

The Story of Baba’s Face in the Tree

Almost fifty-three years have passed since the day Baba’s beloved Mehera looked out her bedroom window, wondering how her beloved Baba could be gone and how she could carry on without Him. Her grief was overwhelming and her pain at separation was beyond expression.

Baba had called Mehera His very breath . . . His Radha, and told His other mandali that Mehera’s love



The blessed tree trunk now rests on its concrete platform in the specially built room.

was absolutely pure; she loved Him as He should be loved. So it was no surprise that although her heart was broken, her spirit to obey His wish for her to “be brave” kept her going . . . but she couldn’t help wishing for some sign . . . some assurance that her Beloved had not forgotten her. . . . And it was then, after the mandali had returned to Meherazad from the Last Darshan, that one day in mid-July 1969, as Mehera looked at the garden outside her bedroom window, recalling how Baba loved to walk through the garden, her attention was suddenly drawn to the Umar tree. Were her eyes playing tricks on her or could it really be . . . she wondered, for appearing in the bark of the trunk—just at the level of her eyesight—was an unimaginable natural sculpture: Baba’s beautiful face—with even a crown gently gracing His head. There was no doubt that, in response to the agony of Mehera’s separation from her beloved Lord, creation had responded, reflecting the compassion of the Creator.

For those who are unaware of the amazing story behind that moment, we need to go back in time a decade earlier, to 1959. Baba had stood by the tree, and casually resting His hand on its trunk, remarked to the visitors with Him that of all the trees, He liked this tree very much. Unseen by the visitors, Mehera had been peeking out from behind the curtains of her window when Baba had said this, and His comment had perplexed her. There were so many more beautiful

How to Donate

The Trust is supported entirely by love-gifts from Meher Baba’s lovers around the world. In truth, it is Baba Himself who gives through your hands, and it is Baba Himself who brings the objects to completion which He laid down in the Trust Deed, when it pleases Him to do so.

Please see “How to Donate” on the Trust’s website: www.avatarmeherbabatrust.org/where-to-contribute/

Another way to support the Trust is to list it as a beneficiary in your personal Legacy. See “Legacies”: www.avatarmeherbabatrust.org/legacies/

Trust financial information is provided annually in the Trust Financial Report, sent out with the June issue of this newsletter and posted on the Trust website. More information can be found in the Trust’s website at www.avatarmeherbabatrust.org.

Current news about foreign donations

Although the Trust cannot accept foreign donations at this time, we encourage Trustwallas and Meher Baba organizations to continue to collect the love offerings from Baba lovers and to keep the funds on account until such time that we will be able to accept them.

trees in the garden, she thought, why did He like this one—this Umar tree?

Later, when Mehera asked Baba about His comment, He had gestured to her, “Wait . . . just wait . . . you will see . . . later you will come to know.”

And the answer came after a decade, after her beloved Baba had dropped His physical form.

For almost ten years the image remained, and then gradually pieces of bark fell off and new growth replaced it, until His image could no longer be seen. Still, the tree weathered storms, heat, wind, and rain, allowing His lovers to marvel at the glory of love. But eventually the ravages of time won out; the trunk, from the top down, died.

After consulting with tree specialists and preservation experts, it was decided by the Trust that the portion of the tree that bore Baba’s image must be preserved for posterity. After much discussion and careful consideration, the Trust decided to cut that part of the dead trunk off, with the aim of preserving it in a controlled environment.

In order to preserve the tree trunk that bore His image, and make it possible for His lovers and posterity to see it, a small room also had to be built to house it and protect it from the elements. The spot chosen was

at the eastern end of the small veranda, around the corner from where Mani would write her family letters, and just outside Rano Gayley’s room in the area where she used to do her drawings. The tree trunk has had a long journey, first being allowed to dry out so that all the moisture from within would dissipate, before being treated to withstand any insect invasions. Then it was placed on a cement platform in the specially built room so that it would remain as it had naturally stood.

This project has finally been completed with a large viewing window installed, facing the eastern side of the garden, along the walkway. Ceiling and wall lighting also enhance the viewing experience of pilgrims as they walk by. Photos of Baba’s image on the tree will be situated beside it, so that His lovers in future can glimpse the image that helped to bring Mehera out of the fathomless depths of her bereavement.

Nothing is lasting except Him, but perhaps those yearning hearts who in future will read about this tree, and are touched by the divine love story of the Beloved and His beloved Mehera, will find some solace in at least getting a glimpse of the tree that sculpted God’s face in its living bark, all for the sake of Divine Love.

TREASURED MEMORIES

Continued from page 1

Baba gave a spiritual discourse, the mood in the hall was charged and uplifted. On a couple of occasions when Baba appeared truly displeased, we all felt it immediately, our joyful world in His company collapsing. Then, in a flash, it would be over, with the person involved asking and being given His forgiveness. All instantly forgotten, as if it never happened.

Baba was so human in how He related to us that in this intimate atmosphere, when things became too boisterous or got out of hand, He had to sometimes clap and sign, “Don’t forget, I am God.” Everybody around Baba sought His gaze and was drawn to be close to Him. To be singled out by a glance, a small gesture, a wink, the smallest word, would send the heart leaping to the moon.

There came a time when Baba put some limits in place: we could come only when He called. In 1965 (or ‘66) the instruction was for no one to come to Guruprasad. But those of us who were used to being there with Him came to Pune anyway, not expecting to be called by Him. In my mother’s words, to “breathe the air

He breathed.” But Baba allowed us to come to see Him a few times. The following year, He said explicitly, “do not come to Pune at all.” In December 1968, at Meherazad, I saw Baba in person for the last time.

I treasure my times with Baba—the sahasvas programs, the East-West Gathering, and the daily meetings with Him in more informal settings. These occasions make up the most beloved moments of my life. My heart quickens with joy when I recall that I met God, but it all seems like a dream now.

Once on a walk with Eruch at Meherazad, reflecting on my childhood memories, I spoke of regretting that I didn’t really understand the value of being with Him adequately until later, as an adult. But Eruch corrected me. He said it was better to have been a kid with

Baba. “The adult mind comes with so much baggage. But to the innocent child, He can most easily impart what He has to give.”



Baba giving sadra and khushthi to Falu during his Navjote ceremony at Guruprasad, 1960

WHAT IS THE AVATAR MEHER BABA TRUST?

CREATED IN 1959 under Meher Baba’s direction, the Avatar Meher Baba Trust has the purpose of fulfilling the objectives in the Trust Deed set out by Baba and the Trustees He appointed. The Trust Deed calls for the maintenance of Avatar Meher Baba’s Tomb; for the creation of pilgrim facilities; for educational, medical, and other charitable services; for estate development and procurement of sources of water; for the advancement of Avatar Meher Baba’s love-message through melas, museums, lectures, publications, and the arts; and for spiritual training.

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For Reservations to Stay at Meherabad:
FOR MEHER PILGRIM RETREAT: pimco@ambppct.org
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Sassoon Hospital Memorial Inaugurated

THIS YEAR on Meher Baba’s Birthday, the Inauguration was held for the newly completed “Meher Baba Room” at Sassoon Hospital, in Pune. The ribbon was cut, and Baba lovers from Pune and Ahmednagar, as well as hospital officials, joined to honor the birthplace of the Avatar of our Age.

Baba was born in Sassoon Hospital on 25 February, 1894. The maternity ward at that time was a stone building, which was much later converted into a ward for leprosy and other skin diseases. In 1968, at Baba’s direction and arranged by Adi K. Irani, a marble plaque was installed on an exterior wall near-by announcing the birthplace of Meher Baba. For many years Baba lovers visiting Pune could see this plaque and at least the exterior of the old maternity building.

In about 2009, the Trust learned that, as part of reconstruction projects at Sassoon Hospital, this old building was to be torn down and a new, eleven-story building to be built in its place. The Trust was permitted to salvage materials from the room Baba was born in during the demolition phase of the project. Later the Trust was granted a room on the first floor of the new building to use as a memorial of the Avatar’s birthplace. It took many

years to build the new building and to prepare the room for Baba, which was done by the Trust.

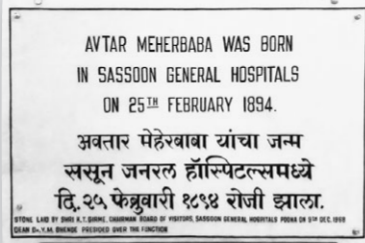
Using the original carved stones surrounding the windows, the window and door frames and shutters, the marble tiles from the floor, and the marble plaque installed in 1968, the Trust team created a beautiful, charming space to honor Baba. The walls are adorned with pictures of Baba and information about the history of His birth and the memorial.

The room is located in the approximate place of the original room in the old stone maternity ward, as close as we can imagine to the actual location of His birth. It is located in a hall which,

though not open yet, will be used for administrative offices, and it is near an entrance, so will be easy for pilgrims to visit. At this time it is not open to visitors, as the lower floors of the building are still in the final stages of construction. Soon this memorial will be available for visitors for generations to come as the location of the birth of Avatar Meher Baba.



The old maternity ward building, now demolished



The plaque, which was displayed on an external wall for years, recovered and installed in the Meher Baba Room



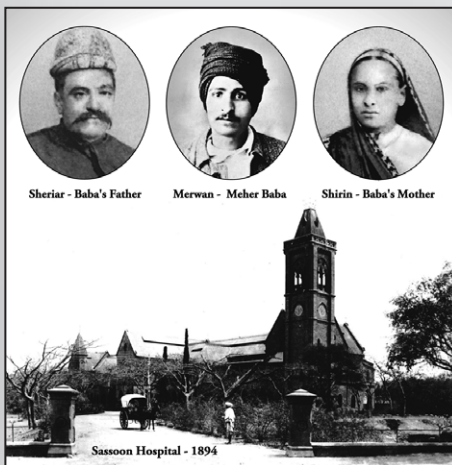
Interior of the room, showing original door, window, and floor tiles



View of the back of one wing of the new building; the arched window is Baba’s room



Beautifully incongruous, the original stone frame and window mark the Meher Baba Room in the administrative hall of the new building



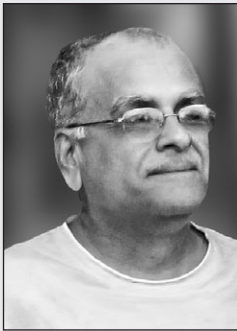
One of the framed pictures on the wall in the Meher Baba Room

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN

*“Mine you always were
and mine you will always remain,
whether there or here.”*

MEHER BABA

Dear Baba family,
Jai Meher Baba.



Eruch would often recount in Mandali Hall how Baba would have Adi K. Irani tearing his hair out at the seemingly impossible task of keeping the accounts balanced. Adi could see no way that all Baba's out-goings could possibly be covered by incomings. Yet Baba, like the eye at the centre of the storm, remained calm. And sure enough, by the end of the month both sides of the balance sheet would match perfectly. During this time of great turmoil, we have to hope and trust that Baba's eye, or nazar, is firmly on us all, when every April the Trust Office becomes a beehive of accountants, clerical staff, and heavy-spectacled auditors keeping long hours for weeks of the summer's soaring temperatures. This flurry of activity precedes the closing of books and preparation of financial year statements for the board of trustees as well as governmental and regulatory departments.

Beloved Baba has been churning the pot as always, especially vigorously over the past two years. COVID-19 has brought about a natural change in the perspective of those who love Him. For the period of total lockdown, when His Samadhi, Meherabad, and Meherazad were unreachable, a new consciousness evolved, driving us to look inward to find Beloved Baba's Presence and Companionship. And even when the Samadhi was partially re-opened, it was not possible to

offer flowers or receive prasad. This underlined the external nature of such trimmings of pilgrimage, making us turn our gaze to a pure and simple approach to the Beloved, devoid of all ritual.

Home Affairs Ruling Affects Donations

All charities in India are required to register with the government and get approval to receive donations from donors who are not Indian citizens. This registration is renewed every five years. The Ministry of Home Affairs has recently denied the renewal applications of thousands of organizations in India for receiving these foreign funds. We are making all efforts to get the approval renewed as early as possible.

Although we cannot accept foreign donations now, we encourage Trustwallas and Meher Baba organizations to continue to collect the love offerings from Baba lovers and keep the funds on account till such time that we will be able to accept them.

Tree planting

Afforestation work at Meherabad and Meherazad is continuing, with many of the trees planted at Meherabad and Meherazad coming from seeds and grafts of trees that existed during Baba's time, blessed by His sight and touch. At Meherabad, the view corridors from the MPR to the Samadhi have recently been planted with neem and banyan trees. At Meherazad, we have developed two orchards of the “mast” mango tree and chikoo tree that Baba's father, Sheriarji, planted at Baba House in Poona. Afforestation at Meherazad also includes local trees that are fast disappearing and trees of special spiritual significance in present and past Advents. But mostly, afforestation of the lands surrounding Meherazad is with trees planted during Baba's time by His Beloved Mehera.

Medical and Educational Projects

The Trust's medical and educational charitable activities may not appear at the forefront, but much of the Trust's resources are focused on these facilities. The heart quality of Seva—serving Baba with love in the many—is what brings these buildings to life. And the benefit to the surrounding communities from these Trust services remains unquantifiable. During the pandemic, donations were made by the Trust to central and state governments. It rendered help in kind—beds, medical equipment, grain, cooking oil, groceries, toiletries, etc., at the local level. An isolation ward was also established in Meherabad to help the overstretched health department.

A worthy feature to note is the recent addition of new and sophisticated equipment to upgrade the ophthalmology department at the Meherabad and Meherazad dispensaries. And after a long hiatus, children are now back at school with two new school buses purchased for Meher English School, since (in accordance with Maharashtra Motor Vehicles rules) the old ones have exceeded their permissible life-span of 15 years.

AVATAR MEHER BABA KI JAI

Framroze Mistry, Chairman
Avatar Meher Baba Perpetual
Public Charitable Trust

*“People call Me the Lord of the Universe,
but I am the servant of the Universe.
I am the Washer-Man come to cleanse
the dirt of Humanity.”*

MEHER BABA

GOPI SELECTED AS TRUSTEE

On 14th May 2022, the Board of Trustees selected Gopala Krishna Meher Kala, known as Gopi, as a trustee of the Avatar Meher Baba PPC Trust, the Avatar Meher Baba Trust (“Firstly”), the Meherazad Public Charitable Trust, and Meher Free Dispensary (Meherazad). Gopi was born in January 1974 in Hyderabad, India, to a family that boasts



The new Trustee, Gopi

five generations of Baba lovers. His maternal great-grandfather, Shri. N.S. Prakasa Rao, met Beloved Baba for the first time in 1958, and he started the first Baba center in Hyderabad in the early 1960s.

Gopi has contributed his services to a variety of Trust activities over the years. And Baba lovers from East and West will easily recall Gopi's beautiful voice and moving performances praising his Beloved through music at Meherabad and Meherazad.

After graduating in engineering, Gopi has been working in the IT industry, and is currently employed at Bank of America in Hyderabad. Gopi is married to Manjula, and has two daughters, Meher Nidhi and Meher Eesha. They live in Hyderabad along with Gopi's father, Sanjeeva Rao, and plan to move to Meherabad in the near future.

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY © MEHER NICHIF

HISTORICAL TOUR OF MEHER NAZAR



HIGHLIGHTS OF THIS TOUR INCLUDE:

- Upasni Maharaj and Meher Baba's Room
- The place Baba and the mandali stayed in 1923 for the occasion of Rustom and Freiny's wedding
- The room where Baba kept a 7-day seclusion
- The room where Mehera stayed in 1924 following her “first orders from Baba”
- Site of 1954 “Small Darshan” during the Three Incredible Weeks
- Many historical offices, such as Mani's office, Adi K. Irani's, Eruch's table, Bha'u's office

One activity pilgrims can once again enjoy is the tour of Meher Nazar, the Trust Compound in Ahmednagar. Home of the main offices of the Avatar Meher Baba Trust and the Ahmednagar Baba Centre, the compound is also an important part of Baba history here in Ahmednagar. It was originally called Khushru Quarters and figures in many Baba stories. Proceeding to Meher Nazar by Trust bus on certain days, pilgrims are guided there by one of the residents on an historical tour that includes the telling of stories connected with this place.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF MEHER NAZAR PUBLICATIONS

Baba in Khushru Quarters, Ahmednagar

FALU SHARES TREASURED MEMORIES

On Monday, February 28, 2022, the Board of Trustees of Avatar Meher Baba Trust Meher Baba Trust selected Framroze J. Mistry, known as Falu, to serve as the Chairman of the Avatar Meher Baba Perpetual Public Charitable Trust, the Avatar Meher Baba Trust (Firstly), and the Meherazad Public Charitable Trust.

Falu was born in Mumbai in February 1952. His parents, Jamshed (Jim) and Roda Mistry (affectionately called “Rodi” by Baba), were close disciples of Baba. His aunt was Amavaz Dadachanji and his great-uncle was Chanji, one of Baba's closest mandali. Growing up in a family so devoted to Baba, Falu spent memorable days as a child and teenager in Beloved Baba's divine and loving company in Mumbai, Meherazad, and mostly in Guruprasad.

Falu shares with us some of the most treasured memories from his life with Baba:

MY CONTACT WITH BABA was right from birth, even before my birth. On 22 February, 1952, Baba was returning to Meherazad from a visit to Ashiana, the Bombay residence of Arnavaaz and Nariman. As He passed through the Dadar neighborhood on such occasions, the Dadachanji and Mistry family would wait on the opposite side of the divided boulevard to wave at Baba and the women mandali as the car would slowly drive past. On some occasions, like the one I am relating, Baba had the car stop and called the family to come over for hugs and greetings. While greeting my mother Rodi, Baba snapped His fingers 2 or 3 times next to her pregnant belly and indicated, “It's time now.” Within a few hours, my mother went to the hospital in labor, and I was born the next morning. Naturally, my parents informed Him of my birth and asked what name should be given. Through Baba's secretary Adi, the message came: “With a lot of My love, name him Framroze.”

Growing up, my elder brother Meherwan, my younger brother Sarosh, and I had many cherished times with Baba during summers at Guruprasad in Pune. With Baba's approval, our family stayed in a simple rented room near Guruprasad, in the old, dilapidated mansion called Mobo's. We stayed there every summer for several years, in order to be near Baba when He was in Guruprasad. Baba also visited us there; sometimes He surprised us with unannounced visits, causing my mum to go into a tizzy trying to hide the clutter of three boys!

News UGGETS |||| TRUST EVENTS INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS

PILGRIM ACCOMMODATIONS: Meherabad accommodations are open during the summer months when we normally close, March-June, as a one-time exception to compensate for the lockdown from early 2020 until recently. Meherazad will remain closed and will reopen, Baba willing, on 3 July 2022. Over several months, limitations and extra requirements for pilgrims have been gradually lifted, in accordance with government rules and the continued decrease in the prevalence of the COVID virus. Fortunately, Arangaon and Pimpalgaon-Malvi are at present COVID-free, although there have been sporadic local surges throughout India and we must continue to be vigilant. To everyone's delight, a few pilgrim activities have resumed now, including film showings, tours, and the museum is open once a week

SAMADHI PROTOCOLS: At last Baba lovers may enter the Samadhi again. Restrictions there have been somewhat lessened. While masks are not required, queuing in the portico is with social distancing, and use of hand sanitizer is required.

Inside, a railing has been placed in front of the sacred marble. All are requested not to touch the threshold, the frame of the door, the railing, or the covered marble of Baba's tomb inside the Samadhi, but rather to pay obeisance to the Beloved with folded hands. Sitting inside is not allowed at this time. A sitting area has been created with benches in an extension to the portico.

SILENCE DAY: After two years of cancelled events at Meherabad, the Trust has announced that, due to the waning of the pandemic, accommodations in Hostel D and Meher Pilgrim Retreat (MPR) will be available for Silence Day 2022. Silence Day is July 10, the date that Baba lovers honor Baba each year by keeping silence for 24 hours.

THE MEN MANDALI'S GRAVES at Lower Meherabad, which had been sinking and cracking because of the soft soil beneath, have been restored on a solid foundation.

ON THE HILL: The rear portion of the compound wall around Meher Retreat that was built in 1938 is being restored using the original well rubble. Photos from the late 1930s are being used to guide the rebuilding as accurately as possible.

THE NEW ENTRY GATE at lower Meherabad has been installed, on the road leading straight back to the hostels and the hospital.



DHUNI: Restoration has been done on the Dhuni platform at lower Meherbad. Care was taken to save and repair the original *farsi* (stone flooring) pieces from Baba's time, so they can remain on the platform, even if they have broken into pieces.

Restoration of the compound wall around Meher Retreat

Continued on page 4

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF TED JUSSON

Meher Retreat Maintenance

The Trust has almost completed extensive maintenance on the Meher Retreat building on Meherabad Hill, using skilled craftsmen and guidance from historic building conservationists. We sought advice from Architect and Conservationist, Maya Vaidya (M.Arch, A.I.I.A.) of Aurangabad, who personally inspected the building and provided a report identifying problems and recommending solutions and materials.

Roof tiles, gutters, and external woodwork, including eave boards, handrails, doors, and windows, required skilled archival repair work to preserve this important historic building. Waterproofing, plaster, and painting have also been done. A full team of skilled masons, carpenters, and painters were employed to execute the work.

Meher Retreat, the hilltop yellow building with its impressive tower and

Baba's flag flying at the top, plays an important part in the story of Baba's life, and in the life of Meherabad today. It was an old military water tank during British times, and it was used by Baba for the accommodation of the Meher Ashram boys starting in 1927. The section of the old tank known as the East Room was used as a residence for Mehera and the other women mandali in the 1930s. The upper story was constructed in 1938, and it was used to house the Western women mandali who came to stay with Baba.

Today this building holds the archival East Room as it was under Mehera's loving care, the Meherabad Museum exhibiting articles from Baba's life, the Library, and the multipurpose Study Hall on the upper floor. Its maintenance is a crucial part of preserving the monuments of Baba's Advent.



Work in process: waterproof membrane and new roof tiles