mr. L. B. Thade the senior-most among the Thade brothers. He had just graduated from Karnataka, in Belgaum, and he had come in search of a job. So he was living with his grandparents here in Poona, and he got a job in the department of which Gadekar was the head. Gadekar always used to tell persons whom he met for the first time about Baba. In fact, I would say that Gadekar was such a person that he may go anywhere, meet with anyone, whether he may be a government officer, or his boss, or his subordinate, and somehow he will bring up the topic of Meher Baba. So he had told about Meher Baba to Mr. Thade.

Mr. Thade was just a young person, enthusiastically going to several study classes, and also libraries, searching for some literature and reading and all that. In the same course of study, he happened to visit the Theosophical Society (which was frequented by intellectual giants, people from the highest realm of society - doctors, scientists, and others of high repute). There he heard Gadekar giving a talk on the sanskaras. Of course, Gadekar was his big boss, he was working in the same department, same office. When he heard, he didn't quite understand - it was too early for him to understand the theory - but Baba has explained it so minutely, nobody has ever dwelt in such an elaborate way about the importance of sanskaras in the context of human destiny.

After the talk he went up to Gadekar and said how much he liked the talk.

"Did you like it?" asked Gadekar. "Tomorrow you come to my office and we'll talk."

That is how they came to be very close and found a good friendship. But perhaps Thade was more inspired, later on, when Dr. Ghani had given a talk, and in that forum Dr. Ghani was very respected. He gave a talk directly on Meher Baba. And he concluded, "Take it from me that Meher Baba is an incarnation of God in human form." In very clear terms he said it, and that too being a Muslim.

That inspired Thade. He had wondered to himself, "Can a human be a God?" And then he had that curiosity, and he asked his grandmother. She gave a simple answer: "It is just possible. All the earlier Avatars had been human beings, after all." She said, "I have one book on Meher Baba, if you are interested in reading it." He read it, and became very much interested in Meher Baba.

As a child, I was tossed from here to there, because I had lost my parents. My father died at a very early age, and though our family had been well-to-do, his death collapsed our fortune, and we were just on the streets. This was in the late 1940s. My father died in 1943. I was the only person who was able to take education, in fact I would say struggling to take education. My brother had to take a job. On a special recommendation, British officers arranged for my brother to be taken into the same organization in which my father had worked.

It was a very hard time; I used to ride my bicycle to and from school, a distance of twelve miles. I was very weak, I had a chronic cough from my childhood, and this was very difficult for me.

My step-mother thought it would be better if I stayed with another part of the family that lived nearer to the school, and that is how I came to live with my cousin's sister. Her husband was Ramchandra Gaikwad, a good singer. He had come from Hyderabad, and he had a very high pitched, melodious voice. All these people were interested in singing, and they used to go to bhajan programmes.

At this point, I was admitted, for further education, into a government hostel. I was studying in eighth standard, thirteen or fourteen years old, and was given lodging in the hostel. The superintendent of the hostel was Mr. L. B. Thade, who by this time had become a staunch Baba lover. In Poona, Baba activities were just taking a good shape. I became the favorite student of Mr. Thade. When he would go to Baba programmes, I would go with him, and that is how I came to know about Meher Baba.

In these years of the early Baba programmes, singing was a big part of the meetings. A singing group grew up. My friends and family were not conversant with any ghazals because we didn't know any Urdu. Ramchandra Gaikwad came with devotional songs about Ram, Krishna. They used to sing these songs. Even Subhadra used to sing Krishna songs, general bhajans. It is only after Madhusudan came into the picture that there came to be Baba songs. Under the inspiration of Dr. Ghani, Madhusudan got to composing songs directly on Baba,

starting somewhere in the year 1949. Prior to that Madhusudan, who came from a non-religious background, didn't know many bhajans, though he used to sing those he did. Ramchandra and Subhadra had a good stock of them, and they used to sing Kabir's ghazals, mostly in Hindi. They used to visit each other, the families became close, and then Madhusudan began composing bhajans directly on Baba. I was very proud to belong to this group, which was of young people. They had just come out of college and had taken their first jobs. For a young person like me, just studying then, to belong to this group was a joy. Everyone had some talent, at least a talent for singing. This Thade family - they are all singers. The whole group had one-pointed faith in Meher Baba.

Now in our traditions, Indians have information about God and all that. But until we came to know about Meher Baba, we had no thought of coming in God's contact. Looking back, I can say that to me it seemed like a wonderful accident that I came in Baba's contact and started loving Him. Others may say it was destined, and all that, but to me it was quite simple and natural.

By the sixteenth of October, 1950, Baba had completed one year of His New Life, and to commemorate this anniversary, He announced a meeting in Mahabaleshwar, which He allowed His Old Life people to attend. He also permitted any new persons to attend, and that is how we got the chance to attend that meeting. It was the first meeting for Pukar as well.

By that time, the group had taken a good shape. There used to be regular meetings, there used to be composition

of songs, because Dr. Ghani was all the time concentrating much on this group. This group was called the Dr. Ghani group, before Ghani left to go with Baba in the New Life. Dr. Ghani was sent back from the New Life [in late January 1950] and then he came back to the group.

Now let me tell you about the events leading up to that meeting, as well as the meeting itself.

We arranged, the group of us, to take a bus together to Mahabaleshwar. The night of the fourteenth, we had a beautiful musical programme in Poona in Thade's house, a large house on the premises of the hostel, and Pukar attended along with some twenty other persons from Hamirpur. It was very touching, and that was the first thing that made an impact on Pukar's heart. He was just keeping very quiet and serious in that setting, but he had tears in his eyes when the programme was going on.

The next afternoon we got on the bus, and Pukar and his friends accompanied us on the bus ride. I was studying in the hostel and had no money to go for this meeting. Somebody who loved me very much gave me the money to attend. He is also a Baba lover. When we went to Mahabaleshwar, we were full of energy, and everywhere the feeling was created that we were going to see Baba. We spent the night of the fifteenth in Mahabaleshwar, and on the next morning, very early, we went to see Baba.

We first saw Baba on a veranda. We were not even allowed to fold our hands in salutation to Him, as it was the New Life and such things were not permitted. Anyone who sees Baba, he would like to see Baba very often. That was all, because I can't say what conviction I had then.

Everyone passed before Him, but there was no personal introduction. Quite a number of people were there, and there was going to be a meeting for the sermon. All of us were sitting, the companions were sitting on the floor and Baba was sitting on a chair. People tried to offer coconuts, and Baba would throw them at Dr. Ghani.

Before this meeting, Bapji mast [Ali Shah of Ahmednagar] was brought to Mahabaleshwar, and we witnessed Baba giving bath to this mast before the meeting, and then the meeting was started. We didn't know then, and I do not now know, the significance of the meeting.

The meeting was held in an enclosed big area, walls on all sides - it seemed to be a stable.

It started with prayers, by Donkin, Vishnumaster and Khak-saheb taken from the different religious traditions. A sermon, now known as "Baba's Sermon" had been mimeographed and was distributed by Baba with His own hands, to each and every one of us, and then the sermon was read out, and then it was explained. All this was going on, but I was too young to understand it all.

Pukar, a very hefty person, was standing at the extreme wall facing Baba. I looked back, though we were sitting in the front, because Baba was looking very pointedly at him. I got curious as to what Baba was looking at. It aroused curiosity that Baba was looking that way, it was such a look. Pukar was standing by the wall, whereas everyone else was sitting.

Some people's accounts of the meeting have the following story occurring at this point, prior to the offerings. I don't

recall whether it was before or after, but I witnessed one man coming up to Baba and touching His feet. The man was none other than Homi, the brother of Minoo Kharas. He was living all alone on Wardhya College Road in an old bungalow. I along with Mr. Thade visited him at that place later. Minoo Kharas was sitting right in front of Baba, and Baba got very annoyed with him. Baba said, "Doesn't he know that I am in the New Life? Haven't you told him?" Baba asked Minoo Kharas to slap Him. The slap was a very hard hit on Baba's cheek and Baba's cheek got very red. It looked to me as if Minoo might have stumbled while he was offering it, thereby increasing its force. Baba came into a normal mood after that. Whether this took place before or after Pukar's surrender I do not remember. Certainly it was not the sole reason for Pukar's surrender, which I now describe.

Baba had allowed people to give their offerings. For a year people had saved up and now they were coming up to Baba. It was at that point that Pukar came and surrendered to Baba. When I talk about all these things the picture comes before my eyes. When the time came for these offerings, one by one people were coming, putting money in a pile on a cloth. When Pukar came, he must have been overcome by Baba's presence, and all that he had previously in his mind, all the prejudices must have vanished, because he took off all his clothes but his dhoti, and offered them to Baba as, "I surrender to you today." Baba took them in His hands as an acceptance of Pukar's surrenderance, and gave them back to him. Thereafter Pukar dedicated himself to Baba's cause till his last breath. Absolutely Pukar did not become naked as is sometimes described.

That meeting was over, and we came back. The meeting lasted for maybe 4 hours. Not a single note was sung. It was a serious meeting. Baba was repeating the New Life conditions, asking for forgiveness for the failures of the companions, and all that.

For several months, Baba made mast tours, returning to Mahabaleshwar, which for the time was Baba's center, where He stayed.

After two months, on the occasion of Mehera's birthday, the Poona group was invited to give its first programme before Baba, on 23rd, I think. Some time between 23-25 December, in 1950. We were all very excited, so very happy, and it was a change from the New Life conditions as we understood them.

All the correspondence, the messages, Ghani used to receive, and then those messages would be passed to Thade, and then I would come to know. "Dr. Ghani group was to give a programme before Baba." In between, we were having the programmes, talking about Baba and His life. Must have been a week before, everyone came to know that these boys were going to give a programme before Baba. One condition was that no news should be given, no complaints, no bowing down, we were cautioned to observe all these conditions. At this time there was no woman in the group - all gents.

Gadekar came for the meeting, but Thade used to say that he was not authorized.

A week before, Khak Saheb had given one paper to Mr. Thade, and he said, "Since you are going to appear before

Baba, you are not allowed to talk about the people of the Old Life, but just if you get a chance, here is one song. If you get a chance the group might sing it before Baba." After three or four days, Khak Saheb passed away. We went to his funeral, in Poona, just nearby Bindra house. Now Thade remembered the paper from Khak Saheb, and he went to Ghani, and asked him to translate it, because it was in Urdu. The first line in the ghazal was:

"When people saw me in a joyful mood they were wondering how this man could be such a happy one, but when they cut open my heart they found the broken arrows that were hidden there by my Beloved."

Now there is a beautiful story about this. This was the composition, and Ghani was very much touched by it. Ghani said that it made him feel as though Khak Saheb had seen Baba in His real form, because the whole song indicates that.

Ghani decided to also give us one song to take to Baba. Khak Saheb and Ghani were very close friends, with great mutual respect.

Just before we were to go to Baba, we had given everyone's profile, sent to Baba along with a picture - name, age, what he is doing - a small introduction. Thereafter the message was received that Baba wants to keep one of the members of this group with Him, to live with Him for ten days. Two persons were selected for that. One was Madhusudan, and the other was Narendra Thade, the younger brother of Mr. Thade, the person who today arranges Amartithi. The pictures that were sent to Baba were sent back, and there were marks on the sides that said that one of these two would

stay with Baba for ten days. I was not in the picture at all. I was too young.

So we went for the programme, which lasted two days. The first evening, there was "a day of trial," arranged by Baba. We went to see Him, and found Him in a small room, sitting on a wooden chair, and we sat around Him. It was a "Day of Trial" because each one of us was asked to sing individually, not together as in a group, which was typical for us, that we might have sung together. I sang a composition of Madhusudan.

Now each one was individually introduced to Baba, When I was introduced, Baba said, "Would you stay with me for ten days?" Those other two persons were left out.

Baba's conversation with me used to be in Marathi, using the intimate, familiar tense. Baba was very good in Marathi. The words that studied class people do not know, that are known by the lower class persons, Baba would know those words also.

So Baba asked me if I would stay with Him for ten days. I just spontaneously said, very happily, "Yes, Baba." I had not to take any person's permission because my guardian was Mr. Thade and he was present.

Baba said, "What about your school?" It was the month of December and there are annual social gatherings, and I told Baba that the teachers won't mind. "No," said Baba, "You go back, go to the headmaster and get his permission. Tell him that you have been called to stay with me. Once you get his permission, come back." Baba instructed Mr. Thade to arrange for this.

After others sang, Narendra Thade, the one who might have been staying with Baba, it was his turn to sing. But he was a little shaky in his singing. Baba said, "You need not be shaky. Think that there is no one around you. You are all alone here. Or, all the persons here are your own people, either way." That was a trial session, and the next day was the main programme.

We went to the lodge, for the night, and the next day was the real thing. One after the other we sang Madhusudan compositions and some general bhajans. Four ladies were there, and they may have suggested, "We have today heard many songs about Mira, but does anyone know any songs about Radha?"

Luckily L.B. Thade knew one song about Radha, and it was sung. Baba was in such a rare mood that He asked for the dholak. He just for some time played on the dholak like an expert. He also asked for the cymbals, and He played like an expert person, very fast and very rhythmical. I still have that dholak. The dholak player was a distant relative of mine and he gave it to me.

When we say what happened, there should not be any decoration of the story. So I am trying to tell you exactly what happened, without embroidery.

We were going through these compositions, and the stock of new songs was getting exhausted. We had a short break and when we came out, Dr. Nilu asked if we might sing some bhimplash, which are related to ragas - more like classical music. Baba had a very high standard for music, and an appreciation for music. So after that break, we again resumed singing, and some ghazals were being sung.

First was the ghazal with words composed by Khak Saheb. The tunes were set by Madhusudan. We all used to accompany, as group singing. Lead singer for the ghazal was Madhusudan. So when the first two lines were being sung, Baba stopped him. For some little moments, Baba seemed lost somewhere. His face became very serious and it seemed to us that He was far away from us. In fact, everyone was so very quiet then, as if the whole creation was standing still. Then, after a few moments, Baba came back and gestured that "He has come to me" without referring to any name. The whole ghazal was sung. After this song, we took out the song of Dr. Ghani, a song full of humor and taunts to Baba, a beautiful song that has a mood entirely different from the other one.

The first line was no sooner sung, than Baba became red with suppressed laughter and gestured, "Big Head," His name for Ghani. The song was sung and the programme concluded. We were happy and the companions were happy. Now we came back to Poona and that is the end of that programme.

After a week, I did get permission from the headmaster to go to Baba for ten days. In those days they weren't very strict about attendance, and so he very happily allowed me to go. After a week, I was given a send-off at the bus stand for the bus going to Mahabaleshwar. I reached there by 10 or 10:30, all alone. I was watching nature, wasn't very fond of reading at that time, so the time passed well. There are three mountain roads leading there. When I reached the motor stand, Vishnumaster had come to meet my bus. Vishnumaster used to be the bazaar master for the ashram. He told me to sit in a tonga (horse-drawn cart) and we

went to the Aga Khan bungalow. There was one out-building where the men mandali were staying - a kind of servants' quarters - and Baba was housed in the main building. Dr. Nilu was taking his food, mixing bhakri with dal and trying to chew it. I was sitting on the veranda and he was in his room, but I could see him. Vishnu went to inform Baba that I had come.

In those days, I had a particular nervousness about my own conditions. I told you about the struggle of my life, and it had caused a nervous type of mood in me. A complex was developed within me. After about twenty minutes or half an hour, he came back with a lunch box containing food for me. He told me that this food was a share of the food that had been cooked for Baba, and Baba had sent it for me. It was a pullao, very soft. It was rare for me to have that type of food. Vishnu went away to do his own work, and after some time I had finished the food and he again came.

He said, "Now, come on, I'll take you to Baba," and, holding my hand, he took me to the main bungalow. From about 50 yards distance, he showed me the place, and Baba sitting on the verandah, which was a little raised, a few steps up. He said, "Baba is waiting for you" and he left. Baba was standing there with His hair flowing to His shoulders, with the rays of sunlight falling on His face. Baba watched me as I approached the veranda. He was looking at me with so much compassion, I never forgot. I was also looking at Him the whole way. Baba's face was as if light was coming out of His eyes - His look was very radiant. I never saw that look again. He gave me a very warm embrace and kissed me on the lips several times, and then He said, "You are very fortunate. I do not meet with anyone in this New

Life." He said this with gestures. He didn't have the board. "You have very old connection with me." Now there is a question about how I could understand the gestures, but I can only say that He made me understand that. Others have felt the same. So this is what He was saying. Holding me very close, He took me in the hall. He made me sit very close to Him on a cot in the hall, and then He took the alphabet board, and very, very slowly went through the spelling out of words on the board, understanding my limitations. He was doing it in English. I would speak out as He would write. He asked me several questions about my personal life. "Where are my parents," "Who is left in my family," He asked those questions. He also said that my family has a close connection with Him.

I do not know why Baba must have said that, but after years of thinking on that point, I just feel that my family had a good spiritual background. They belonged to Nathpanthi, that cult, and they were very sincere. Some of my forefathers were spiritual masters in that cult. I am not very sure, but perhaps that is why Baba said it.

Baba was very slowly moving His fingers on the board and was reading, and I was being very, very comfortable. He was embracing me, caressing me, kissing me, and once He asked me to kiss Him on the cheek. Then He asked about school. He asked about my favorite subjects, the ones I was best at, the ones I was worst at, who my friends were, how my teachers were - very common questions that Baba was putting to me. It must have been to make me very much at home. He was caressing me as a mother caresses a child and perhaps I was getting all that I had missed in growing up of motherly love, and then more. During the course of

this conversation, it turned to what games I liked, what I played, these were the kinds of questions, and it was going on very slowly in a very relaxed mood. During this conversation, He asked me to get up and stand at a little distance, perhaps ten feet from Him. He asked me to take off my clothes. For a fraction of a second, I was a little hesitant, because I thought someone else might be looking. He reassured me that nobody else could see. I was comfortable doing this with Baba, though. First I removed my shirt, and then Baba asked me to remove my knickers. Baba asked me to turn around. Immediately after, He asked me to put my clothes back on.

Then again He called me near. He asked me some personal, private questions: first, whether I smoke. I said I didn't, though I explained that my father used to smoke bidis, and out of curiosity I took one puff once. Baba just smiled.

He asked, "Whether you take liquor?"

I said, "No Baba."

"Whether you have sexual relations with some girls?"

I said, "No Baba."

"Whether you have some bad sexual habits?"

I said, "No Baba."

This whole conversation had been in simple English, through the alphabet board. Baba was happy to hear that, and He said, "Abstain from all these things, not because there is anything like sin in it, but because Baba does not like it." Very natural.

"I am telling you as your elder brother," Baba said. Later it dawned on me that He was maintaining His role in the new life. I was with Him for about two hours.

This meeting was now over. We came out of the hall, and when we were coming down the steps, the whole group of men companions was outside, waiting for Baba. Baba was holding me close, coming down the steps, and to the people He said, "I am very happy with this boy. I like him very much. He loves me." Then, in His humorous nature, He asked people, "How many years have you been with me?"

Nilu, who was directly in front of Baba, answered, "Must be some people twenty-five years, thirty-five years, like that."

Baba responded, "And still you are good for nothing. For all these years so many of you have not been able to read my alphabet board, whereas this boy has come this morning and he has been able to read my board."

Nilu was also full of humor and he said to me, in Marathi, "Now Baba will prefer you, and you will deprive us of our daily bread."

Now, in Lord Meher a background is created for this incident of asking me to become naked. Baba supposedly asked me whether you will obey me, and all that. It was nothing like that. Baba asked me to stand a little away, take off my clothes and turn around. It was not a test of obedience. I never tried to interpret what and why Baba had done this. I told it to some people, who made their own interpretation. After years, it must have been in the '60s, when Baba used to come to Guruprasad, a few people had the permission to visit Baba at any time, and I was one. I

remember that when Baba used to retire for the day, He had a peculiar thrilling way of saying goodbye to each and every one. All would expectantly stand around, and Baba would fold His hands, and bend a little. And if someone is unsighted, because being behind another person, Baba would acknowledge that person. Baba's eyes at such a time used to be very deep. It was so thrilling that if at this moment I could go there, I would move heaven and earth to see it again. There is a deeply felt sense on these occasions, and it came from His eyes and His face.

Once Baba retires in the evening, only the watchman would go to His room; unless specifically called, no non-mandali person should linger on the property after Baba retires.

So in the year 1960, there used to be two sessions for visitors at Guruprasad. The first session started at 8:30 in the morning and was over by 10, or 10:30 - at the latest, 11. Then we used to go for lunch to our respective houses, and in the afternoon we would come back at 2 PM, and Baba would sit there at 2. By 3:30 or 4 at the latest, He would retire for the day.

Once, after lunch, I was entering the room, and Baba was there, along with other people. Eruch used to sit in the door itself, and I was just in the door, and Baba is gesturing now, and Eruch is interpreting. Eruch is saying, "Pratap."

I say, "Yes, Baba."

Baba continues, through Eruch, speaking to the other people present, "He was very young when he had come to me. That was in Mahabaleshwar."

Now He addressed me directly, "Do you remember, I had

made you naked?" and before Eruch had actually said the words, I could understand what Baba was saying.

I said, "Yes, Baba, I do remember, because it was the most precious moment of my life. How can I forget that?"

Baba said, "I like him. He loves me very much." This was said to all the other people present.

Very hard to obey him, and very hard to understand.



Convocation of Baba singers, including Pratap, Amiya, Kishore Mistry, and Bhagirath Tiwari

Some Khilnani Family Reminiscences

The family of the Khilnanis appears in Lord Meher. They resided in Ahmednagar, and the whole family was very close to Baba. This story was told by Raj Prem Khilnani, son of Judge Prem Fatachand Khilnani (LM American Edition, page 5191).



Raj Prem Khilnani

Baba used to say that my father was a bit of a miser. Judges' salaries are not very high, so he was careful spending money and could usually put some by from his salary. So Baba would say, "I have two misers. One is Dr. C.D. Deshmukh and the other is Prem Khilnani."

In spite of his being careful with his rupees, he used to take the family to Poona during the summer vacations, to have Baba's darshan. A more careful man might have felt that he was from Ahmednagar, and he could see Baba in Ahmednagar, so why to go? But Baba made it somewhat

easy for him to spend even this much. First, both school and court were out of session during these summer months, so there were no worldly difficulties. But, in addition my two grand-fathers lived in Poona - my father's father and my mother's father - and we could stay in their houses when we went to Poona.

Thus, we had the best of Baba throughout the year. Though Baba was frequently in seclusion in Meherazad, He sometimes permitted us to meet Him.

My hobbies were carpentry and making things. Where the Trust Office is, today, was my workshop in Baba's time. I had a workbench, and I used to make whatever took my fancy. I had some aptitude for engineering, but I had a greater desire to be a pilot. My mother's brother was a pilot, and he was such a romantic figure. Like most young boys, I thought piloting would be very exciting.

Once when we were seated before Baba, He told my brother Vinod, "You do M. Sc. [pursue a master's degree program in science]!"

I spoke up and said, "Baba what should I do? What should I become?" Baba didn't reply. I told Him, "Baba, I want to be a pilot."

Baba said, "No you will not be a pilot." But in my mind I said, "Let Baba say whatever He wants to say, I am going to become a pilot." This was as late as 1967-1968. Soon after that, I became myopic, and I had to wear glasses, and then it was out of the question to be a pilot. That's how He made sure I wouldn't be a pilot.

The spiritual side of life and the mundane side of life was

so interwoven that it was impossible to separate them. My father was posted as District Judge of Ahmednagar. The superintendent of Police had the bungalow next door. I used to see a young Police Superintendent. After I discovered that myopia barred me from becoming a pilot, I thought of trying to become a police superintendent, and now I have come into this line. I became an Indian Police Services officer after taking an examination.

Baba didn't tell me what I would be. If He had I would not have studied so hard for the entrance exam for my present post. He did tell me that He would tell me what I was to be when the time came. As it happened He was not in the body when I had to decide to appear for the examination for my present post, but I still feel He gave me the assurance that this was the right thing to try for.

I was Superintendent of Police in Thana, and then Superintendent of Police in Chandrapur 1985-1988. When Baba used to visit Chandrapur, there was one mast called Lokhandwala Baba. He was very fond of iron, and he used to carry home entire iron wheels of locomotives. Even in 1985 the people of Chandrapur remembered him. They showed me the house the mast used to stay in, and there was still an iron wheel on the wall of the mast's room.

Because my jurisdiction was all over Maharashtra, and I was in the State Criminal Investigation Division (CID), I had to travel Maharashtra extensively. Baba didn't seem to want me to be posted to Ahmednagar and the possibility never arose. In my touring even I was a miser, and I used to be able to come to Ahmednagar frequently at government expense. My tours of duty revolved around Ahmednagar.

Even though a person may be very devout and have full faith in God, it isn't easy to accept a person like Meher Baba who says, "I am God." Generally I find that it is more difficult for a person to develop faith in Beloved Baba if he or she already has a spiritual guru. There are examples among my close relations.

I am married. My wife's name is Mina, and she studied in Nagpur, which is a Baba place. My wife's parents are devout and spiritually-minded, so naturally they have tried to find a guru, and they became disciples of a woman named Mata Parvati. My paternal uncle used to go to Shirdi Sai Baba, and my grandfather had close relations with renowned: saints and great faith in Ramana Maharshi.

Mata Parvati became the guru of my wife's parents prior to our marriage. When my wife went to this lady to ask that she be accepted as a disciple, Mata Parvati told her, "No, I am not going to make you my disciple. After your marriage you will get your guru." That is what she told my wife. My wife met Mani and Mehera and she likes them.

Meher Baba works slowly and imperceptibly. Darshan always started with an embrace from Baba and the opportunity to kiss Baba on his cheeks. Even as a boy, I used to feel that I was kissing the cheeks of God. I used to think, "Nothing is left in life. The greatest thing that can ever happen in life has happened and now there is nothing more." In my childlike way I thought that now that I had seen God there was nothing left to see. But I was conscious that I might have years of life ahead of me. As the years have passed by, I feel how little I know God, and how little I have seen of Him, and I am very mindful of the times

Meher Baba would point to His own body and say, "This is not Meher Baba. This is only the coat that I wear to make Myself visible." As the years pass, you realize how He has to make you grow inwardly.

When we were seated before Baba, my mother usually got a great seat, close to Baba - the type of proximity that Maharani Shantadevi used to get. Even though she would be sitting there she used to look down because she was very shy. Baba used to sit on the sofa, and He would say, "Look at me. Why don't you look at me? A time will come when you will not be able to do that." And today she does long to see Baba so much. As a traditional Indian woman, she was not accustomed to look into the eyes of someone directly. Her faith in Baba grew slowly. In the beginning period in the early 1960s, her faith may not have been as strong, and she could not look into Baba's eyes continually. He used to remind her to look into His face.



Raj's brother, Vinod Khilnani, at Amartithi 2004

Some Vajpayee Family Stories



Siddharth Vajpayee

My name is Siddharth Vajpayee. My father is Mr. L. D Vajpayee; he had Baba's darshan and he is a Baba lover. I was born into a Baba lover's family, and since childhood I have been trying to understand Baba and I can now say that it is a familial love for Baba that is in me also.

Here are some of my father's stories. Let me begin from the beginning; my father was standing at the Bilaspur railway platform waiting for a train to arrive. He was reading a book by Shri Aurobindo while waiting. A gentleman walked up to him and said, "If you are interested in spiritual things, why don't you read something about Meher Baba." That gentleman was Mr. V. Rama Rao.

My father said, "I am really not interested in all this spiritual stuff, and especially I don't have any respect for

babas." But as it happened, you know, Baba's Discourses were translated into Hindi, and somehow he obtained the translation. In another Baba book or pamphlet, he discovered that Baba had declared that three-quarters of the world would be destroyed. When he read that article, he discussed the whole thing with his friends and they all laughed at such a declaration.

But then something great happened. My father awoke in the early morning hours. He saw a tree outside the window and the sun was rising. He closed his eyes, and then he felt the presence of someone behind him. Without getting up, he just turned his head to see, and he saw Baba standing behind him. He scrambled up to see Baba fully, but Baba disappeared. I heard directly from him about this first darshan, which happened in 1957.

When this incident happened, he started taking the books seriously and started reading them. Within several years, in 1959, he got *Listen Humanity* written by Don Stevens. There is a chapter about death in that book. While going through the chapter, my father started feeling, "Who can write about death with such authenticity except God Himself?" So he immediately put down the book and sent a postcard to Meher Baba in which he said, "I want to have your darshan."

The reply came almost at the heels of the letter that he wrote to Baba. "You can not have my darshan at present." But my father kept on writing postcard after postcard asking Baba for darshan. He was going to Poona, and on this trip he decided he should try to take the opportunity to see Baba, though there was a life circular that intimated that

Baba had stopped giving darshan to anyone. At that point he was in touch with Rama Rao, and Rama Rao showed him the life circular. When Rama Rao told him that he should not go, my father said, "This circular has come to you and not to me, so I am free to go!"* He went to Poona and he put up at the dharamshala near the railway. Then he went to Guruprasad bungalow for Baba's darshan. He was immediately turned away from the gates at Guruprasad. "Don't you know that Baba is not giving his darshan? You please go back." My father was determined and after a day or two he again went to the same place and he had a verbal confrontation with the person on the gate. It might have been Eruch or Padri. "Why do you think that Meher Baba is just your property?" Papa got annoyed and came back to the dharamshala. We kids were there with my mother.

My father told us that we have been trying in vain for three days to have His darshan, so let's go to Bombay. They were talking like this standing on the balcony of the dharamshala. Suddenly they saw some man in search of someone down on the road. It appeared that he was desperately trying to find someone. But my father had an intuition that he might be searching for him. He climbed down, and went to the man, and that man said, "Are you Vajpayee?"

"Yes."

"Baba is calling you."

So my mother and father went into Guruprasad bungalow.

* Eruch Jessawala used to say that the time to be disobedient is when disobedience offers the opportunity for God's darshan in the flesh.

We children were with them but there was a ban on children, so we had to stay outside. When they came out, we asked father what happened. He said, "I am unable to tell you, because when I put my head on His feet, I somehow lost consciousness."

We asked our mother what happened. She said, "I never had any faith in saints and babas, and even when I was in their presence I never had any respect for them. I was not interested in Meher Baba, so I remember Guruprasad bungalow more than Meher Baba. What I saw was very objectionable according to my orthodox concept. I saw Meher Baba giving embrace to both men and to women. This is such a person who is embracing women? I didn't go up to Him because I didn't want a darshan in which He would embrace me." Baba understood the whole thing, called her to him and instead of embracing her asked her to touch His feet. She touched Baba's feet and came back to her place.

Thereafter Papa took Baba's darshan on two additional occasions. Papa had read somewhere that Baba used to wear his hair in a pigtail. My father wanted to see the pigtail of Meher Baba and there was a long line at the darshan, and he also stood in the queue, and it was a hurried affair, just a second or two, because it was a long queue. You just touch Baba's feet and you go out. The moment he took a step aside, a member of Baba's mandali came up to him and said, "Have you seen Baba?"

He said, "Yes, I have."

"Please come back. Baba wants you to have another darshan." Mr. Francis Brabazon objected, saying that he

had already taken Baba's darshan.

"But do you not see, Mr. Brabazon, that Baba is calling him? When he got to Baba, Baba said, "You stand behind my chair." My father stood behind Baba's chair, where he obtained just that view of Baba's pigtail for which he had wished! Papa used to tell me that it had been a great honor and a great good fortune for him.

Whenever my father had any problems to face, he always saw Baba coming to him in his dreams.

As for my mother, in our worship room Baba's photo is there, and we always worship Baba's photo together ever since she dropped her orthodox notions. We have full trust in Baba and whenever we have to take the name of God it is always Baba's name only. Although the whole development of faith in Baba was subconscious, my first conscious faith in Baba came when I went to His samadhi for darshan in 1985.

I wanted to go to Meherabad, but I didn't want to tell anyone. I had been posted to Pendana, and now it was time to go back, and I thought that it might be the perfect occasion to visit there, but I didn't have any idea where it was. I asked one person and he said that it was somewhere near Shirdi. As I was traveling with another fellow, a very close friend, and as he was a devotee of Sai Baba, it seemed natural to go to Shirdi, let him have his darshan and then go next door to Meherabad, or so I thought. I thought this was fairly clever, since I would have a companion up to Shirdi at least.

We had Sai Baba's darshan at Shirdi, but someone there

told me the truth, that it was a long ST bus trip of three hours to Ahmednagar to visit Meher Baba's samadhi. I told my friend that I had to go, and if he wanted to go he could, or otherwise go back. He was absolutely shocked to hear this, but he agreed to accompany me. I didn't know anybody at Baba's place, either. As we were traveling I saw the signboard for Meherabad, so I was able to get down at the right place. To me, the atmosphere seemed indescribably peaceful, and I liked the place very much. I did not know where I was going, but actually I was just going toward Mandali hall. I entered the hall, and saw rows of Baba photographs there and Baba's chair. I began to minutely inspect all the photos and I took the round of the hall. I was surprised when I saw Mohammed mast sitting there. Who was this man? He said something that I couldn't make out, and he repeated it.

I came out and started walking. I saw other buildings, stone buildings, and went to see what was inside. There was a notice board on which was written Pilgrim Centre, and it said, "You can stay here." I left the idea of going up to the Samadhi, and attempted to secure lodging here. Heather Nadel was sitting in the reception room. I remember her name till today. I told her that I wanted to stay there because I had come to this place for the first time. She said that you must have a reservation first, and did I have any references? And then she started wondering, "who are these two guys?" She said, "Do you understand this is for pilgrims, and it is not a hotel?"

I said I understood perfectly. I am from a Baba lover family, so I requested that she check somehow. "Do you know any Baba lover here?" she asked. I was taken aback. I did-

n't think I knew anyone. The only name I could think of was Rama Rao's, but I was under the impression that he still lived in Bilaspur. On the contrary, it turned out that he was at Meherabad, and after one call to a Trustee, she admitted us.

Then I went to the Samadhi. Yes, it was a moving experience. There I saw Rama Rao but to tell you the truth I would not have recognized him, since I hadn't seen him since childhood. I asked others, "Is Mr. Rama Rao around here? Will you please point him out to me?" He came up to me, and I told him that I am Siddharth Vajpayee, and he recognized me from my childhood. I feel it was not a coincidence, but that was how that thing went at that time, first darshan at the Samadhi. I did go inside the Samadhi then and many times after that. Almost every year, I return at least once to bow down.

As for the youth of the East and West, I have felt He is God, and I can say to my young friends this thing. Having believed He is God, the question of how to love Him comes up. The answer that suits me is to remember him constantly. Jai Baba.

Ukhalkar Experiences Merging in Baba

Mr: Ukhalkar explains that he was raised in the Jain faith. Jains are as a whole very particular about their beliefs - strongly devoted to maintaining the orthodoxy of Jainism against the incursions of faiths outside their own. So, Jain followers of Meher Baba are comparatively rare.



My name is Manohar Shravan Ukhalkar. At the outset, let me tell you about an apparently unimportant childhood experience of mine.

I was a schoolboy, perhaps eleven years old, living in Dongargaon, near Akola in Maharashtra. The year was 1939. I came upon a huge gathering. I inquired from some persons there, "Why has the crowd gathered?"

They told me, "Meher Baba is at this moment traveling by car, and his car is about to pass this place. There will be

three cars," they told me, "and the first one will have Meher Baba in it." I didn't see Him at that time. The car must have sped past very fast.

I had been interested in having darshan of sages and saints all my life, since childhood. I was in close contact of Gadge Maharaj. He was revered in my neighborhood. When I was a child, I used to go to him, and he would play with me, and he also taught me the spirit of service - how to serve others. I also visited Gajanand Maharaj of Khedgaon near Akola, a great saint of Maharastra whom Meher Baba said was on the planes.

Ultimately I joined the movement led by Gandhi for national freedom. Really my first love was my country, and I worked for its freedom, until the police arrested some of us. My elder brothers were also freedom fighters. School education was service before self - that was the theme.

Now we move to 1962, the first year when I came to know more about Meher Baba. There was one Mr. Kaunikar. I had come with Kaunikar from Nagpur to work for the Madhya Pradesh Electricity Board, which had shifted its head office to Jabalpur from Nagpur. Kaunikar and I worked in the same office, though in different posts ..

One day I chanced to visit Mr. Kaunikar at his home. We were friends, so I knew that his family had gone to their village for a visit, and at the same time so had my family. We both being alone, I thought to share our plight. When I arrived, I saw that he was reading a book, and the moment he saw me glance at it he hid the book. I was a little curious and I began questioning him, and he evaded the answer. He also evaded a second attempt on my part to

ferret out what he was reading. Finally I could not repress the curiosity and I asked him straight out if it was a romantic book that he might have been ashamed for me to see him reading. He laughed, and said, "It's nothing romantic. See the book if you will like to." It was a book in Marathi by Dr. C. D. Deshmukh about Meher Baba. Mr. Kaunikar was hiding the book from me because I belong to the Jain community and they do not believe in Avatars. They are such staunch disbelievers that Kaunikar thought it might really offend me, since I was also greatly in support of the Jain ideals.

I asked Kaunikar if he was a follower of Meher Baba. Kaunikar told me that he was His lover. "Oh, Mr. Ukhalkar," he said, "I am not the only one here who loves Him," and he gave me the names of some other Baba lovers I knew from my work at Electricity Board - Pendore, Pande and Pankhraj. They all worked in my section of the office. You may say I had been working in a nest of Baba lovers! But I was never told about Meher Baba, and never given to know that there were Baba lovers in my office. They definitely thought that I would be outright annoyed with them, because of my staunch Jain stance.

Later in 1962, these persons asked me to go with them for Meher Baba's darshan. I didn't, because at that time I was hostile to the idea that there would be an Avatar of God, God taking human form. Thereafter I began speaking against Meher Baba. It was the religious factor that was coming in between myself and my admiration of Meher Baba. The Jain community only believes in saints, sages and mahatmas, but we don't believe in a God Man.

However, gradually I came to believe that I might have been wrong. They gave me some Baba books to read, and I was charmed in spite of myself. I began attending Baba meetings, initially of two minds, but as time wore on and I heard the great Baba speakers like Rajanikant Upadhyaya I began to think that Baba might be a real saint. I wasn't at all sure that He was Avatar, but I felt myself attracted.

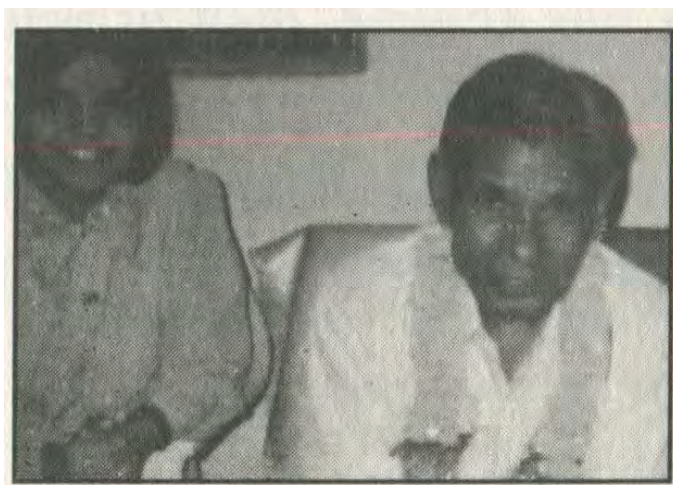
By 1965, when darshan in Poona opened up, I was determined to go see. I was so determined that I brought my wife and my little daughter with me. Not only that, but against all odds, because my daughter had a bad case of the measles. Once Rajanikant had told us during one of his lectures about Baba, "However keenly you want to have His darshan, if He doesn't want it you will be compelled to drop the idea of the darshan, but if you are desperate and not afraid and not intimidated by the circumstances, ultimately the circumstances will work in your favor." Armed with this, we boarded the train. My daughter was so sick that she threw up twice on the train during the seventeen-hour train trip to Poona. Other passengers complained, and I can not blame them, but I was determined that my family should have the experience. By the time the train reached Poona, the child was 100% recovered and I thought that Baba had rewarded my determination.

When I went for Baba's darshan, I had a powerful experience of merging in Him. The moment I put my head on His feet, I felt as if I was drowning. I had become one with him. I had lost any sense of my separative existence. I do not know how long I kept lying on His feet. I lost count of time. At the end, Baba made a humorous comment, "Are you taking my darshan or not?" Afterwards, when I was

standing with Pendore, and the darshan was going on, I was just looking at Baba, and then Baba made a gesture in which I thought Baba was calling me. This kind of signal, a gesture to call me to Him, took place three or four times but I could not dare to go back to him. On the last gesture, I went halfway, but then I didn't have the courage to go the whole way and I returned. I am not sure it was I he was calling, but later I repented and repented.

When I returned from Poona to Jabalpur I found I was completely transformed through this experience of completely merging in Him.

In 1981, the principal of the school I had attended called me to give a lecture there on Meher Baba, and I did address the students about Meher Baba. As it happened, my elder brother was on the management committee of the school, but he was not a Baba lover. He had another guru named Nangay Baba. I went to see Nangay Baba also, and when I told him about Meher Baba he was very, very happy. I found a remarkable atmosphere of peacefulness in his ashram. I concluded that my elder brother was blessed to have a real saint as his guru.



Ukhalkar with granddaughter

The Ukhalkar family came closer to Baba after this. Ukhalkar gave up his Jain principles, which disputed even the idea of an "Avatar." Ukhalkar worked very hard for Baba, becoming the secretary of the Jabalpur Baba group.

An Abduction Foiled by Baba

Amiya tells this story.'

I knew a Baba lover, Arun Kumar Singhai, as a student in my college, and I taught him for two years. Later on he went for post-graduate education in other topics, and became quite a scholar. Soon after he completed his postgraduate work, he joined us as a junior member of the faculty of the college in which he had been a student.

Arun Kumar was very attached to me, as a student and as a colleague. He came to know about Baba from me, and he had read quite a few of Baba books and heard quite a few tales from us about Baba. His faith was quite strong.

He came from a very wealthy stock of Singhais who had great fame and property in a place near Sagar named Khurrai. His family were known as jamadhars, landlords of immense holdings of property. His father was fabulously rich. Dhannalal Singhai was about 60, very sturdy, but bowed down by a massive cardiac attack which he had survived. Whatever Shannalal's personal proclivities were as regards religion, Singhais are Jains and they believe in Mahavir as their incarnation, as opposed to other Hindu sects who believe in Ram, Krishna and Kali, perhaps. So Baba was a stretch for Jains, even more than for others.

Khurrai and the surrounding places were quite fertile, and there were many wealthy persons in that region, and their presence had attracted many notorious gangsters (we call them "dacoits" in India), who found it very much in their interest to prey on wealthy persons. The dacoits often kidnapped and sometimes killed people. It was impossible for

the government to track the dacoits to their lairs, which were usually deep in the extensive forests of Madhya Pradesh. Further, their enterprises made them a lot of money, and nobody much trusted that the police were putting their best foot forward to catch them.

Dhannalal used to visit his own lands to supervise the agriculture. One evening, on his way home from the fields, he saw a procession of mourners who were carrying a dead body in a cortege, and chanting, "Ram, nam, satya hai, Ram, nam, satya hai, satya bolo, mukta hai," and so forth. This is the common way of Hindus in a funeral procession, chanting God's name. It means, "Speak the truth and you will be liberated, take Ram's name and you will be liberated." Being an Indian Hindu, not exactly in the same sense as others were, as he was in the Jain sect, it behooved that he should stop his car out of respect for the dead. When he did that, the funeral procession also stopped. He couldn't pass through the procession, because that would have been uncivil, unmannerly. Instead they lowered the dead body, and didn't move the dead body. He was a little perturbed. Suddenly the dead body sprang up, and with a Sten gun in his hand rushed towards him. Other persons in the funeral party rushed at him with their guns, and then he came to understand that this was a mock funeral procession to capture him, and they had guns and he was unarmed and couldn't fight back. They told him, "Now you are our prisoner. We are dacoits and our tradition is that we do not kill you unless you force us to. We want 60 lakhs from you - six million rupees - as ransom. Dhannalal was a brave guy and he began to buy time. He said, "Well, okay, but my resources aren't that great. I don't have as much as I used

to have, so I may be your captive, but I have to communicate with my sons and relatives to see if they can arrange the money for my freedom." That suited them, and they removed him from the car, put him on horseback, and blindfolded him. They all went back to their lair in the forest. His car was left by the roadside. This happened after Baba had dropped his body, maybe in the early seventies.

Arun Kumar Singhai came to me and said, "I have very bad news. I have received a phone call from Khurrai that says my father has been captured by dacoits who will kill him after a stipulated period, if we do not give them a large amount of money as ransom."

I listened to him and said, "Do whatever is practical. You love your father?"

He said, "I love him very much. Sir, what do you think I should do?"

I said, "Don't take all the money from your property. Take a few lakhs and tell them that you will pay by installments. That will prevent them from killing him outright."

"But that will prolong his imprisonment, and he is a heart patient."

"Tell them that they should take care of your father, otherwise he will die and they will get no money."

The dacoit who had captured Dhannalal, notorious in that area, was named Puja Babba [pronounced "Bubba"]. The one strange thing about him was that he was a great devotee of God. Puja means worship, and Babba in this context means one who patronizes worship. He would worship for

hours and hours before he would go do one of his thefts or kidnappings. He wanted to appease the gods and goddesses to make his plunder successful.

So the son paid ten or twelve lakhs, but after a time his relatives, even his brothers, got tired of paying, and they wanted quits of the whole thing, "We do not have so much money, our business has gone down and we can not pay so much money." It was a bit of a family scandal.

So now Arun Kumar came back to me to say, "What should I do? My father will be killed by them if we do not fulfill the contract by the stipulated period."

I said, "Okay, let me think about it for a while. So I went and sat before Baba's photo, and I started meditating for some time, thinking Baba would give me some hint. And He did, and it was this. I felt Baba say, "You should take a locket and picture and give them to Arun Kumar Singhai - and tell him to take these two things to Puja Babba straight away and say whatever you think is proper."

I gave the locket and the photo to Arun Kumar and said, "Take these to Puja Babba, and tell him, 'It's not money, because no money can be equal to this. What I am giving you today is God Himself in human form, and if you care to understand you will be the most fortunate person.' Give the locket to your father and tell him not to worry."

"Will Puja Babba accept this sort of ransom?" he rejoined.

"Don't call it ransom. This is for Puja Babba's liberation and it is for his good that you are doing this. Are you afraid of death?"

Arun Kumar replied, "On the contrary. I was thinking of going there to suggest that the dacoits release my father and hold me instead, and if they didn't get the ransom they could kill me instead."

I advised against this plan, and instructed him to do as I asked him, and I explained, "I'm inspired, I think, by Baba. Nobody but Baba could inspire me this way."

So Arun Kumar took the photograph of Baba, a beautiful photograph of Baba, and the locket and went. The dacoits permitted some visits to their hideaways under the condition that the visitor would go blindfolded, accompanied by some dacoits, on the back of a mule, and this he did, with no money but with the Baba things. He was on the mule, blindfolded, for three hours. He felt he hadn't gone far and that the route looped back on itself quite a bit. Eventually he reached the dacoits' camp.

Arun Kumar said that he wanted to see Puja Babba himself, and also his father. This was also the dacoit's instructions. So Arun Kumar first bowed down, from a distance, to Puja Babba. Puja Babba told him, "Where's the money? You are being damn slow. If you hurry up I will release your father, and a dacoit is never false, so you can count on my word."

Arun Kumar said, "I have brought something else for you." "What else could you have brought? You are not cheating me, are you? Do you know the consequences?"

"No, I am not cheating you. On the contrary, you are cheating yourself all the while. See, here is a gift for you, and this gift is given to you by one of my teachers, and it is said by him that this is the greatest treasure of all treasures in the

world you could ever imagine to have got." And so saying he opened the photo of Baba and brought the photo Baba near to Puja Babba.

When Puja Babba looked at Baba's photo, he was almost taken aback, sort of dazzled. Puja Babba said, "No, no, don't hand it to me, I won't touch it. I have not yet taken my bath. First let me take my bath and then I will take it," Meanwhile he told another dacoit, "Take this photo and put it in my prayer room. I will come later on after my bath. Okay, boy, this is a wonderful thing you have brought me, but next time you must bring me the installment. Now you can see your father."

Arun Kumar went to his father, who was very impatient and said, "Why are my very rich relatives not giving the ransom How long shall I be compelled to remain here? I don't like this place and I don't like these people."

Arun said, "Father, have this locket around your neck."

"Who is he?"

"Meher Baba, the incarnation of God."

"Incarnation of God? How do you know that?"

"It's a long story, and I don't have much time because they won't permit me a long session with you. You wear this. Now remain happy in the knowledge that His nazar [sight] is on you and not to worry about anything."

Arun Kumar was blindfolded, and escorted back.

Within a few days, a miracle happened. His father escaped the strict cordon of dacoits, climbed a hill, went to the

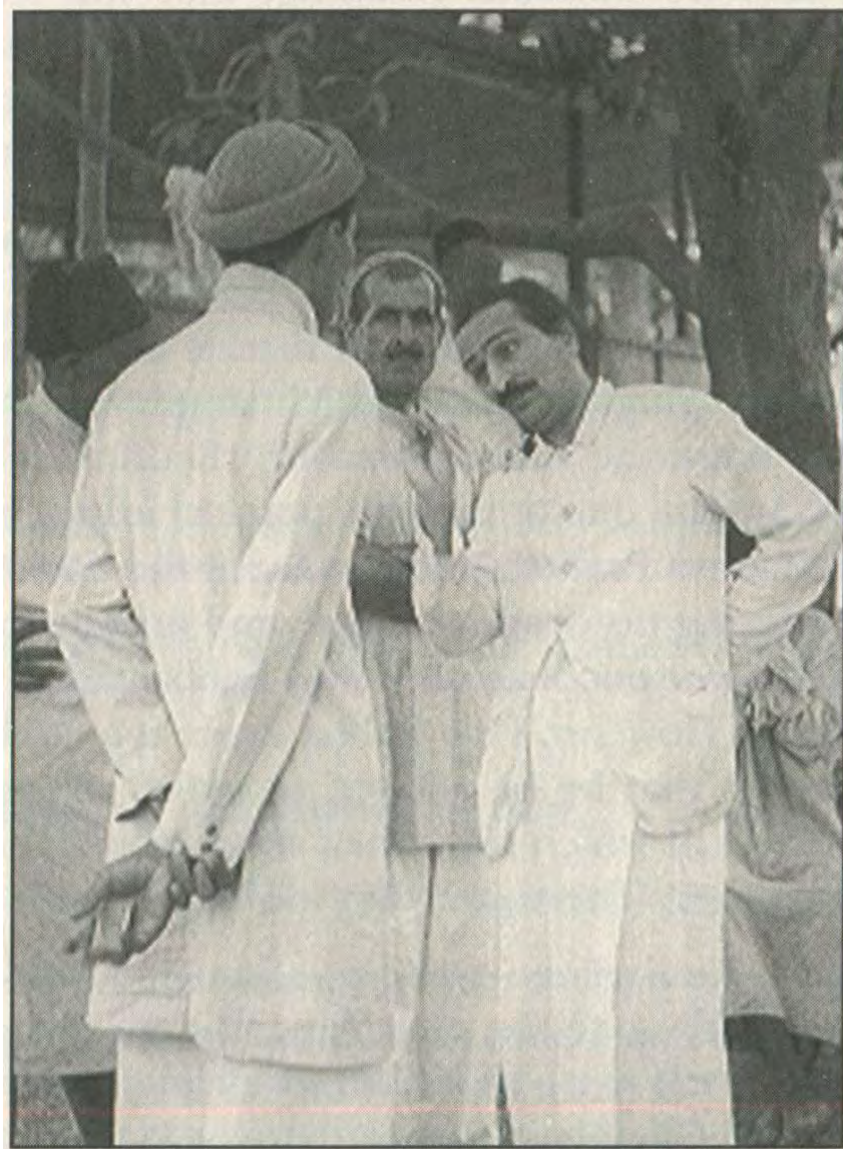
other side, found a highway, saw a truck coming, and flagged it down, and was able to return to his native place without further incident.

Now, the dacoits of India have some curious rules. If a prisoner is caught escaping, he should be immediately shot. But, in case he succeeds escaping, they will leave him alone. It's an honorable matter, and the dacoits have a kind of honor, a contract with the victim you may say. So that was it.

Meanwhile, Puja Babba began worshipping Meher Baba along with the other deities in his prayer room. He sent additional letters with additional threats and requests for money to the Singhai family, which simply ignored them since they knew the rules of dacoitry. Soon after that, Jai Prakash Narayan, one of the able political leaders of India, came to Madhya Pradesh and requested the dacoits to surrender, offering no death sentence and an open air jail if they would come out peaceably. Puja Babba and all his gang surrendered. However, Puja Babba made it a condition of his surrender that he be allowed to make pilgrimages to certain places at which he wished to worship. This condition was granted. Thereafter they took him to jail.

This story dates back to early seventies, and he was already getting old, so Puja Babba and Dhannalal Singhai probably are no more, but Arun Kumar Singhai is still alive and his faith in Baba developed intensely after this incident.

Further Details of the History of Pleader



*Pleader, his back toward the camera, with his beloved master
at Rahuri 1936 (from Hermes' collection)*



Pleader at Tiger Valley Cave, 1930s

This story is in the voice of Meherwan Merchant. Kishore Mistry contributed various details prior to Kishore's untimely death in 2005.

Kaikhushroo Pleader belonged to a family of barristers as his name suggests ["pleader" means "barrister"]. His father was from Markera, a very beautiful place in southern India. The father was a very rich man with seven houses, but by the time of his death, he had lost all the houses and all his money, due to various lawsuits brought by members of his family. Pleader and his mother came to Bombay with nothing but the clothes on their backs, and stayed at a modest place at Cherabazaar in Bombay after his father's death.

Pleader got a job at the Bank of India. At that time, bank jobs were very easy to get. Though his body might have been at the bank, his attention was always on spiritual books and scriptures. One day, Pleader encountered a

book by Swami Ramtirth, a professor who had become a saint. Pleader said that this book was so powerful in its expressions that it would put life into a dead body.

That book changed the course of Pleader's life and he began visiting saints and sadhus. He visited Narayan Maharaj, Upasni Maharaj and Tajuddin Baba, as well as some he later described as fake saints. He also went to Hazrat Babajan on many occasions. Hazrat Babajan used to take him in a tonga - a horse-drawn vehicle cart. The tongawalla would carry Babajan the whole day, and Babajan would not permit the tongawalla to pick up any additional passengers while the two of them were in the tonga. They would rest in Bund Garden near the neem tree that Baba used to sit against in later years.

Once Pleader asked Babajan why she didn't allow the tongawalla to pick up any additional passengers, since that was the only way the man could make his living. Babajan scolded Pleader at this. She said, "What do you know of this man? He is not an ordinary soul. He was a king in his last birth, had an empire of his own, but he didn't want it."

When he went to visit Upasni Maharaj, he used to see Upasni Maharaj perform Hindu rituals such as yagna (fire worship). Upasni Maharaj used to tease Pleader, "Look, you're a Parsi, worshipper of fires, this is your holy fire. I am your head priest. When I pray to this fire, because of your presence the doors to heaven will be opened for your ancestors and they will pass off."

Pleader in this phase began also going to Meher Baba. He was not at ease within himself. He had the intense desire to get out of this circle of births and deaths even in this very

birth. Once when he went to Narayan Maharaj, he asked Narayan Maharaj whether he might get God-realization in this birth. Narayan said, "You must find a guru." Pleader rejoined, "Will I ever find a guru in this life?" Narayan said, "Shortly, within a month's time, you are going to get him."

Again Pleader went to Meher Baba and he asked the same thing of Him. Baba said, "Why not? You must catch the feet of your master." At this instant, Pleader broke down, fell at Baba's feet, grasped them and cried his heart out. Baba said, "Go back to Bombay, wind up your job, wind up your family ties, your every attachment in Bombay and come back to Me. Your journey starts now."

Pleader had no wife and no children, so he was free from these burdens. Ardeshir, Pleader's brother was there to take care of Pleader's mother and sister. None of them even once objected to it, because they were all obsessed with worldly miseries, and so the idea that Pleader might be able to work free of these miseries was approved by them. At this time, Pleader had been living apart from the mother, brother and sister, and they were not depending on him for much.

On his return to Baba, he arrived in the midst of the Prem Ashram days. He was given all sorts of duties, big, small, behind the scenes and in the public eye. After that, Baba sent him on a five-year tour of India, with nothing but a begging bowl and a sadhu's robes. He was ordered to beg for his food, but the circumstances under which he was to beg were highly circumscribed by the order. If he got food, well and good, but if not he was to go without food.

Generally he was fortunate, and he always got food. But

once in the Himalayas he got only raw rice grains from his begging. He wanted to make a fire to boil the rice so he could eat it, because he was very hungry, but the winter was so cold that the fire would not start, and he couldn't eat, so he threw away the rice, thinking, "Well, Baba must want me to observe fast tonight. As He wishes, so I should do." He was settling down to sleep when suddenly a very old couple came to him, and said, thinking that he was a sadhu, "Look, Maharaj, will you take some offering of food from us? We don't intend to give you left-over food, but our practice is first to offer food to a holy person and then we will eat the left over portions for ourselves." Pleader, telling this story, used to say, "Even in the worst of circumstances, Baba came to me in one form or another to see that I wouldn't have to go without food."

He went on traveling, and in the Himalayas he encountered Keshawanandji, who Baba described as his spiritual agent, and Baba said was on the sixth plane. He would go into samadhi, and shut his eyes as soon as the sun came out on the Himalayas, while sitting on the bank of the Ganges. As the sun moved through the sky, Keshawanandji would slowly rotate his body so that it faced the sun the whole day long, and when the sun went down he would again open his eyes. He would not allow anybody to come near him to touch his body, and would hit anyone who came near him with a stout stick that he kept for the purpose. But when Pleader came to him and told one of his two or three attendants, "Look, my master has sent me here," and showed the attendant the photograph of Meher Baba, the disciple showed it to Keshawanandji, who readily allowed Pleader to approach him. The disciples didn't like this at all -

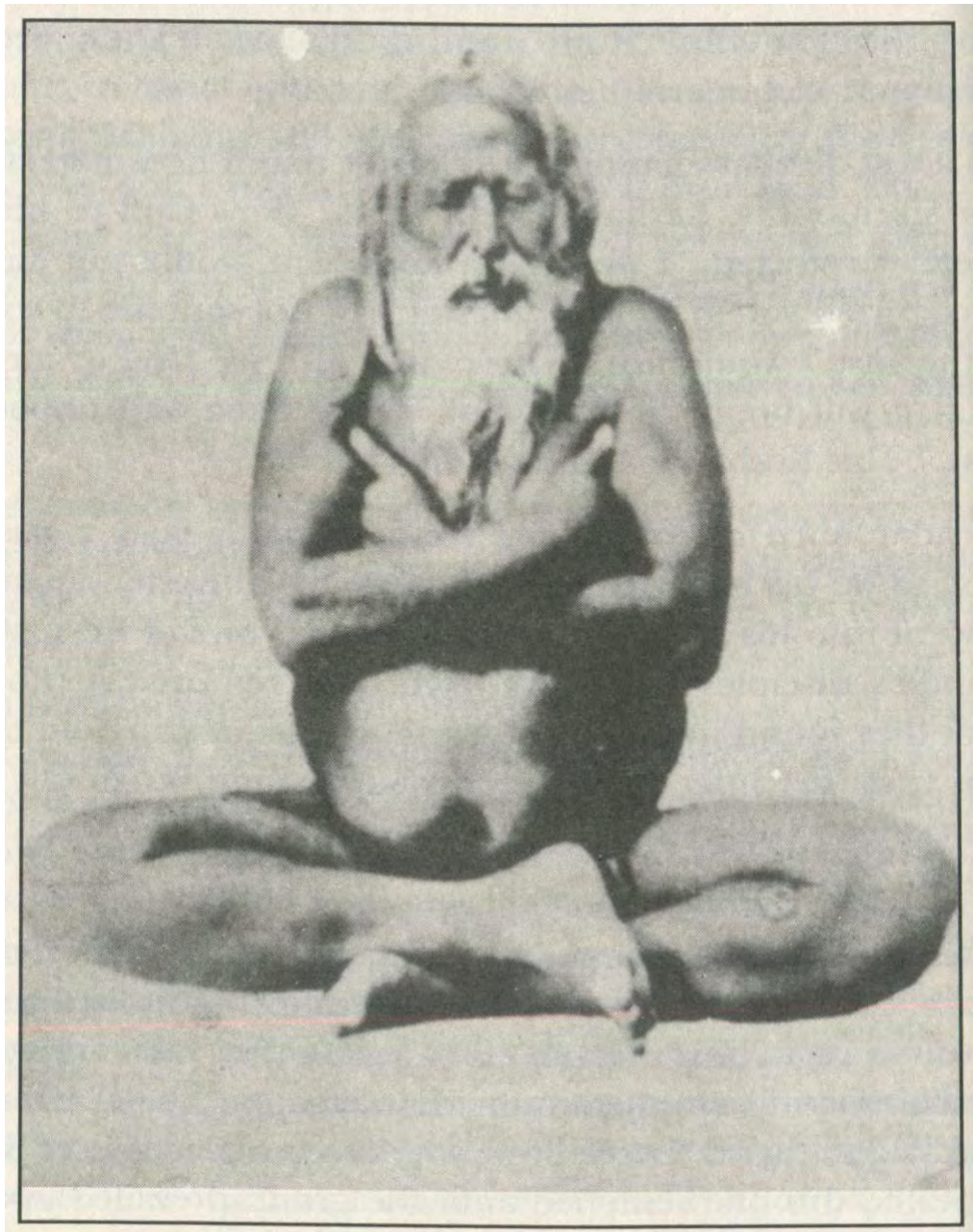
Pleader was a Parsee and even high caste Hindus had not been offered this degree of intimacy. They objected by saying, "This man eats flesh, he's not clean, and we are not allowed this embrace that you are giving him. It is not proper." Keshawanandji shot back, "You do not know who this soul is, how advanced he is and who his master is. I can not disallow him from coming to me." Thereafter, Keshawanandji permitted Pleader to bathe him.

As a test, Keshawanandji told Pleader that if he would stay for six months, Keshawanandji would show God to him. Pleader retorted, "I would not know you, would not have recognized you at all if my master had not sent me to you. Otherwise I would not be here. If at all I see God or meet God it will be at the hands of Meher Baba and nobody else." This Keshawanandji appreciated.

Pleader once observed that Keshawanandji had a nasty wound on his heel that was infected. When Keshawanandji went into his daily trance, Pleader and one of Keshawanandji's disciples took advantage, and removed a thorn that they found in the wound, and were squeezing out the pus from the infection when Keshawanandji broke out of his trance to scold them. "Why did you disturb me? I was in union with God."

After sunset, Keshawanandji used to give discourses on the banks of the river. Once when he was giving a discourse, two young boys came to join the assemblage. Keshawanandji stopped immediately upon their arrival, and said to them, "Look, boys, you have no place here." He repeated this one sentence until the group prevailed upon the boys to go. From the crowd someone asked, "These two

were simply pilgrims like us. Why did you choose to drive them away?" Keshawanandji said, "In a prior birth the two of them were cursed by a spiritual master. His curse prevents them from ever attending a satsang - a coming in contact with someone who can give spiritual guidance - and without



Keshawanandji, the saint whom Pleader visited

satsang there can be no spiritual progress."

From 15 September 1929 to 1934, same date he was keeping silence and was on a diet of milk, with just water in the last 28 days. He had imagined he might die from it, but he survived. This period and Pleader's austerities are covered in Lord Meher and Ramjoo's diaries. Pleader's mother died in the midst of this and Baba told him to go for the ceremony. Pleader said, "She's gone. She has come back to you. Where is the need for these kinds of ceremonies?"

Pleader felt very guilty about one incident in his life, right to the end of his life, and he used to tell this incident to people. After he had observed silence, and had fasted, and had gone through the acute spiritual discipline that was a shining example to others, Baba asked him to visit his mother, who was then alive. When he arrived in Bombay, his sister complained that the neighbors, who were Parsis, and who were therefore anti-Baba, were taunting them day in and day out, "Look, her son has become Baba's disciple, so these two are going straight to heaven. They could not find the same things in our religion."

This really upset his sister; she was suffering pain and starvation, and in addition had to undergo this abuse, and she felt as if she were losing her mental bearings. Pleader went to the neighbors and wrote down (because he was observing silence) that if they hereafter persecuted his mother or his other family members because of Meher Baba there would be a series of deaths in their family. This is the first and the last time he ever wished ill on anyone. It was a kind of curse.

Baba intervened. On his next trip to Bombay, and without

Pleader's knowledge, He visited Pleader's mother. He went to the neighbors' door, with the mother in one of His arms and the sister in the other. Instead of seeking forgiveness, these people continued passing their remarks and Baba. with gestures said, "They are not destined to receive the pardon. They could just have asked for it and I would have pardoned them. They are very unfortunate." It so happened that within 40 days (a Zoroastrian ceremonial period) they lost three male members, all young, the breadwinners, on whom their family depended. As he narrated this to us, he used to bang his forehead, saying, "Why had I to do this?":

I was a very small boy in that time, in my mid-schools, and I vividly recall Pleader suffering from the agony of the spiritual longing for God Realization and wondering when Baba would give him release. I used to see him totally in agony. In my house there used to be so many wonderful Baba lovers who would congregate - Kishore Mistry, Gulabdas Panchal, Afsari, Shapur Parekh, Dadachanjis and many other senior Baba lovers. Of course, my grandmother, Kharmanmasi, was often there.

At a certain point Baba asked Pleader to explain God· Speaks to all, so there was a formal gathering every Thursday, and people came in the evenings at the appointed time to hear him speak. The people also had a translation into Gujarati of God Speaks. So side by side the Gujarati was being corrected. But Pleader's health was slowly fading. He was experiencing cardiac problems and kidney pain that could not be diagnosed. No medicine would fix it, but the pain was unbearably acute, and he used to moan and groan with it.

On 13th May 1959, Pleader went to Arnavaz's place to see Baba. It was their first meeting after a long time. Pleader said, "Baba, Gustadji has gone, Buasahib has gone, so many have gone; do you want me also to go the same way?" Baba said, "No, you have a very unique place. Yours is a different case altogether."

In this regard, Baba had given Pleader the comprehensive list of the 12 circles of Baba, with the names of all the parties in the circles written in. Pleader was told not to show the list to anybody (though my mother snuck a peek). Baba had written the names Himself in His own hand, and had signed and sealed the list Himself, so it was totally secret. Baba had tied a knot on a cloth, and told Pleader, "This will give you a reminder that you will be God-realized in this very life."

Pleader went through the circle list and he saw that his name was not there. So, in a lighter vein, he asked Baba, "Baba, where is my name? I don't appear in the list." Baba said, "You are not in any of these circles. You are under my will, and you will be my chargeman when I break my silence, and Eruch will come to assist you." This was Baba's promise to Pleader.

As Pleader's last days seemed to be approaching, I as a small boy, looked at his condition. Knowing of his life and his sacrifices, I started doubting that Baba was who He said He was. I sent Baba a telegramme followed by a letter. In these, I modestly and humbly complained to Baba that He had not kept his promise. I said to Baba that Pleader had done this and that, had carried out Baba's instructions, done so many things for Baba. And, I kept on, all Baba had given

Pleader was suffering and suffering. Where was even a sign of the promise that Baba had made to him?"

Baba sent back a one-sentence reply. The sentence said. "Pleader is fortunate to suffer a fraction of my infinite suffering. A letter follows." Immediately on the heels of this telegramme came a letter directing us to bring Pleader back to Meherazad for his last days. This letter was followed by a further, a telegramme reiterating this.

Plans were made to transport Pleader by train to Ahmednagar, although the doctors advised that Pleader was too sick to withstand the rigors of the train trip. But regardless of all that, we had to take Pleader because it was Baba's order, and Pleader also insisted that he be taken. We took him all the way in First class - a dozen or so people accompanied him to Ahmednagar, though all but one of them traveled in another compartment in another class. Arrangements had been made at Baba's end - an ambulance had been brought right up to the train platform. Pleader was helped from the coach into the ambulance and whisked away to Meherazad.

Baba was waiting for him, patted his cheeks, and inquired about his health. Pleader said, "Look, I have come back. Either you fulfill your promise, or you give up your divine claim of being God." Baba stretched Pleader's palm toward Him, and in a gesture of giving a promise or maintaining His promise, He banged His palm into Pleader's palm and said, "No, I'll stand by my promise, even today I stand by my promise. You have come here and you will be staying with me."

After that, none of us, who were very much attached to

Pleader, was allowed to stay. Only Homi Irani, my uncle and Kharmanmasi's second son, and another Parsi friend of Pleader - Shapur Parekh were allowed to stay. To me Baba said, "You were sending letters and telegrammes to me, but do you know Pleader broke his promise to me? I wanted him to remain here. Now that he has come back, I will fulfill my promise."

We were all asked to leave immediately, which we did. A few days later, Baba was talking with His mandali and brought up the topic of when Pleader should gain his relief. One man said, "Baba, 25th February is your birthday. Let him be there on your birthday, and let him go the next day." So Baba went to Pleader, and said, "I am sending you to Meherabad. Tomorrow is my birthday. You will drop your body at Meherabad. Your grave has already been dug."

Pleader, with tears in his eyes, said, "Will you at least come to put me six feet down?"

Baba smiled and said, "No. I will come to put your physical body six feet down, but you I will put within myself, and you will see that."

That is the last time Pleader saw Baba in the body, and he was whisked away to Meherabad where he lived until 26th February at 7 AM. At that time Pleader got a big spasm and said, "Shut off all these lights. Why have you put on such big lights?" The attendants reminded Pleader that there was no light - just one small bulb - but by the time they had finished saying that Pleader had already gotten a big smile of his own, and he said, "Tomorrow Baba is coming. Baba has fulfilled His promise, and convey many, many

thanks to Baba." Shapur said, "Pleader there is no light here. This is the experience that Baba is giving to you," Pleader said, "Yes, when tomorrow Baba comes, please give my heartfelt thanks to Him." He immediately shut his eyes and was gone.

That very day, we received a telegramme saying that Pleader had left his body. We immediately set out from Bombay, reaching Ahmednagar at the crack of dawn. Kaikobad was asked to sit near Pleader's body and repeat Zoroastrian prayers, which he did most willingly. Pleader's body had been placed in a coffin. Baba came within half an hour or so, and ordered the body to be brought near the hole. Baba said, "Normally I don't go near a dead body. But here is my special person, I have freed him today in all senses, and he has not to come back." Baba made everybody to recite Parvardigar prayer and Repentance prayer, and Baba put the first fistful of dirt on his coffin.

Brief Life History of Kharmanmasi



Two photos of Kharmanmasi, hardly ever photographed. The leftmost is from David Fenster, and the rightmost from the Talati Family archives.

This set of stories supplements material found in Lord Meher and Mehera-Meher on Kharmanmasi. The stories were assembled from interviews with Meherwan Merchant (her grandson), Arnavaz Dadachanji and Kharmanmasi's daughter-in-law Khorshed Irani. As reported by these persons, and also in Lord Meher, Baba said that Kharmanmasi had been Lord Buddha's paternal aunt in that incarnation and was destined for the role of His father in His next advent. As Arnavaz put it, "Kharmanmasi was a very, very important person. "

Kharmanmasi was born in 1894. At the age of fifteen, she was married to Jamshedji, whose age at the time of the marriage was 45. She bore him ten children, of whom only three survived. The survivors were Homi, Rustom (who survives still, though he has lost his memory), and Merwan.

Kharmanmasi met Beloved Baba just prior to His silence but, though she heard Him speak, she did not have many instances of that experience. She was introduced to Him by her cousin Rustom Dinyar who said to her, "Come Kharman, I will take you to a man who will give you peace."

Peace was a definite necessity. Kharmanmasi was repulsed by Jamshedji from the beginning, but because of the Indian social system she stayed married to him for nearly twenty years. For his part, Jamshedji was fiercely jealous.

In her youth, Kharmanmasi was quite beautiful* and Jamshedji formed the impression that other men were prowling around her. Eventually his obsession got the better of his reason, and he consulted a black magician about how to confine her. Upon learning the steps in the black art that were necessary, Jamshedji himself invoked this curse on her. Her limbs became immobile and her whole body became stiff. Her misery, previously great, became still greater. It's difficult to date this event accurately; but a good guess would be 1928.

By this time, Kharmanmasi had been taken to visit Baba. One day, Rustom Dinyar went for Baba's darshan, and Baba said, "Where is Kharmanmasi?" Rustom explained the situation and Baba gave the remedy. Baba told Rustom that he should go looking for a spotless black female dog, and give the dog a bowl or a cup full of milk daily for about a month. Meherwan Merchant reports, "Much to her consternation, a dog of the type Baba ordered could not be found in that

* Though Kharmanmasi was stout all her life, the Indian taste at this time (and later) did not preclude overweight women from being attractive to men. For example, consider the elder generation of Bollywood stars.

area of Bombay, but after much looking and hunting for such a dog, finally Rustom found such a dog, and enticed it to come to Kharman's house. Once the dog got the milk, she decided to stay, and they began feeding it milk on a daily basis. Gradually my grandmother got better and came back to herself, and the entire influence of evil forces was dispersed."

Kharmanmasi left Jamshedji, and she and her three sons came to Baba. Picking up from Meherwan's account, "Later, it came to her knowledge that Jamshedji was on his deathbed, and he was experiencing the same symptoms that he had induced in her. He could not move - what he had done to Kharmanmasi recoiled on him. He asked everybody who knew her to convey the message that he sought forgiveness from her. Kharmanmasi did not give him any forgiveness, until Baba told her to go to her husband and tell him that she forgave him, but that hereafter there would be no connections, and "you can proceed on your journey."

Now Rustom Dinyar said to Baba, "Baba I am old, and there is nobody to take care of me. Would you allow me to marry Kharmanmasi? Kharmanmasi had enough of marriage and wanted no part of another marriage, but Baba told her it would be good if she married Rustom. Kharmanmasi would do anything Baba told her to do, exactly as He said, and she reluctantly agreed to the marriage. Rustom loved her very much, and was a good companion to her.

Poverty was Kharmanmasi's closest companion, all her life, and this time with Rustom was no exception. Much later,

Arnavaz says, "I used to ask her how she managed in the midst of this deep poverty. She told me, 'I don't know how I manage it. There is a box in which I keep the money. I use it, and by the end of the month it just suffices.'"

In 1938, Rustom died. Soon thereafter, Baba called Kharmanmasi to live in His ashram.

Upon Rustom's death, several interesting incidents happened. Meherwan picks up the story, "Here I am reminded of an incident that was so great that Baba himself became charged with sentiment and embraced Kharmanmasi for minutes together. When Rustom died, he had a restaurant in Bombay, a small cafeteria, and he had left it in the hands of his partner, another Irani. Baba told Kharmanmasi, 'Go to your husband's partner, and tell him, "whatever my husband's share is or whatever he has left behind, please give it to me," and if he doesn't give you anything don't even in the remotest corner of your mind abuse him or even worse still never curse him at all. Just touch his feet and come back to me.' Kharmanmasi went as she was told, said what she was told to say. The partner said, with his greed, 'Nothing is left from when your husband was running the shop. The shop was running into losses, and in fact I was compensating for losses and there is nothing left, not even clothes left by him.'

"So Kharmanmasi, in letter and spirit, did not wish him ill. She touched his feet and came back to Baba. Baba asked, and she narrated the full story. Baba said, 'You did not even think ill of him?'

"Kharmanmasi said, 'It was your order and I carried it out. After all, what values would I need? I'm here with you, I'm

getting all I could ever want here.'

"Baba was touched, and He embraced her, kissed her on both cheeks, and after a minute or so Baba told her, 'You do not know how many lifetimes of suffering of yours have gone on that man.' She came to know soon enough that this man had jumped from the fourth floor of the same building, committing suicide."

However, the consequences of the death of Rustom were not over yet. A Gurkha* worked at the shop. After Rustom's death, it seems that the Gurkha was owed back wages, and the partner sent the Gurkha to Kharmanmasi to demand from her the wages owed. The Gurkha said, "I am coming back here one week from today, and if I don't get the wages owed to me, you will be really very sorry. You have got small children. Consider them."

Kharmanmasi was so worried. Her relatives had all disowned her for going into Baba's fold - at that time practically the entire Parsi community was opposed to Baba due to Colonel Irani's mischief - and so Kharmanmasi was out on a limb. Nobody would help, even though her relatives included some very rich people.

One day within that week somebody knocked at the door. Her son Sarosh opened the door and there was Baba, with Meherjee. Kharmanmasi was taking her bath. Baba told Sarosh, with Meherjee interpreting "I am desperately hungry. I have traveled a long way, and I need something to eat." Some leftover masoor dal from the previous day was

* A warrior sect of persons from Nepal. In World War II it was said that the only warriors the Japanese ever feared were the Gurkhas

there and Sarosh offered it. Baba was so desperate to eat that he could not wait for the food to be warmed up, so He ate the dal at room temperature. He asked for a slice of sour lime to be squeezed on the dal.

Sarosh said, "We don't have any," though they did have some. The problem was that it was very stale and dried up, and he was ashamed of it.

Baba said, "Why are you lying to me - it is in that cupboard. Open it up and bring it to me." Baba ate, and by the time my grandmother came out, drying her hair she was happy because she saw Baba, but she broke down immediately. Baba said, "What is the problem? I have come here and you are crying?" She told the whole story of the intimidation by the Nepali servant. Baba said, "Why do you worry? You have surrendered to me, and your worries have also come to me. Believe in me." Baba went away, and the family went to the window to wave goodbye.

Months later, when Kharmanmasi next saw Baba, she said, "Baba, you really made that whole thing pass off so peacefully. that Gurkha never even came to our house again.

Baba said, "What are you talking about?"

She said, "You remember, few months back, you came to my house and I told you about the Gurkha?" Meherjee was also standing there, and he looked puzzled.

Baba passed it all off, gesturing to all present, "This lady has lost her marbles. I never went to Bombay during that period." In point of fact, Baba had been in England at the

time. However, at some later time, Baba told Pleader that He can be present in a number of places at the same time without difficulty.

Kharmanmasi joined the ashram in Bangalore, went on some Blue Bus tours, and eventually stayed on the hill at Meherabad. She must have had more duties, but at least two are known. One was that she should keep constant companionship with Mehera. At this stage in His work, Baba required that Mehera should never be alone, out of sight of another member of the women mandali. Mani and Kharman split that duty. Roshan Kerawala remembers Kharman's other known duty, though she was barely five years old at the time.

This story begins with Baba and Roshan in lower Meherabad. Roshan tells: "Baba said, 'you come with me, and I'll take you up the hill to see the women.'

"Baba used to walk so fast that as a child I just could not keep up with Him. By the time we reached the railway crossing I was panting, and when I saw the big top of the hill, I said to Baba, 'I can not climb that mountain, Baba - it's too high for me.' So then He held my hand to cross the railway tracks, and then He made me sit on His shoulders, but with His signs He made me understand that if I should see someone of the Upper Meherabad women, I must get down.

I said, 'Haji* Baba.' So I sat on His shoulders, held Him, my two legs dangling down. He carried me for some distance. Meanwhile, my tiredness went. Eventually I saw a

* Literally, "Yes, Dear"

very fat lady, Kharmanmasi, sitting under the tank near the gate. And I said to Baba, 'Baba, there is a big fat lady sitting there.' Then He put me down, held my hand, and walked me up the hill."

For His work, Baba sent Kharmanmasi and Arnavaz back to Bombay in 1940, and then called Kharmanmasi back to His ashram later, until the New Life (1949), when Kharmanmasi was sent back to Bombay to spend the rest of her life there.

By this time, her son Sarosh had married, and they had a son, Meherwan Merchant, and he has a wealth of information about Kharmanmasi that has been invaluable for the preparation of this story. Had it not been for Baba's intervention, no son would have been there. Khorshed, Meherwan's mother, tells that at an early age, Meherwan died. "Standing in front of Baba's portrait, Kharmanmasi held the dead child, rocking back and forth in her anguish and weeping, saying, 'Baba please give this grandchild back.' After some time, the child revived, and Kharmanmasi remarked, 'The original has gone and some passing soul has occupied this body.'"

Life for the family in Bombay was not easy. Pleader at this time had come down from Baba's ashram, and he lived with Kharmanmasi's family. This became very fortunate for the family, because Pleader trained many fledgling Baba lovers in how to please Baba, including Ratilal and Gulab Panchar, Kishore Mistry and the members of Kharmanmasi's family, all of whom loved Baba.

Kharmanmasi used to tell Khorshed that no matter how much Sarosh made, or no matter how poor it made them,

it was essential to keep money aside to go to Baba if He called them. Khorshed did, and in the early sixties, Baba permitted them to come for darshan along with the other Bombay Baba lovers, at Guruprasad.

Jal Dastur tells a story about Kharmanmasi from this time. He said that he was at Guruprasad once when a man came up to Baba and offered Him thousands of rupees. Baba turned the man's gift down, using the special way He had of doing it without hurting the giver's feelings. This consisted of saying, 'You keep it for now. I don't need it at present, but if I need it I will call you later.' Later that same day, Kharmanmasi came into the room to bow down to Baba, carrying with her a five rupee note that she had wrapped in a silk scarf. Baba took it and pressed it to His forehead just above and between His eyes. At that time, five rupees was a lot of money, and for a poor woman in Bombay it must have taken weeks of scrimping and saving, a few annas at a time.

However, at some later time Baba put a stop to these love gifts from Kharmanmasi. He said to her, "Why don't you keep your money? You don't have enough." From then on, she had the order not to give Baba any money and on the contrary, Baba used to help her financially.

Arnavaz tells about Kharmanmasi's obedience. "There's a wonderful incident that happened once. Baba was in my apartment in Bombay. Baba told me not to tell anyone - not even my family - that He was there in Bombay. One day Baba and I were at the dining table. Baba was having His lunch when the doorbell rang. I went to see who it was. It was Kharmanmasi. I didn't know what to do, so I went to

Baba. I said, 'What shall I do?'

Baba said, 'Don't let her come in here.' But Kharmanmasi was an elderly person, like a mother to me. I just looked at Baba. How to tell her to go away? Baba just smiled, 'OK, tell her that I am here, but that I see no one and she should go away.'

"When I opened the door, I said, 'Kharmanmasi, Baba is here but He doesn't want to see anyone.' Can you imagine the expression on her face?

"All right,' she said, and just left. No sooner had she gone a little ways away than Baba had me call her, not for an embrace, not to say anything, but just so that she could fold her hands and see Him from a distance. She came up, she stood there looking at Baba, and Baba smiled. That was it. She said nothing. She just looked at Baba, took her darshan, so happy, and then she left."

About her three sons, Homi was never able to cope with life, though he was not mentally defective. Baba told Nariman Dadachanji to hire him, though Homi never earned his keep. This gave the family a little money. Merwan, the third son, hired out as a stevedore, though he was slight of build. Desperate to earn the family some money, Merwan diverted some liquor he was unloading from a ship, and got caught and sent to prison.

Baba came to Bombay and drove his car around the prison. After that there was a legal jumble including an appeal, and the case was dropped. Baba told Kharmanmasi, "He would have been imprisoned for the rest of his life had I not saved him." Merwan did not live

long. His constitution was not robust.

There is one beautiful story about Sarosh that Khorshed tells. After working for Sarosh Motor Works in Ahmednagar, Sarosh joined the post office. This story dates from that time. "There was an order at a certain time that a Baba lover who wished to obey Beloved Baba should feed a poor person, directly placing the food into the mouth of the poor person with one's own hands. It was easy to find a poor person, but not so easy to find one who would take the food directly from the hands of the giver. But still Sarosh found someone and fulfilled the order, though he had to do the work on his lunch break. That day, at 12:15 he found one leper woman. She was seated on the ground in front of a restaurant. Rustom asked, 'Would you do me a favor?'

"'As you like,' she responded.

"'My one wish, my order from my guru is that you allow me to feed you,' Sarosh said. At this the woman began weeping, and Sarosh also wept. He gave her food, and came home to me. He said, 'Today I am very happy. I gave food to a leper woman and she took it.' He explained, 'If she had said no, there was no time, and Baba's order could not have been kept.'"

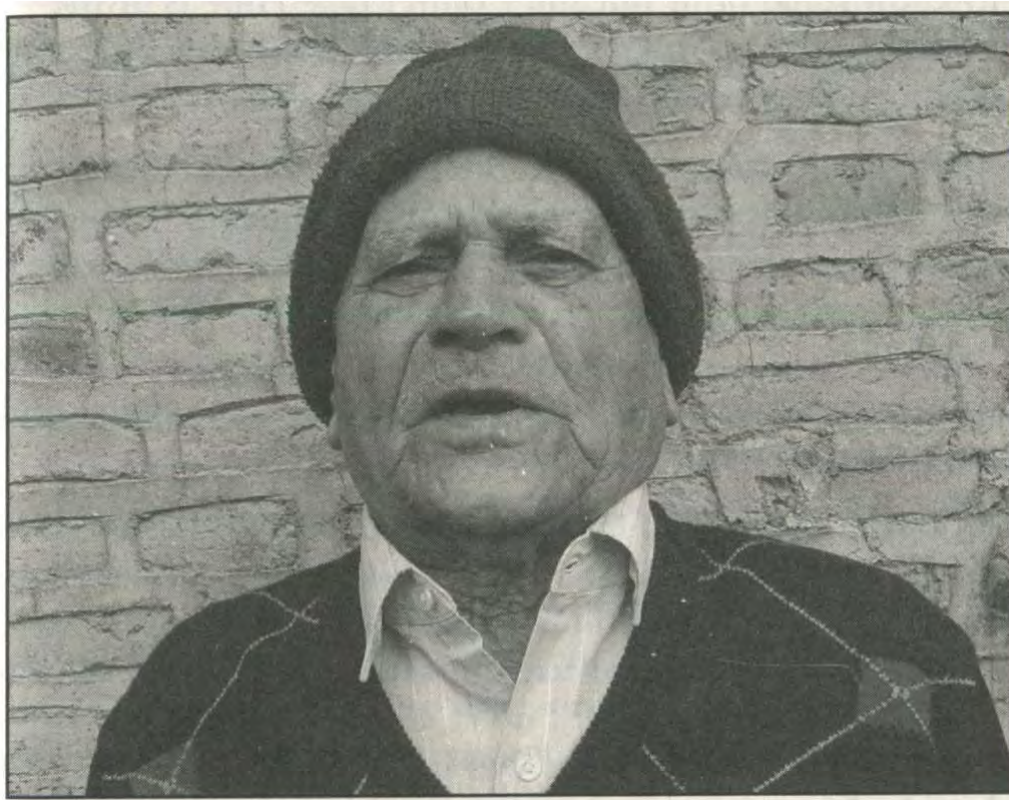
In the mid-1960s, Kharmanmasi suffered a debilitating stroke. Arnavaz takes up the tale, "In the end, she suffered a stroke. I knew that there was no one to look after her, and stroke was a very expensive disease to treat, so I immediately informed Baba. Baba sent me a message to take a bowl of water, to take His name, and to sponge her whole body. So I took the help of one Baba lover, and we went there and sponged her whole body, taking Baba's name. It

really helped, very much. After we followed Baba's instructions, she could sit up, she could eat, she could ease herself, the only thing she couldn't do was walk. All her movements except walking were restored."

When Baba dropped his body, the stroke prevented Kharmanmasi from coming for darshan. Kharmanmasi was heartbroken, and she died after three or four years.

Baba's Servant

Janglimaster (Laxman Jangle) has served Baba almost all his life. Incidentally, typically the suffix of "master" was given to those mandali members who had been teachers in the school at Meherabad that Baba instituted. Janglimaster got his nickname from them, though he didn't teach there.



I came to Ahmednagar in 1930 at the age of 15. For seven years I was here in school, and then I passed the matriculation [graduated]. I went home to see my father, who was a poor farmer. I worked with him on the farm for one year, and then in 1938 Baba advertised in the paper for a servant. A friend told me, I asked Baba and He permitted me

to join Him in 1938.

I stayed and worked for a while and after that time my friend asked me if it had turned out to be a good post. I said it was very good, never mind who He is. But by the seventh month I had begun to find out who Baba is. Some Baba followers told me, and I read some books and that way I came to know some of it. But still I didn't take Him as divine - just as a very important spiritual man. Afterwards I thought that it is all right, so I spent my life with Baba.

After one year Baba went to Bangalore, and Baba took me with Him. After six months there in Bangalore, I got one letter from my father saying, "I am here, your wife is here staying with me, what are your plans?" I gave the letter to Baba. Baba said, "We are going to Nagar. You go straight to your father, and bring your wife to Arangaon." Baba told me which house to engage in the village.

From the beginning, because I was poor, I had to work so much, and still I had days when there was no food for me. Now at this point, when I brought my wife to Ahmednagar, Baba offered to put me back in school for further education. I said I just couldn't do it. So Baba offered work to me, and I accepted. That way I started my marketing, and I worked for eleven years until the New Life arose. During the New Life, Baba had no money, but still He was giving me enough money for my maintenance. I was conducting my whole family with that money.

After the New Life, when things had settled down one letter came to me from my father. My elder sister was unmarried, and my father wanted to get her married. He asked me for some money, but of course I had none. So he told

me that I should get the money from my "owner" where I was serving. My father said that he would pay the money back after one year. I gave the letter to Baba. Baba gave me the full 300 rupees that my father had asked for!

The marriage was thus undertaken. After one year, my father sent me back the 300 rupees. I took it to Baba to repay the debt. Baba said, "What is this? I gave you some money?" I explained that it had been used to arrange my sister's marriage.

"What did I say?" said Baba.

"You said nothing," I said.

Baba said, "Keep the money with you."

I said, "Okay Baba," but now to keep the money with me was a very important thing. I thought that it is Baba's money so it must not be lost or spent, so I thought what to do. At the time my wife was learning how to stitch clothes. I thought that it was better to use the money to buy a sewing machine. In that way we started a village clothing repair business, and she was working there and I was working here, but at the same time we were conscious that it was Baba's money and we should not spend it. When we earned it back, we kept it aside.

By that time I had three children, one daughter and two sons. For their marriage I had to do something, so I kept the money aside. When my first daughter became grown, I decided to marry her. I asked Baba, "That girl has grown up and I want that she should marry. Is it all right with you?"

Baba said, "What about money?"

I said, "Baba I have got."

"You have got? Okay, then it is all right, and you may go for the marriage."

When the New Life came, there was no more marketing, and I had time on my hands, because Baba asked me to look after the people of his staying here. I used the extra time to start a milk business, milking the buffaloes. For some time, Kaikobad was with Baba in the New Life, but after that he came back here and I had to look after him and his daughters by Baba's order. It was my job to fetch any doctor and do their marketing, and since 1949 I have been taking care of them.

For the marketing I obtained one tonga - a horse-drawn cart. There was one horse here, very fine, and Baba gave it to me, but told me not to use it to draw the tonga. But I made one mistake, I attached the horse to the tonga anyway. Vishnumaster [Vishnu N. Deorukhar] used to help, and he was with me when I took this horse and tonga to the market. On the way back, with the tonga full of vegetables and all the things from the market, we reached the bridge. Coming the other way toward us was a military tank. Trying to back up the tonga so the tank could pass, we lost control and fell down into the river! Baba helped us. If the river had been high, we could have been killed. Instead, the river was dry. But, the river was filled with sewage, and we had a nasty experience. This taught me literal obedience. It was my first and last mistake like this.

I have three sons and two daughters. Each and every child Baba played with them. The last one Baba played with him very well, and Baba liked him very well. After that when he

was grown up and became a graduate and searching for a job, what happened was that a job came before him. One day, an insurance company manager came to the office of the Trust, to Eruch, and he said, "I want a man. He should be a graduate, and a hard worker and he should know the whole of 'Nagar city.'" As soon as he told Eruch, it was clear to Eruch that my son was the perfect man for the job. He asked me what my son was doing. So Eruch arranged for the manager and the son to meet, and the manager asked him to work that same day. In one month, the manager sent him to Pune for training. In this way he got the job without leaving home. He is now a big man in the insurance company, a district manager.

Baba used to come to my family, at home. Sometimes Baba would say, "The children are very strong. What are you feeding them?" Baba knows everything. Once a day, I was giving them rice and sometimes millet (jowar), which was very cheap at that time, and sometimes wheat. I told Him, "By Your grace, they have very good health." If anyone was sick, Baba used to provide some milk for that sick person. Dr. Nilkanth, Padri, Dr. Donkin was there, so my family used to receive medical treatment from His mandali, any time.

My second girl married, and after only one year it was apparent that my son-in-law was not good - drinking all the time. My daughter asked me to take her back with me, so I brought her here. As soon as I brought her, I told Baba, "Baba, this and this used to happen. He used to beat her."

Baba said, "Is it? Bring her here." Baba asked her, "Have you an intention to go back there?"

She said, "Baba, I don't want to go back there. After one

year I have too much experience, and I know it is bad for me to go back there." Then Baba said to me, "Send her to the school and get her training for courses." After that Waman Padole was working in the local office and Baba asked him to look after the girl. After seven years she got a job and now she is working even today.

Baba is such a thing. He knows what will happen, and He took care of his own family.

One time, after the New Life, I had a big accident on the road just near the Samadhi. It was my marketing day, and I had to ask Kaikobad's family what food they wanted me to bring. One truck was there, just as I was crossing the road, and it hit me. For four months I was in bed. If the truck had gone two feet more in my direction, I would have expired. Baba used to come to my home, looking to see that everything was right. One day when Baba was roaming in the village, he came to my house, and after arti and prayer he came here to rest. In that way, Baba helped me too much, and that grace Baba gave me permitted me to be carefree, just to work. Baba said, "You have worked very sincerely."

When Baba went on the New Life, Pendu kept some accounts in the village, and when Pendu went on the New Life with Baba, he gave me the accounts to keep. I used to keep account of every penny. At one time, one marwadi villager had a court case against him. The time had come to lock down his bank account. The bank manager told him, "If you know a faithful man, transfer your money to him, and get him to give it to you as you need it, until the account can be unlocked." He called me, because he said,

"Janglimaster is working with Baba. It will be fine." Coincidentally, the manager of the bank was my old teacher from my schooling in the 1930s in Ahmednagar. He instructed me to handle the money faithfully, and I agreed.

Now the marwadi came to me and he asked me for some piece of paper, because he was having second thoughts. I told him, "Take the money if you want. I can't be bothered if you do not trust me." After one year, he came back and I transferred the money back to him, all that he gave me. I gave the account to my teacher to prove that there was no disagreement.

Baba used to send me to Ahmednagar for marketing at 8 a.m. and would tell me to come back before 5 p.m. Although I attended Baba's sahasas programmes, I had to go daily to do the marketing. Thus, I can tell about my life, but not so much about Baba. All the time here I was working, only working for Baba. Up to now I managed faithfully.

When Baba died, up till then I was a servant - up to 1969. But, in 1969 I found that Baba had made me mandali, a beneficiary of the Trust. Baba said I was retired, because I had served for 30 years, just like a government official. In 1970, I told Kutumb Shastri [first Chairman of the Trust] that I was retired, but he said, "No, you have to work at the work that Baba gave you," so I worked for another 30 years. Now it is time for a second retirement.

Now I am doing samadhi duty from 10 to 12. It is my whim, my wish to do something, not just to sit. The mandali were also telling me to leave the job now, but I decided as long as I can walk I will do these two hours of work per day. My health is good. Now my son has built a nice house for me,

just near the village.

The younger generation is hopeless. They don't know how to work. I exclude my sons, who are good, born here, and absorbed that atmosphere of Baba, and in that way I am very happy.

Raghavulu of Andhra Meets Baba



Mr. A. V Raghavulu, interviewed in Meherabad

We were fortunate to meet Mr. Raghavulu during the 1955 Sahavas reunion in 2005, and heard his story directly from him, in English.

I heard of His name first in 1950. Actually from 1950 onward I was hearing, but I could not believe in the beginning. From then on I was hearing more and more. How will the Avatar come in flesh and blood? Only Rama and all that. I was given one book - Avatar by Jean Adriel - which came from Mr. Y. Rangarao, [one of the persons Baba named collectively "KDRM"] who had established a center in Eluru for those who followed Meher Baba.

Just after this, I was sent to Calcutta for my job, which was with the railways, and I took the book with me and started

reading. After reading, my faith in Him began to develop. I thought, "Yes, He might be an Avatar."

In the month of January, I got a message from Eluru, Meher Baba centre, Mr. Rangarao, that Meher Baba would be coming to Eluru and staying for some days, and that I could have His darshan. "Don't miss it," cautioned the letter. Plus, the letter continued that I could come and bring all my friends and relatives who would want His darshan. I informed so many friends and in the end about 20 families came with me on the train to Andhra Pradesh for this programme. My family had a house in Eluru, and all these persons were going to be our guests. I told my parents that these people would stay with us for seven days.

On the night before the first darshan, our train arrived, but quite late. We went to brother Rangarao's house, so we could ask him to instruct us how we should greet the Avatar.

"What are the formalities?" we wanted to know.

He told us, "You go purchase some garlands, and come tomorrow morning at 5 AM, when I will be there only, and I'll take you all to Baba and introduce you and you can garland Baba. That will be more than enough."

Just at that moment, one of the reception committee members, Mr. Charvarao, came running to him. "Rangarao, there is a message from Baba. Ramjoo Abdulla has come down with a very high fever and some doctor has to attend." This was quite late at night, around midnight. How to get a doctor at this late hour? They were saying that Dr. Suryanarayana was the man for the job, but nobody knew how to get in touch with him. But, it happened that his son and I had been classmates in high school in Vijayawada,

and I knew. So I rushed to his place, woke up the family and we called the doctor to attend to Ramjoo. However, Baba's instructions were strict. The doctor was to come directly to the cot on which Ramjoo was taking rest (in a tent in Katta Subba Rao's garden where Baba's entire party was staying, except for Baba himself for whom a small house in the garden had been provided), and was to examine him, give him medicine, and leave by the same path on which he had come, not going aside for so much as one step from that path. So the doctor and I went on this errand.

By the time I returned from the errand, they were discussing bread [in the middle of the night]. Rangarao wanted soft bread for Baba. Nobody could see how to obtain this bread in the middle of the night, or even in the morning by the time Baba and His party were to arise. But by a curious coincidence, I had brought the best soft bread in India from Calcutta. There was a famous bakery there near the metro cinema hall, and on the preceding morning I had purchased two loaves of bread from that bakery for me and the people traveling with me. I had also purchased papaya fruit to give to Baba, because I had heard that He liked papaya. We had actually not bought the bread for Baba, but for ourselves. But, when I got to the train, I found that everyone had brought some food or other, and there was no need to eat the bread, because there were so many other things to eat. I said that I would bring the loaves in the morning for Baba, although I hoped I was not doing wrong, because actually I had not purchased them to give to Baba. But they told me to bring them, and I was happy.

Although Rangarao had promised us that he would bring us to Baba, introduce us and give us our opportunity for

darshan, it could not happen the next day as he had promised. So many people were there, and by 11:30 in the morning, Eruch announced that the darshan would now be suspended because it was time to take rest. The best we could do was to take Baba's darshan from a distance. What to do with our garlands? We did the only thing we could do. There were some photographs of Baba and Upasni Maharaj there on the veranda, and we garlanded those photographs. We were told to leave the garden, and even the host, Katta Subba Rao was told to leave the garden - none should stay behind as per Baba's order.

In my mind, I got very determined. Rangarao had failed in his duty to us, and we must have Baba's darshan. At that time, I didn't know about Baba's discipline and all that, and there was one big mango tree, and I remained there. Everybody left except me. I was waiting for an opportunity to meet Baba. After a little time when it became calm, I approached. Eruch was doing bath duty. I went to the building in which Baba was staying. Eruch signaled to intercept me, and to inquire why I had disobeyed. I apologized, explained that we were from Calcutta, some twenty families, and though we had seen Baba from a distance, we had not been able to meet Him physically and could not garland Him. I asked for Eruch's help. Eruch went to Baba, told Him, and Baba came out of the house and came and sat in a chair on the veranda.

I was in a state. I went outside immediately running, to tell the people who had come with me to come inside for Baba's darshan. Part of them had been overtaken by hunger - no coffee, no tea, no food in the morning - and they had gone off to eat, but some of them were out there.

Now one volunteer came and said, "Raghavulu, Baba is calling you. He is sitting in the chair to give you darshan and you went running away from Him? What kind of a fool are you?" In those days we didn't know any discipline, and my desire was that those people should have the opportunity to have Baba's darshan.

So we rushed back in, we got our garlands off the photos of Baba and Upasni Maharaj, and garlanded Baba. Baba expressed that He was very happy to see us. Then Baba got up, and signaled to Eruch who told us, "There is a small side room here. You bring your party, form a queue of ladies and a queue of gents, and each one should come up to Baba and you should introduce that person to Him. We did this, each person from the Calcutta party who had not felt the need to eat was introduced and Baba signaled that He felt very happy.

Eruch told us that we had been given our opportunity and we could go, but still I was not satisfied. 'I asked that Baba should give each of us some prasad. There were fruits all around that people had brought, so I asked if Baba would give them to us with His own hands. Baba laughed at my boldness, and He gave me one fruit and said, "You have it."

My experience was that Baba's face was so bright, so shining, that I couldn't look at it for more than a few seconds. I would have to close my eyes - the radiance was so overpowering. It would be easier to look directly at the sun. There was such brightness in His face, and our feeling was that we would never want to leave Him and go away from His presence.

Katta Subba Rao took pity on me. He permitted me to stay in the garden, because my house was far away, so he made me another guest of his in the tent.

Afterwards, there were house visits. There were so many houses, but Baba made a special provision for us through KDRM, and the Calcutta group got a place in the conveyances that chased after Baba as He went from place to place. We never expected such a thing.

One interesting thing happened. First the tour went to the District Judge's bungalow. It is there that Baba gave His first message on Honesty. Soon after that, Baba left for the next house, and then on the way He was asking Kutumb Sastry whether they had made provision for Him to stop at the District Collector's house [for Westerners, this means the tax collector, typically not the most popular of people]. Kutumb Sastry gave him lots of reasons for not including the collector, but Baba said that He knew the collector loved Him very much. Abruptly, Baba signaled that He wanted to return to the garden "to take rest." So, the party stopped its house-visit programme, and returned to the garden. And what did they find? As Baba's car entered the garden, as the door of the car opened for Baba to get down, the District Collector and his wife were just standing there with their garlands, waiting for Baba, and it turned out they had been waiting for a long time. Baba accepted their garlands, embraced both of them, and then "changed His mind," announcing that He didn't need rest after all, and the house visit tour was resumed.

It was a wonderful time, those first meetings with Baba.

Dev Narayan Kharate – Baba's Strong Man



Amiya introduces Dev: "When I was eight years old, he was the first person I met on the playground the first week I came to Jabalpur. He was around 14. I didn't understand Hindi at all at that time, and he looked at me kind of sinisterly and said something I thought was abusive. I ran home and I asked my mother what the words he had said meant. "Appan Tupan. " It means you are going to join and play on his side. It means, "we together. " Now the Appan Tupan goes on, and we remain close.

There was a phase in the nineteen fifties during which we lost touch, and that time period was the one in which I turned from atheism to loving Beloved Baba, so Dev Narayan did not find out about Baba from me

directly, as you will see in the story. One other point I tell you before you begin this story. In Jabalpur there was much opposition to Meher Baba on the grounds that, 1) He was deemed a foreigner, being of Parsee extraction, 2) each community had its own saints, so Dev and I as Hindus were criticized for not following a Hindu saint - all that opposition for sectarian reasons. Some people felt it so strongly that they threatened physical violence against us. But you will see how far that went in this story.

In half a minute with him, you can know how strong a person he is and how different. One day I asked him to bring a huge, very heavy painting of Baba from a village Kharmeta seven miles from here. I gave him money for a rickshaw. He's a very innocent person. The rickshaw driver soon found out that he was unusual and said, "Sir, if you feel like easing yourself you can do it in the bushes right there. " This was a locality that was quite unpopulated in those days. As soon as he got off the rickshaw, the driver drove off with the money. Dev had prepaid him. So, Dev walked all the way to my house with the painting - all seven miles.

I was upset. "No, no," he said, "Baba was so light on me, I hardly noticed the weight, and in addition I was proud to be carrying His picture. "

It was 1960. I was working from midnight to 8 a.m. in the railway shed, repairing locomotives. I was married. One day, my wife came to me and she said, "One man [Keshav Narayan Nigam, illustrious Baba lover from Hamirpur] has come to Jabalpur, and he will be speaking at the South Indian Club. You must attend the meeting. It is tonight."

She went on insisting that I must go because he would be

speaking about Meher Baba, and she assured me that Meher Baba is God. I said, "If he is God, that is good enough for me." As it was, I was respecting all kinds of gods. "But," I told her, "let me finish my meal first."

My wife kept insisting, "You must go at any cost. You have understood where you have to go?" I went to my brother-in-law's house after finishing my meal, and then I went to the South Indian Club. I heard Keshav Babu's speech.

I didn't enter the hall, but just kept standing outside the hall, out in the open. Then Keshav Babu started describing the love story of Avatar Meher Baba. When I heard Baba's life story, suddenly I found that I was in tears. I felt as if I was watching Meher Baba himself. And then a sudden urge came into my heart that I must have His picture. The meeting ended, and gradually the listeners came out. I only found one person whom I knew. I asked him to give me some money because I wanted to buy one picture of Baba at the little stall that the Jabalpur people had put up in connection with the meeting, because I realized that Baba is God and God indeed.

I purchased the photo, got it framed, took it home, and said arti before it, and then I went for my duty at midnight. The words spoken by Keshav Babu describing Baba's life made me weep. There was an emotional surging inside my heart as if my heart itself was telling me that, "Now you are hearing about God, and you are now in contact with God." From that day onward, I installed Meher Baba's photograph in my house and started worshipping Him.

I had a little preparation for this experience. When I was a child I used to accompany my uncle and my aunt to all the

temples and used to do whatever should be done - bowing down and so forth - but I understood nothing of it. Still I used to worship the deities, primarily Ganesh, but I never got any real internal satisfaction. Now when I had Meher Baba's picture I felt that I had really met God, and it meant to leave everything else. I distributed all the photos of all the deities adorning my house to all my neighbors and kept only Baba's photo. Immediately I felt that "it is Baba who makes me go to sleep, Baba who wakes me up, Baba who gives me inspiration. All my joys come from Him."

Naturally I asked my wife, "How did you know He was God, and how did you find it, when I have been searching all my life and didn't find?" Janak Dulari is the name of my wife. Her name means "dear to Janak," which is like "daughter of Janak," and Janak's daughter was Sita, wife of Lord Rama. She said that she had just seen one picture of Beloved Baba at a Baba lover's house, and that told her who He was. This was odd to me, but Baba himself came to explain further, as you will see momentarily.

Well, we went to Poona for Baba's darshan. We arrived eight days before darshan was available for us. My wife told me, "Go at once and have Baba's darshan, and after you go we will go as a family." My son and my friend were so eager that they accompanied me. We went to Guruprasad, and Adi K. Irani was at the gate. I explained that we had come for darshan, and he drove me out of the Guruprasad compound saying, "You will get darshan only after ten days. Please, for God's sake, get out of here." We sat on the road outside the gate for four hours. After that, one man came out to see us. He said, "Baba's calling you. Are you not from Jabalpur?"

We went up to the hall and sat outside the door. I said to myself, "I will open the door and go in." I did that, and to my surprise I saw that Meher Baba was not there. I started praying to Baba, because I could not see Him at all - the chair was empty. I said, in my prayer, "I speak lies, I am very dishonest in many ways, and that's why you are not appearing before me, so please forgive me." Immediately a miracle happened and Baba appeared seated on the chair. Baba pointed at me with His finger and said, "How are you feeling now?"

"Baba, it is utter joy, and nothing but joy." Then He asked me about my wife. I said, "Baba, she has sent her love to you." Baba then said, "When I had been to Hamirpur in my incarnation as Ram, your wife was with me then."

Remember that she had told me that He was God and that I must go to Keshav Babu's talk - all this had come about from her catching sight of one photograph. And I also understood that Baba is God without any doubt. Of course, she had already told me that. Though I always loved my wife, from that time forward I began to realize that she was more than just a wife, but my soul-mate, and we grew very close.

Every morning, before going for duty, I would put my head at Baba's feet in the picture. I used to carry one picture with me to the locomotive shed. All the men there, when they saw it, began to oppose me. I said, "Baba, these people are opposing me. Is it your will that I should suffer so on your account?" Baba said to me, that it is this very opposition that is going to bring joy to you. They were so strongly opposed to me, the boss and everybody, that for fifteen years they wouldn't pay me a salary increase.

Once during those days of hostility, there was a Baba program in the house of one fellow named Inglebai. I was actually at that time working as the watchman of the place where the locomotives were "parked" overnight. I was supposed to be on duty, but I went to the Baba program at Inglebai's place, forgetting my duty. That very night, the Division Mechanical Engineer, DME - the highest ranking officer - came on an unscheduled inspection. He shouted, "O chowkidar [watchman], where are you?" But I was not there. He heard my voice answering back, "I am here, sir," and he went away satisfied. Again he came at 4 a.m. for a second visit. All the hostile guys knew that I was not there, and they all collected and told the DME, "Sir, this man was not there, not doing the duty." The DME said, "No, no, he was there. I heard him." Thereafter I became so assured that Baba would use His voice to protect me that I used to slip away often to attend Baba programmes. When the Hamirpur Baba Fair (mela) used to happen, I would make an application for leave that would invariably be rejected. But I still used to go to the fairs.

You see, I was a wicked person. They were opposing me for five years. "Okay, you have a God with you, if He is God, why doesn't he do something for you and get you out of the fix we have placed you in?" One time I serviced a railway engine and then I went to sleep. Suddenly in my dream Baba appeared and said, "Kharate, you wake up because the engine is out of order, there is some breakage in the engine, so you attend to it."

I had already quarreled with the driver, who used to bring the engine from Itarsi. He said to me, "You talk so much about your Meher Baba, I'll fix you one day," and that was

the day. He had brought an engine that was broken. Although it was his duty to tell me that the engine was broken, he had not told me, so he was planning to accuse me the next day of not fixing the engine.

The driver fooled me. He was in a mood to cheat me, but Baba woke me up and said that the engine is dangerously broken. They had planned to fill out a charge sheet - to charge me that I was responsible for not repairing an engine. The DME would have come and found out that the engine was really broken and then I would have to suffer and suffer. So I called the DME and told him that the engine was given to me with concealed damage, and the driver was punished - three years with no salary increment!

I had a friend who was a wrestler. I always used to tell him to take Baba's name when he wrestled. Once he got angry with me. He said, "I have seen so many Babas like yours." Then he lost control of his emotions and he gave me a huge slap. I thought to myself, "That is the end of your line. The kite has become severed from the line in your case. Who knows where it is going to fall." Just after two months he became seriously ill, was admitted to hospital and died. A person who was an engine cleaner said, "What did you do to him that he died so soon?" I told him, "It is the play (leela) of Baba, who is the wrestler of all wrestlers. Whatever happened I had nothing to do with it."

Not only the cleaner, but the boss of the local shed understood that it was getting dangerous to play these games with me, because it was no play to mess around with Baba.

Now harassment got worse and worse. There was a supervisor called Nirbhay. At that time I was supposed to do the

duty from 4 p.m. to midnight. When I told him about Baba, that Baba is the Avatar, he also became very hostile and began opposing me. He reported to the supervisor that I was saying all those things, and I was given a punishment. I prayed to Baba and said, "It's okay that I got a punishment, but if I am in the right, I hope you will see to it that the man is exposed." Soon after the dispute, that man got involved in a murder case and he was in doldrums for about one and a half years. Then he felt repentant and he thought that he should ask my forgiveness. I told him that I am no one to forgive you and that it is my father, Meher Baba, who will forgive you. Thereafter, he used to tell everyone that this is a dangerous man.

I was on a special kind of duty in which I was made responsible for the brass articles, bushings, and there was a group of employees stealing these. They expected me to say that I hadn't received the bushings. I prayed to Baba; "These bushings have disappeared somehow, and please help me find them." Two strangers told me, "You go to such and such a place and you will find the missing bushings hidden there." I went and found them as they had reported, and the thieves were caught. Who were these strangers? It remains a mystery.

One day, I had a fight with a machinist. He was in the habit of coming into some engine and removing parts he needed to repair another engine. I told him not to do this; if he needed some parts he should report to me so that I order them. He replied a very hostile and ugly way. The next night he came back and attacked me with words, saying that I was falsely holy. Quite soon thereafter, I discovered that a huge brass box containing 250 pounds of precious,

expensive parts had disappeared! I prayed to Baba and said, "Oh Baba this is a very difficult situation for me." I started running around the yard, looking for the missing box. I saw a rickshaw outside the yard, which shouldn't have been there at that time. I went running into the canteen. I saw three persons there whom I had seen earlier, and I suspected them. They asked me, "Why are you here?" I just said I was there for a cup of tea, but then after the tea I went to officially report to the chargeman that the box was missing. He said that it is my responsibility. I told him that I had not given up. The heavy box must not be far away. One of the three persons shouted to me, with a hostile face, "Do you understand?" and he repeated it many times, as a threat. A brilliant flash of light came all of a sudden, and I saw where the box was being hidden. All the three persons went near the box. I explained this whole thing to the chargeman - that I had seen the box and these were the persons, and the chargeman took charge of the box. They were angry and assaulted me and tried to beat me with their hands. The chargeman said that I should go to the local police. But the legal validity of the report was in doubt because nobody saw the fight. After some days, I was returning home at midnight. One of the three hostile persons started chasing me, dagger in hand. It was surprising but though he got the opportunity many times he couldn't stab me. Subsequently that man got leprosy.

When I had come from Jhansi and I was a new working man here, I was put into the basic training institute. The interview board asked me, in whom do you believe? I said I believed in Meher Baba. "Who is this Meher Baba?" they asked me, and I told them that He is God. The interview

board declined to believe me. I said, "You don't have to believe, gentlemen. But just know this - that He lives in Poona and Ahmednagar and gives His darshan at those places, and if you happen to visit those places and see Him, you will see who He is." They said they would go. Then the daughter of the boss who was the head of the interviewers fell ill. He asked me to pray for her recovery. Baba was in the body at that time, so I extracted a promise that he would go for Baba's darshan if the daughter recovered. I explained that if he broke this promise he would be responsible, not me. I prayed for the recovery of his daughter. On the third day she became completely well. He said he would definitely go, but I never found out if he fulfilled his part of the bargain.

In the training institute, they failed me, because they didn't like Meher Baba. The instructor there was following some saint and he himself was pretending to be a saint, and he had charged one of his rooms and whoever entered that room got his mind "washed." Baba put His finger on His lips and He said nothing should be done, but I got wild. Again Baba said to me in my vision, "You have got nothing to do about this." The trainer came to me and said, "You write on this paper that you are unable to perform any duties here." When this application was taken to my immediate boss, he said to me, "You are such a fool." He tore up the application and said, "Do not sign a document like this ever. I will arrange for another examination for you, and I hope you will pass that one."

On this second time, when I went into the room for testing, suddenly Baba appeared before me and said, "You simply keep standing. I will appear for the test and I will do all

the work for you." This time I was declared successful. However, the harassment wasn't finished. I had passed the test, but now the instructor brought a micrometer, and began to test me on its use. I had no training in the micrometer at that time, and told him that this couldn't be right. So the instructor went to the big boss, and said that I was supposed to appear for the micrometer test. The big boss took my side.

The whole problem had been created by a clerk who was trying to put me in trouble and had added the micrometer test, knowing that I was not trained. But when this trick failed, the clerk began saying, "Avatar Meher Baba Ki Jai," and he became a devotee.

My wife had stones in her kidneys. She became very ill. Baba sent an order to get her treated by the very best doctors. One of Baba's letters to us said, "keep on drinking the sharbat* of my name and I send you My blessing." Because Baba wanted me to go for the best physicians, I was trying to collect money from some sources so I could obey this order. At that time we were going through a crisis, and I sent a letter to Dr. Bilani, the Division Medical Officer for some loan out of my retirement, and I couldn't get any money from anyone. Then I came to know that Dr. Pande was a very good surgeon. I went to him to ask him to treat my wife, but first he had to go to Bombay. I kept my wife in the railway hospital for two months. When she wasn't improving at all, I brought her back home. Then Dr. Bilani said, "I'll send your wife to Bombay." I declined the offer because I had no

* Not quite the same thing as "sherbet" in the West, "sharbat" is a sweet cold drink, more liquid than solid.

relatives there, no money, and no way to get her taken care of while there. When my friends came to know, they got her released from the railway hospital and taken to Dr. Pande. An operation was going to be needed, and my friends were paying for the operation. Bilani said I should take her there immediately, and he would see to it that she got good care.

Again Baba sent a letter saying that I should go for the very best treatment. I started thinking that when Baba's blessings are with her, why should we worry? I went to my officer and requested him to grant me some loan. "Why don't you come and see her condition?" The officer was callous. He said, "This is the usual pretext." He also declined my request for leave. When I came back home, I found that she was very, very critical. I went and fetched an ambulance, but when I came back I was told that my wife had just taken Baba's name, saying, "Baba, Baba," and then she left her body. The ambulance people came in my house but I told them that she had gone. The ambulance guy began to weep when he saw her.

I shouted, "I do not want anything, and I do not even want Baba." I said this, and turned back, and I saw a strange thing. At the deathbed of my wife, by her head, Baba was standing there. He said, "What are you thinking?"

I said, "I am not thinking of anything." Immediately, something happened and all the anger started fading away. I felt that God had come.

In 1963, I went to Hamirpur to Meherastana, to the place where Baba had declared that He was the Avatar. I prayed to Him, in desperation, "When You are present in each and every leaf of the trees, every blade of grass, why don't

you appear before me? Because one day we have to give up our bodies, and why should I not get your darshan before I give up my body?"

Meherastana is a room constructed for Baba to occupy. It is located within a densely forested area where, at that time, savage animals were often seen. There were twenty-two Baba lovers within the grounds at the time I prayed that He would appear. After a while, nineteen of them left, and only three of us remained. Night fell. I made a challenge to Baba. I said, "I will not leave this place. You have said that you are present everywhere. So I want the darshan, even at the cost of my life, but I must have your darshan." I shouted, "Avatar Meher Baba Ki Jai." Every time I shouted it I felt a sort of internal happiness coming to me, but I was also afraid. It was cold, it was terribly dark, and yet I was perspiring from fear. I kept on shouting. After some time, a tiger came, and he caught hold of my leg. I was mightily' afraid. I thought it was not a tiger, but death himself. After a while, the tiger stopped tugging, and sat down before me. He was staring at me and I was staring at him. I kept on shouting, "Avatar Meher Baba Ki Jai." Then I saw a snake coming at me, and again I was afraid that this was death. As I went on repeating Baba's name I started feeling as if there is nothing there, and suddenly I heard a male and female peacock calling out in some distant part of the forest. And then I found a tremendous light, and from all corners of the place the fragrance of roses began to issue. I felt as if Baba had hastened to the place.

Immediately the snake and the tiger disappeared, and Baba appeared. Through gestures He said, "What do you want?"

I told Baba, "Baba, my head is resting at your feet. What else should I desire for?"

Baba again repeated the gesture, "No, you tell me what do you want?"

Again I said that I wouldn't want anything because my head is resting at your feet and that is enough. I was just looking at His feet now. What could I have asked for, because I got Baba himself, and is there anything greater than that?

Just then, at a distance I saw a man standing with an incense stick. He rushed to me and he locked me in his arms, and started weeping, and said, "Oh how fortunate you are," because he had seen Baba appearing before me. I told him to keep quiet and not to tell anyone about the event. But he narrated the incident to one and all.

Keshav Narayan Nigam, the same man from whom I had first heard of Beloved Baba was there and he turned to me and said, "Was what you saw a fact?"

I said, "I have no idea but whatever this man says is true." Keshav Babu sent me a letter some time later, asking me if I was awake, what was I doing at the time and how did I get to see Baba?

This confused me, so I got my friend Amiya to write for me a letter to Baba, and he took it by hand to Baba. The letter asked Him to tell me whether He had really appeared before me, or not? Baba told Amiya, "Whatever happened with Dev Narayan Kharate was absolutely a true event." Baba continued, nodded His head, "I gave him my darshan because of his very sincere yearning to see Me there."

My advice to the young is that they should come in Baba's contact and derive the maximum benefit that they can. There is no other alternative in this world but to contact Baba, because He is God in human form. There is no joy in the world that is comparable of being in his contact. This is the only way. All other roads are closed because God himself has incarnated as a human being.

Excerpt from the forthcoming second volume of
Seekers of Love, which chiefly concerns the
stories of Baba lovers from the West

Baba Sends a Child to Vreiny

This story was told in the old pilgrim centre dining room many years ago by Vreiny Truitmann. KG heard it there, and found her again a few years ago. She graciously re-told it for this book.

I'm Swiss, and I live in Locarno, a town on Lago Maggiore that Baba visited in 1952 after His automobile accident. I have a dog, and like any dog owner, I walk the dog. So, one day in the summer of 1986 the dog and I came out of my house to discover a little girl, eight years old, standing in front of my house. It was raining, and there weren't any other children there. For several days, she was there whenever I used to go out. She wanted to talk and to accompany me, but my initial reaction was that I didn't want anything to do with her. I didn't like her, at first. She wasn't one of those smiling children that you take in your arms right away - there was something strange about her. Eventually I said, "Okay, come with me, we'll go to the woods, to play with the doggie."

She said, "I can't go with anybody to the woods. I have to ask my mommie first."

So we went to ask her mother, because I said, "Yes, that's right, we should do that. You shouldn't go with just anyone to the woods." When we got to her house her mother Veronika, a nice young lady, came out of the house, and she gave permission for half an hour's visit to the woods.

This pattern repeated itself for two or three successive

days. I came to know that the family was vacationing in Locarno. But it was the end of their vacation, and they left soon thereafter.

In the fall months, Veronika and Nina (the little girl) came again to our town and showed up at my house unexpectedly. Nina had made a child's drawing for me of our house - a lovely house, the sun shining, flowers, somebody in the garden and all that and gave it to me. But after drawing it, she had scribbled all over it - you could hardly see what had been underneath - very disturbing. Veronika said, "She made this for you. She insisted to bring it to you."

I asked what she had brought, and Nina called it, "A scribbling."

I said, "Oh fine, very nice."

At that time, Veronika told me that they were there to look for an apartment and they intended to move to our town. Veronika was divorced and, although she also had a fifteen year old son, Nina was the apple of her eye. The boy just doesn't enter into this story.

Nina got a place in school in our town, and on one afternoon, after school, Veronika called me, asking, "Would you like to come to our house? Nina wants to play with you."

I don't have children, I don't really know how to play, and so I was uncomfortable with this. But I didn't dare to decline. So I went. It was no problem. Nina knew how she wanted to play with me. It was Christmas time, she had made me a present, and we had a good time together.

Nina's ninth birthday fell on a Thursday that January, and

I was invited to celebrate her birthday at her house. She didn't want to invite school children, she just wanted me to come visit her. She called me, "la gentille dame" - French for the nice woman. I learned that her father was French, Veronika was a German Swiss and they had lived together in Crete where the children had grown up. At a certain point they had gotten divorced and she had come back to Switzerland with the children.

On the following Sunday, I got a phone call from Veronika in the morning. She said, "Look, I've got something very sad to tell you. Nina just passed away." Just saying it, even today fifteen years later, upsets me.

I said, "How?" I was shocked. On Thursday we had experienced such happiness together. How was this possible?

Veronika explained that Nina had epilepsy, and she had suddenly sustained a very strong attack, and in five to ten minutes she had gone. I said, "May I come down to your house?" to visit her.

When I got there, I found Veronika, quiet and composed. She took me inside, she showed me Nina dead on her bed, wrapped up in an Indian bedspread, and she said, "Nina went to Baba. I was going to go to India in two weeks with her, but she just couldn't wait. She's so happy there."

I thought, "My God, she's out of her mind. She hasn't realized what has happened to her child."

Veronika said, "Didn't Nina tell you about Baba?"

I said, "What Baba?"

She said, "Well, all the photos hanging on the walls...."

There was a photo of a young man in a white nightie, there was a photo of an old man with flowers around his head, a lot of strange photos. I thought it must have been her father. Nina had taken me around the house once, and said, "That's Baba." It was odd to me. Why was he hanging up on every wall if he doesn't belong to the family? But it was not my business. I wasn't interested. Nina wanted me to play with her, and that's what I was there for.

So Veronika told me about Baba. She said, "You know, Meher Baba is Jesus Christ who has come on earth again."

I thought, "My God, she's a victim of one of those gurus. I don't want to have anything to do with such guru business. I've never heard anything about gurus that made sense to me. I've got to be careful. I don't want to be involved in guru business."

So Veronika said that in two weeks she would be going to India to visit Meher Baba's place. She had been packing, and was taking her son with her.

I went home. A few days later was the funeral. All the school children were there with their mothers, with flowers. It was sad, and I was still in shock. The children were singing, and after the service was over, we accompanied the body in the casket to the graveyard. There was Veronika, everybody passing by to shake hands, to say a few words, and Veronika was calm, very unaffected, giving her hand to everyone who passed by, and she had a nice word for every single one. We were all shocked, in tears, all mixed up and she was the only one who seemed unruffled. I went home, deeply moved and deeply stirred up. I wondered what was behind all this. I knew that Veronika lived for Nina, was

intensely devoted to Nina, and I didn't understand.

A few days later, I went to the house to visit her. There she was, packing her suitcase as though nothing had happened. I felt impelled to ask her about Baba. She told me a few things, and then she said, "Look, here's a book. Read this. Here is my key. If you want more, here are the rest of my Baba books, here are some Baba records, you just come and help yourself, and I will be back in two weeks." She explained that she worked as a translator, and one day a book for her to translate had shown up in the post. It had been a Baba book, *The Discourses*, and she had learned about Him by translating the book. Of course, after that one thing had led to another...

I went home, began reading the book, and couldn't stop. I read all the books on Him that she had. She came home after two weeks, very happy, and told me, "We are very fortunate. One of Meher Baba's close mandali, Bhau Kalchuri, is coming here to us, to stay in my house for a whole week, in June." She had invited him on this visit, and he had accepted. He had been planning to go to France and England, and he stopped off in Switzerland. I couldn't wait. I was so excited. I looked forward to it so much.

The day Bhauji arrived it was raining cats and dogs. The sky was black, with lightning. We went to the airport in Zurich to fetch Bhauji.

The trip back to Locarno from Zurich takes one through a mountain pass. At the top of the pass, one can see Locarno. Just as we reached this point on the trip, the sun broke through the clouds, and it brilliantly illuminated the

very part of Locarno in which Bhau was to stay - where Veronika's house was located. It was magical.

Veronika said that I could come every day and be with the people who were coming to visit Bhauji, so every day I ran down to her house to listen. My English was not very good. I had difficulties to understand Bhauji. I used to stare at him to try to grab every word. This went on for a whole week. When I met Bhauji, though, I knew I didn't need words any more. I wanted explanation but I didn't need them. I was **home**.

Register of Editorial Alterations

Page 22, para 4, line 1, trucculent changed to truculent

Page 38, para 3, line 1, build changed to built

Page 52, para 1 line 4, it changed to is

Page 76, para 3, line 7, canons changed to cannons

Page 119, para 4, line 3, "go to" changed to "to go"

Page 119, para 5, line 2, saluation changed to salutation

Page 161, para 3, line 7, we changed to were

Page 179 para 3, line 5, finiancially changed to financially

Page 180, para 5, line 8, prizon changed to prison