

# **Welcome to My World**

Compiled by Gokaran Shrivasta

An Avatar Meher Baba Trust eBook

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## **Source:**

Welcome to My World

Compiled by Gokaran Shrivastva

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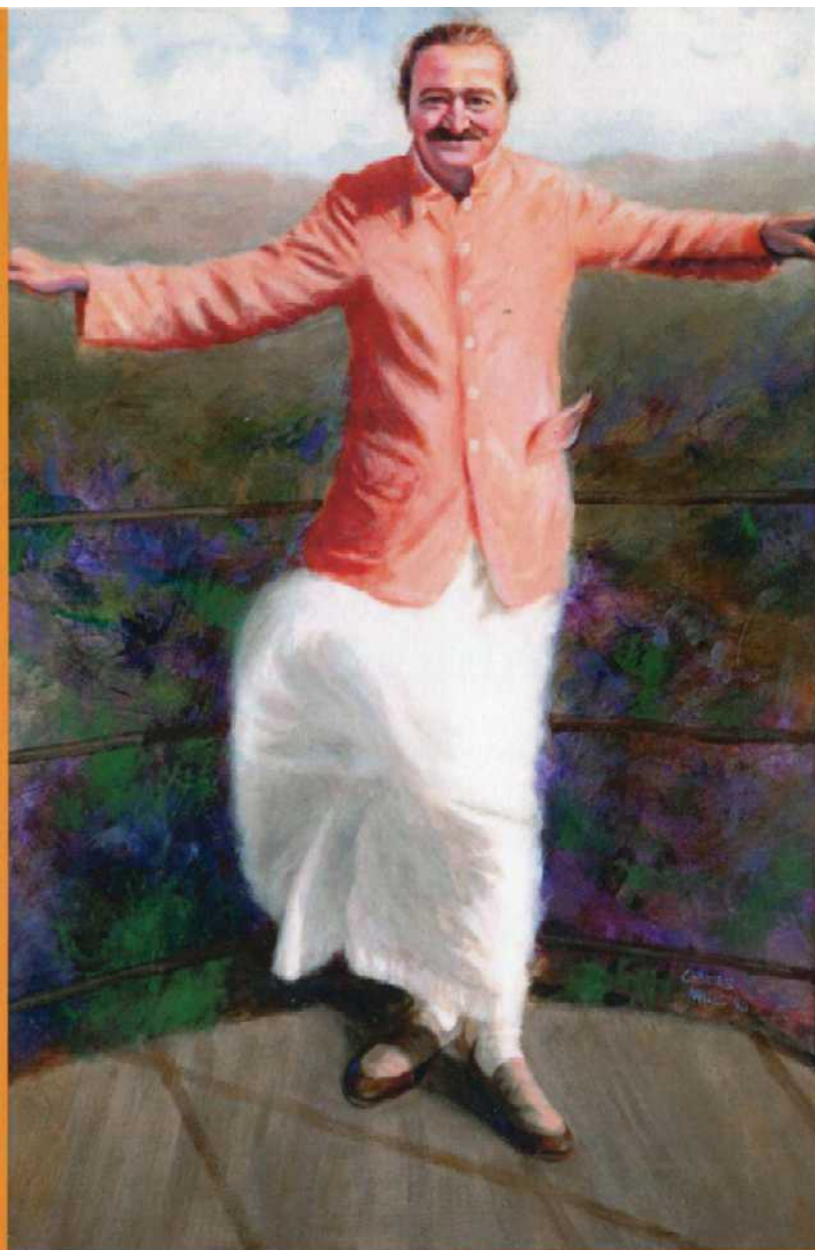
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Gokaran Shrivastava ∞ Welcome To My World



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Trust Ahmednagar, M.S. 414001, India

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## DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to the Love of Avatar Meher Baba which creates, inspires and unfolds these stories in the hearts of His lovers everywhere.

And to those lovers of God who happen to read these stories and are prompted someday to write their own Meher Baba stories.



## Acknowledgments

We gratefully acknowledge the contribution of Baba lovers who have lovingly shared their stories and permitted us to print them in a book form for the benefit of other Baba lovers and the lovers of God who would one day find their God in the form of Avatar Meher Baba.

We also want to acknowledge and thank Charlie Mills for permission to print his most beautiful painting on the cover page, which is quite befitting to the title of this book. Any reader picking up this book will surely feel that he or she is welcomed to the loving world of Avatar Meher Baba.

This project has only been made possible with the committed help of Patrick Finley, who made contacts with Baba lovers and collected their stories and finally typed up the original manuscript, which was passed on to Steve Klein for further work.

As with all such projects, there are many others who have contributed in small and large ways, and I apologize for anyone whose help I have not specifically mentioned. I am indeed grateful to everyone and, most especially, to my Beloved, Avatar Meher Baba.



## Introduction

In the late 1930s, when the Jessawala family joined Baba, Gaimai used to love to listen to Shireenmai tell stories about "Merog" (her pet name for Merwan) when He was a boy. One time when Gaimai was asking Shireenmai to tell more stories, Shireenmai exclaimed she had already told Gaimai everything she could think of. She didn't have any new or fresh stories, only the same old stale stories she had already told many times.

As it so happened, Baba was walking by just at that moment and He stopped to correct His mother, telling her that stories about Him were never stale, they were always "fresh."

As a young boy, and through the rest of His life, Baba loved hearing good story tellers. And He would often tell stories to His mandali, many of which have already been published. Perhaps it was only natural that after Baba dropped His body in 1969, His mandali would tell "Baba stories" to the pilgrims who began flocking to India. A regular feature of many pilgrims' time in India was sitting in Mandali Hall at Meherazad and listening to Eruch tell such stories. But Eruch would also ask the pilgrims to tell their stories - of coming to Baba, of Baba experiences, dreams, and the intimate and telltale signs that Baba would give to His lovers, showing them that He was still active in their lives, even though He was no longer in a physical body.

Bal Natu collected many such stories and published three books of them. Now, Gokaran Shrivastava is doing the same. But these are not all stories that have been shared

in Mandali Hall. Gokaran and the Meherabad Library have been responsible for organizing the 50th anniversary celebrations of many important Baba events. At these celebrations, Baba lovers who had taken part in the original events fifty years earlier often gave talks about their experiences, and several of these talks are excerpted and printed here. As such, these stories cover a wide range of years, nationalities and experiences. Their one common denominator is the overwhelming presence of Avatar Meher Baba. And that presence makes every story "fresh" and inspiring, even if you have heard it before.

Steve Klein

## Who Is Meher Baba?

There is no good answer to this simple question. Whatever title or name you give can never truly explain who Meher Baba is. Baba, as he was called by those who came into contact with him, said he was the Avatar, that same ancient one who comes again and again into our midst to illumine the path with his Light, and awaken the heart with his Love.

Once, when asked how to answer the question, "Who is Meher Baba?" Baba said, "I am the one who provokes that question within you - the Being of all Beings."

You could say that Baba is the perfect man, our highest self, God in human form, the Christ, but perhaps it is most apt to simply say he is the embodiment of love.

For Baba has said that everyone is, ultimately, God and that all of creation is a divine journey from unconscious divinity to conscious divinity. This is accomplished when the seemingly limited individual sheds the constricting shackles of the ego, and realizes the eternal infinite consciousness, which has always been the true nature of the soul.

There are many paths to eradicate the ego, and far too much doctrine and dogma supporting each path. Baba has made it very simple. He says the easiest and quickest path is of love. For love, one not only willingly, but effortlessly, sacrifices oneself without giving it a second thought. Baba, as the embodiment of love, has come into the world to awaken this love in each heart. Because every soul in creation is unique, Baba's love relationship with each is also unique, as the stories in this book portray.

Which is why it is so hard to say who Meher Baba is for each soul sees Baba in slightly different ways and relates to him in slightly different ways. He is the True Friend, the Constant Companion, the Eternal Master, but most of all, he is the Divine Beloved. The One who loves you more than you can ever love yourself.

Baba said that, "the Avatar awakens contemporary humanity to a realization of its true spiritual nature, gives liberation to those who are ready, and quickens the life of the spirit in his time. For posterity is left the stimulating power of his divinely human example, the nobility of a life supremely lived, of a love unmixed with desire, of a power unused except for others, of a peace untroubled by ambition, of a knowledge undimmed by illusion. He has demonstrated the possibility of a divine life for all humanity, of a heavenly life on earth. Those who have the necessary courage and integrity can follow when they will."

But, as the Beloved, Baba is always with us and able to awaken "a love that consumes all selfish desires." And when all of our selfish desires are truly consumed, then we can not only answer the question, "Who is Meher Baba?" but we can also answer the question, "Who am I?"

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### Some Books By Meher Baba

*Beams from Meher Baba on the Spiritual Panorama*  
*Discourses*  
*The Everything and the Nothing*  
*God Speaks*  
*Infinite Intelligence*  
*Life At Its Best*

### Some Books About Meher Baba

*Avatar* by Jean Adriel  
*Because of Love* by Rano Gayley  
*The Beloved* by Naosherwan Anzar  
*The Dance of Love* by Margaret Craske  
*Donkin's Diaries* by William Donkin  
*Dreaming of the Beloved* by Mani Irani  
*Gift of God* by Arnavaz Dadachanji  
*Glimpses of the God-Man, Vols I-VI* by Bal Natu  
*The God-Man* by C.B. Purdom  
*Just to Love Him* by Adi K. Irani  
*Lord Meher Vols 1-18* by Bhau Kalchuri  
*Love Alone Prevails* by Kitty Davy  
*The Mastery of Consciousness* by Allan Cohen  
*Meher Baba the Awakener* by Charles Haynes  
*My Master and His Teachings* by C.D. Deshmukh  
*The Nothing and the Everything* by Bhau Kalchuri  
*The Ocean of Love* by Delia DeLeon  
*Stay with God* by Francis Brabazon  
*That's How It Was* by Eruch Jessawala  
*The Turning of the Key* by Bill LePage  
*The Wayfarers* by William Donkin

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## Baba Unveils My Mother

After a long dry spell, acrimonious words and brief or non-existent visits, Ada arrived. I did not expect her. Surely she would call at the last minute, claiming a headache and, as often happened in childhood, I would be left with a mixture of relief and regret. But Ada came, and wasn't going to waste a moment.

My first glimpse of my beloved Baba's presence came in the car as Ada and I drove away from Washington's Dulles International Airport. I had recently described my mother Ada's mysterious ways to my husband, Greg Butler, preparing him for his first extended encounter with her. Earlier in the week, I told Greg a story about Ada and me that took place in a restaurant in 1984, where I impulsively reached for a toothpick and began cleaning my teeth. And when Ada saw me with the toothpick, she lashed out, "Where did you learn to do such a thing?"

Innocently, I replied, "Jack (husband at the time) does it all the time." Ada muttered some more complaints, settled down, and we continued on home. Greg told me he was going to get some toothpicks, just for fun.

Now, on this beautiful fall day, as we were driving out of the airport, Ada reached for her purse. She removed a purple piece of plastic and stuck something in her mouth. "What's that?" I asked.

"A toothpick," she replied. "I have a place in my tooth that's been bothering me." My immediate thoughts were of Baba. I could see His laughing eyes. His



presence in the car was palpable and it took all my self control to contain my deeply felt glee. In the silence, I basked in the private joke that Baba had arranged for me, and the thorn of the previous encounter was removed without anesthesia, lovingly and humorously.

After several days together, Ada and I were wrung out with processing the incidents which we had been avoiding discussing for three years. We had listened to each other, hoping to be understood and accepted, and it had been another difficult encounter. However, I was not disheartened this time, but could see that Ada, at 83, was. Her old resiliency and ability to digress, deny or deflect were worn thin; she appeared to be anxiously perched in our apartment, longing to flee.

On the morning of her departure, Ada admitted that she was anxious about missing her plane. We agreed to take her to the airport two hours before departure. She wanted to be the first in line for her Valujet flight. Regardless of anything we said to soothe her, she remained convinced that this reduced fare ticket was available only if she was early. Greg and I were responsive and we sat with her two hours at the airport. We took the opportunity to talk about a newspaper article by Tony Komheiser which Greg read in that morning's Washington Post. Komheiser described an incident during a recent United Airlines flight of an intoxicated Wall Street investment firm president who lost control and defecated on a service cart after the flight attendant refused to serve him another drink.

Ada started laughing and, before too long, she, Greg, and I were caught up in the sharing of stories about

travel. We told Ada that Baba traveled 3rd class. Ada shared with us that she had seen films of train travel in India with people on top of the train. Greg began telling us about one of Baba's journeys by train that was originally narrated by Eruch in Mandali Hall.

The story was one about Baba and a few of the mandali in a train so crowded that nobody could get into the 3rd class compartment except by climbing in the window. Baba noticed an old bearded man with a child who would appear at the window at each stop, asking if someone would take the child in. No one seemed to pay him any attention. But when he pleaded, "For God's sake, will someone take the child in?" Baba gestured for Eruch to bring the child in. Eruch obeyed Baba but was royally abused by the other passengers.

But then, at every stop, the old man would come back to the window to make sure that the boy was okay. Finally, Baba told Eruch that it was getting dangerous, that the old man might not get back to his place on the train, and thus become separated from the boy. Eruch should pull the man in the window as well. Eruch obeyed but was severely chastised by other passengers for doing so. Eruch and the other mandali members made a small space for the old man to sit next to Baba, who was traveling incognito.

Baba then gestured to Eruch to start asking the man if he knew where they could find some men of God, some saint (Baba was on a mast trip). The old man was curious why they would be looking for saints and masts. They didn't look Hindu or Muslim. He asked Eruch where he was from. He answered, "Ahmednagar." The man was outraged, "You come

from Ahmednagar! Do you not know that the root of all saints and walis and pirs is there, the source of all, the pivot of the universe is there?" He asked Eruch if he was Zoroastrian to which Eruch answered yes.

"You are a Zoroastrian," he said, "and yet you don't know that God has taken form on earth with the name of Meher Baba and that He lives in Ahmednagar? Oh! You foolish young man, going out seeking saints and masts, when God Himself lives in your hometown!"

Then he calmed down and said, "I have visited Ahmednagar thrice in my lifetime, just to pay my respects to Meher Baba. Such is my fate that each time Meher Baba was not there. I am a poor man, I go a long way to have Baba's darshan, and I do not get it. And you, you fool, you live there, and you do not seek him out to stay by his side." And Meher Baba is sitting silently by his side the entire time.

The old man continued, "I am an old man, I do not know how many years I have to live and I have not seen Him even once. Once in my lifetime I must have the satisfaction of seeing Him. I will take my wife and children to Him."

Ada seemed interested in the story so Greg continued. Finally the man's station was reached and he climbed down. After a minute or two, Baba suddenly signaled to Eruch, "Run and tell the old man that Meher Baba was sitting by his side. Go, run, run before the train starts. Just tell him and come back."

Then Baba inquired whether any of the mandali had a photo of Baba. No one had one. But then Eruch remembered a copy of the Meher Baba Journal in his

bedroll, and that it had a photo of Baba. He got it out, and Baba bowed down to His picture, as He always did when He blessed a photo for someone. "Now run, run out, and give this to him, and tell him that Meher Baba was by his side, that Meher Baba is very happy with his love, and that he knows everything about him, and that he need not worry.

Eruch found the man just as he was about to get into a tonga and told him that Meher Baba had sent him, that he had been sitting next to Meher Baba on the train. The man started abusing Eruch. Eruch said, "He not only abused me, but also my entire generation." Eruch relayed Meher Baba's message, gave him the photo and started running for the train as it was beginning to pull away. The old man ran after him. Meher Baba was at the window. The old man looked at Baba, then bent his head in reverence and Baba put His hand out, in blessing, on his turbaned head.

This was a new story for me - Baba-incognito. I experienced the falling of a wall. Baba was revealing Himself. He too was Ada, and though I had understood this intellectually, I was understanding, deep within, and emotionally, that Baba was Ada.

As so often happens with Baba, lingering is not allowed. At that moment, Ada's flight was called. She sprinted for the exit and we ran after her. After a quick kiss, she disappeared and I exchanged smiles with another woman who had obviously seen us.

While walking away from the departing plane, I told Greg about my wonderful experience with Baba and the profound way that He had revealed Himself to me

there in the airport. With tears in my eyes, we walked to the airport exit.

Avatar Meher Baba ki Jai!

Maggie Shackford Butler

## Beg, Borrow, or Steal

While beloved Baba's presence and benevolence can undoubtedly be experienced anywhere and at any time, coming to Him on pilgrimage to His holy Samadhi at Meherabad and to Meherazad has always been extraordinarily special to me. And while I do not go in order to experience anything from Him, a resultant increased awareness of His boundless benevolence and ever-abiding presence has most naturally come about.

From 1975 to 1979 I was blessed to make three pilgrimages from my geographical domicile in the U.S. to my spiritual home in India, but then things changed. Health problems, work, and relationships all stood in the way of my return - but the biggest and seemingly most insurmountable obstacle of all was lack of money. Almost seven agonizing years had passed, and a return to His intimate sahavas in Meherabad and Meherazad appeared to be out of the question.

At that time, I was managing a small bookstore, but at very low pay. I was being mistreated by the owner to the point that I could no longer tolerate it. Although the job market was very tight in my area, I gave notice that I was quitting. My situation in life at this time had been quite difficult and now it was getting even worse.

Then one day, not too long after announcing my resignation, two Baba lovers who had just returned from India came into the store. They were glowing from the lingering sahavas of their recent pilgrimage. The man was on fire from his experience and exhorted me to travel there. When I told him that I couldn't

afford it, his reply was to tell me what Eruch had repeatedly said during their pilgrimage, "Now is the time to come. Beg, borrow, or steal to get here."

I was astonished by what happened next. I felt a strong shock of excitement within me and caught on fire with unreasonable enthusiasm for actually going. My mind was still being rational and seeing it as impossible - but my heart was a goner, and I went into action.

Amongst other problems, I only had a fraction of the money necessary for a ticket. But when I mentioned what I felt to a close friend - a single mother with very little money and a low paying job - she spontaneously offered me a two hundred dollar loan. I now had more than a third of what a ticket would most likely cost.

After borrowing this money, an idea came to me - my landlord was out of the country and he had asked me to withhold paying the rent until his return on a certain date. Therefore, I had two or three month's back rent set aside for him. Hmm.... Maybe I could "steal" this money, which was really his, and somehow replace it after I got back without his knowing what I had done. (If worse came to worst, I reasoned that I could borrow money from my Dad to pay off the landlord - not a great option - and concern myself with how to reimburse Dad later.)

Even after borrowing and stealing, I was still somewhat short of the going price for a ticket. But, lo and behold, a timely new (and short-lived) phenomenon came into play: frequent flyer coupon tickets were being sold at cheaper prices. It was a risky business, however, and some Baba lovers lost their money and their trips to India to unscrupulous

brokers. But, given my situation, I decided to take my chance. After making many inquiries, I was able to find a broker of coupon tickets whose price was lower than anyone else I had heard of. I had just enough money, and purchased it hoping that it wasn't bogus.

There was still the matter of needing to pay the rent on my apartment during my time away. I would have to find someone willing to rent my place for just three and a half weeks, and then be willing to leave when I returned. Well, it so happened that a friend of a friend was moving to the area and needed a temporary place to live looking for a permanent place. She agreed to stay and pay while I was gone, then leave when I got back.

Oh, but I would also need some money to live on while in India. What to do? Baba knew. I thought, "If only someone would rent my 20 year old car while I am gone..." A short time later, a friend mentioned to me that his car had died. He agreed to rent mine until he found another vehicle.

My challenges were not over, however. I needed to send off my passport for a visa and pray that it would come back in time. And, very importantly, I needed to make flight reservations. The non-refundable coupon ticket which I had purchased was only good on a specific airline. And I would need to get a departure date immediately after my last day of work in order for my trip to become a reality.

Otherwise, it would not work out for me financially - not in terms of the rental agreement I had struck, and other reasons as well.



I called the airline and requested a December 3rd departure. And I requested a December 24th return, because I had assured my parents that I would visit them for Christmas that year after having missed out in recent years. The airline representative informed me that not only were these dates unavailable, but the entire month of December was booked up.

So, here is where things stood: I had bought a non-refundable ticket which was, for all intents and purposes, of no use to me. In a few days I would be out of a job, with no other job possibilities in sight. I had no place to live, having promised my place to someone else. Nor could I use my own car.

After a couple of days, I called the airline again and pleaded my case. No luck. I then requested to be put on a waiting list. The person I spoke with told me that I was wasting my time but, if I insisted, she would put me on it.

At this point, I was feeling quite depressed, and that night as I lay in bed I gave up my dream which had once felt so real. I decided that being homeless, I would travel a few hundred miles to where old friends lived and stay at their places, and also visit my parents' place until my apartment became available again. I didn't know what I would do about money, a job, or my heartache.

The following morning I went to the bookstore for my next-to-last day of work.

Although I had given up hope that my pilgrimage dream would come true, I could not shake my

miserable state of mind and heart. Then, out of nowhere, I decided to call the airline one last time.

A middle-aged sounding woman took my call and I gave her the dates I wanted. When she said, "One moment please," I suddenly experienced a giddy surge of unreasonable hope. Having borrowed and stolen, it was at this moment that I found myself begging for it all to work out - adding, if it was His will.

The woman returned to the phone and informed me that there was now one available departure date for December. It was for December 3rd, the date which I had requested.

And there were now two return dates available in December - the 26th and the 28th. It appeared that I would have to disappoint my parents regarding Christmas, but I grabbed the 26th date. (Little did I know at the time, but due to my sisters' work schedules, my parents delayed celebrating Christmas until the weekend after the 25th and I could keep my word to attend.)

The ticket agent confirmed everything, and although I kept my cool over the phone. I was in a state of incredulous joy. I concluded my end of our conversation by saying, "Thank you." The ticket agent signed off with "Jai Baba." As for who she was, how she knew, what she knew, and how those dates became available, I haven't a clue. I was stunned beyond belief, this much I knew.

There was still the matter of my Pilgrim Center reservation approval and, of paramount importance, the return of my passport with a visa stamped in it.

The day before my intended departure, I had neither. Then, within hours of take-off, I received both. I had also heard, indirectly, that my landlord would be returning unexpectedly early - days before I was to leave. Of course, he would want the back rent which I had spent on my ticket. What could I say to him and what would he do? Then word came that he had changed his mind and would not be coming back at that time after all.

One last hurdle came when I presented my ticket at the airport. The woman stared at it for a long time with a concerned look on her face. She then asked me questions, intermittently returning to silently stare at my ticket in a pensive way. I was frightened, but acted self-assured. After what felt like an eternity, and with a look of ambivalence on her face, she let me go. It took a while for the fright to pass, but I was on my way Home.

Eruch had said, " Now is the time: beg, borrow, or steal to get here." As it turned out, I ended up doing all three, quite literally. The result was, dare I say, three incredible weeks with Beloved Baba in India.... Oh, and by the way, I returned to the West to find that a recently deceased relative had left me some money - enough to pay off the borrowed and "stolen" money, and just enough to keep me going until I found another job.

I feel that beloved Baba's benevolence in what He does for us, and the length to which He goes, is beyond conception. Occasionally, as with this account, one might get a slight glimmer of it. But although some love stories with Baba, such as this one, have a

fantastic quality about them, it is the personal love in His silent giving that informs these occurrences that is so precious to the lover. And whether we are aware or unaware of His presence and benevolence at any given point in time, there is no question that it is always there. That He is always here. Jai Baba.

Post Script: Some time after returning from that wonderful pilgrimage, I sent a letter to the mandali. In it, I described how Baba had brought me to India, providing a full account similar to this one. A few months after having sent the letter, I visited a store owned by a Baba lover. She had recently returned from pilgrimage and upon seeing me enter the store, she became excited to share the following episode with me. In Mandali Hall, she had asked Eruch this question, "If a Baba lover is dying to get here on pilgrimage but doesn't have the money, will Baba see to it?" Eruch's response was, "Go get Philip's letter," and it was read out in reply.

Philip Creager

## Baba's Final Declaration

In 1946 Beloved Baba was in seclusion on Sihava Mountain in M.P. It was a remote and wild area. Tigers could be heard roaring during the night. Jal Kerawalla had made the arrangements and had had buffalos brought to Baba's site so that He could have milk.

Baba was working with the mast, Bapji (Ali Shah), who had been carried up the mountain in a palanquin. Baba was in seclusion but, on the last day, He came out of seclusion and His hair was standing up and His face was very bright. He declared that three quarters of the world would be wiped out. But He only said this to the mandali.

This statement did not become public until September 1954 during the Final Declaration meeting. Before that, we were in Satara with Baba and there was a lot of discussion about the upcoming meeting.

Pendu, who would always be in charge of organizing the program and making arrangements for the pilgrims, was complaining, weeping that it wouldn't be possible for him to make arrangements because it usually rained at Meherabad in September and the program was to be held in the fields at lower Meherabad.

Pendu said, "There is no building, Baba, and it is not possible for me to construct one for the pilgrims. And their food also will be served outside. September is a very risky month for such a program."

Baba replied, "You don't worry because now I cannot change My decision." Then Baba said to Baidul, "Baidul, you grow a beard and pray to God that it may not rain up to 27th September."

This made Pendu happy since the meeting had been scheduled for the 29th and 30th and the Indian pilgrims wouldn't come until the 28th.

Baba sent Pendu to Meherabad two months before to make the arrangements. Pendu had pandals constructed for the pilgrims' stay in the field near the railway at Meherabad. A dining hall in front of the Dharamshala was constructed and temporary latrines and bathrooms as well. Even though Baidul was praying for no rain, Pendu put tin sheets on the pandals where the pilgrims would be sleeping.

The arrangement for the Westerners was made at Upper Meherabad at the Meher Retreat and Baba had given Sarosh and Viloo the duty of seeing to their food. Most of the Westerners stayed where the Study Hall is and some of them in the rooms below where the library is now. Sarosh provided beds and mosquito nets. But there was no arrangement for bathrooms and toilets. Therefore, temporary arrangements were made and commodes were provided. Because this arrangement was very temporary, sweepers were required around the clock so that if anyone went to the toilet, it could be cleaned immediately.

It was not possible to get sweepers to be there 24 hours a day so the duty was given to me and Dr. Donkin. We would remain hidden so that no Westerners would see that we were cleaning the potties. Every day, Baba would ask the Westerners if

the potties were clean and they would say that the potties were spotless. But they did not know who was cleaning them.

These Westerners were called to Meherabad 21 days in advance and Beloved Baba would meet them every day.

He would give them discourses. There would also be singing programs. There would be humor and Baba would ask for humorous stories from them. Baba would be busy with the Westerners and still He would also supervise the arrangements down below. Because Baba was taking care, Pendu was cocksure that there would be no rain. Baidul was also praying everyday and his beard had grown and Baba asked him to put his heart into it when he prayed.

During this period, now known as the "Three Incredible Weeks," Baba took the Westerners, mandali members and other Baba lovers from Ahmednagar and Pune to Sakori. When Beloved Baba had been in Sakori with Upasni Maharaj, Upasni's disciples had been very jealous of Baba because Upasni would stay with Baba during the night in a small room. The last day, when Baba was leaving Sakori, Upasni Maharaj took him to the room and he said to Baba, "Merwan, you are the Adi Shakti (Primal Power, Avatar) and I bow down to you!" Upasni Maharaj bowed down to Baba and Baba bowed down to him and then Baba left Sakori and He did not return until March of 1954.

After Baba left, one of Upasni's disciples named Yeshwant Rao would bring Upasni Maharaj's messages to Baba and Baba would send messages through him to

Upasni. Adi's mother, Gulmai, also would relay messages back and forth.

Because the members of Sakori ashram were very jealous of Baba, Upasni Maharaj would tell them that he had not given anything to Meher Baba. He was a mad Irani, and those who were in the ashram were very, very happy to hear this. But then, see how the whole atmosphere changed in 1954. What did Beloved Baba do? It was a very powerful visit of Beloved Baba to Sakori.

In the ashram, Yeshwant Rao built a house and he invited Baba for the opening in March of 1954. For that purpose he took permission from Godavri Mai who was the head of the ashram. When Beloved Baba went with His Western and Eastern lovers, it was His first visit since He had left in 1921. He was received very well. While He was there, Baba declared, "When Upasni Maharaj said that he did not give Me anything, he was perfectly right. I am the Ancient One, and what did he have to give Me? I am declaring this because Upasni Maharaj is here and he is listening."

Beloved Baba said to Godavri Mai that when He was Krishna, she was His mother, Yashoda. He said, "I would go to the kitchen and help her in making chapattis and she would also swing me in the cradle." And therefore Godavri Mai invited Baba herself to come to Sakori and Baba went to the kitchen to make chapattis and she was also working with Baba. And then she asked Baba to be in the cradle and she and others, kanyas (nuns), were swinging Baba in the cradle and they were singing the cradle-song, "sleep, my dear one, sleep."



There was a restriction that non-Brahmins could not enter into the kitchen, but when Baba entered the kitchen, all mandali members went there into the kitchen. Godavri Mai did not say a word. On the contrary, she was very, very happy. Baba went there twice to Sakori and during Beloved Baba's darshan program on 12th September she also came and sat near Baba. This was the time when Gadge Maharaj, the renowned saint, also came. And the women mandali came for first time and they saw the program and also saw Godavri Mai and Gadge Maharaj sitting near Baba. Some of the kanyas and also some of the persons from Sakori had come at that time.

There were maybe about 100,000 people there for Baba's darshan on the 12th and Baba was continuously distributing Prasad. There was also a feast for the poor and Baba joined the feast along with Gadge Maharaj. The food was served to all and Gadge Maharaj was sitting near Baba. Baba would give him His own food on His own patravali (leaf plate) and Gadge Maharaj would eat. It was such a touching scene how Baba would love His children who depend upon Him fully and follow His wish.

The darshan program went on up to the evening from morning and still there were people who could not approach Baba for the prasad. And therefore Baba arranged another program on 26th September at the Trust compound, which was called Khushroo Quarters at that time. The Westerners joined the program of 12th September as well as 26th September and these two programs were very, very powerful. When Beloved Baba's love was flowing to everyone and His shining face was attracting all the people, they would not leave

the place; they would just remain standing until the time Baba left the place of darshan and they were still all standing there. While going, Baba sat on the top of the car and He was waving and waving towards all of the crowd. And that is why Beloved Baba arranged the second program at the Trust compound on 26th September. There was no Trust at that time, it was Adi's place and it was as it is now.

There was sunshine all this time and there was no sign of any rain and Pendu was very, very happy that there would be no rain. On the 27th September there was again sunshine and Pendu was thinking that there would be no rain now because there was clear sunshine and there wasn't a cloud in the sky.

Baba went to Meherabad from Meherazad and Pendu looked very happy. Padri was also very happy because he was in charge of the electric fittings in the pandal and all over Meherabad and nobody thought that it would rain during the meeting. Baidul prayed up to 27th September, according to Baba's order, and Beloved Baba also lit the Dhuni. Baba also prayed before His own picture, along with the Westerners, and Meherabad was paradise for one month and it appeared as if the Divine Sun was shining.

But now what happened? When the Indian pilgrims started coming on 28th September, it rained and rained. Baba told Pendu to pass out Anacin tables to each pilgrim and he had to collect thousands of tablets. He went to every chemist at Ahmednagar and collected Anacin tablets and each pilgrim was given two. It was such a headache for Pendu and he was feeling as if the sky had fallen down on him.

There was one boy from Dehra Dun whose uncle, Kishan Singh, had made arrangements for Baba's stay in Dehra Dun in 1953. The boy was thinking, "What severe suffering we are facing here, and Baba must be taking good rest at Meherazad with a nice mosquito net all around his bed. He has no idea about our suffering."

The next day, Baba came to Meherabad early in the morning barefooted and He was walking in the mud going from pandal to pandal dining hall, and supervising the latrines and the arrangements for chairs for the pilgrims to sit on.

When this boy saw Beloved Baba walking in the mud, he started weeping. And Baba asked him why he was weeping. And instead he wept more and more. Baba then took him to the meeting pandal and all pilgrims, Easterners and Westerners, came in the pandal.

Baba then said, "When it was raining last night and I was at Meherazad, I, Meher Baba, asked Avatar Meher Baba, 'Am I the Avatar?' And Avatar Meher Baba said to Meher Baba, 'You are really the Avatar.' Then Meher Baba asked Avatar Meher Baba, 'If am the Avatar, how is it that my lovers have come from far away places and they are suffering and suffering? Because of the rain, there is mud all over and they are under a lot of inconvenience.' And Avatar Meher Baba said to Meher Baba, 'If they are really your lovers they will not complain about all this inconvenience. People go to places of pilgrimage walking and walking hundreds of miles. They beg for food, sleep under the trees and whether it is sunshine or rain they don't care

and they go to the place of pilgrimage and take darshan of the statue and they are not your lovers.'

"When I heard this from Avatar Meher Baba, I felt I am really the Avatar and, when my lovers have come to see me, how can they complain about anything because of the difficulties that they are facing?"

And the pilgrims all said, loudly, "We are very, very happy, Baba, to see you. It is our fortune that you have given this opportunity."

And Baba said, "I am very happy to hear this. I want that My lovers should remain brave and strong and not to worry for anything if they want Me."

Baba then embraced each one of the pilgrims, and those who have seen the film of the 1954 Final Declaration Meeting, they understand how Baba was embracing each one with all love and affection. No pilgrim complained about the rain and everyone was very, very happy. The food was of the best quality.

The cots for the pilgrims were made out of bamboo and my duty was to check the cots to make sure they were strong enough. So the contractor would call me and I would jump on the cot and if any cot would be broken, the contractor's son, who was about eight years old would laugh and laugh and he would ask me to do it again.

There is a story about this contractor. In 1925 Baba had made arrangements for poor families to take rations for one week from Meherabad and Gustadji was in charge of the store. He would distribute rice, dal millet flour oil chilies salt and soap for one week. And this contractor would come also to collect the

ration for his family. Every week, distribution would be made and first they would see Baba and Baba would give the note to Gustadji and he would distribute the rations. At that time Baba was writing though He was in silence.

One day, one person came from Ahmadnagar and when he saw this contractor, he told Baba, "He is not a poor person. He is well-to-do. He does not require rations for the family."

And Baba said him, "This distribution is only for the poor and he comes to me as a poor person. How can I not believe him?"

The man kept quiet. But what did he find afterwards? The contractor became very, very poor and he had a lot of debt so he came to Baba and he was weeping and weeping and he asked Baba's forgiveness and Baba forgave him. Since then, for any program, he would get the contract for constructing pandals and mattresses for the pilgrims and he was paid. Now he is no more. So his son makes or brings the mattresses. He was laughing when I would break the cots. Now he is a contractor and a good one.

So, on 29th September Baba embraced each of the pilgrims including the foreigners and the morning session was spent in embracing and after Baba wanted to perform the Prayer. He wanted to wash His hands and Sidhu, one of the mandali, went running to bring water from lower Meherabad. But then Baba washed His hands from the water collected from the rain in the field and He called Kaikobad to recite the prayer. And after the prayer, the morning session was over.

Baba then went to Mandali Hall at Lower Meherabad and the group meeting started. He called the Hamirpur lovers first. When Baba had gone there in 1952, some of the villages had been flooded and it had been difficult to enter. That was because those who were opposed to Baba had destroyed some dams so that Baba wouldn't be able to come. Baba asked, "How is the atmosphere now?" And they said, "The atmosphere is very bad Baba. People throw stones at our houses. They cut our crops and take them away and they create all sorts of difficulties for us."

Baba asked them, "Why they are doing this?"

And they said, "They are doing this because we follow you, and we say 'Jai Baba.' They are all devoted to Ram so they want that we should say 'Jai Ramji ki' and not 'Jai Baba!'"

Baba then asked, "Will you obey My order? And if you obey my order, I will give you one order."

And they all said "Whatever order you give, we are ready to obey very willingly. There is none besides You for us. We cannot follow anyone except you"

Baba then said, "Stop this 'Jai Baba' business. For one year, don't wish 'Jai Baba' to anyone. Will you obey this order?"

They said, "This will be difficult Baba. We remember you by this. How can we forget?"

Baba said, "Then it is better that you leave me. Even if you say 'Jai Ramji ki,' you will remember Me because I am Ram as well as Meher Baba, and if you don't want to follow My order, you leave Me."

And they all said, "We will follow your order."

Baba met lovers from different parts of India until the evening and then Baba left Meherabad. On 29th September, there was sunshine and the mud dried up by the evening. Baba had made arrangements for medical treatment at Meherabad for the pilgrims. There were two doctors: Dr. William Donkin and Dr. Nilkanth. And Dr. Dhanapati Rao was a heart specialist and one person got a heart attack. Dr. Kanak Dandi was checking him and Dr. Dhanapati Rao came and he said to Dr. Kanak, "Bring your stethoscope."

Dr. Kanak Dandi brought his stethoscope and when Dr. Dhanapati Rao saw the stethoscope he said, "The stethoscope is broken! Doctor, you are using this stethoscope?"

And Dr. Kanak Dandi said, "It is all Baba's grace." And Dr. Dhanapati Rao said, "This is Baba's grace. Baba would want you to use broken stethoscope. You don't worry. All right, you take care of this patient because you are also in charge."

Dr. Kanak Dandi gave him two tablets of Anacin and he was all right. Since then, when Dr. Kanak Dandi went back to his home, he would use two tablets of Anacin for every patient and would laugh. He had utmost faith in Baba and Baba said to him, "It is because of your faith that these Anacin tablets work. I don't know anything."

On 30th September there was a very serious meeting. Baba gave His Final Declaration, and the declaration in short is as follows:

- 1) On October 8th Baba will discard His alphabet board and He will remain in seclusion. He will never use this alphabet board again.
- 2) No one should write to Him and no one should come to see him. He will remain in complete seclusion.
- 3) There will be a strange disease which will attack My body and I may drop My physical body.
- 4) Three quarters of the world will be destroyed.

The atmosphere became very serious. Everyone was shocked to hear this. But again Baba embraced each one after giving this final declaration. His lovers were weeping and weeping. And after embracing each of his lovers, Baba left for Meherazad and all His lovers returned to their places after lunch. The atmosphere became very tense and in different prominent newspapers the report came that Meher Baba had declared that three quarters of the world would be destroyed. There was a sensation all over India and even Baba lovers would go from place to place and say three quarters of the world will be destroyed, but if you want to follow Meher Baba you may be included in the one quarter.

Just after this meeting, Baba left for Satara and all the mandali went there because Baba was living there at that time.

There were many letters from all over India from His lovers that what they would do if they could not see Him and write to Him? Baba was disconnecting Himself from them and it was a great shock to them. The letters were read out and Baba gave the message to all as follows.



"I am disconnecting Myself from you externally in order to bring you closer to me internally. Do not worry. Baba was, Baba is and Baba will be. I cannot leave anyone or anything. I am the life of each one. How can I leave you? So be strong and be brave in My love knowing well that I am always with you and I will not leave you even if you leave Me."

This message was circulated to his lovers, but how important this message is now, when He is not in physical form, amongst us. He is our very life. He cannot be away from us, though our false self keeps us away from Him.

### Baba Gives Up The Alphabet Board

On 7th December 1954 Beloved Baba gave a prayer in the morning, "Oh Sai Baba, Oh Babajan, Oh Upasni Maharaj, Oh Narayan Maharaj, Oh Tajuddin Baba! I am discarding this alphabet board before you in the evening. You are the witness." And when Baba came to the mandali in the evening, this prayer was performed and Baba started spinning His alphabet board, spinning and spinning and spinning and He just threw it. And when He threw it, three quarters of the zero was torn off from the alphabet board and we felt that definitely three quarters of the world would be destroyed. But then Baba clarified that that statement was made in His language and the sensation which was there all over India was calmed down.

After throwing away the alphabet board, Baba would come to the mandali and Baba would look at us and

we would look at Him and there was no communication. Every day it would happen. But He would come to the mandali every day and we would just sit before Him without any communication. And one day, when Baba came, He would look at us and from His face we could understand that He wanted to say something to us, but we could not follow.

All of a sudden, Eruch said, "Do you want this thing?" And Baba shook His head that He did. Ramjoo asked Eruch, "How did you understand that Baba wanted this?" And Eruch could not say anything. Baba did not even make a sign before the 1955 Sahavas but would write in the air and very fast. Nobody could understand, but somehow Eruch could understand sometimes. It is surprising to know that the Clarification, Confirmation and Decision were given through writing in the air. Now, one can imagine how Eruch was deciphering it because Baba wanted that. He can make a stone speak if He wishes to.

Then, just before the 1955 sahavas program, one day Baba called Eruch and showed him the signs and thereafter Baba started using the signs. Every one of the mandali would understand the sign language, but Eruch and Mani would understand it much better than anyone else. I would also understand because I was keeping night watch and also Baba would give me dictation for the books, but I was not as good as Eruch.

Let us see what happens to the destruction of three quarters of the world. It was Baba's language, no doubt, but when I was in Chicago one year and I was giving a talk, spontaneously I spoke out that definitely

three quarters of the world is going to be destroyed. I never thought of it and again when there was a video interview in New York, and when I was asked this question about the destruction of three quarters of the world, I said, Yes, it is going to happen.

Beloved Baba had said that the materialism is going to the zenith and therefore the spirituality will also reach the zenith. And, therefore, I feel that three quarters of the world will be destroyed because construction takes place after destruction. I may be right, or I may be wrong about the true meaning of the destruction of three quarters of the world when Beloved Baba's Universal Manifestation will take place.

I remember one incident. After Baba dropped His alphabet board and started the sign language, Baba promised the lovers in Nauranga that when they constructed Meher Dham (Meher Abode), He would send one of the mandali for the inauguration of the foundation. Baba did not forget this. The time of digging the foundation of Meher Dham was approaching and one day Baba said to me, "Why don't you go to inaugurate this function?"

I said to Him, "Baba, what I would do when I go there? People will ask me about the destruction of three quarters of the world and what will I say?"

Baba said, "Either you go to Nauranga, Hamirpur or go back to your home."

I had to go then. There was no other way out. But Beloved Baba gave me this line, "Satchitanand, Paramanand, Meher Baba Vidnyanand." This means, "Truth, Bliss and infinite Bliss, Meher Baba is all

Knowledge and Bliss." I was thinking that people would ask me about the destruction of three quarters of the world and how can this line help me?

Beloved Baba had asked me to tour the whole district and ultimately I should go to Nauranga for the inauguration of the foundation of Meher Dham in Nauranga. So when I went there, I went to the first village called Ichhoura. There were about 6,000 people. And when I saw the big gathering, I was feeling nervous that if anyone would ask me about three quarters of the world, what reply I would give?

The group head came to me and I said that Baba has given me this line. Whether anyone can sing it? So he called the singers and, within no time, they fixed the tune of the song and started singing. This line was so powerful that everyone got absorbed and it appeared that the waves of Beloved Baba's love became very active. I was thinking that now all these people are absorbed in His love and therefore no one will ask me about the destruction of the three quarters of the world.

But when the singing ended, the group head stood up. He introduced me to the people and then he said, Baba had said that three quarters of the world is going to be destroyed and, therefore, if you want to remain in one quarter, follow Meher Baba.

It was a great shock to me and I was feeling as if the earth was moving out from under my feet and I had to give a talk. Silently I prayed to Baba, please tell me what should I do?

When I was leaving Satara, Baba had said, you don't worry, I will be coming with you. And He did come with me.

I remembered one story, told by Baba Himself, which is as follows:

There was a Perfect Master and he would be in a secluded place along with his disciples. If anyone came to see him, he would not see them, and years and years passed by.

Then, one day, his disciples got together and they said there are so many false masters and saints and swamis and thousands of people go to them every day and our Master is the real one and he does not see anyone. So we must go and request him that at least he should see the people who come to see him. We'll say that there are many false masters, saints and swamis and thousands of people go to see them. Why don't you allow them to come and see you?

And the Master said, "The time is coming when I will see them, so wait." And they did, and they waited and waited, for five years, but the Master did not see anyone. So again they approached the Master and they said, "Master, you said that the time will come when you will see the people and five years have passed away but the time has not come."

And the Master said, "Wait, wait. The time is coming. I will see them."

And again two years passed by and the Master did not see anyone and the disciples again became restless and went to the Master and said, "Master, you said that

time is coming, but when? We don't know and we want that now you must start meeting the people."

And the Master said, "The time has come and now go to the people and inform them that I will be meeting them from this date to this date, for a week. If they want to see me, they can come anytime or all the time for that week. But also tell them that on the seventh day, after sunset, I will drop my physical body."

And when the disciples heard this, they said, "Master, now we don't want you to see the people." But the Master said, "It is now a definite thing and I cannot change it. It is not because you asked me for this, it is from me. You have to go and tell the people. This is my order."

And the disciples had to go and tell the people and they gave the Master's message to the people and the people thought, "Why not go to the Master for a week and spend time with him. We'll get more material benefit from him."

When all the arrangements were made and the specified day came, thousands and thousands of people came. The Master was sitting on the stage and he was full of joy. He was looking very bright and he said to the people, "Now sing and dance," so they started singing and dancing and they continued until evening, except for a one hour lunch break and the day was passed very happily.

The second day the Master came on the stage at 9 o'clock and he gave a sign to the people to sing and dance. But people saw him radiant and even more joyful. So a doubt started in their minds. Will he die?

He looks so healthy and joyful. He looks so bright. So they were dancing and singing but they were also thinking about the doubt.

Now the third day came and the Master looked brighter than the previous day. He was smiling and he was very joyful and the people had more and more doubts about this dying.

In this way, every day they would have more and more doubt and, on the sixth day, the doubt was confirmed because the Master was shining, looking very happy and cheerful and healthy. And they started talking and creating a disturbance and there was no charm. They were also tired and they were thinking that the Master deceived them, but anyhow they completed the sixth day.

And the seventh day came and the Master's face was shining and shining. He started dancing and singing but there was no charm at all for the crowd. They were looking at him, continuously thinking that still there is no sign of his sickness. He not going to die and, therefore, at sunset they started throwing stones at him and they killed him. The Master died, but how? They killed him. Then they realized that the Master had died on the seventh day, but how? They had killed him.

So, there was repentance, and so much deep repentance that they started loving the Master. Their desire for material gain died and real love started in their hearts.

I therefore told the lovers, "What do we have to do with the destruction of three quarters of the world? Our duty is to love Baba and obey His orders, lovingly,

sincerely and honestly, without any expectation. Why should we think about the destruction of three quarters of the world? Why should we care for our false existence and make the false existence stronger and stronger? We have to lose this false existence in the real existence of God who alone Exists.

"What do we have to do with destruction of three quarters of the world? We have come into creation to know our real self and to find out the answer to the question of the Whim, 'Who am I?' In order to find out the real answer, we spend ages and ages and ages passing through different kingdoms of evolution of consciousness and ultimately when we get this human form, which is the best form, we must long and long in His love to find the real answer of this question. That is our duty.

"It is not your duty to feel scared about the destruction of three quarters of the world. If this is destined, it will happen. We cannot save it, so why should we worry about that? Our duty is just to love Beloved Baba and obey His orders. He is our very life. We should not forget or neglect that. We are fortunate that we have come in contact with Him and recognized Him. The world will recognize Him at the time of His Universal Manifestation which will take place a hundred years after He has dropped His physical body."

After this, the whole atmosphere was changed and when I went to different places, people would go in procession singing "Satchitanand, Paramanand, Meher Baba Vidnyanand." The whole atmosphere of the Hamirpur district was changed and the wave of



Beloved Baba's love was moving throughout the district.

Avatar Meher Baba Ki Jail

Bhau

## My Appointment With God

My father was a Presbyterian Yogi. A sincere spiritual seeker living near Chicago, he had investigated just about anyone who had any claim, however dubious, to spiritual fame. In addition to Ouspensky, Gurdjieff, Yogananda Paramhansa, Krishnamurti and the Theosophists, he knew about many extremely obscure "masters," both living and dead. He once took me to meet one of them, but I was not impressed. My father also believed in aliens and life on other planets. He did yoga faithfully every morning and every night, and he was an organic farmer, Presbyterian choir director/organist, and professional accountant. Obviously, he slept very little.

During my childhood, my dad and I would often say the Lord's Prayer together at bedtime, and sometimes we would talk about spiritual matters. He told me about reincarnation and the importance of getting my "third eye" to open. He also explained what an Avatar was and told me that he believed the Avatar would be on earth during my lifetime and that it would be my job to find Him! Excited by this prospect, I decided to spend my life searching for the Avatar.

My dad taught me Hatha Yoga and sometimes we did it together. But early in my childhood yoga career, I was in an accident and got a serious head injury that caused headaches whenever I did yoga, so I had to stop. Clearly, Baba had closed a door.

By the time I was twelve, I had developed a great love for Jesus and would sometimes feel His presence. One

night, while I was lying in my room in the dark, I saw a face at the end of the bed looking at me with great love. He was very beautiful and I knew I was seeing Jesus. The strange thing was that there didn't seem to be any body - just a face. Yet the face seemed complete; nothing was lacking. I had a very good feeling from this experience, but I didn't tell anyone about it, not even my father.

That vision stayed with me for a time, and I became quite religious. Although I was positive that the Presbyterian Church was not my destiny, there were few spiritual options in Libertyville, Illinois. And once I discovered boys, my interest in Jesus and all things spiritual was pretty much forgotten altogether, and my dad and I drifted apart. I was obsessed with boys and had also discovered cigarettes and alcohol, which I took to with great gusto. Neither of my parents was prepared to deal with my teenage transgressions.

My father died of a heart attack when I was sixteen, and it is a great sadness to me that we were not close in the last years of his life.

The following year, 1962, I went off to college in Missouri where I began reading my dad's many books on spiritual subjects. I was particularly taken with Theosophy and even believed I might have been Madame Blavatsky in a past life! One of my favorites was *Autobiography of a Yogi* by Paramhansa Yogananda. I also read a lot of really strange stuff including *Why We Are Here*, a book supposedly written by a being from Jupiter.

I even read about Meher Baba in *A Search in Secret India* by Paul Brunton, though I didn't pay much attention

because the author's reaction to Baba had been negative. But I'm glad my father had read that book so at least he knew of Baba.

From my reading, I became convinced that I had to find a master but, alas, this was easier said than done during the early sixties. Nonetheless, I would chatter endlessly about spiritual (or pseudo-spiritual) subjects to anyone who would listen. I was fairly certain I was spiritually advanced and privately liked to speculate about what plane I might be on!

In 1963, I transferred to the University of Miami where my roommate was an atheist who was totally uninterested in anything I had to say about the spiritual path. She became so fed up with me that one day she said in desperation, "You know, I went to high school with someone who went to India and met a master. I'll try to introduce you to him."

I was very excited at the prospect of meeting someone who had actually met a master. But meeting him turned out to be another story. My roommate didn't know his last name or phone number; she knew only that his name was Eddie and he hung out at a certain spot in Miami Beach. Getting to the beach was quite an ordeal because we had to take three different buses, and our first couple of attempts to find the elusive Eddie ended in failure. I begged her to take me to the beach again because, of course, I had no way of recognizing this guy on my own. And on our third try, she spotted him as soon as we arrived. She quickly introduced us, saying, "Cindy, this is Eddie. Eddie, this is Cindy." Then she left as fast as possible.

I was so happy - after all, I'd been searching for a master for two years! And for the past two months, which had been excruciatingly painful because my boyfriend had dumped me, the desire to find a master had been especially intense. Dying with anticipation, I said, "I hear you've been to India to meet a master."

Eddie, in an agonizingly slow fashion, replied, "Yes. His name is Meher Baba and I met Him in India."

I was extremely curious. I had a feeling this was IT! I said, "Tell me about Him." Time crawled along. I felt as though I'd waited such a long time for this information that I just couldn't bear to wait any longer.

Then Ed asked if I would like to see the picture of Baba he had in his wallet, and he slowly, ever so slowly, removed the wallet, opened it, and showed me the photo called "The Ancient One." Immediately I realized that this was the face I had seen in my vision when I was twelve!

After a few minutes of conversation, Ed told me Baba was God. It didn't cross my mind that He was not God. I knew it was true. I knew Meher Baba was my master, the one I had been looking for.

I was in a strange state of exhilaration and ecstasy as Ed and I talked the whole day. He gave me some pamphlets including *The Highest of the High*, in which Baba declared He was the Avatar. I felt that all the puzzle pieces of my life suddenly fit perfectly together: everything about Meher Baba made complete sense. And that was pretty much that. I even remember thinking foolishly that all my problems were over now that I had found my master at last!

I decided that I absolutely had to meet Meher Baba as soon as possible. The fact that I was a college student with only about twenty dollars to my name did not deter me in the slightest. I was going to meet Him. Nothing could stop me, I thought. The next morning I called my mother. I was sobbing ecstatically as I told her this surprising news. She, of course, was less than thrilled and also started sobbing, but for very different reasons. She said, "Oh no! Not another one in the family! How much money do they want?"

She was referring to the fact that my father had sometimes given large sums of money to the "masters" he was involved with. (In later years my mother, who came to like and respect Baba, was most impressed about two things: she believed He had gotten me off drugs, and neither He nor his followers had ever asked for money.)

I then called Ed and announced that I was going to India and needed to get Meher Baba's address. He told me that Baba was in seclusion and I couldn't possibly see Him. Ed explained that going to India would be seriously disobeying Baba, and since I sincerely wanted to obey Baba, I agreed not to go.

But I felt crushed. To this day I feel that not going to India at that time was the biggest mistake of my life. Of course, I also realize that it was my destiny to have had Ed, who insisted so adamantly that I couldn't go, as my Baba contact. But I had searched and searched for my master, and now that I'd found Him, I couldn't see Him! I went from bliss to bleak despair during that one short phone conversation.

Ed did invite me to come to Miami Beach and meet his brother Irwin, and although this prospect seemed a poor substitute for meeting my new master, I had a wonderful day with the Luck brothers, who talked to me about Baba for hours and hours. From then on, I spent every possible moment with them and other Miami Baba lovers. The Baba meetings at that time were small and very powerful. Almost everyone had recently been to the 1962 East-West Gathering, and they were all filled with love. This period was a very magical time in my life with Baba - the "honeymoon."

Baba was in seclusion in 1964, but not the deep seclusion of later years; I don't think there was an injunction against sending letters or cables to Him, especially if no answer was required. In any case, one could always write to Him in an emergency, and "emergencies" could be quite loosely defined when necessary. We sent several cables to Baba during this time period. Because I had no clue how precious these communications were, I didn't always keep good records of our correspondence, but I did keep a copy of one of the telegrams the Luck brothers and I sent to Baba in early 1964:

Cindy, Edward and I love you more than anything else and feel privileged to carry out your wish. We are very happy and very, very thankful that you love us so much. Cindy Whitaker's address is 1101 Miller Drive, Coral Gables, Florida. In your love Baba.

Cindy, Edward, Irwin

In Miami I was leading two very different, but absolutely parallel, lives. I had started using drugs right

around the same time I came to Baba. Whenever I wasn't with the Baba people, I was doing drugs with my older friends - mostly musicians. Ed and Irwin advised me to write to Baba about my drug use. I remember they instructed me to use the word "hemp" because Baba might not know what marijuana or pot was! So I sent the following cable:

Need help stopping hemp and present situation to draw closer to you.

Love, Cindy

In an effort to stop doing drugs, I dropped out of school, left Miami, and returned to Illinois to live with my mother. I should have asked Baba for permission before making such a big move, but I was afraid he would tell me to stay in school - I knew he'd given repeated instructions to stay in school to someone else who had wanted to quit. (Later in life I got my degree because I always felt I'd disobeyed Baba by quitting college without asking Him.)

Living with my mother in Illinois was not easy, but I did manage to quit doing drugs temporarily and I visited the Meher Center for the first time. Everyone at the Center was fascinated that I was so young - as a nineteen-year-old I was quite a curiosity. Only a few Baba lovers were younger than forty and most were older; even the Luck brothers and the younger Miami lovers were several years older than I.

Because it was my first visit to the Center, we watched movies at Eileen Coates' home one night. (There was no Meeting Place in those days.) I was overwhelmed seeing Baba for the first time. How beautiful He



looked! I really don't remember what I thought, only that I wept and wept.

For part of the time I was there, I was the only Center guest. Perhaps because of my past drug use, I was often disturbed by entities while I was there alone. There were few rules then, and no set time to be in the cabins, so I always waited until Frank Eaton, the caretaker, came on Center at midnight, before I tried to go to sleep. His presence seemed to keep the disembodied souls at bay.

I got to spend a good deal of time with Kitty Davy and was amazed by her energy. At that time she did a lot of the hard, physical work on the Center, and I tried to help her, although it was almost impossible to keep up with her. I also met Dr. Ram Ginde during that visit and sent the following letter back to Baba with him:

Thank you for all the love and for all the help you have given me drawing me closer to You. I love You as much as I am able. I want to love you more and more. Please don't suffer for me. I have stopped taking hemp.

Thank you for loving me - thank you for my life, thank you for being Baba.

I hope you are feeling well, I wish you didn't have to suffer for our sake. Thank you for your love.

Cindy

A reply came on 29 March, 1965 from Mani at Meherazad:

Dear Cindy,

Your heart's message to Meher Baba sent personally with Dr. Ginde, has reached beloved Baba. Baba wants me to write and tell you that He is happy with your love for Him which is strong enough to make you stop taking hemp. Baba wants you NOT to resume taking hemp or form any similar drug habit again. Baba sends His Love to you, and wants you to remain happy in His remembrance. Beloved Baba does not wish you to reply to this letter.

With love to you dear Cindy and to our Elizabeth Kitty Ruth Eileen Laura Edith Bessie and all who are at the Center,

Mani

Feeling that I was now strong enough to follow Baba's orders about drugs, I left Illinois and went to New York. I told everyone that I was moving so I could be around Baba lovers again, since there was no Baba group in Chicago yet. But I think I knew on some level that I still had a lot more drug karma to go through.

For a while, things went well in New York. I got a job right away. I enjoyed seeing the Luck brothers again, and I was delighted to be going to the Baba meetings in Steinway Hall. I must say that listening to a bunch of middle-aged and elderly Westerners singing along with a scratchy recording of the Neti Neti arti was very strange indeed - but Adele Wolkin and Fred and Ella Winterfelt took me under their Baba wings, and I was happy to be in His atmosphere again. Because I had no same-age peer group, however, I was very lonely in some ways. And I felt pressured by the older Baba

people to be something I was not. I was still very much attracted to drugs, although I was trying hard to obey Baba by not using them.

I had driven to New York in a newly purchased car but didn't really have a place to live, so I was staying with new hippie friends in a "crash-pad" on the Lower East Side. One night, during a serious altercation between my friends and some very nasty neighbors, I was arrested for possession of narcotics and spent the night in the infamous New York City jail known as "The Tombs." Since I did not, in fact, have any drugs of any kind, I was outraged. And while I was being hauled off to jail, my car, which contained all my worldly possessions, was burnt to a crisp by an angry Puerto Rican mob while the cops did nothing. In retrospect, I think the police arrested us because they were trying to keep us from being killed, but I don't know why they allowed my car to burn.

About fifteen of us spent the night in jail. The next morning, our cases were thrown out of court because no drugs were ever found, but I felt that Baba had not treated me well at all. There I was, trying to obey Him, and look what happened? My car and my belongings had been burnt to cinders while the cops looked on. I'd been propositioned by a member of New York's Finest; I'd spent the night in jail for possession of narcotics I did not possess, and I'd lost my job because I couldn't show up for work. I was not one bit pleased with Baba! So, naturally, I turned on. I smoked some pot on the roof of a building, and I remember thinking that surely I would be struck by lightning. When lightning failed to materialize, I smoked more pot. One

thing led to another, and I ended up being high almost every minute of every day for a very long time.

When I got out of jail, I owned nothing but the clothes I was wearing. I became a panhandler and slept where I could; sometimes I spent the night in Washington Square Park. My "parallel" lives continued. I was angry with Baba but still going to Baba meetings. When people asked if I were doing drugs, I would lie and tell them I wasn't. I thought that if I could just hang on until I met Baba at the upcoming May, 1965 darshan program, I'd be okay.

Then Baba canceled the darshan for the Westerners. I was devastated. I cabled Baba to ask:

Will You permit me to see you in May? With all the love I am able to give,

Cindy Whitaker,

He replied that I should "wait for darshan."

My life became hellish. I stayed continuously stoned. I tried hard not to think of Baba, but I still kept the "Ancient One" photo by my bed, where it was the first thing I saw every day and the last thing I saw every night. The Baba scene felt increasingly oppressive to me, and I began to do more and more drugs in an effort to obliterate the pain of disobedience. I became almost completely estranged from the Baba community, although at one point some of the Baba lovers actually kidnapped me in an effort to save me from myself.

Sometime in 1965, Baba asked His lovers to write letters to Him by a certain date. I waited until the last possible moment to write my letter and when I wrote

it, I was still coming down from an acid trip. I think I said,

Dear Baba,  
I'm not ready for your love. Love,  
Cindy

By 1966, I had become a very successful drug dealer. I was high all the time, although the guilt of flagrantly disobeying Baba was horrendous. I dealt with it by trying to ignore Him and His followers. I used vast amounts of pot, hash and LSD and smaller amounts of cocaine, opium and other more exotic drugs.

Fortunately, I had a needle phobia which prevented me from ever shooting drugs directly into my veins. But I couldn't sleep alone. I had out-of-body experiences. I was tormented by entities. I was despondent. One day I looked in the mirror and realized that I was probably going to die soon. I could not find my way back to Baba - even though Baba reminded me from time to time that He had not forgotten me.

During that period, a friend arranged for me to sell drugs to a famous English folk-rock star. To my utter astonishment, I was sent to the Hotel Delmonico to make this deal, to the very place where Baba had stayed during his 1956 visit to New York! Although I had never been there before, I had seen a film of Baba at the Delmonico, celebrating His birthday with a large group of His Western lovers. And now here I was, surrounded by vacant-eyed groupies, selling drugs to an English singer's stoned "assistant" (I never did meet the star) in the hotel where Meher Baba had slept, given interviews, and attended a banquet.

While I was hanging around waiting to get paid, I had a vivid fantasy that Baba had actually stayed in that very suite! I have no idea whether or not I was right, but at the time I was convinced, and I could clearly visualize Baba sitting in a corner on a divan, looking radiant. I felt horrible beyond belief. But I knew Baba was still there, waiting for me.

Baba was also there to save me when I needed Him most. On my final acid trip I stopped breathing, and I believed I was dead. I made a deal with Baba, "If You get me out of this, I'll never do LSD again." I recovered, but the whole experience left me so rattled that I locked myself in my apartment for two weeks and wouldn't see anyone; I was quite insane. But I kept my "bargain" with Baba and never did LSD again; I simply used more cocaine and other substances instead.

About this time, Baba communicated to Ed and Irwin that He did not want them to use drugs, including marijuana, or to associate with those who did, and Irwin wrote to me to say they could no longer see me. Now, I was even more isolated from Baba people. Adele Wolkin has told me that I sometimes showed up at her apartment very stoned, but I have no memory of those visits. I only remember being very miserable. And very high. And very promiscuous.

In October, 1966, I had a dream that I was with a man I loved deeply. The feeling of love was so intense that when I woke up and realized I'd only been dreaming, I wept because my loss felt so great. But the very next day this dream man moved into my apartment building, and when I saw him I thought, "Wow! This is

the guy I'm going to marry!" His name was Henry Dacek and he was also a drug dealer. Since I already loved him in my dream, things progressed very rapidly and just three days after I met him, he asked me to marry him. I told him I would if he got permission from Baba. It happened that Henry had heard of Baba just a few days before he met me and was drawn to Baba, so he agreed and we went to the Western Union office together. I remember feeling Baba's presence very powerfully as Henry was writing and sending his telegram, asking if he could marry me. Baba soon responded by cable:

You may marry Cindy if Cindy also wants to marry you. My love to you. - Meher Baba

After we got married, I always kept the two telegrams and my marriage license together. Later they all disappeared, but I'm convinced I didn't "lose" them; they just vanished.

Several days after we met, Henry and I got up one morning and did not use drugs. We didn't discuss this issue at all; it just happened. During the day, several people came by and offered us drugs, but we refused. There was still no discussion; we simply didn't feel like doing drugs - which was pretty amazing, considering both of us had been constantly stoned for so long.

That afternoon, October 10, 1966, after being out of touch with him for quite a while, I got a call from Ed Luck. I was surprised to hear from him in view of Baba's order to stay away from people who were using drugs. He told me he had received the following communication from Baba in a letter from Eruch:

Beloved Baba is very happy to hear that dear Cindy Whitaker is totally free from drugs and is proud of her love for him.

Upon hearing this message, I immediately felt totally free from drugs! I was astonished to find out that Eruch's letter had been sent more than a week earlier from India. And not only did I feel free from drugs, I felt free from the karma I had incurred. For some reason, I foolishly assumed the message was intended for both Henry and me, and we made plans to go to the Center to get married as soon as possible.

We wanted to have the ceremony on the Center, but after some consideration Elizabeth decided that allowing a wedding to take place there would establish a precedent that would be hard to deal with in the future, so we were married by a justice of the peace. I saw three poisonous snakes on the Center the day we got married! Was Baba trying to tell me something?

After a few days at the Center we returned to New York, where we attempted to adapt to our new, drug-free lifestyle. Unfortunately, Henry was unable to continue to stay away from pot and other drugs. In the months that followed, I received more communications from Baba about drugs. On January 26, 1967, a note came from Dr. Goher to Kitty that said:

Have noted about dear Cindy Whitaker. Yes one learns through experience. Beloved Baba sends His Love to her and wants her to remember Him wholeheartedly and keep away from drugs.



I was puzzled by this message, as I was no longer using drugs of any kind. I was also distressed that my husband had resumed taking drugs, and I asked Baba for clarification about "keeping away from drugs." Baba responded by cable in June, 1967:

Henry may smoke tobacco but stay away from drugs except medicines when prescribed by medical specialists. Love to you and Henry. - Meher Baba

Baba works on so many levels that it's impossible to know what He's really doing. But not long before Baba had said I was free from drugs, I'd been arrested a second time and received a one-year suspended sentence for felony possession of hashish. And that time I'd definitely been guilty! So I felt that by keeping me away from the actual physical presence of drugs, Baba was also keeping me safe from getting arrested again. The idea of going to jail for something I wasn't even doing any more was pretty scary.

Henry continued to get high. Although I implored him to keep his drugs out of the house and use them elsewhere, he continued to bring them into our home. Eventually, although it was one of the hardest things I've ever done, I left Henry because I wanted to follow Baba's orders to me about keeping away from drugs. I could see no alternative; I felt Baba forced me to choose between obedience to Him and my love for my husband. I moved to Woodstock to start over.

After Baba said I was free from drugs, I very easily obeyed His orders until 1976, when I suddenly and inexplicably smoked some pot one evening with friends. I have no idea why I got high because I had

absolutely no desire to do so. And, strangely, I continued to feel "free" from drugs even though I'd smoked pot. But that very night I had a bizarre dream in which Baba made it clear to me that I could never, ever, use drugs again. I never have.

During the late 60s one of the best things that happened for me was that many young people came to Baba, so I finally had a same-age peer group. Many of these "new" people, mostly former drug users like me, would become my closest friends. The sense of community I experienced with my Baba friends in Woodstock and New York was wonderful.

In 1969, when the news came that Baba had dropped His body, I was devastated. It seemed totally unbelievable that He was gone. My first, very selfish thought was, "How could He? I never got to meet Him!" I now regret that in my grief I couldn't act quickly enough to go to India for the interment. I felt numb and depressed. All of us in Woodstock were in mourning, wondering what to do. Then news came from India that the mandali believed the darshan program should still be held; after all, Baba had said, "I will give darshan reclining."

In 1965 Baba had told me to "wait for darshan." And in April, 1969, I finally "met" Meher Baba at The Last Darshan, the event in Poona that He planned for us before He dropped His body. When Eruch opened the darshan program with the words, "It is nine o'clock and you have kept your appointment with God," I knew it was true. All other moments in my life had led to that particular, infinitely timeless moment, the most

important moment of my life: my appointment with God!

Throughout the darshan week, I felt Meher Baba's living presence in a way I've very rarely experienced again. I go to India frequently in an effort to recapture the experience of being "with" Baba, but that first "meeting" with Him remains the most extraordinary.

At the darshan, Baba also gave me the wonderful gift of seeing His beloved Mehera as the Queen of the Universe. When she stepped across the stage at Guruprasad to greet us, I was somehow momentarily "unveiled" long enough to see who she really was.

After the darshan, and also in the twenty years that she lived after Baba dropped His body, I spent as much time with her as possible. But I never again saw her as the Queen; instead, I saw her as the quintessential woman. I saw her as the most beloved woman in the world, the one who loved Meher Baba more than anyone else, the one who suffered for Him more than anyone else. Mehera taught me about Baba's suffering. And about how to love Him. I can't love Him the way she did, but she showed me that such love is possible. I am fortunate to have had the gift of her company.

And it was at darshan that I realized I wanted to be a professional musician. For the most part, I've made a living at music since then. Music is also the way He has worked on me, pulverized me, and ground me into dust. I'm convinced that writing, performing and recording songs is my "assignment" for this life. For better or for worse.

So I kept my appointment with God and received the gifts of a lifetime. I established a relationship with Mehera, the Queen of the Universe. I met Mani, the divine sister of the Sun. I met His mandali, the jewels in His crown. I got to be with saints and lovers and lifelong friends, my true companions on this journey of my heart. And I discovered what my life's work would be.

I kept my appointment with God. Thank you Baba! Thank you Mehera! For Everything. I will continue to work on my assignment.

AVATAR MEHER BABA KI JAI!

Cindy (Whitaker Dacek) Lowe

## A Former Priest's Search for Reality

This story is the sum and substance of an extraordinary spiritual odyssey that began just after my disillusionment and leaving of the Catholic priesthood at the end of January, 1969, never having heard of the Master. That journey was, first of all, a violent stripping of almost everything I had known and believed in, given my heart and soul for; and now a feeling that I had truly failed in my life's mission and lost. Then came years of the delicate balancing act between head and heart to restore my sense of place in the world while maintaining a sense of my self-esteem - however many false choices I might have made in that process during the no-holds-barred 1970s.

One of the first jobs I had in the "unreal" real world after putting aside religious life was as a Madison Avenue television and film producer. My boss, Robert Riger, a Catholic himself, walked in one morning and sincerely asked me if I thought Christ could have returned to earth. He explained that his son, Chris, had just returned from India, apparently "reborn" and buzzing about a man in India called Meher Baba, believed by countless thousands to be the "return of Jesus." Well, I certainly hadn't caught it on the evening news and had all I could do to keep from laughing in the poor man's face at such a ludicrous suggestion.

But, shortly after that, I began watching and even exploring the unusual and ecstatic charismatic movement, complete with tongue speaking and prophesy in the previously sober Catholic Church. The

Protestant Pentecostal movement had burst forth in America around the time of Meher Baba's birth in the very late 1800s and now, curiously, again seemed to be reviving in 1969 when I left the priesthood - the year Meher Baba finished his work on earth. Now once again there were Christian, and even Catholic, Pentecostals!

This phenomenon had first erupted in the very first weeks following Jesus' crucifixion, with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Seeing this re-occur in modern times, with Catholics and Protestants now praying together in each other's homes in unprecedented spiritual brotherhood and friendship, I felt that something new and spiritually exciting was going on. But what was it? It was ecumenism for sure - not of ideology, but of experience. This was popularly referred to as the "underground church" - people becoming the priests of their own spiritual consciousness - something unprecedented in Christianity.

In those days, I had no knowledge of Meher Baba, nor could I have guessed that this was a similar manifestation of the Christ come once again on earth. Later on, I would be especially intrigued to see so many Jewish people having a strong affinity for Meher Baba, from the early 1930s when he first came to the West, and especially following WW II and the Holocaust.

I also witnessed the evangelical messianic Jewish movement take off in the early 1970s, at the time the Pentecostal movement did, just after Meher Baba's passing, with groups like "Jews for Jesus" growing in

major American cities, as well as in Russia and South Africa.

I recalled that the early Church fathers proclaimed that the Second Coming - the Lord's return to earth - would occur when Jews started accepting Jesus. This was said to be a manifestation of the gathering of the lost tribes of the Diaspora. But that so many Jews would make the double leap, to take and accept Meher Baba for exactly who and what he said he was, the Messiah or God-Man, thereby also including and embracing Jesus, was something I could never have expected.

But I still hadn't a clue about Meher Baba. Within two years of first hearing his name, I was teaching for a mystical school, the Arica Institute, in their London branch, having temporarily left the television and film business. One day we received a call from Pete Townshend of the rock band The Who inviting a few of us from the school to a reception in honor of Ivy Duce, an American woman who had spent some time in Meher Baba's presence, both in America and India. By then, I had heard from Oscar Ichazo, the founder of the Arica Institute, that this Meher Baba was the "Avatar" of the age - whatever that meant.

I certainly had no idea then that the word Avatar was the Hindu word for the Christ. But Townshend's invitation was pivotal in my life. Pete met me at his front door, smiled, shook my hand and ushered me into his living room. Everybody was gathering in his large back sunroom for the talk, which was about to begin. Before heading back there, I happened to look up and saw this large photograph of Meher Baba on

Pete's living room wall - the first time I'd ever set eyes on the Master.

Baba was looking directly on camera. Suddenly, his eyes drew me like a magnet and his heart fell into mine with the same heartbeat as if we were the only ones in the universe. I'd never looked into a human being's eyes before and felt such a deep personal presence as in this moment, without the interference of mind chatter. It was like we were in a silent "void." It was a photograph taken when he was in his late sixties, and although he was no longer young and handsome as he had once been, his presence was hauntingly real in an instant of timeless eternity without past or future.

I stood there as we gazed deeply into each other's eyes in an exchange of infinite silence. And I thought, "Oh my God, who are you?" I stood there frozen in time while people were filing past me and going into the back room. Finally, Pete approached and said, "We're about to start now." So I broke eye contact and headed back to where Ivy Duce was sitting with the large group. But I'd return later to steal another gaze at this Baba - whoever he was.

Ivy Duce's talk, aimed at recruiting new members to her Sufism Reoriented group, didn't especially hold me. For with the extraordinary essential contact I'd just experienced with the Master, as his direct gaze entered my heart so intimately, most of my attention was still back in the living room, or wanting to be, looking into his eyes again. At that time, I still had no idea of who he was, but the moment our gaze met, I was forever his. As the Perfect Master Hafiz said, "When my eyes met His eyes, I became useless to the world."



On the way out that evening from Pete Townshend's, I paused again before Baba's photo on the living room wall and immediately started scheming. How might I get a copy of this photo? Maybe I could ask Pete for one or come back and photograph it myself one afternoon....

Pete was busy chatting and saying goodbye to others, so I just let it pass and left. I still didn't know who Meher Baba was. I'd need another year and a half for that realization to dawn. But he had insinuated himself into my heart with just that one glance.

A week or so later, I went into a bookstore to find *God Speaks* - the book Ivy Duce had mentioned at the meeting that she had helped edit and publish. I took it home and began reading it, getting to about page thirty or so when I had to put it down. Although I had never before sensed such spiritual authority, this stuff was heavy and written in a style I found very difficult to absorb at the time. My academic credentials included a B.A. in philosophy and two Masters Degrees in theology and religious education. But still, I found that *God Speaks* was very hard for me to assimilate.

This Baba obviously knew what he was talking about, but it was like spiritual quantum physics and somewhat beyond me at that time. It was very unlike my traditional religious teachings. It went to places Catholic theology never even dreamed of going - where St. Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologica* couldn't even imagine going. Albert Einstein is reported to have said to his daughter after reading a copy of *God Speaks*, signed and sent to him personally by the Avatar, "I know nothing compared to Meher Baba."

In his last years, Einstein's vision of compassion and vision of the universe resonated deeply with the Avatar's when he wrote: "A human being is a part of the whole called by us 'the universe,' a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings, as something separate from the rest - a kind of optical delusion of consciousness.

"This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and affection for those few persons nearest to us.... Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening the circle of understanding and compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in all its beauty."

Now, a couple of my closest friends in the London Arica family were a young couple, Ray and Liz Barnett. Without even a high school education, Ray - one of the closest friends I ever had - read through my copy of *God Speaks* in a few days and seemed to grasp it with far more facility than I was able to. He was actually explaining it to me as we were walking down a London street one afternoon. What an ego reduction that was.

And still, I didn't know who this Meher Baba was. It would take twenty years before I even ventured to pick up *God Speaks* again. But by then it would play easily, like sight-reading old familiar music, or as my friend Mik Hamilton describes his reading of it, "The words went into my mind like butter on hot toast."

Within a few months, and totally out of the blue, the Arica school suddenly closed to the public and I found myself back in New York City without a job, and without even wanting to remain in the world. I had just

crashed from a disastrously ill-fated love affair that not only left me spinning, but gasping for my very life.

It was probably the toughest period of my life so far. I had absolutely no direction. I was at sea without a rudder or a life raft and my ship was engulfed in flames. I had been stripped of the dearest one I had ever loved and now found myself with nothing of excellence to offer the world. In fact, I remember feeling that feeling so deeply one night that kneeling beside my bed my heart broke as I banged both fists hard on the bed and in tears cried out to God with all my heart, challenging Him, "Why have you put me here? I want Excellence!"

But this was still the summer of 1977, before really knowing about Meher Baba, and I was still totally obsessed with my own suffering. I skirted madness to the extent that I had to keep telling myself that I really did want to continue living no matter how hard it was getting. I thought of seeking professional help for the second time in my life. I was crossing a point of crisis, which in Arica we called level 192 - when the ego-mind experiences that it really doesn't exist and is actually dying.

This is a very high level of consciousness, but still a level of total subjectivity and very dangerous to cross, as it is also the level of suicide and/or very heavy drug and alcohol use. I was spared the worst of both, not that I wasn't acquainted with either of them. But suddenly there was a new kid on the block - an investigative antidepressant that was entering first phase clinical trials. I read about its promises and quickly decided to enroll in the program.

I had to take a train each week out of Grand Central Station up the Hudson River to Westchester County, not so far from the seminary where I'd been ordained a priest in 1964, next door to Harmon-on-the-Hudson where Baba had contacted his first American disciples in the early 1930s. The seminary was also only a mile from Sing Sing Prison which Baba entered doing out-of-body work to contact one of his agents inside.

Participating in this new drug study, I met with a psychiatrist each time to fill out my weekly questionnaire. He was Jewish and truly compassionate, seeing clearly that I was suffering what he was convinced was totally unnecessary. One day, with tears in his eyes he said to me, "You know, you don't have to suffer like this. I can help if you'll just let me." I shook my head slowly and thanked him, saying, "No, God has given me this chalice and I have to see it through to the end, drink every last drop, to come out on the other side." I'm sure that's when he really thought I was crazy.

Not understanding how I had been formed by Jesus' sufferings in the Garden of Gethsemane or on the cross, he just couldn't sense where I was coming from. Years later, I would read somewhere that there were two responses to trauma: to hold onto it in all its vividness and remain its captive, or without necessarily "conquering" it, to gradually integrate it into one's day-by-day existence.

Maybe it was part of my craziness, but after two or three years of this open-wound agony, I was holding out for something else. What that else was, I hadn't the slightest clue.

Then, one stormy fall afternoon in 1977, in the midst of my convoluted mental and emotional agony, I was browsing while in a fog through the stalls of the East-West bookstore on 13th Street and 6th Avenue in Manhattan, when I spied a little paperback - actually, it spied me, almost falling off the shelf and hitting me on the head - *The Mastery of Consciousness: An introduction and guide to practical mysticism and methods of spiritual development*, by Allan Cohen. Hmm.... I thought, one of Ivy Duce's boys.... Now this might be some good medicine - just what I need right now.

After paying for it at the register, I went back up to my apartment on West 22nd Street and started carefully reading it that very afternoon. I read it very slowly over the next three days to absorb everything. It was a bit of a shock, because now I was finding out what the word "Avatar" really meant and who Meher Baba was really claiming to be.

It was an amazing book, but it sat uneasy with my theological background. It jarred a lot of old belief structures that I still had inside my brain. God in human form? He was Zoroaster, Rama, Krishna, Buddha, Jesus, and Muhammad - all the same One? Wait a minute here. But as I kept reading further, I started to become fascinated by the concept - the real connectedness of all the religions as beads on one string - and charmed by this "divine" personality who had the courage to claim that he kept appearing periodically on the screen of human history as the Christ, the Messiah, the Buddha, in one disguise or another.

Well, wouldn't that just be nifty. I secretly wanted to accept this universal solution to unify all the horrifically warring religious "isms," and to especially accept him in my heart which was strangely attracted to him and knew no reason. I hoped that the key would please turn to help me overcome my stuck mind's theological prejudices. I was now being forced to step back and look at them very objectively. My life was at stake here.

As a Catholic, I'd been raised to see Jesus in everyone. On some logical level I could do that. But here I was beginning to literally see and smell Jesus in Meher Baba, not just as a spiritual nicety, but literally in the flesh. Nobody before ever had that same unmistakable fragrance of Christ - not even close. No one before had ever spoken or acted like him.

No one had ever said such outrageously, beautiful and preposterous things about human beings. Nobody ever told me that I too, was God in human form, though hopelessly veiled in the delusion of illusion.

He was saying that he had come anew, precisely to unveil me at the appointed time; that I was now, always was, and ever will be the same One God who alone exists; and that like it or not, one day - whether it took just one more lifetime or eight million more - I too was destined for God-Realization: Infinite Knowledge, Bliss and Power beyond any heaven or hell that any church or religion ever held out to me. Also, nobody ever told me that I was a living hallucination. My religion never told me about that. How could they? Because they too were that same living hallucination.

And when he got to the subject of suffering and the subjectivity of the limited false mind - that my life was pure dream and my so-called sufferings were a purely self-created, self-induced hallucination, a walking sitcom trance - suddenly and unmistakably, the key turned.

I broke down and found myself laughing and crying at the same time at the leela, the divine comedy, of it all. And as in a bright morning sun, the dark mist started to lift. The veil of suffering lifted in that moment as I found myself emptied and silent within. My sick, whirling mind was finally coming to rest.

It was about 3:30 that afternoon. I can never forget how the sun was gently streaming through the window, softly falling on my hanging asparagus fern when suddenly I realized, "Oh my God, it really is you! You sneaky one - you are and must be exactly who you say you are! How could you be anyone else?"

It was the miracle of not only being reborn, but being awakened from a very bad dream, enough at least to know that now I was going to be all right. It came with the beautiful conviction that my Jesus was still with me, anew, in a new human form, had just passed this way, only yesterday, his fragrance still in the air.

In that moment, I embraced him with the totality of my heart. Whereas I might have felt chagrined that I had not known and met him, I was thrilled just to know that we were both in human form on the planet at the same time, and that our physical paths crossed closely in 1956 on my twentieth birthday when he declared his Avatarhood on NBC-TV in New York

and I was about a hundred miles away, having just entered the seminary in Pennsylvania.

Then, I did something very, very strange. I don't know why, but I got out the New York City telephone directory and through my tears looked up Meher Baba. What? Are you that mad? Well, he felt that close. And, lo and behold, but wasn't he listed. There were two listings actually, with addresses and phone numbers.

One wasn't that far away - eighteen or so blocks. I picked up the phone and dialed the number. The recording said, "The Meher Baba Center on West 4th Street in Greenwich Village is open Friday evenings from 7-9, with talks, films and refreshments - all are welcome." I looked out the window. It had suddenly begun to storm - a rainy Tuesday afternoon. Well, I'm sure as hell not waiting until Friday evening.

I got on my bike and, with umbrella in one hand, rode the storm downtown, locked up to a parking meter and hurried upstairs to the given room number. I just stood paralyzed in front of the door. Then, I put my hand on the knob and slowly turned it - Open Sesame. I remembered that from Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves, my favorite childhood story, and damned if the door didn't just open.

The lights were out. Nobody was there. Did someone forget to lock up last Friday night? I entered and locked the door behind me to assure I'd be alone, turned on all the lights and feasted my eyes. And what a feast. There were boxes of Meher Baba's photos everywhere. I took one for myself and went over every square inch of that room with a fine-toothed comb, peering into drawers, cupboards and cabinets.



I didn't know then what forensic meant, but I did a forensic on that room: his sandals, his robe, a piece of rock from his Tomb, locks of his hair, books and discourses, pamphlets, pictures - now suddenly to me all treasures that he had put there for me to breathe in that afternoon. I knew now what Howard Carter must have felt when he stumbled upon the treasures of Tutankhamen; only here were things of significance light years beyond a mere pharaoh.

Like a kid in a candy store, I spent the next three hours alone with my newfound Beloved Baba - having my very first darshan, hardly believing my good fortune. When nobody was looking, he had opened the door and let me in. Was I still dreaming? Yeah, no doubt about it, but this was such a far, far better dream than the other one. I carefully locked up when finished and went home that night with my first photo of Baba and slept the longest, deepest, sleep I'd had in ages....

Next, I started doing systematic historical research. Heart had been filled. Now mind was urging for its turn. I headed uptown to the reading room of the *New York Times* archives and looked in logs for 1931, finding on the shipping and foreign mail's page, the date and time of Meher Baba's first touchdown on American shores as his steamship arrived and landed at a Brooklyn pier - pier 56.

I thought it absolutely astounding that it was preserved there in cold historical fact, so carefully noted. They didn't know about the Avatar, but they sure documented his arrival, as well as a 1931 obituary notice in the *Times* for Hazrat Babajan, Baba's first Master.

After I found and read several articles on Baba in the Times archives, I folded my hands and bowed my head reverently. As I was leaving, the librarian at the desk stopped me and quietly asked, "Excuse me, sir, did I see you praying a moment ago?" I met his eye for a moment and said, "Something was discovered here today of enormous importance for all humanity and for the entire creation," and left him looking after me, quite puzzled.

And so now I began collecting images of Meher Baba - artwork and photos. Later, I invented a totally new technique for making carpet tapestries of Baba for hanging on walls, as well as delicately hand-tinting old black and white photos of him. This was my meditation in action on his form.

I was never a groupie, but I did start going to Friday night meetings in that little room that I'd sneaked into that rainy Tuesday afternoon - especially film nights, where I was fascinated to see his moving form. Just the way he moved: the alacrity of his gestures and darting eyes that pierced your heart, and his stride like that of a deer.

There were expressions I'd never encountered before in a human being. I realized that I was looking at actual footage of the One who was once Jesus - as well as many other Avatars. If you really believe such things, as I do, then you can imagine how thrilling this was - to realize this with 100% conviction.

In the early weeks after first finding Meher Baba, I mentioned him to Oscar Ichazo one Saturday evening at an impromptu Arica party up in Scarsdale, New York, where Oscar was staying in a large house for a

few months. I told him that night that I was "drowning" in Meher Baba and asked him what was this all about?

He took me aside and told me this story. When he was given the mandate in Kabul by the Sufis in 1969 to start passing the work of the school to the West, there was only one stipulation. The work was to be started in the driest desert of the Western Hemisphere. That happened to be the Chilean desert in a place called Arica.

He felt very conflicted and uncertain of how to proceed, knowing that this work was far too much for just one man and would need a strong group effort. He didn't want to play the master-guru game. The work was too vital for humanity and time was too short. He knew that the wave, what he called the "sunset for humanity," was coming soon and that it would require humanity to jump its previous level of consciousness to a radically higher vibration.

So he went into the desert of Arica in northern Chile and did his ceremony of dedication to the work and to his mission. At the end of a three-day prayer, during which he lay facedown on the ground in the position of zero, of emptiness, asking God repeatedly from his heart for forgiveness for his sins, he saw a figure quickly approaching him across the desert from a long distance.

Oscar said that, looking into the eyes of this person, he had never experienced such waves and transports of divine love.

"And he dove into my heart," is the expression Oscar used to me to describe that definitive moment. With that, he said he felt the strength enter him to start what would be known as The School, later to be known as "Arica." Shortly afterwards, the first group of 56 Americans came down from Big Sur in California to spend the next ten months with him in the desert of Arica doing the first training.

One day, somebody in this group - Steve Stroud, who would three years later be one of my 40-Day trainers - handed him a "Don't Worry Be Happy" card with Meher Baba's photo on it. In that moment, Oscar instantly recognized that it was Meher Baba whom he had encountered in his vision in the desert in 1969. This was around the time Baba had dropped his body, appearing in countless places all over the world. Was this really true?

I thought it very odd that the next two or three times I saw Oscar, he repeated this story to me, unasked, as though he had never told it to me before. Perhaps he was trying to point and show me where my true path lay. I still remained in the school for about another twenty years, eventually seeing that Arica's most useful work had been in its first decade. After that, it became an endless series of increasingly expensive trainings, heavily dependent on esoteric rituals, concentrations and meditations. Frankly, it was becoming for me spiritually unsatisfying. Eventually, I would close the door on such esotericism.

Within four years, I finally made my first of many pilgrimages to India to receive the personal treasure that He had prepared with my name inscribed upon it,

and to bow down to the Lord of the Universe, Christ come  
once again.

Ed Flanagan

## Baba's Avatarhood

When I was preparing to go to meet Meher Baba for the first time, my mother said something wonderful to me. She was a very sweet lady, very very loving and very wise in her quiet way. She said to me that when I meet Meher Baba, she wanted to know if He was that which I thought, which inspired me to want to see Him. So, after having been with Baba for a period of time, I sent her back a telegram and I said to her that Meher Baba is all that I thought and much more. When I returned back, she was very happy to have received that because the thing that she liked most was Baba's message "How to Love God" which to her was the cornerstone of who Meher Baba is as Love.

Well, the Avatarhood of Baba, I never felt was something He was saying belonged to Him. And we had no connection with it, as such. The connection that we have with His Avatarhood is that this consciousness, this Avatic consciousness which includes everything - past, present, future, infinite knowledge, infinite power, infinite bliss, infinite love existence - all of this is within each of us. And Baba, as the Avatar, was out to unveil this in us so that we could share what He is. And that we could know God as the infinite one who comes down occasionally into His creation to unveil us as to who each of us is - as one with Him and one with everything that He is. So, in my mind, when I first understood this about Baba, when He declared Himself Avatar, I felt that He was declaring what each of us would one day experience. And that He was the Avatar in every sense of the

word, which is what He did say, while we were the Avatar in one sense or another but totally unconscious of it. And so the journey for us was a journey in consciousness to realize what the Avatar really is, in a way that we could understand.

Now, there was something that happened in one of my visits and it was a very amazing thing for both my brother and me. We were never much desirous of leaving Baba's presence, His physical presence. And on this particular occasion, Baba in 1961 said that we could come to see Him for one hour only, but then He actually kept everyone there for two hours that day. And as we were leaving the hall, everyone else had left, and we were now the last ones to leave, that is my brother Edward and I. And Baba said something very amazing and the way He gestured and Eruch was the only other person there besides Baba. And Baba gestured and put His hand over His head. And in four steps over His head, He said, "One day, I will give you the highest experience." And then, He repeated it again. "One day, I will give you the highest experience."

Well, to me that was everything because what else could a person want except to know the experience of God? Because this is the anniversary of His declaring His Avatarhood, I wanted to tell you my feeling and my impression of what Baba means by Avatar in relation to each one of us. And with that, I salute you all and say, "Avatar Meher Baba ki Jail" Indeed, He's the Avatar of this age and of all ages.

Irwin Luck

## My Father's Acceptance of Baba

I was born into a semi-Baba family. My maternal grandmother, Joyce Bird, had shown me a picture of Baba at the age of two, when I promptly pointed to it and told her "That is God." From that time, Baba has always been the focus of my life, but this story is not about me. My father was a Christian Arab and did not believe in Meher Baba. He would get upset if Baba was mentioned, so my mother and I never spoke about Baba in the home if we thought he could hear us.

My parents divorced when I was eleven years old, and my father moved to another country, and whilst I would visit him often, I did not imagine in my wildest dreams that he would still have contact with my Grandmother over the years. By the way, Joyce could not stop speaking about Baba to anyone, and made no excuses for that either.

Years later, my father was diagnosed with stomach cancer, and he rang me one day from his hospital bed. He said he had just finishing a conversation with my Grandmother, which surprised me. Towards the end of our conversation, I fearfully asked him if he was going to die, and he replied, "Don't worry, I'm not going to your Meher Baba just yet." That was the last time he spoke to me, and he died a few days later. He almost died with Baba's name on his lips, but it is wonderful to know he came to accept Baba in his lifetime thanks to the persistence of my Grandmother. Joyce passed on August, 2008, and is now with her beloved Baba.

Julia Bellucci



## My Experience of the Last Darshan

I went to the Last Darshan in 1969, and have written up an account of that trip in "The Awakener," Vol. 13, Nos. 1-2, and again in Avatar of the Tortoise (2001). A key moment of that momentous event was when Mehera led us first in going up to Baba's chair and "taking darshan," which is something that most of us had never done before. My experience, surprisingly for me at the time, was that I felt Baba in the chair. I even had some couplets come into my mind that expressed the relationship between the lover and the Beloved. It seemed to me that this was the inner experience of taking darshan, and had Baba been there physically this would have been how it felt within.

However, someone there commented afterwards that it seemed like "the darshan was given to us by ourselves." This was not necessarily to discredit it, but to raise the question of where the darshan comes from, or at least this one with Baba no longer being there physically. Over the years since then as a Baba lover, this comment and the issue raised by it stuck with me in the back of my mind, most of the time far in the back, but sometimes moving a little closer to the foreground. Part of the reason that this kind of idea has something of a hold on me, comes from my education and training in science and the general skeptical stance towards things spiritual that goes along with that.

My son does not consider himself a spiritual person, after letting go of the spiritual outlook, and Baba along with it, as he went through college. I tried my best to

inoculate him against academic skepticism, but ultimately it didn't work. Now his favorite books are what are called "theatheism," by popular authors such as Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, and Sam Harris, *The End of Faith*. At one point, he made a very striking comment to me, saying that he thinks that "God is an imaginary playmate for adults." This is a reference to the fact that some children develop an "imaginary playmate" when young, but of course, they eventually outgrow it. I thought this was a very perceptive idea on his part, and maybe even a bit daunting. However, I'm happy to say, it did not dissuade me from my spiritual beliefs and taking Meher Baba as God.

And then I was quite pleased, and I shared this with my son, to find out the following from a book on child development: "As many as 65 percent of preschoolers have imaginary friends, and the creation of such friends is associated with positive characteristics. For example, in comparison with children who don't have imaginary companions, those who do are more sociable, are less shy, have more real friends, are more creative, and participate in more family activities. Imaginary companions also seem to help children learn social skills and practice conversations."

Learning of this, it seemed to me that imaginary companions for young children are a forerunner of their possible later ability to have a relationship with God. So this, the idea of imagination as a positive spiritual quality, and not just a false projection of the mind, gave me more confidence in my experience at the darshan, and then in my ongoing relationship with Baba.

But the crowning touch on all this was the following. In one of Bhau's recent emails, he retold the story of the Baba lover in Andhra who wanted to build a temple for Baba, which even included a statue of Baba. Baba at first did not want or approve of the project. But the Baba lover was persistent. So Baba gave in, but he dictated eight messages that should be displayed on the walls of the temple, which was called Mehersthan (Meher Place) and built in Kovvur, Andhra.

One of those messages came back to me a few days after I had read it: "I am only here when you bring me here." And it struck me that this was the answer to the whole issue of "who" creates the darshan, which had been instigated in my mind now forty years ago. In a way, we do give ourselves the darshan. But we do this, because we are "bringing" Baba with us, within. The words "bring me here" was a perfect solution to the puzzle of both my experience and the experience of God in general. Bring has two implications. One is that something exists first. It is not created or imagined. And that's why it has to be brought. But the second is that bringing is an act of the person. It is something that he or she does, or has to do, for the experience of God's presence to occur. That's his or her part to play.

And then a funny thing happened. I soon went back and reread the eight statements, and remarkably, the statement I had thought I read was not one of them! The eight of them essentially did make the same point in one way or another, and there was one that was the closest: "Mehersthan has been built for Me with love, but I may only be found here by My lover who brings Me here in his heart." But the exact phrase I thought I read, which had rung in my mind as the answer to the

puzzle, did not exist. I had "made that up." However, in this form that the phrase took in my memory, I had found a direct and unqualified statement, which was what I needed to deeply solve the whole thing.

But what I had done in my unconscious mind is eliminate the part of the statement about the person bringing Baba here "in his heart," and just remembered the part about 'bringing.' But, unconsciously, this is what I needed to do. The word heart has always confused me. What is the heart? The muscle in the chest that pumps blood? Of course not. But what is it? If I had remembered the heart part of the statement, the whole statement might not have meant that much to me, and in that sense I might not even have remembered it at all. With discovering that I had eliminated this word, I was prompted to go on a search in Baba's literature for the meaning of the word heart. Even after all these years as a Baba lover and reading over and over again about the place of the heart in spiritual life, and particularly with Baba, I had basically ignored this word without realizing that I was doing so.

So what is the heart? I know what the "head" is, in contrast. It is the place of thinking. In one of his *Messages*, on p. 87 in the collection, Baba says, "the head is for discrimination, the heart for feeling." (In another place he also refers to the head as "the intellect.") Such a distinction, between head and heart, is nothing unique to Baba, and is universally known, but here he affirms it. When Baba says "discrimination" he is talking about one of the main essentials of thinking. Thinking "discriminates" between different things, ideas and concepts. So, in contrast, the heart is for "feeling."

But this wasn't entirely clear to me. Is feeling the same thing as emotion? This can't be, as emotion presents many basic spiritual problems. Anger is an emotion, and so is fear, and so might greed be considered one and so forth. And then there is the issue of lust to be distinguished from love. And we can say, as is said in all our language and poetry, that the heart is the place of love.

I am writing this in February, close to Valentine's Day, and all those hearts are for sale in the stores. In that same collection of *Messages*, on p. 73, Baba says that "True love is very different from an evanescent outburst of indulgent emotionalism." So feeling, in contrast to thinking, or the intellect, is a rather tricky word. But we can take the often used phrase by Baba, "true love" as our cue. By feeling, Baba is not talking about emotion, or lesser or more primitive forms of love, but rather "true love." And he says in one of His discourses that you can't have or feel love through the intellect, but only have "a theory of love."

That discourse, in fact, is called "The Avenues to Understanding," and in it he distinguishes head and heart as two different and un-equivalent avenues to understanding. You need them both. And here, by putting together the matter of heart or feeling with the idea of understanding, Baba is telling us that the heart is a means of understanding in its own right. In this understanding, the discourse continues, the heart "feels the unity of life," and in doing so naturally wants to fulfill itself through love and to "seek expressions that unite humanity." This kind of feeling then would be incompatible with anger and fear.

From here I went on to investigate and review Baba's widespread emphasis on balancing and eventually integrating and fusing head and heart, intellect and feeling "balanced and fused into an integral unity." (*Discourses*, 1967, p. 157). Certainly more could be said of this specific aspect of this issue. But here I want to go on to one further point.

This is about Baba's statements for the temple, Mehersthan, to be built at Kovvur in South India or, as it turns out, what I thought were his statements about that temple. In the list of eight statements that he gave to be put up on the wall of that edifice, which I referred to above, it seemed to me that something I thought I had read was missing. I thought I had read something like, "in this house built of stone, I am not there unless you bring me there." But when I looked at them, there was nothing in these eight statements about a house build of stone. Most puzzling. But in asking a Baba friend of mine about this, he told me that there was also a temple built for Baba in North India, and that was called Meher Dham (House of Meher). Looking into this I quickly found that Baba had also given one or two statements for that building, and one was to be carved in stone, and not painted on boards, over the entrance:

"I belong to no religion. My religion is love. Every heart is my temple. Although it is in love that you have built this house of stone, I am only in it when your heart brings me here."

So here was the statement about a house of stone. Of course the word heart is here in abundance, we might say, and I'll get to that again shortly. But it was the

word stone that I found most immediately meaningful. I would have no trouble with this, as I had had with the word heart. But first, another curiosity of the unconscious presented itself to me here.

I had had no idea that there were two temples with statements that Baba had given. And I had read a story told by Bhau about the one in South India. How in the world did I meld that account and its messages from Baba with the statement to be put above the temple entrance in North India? I have no answer to that. But the unconscious, under Baba's direction of course, often does what it needs to do. So now the complete statement that is so important to me in solving the spiritual riddle posed to me at the Last Darshan so many years ago has formed itself.

I'll paraphrase it here slightly so as to say it in a form that puts it all together for me: "I am only here in this house of stone when you bring me here in your heart." Now the meaning, at least for me, is the following. The heart is the place where Baba resides. That's his "home," or abode within you. Your intellect can think about Baba, can know about Baba, and thus he would seem to exist in your intellect. I would even say that in a way that is true. But what this misses is that what your intellect knows is not where he really is, where he lives. That is your heart.

So if you bring Baba anywhere, you are bringing him there in your heart. But it takes a certain consciousness of that place, of Baba in that place, to be able in actual practice to "bring" him with you. This is probably where the head comes in, and what Baba refers to as the balance of the head and the heart.

When I went to the Last Darshan in 1969, as a much-educated college intellectual, it took me a long time, essentially until now, as I have described above, to appreciate and recognize the meaning of the word heart.

But to some degree, without knowing it in that way, I had enough presence then, if not balance, of head and heart, so that Baba was "there" for me in that chair.

But I still haven't gotten to the "house of stone" issue. All houses or places in the world are houses of stone - even if they are made of something else, such as wood. In fact, everything in the world, materially, can be said to be of stone, in this sense. This is what I think Baba means and is telling us by using that phrase "house of stone." After all, of all the infinitely existing things in the physical world, both human made and natural, perhaps the presumably most exalted is a temple, or house of worship. And yet Baba still is calling it a "house of stone." So in this I think he is saying, once again, that the physical world by itself is only 'stone.' Then he says that when we bring him there, and it's in our heart that we do so, then that place becomes a place of his existence. And in being a place of his existence, it is also a place of his love.

And I think we can go one step further with this. The heart, and always in conjunction with the head, might be the faculty that gives meaning to what otherwise would be a world of stone, merely a material world. Baba so much as says this in the following, "If love were excluded from life, all the souls in the world would assume complete externality to each other; and the only possible relations in such a loveless world



would be superficial and mechanical." (*Discourses*, p. 116). Doesn't this describe the relations and interactions between "stone" objects? For this to be something other we have to "bring" something else to it.

Ken Lux

## My Coming to Baba

When I first experienced the presence of Meher Baba in my life 10 years ago, it was a great homecoming and the culmination of 25 years of searching for the path to peace and faith. I wanted more understanding and connection in my experience of life.

In 1996, I came to the Meher Spiritual Center in Myrtle Beach on a day trip while at a family reunion in Ocean Isle, North Carolina, 45 minutes north. I was a spiritual seeker and this was to be a bit of a spiritual tourist stop. An admired friend I'd known in Durham, Ambika, had visited the Center 10 years earlier and had just stayed. I had been curious as to what she had found there, as she had been searching in spiritual centers around the world with great mindfulness. We lost touch with each other and I hadn't talked with her in all that time, but when I entered the Meher Center Gateway building, a little ill at ease, to join the tour for visitors, she was the tour guide. We immediately picked up having fun where we had left off years ago.

As we drove through the pristine forest on the sandy one-lane road, I was at first taken by the beauty and quiet there. We entered the original compound of buildings, including the Lakeview Kitchen, the Lagoon Cabin, the expansive view of Long Lake, and I breathed a sigh of relief - a sigh of wonder and rightness. I started looking over my shoulder asking internally, "What is going on here?" I continued studying the people who were going about their day, and looking at the photos and quotes from Baba on

the wall - but still I couldn't pinpoint the source of this feeling.

Although I enjoyed the experience of the three hours at the Center that day, I kept my distance, not wanting to be fooled or lured into something that was not right for me. I was cautious about being caught in a religious system. I returned to the Center the following summer during the family reunion and stayed for six hours.

Over time, I became fascinated by the subject of Meher Baba. Now I realize that this was His grace. I looked Meher Baba up on the Internet and started a file folder of interesting articles and quotes. I read that when the Avatar comes every 700-1400 years, He comes as a human for humans, but also comes as a bird for birds, as an insect for insects, etc. I was amazed. I attended a lecture by Bhau Kalchuri and found his stories so interesting that I went home and wrote them down, pages and pages of them.

At that program, I bought the book *Meher Baba, The Awakener* by Charles Haynes, and to my surprise, cried my way through it, so touched by the stories he related. I am an analytical thinker and Baba stood the test of analysis over the first few years of exploring. The writings, the people I talked to about Baba, the out-of-the-ordinary experiences I had were all "interesting" to me. I continued to "explore," attending Baba-related meetings, and I continued to have "interesting" experiences. Baba let me come to Him by my winding road.

I was enjoying visiting the Center and going to Baba meetings in Chapel Hill and getting to know my new community. Over Thanksgiving in the year 2000, I

was staying in the Coop Cabin between the Meeting Place and the Lagoon Cabin. I attended the evening program that featured the video *Mehera, Meher Baba's Beloved*. Mehera related that she was very shy around Baba, feeling giggly, hiding and keeping her distance, peeking out to try to catch His glance. She said that throughout her life, she wanted to do only what Baba wanted, wanting only to please Him. She seemed so childlike and dependent.

I left the program and was mildly irritated, thinking that she should have been more assertive. What kind of life or fulfillment was that?

I decided to stop in the Lagoon Cabin on my way to meet some fellow visitors in the kitchen. As I entered the empty cabin where Baba used to greet new visitors to the Center, I was nonchalantly standing by the door thinking about Mehera's shyness. Then I heard Baba's voice internally say, "Come closer." My breath was deepened and I broke into overwhelming sobs. Baba called me to Him! I saw that I had also been shy and afraid to come close to Him.

By His grace, I surrendered to Him that night and have lived a new life for Him ever since. I was surprised by this surrender as I had prided myself on being spiritually independent, and it took me a while to believe it had happened. But the feeling of closeness and belonging to Baba only grew. Learning about my new identity remains an ongoing process - discovering who I am, and what life is about now that I am with Baba.

As I have heard since that time, we do not choose Baba, He chooses us. And I have also heard that He

draws us to Him in the way that we can perfectly relate to. I have come to know that Baba loves me and that, by His grace, I love Him too. In the book, *Meher Baba, the Awakener*, Baba illustrates to His followers that God is always speaking in our hearts. It is our part to learn to listen. Baba is communicating with me in an ongoing way, answering my questions as I learn to listen to Him and keep close to Him by remembering to hold fast to His Daaman. The struggle in my life is about releasing my expectations about life and the world, and my joy is in aligning my wish with His.

No matter how new to Baba I am compared to others in Chapel Hill, Baba is mine 100% and I am His. In all my hopes and dreams, projects and relationships in this world, fears and disappointments, I am like a kid coming to Baba to tell Him all and to get His help and support. I thank the community of His lovers for reminding me that we are His and to remember Him. I know that He is the Love in all our experiences.

Kethy Alberter

## Baba's Never Ending Care

I was quite young when I was in Baba's ashram and I don't remember everything from those days but I would like to relate some experiences that show how Baba has been with me all my life and guided me throughout my life.

In 1949-50 I had many problems in my life. So much so that one day I said to Baba, "You know what I'm doing wrong. What would You like me to do?" Just at that time, someone told me they had received books for Mr. Namirania and asked me what they should do. I said, "Bring the books to me."

When I opened one of the books, it said, "It is my desire to make you desireless eventually." I got the clue from that and started to try to lessen my desires.

I was happy after reading the poetry in the books. I felt that it wasn't my fault that I was having so much trouble. I started giving away whatever I had until, one day, my wife said, "Now, we are out of everything!"

I asked my wife to sit down and make a list of all of our necessary expenses: so much for rent, this much for the children, and so forth. The amount came to 600.00 toman. As we finished the list, somebody knocked on the door and a neighbour/ friend came and told me that he needed help. He asked me if I was willing to help with his work.

I said, "My household expenses are 600.00 toman. If you are able to give that, I will work for you." The man agreed and gave me the money.

I was happy and gave the money to my wife and then accompanied the man to his village. He was doing some farming and I worked for him for over five years.

However, another worker got angry with me for accepting such a low wage. He said, "Since you don't get paid enough, we don't get what we want. So I'm going to kill you."

I said, "No problem. "I'm going to lie down next to the river so you can cut my head off and the water will wash the blood away and you won't be responsible."

So the man brought a knife. But, instead of using the sharp side of the knife, he used the dull side in an attempt to scare me. Then he left me. Within fifteen minutes, he had an accident with a piece of machinery and had to go to the hospital. Within a week, he died.

At that time, we were renting our house, but a friend of my wife came to her and said, "I have a house I would like to sell and I'm asking 200.00 toman for a monthly payment." So my wife wrote a letter to my employer explaining the situation and the employer was very happy to make the payment and, in this way, I became a house owner.

Not only did Baba give me the house, He has taken care of me all of my life. He took care of the children without me doing very much and, now, all of them have their own homes and are well to do and are happy in Baba's love and faith.

Khoshru Namirania

(As translated during an interview)

## Taxi Memories

Though I had come to Meher Baba amid great joy in 1971, I was in a depressed rut in early '77. All I could feel of Baba was a terrible longing born of separateness. Going daily to the job I had, filing papers at the large apartment complex my father managed, took every bit of my will power.

Through friends, I learned that Adi K. Irani, Meher Baba's Secretary, was about to visit Chicago, only 300 miles from St. Louis, where I was living. I persuaded my dad to drive up with me. During a private interview, I told Adi about my depression. He listened. Then he closed his eyes, as though in meditation, for about a minute. Upon opening them again, he looked at me in a very kind way.

"Do not worry," Adi said. "Everything will be all right. You will get a better job."

I had never enjoyed filing papers in a back room eight hours a day. Till I felt better, though, that was about all I could see myself doing. The thought never occurred to me that changing jobs would cure the depression. A month after my visit with Adi, though, the company that owned the apartment complex suddenly sold it, and I was laid off.

A few days later, at the local natural foods restaurant, I ran into my friend Tom. Tom was a member of the Holy Order of MANS, a mystical Christian community. Baba had drawn me to this community – I'd even had a vision of Him during one of their meetings. It was my surrogate Baba group until



Michael and Cynthia Shepard started Baba meetings in St. Louis a year or so later.

Tom seemed excited and happy to see me. He was bubbling with something he wanted to share. "Hey, Max!" he said. "I've got an idea! Let's go down and get a taxi to drive; we can share it. One of us can drive days and the other nights."

I had long felt driving a taxicab in a big city would be too dangerous. Now, however, as I heard the suggestion come from an enthused friend, Baba seemed to wipe all those feelings away.

Tom and I went straight to the Laclede cab company, which at that time was the elite taxi outfit in St. Louis. There, we both proceeded to flunk the very intimidating "Knowledge of the City" test. So we went across town - and down a couple prestige notches - to Checker Cabs.

All cab companies seem to have seedy-looking offices in low-rent districts. Checker's building and lot didn't look much different from Laclede's. The old, green-and-black cabs were not as shiny or as well-maintained as Laclede's. There was one thing in Checker's favor, though. They were willing to hire us!

I went out, a day or two later, to train for the job with a light-skinned, African-American driver named Pete. Pete had me drive to one of the many Checker waiting stands that were scattered throughout the metropolitan area. This one was on a busy street on the near side, the African-American side of St Louis' dramatic racial divide. It overlooked a neighborhood of old, palatial mansions in a park-like setting.

Light snow lay on the ground that day. The big homes looked lovely. I hadn't even been aware of the existence of this neighborhood. I had grown up in a homogeneous, primarily Jewish suburb. My stint as a taxi driver proved to be a passage to a universe beyond that former shelter of my ego.

The dispatcher on the radio, his voice competing with the crackle of static, was calling off stand numbers. If you were waiting on the stand he called first, you responded immediately with your cab number: "Seventy-one on stand six." When you did, that fare was yours. The dispatcher gave you the address, and you drove to pick up your passenger.

If no one was on the stand closest to the pick-up address, the dispatcher would call a second nearby stand number, then a third. After that, he would open the job to bids, and the closest bidder would get it. Such etiquette helped civilize the taxi business.

Now and then, of course, some driver would be suspected of lying about his location, but mostly, the system worked well.

We waited about half an hour. In that time, Pete bid on a couple jobs we weren't close to and didn't get. Watching him, I was getting an idea of the radio procedure.

Suddenly, Pete gave me the microphone, saying "When I tell you to, just push the button, say 'Number 71 on stand 19' and let go of the button."

A minute later, the dispatcher called, "Stand 19." Pete said, "Go ahead."

I felt like I was addressing the entire world with a momentous pronouncement. After repeating exactly the words I'd been told, I let go of the button. I did it clumsily, like most things we try for the first time after merely observing.

"Pick up at 5821 Cabanne. Going to the Jefferson Hotel," the dispatcher said.

"Say 'ten four,'" Pete told me.

"Ten four," I said. Fully embarked now on this new adventure, I pulled away.

The next evening I went out alone. I picked up the taxi at the Checker office. My first fares were three men, shadowy figures waiting in a poorly lit lobby. They opened both of the cab's curbside doors. Two of the men got in the back, the third in front. I saw, as they got in, that they were all Asian men, probably from China.

"Where would you like to go?" I asked, smiling.

The man next to me smiled back and spoke a sentence in Chinese that I found totally incomprehensible. I turned my head and tried asking the two men in back, who also smiled and answered in Chinese.

I glanced at the DON'T WORRY BE HAPPY card I'd put on the dashboard.

Baba looked delighted with the situation. There followed more bilingual conversation, looks, shrugs... and then the four of us sitting in total, stumped silence.

I noticed that the man next to me was holding a matchbook in his hand. It had on its cover an ad for a

Mongolian restaurant. I saw that the restaurant's address was across the Mississippi river, in Illinois. I pointed to the matchbook.

"Is that where you wan to go?"

"Ah," the man said, his face relaxing into a sun-like smile. The language barrier had broken. My cab-driving career had begun-with a big laugh.

The day-to-day memories of my year in a Checker taxi have begun to fade with time. Delicious flavors of a year of discovery meld together. Vivid memories of some landmark experiences linger, though.

The year brought me into loving connection with people from every side of life. I felt honored to drive elderly ladies carrying shopping bags home from the supermarket. An old man collapsed one day getting out of my cab, and I half-supported, half-dragged him up to his wife in their high-rise apartment. Another day, I joyfully obliged when a lovely woman asked if she might "anoint" my forehead with holy oil.

In winter, I came to think of the smoke as representing the prayers of all the city residents - the prayers of their lives - going up to God.

I drove priests and prostitutes to work. A teenaged passenger once remarked that I was taking him to a reunion with his childhood counselor at the State Orphan Home. I felt involved in the young man's life passage. When he told me he had to get the \$18 fare inside the house, I trusted him too much to be suspicious. And when I finally realized he'd slipped away - taking me "for a ride" - I felt intimately violated.

During a period when I was acquainting myself with Meher Baba's words, and comparing them to Jesus's words in the New Testament, I brought my Bible along in the cab to read while waiting on stands. Three Pentecostal ministers got into the cab one night at the airport. In town for a national convention, they needed a ride downtown to their hotel. I had recently been thinking about the phenomenon of "talking in tongues," and got to ask these gentleman some question about it. They were impressed - and I was astounded - when I opened my Bible cold to the page on which Jesus speaks about the gifts of the Holy Spirit, one of which is talking in tongues.

I used to talk about Baba or God to people frequently. I felt so enamored with Meher Baba that very few other things existed for me. Baba was exciting! What else was there to talk about besides the divinity of the Universe? I may experience a bit of embarrassment at my excessive enthusiasm if I have to re-live this period again during my between-lives interval.

One time, I drove a cab full of people from the airport to hotels downtown during a severe blizzard. It was one of those nights when people would beg me to let them in the taxi, so that they didn't have to sleep at the airport.

The people packed in that night were all strangers to one another. My heater wasn't working, and I drove, carefree, talking about God, the whole twelve miles downtown along interstate 70. Though I don't know whether I've brought people closer to God very often in my life, I'm pretty sure I had some of them praying that night!

An architecture student got in the cab one night. "I just happened to be reading an article about spiritual architecture, by a sufi mystic," I began.

And so it went. Young, naive, I talked to the Baba-lover in every fare. I may have been a fool, but in retrospect, I think I could have done far worse.

On one occasion, however, my effort to share Baba's compassion nearly had a serious misfire. This was my only "close call" as a cab driver. Against the policy of the Checker company, I picked up a flagger one night, someone standing on the street trying to wave me down. Business was slow that night and I didn't see how it could hurt.

The young man flagging me down asked me to drive him to the Malcolm Bliss psychiatric hospital downtown, where he needed to pick up medication. Instead of taking him there immediately, I began sharing how compassionate Baba had been in my life. Since there was currently no Baba group in St. Louis, I drove to where my friends in the Holy Order of MANS were meeting.

But, after talking with me a while, he didn't find comfort in the meeting. Instead he told me, when he got back in the cab, "I left it because I couldn't find God there. You've been talking to me about God. If you know how to bring God here for me, bring God here for me, and bring Him now."

He was getting agitated. I tried to explain that it wasn't quite that simple, but he told me to close all the windows and lock the taxi.

I felt I was being taken prisoner in my own cab. When my passenger reached into his pocket, where I imagined he might have a knife, I screamed "Meher Baba!" and ran from the car as fast as I could.

The next morning the police found the taxicab - abandoned in the vicinity of the Malcolm Bliss Hospital.

It was a year of learning the byways of the gross world.... and seeing them as divine. I could especially feel Baba's protection of the world, His Grace, during rush hours downtown. Though it's hard to communicate how, I feel Baba showed me, in actual experience, that in all the unmitigated chaos, Divine Grace, and not the complicated system of stoplights, police, highway lanes, and such forms of human organization, gives a city enough order to continue its business for another day. Man's efforts certainly play their part, but clearly, by themselves, are not enough.

Baba showed me so much more about these mysterious parts of the divine scheme, cities. They are museums, monuments, and shrines to the divine, through the human mind and hand. Their beauty can be sublime! Cities are so complex, too, that no person, be he architect or mayor, truly controls them. The city is a grand sculpture, on which there are so many angles of vision, and in whose architecture so many historical periods are juxtaposed, that its expression inevitably transcends any conscious, human intention.

As I drove downtown in my cab, the buildings often appeared like many, different-shaped cakes - birthday cakes, for every day is a birthday. Every tree lining city streets seemed an immigrant from God's GREAT

Forest, whose spirit still breathes in them. In the fountains in front of public buildings, Eternity's waters bubbled forth into Time and rippled in tiny ponds like mini-Oceans.

Gargoyles, nudes, and arabesques adorn the art-deco building from the 1920s and 1930s in downtown St. Louis. A pyramid and sphinx top the strange, neoclassical/Egyptian skyscraper, the Civil Courts building, everything is ordinary, yet strange - common, yet divine.

And me. The eternal driver, like a ferryman in a myth, taking God's children from place to place and even trying to do my little part in taking them Home. As I drove my taxi, Baba helped me to find and connect with Him in His Humanity, more than ever before in this lifetime.

My taxi career ended one day as abruptly as it had begun. I had been starting to realize that my efforts to save enough money for my first pilgrimage to Meher Baba's Samadhi by driving my cab would never get me there at all.

One day, after turning my taxi in to the garage for two days off, I went to a park and sat under a tree. Suddenly, a thought just slid into my head, "If you go to work on a Mississippi river towboat, you'll have the money in a month."

Was it the grace of some Saint, somewhere on the other side of the world? I'll never know. I drove my car straight to downtown to the National Maritime Union Hall, paid my union fee, and filled out the necessary papers.



After two days of sitting in the union hall, reading and looking out the window at the very Mississippi I hoped to soon be working on, I received orders to board a boat in nearby Alton, Illinois.

The job paid \$1750 a month - quite a bit of money in 1978! A month and a half later, I walked eagerly up Meherabad Hill, crossed the threshold of the Samadhi, and fell down at my Master's feet.

Jai Baba.

Max Reif

## Mehera Chalisa

When Mehera J. Irani, Beloved of Avatar Meher Baba, dropped her body in May 1989, I had the good fortune to be at the Samadhi and to hear, for the first time, Gokaran Shrivastava sing "Mehera Chalisa" in that sweet atmosphere of quietude on Meherabad Hill. And with the deep pain of quiet we were all carrying, the song bloomed with fullness and beauty in my heart.

For many years, where memories of Mehera required my heart's expression, I would listen to a recording of "Mehera Chalisa," although it was never so beautifully sung as the first time I heard it. Years went by and many lovely songs came and went. Then, a surprising incident uncoiled itself, subtly into my life and brought these magical songs into the forefront once more.

At the time, I was working in Canada as the office manager at a private clinic. My boss was experiencing a spiritual crisis and was searching through every means for a doorway to inner truth. I had spoken to her about Meher Baba previously, but the facts and information on His extraordinary life did not hold her interest, so she continued searching.

She had a guru in Russia and he, one day, advised her to make a trip to India where he would meet her and train her in spiritual matters. He was to transfer all his abilities to her. She enthusiastically planned her trip, but upon her arrival in India, the One who knows and moves circumstances at will, completely redirected her path away from her meeting with her guru and gave

her a far more beautiful gift than she could have imagined.

With no one to meet her at the Mumbai airport and nowhere to go in the dark of the night, she connected with a man named Vinod who was a friend of a friend. The two of them instantly fell in love. It was a deep, soulful connection.

Three weeks later, back at the clinic, all she could say to me was that she loved India and this was the happiest time of her life. Then, a few days after that, she went into a deep depression as she learned that Vinod had just been diagnosed with terminal cancer and that his one and only kidney was involved. Desperately, she sought any medical help she could find and coincidentally, I had just received an e-mail from Gokaran's daughter, Dr. Ashima, that she had just begun working at Hinduja Hospital in Mumbai where Vinod had been admitted.

Shortly after, I had a dream in which I found the "Mehera Chalisa" cassette floating in a strange shaped toilet along with some photos of Mehera and Meher Baba. I was aghast! Madly, I sought to retrieve the items and luckily there was a thick white sweater which had prevented the items from getting wet! Upon awakening, I was extremely upset about this dream. Being Hindu (although living in Canada), and also having been inspired by Mehera to be devotionally watchful with any Baba items, this dream seemed to be pointing out that I was dishonouring Baba and Mehera in some way.

I begged and pleaded with Baba to help me see what I was inadvertently doing to degrade them. The only

thing that came to mind was the possibility of my boss who was married at the time but had gotten involved with Vinod. However, I did not feel that was bad enough to warrant such a dream. Eventually, I thought that perhaps I had not paid attention to Mehera lately. So to make up for it, I decided I would listen to my "Mehera Chalisa" cassette on my way to work. At the clinic, I told my boss my dream, as we were accustomed to sharing such incidents.

After work, I played the tape again as I returned home. I knew there was a missing piece to the puzzle of my dream, but it just did not make itself visible to me. Once I arrived home, I felt resigned that I had done all that I could do, even though I did not feel settled or satisfied with the results. As I was putting the cassette back in its case, I noticed the name of the first musician was Vinod Pandit. I did not know Vinod's surname at that time, but I recalled that my employer had mentioned that he was a musician. I immediately phoned my boss and she confirmed that he and his family were well-known musicians in Mumbai and that his last name was Pandit. Then I noticed that another musician's name was also Pandit. What were the chances?

The next morning, she told me that she had phoned Vinod, but he denied any knowledge of Meher Baba or the recording. I played the cassette for my boss. She felt certain, as she listened to the song, that it was him.

Meanwhile, I realized that the meaning of the dream was that Vinod was sacrificing the spiritual aspect of his talent. The strange shape of the toilet became relevant because it was kidney-shaped! Also, my boss

and I being from "snowy" Canada, the "white sweater" which protected the cassette from getting soiled, signified the help from abroad which Vinod would receive to prevent the loss of the spiritual in his life.

As the story unfolded, it became clear that it was, after all, the same Vinod Pandit, but that he had forgotten about his participation in the song. I had Dr. Ashima give him a copy of the dream and my interpretation, so that he would realize Baba's compassion - that God was there for him throughout his great struggle with cancer.

My part with the dream being over, I was soon removed from the story. My boss's guru from Russia convinced her that I was possessed by this Meher Baba and was responsible for bringing ill fortune to her life. In her distraught state of mind, she was vulnerable to such suggestions. What to do? Years later, I learned that Vinod had died. His cancer had already been so advanced that it was a miracle he had lived as long as he had! Although I was never in direct contact with him, I have no doubt that Beloved Baba and Mehera were with him throughout his ordeal and are with him still. I cannot help but glorify Baba for that. He had me listen to this song at the Samadhi in 1989, so that a decade later, He would be there to comfort a soul in his suffering. Can there be a Beloved such as He?

Debjani Ray

## My Memories In His Love And Compassion

Avatar Meher Baba performed miracles in my life in a quite natural way. I am an ordinary clerk who become a Lecturer and visited the USA only with the grace of the Beloved. I will try to explain briefly.

From my childhood I had some peculiar erudition. I was brought up as a theist (believer in God), full of superstitions and rituals. When I grew up, due to the influence of friends who had leftist ideas, I became a rationalist (one who uses reason, rather than experience, as the basis for knowledge and action) and a dialectical materialist (one who sees the world's changes occurring due to materialism). After marriage, I again became a theist and pagan. My innate desire was to know the truth.

At the age of ten, I happened to see a photo of Avatar Meher Baba in a clothes shop, and it made a clear impression in my mind. At that time, I didn't know He is God; I didn't even ask the shopkeeper, "Who is He?" I just stared at the photo. I will never forget the unconditional happiness I felt at that moment, for reasons I didn't know.

At the age of thirty-two, when I was working as an office assistant in Govt. Junior College, Tadepalligudem (A.P.), I had contact with Sri Y.S. Rao, who was a Lecturer in that college. On every paper he used to write "Jai Baba" at the beginning. I asked him what is meant by that. He simply said, "I am Meher Baba's lover - all His lovers write that."

I asked why there wasn't much publicity about this Meher cult and he replied, "Ours is not at all a cult. We don't need any propaganda. Our God will go into the destined hearts silently." He gave me a photo/ card of the Beloved with the message, "Things that are real are given and received in silence." I could not understand the inner meaning of the message and had the questions, "What are real things, and how they can be given in silence?"

After six years, I went to Dr. Y.V. Saradhi, a homeopath doctor, for consultation. He is also Baba's lover and the Secretary of the Baba Centre at Tadepalligudem. Due to my interaction with him, gradually I became a member of the Centre. From 1988 onwards, I have been an active participant in the centre, becoming a regular at bhajans and other activities. I read many books including the *Memoirs of a Zetetic* by Prof. A.K. Hazra. I also gave speeches at the end of bhajans. I had just come into His fold at that time. I am not sure whether I began to love Him as He ought to be loved, or if I was loving Him as my benevolent Father, worshipping Him as God or one of the Gods.

A doubt was always in my mind - whether Meher Baba is a man or Sadguru or the Avatar of the age. It was an accepted traditional belief that God will shower boons on His disciples because He is all-knowing. I was wondering whether Meher Baba would respond to my requests to Him.

In May of 1990, I and some other colleagues went to Eluru (A.P.) to attend an association meeting. It was a hot summer day. The meeting lasted a long time, and

then the participants were dismissed. It was late at night, and there was no transport facility to reach the bus station. My friend and I took the footpath. I was thirsty and needed something to drink - at least water - immediately, otherwise I might have collapsed before reaching the bus station.

Shops on the way were closed. I began to ask Meher Baba inside myself, "Baba if you are all-knowing, give me something to drink." We were about a furlong away from the bus station. I saw a shop was open which was not a drink shop but similar to that. All of a sudden the shop owner shouted at us. I took a moment to realise that he shouted at my friend to come inside because they were relatives. My friend and I stepped inside and it was very astonishing for me to see the Beloved's photo inside the shop on the wall. Without a word, the shop owner gave both of us a drink.

In the year 1991, when my participation in Baba's programmes in and outside the centre was intensive and extensive, my mind sometimes went blank. The hidden rationalist and dialectical sides of me appeared and made me think very often, "What am I, who am I, what is the use of my involvement in spirituality? Is there actually any eternal life?" This had become all consuming.

One night I fell asleep and had a dream at approximately 5.00 a.m. In the dream, I saw a bus (later when I visited Meherazad in 1992 I recognized it as Baba's Blue Bus) come and park near my residence. About ten men stepped in, the leader of whom wore a white garment. He stood before me, but I could not



see His face because the glory of His being spread all over the interior. I fell at His feet weeping - weeping and weeping. Suddenly I woke up and saw nothing. I explained all this in our centre at next week's gathering.

The Zetetic inside me disappeared forever and I think I began to love Him.

In October of 1992, for the first time, I visited Meherabad and Meherazad with others from Andhra. I was very much excited about seeing the "Sanctum Sanctorum" of Baba's tomb-shrine. We were happy to receive messages from dear brother Bhauji in His love at Hostel D.

I had a conception that an unconditional bliss would shower on His lovers when they were in the presence of the Beloved in the tomb-shrine. But I did not get any such bliss or inspiration for the first four days. My longing was increasing day by day. On the third day we had the opportunity to participate in the prayers along with sister Mani who came to Meherabad.

On the fourth day all of our group visited Meherazad, climbed Seclusion Hill, and prayed to Baba there. After coming down we had an opportunity to listen to brother Eruch.

On the fifth day (the day before our departure), I sat at the threshold of the Beloved, bhajans going on, when suddenly a miracle happened. I don't know whether it was my imagination, delirium, or real, but rays emerged from the tomb-shrine, ultimately turning into the image of the Beloved which I had seen at the age of ten in the clothes shop. I burst to tears, shouted loudly "Avatar Meher Baba ki Jai!"

On the day of departure, I bowed at the "Dhuni" and asked Him, "Beloved Baba, I don't know what is good or bad for me - please do to me that which you deem fit." On return, I reported to duty in the college to hear the shocking news that I was transferred to some other place. As a result of my prayer at the Dhuni, the Beloved gave me the gift of transfer in the middle of the year, which is abnormal and regarded as a punishment. I cried inside, "Why my Beloved have You given me this abnormal gift (punishment), for no fault of mine?" It took some months to reconcile.

I finally saw that I had developed an ego, consciously or unconsciously, as if I was the pivot in the college administration, and I had formed an unwarranted attachment to it. I realised ego and attachment are the impediments to my spiritual progress. To get rid of these two elements, the transfer was essential, hence the transfer was not punishment but a boon to me to diminish my sanskaras. How compassionate, loving and benevolent was my Lord Meher! After my realisation, my love for the Beloved increased.

Thereafter, considerable changes in my personality and behaviour occurred. I had no ego, no attachment and I practiced the life of detachment. I visited Meherabad in 1997 and 2004, and stood before the threshold of the Beloved. Each time I had a new lesson and some sort of suffering for my betterment. I knew my sanskaras were being consumed. I have tried to put Baba's saying, "Real happiness lies in making others happy" into practice in my life because Beloved Baba and His love are always with me wherever I go.

My story will be incomplete if I fail to narrate these two lines. In 1997 when we visited Meherazad, I had an opportunity of hearing the experiences of brother Bal Nattu. After the conclusion of his message, I tried to move towards him to express my thanks for hearing such beautiful and inspiring words. He shouted, instantly, showing the Beloved's photo, "Don't come to me. Go that side and hold Him firmly." What a conviction of love for Meher Baba! "AVATAR MEHER BABA KI JAI!"

G. Lakshminarayana

## Hamirpur - Baba Declares Himself the Avatar

I want to relate two experiences in Hamirpur in the 1970s which I hope will give an example of the unique love that one finds there. After all, Baba referred to Hamirpur as His heart and, of course, it was no accident or coincidence that Baba chose to declare His Avatarhood there, in this simple khuti, or mud-hut, located near the remote village of Mahewa in the Hamirpur district, before the lovers from that district in 1954.

I first came to India in January 1972, and I arrived at Baba's Samadhi and watched people bowing down at His Beloved feet. But I maintained that I was not going to bow down because Baba, I had read, had not come for people to garland Him, to do His puja, to bow down to Him, etc. That what He wanted was real love and obedience. So in my ignorance, I chose not to bow down and I went into the tomb, expecting to feel something or experience something since I was here, at what I had been told was the center of the universe and I felt.... nothing.

Later, I had the good fortune to accompany Pukarji to Hamirpur. And I travelled through the Hamirpur district including a stay at Mahewa for about ten days. During that time, I was absorbing the unique atmosphere of Hamirpur, which Baba graced twice with His presence in the 1950s. I had some very profound experiences there of Baba's grace, and when I returned to Meherabad from that trip, the one thing that I felt I had to do was to go directly to Baba's Samadhi and prostrate myself at His feet.

Because.... two reasons. One, while I was in Hamirpur, I had learned how to truly worship. Baba says that ceremonies and rituals cover me, but that true worship reveals me. And I had discovered ways of worshipping Baba while I was in Hamirpur. One of them was really letting go and placing myself physically at the dust of His feet. The other reason was that I had experienced Baba's grace to the extent that there was nothing I could do out of the deep gratitude I felt, nothing, except prostrate myself in gratitude at His feet. So that was, in short, the impact that my experience in Hamirpur district had.

There was one other experience that I would like to share and that was while I was in Ichhaura. On that same trip, I was seated in a bullock cart as I was preparing to leave one morning, after staying in Ichhaura overnight. As the bullocks were being hooked up and things were being prepared to leave, the villagers of Ichhaura began to approach the bullock cart that I was sitting in and they were speaking in Hindi so I did not understand what they were saying. But I could see that they were expressing a great deal of love. And, as I watched, I was suddenly aware of a wave of love energy that swept through me as if taking my ego with it momentarily. And simultaneously, I felt, actually, I broke down, weeping and sobbing as a result of feeling Baba's love-grace expressed by these humble villagers. So, those are the two examples of the power of Baba's Love as expressed by His lovers in Hamirpur.

There's a story behind Baba's being at Mahewa on February 9th 1954. In 1952, when Baba's first darshan tour was being arranged in Hamirpur, Andhra and

elsewhere, Keshava Nigam was the principal committee member in Hamirpur of the arrangementwallas. Originally, Baba had been scheduled to go to Mahewa and Meherastana nearby for two nights and one day.

But, just before Baba arrived, Keshava received a message from Gaya Prasad that they could not accommodate as many people as were expected to be traveling with Baba in Rath. Baba had been scheduled to be there for two days. Gaya Prasad asked Keshava to change the schedule so that Baba would only come during the day and give darshan. That left an extra day, and as Keshava lived in Mahewa, he knew that they could handle the arrangements so he added to Baba's schedule an extra day there.

Then a year and a half later, when the arrangements for Baba's second tour began, Keshava was criticized for having arranged for Baba to stay so long at Meherastana (Mahewa) in 1952. Some people felt that it was out of selfishness because it was Keshav's birthplace. Keshava remained silent and let the arrangementwallas make the plans for Baba's schedule in 1954. This time, Meherastana was scheduled to be the last stop in Hamirpur for Baba in 1954 and no darshan was scheduled.

So, the day came and Baba informed Keshav that He wanted to have a program that would last all night. It was during this all night gathering that Baba spelled out on the board, "Avatar Meher Baba Ki Jai." And so, in Baba's own manner, He devised a way of expressing intimacy with His lovers from Hamirpur district without upsetting anyone, especially the

arrangementwalla. So this is, of course, the outer drama that we can see. We have no idea what the inner drama was that Baba was working.

I would just like to add that of all of the places on this earth that beloved Baba visited, He could have hypothetically declared He was Avatar anywhere - in palaces, in front of great crowds, and yet it's so, I think, so telling and worthy of contemplation, that Baba should have decided to give His declaration from this simple hut before these authentic, genuine lovers of God in Hamirpur who were able to receive that message. Jai Baba.

Rick Dryden

## A Blissful Passing

In February 2001, my wife Rosalind and I had been on pilgrimage to our Beloved Meher Baba at Meherabad and to be with His dear ones at Meherazad. On the 24th February (the eve of Meher Baba's Birthday) we were helping Marge Liboiron decorate Baba's Samadhi and the Upper Meherabad buildings for His Birthday. We had helped do this many times over the last twenty years.

At about eleven o'clock a note came to us saying that my father (Harry Hayes) was gravely ill and would I phone my son on his mobile phone. My father had been very ill for some time after having collapsed vertebrae and a series of small strokes. Together with his multiple afflictions and his age of eighty-three, he was finding life very difficult and hoping that he could be let out of this one.

I was tempted to phone immediately, but there was decorating work still to be done and Heather Nadel had shown me how to lift the glass above Baba's stretcher safely for cleaning and garlanding. When I had finished the work, I went into Baba's Samadhi and knelt in front of Him. I closed my eyes and in my mind I brought my father into my arms before Baba. I said, "Please take him Baba and look after him." From my mind's image of him lying frail and suffering in my arms, he seemed to disappear into light and a feeling of love.

I went to the Internet cafe at Meherabad. The phones are in one corner and the Internet booths are close by



I phoned my son and made connection with him as he stood with close family members around my dying father, who was unconscious in a hospital. I was determined my father would hear my voice as they held the phone to his ear, and I yelled:

"This is Roy,  
I want you to know that I love you,  
You have been a great father,  
Don't be afraid, something wonderful is going to  
happen.  
And I know more than you do."

"I know more than you" may sound a strange thing to say to a dying man, but there was a reason - when my father's father (Henry) was dying with cancer, he went into a coma for days, my father sitting next to him when he regained consciousness. My grandfather sat up, beamed a great smile at my father, shook his hand and said, "Harry, I know more than you do now," and then died. While my father thought he was an atheist, he was profoundly affected by his father's words, and he told the story over and over. Also in the light of Baba's contact, I did know more than he did.

Those who were with him said that when I spoke to my father, his breathing changed and his body relaxed; they believed he had heard me.

During the time I was making these phone calls to my father's bedside, Rosalind had escorted an Australian Baba lover who was not well to Ahmednagar for abdominal X-rays and an ultrasound. Adrian Rawlins had been ill for some time, and he had made the pilgrimage to India after some years of absence. During his stay, Adrian had fallen ill with severe

abdominal pain and vomiting. When the usual time had passed for this condition to clear up and Adrian was still unwell, Dr. Gus had decided to investigate for causes other than "Bombay belly."

Rosalind was away for some hours, and upon arriving back at the Pilgrim Centre she was walking past the reception office when the phone rang and she answered it. It was my son, David, letting us know that my father had passed away.

Within minutes of us receiving this news, Dr. Gus approached us and asked if Rosalind would accompany Adrian to Poona. He needed a nurse to accompany him as he now had an intravenous drip in situ, and it was urgent for him to have medical treatment. It was now 4 p.m. in the afternoon. Adrian had to wait for reports to be sent from Ahmednagar and Raine Eastman-Gannett and Sue Biddu were in the middle of packing up an endless number of Adrian's bags. It was doubtful if he could leave before 6 p.m.

I calculated the time it would take to drive to Poona and back plus time at the hospital to settle Adrian. I realised that if Rosalind was to be back for Baba's Birthday she would be travelling the Poona-Ahmednagar road in the small hours of the morning. Unwilling to let her do this alone, I decided to accompany them. I arranged for us to stay at Jal and Dolly Dastoor's home when we got back, as it would be too late to get back into the Pilgrim Centre.

We set out at 6 p.m. We pinned Adrian's intravenous drip to the roof of the Swannie, and it swayed and bucked with every bump in the road. Adrian was very uncomfortable and we had to stop many times on the

way there to ease him or to empty the drip chamber so it would continue to flow. We arrived at the hospital at 9:30 p.m. and stayed to see Adrian comfortable in his bed.

We arrived back at Jal and Dolly Dastoor's house about 1:30 a.m. We were both unable to sleep. When the alarms woke us up at 3:30 a.m., we had only had about one hour's sleep. Jal had asked us to bring an old lady in a car that he would send to take us to the top of Baba's hill.

The car was late and the lady took forever to get ready. I became quite anxious that we would be late. After a while I relaxed as the thought came to me that Baba was in control of the timing - not to worry. We eventually arrived at Baba's Samadhi and joined a line of people moving in to take their Lord's darshan.

Those gathered started singing Meher Baba's name five minutes before 5 a.m. Ros had gone into the Samadhi to bow down at Baba's feet and as she backed out over the threshold, seven resounding rounds of "Avatar Meher Baba Ki Jai" started. We now stood on each side of the Samadhi door. We both have been fortunate enough to have been bathed in His Love at the Samadhi on many occasions, but something extraordinary took place that morning.

Wave upon wave of overwhelming Bliss came from within the Samadhi and kept rolling over us. Neither of us could speak nor sing, and tears streamed down Rosalind's face.

Baba hadn't finished - at evening Arti we found ourselves standing first in line at the Samadhi door

again! We could not have timed this if we tried. It was truly an amazing Baba's Birthday.

When Bhau Kalchuri was told of my father's passing, he lovingly comforted me and said, "You have no idea how fortunate your father is, because you are here he will have come to Baba's Samadhi in Bliss and then be born as a lover of Baba."

Two days later we were in Bhau's office when Eruch Jessawala came in. He cuddled and kissed me when he heard about my father. Eruch also said what Bhau had said: "How fortunate your father is, because you love Baba and are here, he will have come to Baba's Samadhi in Bliss and then be born as a lover of God."

After some difficulty we were able to convince Qantas Airways to give me a ticket to fly home early. It turned out that I was on the same plane as Adrian, so I was able to look after him. Baba takes care of the smallest detail for His lovers.

I arrived very full of Baba at the funeral of my father. My sister Sylvia had kept the coffin open so I could view my father's body. I didn't want to see him as I had seen too much of his suffering over the last months of his life, but Sylvia was insistent and to please her I looked at him in the coffin. I was taken aback at the beauty of his face. The extraordinary peaceful look on his face made him look like someone else. When I commented on how good he looked, some of those who were with him when he died said. "Oh that is nothing! You should have seen him when he died - he looked radiant, even his hair seemed to glow!"

I fondly imagine the surprise and delight this man, who had not been at all sure about Baba, must have had at the moment of his physical death when he was met by God Himself and enveloped in bliss.

"...even the stranger to love, may be slain by love" - Hafiz

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## Spiritual Discipline, Divine Knowledge

We have all gathered here to commemorate Baba's 50th Anniversary of Beloved Baba's declaring that He is the Avatar of the age. One morning, while sitting in my house, cleaning rice to be cooked for my children, my glance fell upon a chair. My father, who was a carpenter, had built this chair and this chair had been used by Beloved Baba during His stay in Pune at Ganeshkind. Before using Guruprasad, Baba would spend the summer, May and June, at Ganeshkind. After that He would head over to Guruprasad. My brother, Dr. Dadi Kerawalla, was superintendent of the gardens at Ganeshkind.

My eyes fell on that chair. We have kept a picture of Beloved Baba on that chair because that was used in Ganeshkind by the Lord to hold His Darbar and what came to my mind was this. You are the Lord of the Universe and yet, look at Your life. The life of seclusion, fasting, you name the illness and You had it, You shattered Your body with two major car accidents. You are the only one who has the right to enjoy Your own creation and what sort of a life did You have? It was always a life of pain and suffering.

And I thought I cannot follow your logic behind it. I had just completed reading the life of Your master, Upasni Maharaj. And that life too was full of pain and suffering. And then, of course, He became a Perfect Master.

Now You, Yourself, have declared that we are all infinite oceans. The only difference between You and

us is that You are consciously aware of that fact; I am not aware of the fact that I am the ocean. I am ignorant of it but I am not bothered by that. I don't want to experience it, this infinite ocean consciously. I am quite happy. If you had left me alone, I would have much preferred that state of unconsciousness. Because I can't follow the logic of your creation.

And I was looking out the window and two of Your bullocks were plowing the field. And I said to You, "Do You think these bullocks are enjoying this? If they don't move fast enough, the farmer is even beating them. The bullocks do not understand it. What is happening here? I see no logic at all behind all this. Why all these problems?"

This was the chain of thoughts I was having. In the meantime, I cleaned the rice, I washed it, put it for cooking. And, as was my habit, I went to a small garden where I plucked a few flowers to offer at my Beloved's feet at my prayer table in my bedroom here. Once I went into the garden, nothing of great magnitude happened. There was no great clap of thunder or anything like that. But suddenly, a thought struck me as if it had originated from my beloved in very forceful manner. And the thought said, "You bloody fool! You have read *God Speaks* so many times." (I read it twice. First time on His own order. The second, later on again just to clarify and remember all that He had written.) And I remembered that He said that all this came into creation out of His whim. So where there is a whim, there is no room for logic. Everything happened because of His whim.

Then I remembered something Prophet Muhammad had told his close one, Abu Bakr. Just as our Beloved Baba had Eruch Jessawala as His right hand man, Muhammad had Abu Bakr. One day Muhammad asked Abu Bakr, "Suppose a man is drunk and he has fallen in the gutter and the dirty waters are flowing over him. And in that state of unconsciousness of himself he cries out "Laila il Allah! Muhammad Rasool Allah!" (Allah is the only God and Muhammad is His only Prophet.) Do you think that truth would become anything less because of from where it is spoken, by whom it is spoken?" Abu Bakr said, "No."

And Muhammad said that is right because truth stands in its own manner. It requires no external support. So yes, if you people cry out Avatar and thousands of people cry out it is wrong, it makes no difference. He is what He is. God in human form. And the purpose of His coming in our midst, the only purpose is to slowly pull us out of this Maya. The illusion that has caught us from birth after birth. Birth after birth.

And this reminds me of this beautiful occasion. Beloved Baba was in Bangalore at that time and if I am not mistaken, I was there too. Because from Jabalpur Baba took us to Bangalore and then after one month, He told my mother to take her two sons, my elder brother Dadi and me, to Bombay for our further education.

On this particular day, Baba was going to inaugurate or do the ground-breaking ceremony in a place called Byramangala where Beloved Baba was establishing a universal spiritual center. And he had instructed all the ladies of the ashram to dress very nicely as this was an



important occasion. The Diwan of Mysore was going to be the chief guest of honor and Baba had told all the ladies to dress nicely. We, being small children, were permitted to stay in the ladies' ashram with our mothers.

The time for the ceremony was going to be ten in the morning. About a quarter to ten, Beloved Baba went to the room of His mother, Shireen, and He saw Shireen dressed in a very beautiful sari. The Parsis call that sari a *gara*, it is very beautifully embroidered. The embroidery is more on that. She was dressed in that sari and she was looking very beautiful in that sari. And beloved Baba entered the room and said, "Mother you are not dressed as yet?"

And Shireen said, "What *is* wrong with you? Can't you see I'm fully dressed." And Baba says "You're going to wear this sari?" "Of course, you told me that we should wear the best of clothes today." "Mother, this is not the sari for you. Don't ever forget that you are the mother of the Fakir. And as the mother of the Fakir, such a sari does not look good on you. You should be dressed in a simple manner."

And Beloved Baba then pointed out His own jacket which was fakir all over. And Shireen, with the authority of the mother told Him, "Merog, immediately go and change that coat!" And Baba said, "No, this is the dress of a fakir, mother. And such a sari does not look good on you. You should be dressed in a manner of a mother of the Fakir. In a very simple manner. Put on something very simple."

And there was a little bit of a tussle, and mother saying, "NO, I like this sari." And Baba said "No, this is not

the correct sari for one who is the mother of the Fakir. You change it." And, because of Baba's insistence, Shireen began to cry even, "You never allow me to do whatever, you know.... wish to do or like to do." But Baba said, "No mother. This is not right. Change this sari, wear something simple and befitting the mother of the Fakir."

And He made her change the sari and made her wear a very simple white sari and then they departed to Byramangala and the ceremony of the ground breaking. I remember that He would not spare his own mother. When the discipline of the spiritual path was concerned, He would not compromise with anyone, including His own mother. He wanted to teach her how the mother of the Fakir should be dressed. That is the thing I learned from Him. Jai Baba.

Now, once we have accepted the fact that Meher Baba is God in human form, that means these are the three basic qualities of God: Infinite Knowledge, Infinite Power, Infinite Bliss. In the 1950s, Baba had several different darshan programs at Meherabad. I think it was in 1955 that Baba had three weeks of Sahavas that were divided into different language groups. Because I was in the Merchant Marine, I seldom had the chance to be with Him, so Baba ordered me to come for all three weeks.

In 1954 Baba had the Western men come for "three incredible weeks." On the last day there was a large program and I remember that my brother Dadi, my cousin-brother Meherwan (Eruch Jessawala's younger brother) and I were sitting way back and beloved Baba was having a message read out.

That was read first in English by Eruch. Then it would be translated and read in Marathi by Dhake, and then in Gujarati, possibly by Mehta, I'm not sure and then finally it was read out in Telugu by Kutumba Sastri.

I was observing all this and suddenly, it occurred to me that the translations in Hindi, Marathi and Gujarati were short - very short and very simple. And then this man, Kutumba Sastri, would go on and on and the thought came to my mind that he was not translating properly. "Why is he taking so long to translate a few words into Telugu?"

Beloved Baba was sitting on the divan that is presently in the tin shed at Upper Meherabad across from the kitchen. Beloved Baba was nodding His head and the thought came to my mind, "Does He understand what his man is yapping about?" After all, Beloved Baba had not studied Telugu in school or college and a thought came to my mind, "Is He just nodding His head?"

Even as the thought came into my mind, Baba snapped His fingers. There was pin drop silence. Kutumba Sastri looked at Baba and Baba said, "Don't use this Telugu word. Use this particular Telugu word. That will make the meaning of the sentence clearer." Now, this could only be done by one who has a good command of the language. By no one else. And then I said to myself, "You bloody fool, Meher Baba does not need to go to school or college to study Telugu. That language originated from Him." That was one of the experiences I had.

Sam Kerawalla

## He Removes All Doubt

Once Krishna was playing hide and seek with His friends. When His turn came, He hid Himself so well that in spite of searching for Him everywhere and in everything, they could not find Him. Out of despair they sat beneath a tree, crying and calling Him. He suddenly appeared and the friends were so happy to find Him back. They told Him about their search and asked where He had been hidden. Krishna looked at them with great compassion and said, "My dear friends, I was hiding within you, which is my eternal abode. Did you ever search for me in your heart?"

Similarly, in this advent too, He plays the same game of hide and seek. Even the slightest variation in our one pointed attention towards Him is noticed and remedied. Having come into His orbit, nothing could be more serious than to have that attention diluted. He has various methods to make us aware of this aberration.

In fact, I was dragged into this play. I knew nothing about Him, except His claim to be the incarnation of God and the fact that my wife worshipped Him as such. Being an agnostic, I was not particularly interested in Him. I did not even know what He looked like. I just wanted to see this man who made such a tall claim.

As an unknown stranger, I reached Guru Prasad at Poona in June 1960. I saw an old Parsi gentleman with an unusual glow and charm, sitting in a big hall with a lot of devotees. He was Meher Baba. His entire

personality and gestures were so attractive and enchanting that I remained rooted to my place.

To avoid digression, it is sufficient to say that He was the only man who not only recognized me, but called me by name to come and meet Him. I was simply thunder-struck. I went to Him and He stretched out His hands. I embraced His. I was already stunned by the whole incident; then some inexplicable force made me bow down to His feet.

I lost all sense of perception at that moment and still do not know how I found myself sitting in the side room crying unabashedly. Intuitively, it became known to me that I was in the presence of no ordinary person, but a supreme spiritual being who was abounding with love of an indefinable, sublime nature.

I also perceived that He knew my thoughts and feelings and, over a period of time, I experienced that His wish invariably came to fruition. He manifested the divine attributes which I had heard of.

As an agnostic, my slate was clean. Besides my own intuition and intellect, I had no preconceived notion, nor a religious frame of reference, to arrive at any conclusion. So I started with the belief that according to the religious scriptures of the believers, if God ever descends on earth in human form, He would be like Meher Baba. I found a natural affinity and liking developed for Him, but His Godhood was paramount as far as I was concerned.

Meanwhile, I read one of His sayings, "I am not this body which you see, and physical existence is not God. God is in everything and everywhere and all the time."

I was now sure that the presence of God in the man-form is to help humanity have more tangible proof of His being and attributes.

During the early sixties, a rather misconstrued concept was afloat amongst a large section of Baba-workers. Out of sheer enthusiasm, they propagated the belief that believers in any other form of God, other than Meher Baba, were not Baba-lovers (a term still incomprehensible to me).

I honestly felt that God's descent on earth is not an ordinary incident. He is not to be confined into a corner of my mind, nor should we allow life to be propelled by the force of mundane desires.

I also felt that Baba is not a subject to be doled out to others, with all the trimmings, when my own conviction in His divinity is less than half-baked. I firmly believed that if He really is God, then my entire life and affairs have got to be insured with Him alone.

Though I belonged to a band of Baba-workers managing a center at Lucknow, yet I detested the attitude of treating other believers as heathen. This belittled Baba's Divinity as well. Out of sheer desperation, I wrote all this to Baba for guidance. Pat came His reply through Eruchji, "Baba wants you to give countenance to your own honest feeling rather than to what others feel about Baba." This was His mandate for me.

Immediately after, He substantiated my belief by an incident. A distant relation of mine was an ardent believer of God in the form of Rama. In all his leisure time, he would constantly repeat his lord's names so

much that his lips would keep on moving even in his sleep. His name was Saliq-ram and he never knew about Baba.

After a short illness, he died remembering his Lord till the last. Baba had already announced that whosoever took His name with his last breath came to Him. I believed that Rama was as good a name of God as Meher Baba. So I sent a reply paid telegram just mentioning, "Saliq-ram expired today." The very next day I received the reply, "Saliq-ram is blessed, and he has come to me."

It so happened that there was a Baba-worker of the same name. As such, along with the confirmation of the telegram, I also received an anxious enquiry from the mandali. They wanted to know if the deceased was our Saliq-ram of Kanpur. I sent the explanation and wished to confirm whether Baba had made this query.

In his reply letter, Bhauji wrote that, having sent that telegram, Baba never asked for clarification. He knew. It was the mandali who were anxious because of the similarity in the name. It was God who accepted Saliq-ram, though he never knew Meher Baba.

After the last darshan programme at Guru Prasad in 1965, which I could not attend, I was called alone to see Him at Poona. After the usual enquiries and some instruction, He very emphatically told me, "Never forget that I alone abide in everything and everywhere." I was stunned to accept such a statement coming from a gross form sitting in front of me. In a stupefied state, I looked at Him. He just smiled and waved me away. The moment I reached the door I suddenly realized that the "I" was meant for God, who

was Rama to Salig-ram and Meher Baba for me. He was steadying my belief and removing that big "IF."

I found another mind-boggling statement, "I tell you with divine authority, that I experience eternally, consciously and continually being one with you all and one in you all."

I started contemplating that, if it is His being in me, then do I need to search Him anywhere or call Him in any special way, or should I quietly and spontaneously remember and love Him?

In the meanwhile, He has transmuted His divine Leela from gross to beyond. That was the most crucial period of my life, but He never abandoned me. By doling out His grace in small quantities, he kept me on a leash. However, one particular incident, indelibly imprinted upon my mind, happened in 1995.

I was then residing in Varanasi, my hometown, which is famous for its traditional form of worship. I often pondered upon the veracity of these traditions. After all, they are prevalent from ages past and, according to common sense, nothing based upon mere hoax can survive that long. I had come across a Baba saying, "Any worship or obeisance done to any deity animate or inanimate, to any saint, yogi, advanced soul or Master, eventually comes to Me." Still it could not allay my doubt.

The ancient Vishwanath Temple of Lord Shiva lies on the way to my home from the river Ganges. One day, while coming back after a swim, my grandson insisted that we should go in for a darshan. At the same time, a fleeting thought came to my mind, as to who might be



accepting the obeisance of millions of devotees offered here. The moment I entered into the temple, there was the overwhelming presence of Baba, so much so that I could not restrain my tears. My grandson, Saumitra, sensed my condition and somehow guided me to the deity. The moment I touched that stone form, I heard a clear voice within, "Who else but me, from ages past, I alone accept and reciprocate."

I had heard this voice thrice in my life and once, in 1963, I mentioned it before Baba, who looked at the mandali, arched His brow, spread His palm and gave me a sweet smile.

I was now convinced that to restore my faith in His Eternal Presence, He had now bestowed this experience upon me. Neither before nor after, have I ever had such an experience at that place again. Now, I firmly believe that He appreciates our sincere inclination to follow His precept of truth and love. Even a feeble and small step in this direction is encouraged. Being an indweller, He is ever watchful of our faith and love, and never allows it to peter out. He has His own ways to pick us up and put us on track again in case we waiver. All this is His benevolence.

To be continually aware of His benediction is His constant companionship-SAHAVAS.

Shivandra Sahai

## My Coming to Baba

I was raised as an atheist except that, at Christmas time, we had a record of Christmas carols sung by the Roger Wagner Chorale. I don't know if Roger Wagner ever had any outward connection with Baba, but I did read that he had originally intended to enter the priesthood but became a choir director instead, and I know that God's presence is strong in his music.

All during my childhood, I longed for only two things - a soul-mate relationship, and to understand something.... I didn't know what it was, I couldn't articulate it, but to me, the star constellation Pleiades, which looked to me like a question mark, symbolized it, so I called that constellation "my question mark."

As I entered my teenage years, I would, then, alternately get terrible crushes on girls who didn't want me, or else I would get entirely tied up in mental knots trying to develop an all-inclusive philosophy.

Later, in high school, I found myself singing in the choir. The director was a black man named William Johnson, who always accepted anybody into his choir, even if they couldn't sing a note. He got all these kids, white and black, singing Handel's Messiah and also several Negro spirituals, including one which had the words, "I hear a voice a-prayin', prayin' Lord, I hear a voice a-prayin', Hallelujah! I hear a voice a-prayin', prayin' Lord, Oh Lord save-a my soul! Hallelujah!"

I had no idea about the words but I liked the tune, and I used to sing it in the shower at the top of my lungs. I am mindful, now, of Baba commenting that if a person

pays respect to God, God has to help him even if the person isn't sincere....

Around that time I used to frequent a large botanical garden in Miami called Fairchild Tropical Gardens. The founder, David Fairchild, was friends with Thomas Edison (who had a home on the West Coast of Florida in Ft. Myers). At a garage sale they sponsored, I found an old book called *The Great Work*. Looking back, I think it must have been a book of Sufi exercises. It shocked me because I realized that someone had already written down ideas that I thought were my own inventions.

I remember that in 12th grade in my high school psychology class, a classmate named Bill professed to me his simple Christian faith - that God was with him as his companion, helping him. I listened politely, but had no interest. Then, not long after, the class intern, David Bullock, was permitted by the teacher, who was a former minister, to give a brief presentation about Meher Baba. He passed out the "Don't Worry, Be Happy" card and The Universal Message, and talked for about 10 minutes. This was 1971. I decided that Baba must have had a perfect childhood and thus had never lost the innocent state of the infant - some psychological explanation like that, which at least was respectful rather than entirely cynical.

But when I read on the back Baba's message, "How to Love God," it impressed me deeply that this man was saying that even though I didn't believe in God, I was "already loving Him" - especially when it came to Baba's words, "If we understand and feel that the greatest act of devotion and worship to God is not to

hurt or harm any of His beings, we are loving God." All my life I had had a very soft spot for animals and their suffering. I used to rescue worms from the sidewalk when it rained when I was in elementary school.

Now, after graduating from high school, I came to an inner crisis point, and resolved to try to take my life into a forward direction. Prior to that, I had, in general, been very negative and cynical. I went through a great many changes and began searching, initially through drugs and then through Zen meditation. During that period, I kept running into Meher Baba, as if by design, as if He were reminding me of Him periodically.

These were the hippie days still, around 1972-73, and I fell in love with a hippie girl a couple of years older than myself (an eternity in one's late teens). She was quite a bit more sophisticated than I was, but I managed to get up the courage to ask her to a Melanie concert. I liked the musicians Melanie and The Who, without realizing that both had connections to Meher Baba. I remember that Melanie performed "Candles in the Rain," and everyone in the audience held up lit matches. Then after the concert I took this girl to a jetty made of rocks that extended into the ocean there in Miami Beach, and as it was a very romantic setting, I was thinking of how to kiss her, when she announced, "Bill and I are moving to Costa Rica in two weeks." I hadn't heard anything about "Bill" up to that point.

So I visited her once more as a friend, and a couple of weeks later I was driving down Old Cutler Road to Fairchild Gardens, when I got stuck in traffic behind a VW bus. This bus had a huge poster with a drawing of

Meher Baba gesturing the sign of perfection with the caption, "Don't Worry, Be Happy." I, on the other hand, was playing "Gold and the Blues" by the rock band Sugarloaf on my eight track player and was thinking to myself, "Now, how does this guy expect me to be happy?" The rest is not very dramatic - finally after a couple of years and getting off drugs (which took a "bad trip" at a Grateful Dead concert, because I had become psychologically addicted), I was ready. I had been studying the world scriptures along with Rumi's *Masnavi* and the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, and when I noticed the cover of *Listen, Humanity* in the "Oak Feed Store" in Coconut Grove, I was simply attracted to the colors. But when I read Baba's discourses in the second half of that book, I knew deep within that Baba spoke with the same authority as Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita* and the other scriptures I'd been reading.

Finally, I found Baba listed in the pages of a New Age catalog and called the contact number. It was for the Luck brothers, but they had left Miami, and their mother answered. She gave me Ann Forbes' phone number, and thus Ann became my Baba-contact and my friend for many years.

Later on, I realized that there were several points of contact with Baba during my life before I learned about Him. My parents moved from Long Island, New York, to Miami, when I was two and a half. It turns out that they stayed overnight at a motel in Myrtle Beach on the last night that Baba was at the Center in 1956.

As I said, all my life I was searching for "something" which I didn't understand. I remember at about age 10 being taken to the 1964 World's Fair in New York, and feeling a thrill that whatever it was I was looking for, it was VERY CLOSE. I remembering feeling that especially when I was in the Coca-Cola pavilion - and if you look at the map of that fair, the Coca-Cola pavilion was only a few buildings away from the American Interiors building, where Kitty Davy and Jane Haynes had the Baba exhibit.

Steve Sakellarios

## How I Came to Baba

I saw the movie *Tommy* in April 1975 by mere coincidence, and I felt that the writer could tell me about God being on the earth again. I had gotten back together with my ex-boyfriend, John Fazio, who told me I should see the movie, and the next year was filled with research and reconnaissance. We bought every newspaper, magazine and book that even vaguely mentioned The Who, the rock band featured in *Tommy*. We scoured music, record, and book stores. One of the books we bought had Pete Townshend's home address in it. We wrote a letter of introduction to the address and I eventually received a reply on letterhead from Pete's secretary, Judi.

Accompanying the letter was also a little pamphlet, *The Universal Message*. It had a picture of a man who looked very much like Jerry Colona from the old Marx Brothers' movies.

Many months later, in response to another communique from us, we received a letter from Pete. He wrote a full-page letter, the crux of which was that we were mistaken and that we did not know what he was talking about. It was basically a negative tone telling us that all fans got the feeling they knew him (or any rock star) through his music, but that we were wrong - sorry.

However, at the bottom of the page, hand written with a fine, bright blue felt pen, was the message, "P.S. I am always here - for you." That was our invitation! When we questioned Pete later about that additional message,

he said he did not know why he wrote it. We took off for England on May 31, 1976, from Tampa, FL.

I don't remember much of the flight, but I do remember the movie: a Sean Connery film called *The Wind and the Lion*, set in a Middle Eastern desert. The last line of the film was, "Wasn't there ever one thing in your life that was worth losing everything for?" This seemed significant.

The food on the plane was good and there was plenty of it. They also had stainless steel cutlery. Ah, the good old days! Neither of us slept and when we landed at Heathrow Airport at 7 a.m., we were in a kind of a surreal daze. As we stood to disembark, the song from Tommy "Listening To You" came on the Muzak system. Another "synchronicity?"

We got out of the airport and wondered which way to go. I noticed the flow of traffic and saw a huge tunnel. The tunnel was extremely long, our backpacks extremely heavy, and the car exhaust intense! We met no one else in the tunnel, indicating that maybe walking wasn't such a bright idea. We wrapped our scarves around our mouths and noses and tried to hold our breath, praying we didn't die before we got to our destination.

We got a bus finally around Feltham, and after getting off in Twickenham, we began exploring the area on foot. We immediately came upon No. 2 The Embankment, which was where Pete lived at the time. We thought, "No, it can't be that simple," and carried on, shortly coming to No. 24, his office.



In the afternoon we ended up in Teddington, the next village along the river and ended up that night sleeping in the public toilet facilities at the park because we wanted to conserve the meager funds we had (about \$60). Sometime during the night we had to look for alternative accommodation, as it got so very cold for some reason.

We found our way into the stairwell of an apartment building nearby and slept on telephone books for insulation from the cold.

The next day, John called Pete's office and talked to someone there who told us that Pete wouldn't be in that day but to come tomorrow and he would be there then. We spent the day walking around again, and ended up in Richmond this time, a few miles away. Just over the bridge on the right, we spotted a little bed and breakfast inn, The Mayfair, which was £5 a night! We were so utterly exhausted by this time we fell asleep almost immediately and slept right through breakfast the following morning - 12 hours straight! We were very disappointed that we didn't get our breakfast, but the proprietress gave us some bread and sent us on our way.

We set off for Twickenham, and by this time, my body was having severe diarrhea with an inability to take in food. I stationed myself across from No. 2 in the public baths. Meanwhile, John went to No. 24, Pete's office. Several minutes passed and I got a strong "knowing" feeling that washed through my whole body. Just then I heard, "Hey, guess who I just talked to?" John was outside the public toilet's window. I answered, "Pete."

I quickly got myself together and met John outside. He explained that when Pete had answered his knock, John had felt impelled to say, "We've come to do the work of the Master." They exchanged some words and then John excused himself to come and get the other part of "we." I felt the overwhelming heaviness and sickness lift from me, and had the distinct impression of floating about three inches from the ground, feeling unusually well.

We spoke at length and I remember I told Pete, "We are here to help you." Neither John nor I knew why we said what we did, but it seemed to us that these two statements were what it was all about. (Weeks later Pete told us that Murshida Duce had told him that Baba would send him helpers and we were the first to arrive.) Pete kept mentioning a place called Oceanic as if we should know what the heck he was talking about. At one point, probably noticing our blank expressions, he asked, "Haven't you been getting the newsletters? Aren't you aware of the center I am building for Meher Baba?" Pete assumed that we had been cognizant of his plans to create a center for Meher Baba in the London area and that we had been inspired to come over in response to this. Nope! We hadn't a clue. We saw Tommy, knew the writer could tell us about God, and here we were.

He asked us where we were staying and then told us to come back around 3 p.m. He had some work to do and he needed to consult with the person who was staying in this house on the second floor, a New York editor whom he had brought in to work on a project called O Parvardigar. He said that if it was okay with Ginny, we could "stay here tonight and then we'll see."

We arrived back promptly at 3 p.m. Pete told us everything was set and we could spend the night. We sat on the bed in the top-floor room and talked a little, and then Pete asked, "Would you allow me to buy you dinner?" We of course said yes, and he immediately ran downstairs and was gone.

Some time later, he arrived back with boxes of Indian food. We stood in the small kitchen downstairs eating from the take-out boxes, talking. Up till then I had been vegetarian for several years. When I mentioned that to Pete he said, "It matters more what comes out of your mouth than what goes in it." That struck me as being very true, and I took a bite of chicken curry. It was so good! I remember Pete saying, "You know, Meher Baba is the Avatar." In my head I thought, "Oh, yeah, of course. Baba is the Avatar." It all made sense and I accepted it completely.

I had office experience and could type, so Pete set me to work transcribing interviews with older Baba lovers that he had filmed. John had a talent for sound engineering and became valuable in that role.

I got a crash course in Baba history by listening to those interviews: Fred Marks and Delia DeLeon, who lived nearby. Kim Grajera, Kitty Davy, Anita Vieillard, and Tom and Dorothy Hopkinson were some others who educated me in those first days at Oceanic. John got similar lessons by working on a series of tapes recorded by Dara Irani in India of Adi K. Irani's talks.

On the afternoon of July 3, 1976, special guest, Adi K., cut a pink ribbon at the entrance to Oceanic and the ten days of festivities officially began. The Opening of Oceanic was an amazing event. People came from all

over the world: from America, France, India and Australia - people who loved Baba and who had lived with Baba, both old and young.

John and I worked for Pete and Oceanic until mid 1979. I eventually moved back to the U.S. in 1991 and soon ended up in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, where I lived for 17 years (as of 2008), the very place where the first of the younger generation began coming to Baba in America in the 1960s.

Susan Vee Laney

## I Will Give You My Love As Much As You Can Take, But You Have to Give God in Return

In February 1965, I was married to Gokaran Shrivastava. Before marriage, my father was asked by Gokaran's elder brother to take permission from Meher Baba for this marriage. Accordingly my father wrote to Meher Baba and got His permission along with an assurance that He would send His blessings on my wedding day. At that time, we were only knowing that Meher Baba was Gokaran's Guru and did not actually feel like knowing anything more than this. Since we did not know Meher Baba's greatness at that time, we never awaited His blessing at the time of marriage. However, true to His promise, He sent us His blessings on 27th February 1965, through a telegram which was kept amidst the pile of other greetings received on that day. Nobody in my house, including me, gave any importance to the blessings of Meher Baba. The blessings, that we unknowingly ignored, later engulfed my whole life and I very soon became His captive for eternity.

For a month or so after our marriage, Gokaran did not tell me anything about Baba, as he was actually waiting for the proper opportunity to reveal to me the greatest secret that God is once again amidst mankind in human form. Gokaran thought that first he should win over my love and faith for himself, and once I was fully in tune with him, he would then tell me about Baba.

For a few months after our marriage, Gokaran and I were still living away from each other as we were

serving in different towns. During this period, we were corresponding with each other through letters, but unlike other newly married couples of our age, we were not indulging in writing romantic letters. In one of these letters of our early married life, I casually wrote to Gokaran that I was prepared to give him as much love as he could take provided he gave me God in return.

I actually did not know what I was asking for, and never dreamt that such a heavy demand could ever be fulfilled by an ordinary mortal like Gokaran. It was a sheer poetic taste in me which made me include such an odd demand. Probably, Gokaran was waiting for this very opportunity and my demand was a signal for him to tell me that, well, he was really able to give me God in return for my love!

When our marriage was just one month old, I got a letter from Gokaran full of a description of Baba's divinity. In this letter, he vividly tried to explain that Baba was the same Ancient One who was Rama, Krishna, Muhammad, Buddha, Christ and Zoroaster. By all possible means, he tried to bring home to me the fact that Baba was the Avatar of this age.

Had there been any other newly wedded girl in my place, such a letter from her spouse would have inflicted a great shock on her, and she would have definitely thrown out such a letter in the dust-bin. Since my destiny was quite different than the usual one, I reacted to this letter quite differently. This letter actually became instrumental in lifting me out from the dustbin of mundane life.

The letter instantaneously revealed to me the whole glory of Baba, and my conviction in His divinity got the finishing touch soon after I read the brochure entitled "The Highest of the High," which came along with this memorable letter from Gokaran. Reading this brochure, I needed no more proofs about the divinity of Baba, and I have, so far, not read any other Baba book in such a detailed and careful manner as I did with "The Highest of The High," although about 48 years of my contact with Baba have elapsed. For the last twelve years, since my retirement, I have been working for the Meherabad Hill Library and reading a lot of Baba books and, in spite of this, my reading the "Highest of the High" brochure has impacted me the most.

Incidentally, it so happened that my conviction in Baba's divinity and the announcement of His 1965 darshan coincided. Baba had already started capturing my heart very fast, even before I learned from Gokaran about the possibility of meeting our eternal Beloved. My heart was filled with joy and soon I found myself waiting at the threshold of our Beloved Lord at Guruprasad, Poona. During our four to five days of Baba's darshan, I was surcharged with Baba's love, without understanding anything. The embrace that Baba gave me during one of the group darshans will never wane from my memory till the end of this life.

I was most impressed by the proceedings of this darshan. For hours together, His lovers were silently sitting, just gazing at His beautiful countenance and His glory. No big speeches were going on. People were not talking to each other. An unimaginable silence prevailed. Baba looked fragile, yet most beautiful and,

from time to time, supported by His mandali, He would get up from His sofa so that His lovers, even from the distant seats, could see Him clearly. His getting up from His seat each time was a very special moment that captured my heart and got imprinted there forever.

May 1965 was my first darshan, which affected me deeply, but not absolutely, because, at that time, my parental family and I were connected to a guru. After having Baba's first darshan in May 1965, our family was visiting this family guru for our annual meeting. I requested Gokaran also to join me and have darshan of our family guru. Although Gokaran did not say anything, inside he was not happy to go to any guru but, just to honor my sentiments, he accompanied me.

Our family guru had separate meeting places for the male disciples and for the female disciples. With other ladies of our group, I went to meet the guru and, on seeing me, he told me in a very stern tone that, "Your work here is over and you should not come here anymore." I could not understand the deeper meaning of these words of our guru and I started weeping bitterly, feeling that I had displeased my guru by going to Meher Baba.

Before this meeting, my guru would always give me greater importance and give me preference to do several duties during the darshan programs. I was even asked to make some special food items during these darshan programs. It so happened that before my father consented to fix my marriage with Gokaran, he informed this family guru and asked for his approval. The guru not only approved this wedding, but at the



same time he instructed my father that he should do his best that this marriage is performed in a decent and dignified way.

This instruction may have been based on his inner knowledge about Meher Baba's status. At the time, we never knew the meaning of this instruction. In spite of this inner knowledge of the guru, his behaviour towards me after my marriage was quite different and quite contrasting to my previous visits to him.

So this visit was quite different, and he was a different person altogether. My family members - sisters, brothers, and my father - were very much upset by thinking that I had displeased the guru by going to Meher Baba. Their attitude brought me still more pain and suffering. While this was happening to me in the group of ladies, Gokaran was undergoing a totally different experience with the male disciples of this guru. Gokaran was told to share with the guru's disciples his experience and the glory of Meher Baba. Gokaran was happily sharing his understanding of Meher Baba, but he didn't know what was going on with me because of the segregation of the male and female disciples.

After this darshan program, when Gokaran and I met, Gokaran found me very upset and weeping bitterly. On asking the reason of my distress, I told him about the treatment which the guru gave me. Gokaran instantly consoled me by telling me that the guru seemed to be a genuine one who recognized Meher Baba's glory and, by this severe treatment of me, he actually severed my connection with him so that I could now be fully devoted to Meher Baba. This type

of treatment was necessary to break his connection, otherwise it would have never happened and I would not have accepted Baba fully.

Although it took some time for me to understand the deeper meaning of the guru's strange behavior, finally I could overcome my grief and became fully Baba's. In order to neutralize this experience, Gokaran prompted me to request Beloved Baba to give me another darshan so that I could forget this experience and try to love Baba fully.

I wrote a letter to Baba telling Him that I very much wished to have His darshan. This letter was read out to Baba by Bhauji and Bhauji also informed Baba that there were so many other Baba lovers who missed the main darshan of May 1965. Bhauji suggested that if Baba agreed to give Urmilla an extra darshan, then it would be nice if those other lovers would also be given a chance to have His darshan. To this proposal of Bhauji, Baba agreed and, because of my letter, about 700 other Baba lovers got a chance to have Baba's darshan on 6th June 1965.

I, with Gokaran, as per Baba's appointed time, reached Guruprasad at about 3 p.m. on 6th June. The darshan time was 4 o'clock.

Suddenly, we were spotted by Nana Kher who was probably on watch duty in one of the front verandahs of Guruprasad. Nana Kher told us to go inside the hall and take seats before Baba came there for darshan. Gokaran and I were actually heading to Bombay for some educational training program and our train was to leave Poona railway station at 4:30 p.m. the same day.

When we entered the Guruprasad hall, we were horrified to see that the hall was fully packed and we thought that if we waited for our chance to get Baba's darshan we would surely miss the train. Catching this train was also important, as we were to report at the Bombay University before the next morning. Our horror was changed into a great and pleasant surprise when we found that this large group of Baba lovers in the Guruprasad hall gave us a clear passage to go to the front row without any hesitation and without any instruction from anybody. Till today we still wonder how we got this V.I.P. treatment.

So the fear of missing the train was gone and we were comfortable. Soon Baba arrived and He asked Bhau to announce that Urmilla and Gokaran should take His darshan first, as they have to catch the 4:30 p.m. train. Both of us went to Baba and, one by one, bowed down at His feet. When I took Baba's darshan, Baba started asking me some questions. He asked me about my educational qualifications, about the grade, and about the merit position in the university examination. I told Baba that I was MSC in Botany and obtained first grade and third position in the university merit.

To this, Baba first lifted His two fingers and then lifted one finger. Bhauji interpreted that Baba says, "Both of you are first class." That time I could not understand the deeper meaning of this gesture but, later on, I understood and got convinced that Baba showed His satisfaction about my educational qualifications. And now my conviction goes beyond this, as I strongly feel that almighty God has descended on earth to show His satisfaction about my studies. This may have some deeper meaning which I have yet to understand. While

Baba was asking these questions to me, He did not ask anything to Gokaran, who was silently standing on one side and witnessing all this exchange between Baba and me. Probably this intimate conversation between Baba and me dissolved my pain about the treatment which was given to me by my family guru. After this incident, my connection with the guru was completely gone and I never had any urge to go to that family guru again, although my parental family members are still connected to that place.

After we had Baba's darshan, we were told to leave immediately and catch the train for Bombay. So we did not stay there to see the proceedings of 6th June 1965. That was the first and last time Bhauji acted as Baba's interpreter. This was because when Eruch came to know that Bhauji's request to Baba would result in 700 lovers coming for an extra darshan, Eruch was very upset with Bhauji. Eruch told Bhauji that he had ignored Baba's health and had put an extra burden on Baba. So Eruch would not be acting as the interpreter of this program.

This is how it came about that, in quick succession, I had two darshans of Meher Baba in 1965. With the memory of these two darshans, I have passed almost 50 years of my life. In his biography, Mahatma Gandhi writes that he cannot recall a single instance when God had forsaken him at the last moment. In these past years of my contact with Baba, my life has probably become a living testimony of Mahatma Gandhi's aforesaid faith, as Baba has never forsaken me at the last moment and I also got His two darshans in 1965, which were really His last darshans.

Apparently, my Baba story begins with my marriage, but it is quite strange that once we were in Baba's fold, we came to know that our contact with Baba is quite old. In 1975, an article entitled "The Great Seclusion" by Jal Kerawalla appeared in *Glow International* magazine. When this issue of the *Glow* came, my father was coincidentally residing with me and he happened to go through that article.

My father is not a Baba lover, yet he could recognize Mr. Jal Kerawalla from his photo in the magazine and drew my attention to a long forgotten incident. He reminded me that Jal Kerawalla was the commissioner in Nagpur when I was just a school-going child of ten to twelve years of age. My father told me that when Jal Kerawalla died in Nagpur in 1952, a large number of mourners gathered there.

With my father's narration, the whole past flashed back before my eyes. During the 1950s, we were living in Nagpur quite close to Jal's bungalow. I used to go to my school (Providence Girls High School) by the same route along which Jal's bungalow was located in the civil lines. I do not know why, but I would always stop near the bungalow for a while, gaze at it, and then proceed on my way to school. The bungalow always attracted me, magnetically, till one day, while going to school, I found a great rush of mourners there in black clothing. The atmosphere was very sad and I was deeply shocked.

On my return from school, I asked my father about the man who resided in that bungalow. My father consoled me somehow without disclosing the name of that person, and from that day on, my interest in that

bungalow totally disappeared and I would cross that bungalow running as if I was scared to look at it.

In 1975, my father reminded me that the bungalow about which I asked in 1952 belonged to Jal Kerawalla, whose article he was reading in the *Glow*. After knowing all the details about Jal Kerawalla, I could understand the reason why I was attracted towards his bungalow in Nagpur. Baba had stayed there many times and it was either His presence in the bungalow or the surcharged atmosphere of it that used to attract me.

It is extremely difficult to comprehend the ways of Baba, yet it is certain that He waits for each one of us with infinite patience. He sows the seed of His love in our hearts without our knowledge, which sprouts in the due course of time when we actually come to know that we have fallen in love with Him. As we mature in His love more and more, we are able to trace His guiding/hand in our lives from a very remote past. The day our love is completed, we will know that He was with us from the very beginning.

I do not know whether I have been successful in giving Gokaran the promised love, but Baba's grace has definitely made Gokaran give me God in return. The story is not ending here, but is just the beginning of my story.

Urmilla Shrivastava

## A Couple's Story

We don't know what "Sahavas" with Baba really is, as we have not met Him physically. A significant change, however, took place in our life after accepting Him as the Christ of this Age, and we attribute this to His active presence in our daily life.

[Dieter:] Looking back, it seems to me to me as if a different person is looking back because my eyes have changed, my heart feels different and I am looking at life from a very different point of view.

Before coming to Baba, it never occurred to me that "somebody" was leading me. For me, God represented an inconceivably huge intelligence which contained everything. In this vastness, I felt, He could neither see me nor the suffering around me. Just as I was unaware of the genocide of millions, the killing and torture of innocent people, the thousands and millions of my fellowmen who died by drowning or starved in catastrophes. I couldn't see His love; I only saw His ignorance. If He pretended to be a loving God, how could He be so cruel and callous?

This hurt me a lot and, as a child, I often got into a depressive mood and felt broken-hearted. I never prayed. Due to my childhood, I was very reluctant to accept authority. I was extremely critical, at times even sarcastic, and couldn't believe what people claimed to be true. I was never satisfied with this world and was always looking for another world.

This world came, but it came very late and, obviously, only after some inner aspects of my personality,

unbeknownst to me, had changed or had become mature. This change took place in a bookshop where I was attracted by a photo on the cover of a book (*The Discourses*). I was trapped and compelled to open it. While I was reading some passage, I lost any sense of time and space and my life was changed. My sarcastic attitude failed completely. I melted in the beauty of its written words, their clarity and lucidity.

After a short time, I found myself washed away to the opposite shore, as if I had crossed a river. I accepted His authority unconditionally, but I didn't feel worthy to be at His feet. Death, which I had once falsely regarded as being the end of life, now meant no more than just the end of the flesh, setting the soul free for a new beginning. The suffering of my fellow men, which to me had been a frightening and pitiable state, became more like a jewel shining resplendent in their eyes. I experienced the purifying effect of suffering by inviting it onto myself. This was not sheer learning by reading, but corroborated by experiences.

The most astonishing experience, however, was, and still is, His presence in my thoughts. So far this has been the greatest miracle ever in my life. For this is not just my fancy, or my imagination, but His presence is a convincing reality. Over the years we have experienced His presence in a most natural and unspectacular way in our daily life. From the very beginning, in this new world of mine. I have felt I have been guided and this has not only been my experience but also that of my wife Ursula.

[Ursula:] Yes that's right. I would like to add that when we first came to Baba, He opened our eyes to His



presence with some more or less unusual coincidences which made us clearly aware of His companionship and guidance. This has now become so natural that we cannot image His absence.

Let me give you some examples. On our first visit to Meherabad, in 1989, we only realized at the Bombay airport that we were entering a rather unknown and different country and that we had to be cautious not to get into trouble. To our relief, and only on this first trip, we came across a Baba lover at the airport who helped us to get to our hotel in the middle of the night.

Then, in Poona, after we had visited all the Meher Baba places except the Meher Baba Center, which is not easy to find, we noticed a young man following us for some time. We felt more and more suspicious and, as it was getting late, we decided to return to our hotel and give up trying to locate the center. At that very moment, this man addressed us in a very civil manner, offering his help. It turned out that he not only knew the location of the Meher Baba Center, but was the son of the owner of a small printing company which had printed several booklets for the Center.

It seems significant to me that not only did Baba help us, but He also helped this young man. He had never been inside the Center but, as it was Monday night, the day when Baba meetings are held, the Center was still open and he was able to look around and meet some Baba lovers.

At the beginning of our stay in Meherabad, Dieter wanted to buy six or seven volumes of Lord Meher at the Meher Nazar bookstore in the Trust compound in Ahmednagar. I had to stop him, and I put one of these

volumes back onto the shelf, because I felt we couldn't afford so many. When we left Meherazad that same day, we were given just this volume as a gift from the mandali. They could not have known what had transpired in the Nazar bookstore.

[D:] Sometimes doors which seemed closed were unexpectedly opened for us.

[U:] This brings us back to Poona on our way to Meherabad during our second trip in 1997. We had once seen a very old beautiful movie in Germany, made in the thirties in India, called *Tukaram*. We decided to look for it, but after some time we become disheartened. The video shops were hard to find and the young men in those shops didn't seem to know what we were asking for. So we dropped this crazy idea. Having walked for a while, we saw a card shop. We went inside. While I was selecting some cards, Dieter suddenly requested me to ask the sales lady for that *Tukaram* movie. Knowing that this was surely the wrong place and, therefore, an odd request, I hesitated. At last, and after some argument, I gave in and asked the lady who then disappeared into the back of the shop.

To our amazement, she returned with the owner of the shop who seemed to be delighted to see us. He turned out to be a friend of the son of the man who had directed that movie, and he knew where we could get hold of it. Moreover, he had met Meher Baba and had even written a song for Him. He kindly called up the Prabhat Theatre and arranged for someone to take us there.

There we bought the only two copies of *Tukaram* and *Dnyaneshwar* they had at the time. Two years later, when we were again in Poona, we had the feeling we should contact the Prabhat Theater again to find out whether copies of these old movies were available with subtitles now. The man at the theater called Mr. Damle, the son of the director, who told us that his son in Bombay had just produced copies with subtitles and he was expecting the very first delivery within an hour. He then came in a rickshaw and invited us to his home where we had a nice conversation over some tea while waiting for the films to arrive. So we got what we wanted.

[D:] With Baba we haven't experienced anything like doors being closed to us, but Baba sometimes redirects us in our daily life

[U:] As an example, let's go a few weeks back. We have a nice and a spacious but rather old car. We've had it for many years and, with a relatively small budget, we had to spend quite a lot of money on repairs to have it pass our strict technical inspection in Germany, which is due every two years.

This time we were quite sure it would not pass without a considerable investment in repairs and spare parts, and we felt this would be a welcome and acceptable excuse to buy a relatively new car, as we had the necessary funds at that time. We had already chosen one and, since we need a car to get to our working place, the idea became more and more attractive. To our surprise, however, this time our old car easily passed the inspection with the smallest bill ever. The idea of buying a new car now became disturbing to us,

because we felt Baba would not like it. At last, we dropped this idea and will save this money for another cause.

[D:] We experience Baba's guidance not just in big things, but also in tiny things. In this sense, His companionship is not limited to particular events but is continuous. We can see it in every step we take, and we try to keep Him in our thoughts as much as possible during the day so that He will be present in our mind even if we have to concentrate on some difficult task.

[U:] Or if I start to worry because I am not as focused as Dieter and, on my side, it requires a special effort to focus my mind. I can, however, say that He is a constant emotional reality. He is more like an intimate family member than a God who is far beyond someone I can say "good morning" and "good night" to and, to our amusement, it has happened many times that I have called my father "Baba" with two short "a's" like in "Papa" which I use to address my father.

A similar feeling of familiarity was expressed by our landlady. Once, when I was airing a pillow, a small photo of Baba fell onto her balcony. When I asked her for it, she told me, with a bright smile on her face, He seemed very familiar to her and she felt as if she had met Him before.

[D:] It is not always easy and joyful to be in His presence, because I feel for certain what He does not like. On the other hand, I often do not really know what He likes, but the experience of going against His wish is becoming more and more painful, even in minor things, as if His pain was reflected in my own mind. Pleasing Him seems to be a never-ending

exercise of self-effacement. In fact, it seems to me as if He was moving the basket when the ball has already left my hand. In the past, without His presence, I found it much easier to ignore all this. Of course, I felt guilty then, but I didn't feel any pain in my heart such as you do if somebody hurts you badly. Now I feel pain, but I do not feel guilty anymore.

[U:] We don't really experience Baba as someone who tells us "do this" and "don't do that" with fixed rules. To some extent, we feel free to follow our inner voice or to find out for ourselves what is best for us in a particular situation in our life. As an example, we sometimes unmistakably feel that we should keep things simple and not indulge in luxuries, or we may feel we shouldn't have a sumptuous meal. If we do it anyway, we learn from the result. That means something we bought turns out to be useless and a waste of money; the meat we ate was bad, or just didn't taste good; or we spent our holidays in a spacious, beautiful summer cottage but being ill all the time. Those experiences provide us with more and more opportunities to learn what He likes us to do. The beautiful thing for me, however, is that there is not one way with Baba. There is no dogma. There is a slightly different way for everybody and, for me, this is His humour and all-encompassing love and divinity.

[D:] Concerning His presence, we feel a remarkable difference when being in Meherabad or being at home in Germany. Living at home feels like sitting in a small rowboat with Him at the back. We are more or less on our own, very few seem to be interested in joining the boat. We are rowing while the sea and the wind are moving us here and there. We don't know where we will

be going. He is at the helm, but we are insecure. When we see that big waves are coming or are bound to come, I get worried. Although nothing really bad can happen, it drains my energy and gives me much stress.

When we come here, I lose all connection to our home very fast. All of a sudden our home has become Meherabad. This replacement is total; not a single thought remains. Time also feels different now. Everything here bears His touch and everything serves as a remembrance. The focus on Him is inherent in everything here in Meherabad; it has become a part of the environment. It is as if our boat has reached an island, we are getting out and we are walking towards its center.

Dieter & Ursula



## Welcome To My World

This collection of Baba stories from twenty two different people, Westerners, Easterners—those who lived with Baba, those who met Baba as well as those who never met Him physically—will serve as another reminder of the way the Avatar, Meher Baba, can enter anyone's life, at any time.

*These stories were compiled by Gokaran Shrivastava in his capacity as librarian of the Meherabad Library. Some were transcribed from tapes made of talks given during the 50th Anniversary Celebration of different events in Baba's life, such as His declaring Himself as the Avatar, or The Three Incredible Weeks.*

## Register of Editorial Alterations

Page 5, para 2, line 6, give changed to gave  
Page 14, para 4, line 3, Weeping changed to weeping  
Page 16, para 5, line 3, message changed to messages  
Page 22, para 3, line 2, "a as" changed to "as a"  
Page 31, para 3, line 1, disciple changed to disciples  
Page 57, para 2, line 2, mind changed to mine  
Page 78, para 2, line 5, contest changed to contrast  
Page 88, para 5, line 5, "to make to" changed to "to"  
Page 90, para 3, line 4, feeling changed to feelings  
Page 158, para 3, line 7, were changed to where