

Gift of God

Source:

Gift of God

by Arnavaz N. Dadachanji

Published by

Naosherwan Anzar

Beloved Books

Copyright© 1996 Meherazad Trust for Avatar Meher Baba

All Quotes by Meher Baba copyright© Avatar Meher Baba
Perpetual Public Charitable Trust. Used by permission.

Photograph on page 50 by Elizabeth C. Patterson
copyright© Jane Barry Haynes. Used by permission.

International Standard Book Number: 0-9613907-5-1

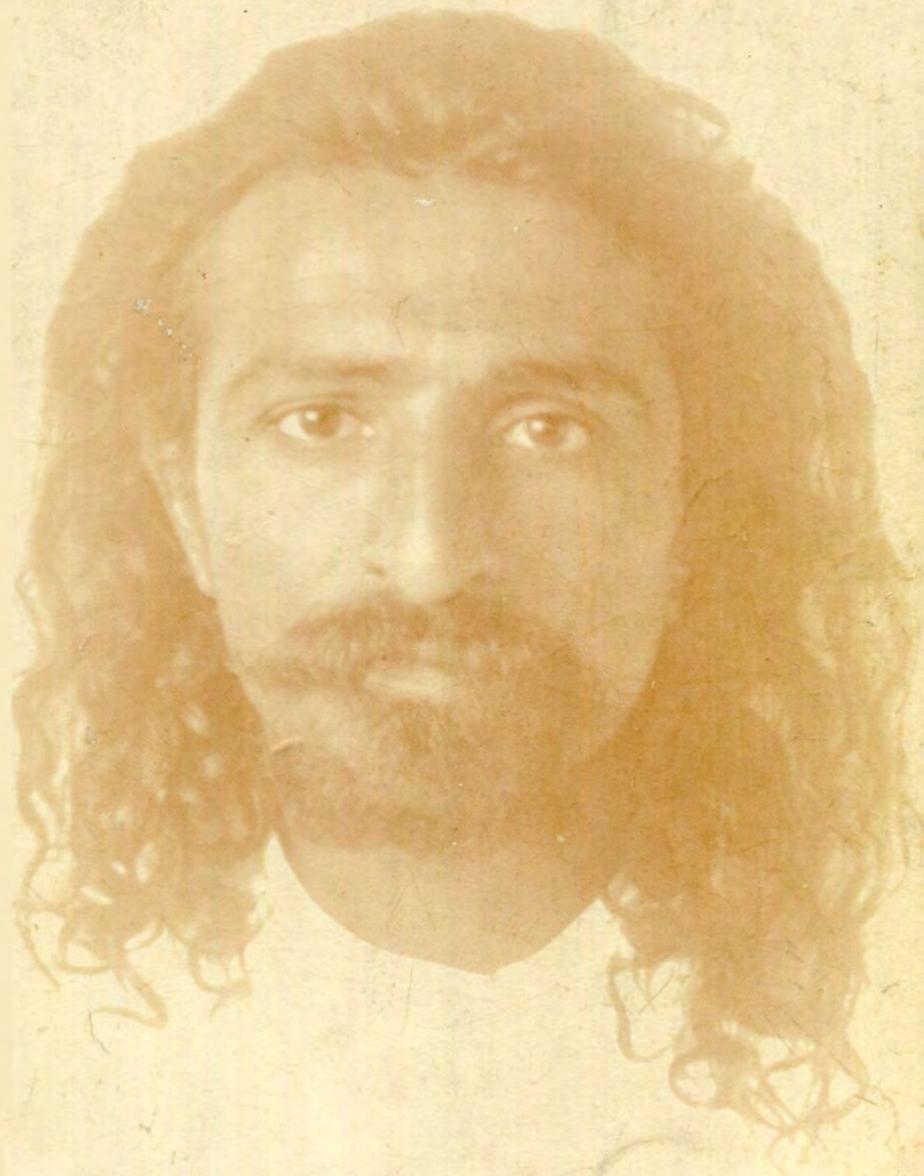
eBooks at the Avatar Meher Baba Trust Web Site

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

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

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

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

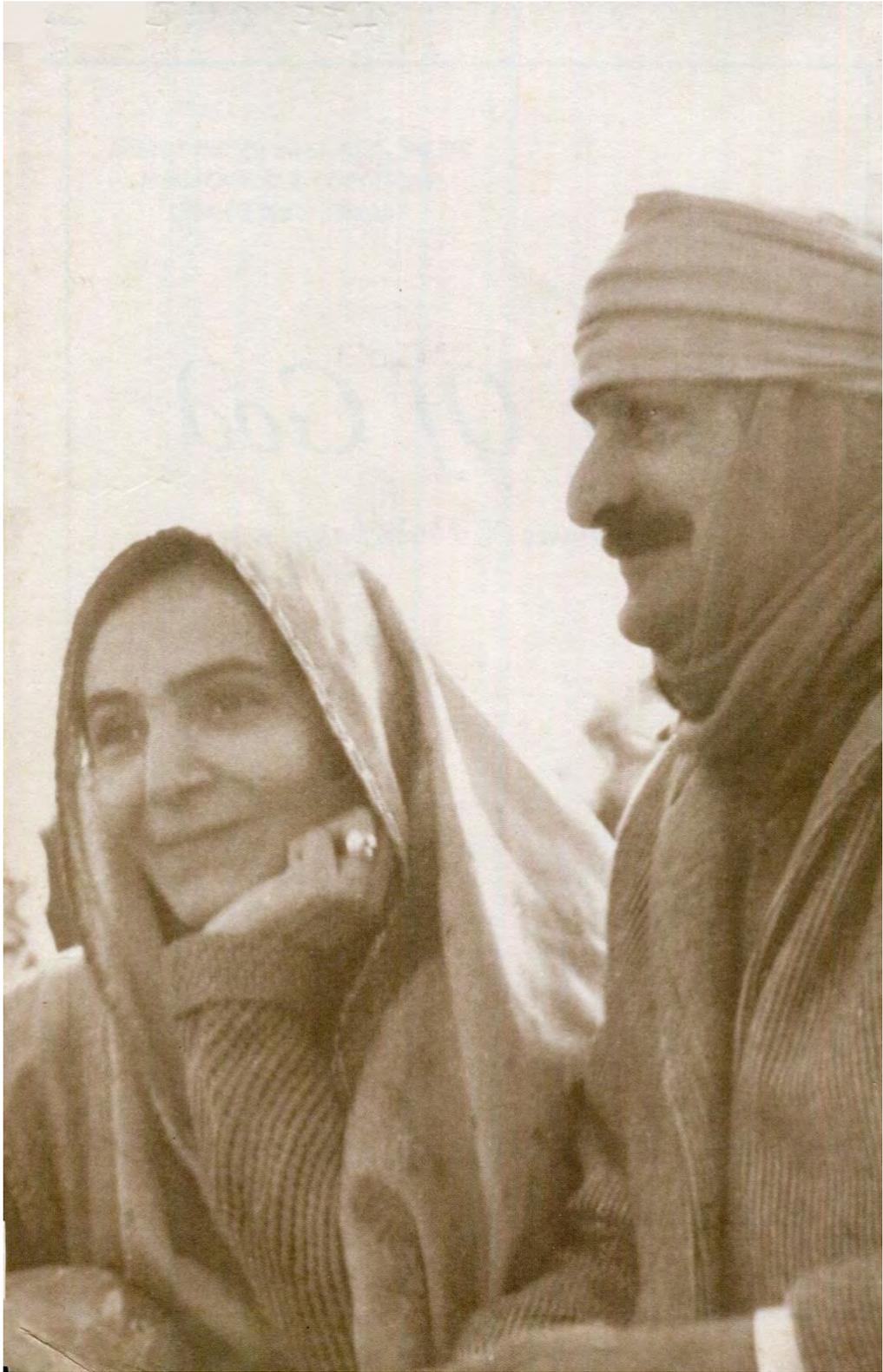


Gift Of God

Gift Of God

Arnavaz N. Dadachanji

BELOVED BOOKS



Gift of God

Dedication

*To my Beloved God Meher Baba
and His Beloved Mehera*

*In Memory of Nariman,
whose love for his Beloved Meher Baba
was selfless and total*

Gift of God

Gift of God

by Arnavaz N. Dadachanji

Published by
Naosherwan Anzar
Beloved Books

Copyright© 1996 Meherazad Trust for Avatar Meher Baba

All Quotes by Meher Baba copyright© Avatar Meher Baba
Perpetual Public Charitable Trust. Used by permission.

Photograph on page 50 by Elizabeth C. Patterson
copyright© Jane Barry Haynes. Used by permission.

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise without prior written permission of the publisher, except by a reviewer who wishes to quote brief passages in connection with a review written for inclusion in a magazine, newspaper, or broadcast.

For information write:
Naosherwan Anzar,
Beloved Books
599 Edison Drive,
East Windsor, NJ 08520-5207

International Standard Book Number: 0-9613907-5-1

Cover: Meher Baba, 1925
Frontispiece: Meher Baba and Mehera seated on the banks of the
Ganges River in Benares, 1939

PRINTED IN THE USA

I love you.

Do not worry about your weaknesses.

Eventually they will go.

Even if they linger, love will one day

consume them.

Everything disappears in the

Ocean of Love.

Because I love you, you have

a pool of love within you.

When you feel wretched, when you

fall in your weakness, have

a dip in that pool of love.

Refresh yourself in that pool of

my love within you.

It is always there.

Even if you wash your weaknesses

every day in that pool,

it will remain clear.

Don't worry. Baba loves you.

That is what really matters.

- Avatar Meher Baba

Preface

Beloved Meher Baba, the Avatar of the Age, gave me a supreme gift, the highest gift any soul can receive from the God-Man: the opportunity to live with His Physical Form in as close proximity, from childhood, as one would with one's loving mother and father. How can I express what this gift has meant to me? How can I explain? As Beloved Baba said, "God is not to be understood but to be experienced." All I can offer in this book is my experience of living my life with Him.

Meher Baba captured the hearts of all my family when I was only eight years old. From the first moment we saw His beautiful form, we were spontaneously drawn to Him, and He gradually deepened our faith and developed our understanding of His ways. My life with Baba shows clearly how He draws to Himself His chosen ones, who knowingly and even unknowingly yearn to be with Him. Throughout the years Beloved Baba brought everyone in my family closer and closer into the orbit of His perfect love. Baba's love and grace were His gifts, not only to us, but to all the fortunate generations of Dadachanjis who have since been born with a deep connection to and abiding love for the God-Man.

Some might say that I dedicated my life to Beloved Baba but, really speaking, it was He who determined that for me. None of us has the capacity to do anything for or give anything to the Highest of the High. He comes down as the God-Man to our level and He is the only one with true dedication. He dedicates His Supreme Self not only for humanity, but for stones, animals, and everything else in the universe. It is He who does everything. It is Baba's grace, love and compassion which give us the opportunity to do what He wants. And what He wants is for us to place our hands in His, trusting Him to lead us wherever He wants us to tread and travel.

Baba told us to be natural with Him, yet He expected us always to hold Him in the highest respect. He said, "I come down to your level, but never bring me down to your level." Baba gave us the human side of God in order to show us how to love,

Gift of God

sacrifice, suffer, be practical and serve. Throughout all, Baba's purity and divinity shone through His humanness, but sometimes when we became forgetful, He would have to say to us, "Remember, I am God."

There was no exact moment when I accepted Baba as All in All. Over time He was to me my Father and Mother, my Companion and my One True Friend. Being with Meher Baba and following Him was a natural and spontaneous process of growing spiritually. By growing spiritually I mean learning to love God as He should ultimately be loved. Beloved Baba taught me to give my all to Him and to live my life for Him while living a normal life in the world. This, then, is the story of my loving Meher Baba.

Although I wanted to resign to Baba's every wish, my human weaknesses stood in the way. In His loving compassion, Meher Baba said, "I accept each one of you as you are, with all your weaknesses," and He gradually led me to obey and surrender to Him with rock-like faith that eventually awakened love. This foundation of love enabled me to make the Herculean effort that was necessary to overcome my weaknesses and endure the pain and suffering that ultimately brought about detachment within me.

It was Beloved Baba who prompted me to start working on this book. Although years earlier I had completed a very rough manuscript about my life with Him, I had put it away, thinking that my family or someone else might do something with it after I died. Then, in October of 1991, I was about to go to bed one night when a voice within me said, "Your time is short. Print your book." I said to myself, "Oh Baba, there is so much work to be done, and I haven't the physical or mental energy to complete the task. I don't even have a title for the book." And the voice said, "Gift of God." I immediately remembered a scene that had taken place twenty-five years earlier. One evening in 1967 Baba was sitting on His bed in Meherazad before retiring, and His beloved Mehera and I were alone with Him. In the midst of our conversation dear Mehera had suddenly asked, "Baba, what is the meaning of Arnavaz?" Beloved Baba replied, "Gift of God." Tears welled up in my eyes, and in the great force coming from Baba to me I had felt that He was telling me more than simply the meaning of my name. As I contemplated that distant moment with Baba

Gift of God

and Mehera, I knew the Eternal Beloved had given me yet another gift, and I had to respond to His wish that I share with others the story of my life with Him. I offer this book, hoping that the lessons I learned over the years - obedience, surrender, detachment - will be of benefit to those who read about them and that my words may bring comfort to those who are struggling to please the God-Man.

Introduction

Avatar Meher Baba inwardly prompted Arnavaz Dadachanji to write about her life with Him some twenty years after He had dropped His body. Not intending simply to write an autobiography, Arnavaz set out to show, through the details of her life, the way in which Baba awakened her to both love and an understanding that did not come from reading, studying, or being taught. In her words, "knowledge flowered as love did, straight from the heart."

In her early years with Meher Baba, Arnavaz imagined living as an ascetic, thinking that true renunciation had nothing to do with life in the world. Certainly her dreams would never have included a husband and a lovely apartment in Bombay - yet this was exactly what Baba had ordained. And in resigning herself to His will, she found her life's meaning in serving Him through all the routine details of daily living.

Because Arnavaz lived in the world, most of us will find much to relate to as we read her story. It is a good deal easier to imagine making arrangements to meet Baba and the mandali at the train station, or cooking and cleaning in preparation for one of His visits, than it is, say, to imagine accompanying Him on the New Life. In reading about Arnavaz we see that *through the ordinary*, from the smallest of circumstances to the most difficult crises, she learned the lessons essential to spiritual life: obedience, love, resignation, surrender, understanding and, ultimately, detachment. Certainly we cannot emulate the specifics of her life, but in the end there is only one story - the story of the soul's journey to God. While the circumstances of the journey are unique to each person, the same thematic notes are always present.

From her first lesson in literal obedience, Arnavaz grew more and more determined to please Baba. As she kept her focus on Him, learning to pay attention to seemingly unimportant details, her life itself became an act of devotion. Arnavaz describes the process: "You cease caring about what you want, you stop struggling with what is, you remain open to all possibilities, and

Gift of God

you become completely won to His work." This is not to say that she escaped worry, grief, or the disappointment and loss that all human beings must endure along the way. But she shows us how Baba gradually brought about detachment. Meher Baba asks His lovers to abandon their own will and to seek His, and the way in which Arnavaz bowed to His wish, and thus became resigned to His will, can serve to inspire all who are struggling to love Baba as He should be loved.

The internal order that Baba gave Arnavaz to write her book came at a time when she wanted simply to bask in her relationship with Him. Fulfilling this unexpected responsibility has been a constant struggle in the face of her declining health and advancing age - not to mention the demands placed on her by an ever-increasing number of visiting Baba lovers who seek her comfort and advice, knowing they can discuss with her their most intimate problems. The time that Arnavaz has devoted to this manuscript exemplifies her absolute surrender to Baba. She has told her story because Beloved Baba asked her to - and the result is truly a *Gift of God*.

Deborah Mann Smith

Nancy B. Wall

August 1994

Chapter One

*"No one requires an
introduction to me, for no
one is a stranger to me."*

- Meher Baba

The story of my life with Beloved *Avatar** Meher Baba begins with my uncle, Framroze H. Dadachanji. He was one of Meher Baba's early mandali (a term Baba used to refer to His intimate disciples), and he served as the first link in the chain connecting all the members of my family to Baba. In a sense, the story starts on Christmas Day, 1916, when my Uncle Framroze, at the age of 23, was married in a double wedding with my parents. After a few years, however, his wife left him for his best friend, a medical student. The family had warned Framroze of this friend's visits to his home while he was at work, but my uncle was so good-hearted and trusting that he suspected nothing. He loved his wife and he was heartbroken when she left. In those days divorce was something quite unheard of, considered disgraceful - so disgraceful that when my grandmother heard talk of divorce, she spoke of taking her own life. Fortunately my father and his brothers were able to persuade her that a divorce would be wise in these circumstances so that Framroze would be free of any responsibility for his wife's actions. The divorce was granted in 1920, simply adding to my uncle's misery.

Framroze's career was also beset with misfortune. While managing the Globe Cinema in Bombay, he had become interested in owning a theatre. He left his job and entered into a partnership, becoming co-owner of another cinema house called The Madeleine. They showed good movies from Hollywood and

* See glossary for definitions of italicized words and unfamiliar terminology.

Gift of God



*My uncle Framroze Dadachanji (on extreme left)
at the entrance to the Madeleine Cinema
in Bombay, 1923*

social dramas as well as quality Indian films depicting the lives of Ram and Krishna.

Outwardly, the business appeared to be flourishing because there was always a full house; actually, the cinema was running at a loss because the partner was embezzling the profits. Again Framroze's trusting nature seemed to be failing him. His partner finally absconded with what cash there was, and my uncle had to borrow money to pay off large debts. Framroze, who was very honest, had many trusting friends. One of them, convinced that my uncle would never fail him, lent him some money, but when time proved Framroze unable to repay the loan, the friend was very angry. He refused to believe that my uncle was really in debt and accused him of not wanting to repay the money. Uncle Framroze became increasingly frustrated, sinking into an overwhelming depression about the course of his life. Not only was his marriage over and his business partnership a fraud, but now he was hopelessly in debt. Concluding that life was not worth

Gift of God

living, he decided to commit suicide and one day, with this thought in mind, he went to Chowpatty Beach to throw himself into the sea.

I was not there to witness the incredible beginning of my family's connection to our Beloved Meher Baba. But I can imagine my dear uncle sitting alone on the almost deserted beach, staring in despair at the ocean, unaware that his destiny was about to change, ordained by One he had never met - never even heard of.

On that very day Meher Baba and a few of His mandali, including a friend of Framroze's, Naval Talati, were strolling on the same beach. Baba saw my uncle, a solitary figure in the distance, and sent Naval to find out who the man was and what he was doing. As Naval approached, he recognized Framroze and asked, as Baba had ordered him to, "What are you doing here?" My uncle, not wanting anyone to know what he was planning, replied that he was just sitting on the beach. Naval returned to Baba and told Him that he knew Framroze, and he was a very unhappy man. Baba said, "Bring him to Me," and when Naval went back and briefly told my uncle about Baba, he got up and followed his friend. Approaching Baba and looking into His eyes, Uncle Framroze experienced such a surge of love and compassion that his thoughts of suicide vanished. When Baba told him to come the next day to Bharucha Building in Dadar, where He was staying, my uncle was so overwhelmed by feelings he did not understand that he found himself instantly agreeing. All he knew was that he felt totally committed to Baba, whose beauty and magnetic personality had touched his heart so deeply.

The next morning Baba didn't wait for Uncle Framroze to come, but sent Naval to bring him from his house. Baba, who observed silence from 1925 until the end of His life, was still speaking at this time, and when Framroze arrived, He asked my uncle if there was anything he wanted to say. Baba's compassion was so powerful that Framroze could not contain his troubles, and he poured out his heart and soul to Baba, who took my dear uncle in His arms. Framroze felt so renewed that he did not want to leave Baba. In Baba's Presence his painful past disappeared, and his spirit was uplifted with a love that filled him. When Baba asked him, "Will you do what I tell you?" my uncle said that he

Gift of God

would. Baba said, "Leave everything and come to Me. Join My *ashram* near Ahmedriagar. Your love for your wife is only *maya* [illusion]. I will show you the highest type of love." Framroze agreed immediately. Baba then instructed him to wind up his business so that he would be completely free. Of course Baba gave him some time to do this, but He began my uncle's spiritual training immediately. At this time Baba also began calling him by the name of Chanji.

For quite a few months my uncle went back and forth between Bombay and Meherabad, Baba's ashram. Baba also visited Bombay and one time took His men and women mandali to Chanji's cinema to have a meal there. Exactly at the time the show was over and the rest of the crowd was leaving, Baba and His mandali entered the gates and made their way inside the cinema with big vessels of cooked food on their heads. Because of the stringent restrictions Baba placed on the mandali, allowing them only one or two sets of clothing and few amenities, the men looked somewhat unkempt with their unshaven faces and worn clothes. The women had white scarves tied around their heads, so they looked old-fashioned and funny. Chanji felt embarrassed as he led Baba and the mandali through a crowd of curious onlookers. For Chanji this was the first of many lessons in humility.

One day during this same period Chanji was walking along the street when he saw the friend who had lent him money. Chanji tried to cross the street in order to avoid a meeting, but the man saw him and called out. Although Chanji was nervous, he could not avoid a confrontation. To his surprise, his friend apologized for his past abuses, embraced Chanji and said, "Don't worry about the money. You are my good friend. I know that if you had it, you would definitely pay me back." Chanji felt that his friend's change of heart was somehow a gift from Baba, and his faith in and surrender to Baba increased all the more.

Our family was initially worried when Uncle Chanji joined Baba in 1924. We were Zoroastrian, recognizing only God and Zoroaster, His Prophet, as worthy of worship, and we had no understanding of the concept of "master" or "*guru*." When Chanji tried to explain, the family could neither comprehend these ideas nor accept them. But after all that had happened to him, they

Gift of God

wanted him to do whatever made him happy and never interfered in his going to live with Baba. In early 1927 my father, who was a building contractor, was asked to construct a hostel for an



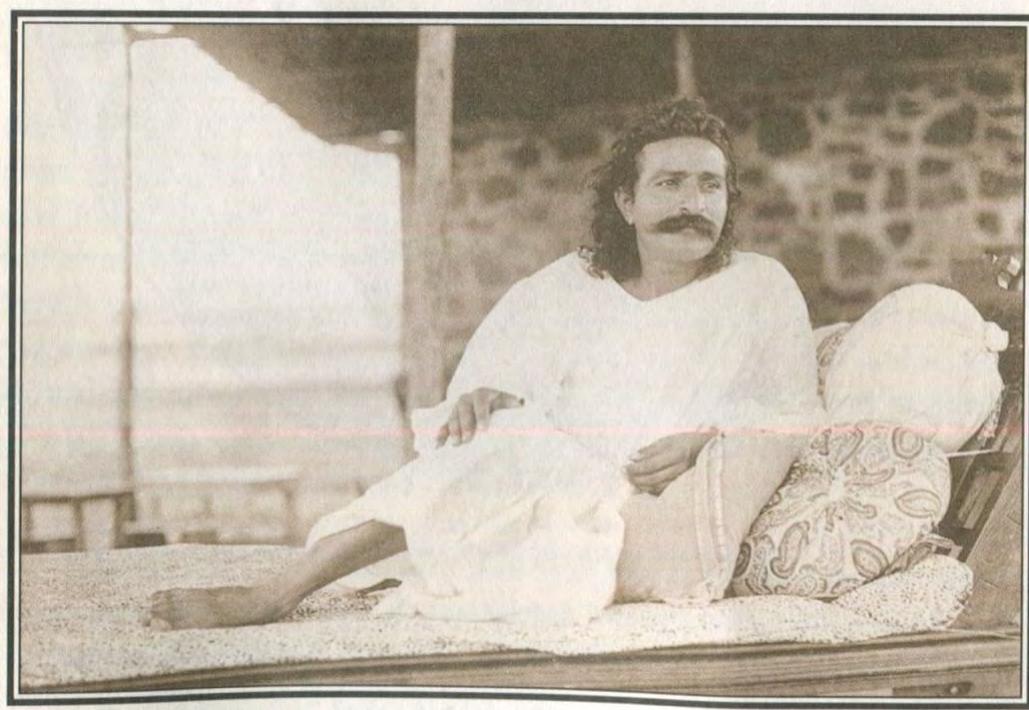
I was eight years old when I first met Baba

engineering college in Poona. I was eight years old when the family went to stay there. Uncle Chanji, who had by then lived in the ashram for three years, was anxious for all of us to meet Baba.

Gift of God

He was delighted when Baba finally told him to ask us to come from Poona. Chanji, in order to persuade us, suggested that since we were so close to Ahmednagar (about 100 kilometers), we should bring a picnic lunch and come to meet Baba. Although my parents did not understand anything about spirituality or know the significance of the Master's call, the idea of a picnic was very appealing to my mother, and my father agreed. Our family included my mother Bachamai and my father Naoroji; my two sisters Nargis, four, and Roda, two; my two-month-old brother Tehmton, and me. We were joined by my paternal grandmother and Meherji Karkaria, my mother's cousin. Meherji was studying engineering in Poona, and Uncle Chanji had also persuaded him to meet Baba. We rented a small bus for the journey, and although my parents hadn't told me where we were going, I was very excited by the idea of riding in the bus, which was a rare treat. We started out with our picnic lunch, not knowing the glorious path we were travelling or the ways it would change the whole course of our lives.

We arrived in Meherabad and entered the building that is now the *dharamshala*. Baba was awaiting us, seated on a couch, and



*Beloved Meher Baba as He looked when I saw Him
for the first time*

Gift of God

we sat around Him in a semicircle. From the moment I walked into the room, my eyes were fixed on Baba. He was dressed in a white *sadra*, and His shining dark brown hair flowed to His shoulders. His radiant face fascinated me. I knew nothing about who Baba was; I didn't even know His name, but I sat gazing at Him with wonder and He entered the very core of my heart. My young mind had no questions and did not try to understand who He was. The impact Beloved Baba had on me was so strong that today the memory of first meeting Him is still fresh and alive.

Along with being absolutely absorbed in Baba, I remember two incidents from that day. Baba had begun keeping silence and was communicating through the use of an alphabet board. Chanji, acting as interpreter, said to my grandmother, "Mother, Baba wants to know if you would like to ask Him anything." That made me wonder, *who is He? Why is my uncle asking Grandmother if she has any questions?* We had been with Baba for about an hour before He wanted us to have lunch. I remember that we walked across an open field to the old Post Office building, where the women rmandali were staying. As they had cooked rice and *dal* (lentils) for us, we ate what they had lovingly prepared and took the untouched picnic lunch, which we had thought would be the high point of the day, back with us to Poona.

These are my memories of first meeting Meher Baba; my father's diary speaks of the effect Baba had on my parents:

Starting from Poona in the morning in a small hired motor bus, we arrived at Meherabad before noon. We were called in the big hall where Baba was sitting on a low sofa. After enquiring about our health and other particulars in great detail, Baba served us lunch and told us thereafter to rest awhile. We were to meet Him again at 3 p.m. We were made to rest in a detached stone building near the railway lines, and then went back to Baba to be in His august presence. Baba took my newly born son, Tehmton, in His hands and caressed and patted him for awhile. I was simply gazing at Him all the while, looking at His bright illuminating face, emanating Divinity. With a napkin tied around His

Gift of God

forehead, His face looked enchanting and His eyes penetrated right into the core of my heart. We were asked to leave for Poona in the evening so that we would reach home before nightfall. My dear wife, Bachamai, was equally affected by the experience of meeting, for the first time, a Divine personality... and for days together, we spoke of nothing but Him.

Chapter Two

*"I do not want anything
else from you but the gift of
your obedience."*

- Meher Baba

Ten months later my father's work in Poona was completed and we returned home to Rustom Bagh, in the Byculla area of Bombay, where we shared a large third-floor apartment with my grandfather, my grandmother, my uncle and his wife. In those days joint family living was very common and with large families being the norm, relatives, friends and neighbours were always coming and going. After our first visit to Meherabad, Chanji, to whom the apartment also belonged, began to come frequently with Baba to Bombay. Baba often stayed with us between 1928 and 1933, so whoever happened to be there at the same time got to meet Him.

On one of Baba's visits Nariman, my paternal cousin from Karachi, then in India, was also there. He had just finished his secondary education and had come to spend some time with our grandparents, who hadn't seen him for a very long time. This was Nariman's first meeting with Baba. I remember that he bowed down to Baba, as the family told him to, but I don't recall much more about him from that visit. I was ten and he was fifteen. I was quite shy and kept away from boys; most likely we did not even look at each other, as in those days young boys and girls did not mix freely. We could never have guessed then what Beloved Baba would one day ask of us.

Whenever Baba came to our home, my parents would clean and vacate their room for Him. Baba never slept on anyone's bed in those days; He carried His own bedding with Him wherever He

Gift of God

went and would sleep in a corner on the floor. After Baba was made comfortable, we would sit around Him, not wanting to leave His side. I remember feeling such joy whenever Baba was in the house - those were very special times.

Baba always traveled with some of the men mandali, and they, including Uncle Chanji, would be accommodated on the broad enclosed verandah at the front of the apartment, where they slept in a row, side by side. Baba's mandali were quite ordinary and down to earth. Their spiritual training didn't involve leading ascetic lives, wearing saffron robes, or meditating cross-legged in a corner. Like other people, they did their daily chores, but they had always to remain alert to the rigorous demands of their Master, obeying His orders implicitly. Baba's guidance in all aspects of their lives was the source of an inner unfolding which came about through their willingness to obey and serve Him wholeheartedly. Sustained by the joy of living in close proximity to Baba, the mandali were able to bear the difficulties and suffering inherent in such a life.

One story concerning Masaji (the name means "mother's sister's husband"), Baba's uncle and one of His closest followers, clearly shows the high expectations Baba had of the mandali. Masaji had been given an order to set aside for Baba the cream that was removed from the milk each day. One day Baba did not ask for the cream, and it remained in the kitchen. About 9:30 that night Masaji decided Baba must not want the cream, and if he kept it until the next day, it would become rancid, as there was no refrigerator. Thinking that the cream should not be wasted, he ate it. Within fifteen minutes Baba sent for Masaji and asked for the cream. Upon hearing Masaji's confession that he had eaten it, Baba did not spare him; he was not new to Baba's ways and should have known better. Masaji had followed His own manner of thinking. His desire to eat cream had superseded his literal obedience of Baba's order, and he was reprimanded very strongly. Baba asked, "Why did you eat the cream? My order was that it be kept for Me. Why did you disobey? It is my *order* that is important. Even if the cream had become rancid, that has nothing to do with it. You are to obey My orders!"

Gift of God

Even those who didn't live with Baba were given the opportunity for His training, but His manner of dealing with new disciples was quite different from the way he dealt with the mandali. Baba began my mother's spiritual training with a small incident that showed her His wish that she be alert and responsive to His needs. Mother loved to cook for Baba, who was very fond of her *masoor* (lentils), and we all got to help in some way as she prepared the dal, rice and vegetables. Baba's habit in those days was to eat very small quantities at frequent intervals, so my mother always had food ready. The latest Baba had ever asked for food was 9:00, however, so she never kept food after that time. Then one night He wanted food at 10:00. My poor mother stood in front of Baba, terribly embarrassed, and confessed that no food was left. He simply said, "Don't worry." From that day on, however, my mother always had food ready for Baba any time, night or day. Without giving her a direct order, Baba gently drew from my mother, who was new to His ways, the desire to be ever attentive to His needs.

Using different methods appropriate to each person, Baba brought other members of our family closer to Him, even those whose devout Zoroastrian beliefs made accepting Him difficult. Chanji's father Hormasji, my paternal grandfather, was a very honest and religious man with complete faith in God. Although a Zoroastrian priest, he never practiced in the temple. He was a scholar and teacher who wrote a book used as a Persian text in schools, and his love for the language was such that he held free Persian classes for women in the evenings at our apartment. As a good Zoroastrian, my grandfather believed only in God the Almighty and Zoroaster the Prophet; he did not believe that the Prophet was God manifesting in human form. In those days we Zoroastrians hadn't heard the terms *Perfect Master* or *Sadguru*, and *saint* was the highest designation we had for a person of great spiritual status. Although my grandmother and the rest of us were already bowing down to Baba, Grandfather would just shake hands with Him, for he sincerely believed that one bowed down only to God and Zoroaster. But despite his beliefs, he respected Baba and never interfered in our relationship with Him. Grandfather always seemed quite happy when Baba came to stay with us and lovingly welcomed Him into our home.

Gift of God

Baba must have been coming to Rustom Bagh for about a year when my grandfather developed cancer of the esophagus. The cancer advanced until he found it difficult to swallow even water. Hearing of Grandfather's condition, Baba sent instructions through Chanji that my mother must feed him fish for three days. By that time mother had tremendous faith in Baba, and she managed to persuade Grandfather to try to eat the fish. Grandfather loved my mother very much and wanted to please her, but how could he eat fish when he could hardly swallow water? Mother coaxed him, saying that because Baba had said he should eat fish, he should try, even if he couldn't keep it down, just for the three days.

Mother cooked the fish and lovingly tried to feed it to him, even though he had great difficulty getting it down. The first day he threw it all up, and the same thing happened on the second day. On the third day he was so exasperated that he said, "It's no use. Don't give me any more fish." Mother said, "Throw it up, but just eat it." So Grandfather took it to please her. Again he vomited, this time releasing all the foreign matter that had choked his throat. That evening, very weak and thirsty after the ordeal of vomiting, he asked my mother for water. To her amazement, he drank a full glass! Grandfather felt this change in his condition to be a miracle. He allowed my mother to place a locket with Baba's picture under his pillow, where it stayed until he breathed his last. The cancer took his life a month or two later, but because of this experience he developed faith in Baba, who in His mercy allowed my grandfather to feel love for Him before he died.

Another interesting story about my family and the way Baba developed our faith and love has to do with Dara, my second youngest brother, who was born in 1931. Dara developed double pneumonia when he was six months old. In those days there was no treatment for pneumonia except to apply a poultice of antiphlogiston (a paste that was supposed to draw all the congestion from the lungs) to the chest. There was little hope for such a tiny baby to recover.

Baba was in Bombay, this time staying in the family home of Kaka Baria, one of His mandali. Since Baba had not placed any

Gift of God

restrictions on our visiting Him, we could go at any time, and when we went for His *darshan*, my mother told Baba that Dara had double pneumonia. As we were taking our leave, Kaka Baria came to us and said, "Do you know what happened? Yesterday Baba, out of the blue, told me, 'Bring antiphlogiston. I want to apply it to my chest. I've got double pneumonia.'" Kaka Baria knew that Baba did not have double pneumonia, but knowing the unusual ways in which Baba worked and having been trained to obey His every order without question, he brought the salve quickly. Baba, applying it to His chest, said again, "I've got double pneumonia. I've got fever and I've got to get well!" Dara's condition improved rapidly and he recovered. If Kaka Baria had not told us this story, we would not have known how directly Baba had intervened to save Dara's life.

Within the first year of our meeting Baba, He began calling my father to help with various construction projects, and in 1928, along with some of the men mandali, he went to Nasik to build a cinema. By February of 1929 they had almost completed it. Baba had recently moved the men and women mandali from Meherabad to Nasik, where they would remain for the next four years, and that year there was to be a grand celebration of His birthday. The mandali wanted to inaugurate the theatre on that day, even though it was not yet ready to show movies.

While my father was working in Nasik, he brought me to be with him whenever I had holidays from school, and I was taken there especially for the birthday celebration as well. The women mandali had made Baba a white silk robe with gold and silver embroidery on it and a hand embroidered crown to wear. I remember how beautiful Baba looked, adorned with their gifts of love and bedecked from head to foot with fresh flowers. He was seated in a car and taken in a procession from the men's bungalow to the Meher Theatre. There Padri, one of Baba's earliest men mandali, who had been very involved in building the cinema, projected on the screen many beautiful still photographs that he had taken. Beloved Baba sat with us in the theatre. The majestic quality that shone from the closeups of His radiant face impressed me deeply, and I still remember the occasion vividly.

Gift of God

Nasik holds great importance for me, as it was there in 1929 that I first met Baba's beloved Mehera and the other women mandali. I don't remember anyone except Mehera and Naja, Baba's cousin. Mehera embraced me and took me into a room where a framed poem hung on the wall. I don't recall the poem as it was in English, and I understood very little of the language at the time, but she read it to me line by line and then explained it. I was deeply touched by the interest Mehera took in me.

I was still young and my interactions with Baba and His mandali were limited, but my father's diary of this time in Nasik describes his experience of living in Baba's ashram:

I was summoned to Nasik in 1928 to carry out the construction work of a theatre, which was to be erected by Rustom, elder brother of Shri Adi K. Irani.... I was ordered to stay with Baba amongst His mandali at Gyaz Manzil before the commencement of the theatre work. Baba left Nasik for a few days, ordering me to stay there only. After His return He went into seclusion in an enclosure... on the first floor of the Gyaz Manzil. Gustadji attended to Him. People came for His darshan throughout the seclusion period, and musical performances were held daily outside the enclosure. I was one of those fortunate ones ordered to take part in those musical programmes, playing the harmonium, while Jal, Baba's brother, took part in singing songs.

The theatre work commenced and the whole construction work from the foundation to the roof was carried out with great help from Naval Talati and Padri. Baba had gone out of Nasik to different places several times during this period and I had also changed three places of residence. The last and longest period was spent in the home of Dinamai and Naval Talati, with Baba's permission During the period I stayed in Nasik, I had to undergo a severe test of patience, endurance and obedience at the hands of Baba. This caused me tremendous grief and mental strain due to Baba's displeasure. Often He would give me contradictory and puzzling orders and when these could not be fulfilled by

Gift of God

me, He would take me to task. I was fully compensated by Him, when He invited me to participate in games, play carom with Him, go for outings in Rustom's big bus to places of interest and for picnics. But the greatest joy was His loving company and Sahavas.

Before I came to live with the Talati family, I stayed for some time in a house with Baria Kaka and Baba's younger brother Adi, in one room. There I suffered for some days with severe colic due to dysentery and passed sleepless nights killing bugs by thousands all through the night, as the floor we slept on was infested. During the day I had to attend to the work and it was a terrible time I had to pass through. One day I had to leave for some work [in Bombay] that Baba had given me several days ahead. I reached home to find that my father had passed away a few hours prior to my arrival and a telegram had been sent to Baba to send Chanji and me to Bombay immediately. The telegram had reached Baba some time after I had left Nasik. I was able to attend my father's funeral. I returned to Nasik after a few days [and] completed the construction of the theatre, which was inaugurated by the then collector of Nasik in the presence of a great number of Government officials and other people. The theatre was named "Meher Theatre" after Baba. After a few days I was ordered by Baba to leave Nasik for Bombay.

It is clear from his diary that my father was receiving the full rigours of Baba's training; the time for me to experience the impact of Baba's direct orders on my life was yet to come.

After our being in Nasik I remember Baba bringing Mehera and the women to stay with us for a night in Bombay, but I have only hazy recollections of them. Then, in 1933, we had to move from the big apartment at Rustom Bagh, as my uncle and aunt had decided they wanted a separate apartment and we could not afford to stay there by ourselves. We moved to the Dadar district, to Banoo Lodge, a big bungalow where we rented two rooms and a kitchen at the back that were separate from the main house. Our new quarters were not large enough to accommodate Baba and His

Gift of God

mandali, but Baba's mother Shireenmai and His brother Behram and wife Perin lived in a small cottage in the same compound. Fortunately, Baba sometimes stayed there, so we could still go for His darshan, and He would visit with us in our two rooms. Later I realized that our home was practically opposite Manzil-e-Meem, the bungalow Baba had used for an ashram ten years earlier.

A year after we moved into Banoo Lodge, we received a letter from Baba telling us to vacate that apartment within twenty days. We never questioned Baba; we simply did as He said. In spite of the fact that twenty days was such a limited time in which to find suitable quarters, my father began the search immediately and finally managed to locate another apartment. In January of 1934 we moved from Banoo Lodge to Boman Lodge, which was also in Dadar.

While we were staying at Rustom Bagh, I had attended St. Theresa's Convent for seven years, but I had to leave that school when we came to live in Dadar, as it was too far away. I completed my fifth standard at a new school. In the Indian educational system at that time there were four years of primary education followed by seven standards; after completing the seventh, a student would take a university examination to qualify for college. Languages were taught beginning in the fourth standard, and at St. Teresa's Convent I had studied French; however, the new school did not teach French, so I chose to study Persian as a second language. As I was starting Persian a year later than my classmates, I needed private tutoring to help me learn two years' work in one. It was in these classes that I was first exposed to the great Persian spiritual poets. When the tutor explained the works of Hafiz and Sa'adi to me, I became lost in a reverie. My teacher told my father that I was different from his other students in that I seemed to comprehend these highly spiritual poems and become immersed in them. In the midst of my everyday life I would sometimes daydream of leading an ascetic life in the mountains.

Just after I had passed my fifth standard, in April of 1934, Baba visited our new home and gave me my first real experience of obedience. When He asked me my rank in school, I happily told Him I stood first in the class. Baba seemed very pleased. Then He turned unexpectedly to my father and said, "I don't want Arnavaz to continue with her studies." My father had high hopes for me, as

Gift of God

he believed in education and wanted me to finish school, to go to college and achieve academically. Naturally, he was quite taken aback by Baba's words. My father said, "But Baba..." Before he could continue, Baba put His finger on His lips, not allowing my father to say any more. Very firmly Baba said, "Haven't you faith in me? Do what I tell you!" Immediately Father said, "Yes, Baba," understanding that His order demanded strict obedience. Baba then turned to me and asked, "Will you do what I tell you?" I replied, "Yes, Baba," even though I was deeply upset and wanted to continue my studies. I was only sixteen and didn't know if I had the strength to do what Baba was asking of me. I wondered what I would do all day long in the house. When Baba saw the disappointment on my face, He said, "You stay home for a year, and then I will let you rejoin your school."

Although my response wasn't from my heart, I said yes just to obey Baba. When He told me to quit school, I was still too young and raw to obey wholeheartedly. This was Baba's first strict order, beginning the training which would lead me finally to resign myself fully to His will. We have to start saying "Yes, Baba" even if it's not from the heart. If we start that way, slowly and gradually Meher Baba teaches us to obey Him wholeheartedly, without the reasoning of the mind. But that takes time.

The next day Baba again visited our home with Uncle Chanji and we all had His darshan. Then Baba said to me, "You and Nargis come with me and we'll go to a movie." How His love and compassion manifest in every little detail; I was so exhilarated at the prospect of going to a movie with Baba that I completely forgot my disappointment of the day before when He had given me the order to leave school. That afternoon was delightful; not only did we get to watch a movie with Baba, but even better, we got to sit close to Him for two hours. We were seated on a sofa, Baba in the middle and Nargis and I on either side. The movie was *Marie Antoinette*, the story of the last queen of France, who was guillotined. When the tragic moments came, I started weeping silently and Baba tickled me on the side. (I am very ticklish.) I looked up at Him and He asked, "Why are you crying? It's just a movie."

At that time movies seemed as real to me as life. When I laughed and enjoyed myself or cried in pain and sorrow, I was responding to what I felt. Only much later did I realize what Baba

Gift of God

was implying in the theatre that day. Our close contact with Him gradually helped us to understand that life, like a movie, is all an illusion. But as a teenager I found Baba's order to leave school a difficult one, as next to Baba and my family, school was the most important part of my life.

To make the situation even harder, my principal did not want me to leave, as I was her prize student. She argued with my father, insisting that he was making a grave mistake in not allowing me to continue with my studies. She said that if it was a question of money, she would take care of it. My father kept saying that these were doctor's orders. What else could he do? He would say, "She's not keeping well, and therefore the doctor wants her to stay at home for a year." The principal finally accepted this excuse because she knew I used to suffer from very severe headaches, but all the same she was disappointed, and she asked if I could attend the following year. My father replied, "I can't promise you, but we'll see." My principal, in order to give me an incentive to return, told me that if I studied at home for a year, she would give me a promotion to the next standard.

Baba had made it very clear that I was to stay home. There was no one to help me with lessons, and I certainly couldn't continue with my studies, particularly difficult subjects like Persian and mathematics, all on my own. Besides, I didn't really believe that Baba would send me back to school; I thought He had given me that promise just to make the shock of staying home easier for me to bear. Consequently, I didn't do any reading or studying for the entire year. I stayed at home, cooking, sewing and helping to tend the house, but found the routine tedious. All my friends were in school, so I rarely saw them, and I had no recreation because net ball, badminton and other games were played only at school. I couldn't go out just any time I wanted to, as in those days young girls were strictly guarded. I was heartbroken, but I know now that this experience began to weaken my attachment to having life the way I wanted it to be. My obedience to Baba's first order was a small step on a long journey that would gradually create detachment in me. And it is only through detachment that we can come to understand the illusory nature of life, to understand what Beloved Baba meant when He said, "Everything is a big zero, but you don't feel that it is. It is all illusion and a dream."

Chapter Three

"When pure love is first received as a gift of the Master it becomes lodged in the consciousness of the aspirant like a seed in favourable soil, and in the course of time the seed develops into a plant and then into a full-grown tree."

- Meher Baba

A year later, in April of 1935, Baba visited us again at our apartment. To my amazement He asked me if I wanted to go back to finish my studies! I immediately answered yes. Baba knew how much I wanted to return to school and how important education was to my father. In His compassion He allowed me to go back, though later I sensed that Baba had not been pleased with my answer.

School didn't start for another two months, so I studied very hard with a tutor. Just prior to the beginning of the school year my principal gave me the sixth standard test and said if I passed, she would allow me to go directly to the seventh and final standard, even though some teachers advised her not to take this risk. Then Baba put me through such a severe test that I wondered if I had made a mistake in being so eager to return. During the first month of school my mind was so rusty that I just couldn't seem to learn anything, as though I didn't even know the English language. I hadn't opened a book, not even a novel, for a year. After two months my English teacher, in despair, called me to talk with her; she didn't know how to help me keep up with the the class. As the tears rolled down my cheeks, she comforted me, then suggested that I read nineteenth century novels by Charles Dickens and others for five hours daily, even though I didn't understand what I

Gift of God

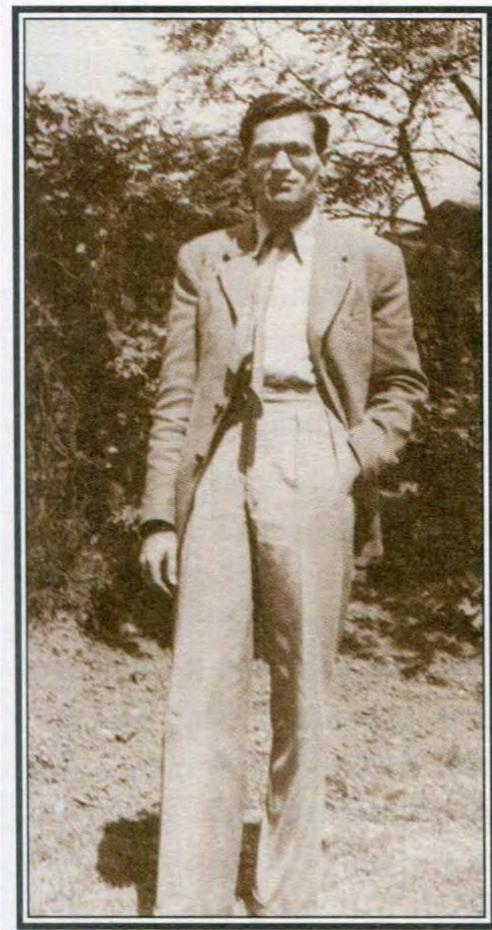
was reading. On the third novel my previous knowledge of English suddenly returned, as well as my concentration. Studying became easier, and by the sixth month I ranked as one of the top three students in the class.

At the end of the school year I appeared for my university matriculation exam. A week before the results were announced, Baba came to our house. He was very interested in my year at school and asked, "How have you fared in your exam?" I said, "Very well, Baba; I think I'll pass with high marks." Baba looked at me. "You will fail," He said, "and I want you to appear again, and then you will get through your exam." I was really taken aback. Despite what Baba had said, I still had some hope of passing, but when the results were announced, I had indeed failed. Then, for seven days in succession, Beloved Baba appeared in my dreams. One dream in particular stands out in my memory: the doorbell to our apartment at Boman Lodge rang, and when I opened the door, Baba was standing there. He shone with such brilliance that He filled the whole apartment - three rooms and the kitchen - with light.

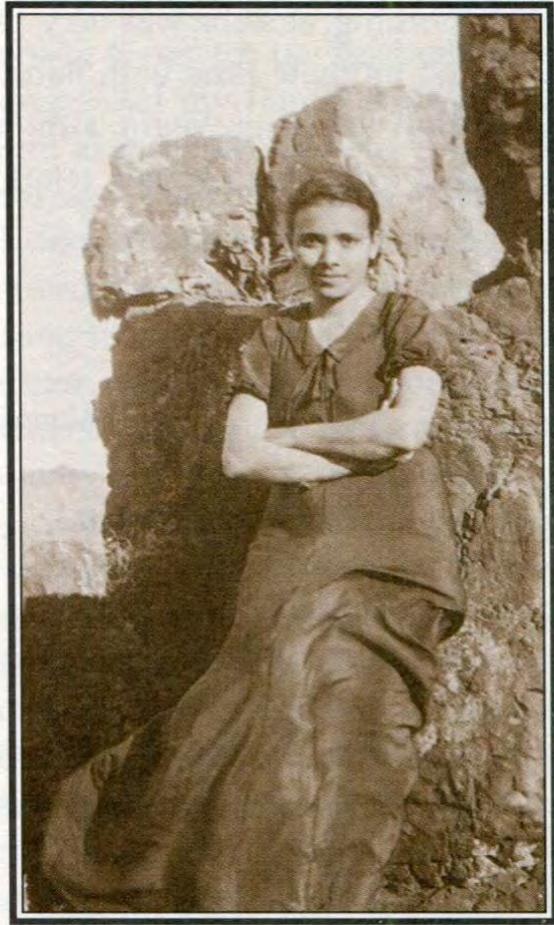
After four months I reappeared for the examination. Because Baba had told me to, I tried again, this time succeeding. The next time Baba visited us, I asked Him about attending college, since it was clear to me that He had taken charge of my schooling. He raised His hand and said, "You have studied so very much. Now it is enough. I don't want you to go to college." Wanting to help my family financially, I asked Baba if I should take a diploma class and become a teacher. "Yes, you can do that," He said.

During that same time my cousin Nariman, whom I had met only once in 1927, arrived in Bombay. He had attended college for two years in Karachi and had then gone to Benares University to complete his B.Sc. As he stood first in his university, he was offered a scholarship to study either in the United States or in England. Nariman chose to go to Manchester, England because the university there offered the best course in chemistry. He came to Bombay late in 1936 to make preliminary arrangements for his trip and get his passport. By this time I was eighteen years old and was getting acquainted with boys and men, although I still kept

Gift of God



*Nariman at the time he went
to England*



*Nariman took this photo of me when
I was eighteen*

them at a distance. Nariman came to our house frequently during the few months he was in Bombay, and I enjoyed his company. Along with his distinguished academic achievements he had been the captain of the university cricket team and was an excellent chess, tennis and table-tennis player as well. We got to know each other during group outings and at home, where we would sit and talk. As the eldest children in our respective families, we had much in common. We felt very deeply the hardships that our parents had suffered and often discussed our problems and experiences.

Nariman told me of the time he had spent with Baba in 1929, when He and the mandali, including our Uncle Chanji, had visited Karachi. Nariman and his maternal grandmother, along with his aunts and uncle, had gone to take Baba's darshan. Baba told Chanji to bring Nariman to be with Him, and for fifteen days Nariman stayed in Baba's bungalow, leaving only to go to college

Gift of God

each morning, as Baba was very particular about his studies. After this first intimate time with Baba, Nariman had no direct contact with Him for seven years, although a personal letter from Baba reveals the closeness of their relationship:

*Meherabad
Ahmednagar 16th March 1934*

My dear Nariman -

Framroze gave me your letter and as desired therein, asked me to dictate to you something from Me.

I want you to remember all I told you in Karachi - to be always pure in thought and action.

I give you My love and blessings.

[Signed] M. S. Irani

Enclosed with Baba's letter was a note from Uncle Chanji emphasizing the importance of the letter:

[This] ... letter from Baba, personally signed by Himself... is a privilege to very very few who are close to His heart and love. It is a message to you, coming direct from Him, and should be considered and valued - as so precious. You can scarcely imagine what it means. You will know it one day and then realize what every word of a direct and precious message like this means, and [it] brings you blessings untold. Keep it always at heart.

[signed] Framroze

Gift of God

After making his preliminary travel arrangements, Nariman returned to Karachi, so he was not in Nasik for the celebration of Baba's birthday in 1937. I accompanied my family, along with hundreds of other Indian disciples and the Westerners who had come to India to be with Baba and were staying at Meher Retreat. There are many pictures which Padri took of this glorious occasion. From morning until evening Beloved Baba gave darshan to more than fifty thousand people, touching the feet of each one with His hand and then touching His forehead, which literally became black from the dirt on their feet. With the other hand Baba gave *prasad*, and then a piece of cloth was given by one of the mandali standing at His side. We felt exhausted just watching Baba. We thought this effort put too much strain on Him, but the capacities of the Master are beyond anyone's grasp. (In later years, as Beloved Baba advanced in age, the intensity of His work actually increased.) On that day Baba sat among us as we had lunch sitting on the ground. His Presence made it a beautiful sight, although it was funny watching His Western followers trying to eat food with their hands, Indian style, something they had never done before. They tried to pick up the rice and dal as if it were a piece of cake.

We returned to Bombay after the birthday celebration, and three months later I began my secondary teachers' training course. I attended classes in theory in the evening and taught in a charitable school for Zoroastrian children during the day. This was a challenging assignment, as the children attending the school were very poor, undernourished, insecure and unruly. Fortunately the school used to give them free lunches; for many that was their only meal. Most of them were from broken homes and lacked discipline, so it was difficult to keep their attention. The other teachers used to cane them, but it was impossible for me to lift my hand against them, even though it seemed they needed this kind of discipline. These children had been so hardened by their environment that the love and kindness I gave them did not appear to affect them much.

As I was beginning my training, Nariman returned to Bombay from Karachi, as it would take him several months to arrange all the remaining details for his journey to England in September, and I was grateful for his companionship. Then, when

Gift of God

it was just about time for him to leave for Manchester, he gave me some poems that he had been writing. In one he spoke beautifully of love:

*Love is of the soul.
Youth and beauty are the bridge of love
and the soul is the stream itself that
washes shore and shore.*

In another he confessed that I was the object of his love:

*... O Arnabela I can half perceive
that I may speak my grief unto thy ear
If thou didst ever anything believe
believe how fondly I love thee dear*

Nariman also showed me the journal in which he kept his writing, and in one place he had written, "My love for this one is pure and simple. All I want now is a small quiet corner in her heart where I can dwell peacefully till the last breath leaves this mortal frame...." He had even dedicated the journal to me:

*... To the companion of my idle hours
To the soother of my sorrows
The confidant of my joys and hopes
My oldest and dearest...
First letter of the alphabet,
This little book
I gratefully and affectionately dedicate.*

Although I enjoyed Nariman's company, I had no romantic inclinations and thought he understood that. We had discussed my study of the Persian poets, and he knew my spirit yearned for that love of God they spoke of so mysteriously. Nariman had accompanied me to movies which depicted the lives of Ram and Krishna and other stories with spiritual themes, and I had wept as I watched those who had renounced the world and lived only for God. My greatest desire was to live this type of single life, and I

Gift of God

wanted simply to have Nariman as a friend. I knew he dreamed of returning to India once he had completed his studies to establish a business and help his family. In the tenderness of my young heart I couldn't bear to dash his hopes completely, so I promised I would write to him while he was in Manchester. I feared my rejection of his love might disappoint him so much that he would abandon his dreams and not return.

During those months Nariman was in Bombay, he had the chance to take Baba's darshan often. At the same time he was leaving for Manchester, Baba was making his last trip by steamer to the West, and this time He was taking Mehera and the other Eastern women, as well as Rano Gayley and Norina Matchabelli, two of the Westerners. After Nariman arrived in England, he received word from Baba, who was then in Cannes, France, to join Him there. Nariman had some free time before starting his graduate studies, so he was able to stay with Baba in Cannes for fifteen days. Baba used this time, as he had in Karachi, to draw Nariman closer. Even though his contact with Baba in his early years was limited, Nariman had a very deep connection with Him. We were to hear later what a love feast Baba gave those who were with Him in Cannes.

I, too, was soon to experience love when, in February of 1938, Baba again celebrated His birthday on a grand scale, this time in Meherabad. He called close ones from Bombay, Poona, Nagpur and other Baba centres. Goher Irani, who later joined the ashram and became Baba's doctor, accompanied me to Meherabad; she had been sent by Baba the year before to stay with my family while she was in medical school, and we have been very close friends ever since. Taking a leave of four days, we travelled by night train to avoid missing an extra day of school and joined my family, who had left a day earlier.

For the first time, I stayed on Meherabad Hill with dear Mehera and the women mandali, in the ashram that Baba had established for them. When I came up the Hill, Baba, who was sitting cross-legged on a big table in the kitchen, called me to Him and embraced me. Mehera was standing nearby and Baba turned to her and asked, "Mehera, do you know her?" Mehera replied,

Gift of God

"Yes, Baba, she's Arnavaz." I was pleased that Mehera remembered me, as I had seen her only rarely. Baba then turned to me and asked, "Do you know her?" pointing to Mehera. I said, "Yes, Baba, she's Mehera." Mehera looked very beautiful in a simple plain white cotton sari with a green border. When I looked at her face, radiant with love for Baba, I was deeply touched and loved her immediately. At that moment she carved a niche in my heart that has been there ever since. It was then that I understood the special position she had with Baba. Nobody ever explained it to me, nobody ever told me, not even Baba, but I knew. It was a natural understanding that came to me. Later I realized the significance of this particular meeting; I was consciously awakening to my deep connection with Mehera.



At Meher Baba's birthday celebration on Meherabad Hill, 1938. Standing (left to right): Khorshed, Nargis, Mehera, Mani, Katie and Arnavaz. Seated (left to right): Goher, Meheru and Silla

Gift of God

It is difficult for me to describe that time in Meherabad. Though we stayed there for only four days, the intensity was immeasurable. From the first moment, I felt the atmosphere charged with the love Baba poured into me - so much love that I couldn't contain it. Baba had entered my life ten years earlier, but I had never had an experience like this one: I was born to His love. He had taught me to obey Him, have faith in Him and surrender to Him, but I had not yet actually felt love for Baba or known what real love was. Now He opened the floodgates, and love burst through, leaving me floating on an endless ocean, supported only by the wings of Beloved Baba's grace. Feeling both ecstasy and agony, I wept silently, my tears falling ceaselessly as I wondered what was happening to me. Because I was feeling self-conscious, I would sit in a corner and hope no one would see me, but I could not really escape, especially from Baba, as He was with us so often. When He walked by us as we were having lunch at Lower Meherabad, my tears would embarrass me, but I just couldn't stop them - for four days!

Back in Bombay, I resumed my teaching duties, feeling like a fish out of water. Experiencing love for the first time had been so overwhelming that I could not readjust to life in the world. It was as if Baba had dipped me in His ocean of love and then flung me back alone on the shore. I became despondent, yet I went on teaching and doing my daily chores mechanically, feeling disinterested and exhausted.

The exams for my secondary teachers' training course were approaching in late March. The principal of the school where I taught gave me two weeks leave for preparation, but I found it impossible to concentrate on my studies. Giving in to a strong urge to write to Baba, I composed a long letter that took me two days to finish. Now the wording seems awkward in places, but such are the expressions of a beginner who has just taken the first steps on the path of God, who is all love.

Gift of God

2/3/38

My sweet Beloved darling Baba,

It is a pleasure and joy to pen a few words to my sweet dear Baba. Can I ever thank Thee for all that You have already done for me, my family, and all in the world. I find no words... to express my feelings and thoughts about You... the King Emperor of the whole Universe, nay not only of the human beings but of Heaven and Earth and all creations.

It is a great thrill to sit on the brims of Your Fountain of Love and to watch the glittering waters dancing and playing about in mirth....

Thou art an ocean of Love which can never be evaporated, how[ever] strong the heat may be! Thousands may drink to quench their thirst, but it can never exhaust.

Thou hast entangled all in the web of [Thy] Divine Love. We have all plunged in and now we have become helpless to escape from this spiritual web....

Dear Baba, when shall I equal the dust of Thy feet! I am not even worthy of that and I feel myself ashamed even to say that I'll equal the dust under Thy feet. I am starving with hunger for the dry crumbs of Your Love; I am dying of thirst to get one sip or a drop from Your Ocean.

I like to sit day and night, every hour, every moment to roll tears on my cheeks in thought of Thee. I, weak as human beings are, as yet [do] not understand Thee in Thy full form but only that "Baba is Love." What if I bathe in Thy Love, never to come out of it, always wet and never become dry?

Thy sparkling, twinkling eyes penetrate into my heart like... the rays of the sun making its way

Gift of God

through the chink of a window. Thou art ready to enter into every heart but unfortunately all the doors of the hearts are not wide open. Thou art detained, Thou has to wait outside till the doors are left open to welcome Thee.... For hours together till life's end I am helpless to end this praise of Thee.

Baba dear, what more can I say. This pen and paper forces me to stop. It says Baba has no time to read your long idle letters, so with a tear in my eye I end here. Mama, Papa and all are sending their deepest love. They also thank you most sincerely for the kind and loving treatment you gave us all in [Meherabad]. Once again, with tons and tons of love,

*Yours most humbly, never to equal the
soles of Thy sandals,*

Arnavaz

Our mail was often carried by people travelling back and forth between Bombay and wherever Baba was staying, and His reply came immediately:

*Meherabad
Ahmednagar
4th, March, 1938.*

Dearest Arnavaz,

I received your letter which made Me very happy. Such faith and love, so deep and intense is wonderful indeed.

I am, as you say "the King Emperor of the Whole Universe" of heaven and earth and all creations. But I am God too in human form and what is that but "Perfect Love." And so My nature is to be loved.

Gift of God

I am the source of this pure fountain of Love from which those must drink whose thirst is to be quenched. It is limitless - as the sky and the ocean - and pure as God Himself. I am the web or the net and the worthy will be caught into that net by My Love. Christ said: "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all unto Me."

What gives you this thirst and hunger for love? It is your Beloved Baba. It is your Beloved Baba Who also loves you so dearly. You have no idea what it means! But your love and deep feelings are the outcome of same. You will know it all one day. I do know how you feel. I am Eternal Love.

Who can understand My God-State who is not yet God-realized? But do not worry, dearest Arnavaz. Love Me in My human form. This is what I want. You say, "Baba is Love." Your faith is great and so too your love. Nothing can separate you from Your Beloved.

Go on loving Me more and more and love will make you one with your Beloved. Everything else is illusion - only Love is real and Eternal - the pearl of great price. Seek it both within and without. I am within you as well as outside you.

Move the stone and there am I!

Look within and there too am I.

All My Love,

[signed] M. S. Irani

Although there would be many times when His letters would direct me to my responsibilities in the world, in this first letter, knowing the tenderness of the new love awakened within me, Beloved Baba comforted, assured and encouraged me to love Him more and more.

I continued to find it impossible to concentrate on my upcoming exams, and soon only four days were left. Not wanting

Gift of God

to appear for the exams, I wondered what to do, but I knew that Baba would want me to try. The general knowledge part of the examination would not be a problem, but there was a section on the history of education and I hadn't touched my books. As it turned out, the paper I submitted on that topic was practically blank! I was sure I had fared very badly, but I just didn't care.

My physical health was affected because I was so mentally and emotionally drained, and after the exam I became ill and couldn't attend the final month of school before the summer vacation. Eventually developing a dangerously high fever, I was moved to a hospital located just below our apartment and run by Dr. Alu Khambatta, who later came to love Baba. My family agonized over my condition as one night, delirious and barely conscious, I hovered between life and death. I recovered, but the doctors were never able to determine the cause of my illness.

Chapter Four

*"The best approach for
the understanding of spirit
is through the heart and not
through the mind."*

- Meher Baba

Because my illness left me in a very weak condition, the doctors ordered that I leave the city for a rest. Dr. Alu suggested that I be sent to Panchgani, where her aunt, who was a disciple of Baba's, owned the Mount View Hotel. I was very happy because at that time Baba was in Panchgani with His men and women mandali. I wrote to Baba telling Him that I was coming there to rest. An excerpt from my letter shows how I longed to be in His Presence:

. . . When shall I once again have the pleasure of drinking the Divine waters from the tap of Thy Feet? Just by drinking a few drops of this sacred water, the whole body is purified, all the sins are wiped off, all the diseases cured - which no medicines of any doctor can cure The most unbearable diseases are the tortures and agonies of the heart and restlessness of the mind but can any mixtures satisfy them?

There is only One Doctor who can give peace and rest with His only touch and a sweet smile on His Face. How I long to see Your brown twinkling eyes in which lie the book of the world to read. How I long to hear the flutter of Your snowy white gown....

Secretly hoping that He would call me to take His darshan every day, I told Baba I would like to see Him often. Baba soon wrote, asking me to come and stay in the ashram with Him. I

Gift of God

couldn't believe it! Considering myself unworthy, I had never even dreamt of being asked to stay in the ashram. My ideas about the mandali were so different at that time - I thought they were living angels and wondered how I could ever go and stay with them.

As Goher had a summer vacation from college, Baba told her to come with me. In those days girls did not usually travel alone, and since my parents had the other children to care for, they couldn't accompany us to Panchgani. Nariman's brother Behram, who was visiting Bombay from Karachi at the time, offered to go with us. We were able to take Baba's darshan as soon as we arrived, and our hearts were filled by His embrace, but that was to be the extent of poor Goher's visit. Her tonsils had become so badly swollen on our trip that she couldn't even talk, so Baba ordered her to have them removed and sent her back to Bombay the very next day, accompanied by Behram. From that time on Baba's sign for Goher was to put His hand on His throat, indicating tonsils.

Very few women were in the ashram at Panchgani. More joined Baba later when He began His Blue Bus tour, but during that time there were only Mehera, Mani, Naja, Khorshed and Valu, and the Westerners, Norina, Rano, Elizabeth Patterson and Kitty Davy. Because of my weakened condition, Baba assigned Norina to attend to my needs, although at times He personally saw to me, giving me my medicine and making sure I was comfortable. On my second day there I felt stronger, and Baba asked me to join the others that evening in the compound and to wear a coat because we would be out in the open and I was still weak. April in Panchgani isn't cold, or so I thought, and that evening I decided it was all right to wear a long-sleeved, high-necked silk blouse. A big mat was spread out on the lawn, where everyone gathered to sit around Baba. After a few minutes Baba turned to me and said, "I told you to put on a coat." It hadn't struck me that the blouse wouldn't fulfill Baba's order, and I answered, "Baba, I'm wearing a long-sleeved silk blouse." Baba firmly said, "But I told you to put on a coat. Why didn't you listen to Me?" He repeated this four times. I realized what I had done, but I remained silent. After a very long few minutes, He again asked, "Why didn't you obey

Gift of God

Me? Why didn't you put on a coat?" I couldn't bear His displeasure and started weeping silently. Baba asked, "Why are you crying?" I said, "Oh, Baba, because I didn't obey You. I displeased You." Baba didn't treat this incident lightly. He said, "Remember to obey Me implicitly, to obey Me literally!" I replied, "Yes, Baba," but I continued crying, and Baba did not tell me to stop. He was loving but, at the same time, very firm. In the end Baba embraced me, and He was very sweet with me the next day, so I was happy again.

In the years that followed, however, I realized that had this incident not taken place, I might not have developed the strong understanding of literal obedience that I have. Sometimes Baba makes us commit very minor mistakes so that we learn not to make bigger mistakes in the future. When I wore the silk blouse, it did not occur to me that I was not obeying Baba, so He deliberately made me go through that experience to awaken me to the real meaning of obedience. Throughout my life I have tried my best to obey Baba, even though I have failed many times, consciously and unconsciously. Once we understand the meaning of obedience, it's easy to obey a simple order like wearing a coat; it's much more difficult to obey Baba when He wants us to do something that is emotionally or mentally not yet in our control. After this lesson in Panchgani, I began to obey in little ways whenever I could.

From then on, the time I spent in Panchgani was very peaceful and heartening. Baba's mood was wonderful, and He embraced each of us every day. Sometimes I received an unexpected embrace as He passed me while going from one room to another. Baba was lovingly intimate with us, joining us in charades, and it was a joy to see Him acting out different characters Himself. Every evening we would sit with Baba in the garden, sometimes playing cards, and we all felt His gentle, loving closeness.

Our bungalow in Panchgani was spacious and lovely, overlooking a valley. One day I was standing at the window, admiring the picturesque scenery, when Baba came from behind me and put His hands over my eyes. I touched His hands and said, "Baba!" He removed them, I turned, and He embraced me

Gift of God

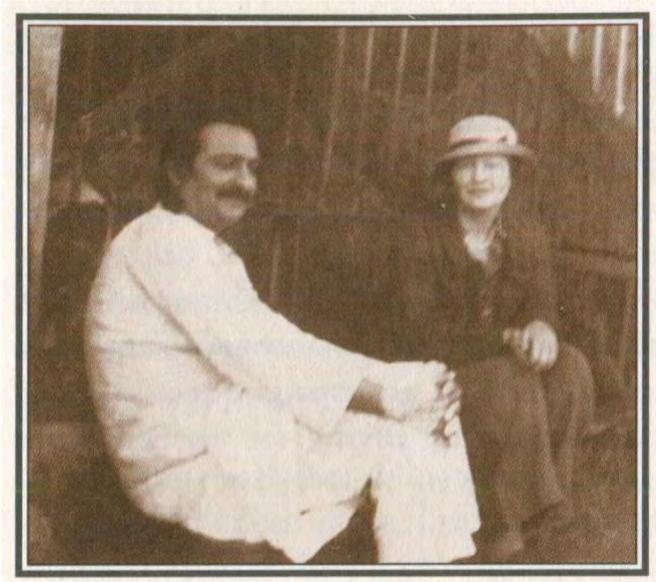
with great love. It was just like the game of Guess Who we would play as children, only now it sent me into ecstasy.

Before Panchgani my idea of life in the women's ashram was vague. When Baba had visited our home in Bombay, my experience of Him was limited to taking His darshan, helping my mother serve Him food, and spending a few precious moments with Him in the company of my family. In Panchgani Baba took me out of the family household and allowed me to see more aspects of His nature, both human and Divine, for the first time. Being so much closer to Him during that visit changed my thinking and my life forever.

My first exposure to Baba's way of combining the serious with the humorous came when Naja was so ill that she couldn't leave her bed. After contracting a nearly fatal case of hepatitis when they were in Meherabad, she had recovered, but was ill again in Panchgani. When Baba went to see her in her room, He would lovingly joke with her and make her laugh. One day He said, "If you die, I will tie you with a rope, lower you into the valley, and a tiger will come and eat you up!" I got such a shock when I heard Baba treating death so lightly. I had been taught not even to talk of death with people who were very ill, and here was Baba *joking* about the subject with Naja! Both of them were smiling, but all I could do was stare. Later Baba said, "What's death? It's like changing a coat!" But to me at that time it was a very big and serious event.

Another incident that impressed me deeply was Baba's keeping Elizabeth in a cave the whole night. Elizabeth was safe because the cave had an iron gate at the opening, but it was situated in absolute wilderness and tigers' pawprints had been found there. I was so filled with my new love for Baba, and my yearning for renunciation was so great, that I wished He would keep me in that cave. But of course I was not prepared for an experience like that, and Baba gives only what one is prepared for. My urge was premature, but it didn't feel that way to me; I wanted to climb to the heights for Baba, not understanding that I was still on the first rung of the ladder.

Gift of God



*Baba and Elizabeth in front of the cave
at Panchgani*

It was in Panchgani that I first heard a discourse from Baba. One morning He was sitting on a sofa with His beloved Mehera by His side and the rest of us around Him in a semicircle. Baba made a sweeping gesture that included all and then pointed His finger to His forehead and said, "Have you any idea how fortunate you are?" (Baba's finger on His forehead meant "fortunate.")

Then, pointing to each of us, Baba repeated, "Have you any idea how fortunate you are? I'm sitting with you, eating with you, playing with you; you are all near Me. You have to go through lives and lives of *jap* and *tap* in order to sit in front of Me!" (*Jap* means the repetition of the names of God, and *tap* means meditation.) "There are so many who are in the mountains who want to see Me; they live ascetic lives of meditation, and some of them don't drop their bodies because they want to see Me."

To think that I, just an ordinary person, had gone through lifetimes of *jap* and *tap* in order to sit at Beloved Baba's feet was beyond my comprehension. Baba gave us this discourse to make us realize that to be in His Presence is no small matter. Even though He spent so much time with us, Baba never wanted us to take Him for granted; He wanted us to realize how very fortunate we were that we had been given this precious opportunity.

Baba went on to say that renouncing the world and leading an ascetic life was easy, but to be with Him, the God Man, was difficult. Only when one lives a normal life does one have the chance to obey Him, surrender to His wish and will, and be resigned to Him with rock-like faith. Living in this manner

Gift of God

develops internal detachment and frees us to serve Him according to His plan. Developing the capacity to do what the God-Man wants is the most important goal and the highest achievement that a human being should aspire to.

Although I tried to understand everything, it was beyond my ability to grasp all that happened in Panchgani. All I knew was that I loved Baba more and more. As years passed, however, and Baba led me through many experiences of suffering and joy, He awakened me further to the realization that His ways and words are always beyond the mind; understanding cannot come intellectually, but only as a result of love. If instead of constantly questioning what is happening in our lives, we try to think of Him, obey Him and resign ourselves to whatever He gives us, real love for Baba will grow in our hearts. This understanding, born of love, deepens our faith and strengthens our capacity for surrender, leading us further along our walk with Him.

Baba referred to understanding as the most precious attribute of love, "the Divine fruit of Pure Love, the... rare flower of the Universe." He bestows this flower in response to our wholehearted efforts to please Him, accepting all that He gives us and always seeking His wish and will. The understanding that Baba gives comes from the heart and illuminates the mind, the mind having no capacity to gain this kind of understanding on its own. Too much reasoning complicates and confuses us, as one question leads to another endlessly without the clarity which the heart brings. As Baba told us, "The mind has its place, but not until the heart has had its say." Baba has given us the mind to use for our everyday lives, but in the game between the lover and the Beloved, it is the heart, not the mind, that prompts the lover to please the Beloved. If we use our minds to rationalize and justify our desires and actions, we miss the opportunity to understand from the heart. But if we acknowledge our weaknesses and ask Beloved Baba to awaken us to His ways, we learn from our mistakes. As Baba reminded us, "Only when the mind accepts its ends and values from the deepest promptings of the heart does it contribute to the life of the spirit."

Chapter Five

*"The only REAL SURRENDER
is that in which the poise is
undisturbed by any adverse
circumstance, and the individual,
amidst every kind of hardship,
is resigned with perfect calm to
the will of God."*

- Meher Baba

As I was leaving Panchgani, Baba embraced me and said, "Whenever you get holidays from your teaching, you must come and join Me, wherever I am." I could hardly believe my good fortune. From then on I began staying in the ashram whenever Baba called me. Imagine my joy at the opportunity to spend all my vacations with Him! That meant a full month in October, two weeks in December, and two months in the summer.

On my return to Bombay, I wrote Baba and the women mandali a long letter to thank Him and each of the women individually for my wonderful stay in Panchgani. I received this beautiful letter in response:

*Panchgani
Satara District
9th June 1938*

Dear Arnavaz,

*I was very happy to receive your long and cheery letter,
which I allowed Mani to read aloud to all. So each heard the
special messages of love and gratitude that you sent to each.*

Gift of God

You do not mention your own health, but I know that you are better than before your visit to Panchgani, Take care of your health and don't overwork. Keep early hours. When you are working so hard all day, you must try to go to bed earlier than you do. Nargis too, while she is still not strong - and still growing - should go to bed earlier than she does.

All loved having you here and talk of the happy times spent together, talking about "Your Beloved Baba" and remember the many games we all joined in. We have not played [Charades] since you left, but were they not happy moments! And perhaps "your Baba" loved and enjoyed them most of all!

I do My work wherever I am and in whatever I do. I work universally - for the good of all mankind. And you too remember that whether teaching, helping at home or working elsewhere, you are working for Me. Anywhere you can be thinking of Me and come ever closer to Me in love and faith. You will find Me more and more within yourself, within others and in every work you unselfishly do for others.

As you say, the journey towards Perfection, i.e. God realization, can be compared to the climb up to the mountain top, difficulties all along the way, but the goal ever in sight to spur the climber on. And where would be the joy of victory without the pains of the struggle in the effort to achieve.

And unseen but ever present is your Beloved Baba to catch you when you stumble, to show you the right path when you might otherwise lose your way and holding out the ever open helping hand to lighten the journey, beset with so many difficulties, as you say. But is it not all worthwhile? Divine Love and Divine happiness await the one who is victorious and holds out to the bitter end.

Gift of God

Give my love to all at home, especially Nargis and to your father and your mother. I read your P.S. about Tehmton and Huma. Do not worry. Leave all to Me. Be happy and don't worry.

All send love.

All My love

[signed] M. S. Irani

Beloved Baba's loving words were to be the only stronghold I would have as the transition back into my worldly duties became increasingly difficult. I was consoled by Baba's order to write to Him once a week, and I took that opportunity to pour my heart out to Him. After the intensity of daily contact with Baba and all that He had awakened within me, I struggled to cope with life in the world.

The results of my teaching examination came out about a week after I returned, but I was not interested because I was so certain that I had failed. On the day the results were announced, I got a message by phone from one of my friends saying that I had passed my exams. I told him that was impossible, that there must be some mistake. Later, after thinking about it, I called my friend back and asked if he were sure. Although he said he was, I still had doubts, so I sent someone to the university to verify that my name was on the list. It was there. When I thought I had done well in my matric examinations, I had failed, and now, certain I had done badly, I had passed. I knew then to trust what Baba always said: "Try your best, do what you have to do, and leave the result to Me." Everything happens because of His wish and will. This experience also showed me the importance of total surrender to Baba; no matter what we do, the result is always in His hands.

Now that I was qualified to teach, the principal of the school where I had been studying offered me a job. She thought I'd be good at Montessori teaching, but I had no experience in that method, as I had been trained to teach at the secondary level.

Gift of God

Although the children were four and five years old, I accepted the job, which was to provide one of the few joys in my life at that time. The innocence of the children, their questions and behaviour, were a delight to me. The dreariness of the rest of my worldly life is obvious in one of my weekly letters to Baba:

June 1938

Baba dear,

... I don't like to bother You by my trifling letters but since You have ordered me to write often, I shall most willingly go on doing so. When I sit to write, I feel I have nothing to write about. You know everything. You are everywhere. All my thoughts & actions do not escape You. When I do a wrong thing, I know that if not anyone; else, You are aware of it. Repentance immediately follows bitterly but You are so sweet and so good, Baba, that when one asks for forgiveness You accept it, though we have to suffer the consequences of our action. Our sufferings are our own actions. Weak as we are, we ourselves only bring troubles on our heads.

I am appointed in the Wadia school in the Montessori department from July 1st at a salary of Rs 60/....

All at home are well & I hope Your health is... the best too. If our health is not good it matters very little, but Your health counts a lot to the whole world. Dear Baba, we are anxiously awaiting You in Bombay. We are eagerly looking forward for that day to come. I close this letter with a heart that is bubbling with love.

Yours ever at Your service

Arnavaz

Gift of God

Baba's loving response brightened my mood and gave me insight into what was happening to me.

Ahmednagar

June 28th, 1938

My dearest Arnavaz,

... Panchgani did you a lot of good, not only physically and mentally, but spiritually too. You needed to be near Me then and in close contact. You have been through a great experience that has awakened in you that Pure Divine Love. This love of which I am the source is in each, but like the seed under ground, it has to grow, and make its way to the surface. In some this latent seed of Divine Love lies deep, and not near the surface and then it takes a longer time to be awakened. And when you have the wonderful opportunity, as have many, in this Avataric period, to come in close contact with the Avatar, then this awakening is quickened.

This Divine Love you feel within will grow more and more intense each day. You will experience moments of supreme happiness such as you have never had before and then again at times you will not be conscious of it, and feel perhaps depressed, but never forget-that Divine Love is within, it is your soul - which is God.

My work is to awaken in each this "Divine Spark" and when the response is as quick as is yours, then is My work made lighter and I suffer less. It is My nature to love and to want nothing but pure love from all.

Be happy and worry over nothing. You have found the one thing in life worth having and worth striving for. Hold it fast and try more and more to

Gift of God

see it in everyone and everything. It is there. "Seek and ye shall find it."

All my love, and you hardly realize what happiness you have given me.

[signed] M. S. Irani

The following excerpts from my letters show that my mood lightened as I continued to write to Baba throughout the rest of the summer.

3 July 1938

Baba dearest,

What joy it is to receive letters from You which are full of precious jewels worth keeping in my golden treasury....

[W]hen I came to [Meherabad] on Your last birthday I felt within me a Divine Inspiration which has caught me with an iron grip.... I know You are within me yet I cannot see You When will that time come when I may fully know what I am. In other words, what is God, Who is Baba!

When will I forget my own self . . . ? When will I learn to be purely unselfish? When will I have the capacity to love deeply so as to forget my own existence? When will the day come when I will become blind with love?

I shall go in search for You, not in the Himalayas and all over Meherabad, but within me.... But Baba, You change Your garb at every moment and slip away from my weak sight....

Gift of God

10 July 1938

... I feel You are quite near, sitting and talking to me. What can I write when You are just by me. Love flows like a radiant light and I like to enjoy its joys in a silent meditative mood....

17 July 1938

. . . Many times without any previous intention, unconsciously Your sweet name Baba dances on the tip of my tongue. I may not be thinking of You, but Your name is ever ready to come out of my heart....

You are the true friend of man, greatest sympathizer of human beings, so You are the only One Who can find something much more in the heart besides flesh - the agonies, the emotions. Baba, my darling, You are the only one in the whole universe Who can cure the pains of the sufferers. You are doing... real service to humanity. You take pains, You carry the heavy burden on You for the sake of men in order to do good to them....

You have laid the strong cable of Love round the world and no one can ever cut it to pieces....

25 July 1938

. . . I am indeed fortunate enough to pen You every week. These letters give me one more opportunity to think of You, which is the greatest joy and consolation to the heart. After the day's work and the same usual routine, the thoughts of the dear ones are like a cup of champagne, which is most refreshing to a tired soldier....

Gift of God

All at home are in best of health. I have also grown quite strong as I was before, by Your kind grace. Anyone in my place would not have recovered so soon. I hope, Baba dear, You are keeping quite fit too.

With showers of Your blessings I fold.

Yours ever at Your feet,

Arnavaz

The gift of Beloved Baba's order to write Him weekly was to hold much more than I ever imagined. His replies held within them the answers to my heart's questions.

Ahmednagar

27 July, 1938

Dearest Arnavaz,

I have along side of me your three letters, the last dated 17th July which made Me very happy and then to-day comes your letter of yesterday. As you say, to write to Me gives you one more opportunity to think of Me, and when you think only of Me, then you will have achieved much. Many are My ways of training you, all to work and think only of your Beloved, whether you are with Me, or physically speaking, at a distance. For both the goal is the same - to merge in your Beloved - through love and service.

Great is your opportunity and great should be your joy and consolation as you say. Yes, it is like the cup of champagne to the tired soldier after a war, but the effects of the cup of champagne wear off after a short time, while the cup I give - 'the cup of living water' - quenches thirst eternally and happy should

Gift of God

all be who have the opportunity to drink of 'this cup of Infinite Love'. And you, I know realize this and are happy for the great gift which is yours, and which more and more you will grow to appreciate and value, as you value nothing else on earth - the 'Pearl without price'.

I am glad you are working less for the present. This is good until you are completely strong again. There are many ways of working and many think, unless each hour of the day is filled with some definitely active work, that they are being idle and lazy. This is not so, if the hours not definitely spent in active work, are given to thoughts of Love and the longing to serve all through love. Remember this and value - while you have them - the hours of leisure no less than the hours of work. There is purpose behind each minute of your day.

Be writing to Me, as you feel inclined. I am glad all are well at home and I send love and blessings to each.

[signed] M. S. Irani

*c/o M. S. Irani
Meherabad
Ahmednagar
24-8-38*

My Dearest Arnavaz,

I see the last letter I had from you is dated 6th of August when you wrote to wish Me and all the Mandali a very happy and joyful coming [Zoroastrian] New Year.

On that day, I took all here for a picnic - near the 'Tower of Silence' under the shelter of the sacred

Gift of God

trees close by. It had been raining heavily the night before and the ground was very wet. Nevertheless we found a suitable spot. I gave a lecture to all for the first half an hour on Friendship. One of the things I spoke of was Love and Realization and how with the greatest lovers - there are also weaknesses because until realization, no one is perfect. And a very common weakness is the difficulty of loving all alike. A hundred lovers love the same Beloved and these hundred should love also one another, but their different natures, different moods, and different faults don't allow them to love each other as they should. It is very difficult for all to love each other equally, but try and don't have preferences. Be the same to all. Don't lean on any one in particular. Lean only on your Beloved. Have full faith and love in Him. This will make you strong and unaffected by what goes on around.

Did you read the thought for to-day in the Times?

"Do not condemn, resent or retaliate; do not argue or become a partisan. Maintain thy calmness with all sides; be just and speak the truth. Act in gentleness, compassion, and charity. Be infinitely patient. Hold fast to love, and let it shape thy doing. Have good will to all without distinction. Think equally of all and be disturbed by none."

Live for one thing - have one goal in sight - to become the perfect lover. This you can only learn living in the world, and trying to become like the one you believe to be Perfect Love in manifestation.

All my love to you and all your family who are with you.

[signed] M. S. Irani

Gift of God

Much as receiving His letters meant to me, I longed to see Baba. To my delight, the following month He invited my family and a few other lovers (the term Baba had used in His most recent letter and the one He preferred for referring to His disciples) to spend a weekend in September at Meherabad. Baba had asked Pleader, one of His mandali, to be in charge of staging a play on the life of Raja Gopichand, a king on the spiritual path, who had left his kingdom and renounced everything. The *masts* from Baba's ashram were to play the roles. I could not imagine masts on stage. It is very difficult directing the actions of a mast in any situation, let alone getting one to perform a role in a play. Pleader and Baidul, another of the mandali, were the chief ones in charge, with other mandali helping. Baba had given strict instructions that those who looked after the masts should be very gentle with them, no matter what. The masts often gave beatings to Pleader and Baidul, and on one occasion a few of them pounced on Pleader and hit him, saying, "Give us the treasure that you have." Poor Pleader did not know what they were talking about, but the masts had recognized that Pleader had some treasure within him. When the day of the performance arrived, the masts acted their parts very naturally and without inhibition, like very small children, saying their lines with innocence and joy. Pleader remained on stage the entire time, as they would forget what to do and he would have to prompt them. It was a delightful play, an event beyond anyone's expectations, but with Beloved Baba anything-even the impossible - is possible.

When we returned to Bombay, I had to teach for only a couple of weeks before my October vacation. I wrote to Baba asking whether Nargis and I could come to Meherabad. Even though He had told me to join Him on my holidays, I first had to write for permission:

8-10-38

Dearest Baba

...We have October vacation for a fortnight, from tenth to twenty-fourth and if You wish, Baba

Gift of God

dear, we'd like to spend even a week with You in Meherabad. I don't need and I don't want any rest at present but to work. I have had enough of rest. So if you call me at Nagar I don't wish to spend easy hours as I did in Panchgani. It's a joy even to spend a couple of days with you. Whenever I get a few days holiday, I feel like running to You wherever You are, especially in Meherabad, as it is a heavenly place.

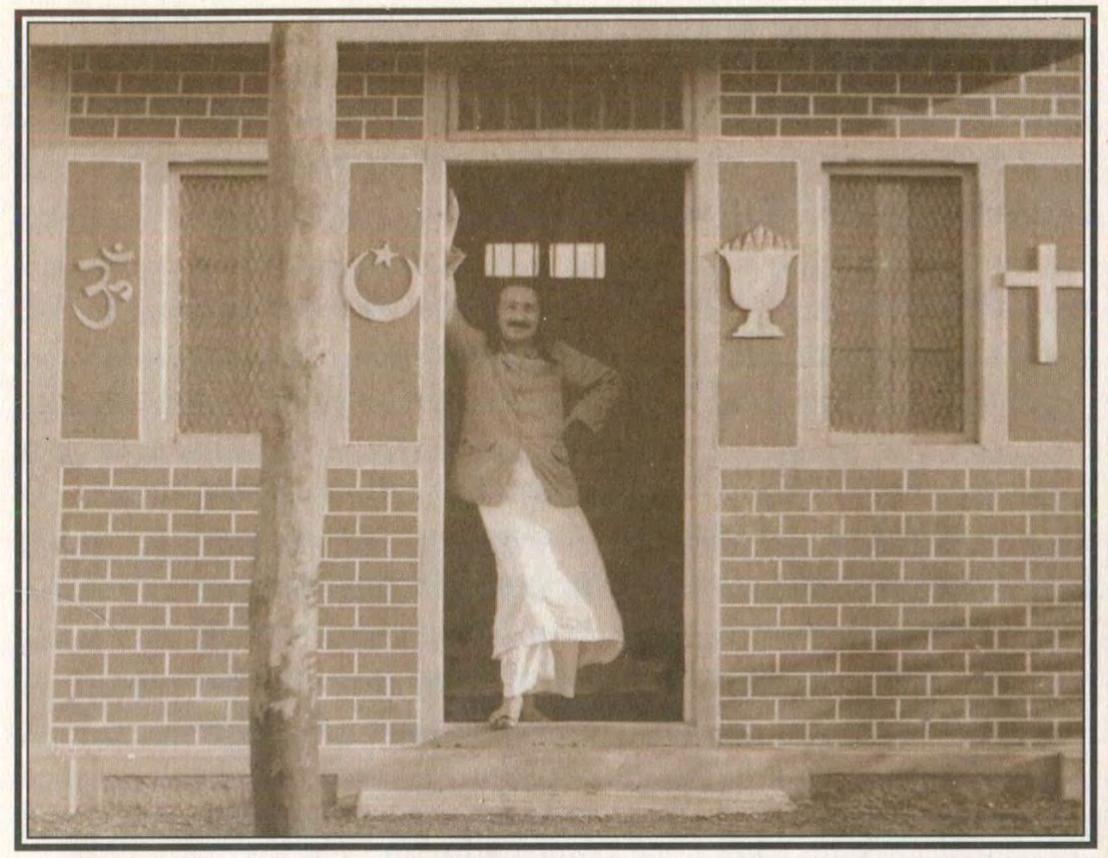
Dear Baba, if You don't wish to call me, I shall be pleased to do whatever You tell me. I know that whatever You do is all for the best. Though deprived of the opportunity to see You, I may surely feel it, but still I can console myself with the fact that You are always and at every second with me. But after all I am a weak human being, always wanting to be close to you physically. Perhaps you may say that it's very hot in Nagar, but Baba dear, what does heat or cold matter when You are near us.

Your devoted Arnavaz

We went to stay for two weeks in the ashram, and Baba granted our wish and assigned us various tasks. But what I particularly remember about that visit was that Baba talked directly to me about love for the first time. During the eleven years since I had first met Him, Baba had told me to obey Him and have faith in Him; He did not tell me to love Him because He knew that love would be awakened through obedience and faith.

Just before Nargis and I were to leave Meherabad for Bombay with Uncle Chanji, we saw Baba in the Rahuri Cabin. We went in and He embraced us and made us sit by His side. Baba was drinking tea, and half a cup remained, which He handed me to drink. I was startled. All Baba's belongings - His cup, saucer, plate, bedding, everything - were kept separate, just for Him. I was about to say, "Baba, how can I drink from Your cup?" Then I remembered the incident in Panchgani and the importance of

Gift of God



*Baba in entrance to Rahuri cabin in Meherabad
(the brick has since been plastered over)*

obedience. Immediately the thought came to me, "Just do what Baba says." I drank the tea from His cup. He then said to me, "You cannot love Me. It is only when My grace falls upon you that you can love Me." I simply looked at Him and said, "Yes, Baba," hoping that when Baba next gave me an order, I would not hesitate at all. I was happy for the moment that I had been able to check my first impulse and obey Him literally.

From the age of eight, when I first met Meher Baba, I had felt as if He had picked me up and adopted me. I just followed Him as though I were a puppy. When Baba was with me, I just felt happy; when He left me, I was lost and forlorn, waiting only for His return. When He did return, I stayed by His heels, keeping my eyes on Him, not allowing Him out of my sight. My puppy stage was a period of training, during which Baba nurtured the latent love within me by stressing the importance of obedience. It had not been in my hands to love Baba. It was only through the gift of His grace that I was able to say, "I love You, Baba."

Gift of God

A week or so after our return to Bombay, Nargis and I were delighted to receive this inspiring and instructive letter from Baba:

*c/o M. S. Irani
Meherabad
Ahmednagar
2nd November 1938*

Dearest Arnavaz and Nargis,

I know how much you both enjoyed being here and I was so pleased to see the way in which you adapted yourselves and fitted in so harmoniously with everyone. The work I gave each of you was done so willingly and cheerfully. This is what I like and it made me very happy.

Life in any community always means control. Control of self-interests, self-expression and of one's own feelings. But it is just this control which leads to self-mastery and the realization of Truth. And as you have observed from staying with the group here... this is one of the avenues along which all must travel if they are to learn from being here with Me. At times it requires a 'Herculean' effort.

Now put your whole heart and mind into your work, which is all important for the moment. Think of Me and don't worry over the results of what you do. Do your best and leave the rest to Me.

I know how much you love Me and long for Me and shed tears because of your deep love. This is natural and rest assured you are both dear to Me.

Be cheerful in deed, thought, word, and appearance, whatever you may be feeling inside. This is a Divine quality and helps others.

Gift of God

The girls send you their love. They all enjoyed having you here to share in their life and work, even though it was for so short a time. But was it not a happy and joyous time.

All my love to you both and to those at home.

[signed] M. S. Irani

With this letter Baba was acknowledging that it was time for me to begin developing more self-control. His words served as a guide that would help me from then on, not only during my stays in the ashram, but in living my life in the world as well.

Chapter Six

"Except God all things are like a passing show. God is never changing; all else is ever changing."

- Meher Baba

In December of 1938 Baba started the Blue Bus tours, a series of journeys around India in a small blue bus with a large group of His Eastern and Western disciples, most of them women. He travelled almost continually for the next few years. The first Blue Bus tour started from Meherabad and settled in Jabalpur for a number of months. In April 1939 Nargis and I joined Baba there during my summer vacation. Jabalpur is well known for its Marble Rocks, which rise steeply from either side of a narrow river a few miles away from the town. Baba first took us there during the day, and the rocks shone like diamonds in the sunlight. Another time He surprised us with an evening boat ride. As we floated down the river, the rocks, chalk white in the moonlight, provided a silent backdrop for Baba's majestic beauty. I can still see every detail - the narrow river, the rocks on both sides, and Baba sitting serenely in the boat. But while my memory of the scene is detailed and vivid, the feeling Baba gave me is beyond description.

While I was with Baba in Jabalpur, I received a letter from Nariman. We had been writing to one another since he departed for England in 1937. I was reading his letter on the porch of the bungalow where we were staying when Baba came up behind me and asked, 'Whose letter is that?' I told Him it was from Nariman, and Baba said, "Read it to Me." In the letter Nariman said that he had submitted his thesis and obtained his M.Sc. Tech. Since he had two years of scholarship left, he intended to go to Germany in September to gain experience and study for further diplomas.

Gift of God

After I had finished reading the letter, Baba told me, "Write to him. Tell him I say he must not go to Germany! I want him to return to India!" I sent my letter right away, but as there was no airmail service at the time, Nariman did not receive it until the following month. He readily agreed to Baba's wish that he not go to Germany but was hesitant about returning to India. He found it very difficult to give up the two years of scholarship that remained. Nariman would never have been able to go to England if it had not been for his scholarship, and he didn't want to lose any part of it. In order to pay for his undergraduate college fees and help support his family, he had worked hard tutoring other students, so he appreciated the value of this opportunity to study abroad. He hadn't yet had sufficient experience with Baba to know that he should obey Him implicitly, so he postponed his return to India.

Two months later, in September, Germany invaded Poland, and Nariman immediately knew why Baba had told him not to go to Germany but to return to India instead. Without further hesitation he went to a shipping company to book passage home. At the ticket office he was told that there was no chance of getting on a ship for at least six months because of the war. The company said they would contact him should there be any chance of a ticket. There was nothing Nariman could do but wait. Then, fifteen days later, a phone call came; one passage was available immediately on a ship bound for India, and he was back in Bombay early in October. If Nariman had gone ahead with his plans to go to Germany in September, he would have been detained there. The Germans used foreigners for their propaganda work, and nobody was allowed to leave the country until the war was over. Nariman knew that his getting passage on that ship was Baba's miracle, and his faith in Baba after that time was immovable.

While we were still in Jabalpur, shortly before war was declared, Baba had his sister Mani produce a play for Him in which three personalities were featured: Hitler, Mussolini and Chamberlain. Although we had read about international tension in the papers, we had not the slightest idea that a full-scale war would break out. When it started, we realized the force of Baba working through the play, even though we didn't understand its implications.

Gift of God

From Jabalpur we traveled to Nagpur. Summer in most parts of India is terribly hot, and the temperature reached 52 degrees centigrade (124 degrees fahrenheit). Our luggage, apart from our bed rolls that carried our clothing, was composed of small satchels in which each of us carried a plate, a mug, a spoon, a napkin and a piece of soap. In Nagpur we stayed only a day and a night in a *dak* bungalow (government rest house). Baba said it would take too much time to bring down twenty-five or thirty bedrolls from the top of the bus and pack them again for only one night, so we should make do with whatever clothes we were wearing. We were soaked with sweat and covered with dust. Fortunately, the rest house had a bathroom with running water. One by one we washed our clothes and then passed them on to someone outside so they would dry while we bathed. The heat was so intense that I would have been happy to put my clothes back on wet, and I was almost disappointed when my dress was brought back to me, absolutely dry, after half an hour.

Our next big stop was Khuldabad, where for four days we stayed in a luxurious house belonging to the Nizam of Hyderabad, a very wealthy man who had ruled that large state during the British occupation of India. He kept this bungalow, situated high on a hill with a view of the surrounding mountaintops, as a guest house. Once again covered with dust from our journey, we were reluctant even to step on the lovely carpets. After travelling for three days without bathing, and eating frugally, we found the contrast overwhelming. We thoroughly enjoyed sumptuous meals served by waiters in an elegant dining room.

For the next four days, both mornings and early afternoons, we accompanied Baba to see the famous Ellora Caves, which are nearby. Baba saw the first sixteen caves in detail, and the others He passed through in quick succession. In one cave is a large statue of Lord Buddha. As Baba and the rest of us were gazing at the statue, a man in a corner was playing a drum and chanting Vedic words which echoed about us. We surrounded Baba, who turned to Shireenmai, His mother, after the music stopped and gestured, "I was Buddha." This poignant and profound memory is still vividly in front of me; two Avatars, Buddha and Baba, the living God, surcharged the atmosphere in the cave, touching my heart deeply.

Gift of God

From Khuldabad we travelled to Meherabad, stopping at several places along the way. I had been with Baba for two months, but now I had to return to Bombay, where I completed another year of teaching and helped my family move from Boman Lodge to Sohrab House. In 1939, during the short period when He was not travelling elsewhere, Baba came to Bombay and stayed in our new apartment for a couple of days and nights. At that time He told my parents never to move from there, and the apartment still belongs to our family today. He also said to my mother, "I am not going to come to Bombay again for a very, very long time." Knowing that Baba's "long time" could be six months or several years, we had no idea when He would return. He did not come back to Bombay until 1947, eight years later.

Baba soon began touring in the Blue Bus again, travelling to Bangalore, where He stayed until May of 1940. During my holidays in April I went to be with Baba. My sister Nargis had already been there for several months and had kept me in touch with what was happening in the ashram. I particularly remember that a recording of "Begin the Beguine" had been given to Baba, and He liked it so much that for quite some time He had the women play it for Him every evening.

The Bangalore ashram was an unusually busy place. Baba had collected quite a variety of animals, and He had named many of them: a pair of piglets, Nati and Gati; a sheep called Meher; a small deer, Lily; two pairs of dogs, Jingo-Bingo and Sunny-Bunny, as well as monkeys, guinea-fowls, peacocks, turkeys and others. Throughout the Blue Bus tour we had Kippy, Elizabeth's dog, with us. In addition to this mini-zoo, Baba had also established a mast ashram. Many masts were brought for only a short time, while others came to live there. Baba used to bathe, feed, and personally take care of them.

One particular mast refused to come to see Baba, and although Kaka Baria, at Baba's orders, went twice to bring the mast to the ashram, he was unable to persuade him to come. When Baba sent Kaka to try a third time, he coaxed the mast the way one would a small child, urging him to come under the pretext of taking him for a drive. Somehow the mast agreed, and Kaka

Gift of God

brought him to the bungalow where Baba was staying. However, when the car stopped at the gate, the mast refused to get out. He abused Kaka and shouted at the top of his voice, "You tricked me! You have brought me to the house of God, Allah's house!" The commotion continued until one of the mandali informed Baba, who went to the car and gently gave His hand to the mast. Without saying a word, the mast put his hand into Baba's and stepped out. Baba said that some masts recognized Him immediately, while others would realize who He is only after leaving His presence. This mast knew even before he set eyes on Him that Meher Baba was God in human form!

While we were in Bangalore, Baba had a piece of property purchased for a centre twenty-two miles from the city, at Byramangla. Once again Baba called my father to supervise the construction. The previous year he had built the dome and the four symbols on Baba's *samadhi*. Helping my father were Padri and Papa Jessawalla, the father of Eruch, another of Baba's early mandali. Before the work started, Baba broke the ground Himself with an axe. When the centre was partially completed, He stopped the construction work and held an inauguration ceremony with many guests, including the *Dewan* (Chief Minister) of Mysore State, who had great respect for Him. Baba took a few of the rmandali, including Norina and Elizabeth, to this ceremony. A few years later the property was sold, but today, fifty years later, Baba lovers have bought it back in order to build a centre there.

When we left the ashram in Bangalore in the Blue Bus, we continued south toward Gersappa Falls. We stopped for lunch, and Baba cut up a watermelon that someone had given Him and handed each of us a piece. One watermelon divided among all of us didn't go very far, but even the bite we had was refreshing. Eruch Jessawalla and Elizabeth Patterson shared the job of driving the Blue Bus with Dr. Donkin, who had come from England only recently. Although he was usually quite dignified, Dr. Donkin was finding the Indian summer excruciatingly hot, and in an attempt to lower his body temperature, he placed the empty watermelon rind on his head like a hat! This sort of silliness eased the difficulties of traveling in hot, cramped quarters for long periods.

Gift of God

We were supposed to arrive at Gersappa Falls by late afternoon but did not get to our final destination until midnight. We had left that morning at 6:00 but, due to mishaps along the way, it took us sixteen hours to cover sixty miles. At 10:00 p.m., when we were almost settled in for the night in a *dak* bungalow, Baba said that we were in the wrong place and everyone was to get back on the bus! Bleary-eyed with exhaustion, we got back into the bus and drove on, actually crossing the river to arrive at midnight at the right bungalow, situated directly in front of the falls.

Baba wanted us to see the falls by moonlight, but that night there was no moon - and since it was just before the monsoon season, the falls were barely a trickle. To create light, someone arranged for men to set bundles of hay on fire and throw them from the top, from the opposite side, but we were so tired by this time we could hardly see anything. One of us would say, "Oh, there are the falls!" and another would then see them in a totally different place, while a third would spot them in yet another. The scene was hilarious: Baba made us sit, exhausted, in the middle of the night, trying to see the falls, which none of us could see. When we did finally see the falls in the morning, they were in a completely different direction from where we thought we had seen them the previous night.

From Gersappa Falls we went on our way, stopping overnight at a few guest houses before we reached Goa. On that part of the journey Baba was traveling with Mehera, Mani and Naja in a car driven by Elizabeth, while the rest of us followed in the bus. They stopped right in front of St. Francis Xavier's church, where we saw an ordinary looking bearded man in a khaki suit approach Baba's car. A silent interview took place between the man and Baba. After we reached the hotel and were gathered around Baba in the evening, He said, "The man who came to My car today was My agent in Goa." We would never have guessed the identity of this man as Baba's agent; we should certainly never assume that we know anything about Baba's work with others. During our four days in Goa we visited St. Francis Xavier's Church. His body is kept in a glass case, and every twelve years it is opened and large crowds of people come to pay homage. Baba,

Gift of God

who often visited the tombs of the holy, went into the church, imparting the atmosphere of His Divine Presence for the benefit of those who were to come there later.

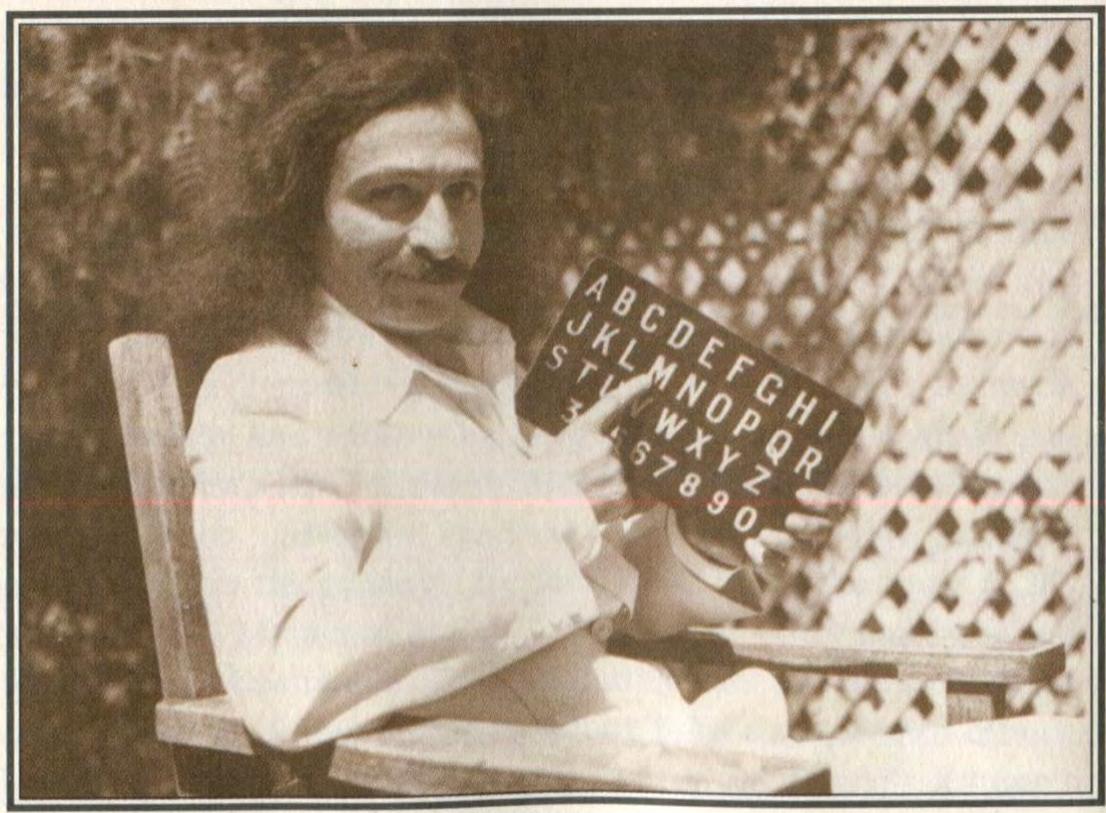
From Goa we continued our journey, traveling for some days until we came to Happy Valley, close to where Meherazad is now. (Meherazad did not yet exist; it would be three years before Baba began living there.) Baba said that we would stay in Happy Valley for fifteen days. It was very quiet and lovely, perfect for our evening walks. The first three days there with Baba were beautiful. Then, on the fourth day, someone brought news that Bua Saheb, one of Baba's earliest mandali, had died in a motorcycle accident. Bua Saheb had left the ashram and was staying in Poona. Before he left, Baba had told him never to ride a motorcycle. He was very close to Baba, yet the pull of destiny must have been so strong that he failed to carry out Baba's order, which might have saved him. When Baba heard about Bua Saheb's death, He was very upset. Despite the fact that the God-Man is all knowing, He also feels on a human level. Although Baba had planned to stay at Happy Valley for fifteen days, we all returned immediately to Meherabad, and after a few days I went home to Bombay.

Chapter Seven

*"The only REAL
RENUNCIATION is that
which abandons, even in the
midst of worldly duties, all
selfish thoughts and desires."*

- Meher Baba

When I had first joined Baba at the ashram in Bangalore, I was not physically at my best, and I was emotionally drained from working with the children at school. I knew that being with Baba and staying in the ashram would again lift me - just being with Him was enough. Then, two days after I arrived, He called me for our first private talk. Baba



Baba with His alphabet board

Gift of God

communicated with gestures for His general needs, but when He wanted to have a conversation or say something specific, He used an alphabet board. Although many of His gestures were easy to understand, I could read the board only very slowly.

Being alone with Baba was unusual in itself, but I was completely unprepared for what He spelled out on the board: "Would you like to marry?" I replied, "No, Baba. I don't want to marry because I want to love and serve only You!" Baba then said, "To love Me and serve Me is great, but to obey Me is the greatest. So will you obey Me and do what I tell you?" I replied, "Yes, Baba." He asked, "If I tell you to, will you marry?" Growing uneasy, but having no choice, I again said yes to Baba. He then asked me, "Do you know the story of Mira?" I told Baba I knew a little about her. Baba said, "Mira did not wish to marry because she wanted only to love Krishna and to renounce the world. But because Krishna told her to marry, she did. So, likewise, will you marry if I want you to?" With downcast eyes I said, "Yes, Baba." Baba then said to me, "Will you marry the man I tell you to marry? Suppose I tell you to marry Nariman. Will you marry him?" In obedience, I said, "Yes, Baba," even though in my heart of hearts I wanted to live a single life devoted only to Him. Then to comfort me, because He knew what anguish His questions were putting me through, Baba ended our conversation saying, "I'm not going to tell you to marry. I was just asking you."

Ever since my early teens I had longed for a life of renunciation. My young mind believed that the only way to think solely of God was to lead an ascetic life, and I would daydream of the distant Himalayas, where *yogis* and *sanyasins* lived lives of renunciation for God. My longing had increased all the more after Baba had opened the floodgates and drowned me in love for Him on His birthday two years earlier. After that experience my reverie became so profound that I lost interest in all around me. I would go through the activities of my daily life, but my yearnings within tore me apart, and I was deeply moved by *ghazals* and Mira *bhajans*. My desire to love only Baba was so intense that the idea of marriage did not appeal to me at all. By now, however, Baba had taught me to obey Him, to do what *He* wanted, no matter what my desires might be. To say the words "Yes, Baba" is relatively easy.

Gift of God

But to accept what He asks of us wholeheartedly is difficult. Although feelings are beyond our immediate control, we must try our best to accept what Baba wants for us, and over time He will in turn help us with our feelings. This doesn't necessarily mean we succeed quickly, but He gives us as much as we can take at one time, then gradually gives us a little more. Though we may think what He asks of us is beyond our endurance, His love eases our pain. He told me, "I'm not going to tell you to marry. I was only asking you." In this way Beloved Baba eased my heart, as He knew I wasn't yet ready to accept the idea of being married; He gave me the time I needed to adjust to that possibility.

One evening shortly after returning to Bombay, I was gazing out the window at the sky when I was overcome by a strong urge; I did not want anything or anybody but Baba. The feeling was agonizing. Suddenly a powerful, blinding flash of light enveloped me. This light was so strong that I felt as if I were suffocating, and I had to close my eyes because I could not tolerate the brightness. My heart cried out, "Oh, Baba! Baba!" From deep within me I heard a voice saying, "You couldn't even bear this light now. So there is still time." With this experience Beloved Baba made me realize that no matter how strongly we feel or how deeply we may want something, we may not be ready. Only He can gauge our readiness and give us what we need at the appropriate time. Although I still felt the usual longing to be in Baba's physical presence, I felt calm and resigned.

Baba had told me to leave my teaching job because it was a great strain on me, but as my family needed financial help, I still had to work. I found an interesting job at a veterinary hospital, looking after the dogs and birds. The job provided living quarters, a nice, cozy two-room flat. This was the first time that I had lived separately from my parents, and I came to feel that this arrangement was given to me by Baba to help me develop independence.

I worked at the veterinary hospital for only a year because in January of 1942 Baba called me to travel with Him and a few of the men and women mandali to Dehra Dun in northern India. We began the journey from Meherabad and travelled by train in a

Gift of God

special reserved compartment. I stayed with Baba for three months, from January through March, and it was a time of many special events. Among them was Baba's birthday, which we celebrated with only our small group. We were given a special treat of sherbet drinks and omelettes. At that time the mandali were not allowed to eat eggs, so everyone especially enjoyed this party. Another time we went to see movies about Krishna and Ram. It was a unique privilege to be in the theatre with Baba, the Living God, while watching the stories of two of His previous incarnations on the screen.

We were still in Dehra Dun for Holi, a Hindu festival. Baba had a pit dug in the back yard, had it filled with wood, and then He lighted a fire. Holi, which has mythological significance, traditionally celebrates the heralding of spring, also commemorating God's triumph over the forces of darkness. As the Holi fire is lighted, the darkness is symbolically consumed by the flames. I didn't know the meaning behind Baba's conducting this event, but it took place during the war, just after the United States became involved in the European theatre.

During the war Calcutta was threatened by the Japanese and Karachi by the Germans. Baba received letters from His lovers in both Calcutta and Karachi, asking if they should leave their homes and move elsewhere. Baba told them to stay where they were. Later He said to us, "If there is a fire in the East, people will run to the West, and if there is a fire in the North, people will run to the South. But if there is fire all around, where will the people go?" Baba is with us wherever we are, and whatever is to happen will happen, no matter where we are.

Baba also told us, "India will lead the whole world spiritually, and for that she will have to suffer the most." He said that in order for India to fulfill this role, she would have to be free and independent. Later that same year, in August, Baba showed us how God in His human form takes an active part in all of His creation, including politics. He ordered Chanji to distribute His discourses on violence, nonviolence and war at an important meeting in Bombay of the Quit India movement, the purpose of which was to end the British rule. This meeting was to be attended

Gift of God

by all the great Indian freedom fighters and leaders, including Nehru and Gandhi, two men whose lives were dedicated solely to service without any desire for material gain. While en route by ship to England in 1931, Baba had granted an interview to Ghandi, who was on his way to the Round Table Conference.

Chanji took some of the men disciples to help him make sure the main leaders received copies of Baba's discourses after the meeting was over. Chanji himself stood near Nehru's car and was able to place a pamphlet in his hands. Nehru, a gracious man, accepted it with a nod and Chanji saw him look at Baba's photo on the cover. Soon after, all these leaders were imprisoned, and Nehru was held at Ahmednagar Fort. After tremendous suffering and struggle, India won freedom from British rule just five years following Baba's distribution of the pamphlets. Although great violence and bloodshed occurred with the partition of India and the creation of Pakistan, India's achieving nonviolent independence from British rule was unusual, especially for such a large country. Jawaharlal Nehru (*jawahar* means jewel) became the first Prime Minister of India.

Eighteen years later, in May 1965, Nehru died while still in office. Tens of thousands of people joined the procession carrying his body from his home to the cremation ground. The ceremony, which lasted for hours, was broadcast, and Baba listened to it on All-India Radio. Ordinarily Baba would listen to the radio only for short periods, but that day He sat through the entire programme, listening intently. Later that evening Baba said, "There won't be a man like Nehru for another seven hundred years." Baba's statement made us realize what a tremendous impact a great soul like Nehru has on the world.

It was during this time in Dehra Dun that Baba gave us a discourse explaining the intricate workings of His creation, discussing with us a pamphlet, "Meditation on the Divine Theme," that He had distributed to his mandali and close lovers in November or December of the previous year with instructions to read it for half an hour every day. When Baba asked the Western women mandali what they had understood of the pamphlet, a few tried to explain but struggled because the material was rather difficult. I had not understood what I had been reading either.

Gift of God

Then Baba explained it to us in such a clear and simple manner that it suddenly seemed easy to grasp and was immediately impressed upon my mind.

Baba spoke of a calm and quiet Ocean, saying that the Ocean was God, who was in a sound sleep. One day the Ocean was stirred by a whiff of wind and awoke from sleep, saying, "Who am I?" No sooner had it asked the question than an unlimited number of drops were flung on the shore far from the Ocean. These drops, separated from the Ocean, became individual souls, and each soul in turn asked the question, "Who am I?" and that is how evolution started. Each drop first took the form of gaseous matter, then evolved to various forms of stone, metal, plant, and animal until it reached the human form. Evolution then ended and reincarnation began. Baba told us that the drop soul has to take form eight million, four hundred thousand times, and as it travels through all these experiences, it comes nearer and nearer the Ocean. Eventually it begins its final journey, which Baba called involution, across the seven planes of consciousness that will reunite it with the Ocean. When it comes to the sixth plane, it stands face to face with God, the Ocean, but here is a deep, deep chasm that is extremely difficult and painful to cross. When the soul succeeds in crossing this chasm, it reaches the seventh plane and merges back into the Ocean, becoming one with it, and realizes, "I am the Ocean that is God." As Baba concluded this discourse, I was amazed by the enormity of His revelation. I knew about reincarnation even though it was not a part of the Zoroastrian religion, but Baba had just laid the entire theme of creation before us and it was absolutely awe-inspiring.

During our stay in Dehra Dun Baba made plans for all of us to go to Rishikesh, in northern India, where many yogis and sanyasins lived. I was so happy that I was finally going to see the type of place that I yearned for inwardly. Much to my disappointment, however, Baba changed His plans and I did not get to go. Even more disappointing was hearing later that after my departure Baba had taken the men and women mandali, including my sister Nargis. Much later I accepted that it would not have been good for me to be in that atmosphere. Baba had a life in the world planned for me and wanted me to discover that true renunciation was quite different from what I yearned for.

Gift of God

Near the end of March, after I had been in Dehra Dun with Baba for nearly three months, He called me to His room and showed me an advertisement in a newspaper. He said, "I want you to join this Auxiliary Nursing Service. Go back to Bombay and take your training." In high school I had very much wanted to serve the sick and poor by becoming a nurse, but my mother would not allow me to consider nursing; therefore, I had asked Baba if I could be a teacher. Now Baba was fulfilling my original desire in giving me an opportunity to be a war nurse.

Nurses' training usually takes four years, but this programme taught only the fundamentals necessary for work in a military hospital. It was a hard, rigorous three-month crash course. I went back to Bombay, was accepted into the A.N.S., and for the practical part of the training worked with British soldiers. After completing the course that September, I was put on reserve. One could choose from three types of service: local, all-India, or overseas. Baba had told me to sign up for local service, and He had also said, "See that you don't have night duty." At the time it didn't strike me how impossible that order was; nurses are always given night duty. But when Baba gave that instruction, I just said, "Yes, Baba." I was learning that when one simply said, "Yes, Baba," without thought or worry, He took care of everything.

While I was waiting to be called for duty, Baba asked me to come to Lonavla where He was staying with the men and women mandali. At that time Baba had Uncle Chanji writing His biography in Gujarati, and I had been helping by recopying the rough drafts of his writing. He was working on this book mainly in Bombay because he needed quiet, which the close quarters of the ashram did not provide. Uncle Chanji asked Baba to keep me for only a short while and then send me back to Bombay, as my help was essential. Until December I went back and forth between Bombay and Lonavla, spending a fortnight at each place.

During this time I was regularly seeing Nariman, who had settled in Bombay after returning to India. Although he wanted to start a business of his own, he was only twenty-six and knew he needed some experience, so he took a position for a year with a good English firm, Imperial Chemical Industry, which dealt in his

Gift of God

field of interest. After working there for only a year, Nariman was approached by a friend who recognized his ability and asked him to form a partnership. With Nariman's knowledge and his friend's money they set up a business, American Colour and Chemical Company, importing materials from foreign countries and selling them on the Indian market. Within two years the business was doing fairly well, but the partner wanted to leave Bombay, so Nariman became the sole owner. He used his share of the profits to expand the business and worked very hard, seven days a week. In spite of having started with no money of his own, Nariman quickly became well established in the industry and was able to bring his mother and brothers from Karachi to settle in Bombay. His youngest brother was still in school, but he took his other two brothers into the business, looking after the family like a father.

Nariman and I had remained close friends, but now he wanted to marry me. Although I knew what a brilliant and practical man he was, and I admired his integrity and enjoyed his friendship, I was still not interested in marriage. Yet I knew I could not push Nariman away. Baba had planted this hesitation in me with His words in Bangalore, asking me if I would marry someone He chose and, specifically, if I would marry Nariman if He told me to. Then, just before I went to Lonavla in September, Nariman showed me a letter he had written to Baba, in which he had asked permission to marry me. Remembering Baba's words, I allowed Nariman to send the letter. I knew that Baba would do exactly as He wanted.

When Baba next called me to Lonavla, He very casually asked me if I had seen the letter Nariman had written. I said that I had, and immediately Baba said, "I will fix the date of your engagement!" He gestured that He would put the rings on our fingers, then quickly walked away, leaving me standing there alone on the verandah. I was distraught that Baba did not say anything more to me about His decision. But although it was difficult for me to accept what He wanted, I knew that if I surrendered to His will, Baba would help me. Later I realized how He had blessed Nariman and me in giving us the opportunity to love and serve Him through marriage, in a way that neither of us could have done separately. Beloved Baba gave me a husband who was unique

Gift of God

among men, selfless, faithful and very loving, but my appreciation came after I was leading my married life.

Baba soon sent me back to Bombay to help Uncle Chanji, but I was so despondent that it was difficult for me to carry on. Although I was willing to do anything Baba wanted, the idea of marriage still disturbed me greatly. I would come to know that in asking me to marry, Baba was beginning the process of showing me that real renunciation was to live in the world and not be of it, but at that time I did not have this understanding. It could come only from Baba's throwing me headlong into all the activities and duties that a worldly life required.

Baba had put me in an agonizing situation, but because I accepted His will silently, He showered me with His love and compassion. One day, while resting on my bed with my eyes closed, I had an amazing vision that changed everything and brought me great comfort. In the vision Nariman and I were acting on a stage; though there were many people in the audience, I saw only Baba and Mehera. In the first scene I was playing the part of Mira. Dressed in a beautiful white sari, spangled with silver stars, I was seated in a chair by the side of Nariman, who played the king. The first scene faded into the second, in which Nariman and I lived in a palace, completely involved in our worldly obligations, although the true focus of our lives was Baba. In the third and final scene the background was a forested area in the mountains, and I was dressed in a plain, saffron-coloured sari. I walked alone in the forest, singing one of my favorite Mira bhajans, in which she says, "Now I have come to you, my Beloved God; no one can stop me from coming to you, my Beloved." As the vision ended, I was still singing, and it was as though Baba had said to me, "Your desire to lead a life of renunciation will not be taken away from you. It will be a gift to you after you have played out your role for Me in the world. This life *has* to be. You have to pass through an ordinary, normal married life." I felt great peace as I accepted Baba's wish and will.

I had wanted to accept Baba's will wholeheartedly but did not have the capacity to do so; because my desire to please Him was strong and sincere, Baba helped me with the gift of this vision.

Gift of God

I had been so disinterested in our engagement that I didn't even feel like buying an appropriate sari to wear for the occasion. I had decided I would just wear an ordinary sari, but now I knew Baba would want me to play my given role to the fullest. I was to be engaged, and that meant I must dress befitting the occasion. While looking for my engagement sari, I saw in a shop window a white tulle sari with small silver stars and spangles embroidered on it - identical to the one I had worn in the vision! I went into the store and ordered the sari immediately, knowing that Baba had provided it for me to wear on our wedding day.

Unfortunately, the peace and calm that followed the vision Baba gave me did not last. He helped me to accept His wish for me to live a normal married life, but I still felt restless. Baba knew that more than acceptance was necessary; He wanted me to feel love for Nariman, so He had to instill that love within me. Early one morning as I was lying awake and taking Baba's name, I had a second vision. Nariman, dressed in a white shirt with a necktie, came and sat by my side. He said he was on his way to Meherabad for Baba's darshan, as Baba had written him a letter telling him to come. Nariman said, "I am going to the station now and have come to say goodbye to you. Open your eyes." In the vision my eyes were closed, but I could see him and I said, "Nariman, I can see you!" He said, "But your eyes are closed." I replied, "Yes, but I can still see you." Nariman bent down to embrace me before leaving, and I was overwhelmed by the fragrance and purity emanating from him. At that moment a portion of the pure love in my heart for Beloved Baba was transferred to Nariman for our coming marriage and life together.

Chapter Eight

*"Accept with love what I
give with love."*

- Meher Baba

Before I knew that Baba would ask me to marry Nariman, I had ordered a ring with Baba's name engraved on it that I could wear always. When Baba set our engagement date, Nariman said he wanted one with the same pattern, so we ordered an identical ring for him. On 21st December, 1942, I dressed in a traditional red sari for our engagement ceremony. Margaret Craske, an English ballet teacher who had been staying in Baba's ashram for a number of years and had become a good friend, helped me with the finishing touches and did my makeup.

Nariman, his family, and my family had come to Lonavla, where Nargis and I were already staying with Baba. Everyone gathered in the men mandali's bungalow, and Baba brought me from the women's bungalow along with Pilamai (Goher's aunt) and Nargis. While Nariman and I stood in front of Baba, He put the rings on our fingers. and embraced us. We placed a garland around Baba's neck and embraced Him. After Baba had given His darshan to all those present, Nariman and both our families returned to Bombay, and Baba took me, Pilamai and Nargis back to the women's bungalow.

The day before our engagement I had given the gifts that Nariman and I had brought for Baba, Mehera and Mani. For Mehera I had chosen a white tulle sari delicately embroidered with gold and silver, a blouse and sandals, and a small gold chain necklace from which hung the words "Meher Baba" in red and blue enamel. Baba, pleased, said that Mehera would wear this new outfit on her birthday.

The next morning Baba and the rest of us left Lonavla for Meherabad on the Blue Bus. This year, for the first time, Baba had

Gift of God

planned a grand celebration for Mehera's birthday, to be held on 28th December. He had also arranged a secret meeting of one hundred Baba lovers to take place during the same week, choosing ninety-nine men and only one woman, Margaret Craske, to attend. The mandali worked hard on the preparations, knowing that the meeting was very important to Baba. But a sudden, violent storm came up, and the large tent that had been erected at Lower Meherabad collapsed. There seemed to be insufficient time to rebuild it. Baba, already upset because Mehera had developed a cold and fever, said, "Maya is coming in My way. The tent is down; Mehera is ill; I'm going to cancel the meeting!" Baba's cousin Pendu, who with Padri had been in charge of putting up the tent, was in tears. He begged Baba not to cancel the meeting, saying that they would do their best to fix the tent. Everyone pitched in, and by the next day the tent was back up and Baba held the meeting. Although Nariman was one of those chosen to attend, to this day I have no idea what it was all about.

After we had been in Meherabad for a few days, Baba called me to Mehera's room, where they gave me presents for my engagement. All the gifts were in a blue embroidered cloth bag with a wooden handle. One by one Baba showed me the presents - including a lovely photo of Him in an 8 x 10 silver frame, a small compact for powder and rouge with a watch on the outside, and a scarf - then put them back in the bag and gave it to me. Baba also gave me a pair of gold earrings and a blue sari with a green border that had belonged to Mehera. He told me that He had not previously given away any clothes which had been worn by Mehera and that I was very fortunate to receive this sari. I felt blessed by these expressions of Baba's and Mehera's love.

On the evening of Mehera's birthday celebration Baba called me to her room and said, "Help Mehera put on the sari, and dress her with style!" This was the first time I had seen her wearing elegant clothing, as she had always dressed very simply. In her new white tulle sari she looked stunning, quite unlike the shy, retiring Mehera of the ashram. I couldn't take my eyes off her celestial beauty. After helping Mehera dress, I went back to the room where I was staying and some of the other women asked why Baba had called me. When I said I had helped Mehera put on her sari, everyone was quite surprised, as in those days she was

Gift of God

kept secluded even from the other women mandali. She remained in her room most of the time, and Baba would allow no one except Mani to touch her. I knew then that dressing Mehera had been something quite special, and I marked this event as one of the ways in which Baba was gradually revealing the connection between Mehera and me.

This whole occasion had felt like a Sahavas with Baba gathering us women around Him in Mehera's room during the day. Close disciples from Poona and Bombay had been invited to attend the four-day celebration, with the women meeting in Upper Meherabad and the men at Lower Meherabad for their own programmes. On the evening of Mehera's birthday everyone, men and women, dressed in their best and assembled in Upper Meherabad for a *qawwali* programme. Mehera and the women mandali enjoyed the singing from behind a screen placed in front of the tin shed. This special celebration was a beautiful and intimate time with Beloved Baba.

Usually the women were not allowed to step outside the walls that surrounded the ashram on Meherabad Hill, but one evening Baba took us out through the gate and we stood together near the old water tank. Pointing toward Lower Meherabad, He said, "A day will come when there will be a township down there." Baba extended His hand to the far right, showing us where a river would flow, offering us a tiny glimpse of His infinite knowledge. The next day, when we were all assembled in Mehera's room, Baba talked with us again, saying, "I am the last Avatar in this present cycle of twenty-four and therefore the greatest and most powerful. I have the attributes of five. I am as pure as Zoroaster, as truthful as Ram, as mischievous as Krishna, as gentle as Jesus, and as fiery as Mohammed."

Baba sent me back to Bombay showered with love, gifts and beautiful memories of my time with Him and Mehera. As soon as I arrived home, I received a call from the A.N.S. to start work. I signed a year's contract, beginning in February, 1943, and began nursing Indian soldiers in a military hospital. After two months of working the day shift, I was assigned night duty for the following fortnight. Remembering Baba's order not to work night duty, I was

Gift of God

in a dilemma. I couldn't possibly refuse, as nurses are always expected to work whatever shift they are assigned, and I was under contract. I said desperately, "Baba, I don't know what to do. Please help me to carry out Your order." In a few days the matron called me to her office and told me there was no need for me to go on night duty, as she had given it to someone else. For six months I was never assigned the night shift again. When we leave it all to Baba, He takes care of everything.

Despite the fact that Nariman and I were now engaged, and Baba had given me such beautiful visions of our future life together, I continued to struggle with my attachment to the idea that true renunciation meant withdrawing from the world to become completely lost in longing for God. I wrote long letters to Baba about my difficulties:

[Undated]

Baba darling,

Since You want me to marry Nariman, I shall surely do [so], but allow me also to explain what my heart holds.... Oh Baba, is it in my power to stop the flow of my heart in its own forceful, natural channel? If only human beings could make the heart do what one wishes to do. Would there be any sufferings on the earth? Oh Baba, I beg You, I beseech You to help me and make me do whatever You wish. Baba dear, why can't I love You only? Perhaps I am not so worthy as to love only You eternally. Happy will be the day when I shall have no other thought but of You. Baba dear, how I wish I could transfer all my love... to You. Then I would not want anything on this earth. I would not even mind the sufferings that true love is bound to bring.

Gift of God

June 1943

Baba, my dearest of the dearests,

It seems... ages [since] I... met You, though there's not a moment that is void of the thought of You.... Baba darling, when shall I have the opportunity of taking Your darshan again. Life would have been an empty dream without You....

Baba, darling, You are the only One on earth Who can understand a heart, and more beautifully so, a broken heart Dear Baba, I am simply tired of life Exhaustion is raining in every tiny fiber of my nerves. Till I feel fresh again, how can I live, Baba? The dullness and disinterest that has gripped so tight seems so difficult to remove. If You wish, You can help me out of it. Please, Baba, I don't want You to quit my suffering. No, that is not what I want. If You desire, let my sufferings be increased ever more, but I pray You to remove disinterest and exhaustion out of me. [They are] driving me more and more into a deep abyss. The only thing that has kept me up until now is that You are the One, and the only One, who understands me My heart is known only by You, and that is enough for me to live on at present....

Baba's reply to my suffering was loving but firm:

*Meherabad
1st July 1943*

Dear Arnavaz,

Your letter... made me happy for your expression of love, faith and trust in me; but a bit sad also, about the depressing situation you are in.

Gift of God

You need not worry. I know everything. I don't blame you for anything. But I really would wish you to give definite, loving response to Nariman.

As for nursing, if you feel you must do it for helping your home people, sign another year's contract. But if your health makes you feel unable to cope with this, do not sign and do not worry.

Love and blessings.

Dictated by Baba

Within a month my own problems were overshadowed when my brother Tehmton developed typhoid fever. We took him to the hospital where Goher was studying to be a doctor because we wanted to be sure he would receive good care. Two weeks later it seemed that he had nearly recovered, and the doctor said he could go home soon. The very next day, however, he suffered a severe relapse, and after three days he died. My mother was shattered; it was the first death in our immediate family, and Tehmton was her first-born son.

Just a few months earlier Tehmton had decided not to continue with his schooling. He was only in the seventh standard, and my parents and I were worried about his future, wondering what he would do without an education. In those days Baba expected us to write Him about our problems, so I sent a letter telling Him of Tehmton's decision and our concerns. Baba sent a reply saying, "Don't worry. Let Tehmton leave school and not study further." When Tehmton died, we understood the reason for Baba's answer to my letter.

We all loved Tehmton very much and Baba, knowing how distressed we were, called us to Poona the following week for His darshan. When my mother saw Baba, she cried her heart out, and He consoled her with a long, loving embrace. Greatly comforted, she said, "Baba, can I ask You something?" Baba nodded. "Tehmton's horoscope indicated that his life span was seventy years and that he would be a prominent doctor or engineer. How is it that he died at seventeen?" Baba told her gently, "He would

Gift of God

have lived that long, but his life was so miserable that I finished it in seventeen years." He looked at my mother and asked, "Would you have liked to see Tehmton miserable?" My mother, with tears in her eyes, said, "No, Baba." She was relieved by Baba's words and felt more peaceful. Knowing that what Beloved Baba had done was best for Tehmton, she could accept His will despite the pain of her loss. When we were taking our leave, my mother asked Baba when He would come to Bombay. Four years earlier, in 1939, He had said that He would not come to Bombay for a very long time. This time Baba replied, "I will come when Nariman and Arnavaaz have their own home."

After a short leave following Tehmton's death in August, I resumed my nursing duties, but in September I fell and sprained my ankle and was unable to continue working. It wasn't a simple sprain; the doctor fitted me with a special type of shoe and advised me not to be on my feet for at least six months. Even though my contract would not expire for another three months, I was released from my obligations, and I didn't know when or if I would sign another contract. One more career had suddenly ended. In less than a year I had become engaged, my brother had died, and I was no longer working. Baba was changing my life, preparing me for the role He wished me to play in the world through these first difficult lessons in detachment.

Seeking to fill my days while my ankle was healing, I thought about learning to play the sitar. Whenever I heard the sound of this instrument, I felt as if my heart strings were being played. I would become lost in the music, which consoled me. My father was not at all enthusiastic about the idea, and he told me first to write Baba and ask His permission. My father's objection to my learning the sitar came from an experience he had as a young man. A good musician himself, he loved classical Indian music and played the harmonium, dilruba and violin. He had wanted to learn the sitar, but his mother had tried to dissuade him because of an old folk belief that playing this instrument might bring ill fortune. Finally, however, he convinced her that she was just being superstitious, and he purchased a sitar. He placed his new instrument in a corner, only to find two strings broken when he picked it up the next day. Though my father repaired them, the

Gift of God

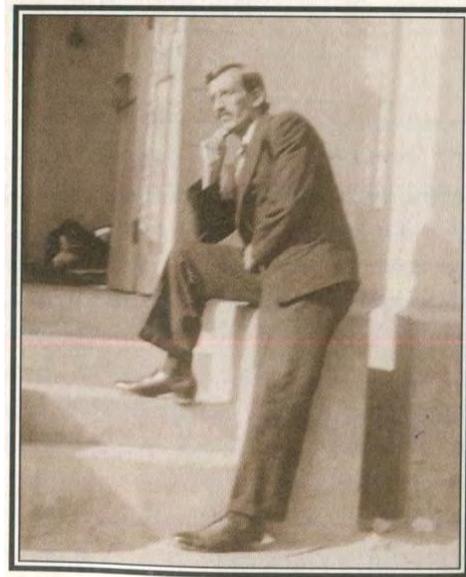
following day he discovered that all the strings had snapped! He wondered if perhaps there was something to his mother's not wanting him to play this particular instrument. Although he was not superstitious, he returned the sitar to the dealer. When I showed an interest in learning to play this instrument, naturally my father thought it best to ask Baba first. He also instructed me to ask whether or not I should learn to drive Nariman's new car. Baba's reply to my letter was, "You should not learn the sitar and you should not learn driving." I did not understand then why I should not learn to drive, but I realized that playing the sitar would have distracted me from the life in the world Beloved Baba had planned for me.

Chapter Nine

"The service that the disciple can offer the Master is not only linked with the universal cause of humanity but is one of the most potent means of bringing the disciple nearer his spiritual goal."

- Meher Baba

After my first visions of married life with Nariman, others followed. In one Baba told me, "You will have to undergo much suffering." I tried to imagine what could be worse than the struggle I had already been going through. When I asked Him in the vision if it were death, Baba replied, "Yes, you will have to face many deaths in your life." In August of 1944, a year after my brother Tehmton's death, just when we were beginning to become accustomed to his absence, the family suffered another irreparable loss. Uncle Chanji, whose loving nature made everyone cherish him, died suddenly while on a trip



Chanji

Gift of God

with Baba. We all felt cast adrift. Chanji was the captain of our ship, and he had lovingly steered us into Baba's harbour.

A man of medium stature, Chanji wore round spectacles typical of his times, and when he made jokes, he always twirled his moustache. Smiling, eyes twinkling, he would tell stories with a spontaneous wit that filled Baba and the rest of us with laughter. Chanji was quite absent-minded, often searching for his glasses when they were sitting on top of his head or leaving his briefcase behind and then rushing back to our house to retrieve it before catching a train. But if he was forgetful with his personal belongings, where Baba's work was concerned he was very particular about even the smallest details.

Chanji's temperament was unique. He was extroverted, good-hearted, kind and trusting. His deep understanding of human nature gave him the ability to bring solace to those in despair by sharing Baba's message of love. His own gratitude, conviction, and intense love for Baba inspired others without his ever forcing Baba upon them. We always looked forward to Chanji's visits because being with him was such a joy. He could make us laugh until we hurt. Best of all, though, he always brought Beloved Baba's atmosphere with him. I loved Uncle Chanji more than I loved my own father, and I found his death almost unbearable.

Although Chanji's dying came as a complete shock, we realized later that Baba had given several indications that he would not be with us much longer. In May of that year, while discussing plans for a darshan programme in Nagpur in September, Baba had named quite a number of men mandali who would go with Him. To everyone's surprise, He did not mention Uncle Chanji, who accompanied Him practically everywhere. When someone asked Baba why He had not included Chanji, Baba replied, "He will come if he's alive." Most of the mandali took Baba's remark to be humorous, but Dr. Nilu later told us that Baba's words had made him uncomfortable, and he wondered about their meaning.

A short time later Baba sent Chanji to Bombay, saying, 'When I send for you, bring all your belongings because you will

Gift of God

not be going back to Bombay for a very, very long time!" Chanji was with us for a few days and we spent our time talking of Baba, as we always did, but on this visit he wasn't joking with us in his usual manner. The day he was preparing to leave Bombay, we were alone in the house. Uncle Chanji said, "Arnavaz, I am not coming back for a long time." Sometimes we wouldn't see him for long periods, months at a time, so I asked if he meant five or six months. Uncle Chanji said, "No, no, no! A *very* long time." I suggested, "Then maybe after a year or two?" He repeated, "No, a *very* long time!" There was a sadness in his voice that I didn't understand. I went to see him off at the station, but I didn't go to the platform, as he had Baba's orders not to reveal to anyone where he was going. After he embraced me, just before he left for the train, he removed a five rupee note from his pocket and gave it to me. Uncle Chanji never had any money of his own, and this was a very unusual gesture. I asked, "Why are you giving this to me? I should be giving it to you." He answered, "You keep it." I took the money because I could feel that he was giving it lovingly, with a purpose. That was the last time I saw him. Later I realized that he knew in his heart he would never see me or the rest of the family again, and perhaps he even had an intuition that he was going to die.

We later came to know that when Chanji left Bombay, he met Baba in Raipur, where he fell ill, and he never fully regained his strength. Then, in August, when Baba took the group to Shrinagar, Kashmir, Chanji contracted typhoid fever. His condition was so serious that he had to be moved to a hospital, where Baba visited him often during the next few days. Chanji died on 25th August, 1944. Baba sent a telegramme to one of His mandali in Ahmednagar, Adi K. Irani, Sr., telling him to inform us. However, he was not to mention where Chanji's death had taken place. When we heard the news, we didn't want to believe it. We wondered if perhaps Baba had sent Chanji somewhere and did not want him ever to return. Of course, all this was just hoping on our part. Chanji was only fifty-two years old, he was generally healthy, and we had known nothing about this illness. It was not until a week after his death that Baba wrote to Adi, allowing him to visit us personally and relate the whole story.

Gift of God

When Nariman heard that Uncle Chanji had died, he grew pale and his sorrow was obvious. These two men, both so important in my life, had a very close and deep connection, and Uncle Chanji had been delighted at the news that Nariman and I were to be married. Uncle Chanji loved all of us very much, but especially Nariman, whom he had adopted in his heart as his own son. He knew Nariman's true worth, and from the very beginning of their relationship he had talked to Nariman about Baba, gradually drawing him closer and closer, knowing that one day his nephew would be completely Baba's. And he was right. Nariman's love for and faith in Baba grew until it was total and spontaneous. His response to anything Baba asked of him was simply to say, "Yes, Baba," and carry out the order. Nariman always responded from his heart. He never let his mind get in the way of serving his Beloved Lord.

Uncle Chanji was so fond of Nariman that I used to tease him, saying that he would inherit all of Chanji's possessions. Of course Uncle Chanji had nothing to leave to anyone materially, not even his bedding and clothes - those did not belong to him, as they were given by Baba, along with enough money to cover the bare necessities of life. After settling in Bombay, Nariman, out of his deep love for both Baba and his uncle, had helped take care of Uncle Chanji's material needs. Although I had merely been joking about Nariman inheriting everything belonging to Uncle Chanji, in a sense he did. Baba's gesture for Chanji had been to indicate spectacles. When He began using that same gesture for Nariman, I witnessed Nariman's connection with Baba deepening.

Baba knows what is best for each one of us, and Chanji's dropping of the body was in accord with His perfect timing. Nevertheless, Chanji's death sent a wave of shock and grief over the entire Baba community, in both the East and West. For years he had been Baba's chief personal secretary and the primary correspondent with Baba lovers in both India and abroad, writing or visiting them whenever he could, no matter how busy he was. In this way he served as a link to Baba for many, many people. Through love, tenderness and concern, he won the hearts of all who came in contact with him. He was a true friend, and his death was a great loss for many.

Gift of God

When one of the mandali asked Baba why Chanji, who was so indispensable to Him, had to die, Baba replied, "I saved him twice. The first time he wanted to commit suicide on the beach in Bombay, and the second time he almost drowned in the Toka river." This second incident had occurred in 1928, when Baba moved His ashram temporarily to Toka. One day while Chanji was sitting on the bank of the river, he slipped and fell into the water. Not knowing how to swim, he sank, then struggled three times to the surface; the third time, feeling it was surely the end, he shouted at the top of his voice, "Baba! Baba!" Then he felt as though a hand came underneath him and lifted him above the surface of the water, but actually one of the other mandali pulled him out of the river. Uncle Chanji later told us that as he was falling into the river, he knew he was going to drown. In the water he had "experienced death," but Baba had saved him.

Everyone in our family was very impressed when Chanji narrated this incident, especially his mother, my grandmother, who used to worry about who would look after him in his old age. After his divorce she had wanted him to remarry. He would tell Grandmother to stop worrying about him, but she did not understand that he had dedicated his life to Baba. Finally she decided to have his horoscope read to learn whether or not his destiny included another marriage. She went with one of my aunts to an astrologer, who, after studying Chanji's chart for a few minutes, threw it down and said, "This is the horoscope of a dead man!" My grandmother was shocked. "Dead man? But this is my son and he is alive!" The astrologer said, "But there is no life! What can I read? He's dead. I am telling you, this is the horoscope of a dead man!" Completely perplexed, my grandmother was certain the astrologer was making a mistake. Then, when Uncle Chanji told us about nearly drowning, he impressed upon the family that were it not for Baba, he would have died. After that my grandmother was convinced that the horoscope had been read correctly; if Baba were not the great man that Chanji insisted He was, her beloved son would be a dead man indeed. From then on, not only did my grandmother stop pestering Chanji to remarry, but her faith in Baba grew stronger.

Gift of God

Chanji accompanied Baba on every trip He took to the west before his death. In obeying Baba's every order, he was subject to trying situations that Baba deemed necessary for his spiritual training. On one voyage Baba told Chanji to ask the Captain why the ship was moving so slowly. The Captain just gave him a funny look. The next day Baba sent Chanji back to ask what day the ship would arrive at its destination. A day or two later Baba sent him to ask what time of day the ship would arrive. Finally, He instructed Chanji to ask the Captain why he couldn't make the ship go faster. Chanji was sure that when he approached the Captain with that question, the Captain would hit him with whatever he could find available and throw him into the ocean, but the Captain just stared at him as though he were crazy. Another time Baba had Chanji repeatedly protest to the steward of a ship that the food had either too much or too little salt, until the exasperated steward threw all courtesy to the winds and unleashed such abuse on Chanji that it made him wish a wave *would* sweep him into the ocean.

Baba was relentless with His training of those closest to Him. On another occasion Baba and Chanji were in the cabin alone discussing a letter that Chanji was to draft. No matter what Baba said, Chanji argued, insisting that the letter should be written a different way. Chanji had Baba's foot in his lap and was tying His shoelaces. Baba finally became so angry with Chanji's stubbornness that He pushed Chanji with His foot, sending my uncle sprawling to the floor, and then gave him a slap for being so obstinate. Chanji broke down and cried. At that moment the door of the cabin opened, and in walked a Western woman disciple who was accompanying them on the trip. Baba beamed and, pointing toward Chanji, gestured, "He is crying because his love for Me has overwhelmed him."

Uncle Chanji did not spare himself in any way in his life with Baba. He made good use of every available moment. Despite the fact that he had little free time when they travelled, a portable typewriter always accompanied him. He pounded on the keys wherever he was - even on trains - and he often worked late into the night, attending to the voluminous correspondence he was expected to take care of. After he died we were surprised to find that Chanji had also faithfully kept beautiful, detailed diaries of Baba's activities and work.

Gift of God

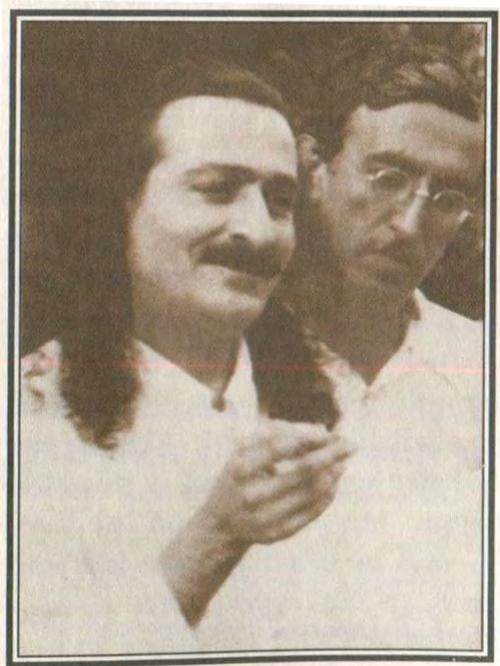
His epitaph, given by Baba, is as follows:

Framroze H. Dadachanji

Born on 23rd November, 1893. Died on 25th August, 1944.

An ardent and very close disciple of Shri Meher Baba of Ahmednagar. He spent twenty years of his life as a personal secretary in the devoted service of Baba. He strove to alleviate the suffering of all with whom he came in contact and especially exerted his utmost bringing the Parsi community to the pedestal of the true spiritual understanding through the contact and grace of Baba. For time to come, he leaves a vast record of events of Baba's life with their spiritual significance explained. With Baba he travelled the world over several times, drawing up itineraries and gathering the records of his Master's work with untiring energy. Whilst doing his duties as one of the most trusted and dear ones of Baba, he laid down his life with the name of Baba on his lips.

After Chanji's death Baba once remarked, "Chanji was not only



Baba and Chanji

My disciple; he was My friend." He always spoke of my uncle with great love. Meher Baba had beckoned to Uncle Chanji, saying, "Leave everything and come to Me," and in heartfelt response he spent the last twenty years of his life serving His God selflessly until the day he died. With his fearless devotion he endured, without question, everything that Baba orchestrated during his life; he considered it all Baba's grace. In the end Chanji was rewarded by what he had most desired: to become as humble as the dust under His Beloved's feet.

Chapter Ten

*"Don't worry. Worry
accumulates and grows in
strength, becomes a habit long
after the cause has ceased to be."*

- Meher Baba

I had felt it necessary to suppress my own feelings in order to help my mother in her sorrow after Tehmton's death, but with the loss of Uncle Chanji my pain was so great that grief overwhelmed me. I wrote to Baba, who was now in Aurangabad, pouring out my heart:

Bombay, October 1944

My Ever Dearest Baba,

... You are the only One to understand and give relief to an aching heartI am all broken to pieces; therefore, I seek refuge in writing to You. My heart seems to be crying every minute of my life, my mind seems to be losing its capacity to think or to remember, and due to that my physical health is failing. I have no plans for the future because my heart and mind have refused to ... build them. The moment I begin to take interest in life, something comes in to kill it. This has been going on [for] years. All that I have built has been broken down. All I want at present is to sit in a quiet corner and cry and cry and think of You only. I want nobody, I want nothing, just ... thoughts [of You]. Let me even forget my own self.

Gift of God

Almost immediately after I wrote this letter, Baba called Nariman and me, along with Nargis, to Aurangabad to be with Him. Baba knew how deeply we were suffering, but He spoke of His own pain, asking, "Why do you feel for Chanji? Who is he to you? It is I who should feel for Him. You have no idea what a loss he is to Me." Baba's sadness over Chanji's death emphasized to us that as the Avatar He experienced everything on the human level as well as from His God state. As God, Baba felt the loss of no one, but as man, He was affected in the same ways we were. His questions also let us know that He wanted us to try to get over our sorrow. Baba then changed the subject, telling Nariman and me that He wanted our marriage to take place in two months and setting the date for 21st December, one week before Mehera's second public birthday celebration. Our hearts were heavy, knowing how much we would miss our dear uncle, who would have been the life of the occasion.

Baba wanted our marriage performed according to Zoroastrian tradition in the hall attached to the fire temple at Ahmednagar. On 18th December our two families and over a hundred of Baba's close followers arrived in Ahmednagar for the wedding. We were immediately greeted with more sad news; Adi Sr. told us Masaji had suffered a stroke the day before and died. Masaji was an elderly man, but still quite strong. Only two days earlier he had gone all the way to Poona to shop for Mehera's birthday, as he was in charge of cooking for the occasion. Masaji was very dear to us, and his death cast another shadow over the wedding festivities.

The day after we arrived, Baba came to Ahmednagar, where He gave darshan to all the wedding guests. The following day He called my mother, Nariman, Nargis and me to have His darshan in Meherazad, a new residence which He had established earlier that year. Nariman stayed with the men mandali while I took all my wedding attire to show to Baba and dear Mehera. Beloved Baba touched each article of clothing and jewelry, holding my sari and my plain gold wedding ring in His hands. My joy was overflowing.

Gift of God

Next Baba took my mother by the hand and showed her around the main bungalow, room by room. He asked her, "Do you like it here?" and Mother, delighted, said, "Yes, Baba. It's so peaceful. I love it here." She was in ecstasy with Baba holding her hand for such a long time. Baba then said, "I will keep you here forever with Me." When I heard His words, I wondered how it would be possible for her to stay in the ashram. She had young children to look after; my brothers were nine, eleven and fourteen. I thought perhaps Baba would call her to stay after the children were older and on their own.



Our wedding photo

Gift of God

The following morning Margaret Craske again helped me with my makeup, just as she had for my engagement. I dressed in the white sari covered with silver stars, and Nariman and I went to the hall for the ceremony. There a Zoroastrian priest performed both the *Navjote** of my brother Nozer and our marriage rites in front of our families and friends. Adi Sr., some of the men mandali, Pilamai and several of the Western women came from Meherabad. The marriage took place at 11:00 and a luncheon followed. Baba had told us and Nargis to come to Meherazad at 5:00 that evening to spend ten days with Him. About an hour before we were to leave, one of Nariman's dear aunts from Karachi, whom he had not seen for many years, started having pains in her chest. Thinking she was having a heart attack, we called a doctor, but it was a while before he arrived. We could not just go off and leave her, yet I was worried that we would arrive at Meherazad later than Baba's appointed time. Finally the doctor arrived and examined her. Much to our relief, he said there was no cause for worry; she simply needed rest.

When we got to Meherazad, our hearts were anxious. Baba immediately asked, "Why did you come ten minutes late?" We had wanted to be there promptly, but because of the unusual circumstances we had failed to carry out His order. Baba was gentle with us, but in those days He was very firm, allowing not even a slight variance in His orders, and I felt sad that we had not tried harder to obey Him.

Baba gave each of us a loving embrace, after which Nariman went to the men's quarters and Nargis and I were taken to the women's, where Mehera, Mani, Naja and Meheru, Mehera's niece, were standing on the veranda to welcome us. Mehera put a *tika* (a mark made with red paste) in the centre of my forehead before she and the other women embraced me. Baba, Mehera and Mani gave me several gifts, including a silver powder box and a vase, but the most precious was a photo of Baba and Mehera in a small silver frame. I knew that Mehera's photo had not been given to anyone before that time. I was in ecstasy. Rano Gayley later told me that when she and Elizabeth took photos of Mehera, Baba would take

Gift of God



Photos Baba and Mehera gave me as a wedding present

the negatives away from them. Baba, knowing that Mehera's pictures would someday be all over the world, presented the first one to me. This photo marked another significant moment in my relationship with Mehera. Baba had already given me a sari that she had worn and asked me to help her dress on her birthday. And now He had given me a photograph of Himself and Mehera together. We entered the hall of the main bungalow and Baba surprised me with another gift, a large photo of Himself.

We stayed in Meherazad for two days, Nariman on the men's side and I on the women's, spending our honeymoon with Baba! Then from the 23rd to the 28th we were in Meherabad with Baba, Mehera and the rest of the mandali for Mehera's birthday celebration. Again Nariman stayed with the men, while I spent this time in Upper Meherabad with the women. Despite our marriage and Mehera's birthday, two occasions that should have been joyous, the emphasis again fell on death. The first day in Meherabad we all went to Masaji's gravesite near the railway tracks. Baba had kept the grave open to a level about three feet below the ground, and He had Uncle Chanji's bedding roll spread

Gift of God

out inside. Baba sat on a chair at the head of the grave and we gathered around Him. One of the mandali read, from a list that had been drawn up beforehand, the names of all Baba's intimate lovers who had died. As one by one the names were read, Baba threw a rose for each onto the bedding roll. At the end the bedding roll and flowers were covered with earth as the grave was closed.

On 24th December yet another sad and unexpected event occurred. Baba's sister-in-law Gulu, Adi Jr.'s wife, was in critical condition after giving birth to their son Dara. Word was sent to Baba, and it was Gulu's fortune that He arrived while she was still alive. Before leaving her bedside, Baba gently closed her eyes, and moments later Gulu breathed her last. That evening the funeral was held in Ahmednagar, while at the same time a qawwali programme was held at Lower Meherabad. Although Baba did not tell us of Gulu's death, as He did not want Mehera to feel sad, Pilamai told me and some of the others. Mehera and the rest of the women mandali came down the hill to attend the programme, which they heard from behind a curtain. It is the Zoroastrian custom not to play music for up to a year after the death of a close relative; however, Baba carried on with the programme that evening. He was showing us emphatically that death does not have to be a time for mourning if we understand that it is nothing more than a transition between lives.

Despite all these sad events, I remember one particularly happy moment. Mehera was very pleased when I gave her a pink sari with a silver embroidered border. I had bought it for my trousseau but decided to give it to her instead. She asked, "Where can I wear such a sari? It's so gorgeous!" Baba just smiled and, turning to her, said, "You wear it on your birthday, then give it back to Arnavaz and she'll wear it." On the evening of her birthday Baba called me into her room and once again told me to help Mehera put on her sari. When all the women guests had gathered in the shade under the tin roof in Upper Meherabad for Baba's darshan and dinner, Baba and Mehera came out, and Baba said, "Doesn't Mehera look beautiful?" And she did indeed look lovely, a vision of purity in the pink sari. She was wearing a new

Gift of God

gold necklace that Nariman and I had ordered for her birthday engraved with two words that described her perfectly: "Baba's Love." This time with Mehera provided a moment of quiet joy in those ten tumultuous days, during which I felt as though I were in a dream. So many life-changing events had taken place in such a short time that I felt dazed.

Baba wanted Nariman and me to stay in Ahmednagar for a month to be near Him, but Nariman's aunt from Karachi pleaded with him to come to Bombay and be with their family. Despite the fact that we knew what Baba wanted, we asked if we could go for a couple of days and then return. Although He agreed to let us go, I then had misgivings and wondered why we had so thoughtlessly asked Baba's permission to leave. This time our worldly attachment to our dear ones overshadowed our desire to please Him, but we learned from our mistake.

When we returned to Ahmednagar, we stayed in a guest house for about three weeks, going almost every day to Meherazad for Baba's darshan. All the recent events had been a great strain on me. My health was deteriorating, and I felt quite weak. Then I began to feel as though I were dying, and no matter how much I tried to tell myself that I was not, the feeling persisted. I was just beginning my life with Nariman, and I was confused. Baba was very concerned about my condition, and two weeks later He told us to come stay at Meherazad. Even then, this feeling of impending death did not go away. Although Baba made me understand that it was important for me to go through this experience, He kept us with Him for a week, looking after me with great care and tenderness. While Baba allows us to go through extremely difficult experiences, His loving hands always take care of us physically, mentally, and emotionally. Baba extended our stay for yet another week, and when I felt better, He sent us back to Bombay.

But at home other problems were beginning. On our wedding day my mother had fallen flat on her chest. She soon discovered a lump in her breast, but she did not pay much

Gift of God

attention to it, nor did she tell anyone else until it had grown quite large. Finally, in April, she became worried and asked Goher to examine her. Goher was very concerned and immediately took my mother to a specialist at a large new cancer hospital in Bombay. The doctor ordered immediate surgery, and the operation revealed an advanced stage of cancer. It had been only four months since we had gone to Ahmednagar for our marriage, and we found it hard to believe all that had happened in that time.

Nariman's mother wanted us to live with her, but Baba had specifically told Nariman and me that we should find a separate apartment. In 1945, with the war still on, it was virtually impossible to find an apartment-or even a room. Hospitals, bungalows, and houses had been requisitioned for military use. Many of my friends had postponed marrying because of the housing shortage. When they asked where Nariman and I were going to live, I'd tell them we were searching for an apartment. They would smile as though I were joking. Because Nariman was working and I was occupied with caring for my mother, we hired an agent and left the matter in his hands. I knew we would find an apartment, as Baba would not have told us to move without providing a place for us to live.

The agent we had hired could find only two flats to show us, and they were both unsuitable. Then, in May, a few weeks after my mother's operation, a friend of Nariman's approached him, saying he knew of an apartment that was for lease. The two of them went to see the place and, without consulting me, Nariman signed the exchange deed. In the evening when he returned from the office, he told me, "Arnavaz, I have a surprise! I found an apartment for us today and rented it immediately. I didn't phone you because I was afraid if we waited even an hour, we might lose it. I know you will definitely like it."

The next morning we were off to see the apartment, located opposite the American Consulate. The name on the front of the building was *Ashiana*, which means *nest*. The apartment was

Gift of God

fully furnished, something very rare - even down to curtains, crockery, telephone, and refrigerator - so that all we had to do was move in with our suitcases. There was even a garage for our car. The Maharaja of Gwalior had used the apartment to house his English jockey who came to Bombay during the four-month racing season each year. The lease was held by rich friends of the Maharaja, the best jewellers in Bombay, who had been asked to order the furniture and accessories and see to the decor. The furniture was of the best quality, made from Burma teakwood, and the matching upholstery and silk curtains were in excellent taste. The jewellers asked only for the expenses that they had incurred for furnishings and decoration, as they were not interested in making a profit. We could not have asked for better; I had never dreamt we would find such a beautiful place to live!

At the time of our marriage we had ordered a bedroom set and the furniture company had been calling us to take delivery, but until we found an apartment, we had no place to put it. Our new apartment had one empty room - Baba had even provided us with the space in which to put our new beds, cupboard, and dressing table. Seeing to every detail, He had given this apartment to us on a golden platter. By Baba's grace, we moved into our nest.

At the end of the war Baba sent most of the Western women back to Europe or the United States, and Margaret Craske, who stayed at Ashiana while awaiting passage on a ship to England, was our first guest. Nariman and I both greatly enjoyed Margaret's company, and I have many fond memories of our time with her. India was still under British rule, and she and Nariman teased one another constantly about the likelihood of independence for India.

Baba had given me an order not to give Margaret anything, but I was concerned that she had no clothing suitable for the cold English winter she would be facing. At that time many British families, wanting to return home, were selling their clothing and household goods for very little money. For just a few rupees I

Gift of God

found two dresses that) knew would fit Margaret, a long-sleeved heavy woollen one and a lovely beaded evening dress. By selling them to her at the same price I had paid for them, I was able to keep Baba's order and still provide her with some appropriate clothing. Margaret's visit proved to be a delightful, bright moment during a time otherwise overshadowed by my mother's illness.

Chapter Eleven

*"Neither seek death nor
fear it, and when death comes
to you it is converted into a
stepping stone to the higher
life."*

- Meher Baba

It was evident that Nariman, who had been working continuously for nearly five years developing his business, needed a rest, and we had planned a vacation to Kashmir for August of 1946. Nariman thought that I needed a break as well, but because of my mother's declining health I felt very torn about going. When Nariman saw Baba in April, He said, "Bachamai will die within five months." Though Nariman did not tell me, I came to know through someone else. Not telling Nariman I knew, I silently resigned myself to Beloved Baba's will and decided to go to Kashmir for Nariman's sake. Fortunately, Dr. Alu, who was by then like one of our family, agreed to look after Mother while we were away. Knowing that she would be well cared for relieved some of my turmoil about leaving. And then, through an interesting set of circumstances involving Dr. Alu and a visit to a saint called Hira Baba, all anxiety was lifted from my heart.

It has long been a custom in India for people to visit saints. As Baba had not yet given the order to His lovers to stay away from any other saints or gurus, many were still visiting them. I personally was never attracted to anyone but Baba, and I had my doubts concerning the authenticity of some of the saints that others went to see. However, when Baba Himself sent Chanji to Sadgurus and saints, Chanji would often take members of our family along with him. We were given to understand that coming into contact with these holy men was beneficial to us. Upasni Maharaj, one of the five Perfect Masters at the time, visited Bombay frequently, and

Gift of God

my family and I would go with Chanji for His darshan. Also, in 1943, Nariman, Nargis and I went to see Narayan Maharaj, another of the Perfect Masters, who had come to Bombay. When I told Him that our uncle was staying in Baba's ashram, Maharaj said, "I've heard Meher Baba is keeping silence. Why is He keeping silence?" "Maharaj," I replied, "You know." He then responded, "Why don't you make Him speak with the intensity of your love?" At the time I thought He meant literally to try to make Baba speak aloud. I later understood the true meaning of His words: Baba responds to our love by speaking to us internally.

Just before our trip to Kashmir I went with Alu to visit Hira Baba. She had been going to see him frequently, and he would give her errands to do. When Alu spoke to him of Meher Baba, he always lovingly praised Baba. Although I was impressed with Alu's stories of Hira Baba, I felt uncomfortable about her growing involvement with him and discouraged her visits. I knew how much Alu loved Meher Baba, so I encouraged her to think only of Him.

Alu understood my concern and agreed to stop going to Hira Baba, but she wanted to see him one last time and take her leave properly. She asked me to accompany her on this last visit, so I did. We sat before Hira Baba for some time, and I was convinced of his sincerity. When we were about to leave, Alu told him that she would not be coming back and then, to my surprise, mentioned that I was going to Kashmir. Alu knew that while I had made the decision to go, I still felt very uneasy about the trip. She did not say a word about my mother's critical condition, but Hira Baba looked at me and said, "Daughter, go to Kashmir. God will take care of you. He will not let anything happen while you are away." I felt that his message had come from Meher Baba, that He had spoken through Hira Baba to calm me and give me the strength to leave despite my mother's impending death.

Then, just before we left for Kashmir, I had two unpleasant confrontations with people who wanted to use occult powers to heal my mother. Mother was good-hearted but rather childlike and spiritually naive, and these qualities worked both for and against her. She had tremendous faith in Baba, but she also

Gift of God

sometimes put her trust in those who were not worthy of it. The first incident had to do with a man named Savak who claimed to be spiritually advanced. This man used occult powers to help people with problems concerning their health, financial affairs, and personal matters. When I was only a child Savak had met my mother through some of her relatives. Quickly recognizing her naive, trusting nature, he began coming around to our home and offering suggestions that would supposedly help her and the family. Even though Mother had complete faith in Baba, she would listen to Savak's suggestions, often carrying them out, thinking they would be beneficial. She believed that all those who presented themselves as holy men were good, not realizing that some used occult powers simply to gain control over others and earn money. It would never have occurred to her that someone might actually harm others in pursuit of his own greed. Even when Savak first came to visit my mother, I felt revulsion toward him. This feeling kept me from getting entangled with him or others of his kind, and I thank Baba for that.

This self-appointed holy man had already tried to heal someone in my family by occult means back in 1934, soon after we moved to Boman Lodge. At the age of nine months, my fourth and youngest brother Nozer had become critically ill and was near death. Savak visited my mother and proclaimed that he could save Nozer from this illness. He instructed Mother to tie a red string around Nozer's bedpost, and after she had, my brother's condition did improve. Savak then told Mother that he wanted to show Meher Baba how he had saved Nozer's life, but I thought his words sounded like an arrogant challenge.

On His next visit Baba saw the red string tied to the bedpost and demanded to know why it was there. My mother explained what had happened, telling Baba that Savak wanted to come and see Him. Baba ordered that the string be removed immediately and told her to send for Savak. When Savak walked in, I could see that he was about to call Baba's attention to the red string, but then realized that it was no longer there. My mother quickly explained that it had been removed by Baba's order. Savak glared at Baba. I turned and saw that Baba's face was expressionless, impervious to

Gift of God

this man's insolence. I don't know exactly what was taking place at that moment, but I felt the eloquence of Baba's silence.

Throughout the years that followed, Savak had continued to visit my mother occasionally. Right before we left for Kashmir, he came to say that he wanted to take her to Ajmer in central India to be cured at the tomb of Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti, who Baba said was a Perfect Master. Mother's suffering was so intense that she was unable to think clearly, and she became even more confused by Savak's suggestion. Mother was only forty-eight years old, and she had three young sons to look after. When she asked me what I thought she should do, I gently told her that we had to place our faith in Baba alone and to surrender to His will. After listening to my words, Mother seemed relieved, accepting that her fate lay completely in Beloved Baba's hands.

The second incident with the occult involved one of my mother's friends. This woman loved Baba; however, in a desperate attempt to save her husband's life, she had become involved in the occult and continued meddling in it even after her husband survived. She claimed she was hearing Chanji's voice saying, "Save my Bacha." (Bacha is the short form of my mother's name, Bachamai.) Certain that she could save my mother, this woman asked another Baba lover to bring my mother to her. When the second woman called me and narrated the whole story, I said firmly, "Look, whether my mother lives or dies, Meher Baba is the only One for us. He knows what is best. If Baba wants my mother to live, she will live. If He wants her to die, she will die. We don't want any interference from *anybody*. I am not going to take my mother to her, so don't even mention this to her. We have the Highest of the High, and He knows what is best for each of us. Why would we turn to anyone else?"

Baba Himself revealed to His lovers the identity of the five true Perfect Masters of the time and on occasion had even directed people to visit them. Later, however, after all five had died, He gave an order that those who followed Him were no longer to seek contact with any other masters. In 1948, while Baba was in Madras, several of His lovers from Bombay who had accompanied Him there asked if they could pay their respects at the tomb of

Gift of God

Ramana Maharshi (who Baba had said was God-realized). Baba told all those present, "Once you come to Me, you must not go anywhere else." From that day onwards Beloved Baba gave repeated warnings to His lovers not to visit other masters, saints or gurus and to stay away from the occult.

Many years later Baba asked me, "Do you know the story of Milarepa?" When I said that I didn't, Baba told Mehera and Mani to tell me the whole story that night after He retired. On my next visit to Meherazad, Baba asked, "Did you read Milarepa?" Although I had found the book at home, I hadn't read it, and I didn't realize until that moment that Baba wanted me to read it. When I returned to Bombay, I immediately read *Tibet's Great Yogi, Milarepa*. Milarepa had used the occult to gain revenge upon his aunt, who had destroyed his family. Finally, becoming disgusted with the emptiness of his bitter feelings, he turned from his practice of occult powers to seek God. Milarepa went through terrible suffering in undertaking the tasks given to him by the Master who agreed to take him as a disciple. Baba told me that Milarepa did attain God-realization, but He wanted me to read this story as an example of how hard one has to struggle and suffer to undo the damage done to the soul through using occult powers.

In 1958 Meher Baba circulated a small booklet entitled "Warning," followed by other later circulars. In His 1966 warning Baba said, "Shun those masters who are like multi-coloured electric signs that flash on and off, brightening the dark sky of your world and leaving you in darkness again." Despite Baba's warnings, however, even today some of His lovers insist on seeking help through using the occult or consulting other masters. These are very dangerous practices. Baba emphatically told those who love Him, "Just hold onto My *daaman*. Leave everything to Me!"

Leaving my mother in Baba's hands, Nariman and I departed for Kashmir. When we arrived in Srinagar, Dr. Daulat Singh, one of those mandali who later joined Baba in the New Life, came to greet us at our hotel. He told us that Baba had sent him a marble slab with Uncle Chanji's epitaph engraved on it along with a letter telling him to keep it until Baba gave him further instructions. The marble had been with Daulat Singh for nearly a year, and only two

Gift of God

days earlier he had received a second letter from Baba telling him that it should now be placed on Chanji's grave.

Nariman and I knew that Beloved Baba had waited for the two of us, who loved Chanji so much, to be in Srinagar to place the marker on his grave. We chose 25th August, the second anniversary of Chanji's death, to go to Badami Bagh, a small, tranquil cemetery near the mountains, with a lovely garden full of colourful flowers. As we stood by his grave, I recalled Uncle Chanji's sadness at the train station the last time I saw him. Then I remembered that long before that day he had said, with a smile on his face, that he would die in Kashmir.

We returned to Bombay on 1st September, and Mother died one month later. During her last weeks she suffered excruciating pain, as the cancer had spread all over her body. Baba constantly inquired about her health, comforting not only Mother, but the rest of us as well. We watched helplessly, unable to do much to ease her pain. Suddenly, three days before she died, she became very peaceful, and I felt that she was no longer suffering physically. Smiling and pointing to different places in the room, she would ask, "Oh! Do you see Baba standing there?" Or she would say, "Baba is here. He's at my bedside." Seeing that Baba was giving her relief, we shared in her happiness.

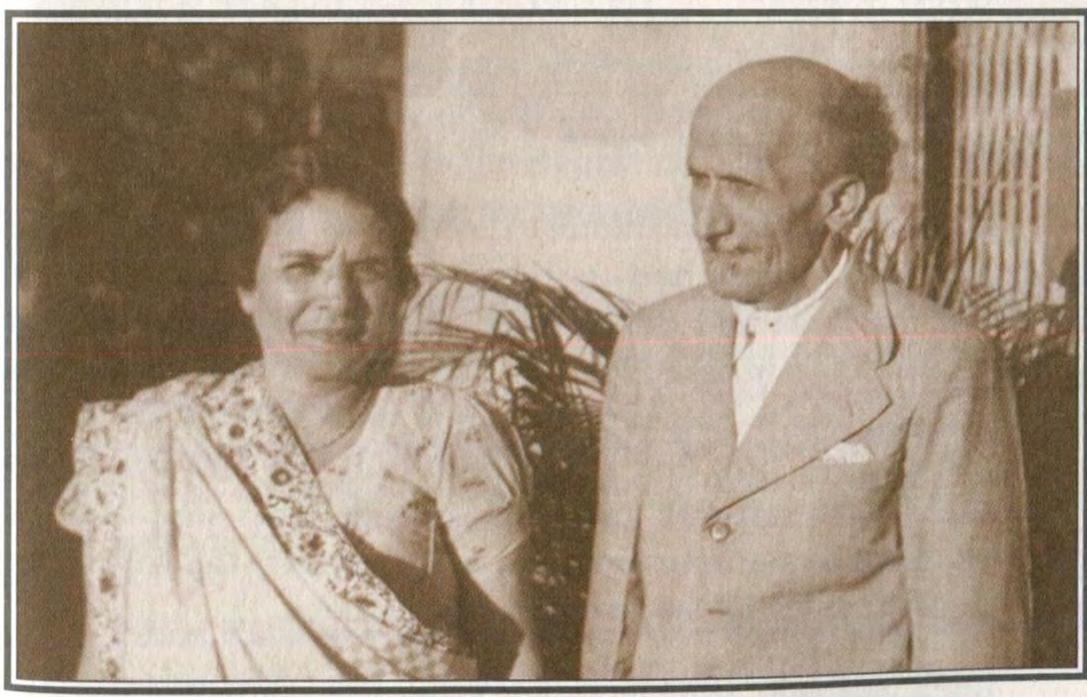
The following day, however, she stopped seeing Baba and apparently experienced a terrible void, the agony of *not* seeing Him. She constantly urged us to send a telegramme to Baba and tell Him to come back, pleading, "Call Baba, call Baba." She would ask us, "Why has He disappeared?" This emotional pain went on for the whole day and was even worse than her physical suffering because there was absolutely nothing we could do to help. Trying to comfort her, I would say, "Mother, I have just sent a telegramme to Baba," but that would satisfy her for barely five minutes. She would want to know why Baba hadn't replied, imploring me to send a second telegramme. "Why don't you beseech Baba to come to me?" she would ask. "Why don't you plead with Him to come to me?"

The third day she became very quiet, so weak she could not even lift her hand, and we had to put an ear to her mouth to hear

Gift of God

her feeble voice. Her life was ebbing away. That night, exhausted, I fell asleep by her bed. At midnight, hearing her voice shout "Baba!" I woke with a start, but my mother was fast asleep. Alert now, I sat by her side. At about 4:00 in the morning she began taking Baba's name, her voice no longer weak. She repeated "Baba! Baba!" with such force that my whole body tingled. Her eyes were open, yet she saw nothing.

The family was very quiet during these final, intense moments with my mother. Half an hour before she died, I awakened my brothers. I had them sit next to her and told them, "Keep taking Baba's name, as Mother is dying." My father held Baba's photo in front of her to see, but it was clear that she was not aware of it or our presence. She went on calling aloud to Baba for forty-five minutes; then she lay quietly, and at 5:00 she slipped away. She had done what Baba had always told us to do: "Take My name when you breathe your last." Two hours later my father broke down and I allowed him to cry for a few minutes before gently telling him that if he wept, the rest of the family would also. Begging him to hold his tears, I said, "Mother has gone to Baba and she is happy. We have to think of her happiness." I told my brothers to imagine that Mother was in a beautiful garden, with Baba at her side, showering His love on her.



My mother Bachamai and my father Naoroji

Gift of God

Baba explained that until the soul severs its connection with the gross world, it feels the grief of the close ones who have been left behind and is hindered by it, whereas positive thoughts and feelings help the soul in its transition. Therefore, when one is grieving, it is beneficial to think of scenes like the one I told my brothers to imagine. The severance of the soul from earthly life takes four days, and Baba described that time as being analogous to time spent in a waiting room until the next part of a journey begins. He likened dying to the removing of an old coat - when it gets worn out, the time comes to discard it. Experiencing the death of a loved one brings us closer to detachment, as it tests the degree to which we have surrendered to Baba, who truly gives us strength and courage. After Mother's death Baba sent us a telegramme saying, "Bachamai eternally happy." During Mother's funeral everyone was calm; none of us shed a tear, even though this was the third death of someone close to our hearts in three years. We were beginning to understand that death is only a transition in the journey of the soul.

Six months after my mother died, Baba called my sister Roda, Nariman and me to Satara for what turned out to be the first of several much happier occasions. Shortly after our arrival Baba unexpectedly said to Roda, "I want you to get married. Have you got any boy in mind?" I was surprised to hear Roda mention the name of Jim Mistry, a young man who lived next door to my parents' home in Dadar. Although Roda and Jim had never been introduced, they had been aware of one another for some time.

It turned out that one of Jim's sisters knew Roda's best friend, and the two of them had, without our knowledge, already arranged for Roda and Jim to meet. The friendship developed quickly and Jim soon asked Roda to marry him. When Baba called Nariman and me to Satara again a few months later, He asked about Roda and Jim, and I told Him that Jim had proposed marriage. Baba happily gave His consent, then said that He wanted them to become engaged in December, the following month. And He left all the arrangements to me!

Roda was very nervous about the prospect of telling Jim that the engagement had to be the following month, as in India it is not

Gift of God

the custom for an engagement to take place so quickly. Furthermore, the arrangements are usually decided upon by the families. When she and Jim met with me to discuss the matter, we chatted about one thing and another before I told Jim we were followers of Meher Baba. He said he knew that, and he clearly remembered having seen Baba at the Dadar Railway Station with our Uncle Chanji about ten years earlier. In order to convince Jim that the engagement should take place at the time Baba had specified, I used my father as an excuse, saying that he was going away to do some work for Baba. Although he would actually be gone for only a couple of weeks, I let Jim think it might be several months and told him that my father wouldn't think it proper for Roda to continue going about with a man she was not engaged to during his absence. Somehow Jim managed to convince his family to accept this idea. The engagement was a very simple affair, with the two of them exchanging rings in the presence of our two families.

A few months later Baba presented me with another challenge: He told me in May that He wanted Jim and Roda to be married in August. I told Roda, who again became quite nervous, but Baba had worked everything out for the engagement, and I knew He would do the same for the marriage. This time the reason I used for the early date was the fact that our brother Tehmton had died on 2nd August, and we wanted the marriage to be on that day. (It is believed auspicious for a wedding to take place on the anniversary of a death.) Somehow, with Baba's help, the family again agreed to the August date, even though they had only two months to prepare for the wedding.

Roda and Jim were married and came straight from their honeymoon to the inauguration of Baba's new bungalow at Meherazad. Despite the fact that Jim was a newcomer, Baba allowed him to stay with His intimate followers at Meherabad. Jim took to Baba immediately and over the next few years came to love Him very much.

When Roda and Jim's first son was born a year later, Baba was staying with us at Ashiana and He told Roda to bring the baby directly from the hospital to Him before going home. As Baba held

Gift of God

the week-old baby in His arms, I could see the joy in His eyes. Baba told Roda to name the baby Merwan, His own given name. Two years later Baba named their second son. He sent a message by telephone saying, "With great love name this child Framroze." And two years later Sarosh, the third son, was also named by Baba. Although we had suffered the pain of loss, we also experienced great happiness when Baba blessed us with these three delightful additions to our family.

Chapter Twelve

"...live a normal life and just love Baba. Then you will have a curtain of Baba's love protecting you from the world."

- Meher Baba

Following Tehmton's death in 1943, Baba had told my mother that He would again come to Bombay when Nariman and I were settled in our own home. His many visits to Ashiana, beginning in 1947, brought us great joy. Baba liked Ashiana. The first time He came to our apartment, He went from room to room admiring the furniture and the curtains, and He made me open all the cupboards. He especially admired the large wardrobe where Nariman hung his clothes. During His second visit He took Gustadji on a tour of the apartment, and I had fun following the two of them around as Baba showed him each room. Of course, Baba pointed out Nariman's wardrobe, with shirts hanging on one side and suits and ties on the other. Gustadji had never seen clothes hanging in such a manner before, as he had always kept his belongings in a trunk. Because Gustadji had long kept silence by Baba's order, they spoke in gestures as they looked at all Nariman's clothes. Their faces, especially their eyes, were wonderfully expressive when they found something they particularly admired. With their colourful, animated personalities they reminded me of two eager children, innocently pure, whose mutual enjoyment as they gestured back and forth to each other was a delight to behold.

There was no regular schedule for Baba's visits. He might come for a day, a week or a fortnight; one time He stayed for a whole month. Baba was always accompanied by some of the men mandali, and frequently He brought dear Mehera and the women. His plans might include simple gatherings with the mandali,

Gift of God

family and close ones, private interviews, public darshans and singing at Ashiana, or larger darshans and more elaborate musical programmes at a public hall. Usually Baba gave darshan to about twenty to thirty people at our apartment, but on two occasions He opened Ashiana to large crowds, once to around two thousand. Baba also came to Bombay to contact masts or simply to make train connections that were routed through the city to other parts of India; at those times He would not see anyone except us. Twice Baba even came specifically to see the cricket test matches (world championship games), once between India and Australia and the other time between India and the West Indies. As man He enjoyed cricket, but as God He did His work through the concentration of large numbers of people on a single focal point.

People new to Baba were sometimes surprised by His sense of humour. Once the daughter of one of Baba's mandali wanted to introduce her boyfriend to Baba. She had explained to him who Meher Baba was, perhaps leading him to expect a discourse on some spiritual topic. A friend of my brothers, good at singing funny songs, was also there. When the couple arrived, Baba immediately turned to my brothers' friend and asked him to sing. I wondered what the newcomer thought; he had probably come expecting Baba to enlighten everyone, only to find Him laughing over light-hearted, silly songs.

Baba enjoyed music. One night as He was retiring, around 9:00 in the evening, he heard someone singing and gestured, "It's a good voice. Is it the radio?" I said, "No, Baba, it's a street singer." He told me to ask this singer to come the next day at noon, so I went down to the street and made the necessary arrangements. The singer, a Christian who sang in English, came the following day. He told Baba that he had just learned a new song entitled "He" and was planning to sing it for the first time at Christmas. Instead he sang it right then, for Baba. The next time Baba brought the women to Bombay, He called for the singer to come again so that they could hear him.

Because Baba loved the song "Begin the Beguine," I kept the record always handy at Ashiana so that I could play it for Him whenever He asked for it. One time after listening to this song,

Gift of God

Baba remarked, "'Begin the Beguine' reminds me of the Beginningless Beginning." Later on He gave instructions to the mandali that when He dropped His body, "Begin the Beguine" should be played in His Samadhi after His body was placed in the crypt.

Each time Baba visited us at Ashiana, we felt blessed with the experience of witnessing both His Divine Presence and His living humanity. One of His early visits, when He was accompanied by Adi Sr., Gustadji and Dr. Nilu, is among my sweetest memories. Baba sent all three men to spend the night at the home of Meherjee, who was then living in Bombay, refusing to allow any of them to stay with Him in the apartment. Everyone was surprised, as it was unusual for Baba to sleep without a night watchman. When He told Nariman and me to go to bed, Baba did not want Nariman to keep watch in His room. Instead, He sweetly asked if we would be comfortable in the second bedroom, even offering to sleep there Himself and give us back our bedroom, which we always reserved for Baba. We were touched by His loving concern, but assured Him that we would be just fine where we were.

I was awake the next morning at 5:00 a.m. when Baba peeked into the room where Nariman and I had slept. Sitting up in bed, I asked Baba whether I should prepare tea for Him. He gave me a sweet smile and told me to go back to sleep. Fifteen minutes later Baba peeked in again and gestured that He now wanted His tea. This brief personal moment was filled with Baba's Divine Love, though His manner was delightfully human.

Examples of the sweetness of Baba's simple human reactions to people stand out among other memories. When Nariman's grandmother visited from Karachi, she wanted very much to meet Baba. Although Baba was not seeing anyone or giving darshan at that time, He told Nariman to bring her to our apartment. Baba was at the door with me when I opened it, and He embraced her. Grandmother, who was very tiny, could not see Baba clearly in the entrance, where they were standing, so she took His hand and led Him to the window in the sitting room. When she got near the window, she looked up and just gazed at Him. Baba's smile was so

Gift of God

delightful, as though He had just met a small child. He was very amused by her actions. Granny had an expression of great satisfaction on her face, as if to say, "Now I know what You look like."

Beloved Baba speaks to each on his or her own level; to a child He is a child, and to a philosopher He is a philosopher. He gives according to each person's individual needs. One time Baba was giving darshan to thousands in our living room, when a central government minister, a man very attached to intellectually-oriented spiritual pursuits, arrived. It is an important custom in India to remove one's shoes before entering a temple or mosque or before approaching a spiritual master, so naturally this minister removed his slippers before entering the room where Baba was. As he approached to take darshan, Baba asked him, "Why did you remove your slippers? I am also in your slippers." Baba's simple words must have pointed out to this man that true spirituality involved more than the mere practice of ritual, and that God is in everyone and everything. It is the loving response of the heart, not the mind, that is most important to God.

We saw Baba's human side most powerfully in His choice to live a simple life - eating rice and dal, wearing plain clothing, and travelling third class on crowded Indian trains. Once Baba and some of the mandali were coming into Bombay by train, and Adi Sr. was bringing a car from Ahmednagar to meet them and drive them back to Meherazad. Nariman was with Baba, and I was alone in the house, waiting for them to arrive. A cyclone unlike any Bombay had ever before experienced hit the city, uprooting huge trees and flooding certain areas, and Baba and the mandali became stranded forty miles away. The railway tracks were covered with water, and their train had to wait for the flood to recede before continuing on its journey. Telephone lines were down, so there was no way for them to contact me. Baba and the mandali spent twenty-four hours in an overcrowded third class compartment without any food. Although Eruch ingeniously managed to collect enough boiling water from a drip in the steam engine to make tea for Baba, nevertheless Meher Baba, the God-Man, was just as uncomfortable as everyone else on that train.

Gift of God

No matter how human Baba's circumstances might make Him appear to be, though, we were constantly reminded that He was also God. During one of His visits I wasn't feeling well, and He told me to take an aspirin before going to bed. Baba had retired, and one of the mandali was keeping night watch. Eruch, Nariman and I were chatting in the dining room, which adjoined the bedroom where Baba was sleeping. Suddenly I remembered Baba's order to take an aspirin but discovered I didn't have any, and when Baba stayed with us, He did not want me to leave the house without His permission. Since I did not want to disturb Him, I was undecided as to what to do. Then Eruch remembered he had some aspirin in the medical kit in the room where Baba was sleeping. Removing his shoes, Eruch quietly entered and tiptoed across Baba's room, opened his bag and got the aspirin. As he approached the door, he heard Baba snoring and the thought passed his mind, "Even in God's house one can commit a theft." At that very moment Baba snapped His fingers and asked, "What are you doing?" After Eruch explained about the aspirin, Baba nodded and turned His back to resume sleep. Closing the door behind him and handing me the aspirin, Eruch told us what had happened. We were reminded that nothing escapes Baba's attention. Not even a leaf moves without His knowing.

One particularly touching incident showing Baba's omnipotence as well as His compassion concerns a troubled widow whom Baba had called, along with a few other women from the small community of His devotees in Bombay, to take His darshan at Ashiana. Baba kept me at His side as He saw the women one at a time, embracing them and then giving them the opportunity to speak with Him. In a strained voice one woman told Baba that for the past six months she had been suffering a terrible agony. In her dreams and throughout the day, unwanted emotions and vulgar thoughts would come to her. She felt suffocated by them, guilty and tormented, as she was a very respectable woman who had been a loving, devoted wife and was the mother of two grown children. She tearfully asked Baba what she should do, and He said, "Take my name." She told Baba that she *had* been taking His name, but the thoughts persisted. Baba then told her not to worry, but to keep repeating His name, even mechanically, whenever the thoughts came.

Gift of God

"Taking My name is like a mosquito curtain," He explained. "The mosquitos buzz outside, but they don't sting you. The thoughts will gradually go away."

Even when Baba was not physically with us at Ashiana, He made His Presence known. Nariman and I were fast asleep one night when I suddenly awoke. I felt prompted to get up immediately to check on the oil lamp that we kept in front of the photograph of Baba that He had given to Nariman and me on our wedding day. So urgent was this prompting that without even putting on my sandals, I ran barefooted to the second bedroom. As soon as I passed through the doorway, I felt heat coming up from under the floor. Suspecting a short circuit in the electrical system, I went straight to the main switch and turned it off. Until that moment I had never walked around the house without my sandals, but if I had paused to put them on, I would not have felt the heat and the house would certainly have caught fire. The next day we called an electrician who located a problem in the concealed wiring and repaired the damage. Baba had saved us; His prompting me to go to His picture was another sign of His constant, loving protection.

Chapter Thirteen

"What the Divine Will has decreed must and will happen, and if I am the Divine Personification you believe Me to be, then the last thing I would do is to avert or avoid it."

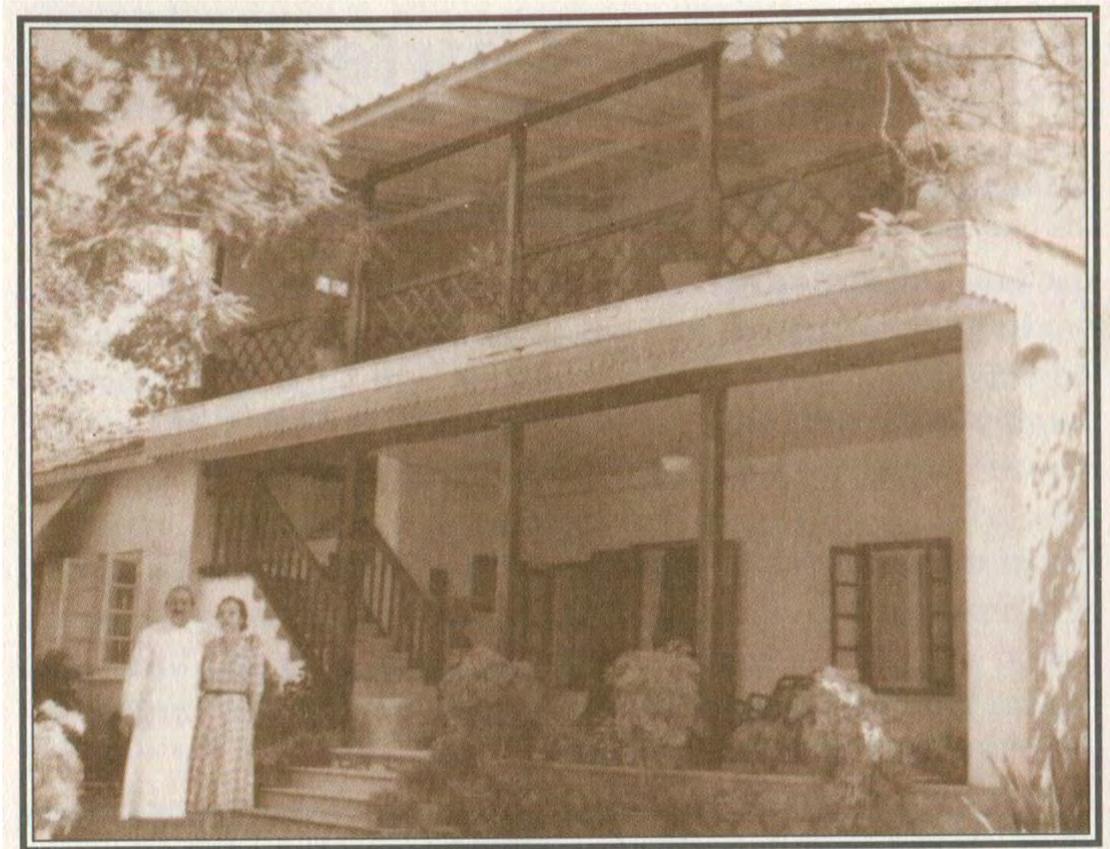
- Meher Baba

In April of 1944, a year before we moved into Ashiana, Baba took Mehera, Mani, Meheru and Margaret to stay in Meherazad, a newly acquired property about fifteen miles northwest of Meherabad. After a month Baba called Naja and then Valu to join them. The original cottage was a small, temporary structure, built in great haste, so after some time Baba asked Mehera to design the alterations and additions she desired. He then had the cottage demolished and the present two-storey bungalow was built to replace the temporary quarters.

When the new house was ready, Baba celebrated by inviting close lovers from Meherabad, Ahmednagar, Poona and Bombay for a house-warming. A silver lock and key specially made for the occasion had been placed on the front door. Written on the lock were the words "Meher" and "27 August 1948." Everyone gathered in front of the bungalow, and Baba turned the silver key, opened the lock, and stepped over the threshold, thereby inaugurating His new home. Afterwards the men went for lunch on the men's side, and we women had lunch in the garden.

A year later Baba sent a circular all over the world asking that His disciples observe silence for one month in July while He stayed in seclusion in the old Blue Bus for forty days, from the last week of June until 31st July. Baba called Nariman and me to spend this

Gift of God



Baba and Mehera in front of the Meherazad bungalow

time in Meherazad. It was relatively easy for us to keep silence in Baba's atmosphere, but His order was much more difficult for those trying to do their jobs and carry out their routines in the world. My father and Nargis had to run the household in Bombay, do the shopping, and manage all the daily chores in complete silence. It was particularly difficult for my sister Roda to look after her one-and-a-half-month-old baby Merwan, her husband Jim, and her aged father-in-law without being able to say a word. But what mattered most was obeying Baba.

My three brothers, Huma, Dara and Nozer, were in their teens and still in school, but they stayed home during the month of silence. Naturally, they were too young and restless to sit in the house, so they went out for movies and played games like hockey and football with their friends. At first their friends played jokes on them, but when they realized how serious my brothers were about keeping silence, they began to respect and admire them for such a difficult feat and would go out of their way to be helpful.

Gift of God

One night Nozer and Dara decided to go to a late movie, and when it was over at midnight, they hurried to the station to catch the last local train home. When the conductor came by to check their tickets, Nozer found that his wallet, which contained the tickets, his money and a pad and pencil, had been stolen. Unable to write a message, the boys gestured frantically back and forth to each other and then tried to explain to the conductor, through signs, what had happened. At first the conductor thought they were trying to get a free ride on the train, and he threatened to take them to the station master, but as he watched them struggle to communicate with him, he must have felt sorry for these good-looking, well-dressed boys. He said aloud, "What a pity; both boys are mute," and let them go.

When I heard this story, I was reminded of the period when Baba gave the women mandali living in Meherazad an order to keep silence from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. Nargis and I, in Bombay, were given the same order. We often attended movies on Sunday evenings, and as they started at 6:30, we were constantly running into friends in the lobby who wondered why we didn't speak to them.

To remain silent in the company of the residents of Meherazad was a very different experience. Peace pervaded every moment of that month as we silently moved through our daily chores. Since I was not residing there permanently, I had no regular duties, so Mehera gave me the jobs of watering the garden and cutting and sewing pieces to make a patchwork quilt. At the end of forty days Baba sent for all the mandali at Meherabad and Ahmednagar to be in Meherazad to break their silence when He came out of seclusion on 1st August. We all gathered near the Blue Bus, where Baba had four of the mandali recite prayers from the Zoroastrian, Hindu, Muslim and Christian religions, and then we all broke our silence by saying "Amen" in our own languages. After the prayers we women went with Baba to the main bungalow. The month of observing silence had held many beautiful moments for me, including the moment it ended. That whole day I felt joyful, and when I walked I felt as though I were floating above the ground.

Gift of God

When Baba came out of a long seclusion, He usually wanted a change. At the end of those forty days He told me to write Dr. Alu, who had invited Him to stay in her rented bungalow in Panchgani whenever He wished. Baba asked that the cottage be made ready in the second week of August so He could rest there for five or six days. He added that He did not want anyone there besides Alu herself. Since people do not usually visit Panchgani at that time of year because of the monsoons, the cottage was closed, and a lot of work would be necessary to prepare it for Baba. Nevertheless, Alu was delighted. She asked my sister Nargis and Dina Talati, another early Baba lover, to help clean the cottage. Meanwhile Baba sent me to Bombay with Elizabeth Patterson and Norina Matchabelli, who were sailing to America, instructing me to be in Panchgani on the day He was due to arrive. From Meherazad He went to Satara with Mehera, Mani, Goher and Meheru for a few days, then made a surprise visit to Panchgani. When Alu saw Baba and the women in the car, she became frantic, telling Nargis and Dina to hide because Baba had said He did not want anyone else there. Baba, seeing the condition of the cottage, asked Alu, "Will you be able to have everything ready within two days?" Alu assured Him it would be ready. "How will you manage all by yourself?" Baba asked. Alu, flustered, had to confess that Nargis and Dina were there to help her. With a twinkle in His eye, Baba asked where they were. Alu said they were hiding, and He told her to call them. When they came out nervously from their hiding place behind the cottage, Baba embraced them and said that Nargis and Dina could stay, even after He and the women moved in. Baba went back to Satara, and when He returned to Panchgani two days later, everything was in order, very tidy and comfortable.

After putting me on a train for Panchgani, Nariman returned home and found a telegramme which had just come from Baba, saying, "Send Kharmanmasi with Arnavaz." Kharmanmasi was a very close Baba lover who had spent time in the ashram, sometimes even staying with Mehera in her room. Nariman went directly to her home and put her on the next train. On my arrival, before I had even entered the gate, Baba asked me, "Where is Kharmanmasi?" I was perplexed, as I knew nothing about the telegramme. She arrived a few hours after I did, and to our

Gift of God

surprise the five of us from Bombay were allowed to spend the entire time in Panchgani with Baba.

Throughout this holiday Baba was in a fine mood. We enjoyed going for walks with Him in the bracing mountain air and had great fun playing games with Him. In one game Baba would show us His alphabet board and ask us to guess a number. He would then take something off the dining table, like a sugar bowl, and give it as a prize to the person who had guessed correctly. Dr. Alu had bought a new tea-set for Baba, and when we played this game on the last day of our stay, it was these items that Baba gave us as prizes. I received a lovely blue nut bowl and a white butter pot, each piece precious because Baba had given it with His own hands.

These days were certainly a treat, but they were also a time for serious training. Baba often quoted from the Perfect Masters Kabir and Tukaram. I particularly remember that Kabir said, "Worry eats everyone. Worry is the master of all. But those who swallow worry, they are the ones who become *fakirs*." He also said, "When the Master gives on His own, it is like His giving milk. When you ask the Master to give, it is like His giving water. But when you force the Master to give, it is like extracting blood from Him." Baba also commented on the importance of obedience and surrender, quoting Tukaram: "The inherent nature with which you are born remains with you; it does not change." Even after Tukaram became a Perfect Master, He went on singing bhajans because that was His inherent nature. Baba said, "The nature you are born with remains with you, but you can modify and change through obedience and surrendrance to God."

One day when I was in the bedroom and the others were on the verandah with Baba, He overheard me humming a Hindi song. Baba called for me and said, "I want you to sing that song for Me." I was taken aback for a moment, but Baba had asked me to sing, so I did:

Beware, oh you traveller. Be very cautious.

*Treacherous is the path; hasten and traverse the
way*

Gift of God

*For where you tread now, the path is very
slippery.*

*May it not be that you, too, fall and get caught in
the quicksand.*

Baba apparently wanted all of us to listen to these words. In the years to follow He was to give this small group of women from Bombay many orders which were often strenuous and demanding, and it was in Panchgani that He knit our hearts together for His future purposes.

I remember vividly one incident that occurred during this holiday. Alu's cottage had two large rooms and a long enclosed verandah with a sloping tin roof. Baba was sleeping in one room, Mehera, Mani and Goher in the other, and the rest of us on the verandah. One night we were suddenly awakened by what sounded like a huge boulder hitting the tin roof, rolling down it, and dropping to the ground with a thud. Then we heard the clock strike midnight. We knew we were not to disturb Baba, so we whispered among ourselves about what might have happened. Moments later we heard Eruch, who was on night duty, talking with Baba, so we all went back to sleep. The following morning when we got up, we searched for the boulder, but could find nothing. Baba gave no explanation for this incident, but it reminded me of something that had taken place in Lonavla in 1942, when we had been troubled by a spirit. And we knew that Baba often stayed in places where there were wandering spirits in order to release them so that they could take human form.

When Baba and the women returned from Panchgani to Meherazad, the five of us went back to Bombay. Just a few days later Baba dropped a bombshell which pierced our hearts: on 15th August, 1949, He declared His plans for something He called the New Life, describing it by saying that He was going away, never to return, and that no one would ever see Him again. We were devastated. The thought of never seeing Beloved Baba again was unbearable. He had been training us all along to resign ourselves to whatever He ordained, but this was an unbelievably severe test. The New Life was to begin in just two months. Baba named

Gift of God

Mehera, Mani, Goher and Meheru as the women who would accompany Him, but the men were all given the option of going with Him or remaining behind. Accompanying Baba on the New Life meant abiding by many rules and regulations, and some, feeling unable to live with the stringent conditions, declined the opportunity to join Him.

Extensive arrangements had to be made. Baba appointed four close lovers, Nariman, Meherjee, Sarosh Irani and Jal Kerawalla, as His arrangementwallas. Each of them had to look after certain matters both before and after Baba left for the New Life. During those two months Nariman had to go to Meherabad nearly every week for meetings because there were so many details to be settled. Baba wanted to get rid of everything in the household except for the barest necessities, so He gave everything to Meherjee to sell. Because Baba did not want to have any property in His name, Lower Meherabad was transferred to Meherjee's name. Upper Meherabad, which was already in Sarosh's name, remained so, and Meherazad was transferred to Nariman's name. Along with the transfer document, Baba gave Nariman the silver lock and key from the opening of the bungalow.

Everyone was in shock. Though such great changes were taking place, to please Baba we all tried outwardly to stay poised and behave as if nothing out of the ordinary were happening. Some of the women were sent to stay with the Jessawalla family in Poona, some were to be with Meherjee in Bombay, and Naja and Katie were to live with Nariman and me. Just before leaving for the New Life, Baba played an important round of charades with the women. He arranged them into groups of three with each team acting out the title of a book they had chosen. The year before, Baba had sent Mehera and the women to Bombay specifically to see the movie *Gone With the Wind*, and the team that included Baba and Mehera acted out this title. We all understood the significance of their choice, as it spoke of what was happening all around Baba. Everything really *was* "gone with the wind."

On 16th October Baba and His companions began the New Life. The first news of Baba came three months later, when He contacted Padri, who had chosen to remain behind, telling him to

Gift of God

bring a small caravan to where they were staying at the time. Two mandali members were sent to meet Padri at a designated place and receive the caravan. Baba told them to relate to Padri everything that had happened to them during the past three months; Padri was then to contact us in Bombay and share the stories with us. We eagerly received every word about our Beloved.

Then, eight months into the New Life, Baba sent Nariman and me a letter informing us that He was coming to Bombay in September and asking us to find a bungalow suitable for housing the men and women in separate quarters. We began searching immediately, and Dr. Alu discovered what turned out to be a perfect bungalow belonging to a family of seven brothers and sisters who were involved in a fight with one another over the estate. The bungalow was locked up and in litigation, but Dr. Alu was very persistent and personally pleaded with each member of the family to rent the bungalow to us. She explained that her grandfather, who was not well, was coming to Bombay for a month to convalesce with His large family. She even spoke to their attorney. Although the family was quite reluctant, due to Alu's persistence they finally agreed and gave the bungalow free of charge because taking rent would have led to complications in the legal dispute. Baba had obviously turned the key.

When Baba came to stay in this bungalow, which was located in the Mahim section of Bombay, we had been given strict instructions that we should not try to see Him or any of the mandali. We were, however, allowed to provide food for them. The bungalow had a hall big enough for them to play badminton, and we brought badminton and table tennis sets so that Baba could play games with His companions. When He left, a few days of occupancy remained at the bungalow, so our whole family and some other Baba lovers stayed in the house in order to enjoy the atmosphere of Baba's Presence. After the agony we had been through, not knowing whether we would ever have contact with Baba again, this was an exquisite gift.

Since we could not see Baba or even write to Him during the New Life, Nariman and I planned a trip to Europe for July through

Gift of God

October of 1951. Then in June Nariman received a most unexpected letter from Baba, who was in Hyderabad, calling him there. Nariman and I were thrilled since Baba had originally said we would not see Him again. When he told Baba we would be leaving in July for a holiday to Europe, Baba asked if it would be possible for Nariman to come to a meeting with Him and a few others in October. There was no question as to what we would do. Even though Baba had given Nariman a choice, we would never miss an opportunity to be with Him, and we immediately shortened our trip in order to be back before October. Nothing was more important than being with Baba.

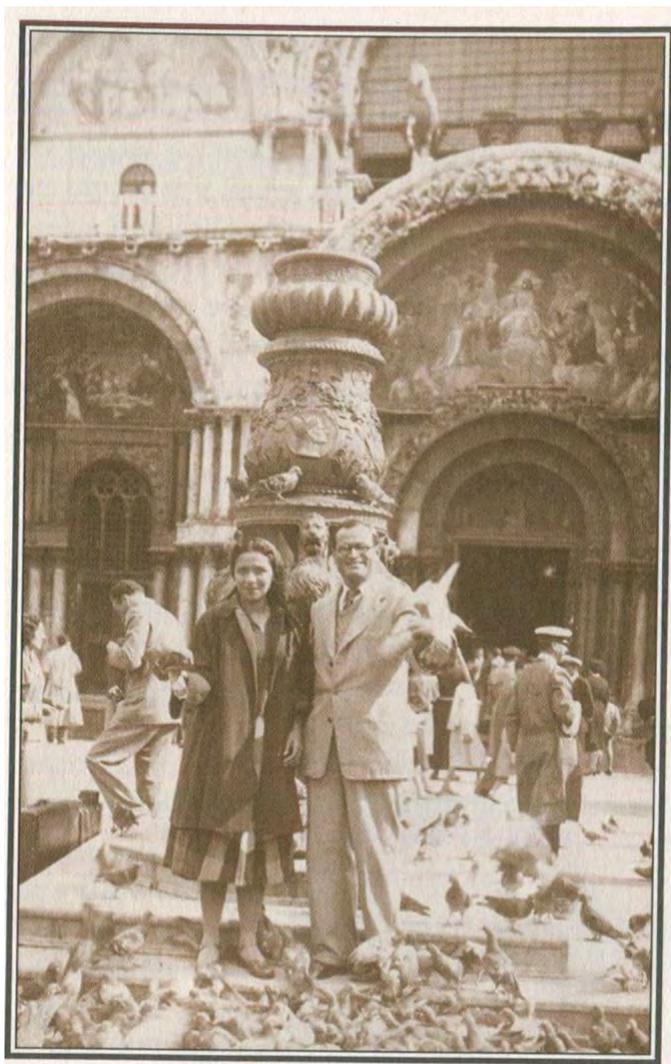
Our trip was very enjoyable, especially meeting Baba's European lovers and visiting places Baba had been, such as St. Mark's in Venice, Cannes in France, and FallenFluh in Switzerland. I was particularly moved by the European cathedrals and basilicas, especially in Italy, and



With Nariman in Paris

I remember a small chapel in Pisa with a big mural of Jesus, who bore a striking resemblance to Baba. We visited the Vatican and St. Peter's, and when I saw the *Pieta*, by Michelangelo, it was as though my heart had been pierced by an arrow. After completing our tour of St. Peter's, I told Nariman that I would like to stand in front of the *Pieta* again. Unable to move or take my eyes off the sculpture

Gift of God



...and at St. Mark's Square, Venice

of Mary holding her Beloved Son, I experienced the deep pain of her suffering. Even though I had spent my life with Baba, and knew that Jesus and Meher Baba are one and the same, it was often Jesus' Presence that was with me in Europe.

In October we were back in Bombay, and Nariman went to Hyderabad as planned to be with Baba. At the end of 1951 Baba called us both, first to Mahableswar and soon after that to Meherazad. Then, much to our surprise, at the end of that year Baba came out of the New Life. Stressing the importance of this period,

Baba made the following extraordinary statement:

This New Life is endless, and even after my physical death it will be kept alive by those who live the life of complete renunciation of falsehood, lies, hatred, anger, greed and lust; and who, to accomplish all this, do no lustful actions, do no harm to anyone, do no backbiting, do not seek material possessions, or power,

Gift of God

who accept no homage, neither covet honor nor shun disgrace, and fear no one and nothing; by those who rely wholly and solely upon God, and who love God purely for the sake of loving; who believe in the lovers of God, and in the reality of Manifestation, and yet do not expect any spiritual or material reward; who do not let go the hand of Truth, and who without being upset by calamities, bravely and wholeheartedly face all hardships with one hundred percent cheerfulness, and give no importance to caste, creed, and religious ceremonies.

This New Life will live by itself eternally, even if there is no one to live it.

After the New Life Baba's health began gradually to decline. Although Baba wanted His lovers to know of His physical problems, Dr. Donkin was concerned that they would not understand God's human suffering, so they were not informed. Only Baba knew what everyone would soon be aware of: the tremendous physical suffering that was coming and would continue for the rest of His time with us.

In 1952 Baba made plans to travel to the United States with Mehera, Mani, Goher, Meheru, Rano, Kitty and some of the men mandali, but He did not seem happy about the prospect of this trip. Elizabeth, with the help of Norina, had succeeded in acquiring a large piece of property in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, and they had completed the Meher Spiritual Center according to Baba's specifications. Elizabeth had invited Baba and the mandali to come to Myrtle Beach to officially open the Center. For several months prior to the trip Baba would send a telegramme to Elizabeth saying that He was not coming; then, a few days later, He would send another saying that He was. At the time we had no idea why Baba kept changing His plans, but we later understood why He was so upset.

Baba's departure from India was scheduled for 18th April, and on 1st April He came to stay at Ashiana with Mehera and the others who were making the trip with Him. After a few days, during which time Baba was noticeably restless, He told Nariman

Gift of God

and Sarosh that He did not feel comfortable and wanted to stay in some other place. With great difficulty Sarosh, who had many social contacts, found a small apartment in Bandra, a predominantly Christian suburb of Bombay. Mehera, Mani, Goher, Meheru, Eruch, Dr. Nilu and I went with Baba to stay in the Bandra apartment. We arrived in the morning, and throughout the day Baba remained uneasy. He retired at seven in the evening, but was disturbed by the local traffic and wanted His bed moved to another room. That night Baba had His bed moved three times from one room to another, finally asking that it be placed back where it had been originally.

The next morning when Baba arose, He looked pale, drawn and tired. He told us He had passed the worst night of His life, the night of His crucifixion, and we realized that it had been Good Friday, the day Jesus Christ was crucified. After breakfast Baba wanted to return to our apartment, but there His distress continued. He actually pleaded with us to take Him to a quiet place. He sternly told Nariman and Sarosh, "You don't know how much I am suffering. You don't care for Me! You are not finding a secluded place for Me." Two days later Sarosh found a small, secluded bungalow situated on a beach thirty-five miles away, where no one was around to disturb Baba. We spent several pleasant days there with Him, and His restless mood passed.

One day as we were walking on the beach, dipping our feet in the ocean, Baba asked me, "Do you swim?" I replied, "No, Baba. You gave me an order not to." Baba then asked, "Is there any other order I have given you?" I said, "Yes. You've also given me orders not to drive a car and not to learn the sitar." Baba smiled and said, "You can go swimming from now on." Someone said, "Baba, since you are releasing Arnavaz from the order not to swim, why not allow her to drive also?" I remained silent. I would never have asked Baba to take away any order, nor did I like someone else asking. Baba nodded in response to the question, appearing to indicate that I could learn to drive, but His reply did not seem wholehearted.

During these days Baba would often walk alone from one end of the beach to the other. I remember watching Him one evening at sunset, His beauty leaving me breathless. He walked with long,

Gift of God

graceful strides, His hair flowing, His sadra moving with the wind, while the ocean rippled and sparkled in the light of the setting sun. The moment was ethereal, and I treasure this memory of watching Beloved Baba move so freely for the last time.

Baba looked rested when we returned to Ashiana several days later, and He and the mandali were soon on a plane, headed for the United States. On 25th May we were stunned to receive the news by telegramme that Baba, while travelling across the United States by automobile, had met with an accident. The next day the Bombay papers carried the story, mentioning that Mehera had been critically injured. Baba and His Beloved were suffering, and they were so far away that we were unable to do anything except wait. We did not learn the extent of their injuries - or even whether dear Mehera was going to live - for two days. We sent cable after cable, anxiously awaiting further news, until a second telegramme arrived from Sarosh, letting us know that Baba, Mehera, and the others were being well cared for.

After two long months of waiting, we went to the airport to welcome Baba, Mehera and the others on their return from the West. Baba had told me to stay close to Mehera whenever we were together, and now that seemed more important than ever, so I embraced her and sat by her side while we waited for Baba to be brought from the plane. The scar on her forehead was vivid, and her face looked tense and pained; I could see that she was very shaken. Sensing that Mehera was not in the mood to talk, I asked no questions. Later she told me she appreciated my not inquiring about what had happened, and we never did discuss the accident.

Although she had remained conscious throughout the ordeal, in His compassion Baba seemed to have erased her memory of both the accident and their stay in the hospital. However, Mehera's injuries had affected her profoundly. In the past she had been able to recall the most minute details, but now there were times when she required a lot of effort to remember specific events. Goher had arranged to show her x-rays to the best brain specialist in London on their return trip, and when he saw them, he said that a person with such injuries could not have lived. Mehera's injuries should have been fatal, but Baba kept His beloved alive. He later

Gift of God

said that Mehera helped Him in His universal work by sustaining injuries in the accident.

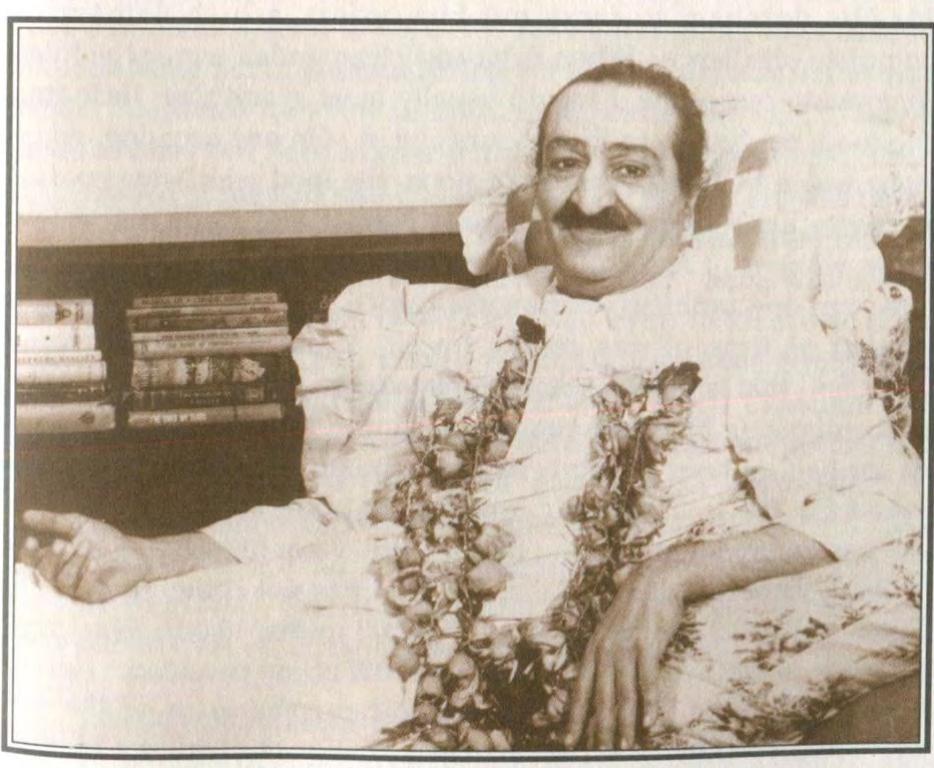
When Beloved Baba was finally brought from the plane, we greeted Him simply with folded hands, and He was taken directly to Meherazad by car. It was heartbreaking to see Him unable to walk, being carried in a chair, with casts on His hand and leg. The septum of His nose had also been broken, marring His beautiful face. Long before the accident Baba had said, "My blood will be shed on U.S. soil," and the sight of Him at the airport brought these words to my mind.

Chapter Fourteen

*"Greater than love is
obedience."*

- Meher Baba

The early 50's were a time of great activity at Ashiana, life now clearly reflecting the second scene of the vision Baba had given me prior to our marriage. It was as though Nariman and I had one foot in the ashram and the other in the world. We knew the intimate goings on of Baba and the mandali, but at the same time we lived a normal life, doing business, going dancing, and attending family gatherings. Yet because our lives revolved around Baba, we remained detached from these activities and were always ready to respond to His call at any moment. With Ashiana as our stage, we played the roles that Baba had given us.



Baba at Ashiana

Gift of God

The final detail of Baba's securing our apartment for us took place during this time. For five years we had been subletting Ashiana under the previous tenant's name, as the tenancy could not be transferred to us without the owner's signature, and he was living in Czechoslovakia. After he returned to Bombay in 1950 and moved into an adjacent building, he periodically sent us notices to vacate the apartment, but legally he could not force us out. In 1952 Nariman's intuition prompted him to send the landlord a big bouquet of flowers and a cake for Christmas. He was very touched by the gift, and he came to thank us in person, telling us he had decided to transfer the tenancy into our name - another example of Baba's silent work. He and his wife eventually came to Ashiana to have Baba's darshan, and he began loving Baba so much that even when no invitation was extended, he would appear on our landing just as Baba was arriving or departing.

Mehera had once suggested to Baba that since they came to Bombay so frequently, we should get a bigger apartment, but He told us not to leave Ashiana and continued to use our home as His base. He called upon Nariman and me, as well as those who came for His darshan, to carry out His orders, which demanded complete obedience. When Baba and His mandali were scheduled to come to our home, I would usually have everything, including the food, ready two to three hours ahead. On one occasion, when Baba was scheduled to arrive at noon, the food was being cooked at my father's home by my sisters Nargis and Roda and a few other women. I had told them to have the lunch ready by 10:00 a.m., but one problem after another arose, and the food could not be sent on time. I was getting frantic, afraid Baba would come early, and that is exactly what happened; He arrived at 10:00. After first embracing Nariman and me, Baba usually sat and talked with us for half an hour or more, having something to drink before He asked for food. This time, however, as soon as He entered the door, even before embracing us, He said, "I am hungry." I felt like hiding. Timidly I said, "Baba, the food has not come yet." Baba asked, "Why? Don't you know My 12:00 means 10:00? Every five minutes from then on He would ask me about the food. I grew more and more tense, straining to hear the horn of the car signalling that the food had arrived. Finally, at 11:00, my brother Huma came with the food, but I had been unable to stop worrying,

Gift of God

and by then I was a nervous wreck. Through such incidents Baba was telling us to keep Him always in mind and to do our utmost to meet His every need.

Often Baba would tell Narirnan and me that no one should know He was in Bombay, not even our families. Although we kept quiet, sometimes when He left after one of His "secret" visits to Ashiana, others would come to know that He had been staying with us. The phone would ring and we had to answer people's questions by simply denying that Baba had been in Bombay. Once I had to keep Baba's visit from my own sister-in-law, whose brother had seen Baba in our car.

This kind of situation could also happen when Baba was in our home. One time when He was having lunch, the doorbell rang and I looked through the peephole to see who it was. There stood Kharmanmasi, who had simply come to visit me, and I ran to tell Baba who it was without opening the door. He instructed me to send her away without mentioning that He was there. Kharmanmasi was a dear friend, almost a mother to me, and one of Baba's intimate lovers. I wondered how I was going to be able to avoid inviting her in without letting her know Baba was in the next room! I hesitated for a few seconds, trying to decide what to say in order to carry out Baba's order without hurting her feelings. Then Baba smiled at me and said it was all right to tell her He was there, but He was seeing no one and she was to leave. Imagine the stunned expression on her face when I told her. Baba was only a few feet from her, yet she wasn't allowed even to glance at Him. She left quietly, but had barely walked outside the compound when Baba, with a twinkle in His eye, asked me if I thought she would feel sad. When I said, "Yes, Baba," He told me to call her back, so I ran down the stairs and caught up with her. Kharmanmasi came back with me and stood silently with folded hands before Baba, who told her not to reveal to anyone that He was at Ashiana. She left smiling, happy to have had this unexpected treat of seeing her Beloved.

In His omniscience Baba tries to save us from the natural course of destiny through His orders, which give us the opportunity to obey Him instead of following our own desires and

Gift of God

attachments. Baba repeatedly told us that an opportunity missed is gone forever, and in one particular incident this truth was dramatically illustrated. In February of 1953 Baba told Gabriel Pascal, a famous director known for his productions of George Bernard Shaw's plays, to come to India during His tour of the southern state of Andhra. Pascal, who had met Baba in Europe in the 1930's, loved Him deeply, and from their first meeting he had expressed his desire to produce a movie about Baba. He promised to come to Andhra and said he would bring his cinemascope equipment so he could film Baba during His darshan programmes. Air India phoned me twice in Bombay asking for Baba's itinerary, as Pascal was chartering a plane so that he could meet Baba wherever He was. Baba was sad when, for some reason, Pascal failed to arrive in India. Four months later, while I was having lunch with Baba at Meherazad, a telegramme arrived saying that Gabriel Pascal had died. Baba was still for a couple of minutes; then He said, "If Pascal had come at the time I wanted him to, he would not have died." Pascal, pulled by his destiny, could not follow Baba's order; he did not realize it would have changed the course of his life.

I was frequently able to see, through the misfortunes of others, both the difficulty of saying no to ourselves and the unhappy results of our insistence upon going our own blind ways. In November of 1953 several other women from Bombay and I were beginning a three-month silence under Baba's order. The same day we were to begin, Baba was giving darshan to a selected few at our apartment. I had permission to speak only to Baba, and He had given very strict instructions that nobody coming for darshan was to ask Him anything. Everyone had been informed of this order. As people began arriving, one mother and daughter approached me, saying they wanted to ask Baba something very important. I hurriedly wrote a note reminding them of His order. They were insistent, so I emphasized again that they should not ask Baba any questions, but when their turn came to take His darshan, they tried to gain Baba's approval for something they wanted to do. Baba emphatically said, "No!" They persisted, trying to extract a *yes*, and Baba again told them firmly not to do what they wanted. When they still pleaded with Him, Baba got so annoyed that He sent everyone out of the room, saying He had a

Gift of God

severe headache. After five minutes He called the family back in, finally telling them they could do what they wanted. Baba seemed more sad than angry.

A year later Baba was again in Bombay staying at our apartment, and He had given a specific order that no one should see Him. There was an unexpected knock on the door, and I found the daughter of this family waiting. I went out, closing the door behind me so as not to let Baba know, and reminded her that no one was allowed to see Baba. She insisted that the matter was urgent, that her mother had sent her to ask Baba something. I pleaded with her to leave. At that point Baba clapped His hands and I went back inside. He wanted to know who was at the door, emphasizing that no one was to see Him. I said, "I'm sorry, Baba. Everyone knows of Your order, and I'm trying to send this woman away." To my surprise Baba told me to call her in, and He allowed her to ask the question. His answer was a specific instruction, and she went away feeling very happy, apparently unaware that she had disobeyed Baba. Some time after she left, Baba said to me, "I told you that no one was to see Me." I kept quiet - there was nothing I could say. The displeasure on His face was obvious. Not only had this family again failed to obey Baba's general order, but I learned later that the mother had not carried out the instruction He had given the daughter.

Many years later Baba told me to visit several families in Bombay. I was to go personally to their homes and obtain their responses to a specific order from Him. This same family was on the list and when I went to their home, I ended up listening to the mother recount all of their sufferings and difficulties. She had become totally blind due to an unsuccessful eye operation. Her children were at loggerheads, some of them not even speaking to one another. The family sounded so miserable that I asked if I could talk to her about the two incidents I had witnessed years earlier, as I felt they might have some bearing on the situation. She was anxious to know, so I pointed out how they had ignored Baba's direct order not to ask Him questions, had forced Baba to say *yes* to what they wanted to do, had insisted on seeing Baba when He had given an order that no one was to see Him, and had then failed to do what He told them to do. Shocked, the woman

Gift of God

began to cry, saying she did not remember any of these incidents and asking me if her family had really displeased Baba by not carrying out His orders. Sadly I told her they had. The poor woman's agony was intense. Full of remorse, she asked if she should write to Baba, beseeching me to tell her what a blind woman could do to atone for her disobedience. Even though it was not possible to undo what had been done, I assured her that Baba loved her, reminding her that in His compassion He remembered her and the family and had sent me there that very day. I told her not to worry, that in His mercy Baba must already have forgiven her, and what was of paramount importance now was to remember Him and repeat His name all day long.

This family never understood the meaning of obeying Baba. They thought that Baba had come to give them what they wanted, simply to fulfill their desires and make them happy. When difficulties arose, instead of questioning their own thinking or behaviour in looking for the cause, some of the family actually blamed Baba for their suffering. But Baba was not punishing them. On the contrary, He had given them orders to follow because He wanted to save them from the consequences of their desires. They had no way of knowing the opportunity they had missed.

This is not to say that if we obey Baba, all our suffering ends. Suffering is absolutely essential to the journey of the soul, as it alone can break us of our attachments, and it may even be intensified for a short while as Baba guides us on the most direct route. This family didn't understand that if they had obeyed Baba, any suffering they endured would have been according to His wish; instead it was the result of carrying out their own willful desires. Baba has said that nothing happens without His will, but that His *wish* gives us the privilege of choice: we can choose to obey Him. Baba's orders come from His all-knowing compassion. Sometimes when we ask Him a question, the answer is an order that we might not like, but it is Baba's wish that we obey. Baba has said, "Better that you don't ask Me; if you ask Me, then you must do as I say. If you don't want to obey, then don't ask Me." This lesson has to be learned. I was allowed to see the painful consequences that occur when people ask Baba for something and then expect His approval or when they simply act according to

Gift of God

their own desires, forgetting to seek His pleasure. Baba gives us alternatives to our destiny that can cut short our suffering if we will only obey Him. As He once told us, a huge field contains grass of different lengths and thicknesses - short, tall, thick, thin. But when a flaming match is thrown, it burns the whole field of dry grass within minutes. Baba said that His spiritual match, in the same way, can burn away the whole field of our *sanskaras*. But complete obedience and faith are necessary. These qualities take many lifetimes of dedication to develop, and only after we are prepared, by the grace of God Himself, do they manifest.

Paying attention to even the smallest of Baba's orders prepares us for the greater ones, which can be agonizing. Failing is part of the process, but each experience, no matter how painful, brings us closer to Him. I remember one woman's struggle to obey Baba's extremely difficult order in the face of love for her son. This woman had a very hard life. She was an orphan, and although she had married happily and had two children, she was widowed after only four years. A friend took her to meet Baba, saying He was the One who could give her solace. She planned to tell Baba about all her suffering, but the truth of Baba's all-knowing compassion was communicated to her with such immediacy when she came into His Presence that she actually forgot everything. After that first meeting she came to see Baba at every opportunity.

This woman's son, who loved her dearly, told her not to worry because he would always look after her. While he was still in college, this boy had a mild case of appendicitis. His mother wrote to Baba, asking what should be done, and He told her not to allow surgery. She complied with Baba's instructions and the son's pain subsided. When he later had another severe attack, however, and the doctor recommended emergency surgery, she became frantic. She wanted to follow Baba's order, but because the doctor told her that her son's life was in danger, she agreed to allow the operation to be performed.

Several years later her son's personality underwent a drastic change; he was no longer the considerate and loving son of the past, and he stopped coming to see Baba. His behaviour became increasingly erratic and insensitive to his mother's wishes, and he

Gift of God

eventually married a woman who made him and his family miserable. For the next twenty years he continued to make one bad move after another. The poor mother suffered so much over her son's wayward life that she once confessed to me that she felt he would have been better off dead than alive. Upon saying this, she realized that if she had followed Baba's order and not allowed the operation, her son's living or dying would have been entirely in Baba's hands, but she had not trusted Him enough. She would never know what changes in their destiny Baba had intended with His order.

Sometimes people say that because they didn't obey Baba, He has punished them by giving them suffering, but Baba never punishes; He did not come to punish us. We do that to ourselves through our disobedience. If we obey, we benefit; if we don't, then we go the way of destiny. Baba is always working to guide us to Him on the most direct path, so He gives us orders to save us from taking the longer route, to save us from unnecessary suffering. Baba said to us, "I do not want anything but the gift of your obedience." Obeying Baba is always challenging, but it is the most precious offering we can make to Him.

Chapter Fifteen

"The diverse rituals and ceremonies of different religions and cults are intended to release Divine Love, but they mostly bind the soul to the repetitive mechanism of expressive forms. Attachment to the external expression of love for God not only limits the love itself but creates separative divisions between one religion and another."

- Meher Baba

In 1951, while Baba was still in the New Life, my brother Nozer had announced that he wanted to join the Air Force. Due to the New Life conditions, there was no way of asking Baba's permission. My father was opposed to his plan, but Nozer was very insistent and I had finally persuaded my father to let him join, saying that whatever happened would be Baba's will, that we must keep faith in Him. That is how we left it, knowing that whatever Baba wanted would come to be.

As a boy Nozer was especially sweet and understanding. By the time he was fifteen years old he had read almost everything that had been printed by or about Baba. Introspective and wise at nineteen, Nozer found the atmosphere of the Air Force difficult at times. His Air Force companions would call him "wise man" or "yogi" because he seldom drank, wouldn't smoke, and led a very

Gift of God

quiet life. Nozer was totally devoted to Baba, and he always behaved in ways he felt would please Him. Every night for half an hour before he went to sleep, it was his practice to take Baba's name using a sandalwood bead necklace; he would slide the beads forward, one at a time, and repeat Baba's name with each bead.

Six months after joining the Air Force, Nozer had a very strange dream in which he was kneeling in the corner of a room where an oil lamp was burning in front of Baba's photo. As he was praying, a hideous figure-half animal and half human-came forward and tried to snatch the bead necklace out of his hands. Nozer fought very hard not to give it up, and the struggle went on for several moments with Nozer shouting Baba's name at the top of his voice. He woke up clutching the bead necklace, still shouting Baba's name. Nozer was very frightened by this dream; he told us later that he had never seen such a repulsive creature. It was 2:00 in the morning when he awoke from the dream, but he was unable to go back to sleep. He sat on his bed for two hours, taking Baba's name until it was time to get up. Still feeling shaken, he did not want to fly that day, but it was almost impossible to refuse to do so.

At 8:00 that morning Nozer was waiting uneasily when he heard his name called, indicating that he was to prepare to fly. Half an hour later, when he was almost ready to board the plane, an announcement came over the loudspeaker that his flight had been cancelled. His relief was short-lived, however, as another flight was soon given to him, and the uneasiness started all over. Again the flight was cancelled. His name was even called a third time, but then one of Nozer's trainers asked him to give up his flying time that day to another boy who was behind and needed the hours to qualify for his training. Nozer, very relieved, agreed immediately. The flying assignments were over for that particular day, and he wouldn't be called again.

Within minutes an announcement came that a plane had crashed, killing two men, the trainer and the student pilot who had taken Nozer's place. Shocked and grieved at the news, Nozer ran straight to his room and fell to his knees, grasping Baba's photo in his hands. He knew Baba had saved him. He wrote us a letter

Gift of God

relating the whole incident, and he was so upset that his handwriting was shaky. I sent the letter to Baba, who was by that time allowing us to contact Him.

Four years later Baba had called Nozer, who was on leave from the Air Force, to come for His darshan where He was staying in Satara. Baba also called Dina Talati's son Khurshed, who was leaving to work in London, and Dr. Alu's brother Jehangir, who was going to Africa. After they had taken darshan, Baba said to Nozer, "You will fly away." To Khurshed He said, "You will go away," and He told Jehangir, "You will go to Africa." Baba also told Nozer that He wanted seven *lakhs* from him and then asked how he would get the money. Nozer replied that he would earn it. As the three were leaving the room, Nozer stumbled on the threshold and Baba called him back, telling him to act out exactly how he had tripped.

Baba often spoke in His own language, leaving us guessing as to His meaning. His words to these three men later took on a deeper significance. Saying that Nozer would fly away had made sense, as he was a full-fledged pilot. However, we could never have known that Baba had referred to the sad fate that was to befall two of the three. Only the words that Baba had said to Jehangir were absolutely literal; he did go to Africa, returning to India several years later. But two months after taking Baba's darshan in Satara, Nozer died at the age of twenty-two in a plane crash, and Khurshed, at the age of twenty-seven, died in England three years later of a heart attack.

We received a telegramme during the night of 13th October, 1955, which said that Nozer's plane was missing. Despite a continuous search the Air Force could not locate it, and we waited two days for further news. On the third day the tail of the plane was sighted in a shallow lake at Secunderabad. The attempts of the Air Force to pull the plane out were unsuccessful, as the nose was embedded in the bottom of the lake. The body of the other pilot was recovered, but Nozer's body was not sighted immediately, so we still had hopes that he might have parachuted before the crash.

Gift of God

During the three days of the search, we were in almost constant contact by phone with Baba, who was in Satara at that time. He would call to find out whether Nozer had been found, and we would call to give Him whatever news we had. One of my aunts, who was very orthodox, started insisting that we perform the traditional Zoroastrian ceremony which is done for four days after a death, even though the body had not yet been found. I did not feel at all comfortable about this idea, so I phoned Baba to ask which ceremonies we should do. When Eruch gave my message to Baba, He at once became very forceful, saying, "I have come to do away with all ceremonies and rituals. And you, who are so close to Me, are asking Me what ceremonies are to be performed? Since you are asking Me, I will be in Meherabad until 17th October. If Nozer's body is in good enough condition when it is found, bring it to Meherabad. With My own hands I will perform the highest possible ceremony."

After that, we just waited. Five days after the crash Nozer's body was finally retrieved from the nose of the plane. My brother Dara and Dr. Alu had already been sent to bring the body back to Meherabad, but it was in such bad condition that the authorities would not permit it to be taken away. They would not even allow Dara to see it. When Dara called to say that he and Alu could not bring Nozer's body back, I told him to have a priest say only whatever prayers were necessary before it could be taken to the Tower of Silence. A Zoroastrian priest said an hour's prayer, and Dara assured him that the rest of the four days' ceremonies would be performed by us in Bombay. Then, in order to avoid doing any further ceremonies and to prevent misunderstanding among our relatives and friends, we told them that the ceremonies had been performed in Secunderabad.

Baba taught us gradually that ceremonies are not necessary, preparing us over the years for the time He would expect us to give up all our traditions. When my brother Tehmton died in 1943, all the traditional ceremonies were performed. At that time Baba did not say anything to us, but when Uncle Chanji came to visit us shortly thereafter, he gently asked my mother, "Why did you have all these ceremonies? They are not necessary and are for our satisfaction only." When Chanji died in Kashmir, Baba did not have any ceremonies done except the prayers required for burial.

Gift of God

Although some of our relatives did the four days' ceremony in Bombay, Mother, remembering Chanji's objections, did not do any of the other traditional Zoroastrian ceremonies (simple monthly ceremonies and more elaborate ones at the end of six months and a year). When my mother died in 1946, we asked Baba what we should do. We did not yet know what Baba truly wanted. He sent the message that only the four days' ceremony was important and nothing more. Eight years later, when Nozer died, Baba told us that no ceremonies should be performed.

Seven months earlier Baba had given an order for a twenty-four hour jap to be held for three months. Three centres had been established, in north, central and south Bombay, my family home in Dadar being the southern centre. During each shift two people would sit before a photo of Baba with an oil lamp burning in front of it and repeat His name quietly. In case one coughed or stumbled, the other was always there to fill in. For three months, twenty-four hours a day, the jap went on, with the main participants being the five of us women who had been together with Baba in Panchgani, my family and several other close lovers. When Baba then requested that we continue for another two months if possible, we were the only centre to do so. Later we understood that through this jap Beloved Baba had prepared the family inwardly for Nozer's death.

Baba also lessened the shock by allowing the news of our loss to be given in stages. First we heard that Nozer's plane was missing. While we sat and waited for further news, it occurred to us to resume the jap in order to ease the tension, and we began repeating Baba's name in turns in front of His photo, just as we had earlier for five months. Whenever we felt upset, we immediately joined in, repeating Baba's name. As each bit of information came to us, despite the uncertainty, Baba gave us the feeling of His Presence through the jap.

When Baba was notified that Nozer's body had been found, He sent us a telegramme saying, "I have physically lost my gem Nozer and Nozer has gained Me spiritually by loving Me to his last breath. Let us be brave and not selfish but rejoice in Nozer's bliss... for such souls are instrumental in showing to us how to love and be worthy of the Beloved - Baba." Two weeks later He called

Gift of God

our whole family for His darshan at Bindra House, where Eruch's mother Gaimai and the rest of the Jessawalla family lived in Poona. Mehera and some of the other mandali were also there. Baba embraced us one by one, and when He put His arms around me, I sobbed uncontrollably. Unable to contain my emotions, I felt as though Baba was pulling them from me. He took me into the bedroom and held my head tightly pressed to His chest. I actually heard and felt vibrations coming from Baba's heart, and a wave of peace swept over me.

Baba had saved Nozer four years earlier, perhaps giving him the gift of becoming a pilot, which was his dream. And He also spared our family the shock of another death so soon after all the earlier ones. Even so, the whole family was grieving deeply. Baba consoled my father in an unusual way, asking him, "If I had sent Nozer to England and given him the order never to return to India, and if I had then given you the order never to see him again, you would be happy that Nozer was alive and doing what I wanted him to do, isn't that so?" My father said, "Yes, Baba." Baba continued, "I want you to consider it that way - that I have sent Nozer somewhere. Think that I have called him to Me and that I am telling you never to see him again. What is this body after all? Nozer wasn't his body. The difference is that you can't see him now. I gave Nozer the order always to repeat My name before flying, and as soon as he sat in the plane the last time, he came to Me. He is with Me, and he is so happy!" When Baba spoke to us in this way, His words helped to ease our pain.

Two weeks later I was very surprised to receive a letter from Mehera - the first that Baba had allowed her to write - concerning our last meeting in Poona when Baba had called us to Bindra House:

[Meherazad]

31-10-55

My Dear Arnavaz,

You will be surprised to receive this letter from me, as you know I am not allowed to write to anybody,

Gift of God

but Baba has gladly given me permission so I take this opportunity to write a few words.

Since we left Poona, a certain point has been weighing on my mind and I want to make it clear. At Gaimai's place when I was showing you Baba's pictures there was a postcard of the child Jesus and a lamb with some beautiful verses which Roda liked and wanted to copy... and so I offered the card to her, but at the very next instant I felt you liked the card more and I should have offered it to you, and since I did not do so it has been preying on my mind and hence I have taken the opportunity of sending two very nice pictures of dear Baba and one of Jesus with the lamb which I hope you will like.

I wanted to tell you about the sample materials you had sent. They are very pretty and colourful and I like them very much. I also received the strawberry sari and other... materials you have sent. Hoping you are keeping good health and keeping happy as per dear Baba's orders.

Love from Mani, Naja, Meheru, Rano and Goher.

With special love from Baba and Mehera

Yours lovingly,

Mehera

Dictated by Mehera and written by Goher.

Mehera says to give Katie our love also.

Despite the sorrow I felt over the loss of Nozer, Mehera's understanding of my feelings brought me joy, and I tried to express to her the depth of my gratitude:

Gift of God

7 November 1955

My ever dearest Mehera,

... Joys and sorrows very deep down in the heart do not have any words.... Therefore, dearest Mehera, I have no expression to give you what is within me but I know and feel deeply that you understand. It has given me tremendous happiness [to know] that I am the first privileged one to whom you have written. I pray and I hope [to] be worthy of you and Baba.

When I receive any gifts from you and Baba... I always treasure them dear to my heart whether they be seashells or precious stones. Of course Baba's pictures are the most valuable gifts and I cannot compare them for they [are] the highest type of gifts.

Mehera dear, Baba's two pictures you have sent [are] stamped in my heart and the other one, Christ with His lambs, has charm of its own. Whenever I see a picture of Christ and His lambs it always reminds me of Baba and His lambs, that is all of us who love Baba. That card you gave to Roda is lost now.... I liked it very much because when I saw those tiny pictures and when I read those simple couplets I felt the card living in my hand. You, being One with Baba, felt that.... Dear Mehera, I am not sorry even for a second that you did not give me that card because what is in a picture... when I know that you felt my heart. There is nothing in the world that could have given me more joy I love you and Baba so much.... Everyone over here sends you and Baba their love and please accept mine too.

With all my love, ever yours,

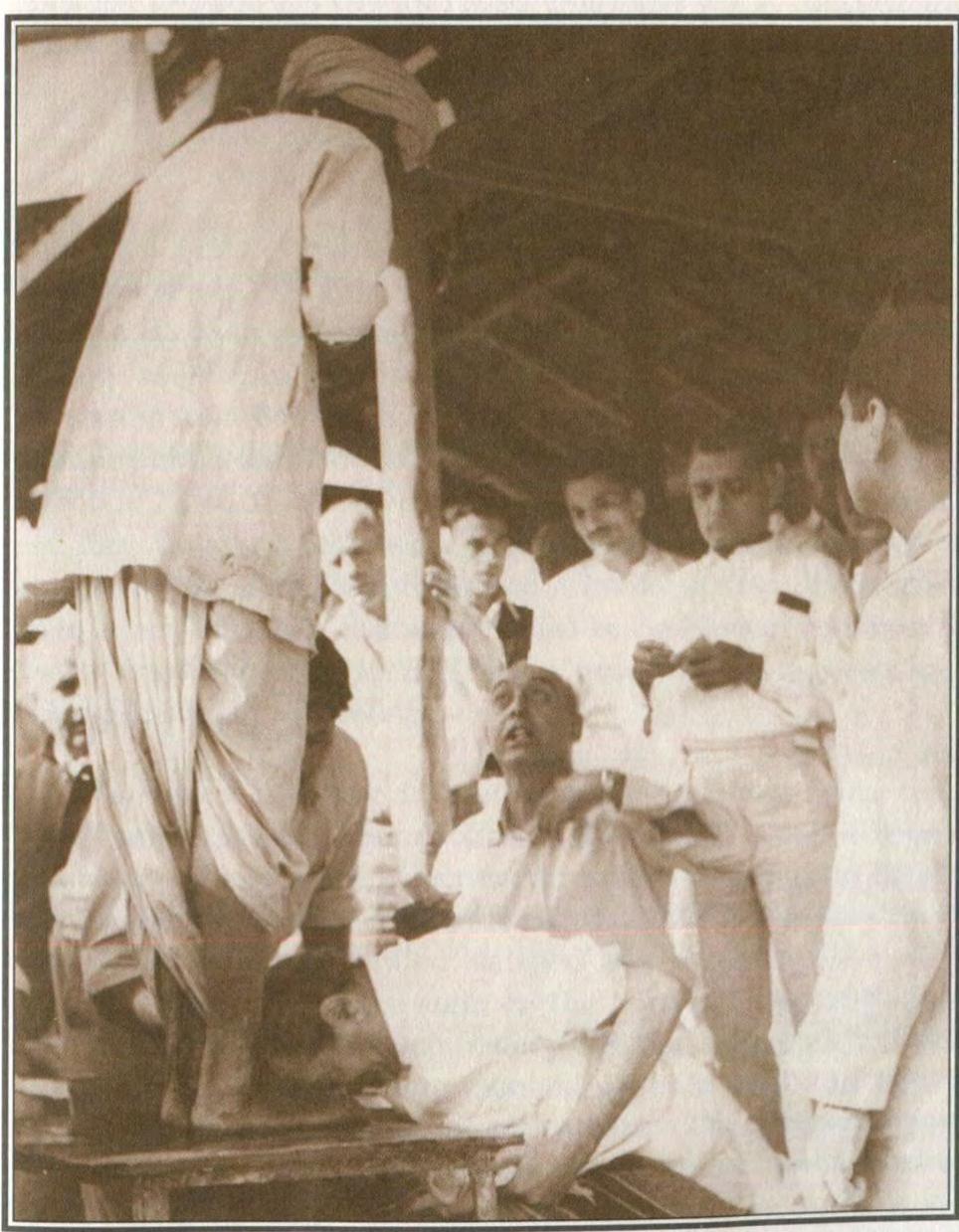
Arnavaz

Mehera's tender heart felt so sorry she had not given me the original picture of Jesus with a lamb that she wrote to a Baba lover

Gift of God

and asked for another copy. When Baba and the mandali came to Ashiana a few months later, she presented the card to me with such a sweet smile that I was overwhelmed by her love.

At the beginning of November a big sahas was held at Meherabad for Indian men only, and all the men in both my family and Nariman's attended. As we had spent no money on death ceremonies for Nozer, we had sent a thousand rupees to Baba in



Baba bowing down at feet of the poor at the ceremony for Nozer

Gift of God

memory of him. At one point during the sahasas Baba had our family members stand around Him. He then washed the feet of ten poor people, bowed down to them, and gave each a hundred rupees. When He had finished distributing the thousand rupees we had sent, He said, "This was the ceremony for Nozer."

Baba asked us for a large photo of Nozer, and we sent Him one in a white oval frame. After keeping it at lower Meherabad in His Rahuri cabin for quite a number of years, Baba brought it to Meherazad. A few years after Baba dropped His body, Goher and I covered Nozer's photo with one of Baba, and this picture is still hanging outside the room where Nariman always stayed.

Chapter Sixteen

*"My accident was no
'accident,' and it all comes to
one thing: what I wanted has
happened and what I want
will happen."*

- Meher Baba

In January of 1956 Baba travelled to Navsari, Bajwa and Baroda for a darshan programme, and Nariman and I, along with a large number of Baba lovers from Bombay, accompanied Him. We started from Bombay by train, stopping first at Navsari, where a large public darshan had been arranged. There were many orthodox Zoroastrians in Navsari who believed only in Zoroaster, and they thought it blasphemy to follow someone who claimed to be the Avatar. Although Baba had a loving group of disciples there, a very anti-Baba feeling prevailed in the Navsari community itself. Encouraged by their elders, a group of young boys had made plans to stir up trouble.

As Baba was giving darshan and everyone was filing past, these trouble makers were spotted in the crowd. One of Baba's followers told us that they intended to squash raw eggs on Baba's feet. They stood in the queue for darshan, but when they came near Baba, they only smiled, saluted and went on their way. After the programme we went to the home of one of Baba's lovers. Baba was relaxed and having His food when out in front of the house the same group climbed up on a wall and began shouting derogatory remarks aimed at Baba. The Navsari lovers were naturally furious and wanted to stop them. Baba, seeing their anger, called everyone together and very lovingly said, "Don't bother about what these young boys are doing. When I was their age I used to do the same." Baba's smile and the

Gift of God

compassion He expressed calmed us down, teaching us to show tolerance for the ignorant.

This was not the first time that negativity was present at gatherings with Baba. Although many thousands around the world loved and revered Him, from the very beginning, especially in the 1920's and 1930's, an antagonistic element sought to humiliate Him. This antagonism came most strongly from Baba's very own community of Zoroastrians, and many anti-Baba articles appeared in newspapers and magazines which thousands read. No matter how much Uncle Chanji had pleaded for permission to respond to the misinformation in these articles, Baba said not to, as those who opposed Him were also spreading His name and doing His work.

It was around the time of the Navsari darshan that Nariman and I decided we wanted always to be available for Baba. Although we had occasionally taken holidays together over the years, we stopped travelling for pleasure, as we were never sure when Baba might come to Ashiana or call us to be with Him. Nariman had great responsibilities with his business, but he was always ready to accompany Baba on a mast trip or darshan programme or just be with Him. When Baba called me to stay with Him wherever He was, I would forget that I lived in Bombay and simply enjoy the loving company of the God Man and His beloved Mehera, who were more than family to Nariman and me. Nothing was more important than to be with Baba, God Incarnate.

Baba was travelling a great deal during this period, and He sometimes used our car, a 1952 blue Chevrolet that Nariman had bought a few years earlier. We had previously owned a used Oldsmobile that Baba had told Nariman to buy from Sarosh, and it had given us good service for five years, but then Sarosh encouraged Nariman to buy this new Chevrolet. Nariman was very enthusiastic about it and, not wanting to dampen his spirits, I did not object. Still, I had an uneasy feeling about the Chevrolet. I would have preferred to keep the Oldsmobile, but it was not practical to maintain two cars, so I asked Baba the next time He was at Ashiana which one we should keep. He took His alphabet board and flipped it high in the air. When it came down

Gift of God

into His hands, He said, "Keep the Chevrolet." We sold the Oldsmobile and it was this Chevrolet that Baba called for when He needed a car.

In May of 1956 Baba called for the car and kept it for two months. He sent it back, then two weeks later called for it again and kept it for another two months. We had it for only a week before Baba called for it a third time, saying He would keep it for a longer period. In October Baba went north on a mast trip in this car, often travelling for long stretches that lasted for hours. Eruch later told us that on one occasion he was so fatigued and sleepy that he begged Baba to let him stop driving, as he could not even see the road, as though there was a dark tunnel ahead. Baba told him to continue, and Eruch's faith and obedience were such that he did. Shatrughan Kumar, a close disciple from Dehra Dun who was in the back seat, saw Baba's right hand superimposed over Eruch's left hand on the steering wheel. Kumar thought he was seeing things, so he looked away in hopes of clearing his vision, but when he looked again, he saw that Baba's hand was still on the wheel over Eruch's.

A year earlier Baba, who was at that time in Satara, had called a number of men to come from Meherabad, Meherazad, Bombay, Poona and Ahmednagar. During their stay Baba took them on a picnic to a place called Ud-Tara, about ten or twelve miles away from where they were staying. They went to play cricket, but on that day they played the game in an unusual manner. Cricket involves two teams, each side getting a turn at bat, but this particular game was played with no teams. Everyone was in the field, and the men came to bat one by one, with Baba taking turns at random. Baba wanted everyone to play wholeheartedly, as if the game were a big tournament, and to have a good time.

On 2nd December, 1956, Baba left Satara to go to Poona in our car, accompanied by four of the men mandali: Eruch, who was driving, Vishnu, Pendu and Dr. Nilu. During their return from Poona the same day, Baba decided to exchange seats with Dr. Nilu, putting Himself in the front seat and Nilu in the back. Passing Ud-Tara, He pointed out the place where a year earlier they had played the cricket game. Baba had put His foot up on the dashboard and was talking with Nilu when the car suddenly swerved out of control.

Gift of God

Eruch had been driving slowly, as there was some road work going on next to a culvert, and large rocks had been placed around the area. He later said it was as though someone had grabbed the steering wheel from him, causing the car to hit the culvert and go off the road. Eruch got out of the car and ran around to Baba's side to see how badly He was injured, and Baba pointed to his hip. It turned out that the socket had been shattered. Vishnu, who had been in the middle of the back seat, was still in the car, but Pendu and Nilu had been thrown out, and Nilu had hit his head on a rock and was unconscious. Eruch stopped a passing car and begged the driver to take Baba to Satara. After putting Baba and Vishnu in the car, Eruch got Pendu and Nilu into a truck that had stopped. As soon as they reached Satara, they were taken to a hospital.

Just four days before the accident Baba had called Nariman to Satara. As usual, He inquired about the business, and when Nariman told Baba that he was going to Delhi on 4th December, Baba gave him this order: "You must go to Delhi. Don't postpone the trip." On the night of the 2nd, we received a phone call from Adi Sr. telling us the horrible news of Baba's accident. Adi reported that Goher and Donkin were attending to Baba at home because the local hospital was hopelessly inefficient, and He would have been given inadequate treatment there. They were arranging for Baba to be moved to the hospital in Poona as soon as possible. Nariman's impulse was to go to Baba immediately, but he remembered Baba's order and felt torn about what to do. We discussed his dilemma and I said, "Obeying Baba is more important than going to Him. Baba knew the accident would take place, so He had reasons for giving you that order."

The following morning Adi called again, saying that Nilu had died from his injuries. Nariman and I were very close to Dr. Nilu, who had always visited us during the yearly vacation that Baba gave him. He was like a brother to us, and we were comforted to hear the others say that Nilu was very happy on the morning of the accident. Just before leaving Satara, he said to some of the men standing on the porch, "If I die, I will die with a clear conscience that I have served Meher Baba well!" Shortly before the accident Nilu, who was exhausted from accompanying Baba on all His trips after the New Life and doing night duty, had asked Him when all

Gift of God

the travelling would end. Baba told Nilu not to worry, that the next trip would be his last, and he died in the presence of the God-Man.

Nariman went to Delhi as planned but left two days later because he was so restless he couldn't concentrate on his work. As he was free to go to Baba at any time, he returned to Bombay and went on immediately to Satara. Nariman wanted to be of help, but upon seeing Baba, he felt faint and went out to the porch and vomited. When he returned home and described what had happened, I realized that he would not have been able to bear seeing Beloved Baba in the condition He was in immediately after the accident. Baba had prevented Nariman from coming when the situation was at its worst.

The damage to our car was extensive, and we turned it over to the insurance company. Our agent, the manager of the company, had been for Baba's darshan, and Nariman had been doing business with him for many years. When Nariman explained to him that Baba had been in the accident and there were large medical bills as well as other expenses, the agent gave the case special consideration. In the end the company not only gave twice the actual value of the car but also paid far beyond the policy's coverage in order to take care of the medical expenses for Baba and the others.

Later Vishnu described the accident to us. He said that when Baba looked back at him just after the impact, he had been blinded by a radiant light that encompassed Baba, and he felt he was seeing *Viraat Swaroop*, the Universal Body of God. Baba told us that His injury was an intentional suffering that He took upon Himself for His Universal work. Years later when I was with Him, Baba gestured with His forefinger, making a circle around His injured hip, and pointed to the centre of the circle, saying, "My suffering for the whole world is centred right here!"

In early September of the next year Dr. Donkin and Dr. Goher arranged for Baba to come to Bombay for a medical check-up. He came for only one day, but a few of us were fortunate enough to have His darshan. My whole family, Katie, Dr. Alu, Kharmanmasi, and Dina Talati were there. We all had His embrace and as Alu

Gift of God

was leaving, she said to Baba twice, "Please Baba, get well soon!" Baba called her back, and as she turned to face Him, He said twice, with great authority, "What is ordained will happen!" I always remembered these words, because Baba had already told us that His hip joint would never totally heal.

After His check-up in Bombay, Baba returned to Meherazad, but He soon wrote a letter informing us that He was coming again for a month of medical treatment, and He wanted to bring quite a number of the mandali with Him. Baba told us to find a comfortable place for Him, with separate accommodations for the men and women. Since Nariman was very involved in his business, Baba told my brother-in-law Jim Mistry and me to search for a suitable bungalow. We were not to tell anyone of these plans.

Jim and I went from place to place. We would find a bungalow that was large enough but dilapidated, or one in good condition but much too small. Baba phoned each day to ask how we were doing. After fifteen days He wrote and said that He would not mind staying in our apartment if some of the men could stay elsewhere and we would install an air-conditioner, as He didn't want noises coming in from outside.

I felt very happy and wrote back to Baba, saying that we would fulfill His conditions. Even though our apartment had only four rooms and a kitchen, I had never worried about whether or not there would be enough room for everyone. I just shut one door, and the two bedrooms provided a secluded place for the women to stay. If I shut the sitting room door, Baba could be alone with the men, and the women could move freely about the rest of the house. When I simply set about doing what Baba wanted, He always worked everything out easily. We decided to rent an air conditioner rather than buy one because we were not sure whether Baba would use it on subsequent visits. Knowing that Baba's hip joint was causing Him great pain, we bought a special lift chair that made it possible to carry Him easily up and down the one flight of stairs to our apartment.

When Baba and the mandali arrived on 1st October, He and the women stayed at our apartment, as planned. Except for the

Gift of God

night watchman, the men spent their nights at the home of Rupamai, another long-time Baba lover who lived close to Ashiana. She was very happy to serve Baba in this way. Early in the morning the men would come and stay the whole day with Baba, returning after dinner to Rupamai's home. In the morning Baba would have His breakfast first, and then Mehera, Mani, Goher, Meheru and I would have ours. As soon as we finished, the dishes would be quickly washed, and then the men would sit down. This was also the arrangement at lunch, evening tea and dinner. The dining room was occupied for a good part of the day, but everything went smoothly. Even though nothing had been changed in the apartment, Baba made it feel much bigger. There was room for everyone and the necessary privacy was never a problem.

One day Baba took my hand to lead me from the dining room to the second bedroom. Because of the pain in His hip, He was limping, leaning on my forearm with tremendous pressure, so I had to make an effort to hold my arm steady. After looking around the room, Baba asked why the oil lamp that we kept in front of His photograph was not burning. I always kept the lamp burning at night and even during the day when Baba was not at Ashiana, but when He was with us the lamp did not seem necessary, as He Himself was the Light. I replied, "Baba, You are here and that is all that matters." Baba nodded but said, "I want you to keep the lamp burning twenty-four hours a day." Because Nariman and I were sometimes with Baba for extended periods of time, I didn't know what I should do when we were away. Then, remembering that I had a small electric lamp, I asked Him if I could keep that lighted. Baba said yes, and from then on a light burned in front of Baba's picture, day and night.

While we were still in the bedroom, Baba asked, "Where is the picture of Jesus?" I pointed to it on the wall behind us, and He simply nodded. Although I had originally hung only pictures of Baba at Ashiana, I had then come across one of Christ, surrounded by roses, lying on a white cloth with two angels kneeling, one at His feet and the other by His head. In the foreground were the cross, the crown of thorns, nails and a hammer for His crucifixion,

Gift of God

and an altar behind Him held lighted candles, vases of flowers and a golden chalice. The figures stood out in relief, giving the scene a three-dimensional effect. I was so drawn to this picture that I had bought it and hung it in the second bedroom. As we left the room, I wondered why Baba had asked about it.

For consultation concerning the injury to His hip, Baba was taken to a private hospital owned by Dr. Talwalkar, an orthopedic surgeon. After x-rays and other tests Dr. Talwalkar suggested that Baba go for physiotherapy. He recommended a Dr. Athle, who had a physiotherapy clinic, and Baba began going there almost every morning. Both Dr. Talwalkar and Dr. Athle must have felt Baba's greatness, as neither of them would take any fees for their consultation or treatments. When the time came for Baba to leave Bombay, He still needed treatment, so Dr. Athle sent the same physiotherapist all the way to Meherazad to continue His therapy. *Diwali* and the Hindu New Year were celebrated while Baba was being treated in Bombay, and He sent Dr. Goher with one silver rupee coin for each of these doctors, asking her to tell them that the gift was His prasad. Both doctors sent their respects to Baba, saying they were very happy to have received the prasad and fortunate to have served Him. Despite the efforts of these two dedicated specialists, however, it was ordained for Baba to suffer from His injuries for the rest of His earthly life.

Baba wanted the women mandali to enjoy themselves while they were in Bombay for His medical treatment. We went to many movies, had picnics on the beach, visited Baba lovers in their homes, and ate lunches at good restaurants. Four or five days before they were to leave Bombay, Baba told me not to take the women to any more movies. Then, unexpectedly, on the morning of 30th October, He told me to take the women to a matinee. We found a good movie in the paper and decided to go to the 4:00 show.

I was dressed and ready to go when I heard the sound of glass breaking. I rushed into the sitting room and saw that the water bottle had fallen to the floor. As I ran to get something to clean up the mess, Eruch followed and told me that whenever glass broke in Baba's Presence, news of someone's death soon followed.

Gift of God

While we were cleaning up, Baba, out of the blue, said to me, "The dress you are wearing looks good; you look pretty in it. Don't give it away. You're always giving things away. You've given away enough. Now stop." Baba sometimes gave orders in the midst of our daily activities; we had to remain alert and responsive no matter what the circumstances.

When we returned from the movie, Baba called Goher and me into the sitting room and broke the news that Gustadji had passed away at Meherazad. It seemed that Baba had intentionally sent us women to the movie so we would not be present when the news arrived. After Adi Sr. called with the news of Gustadji's death, Baba had all the mandali leave the room for a few minutes so He could be alone. When He called them back, His eyes were red and He told them He had wept over the loss of Gustadji, His long-time companion. Baba had given Gustadji an order to observe silence soon after He began keeping silence Himself, and Gustadji never spoke again. When Baba told Goher and me the news, we just stood there, unaware that tears were streaming from our eyes. Baba asked us why we were weeping. He said, "Gustadji has come to Me and I have given him God-realization." That was the first time I had ever heard Baba say He had given someone God-realization. He then told us to go break the news to Mehera and the other women. It was then that we realized why Rano and Naja, who usually accompanied Baba to Bombay, had been left in Meherazad; they were needed to care for Gustadji in his final illness.

Before we heard of Gustadji's death, Baba had told me to invite a few of His close ones for a dinner party at Ashiana to celebrate Nariman's birthday, 31st October. Baba said that I should do everything as planned, with the usual decorations: garlands of flowers on the doors and *rangoli*, pretty designs made with white and coloured chalk, on the floors. The only change Baba made was that we were not to have the ice cream I had ordered, so I made arrangements for it to be distributed to some poor children in a boarding school. We had dinner and enjoyed ourselves, but a sadness remained in our hearts.

The following day Baba and the others returned to Meherazad. Baba told us He would be coming back to Bombay

Gift of God

on 18th December for two weeks, and He wanted to celebrate Mehera's birthday at our apartment. He also told Nariman and me to come to Meherazad on 4th December and stay for ten days. It was rather unusual for Baba to call us to Meherazad when His next visit to Ashiana was so close. Because I wanted our home to be worthy to receive Beloved Baba, I always needed several days to see to everything concerning His stay: cleaning the house spotlessly, changing the curtains, washing the slipcovers, and taking care of a hundred other details. This time I would have to make do with the time He allotted, as Baba wanted us in Meherazad.

Chapter Seventeen

"Whatever your apparent calamities and transient sufferings, they are but the outcome of my Love for the ultimate good."

- Meher Baba

Nariman and I reserved tickets to go to Ahmednagar by the night train on 4th December, 1957. That afternoon our driver took me in the car to do some last-minute errands, all of them having to do with Baba's coming visit to Bombay. I was in the back seat with two photos of Baba in silver frames that I was taking to be polished, reading over my list of errands, when suddenly the car crashed into a pole, throwing me forward so that I hit my head against the front seat. The sound of breaking glass was so loud that I thought every window in the car must have shattered. Stunned and barely able to think straight, I sat quietly for a minute, taking Baba's name. With the impact of the crash the two pictures, which were in a leather bag on the seat, had fallen to the floor, and the glass in the frames had broken into a hundred pieces.

A crowd had gathered around the car. Someone helped me to get out and directed me to a shop nearby so I could call Nariman at his office to tell him what had happened. He came quickly with his brother Behram, who took me home. When I later inquired about the condition of the car, I was surprised to learn that not a single window had been broken. That seemed unbelievable, as the glass breaking in those two small frames could not possibly have made so much noise. It was as though Baba had directed the impact of the accident into those two picture frames.

Gift of God

The accident took place at about 4:00 in the afternoon. When Nariman and I boarded the night train at 9:00, I was still very shaken. Although I had escaped with only a small bruise on my forehead, I found it very difficult to sleep on the train. As soon as we arrived at Meherazad, we went into mandali hall, where Baba was waiting. After embracing Nariman and me, Baba asked, "Did you sleep well?" When I said I hadn't, Baba looked concerned and asked why. I had not planned to tell Him about the accident immediately, but having been asked, I narrated the previous day's events. Baba abruptly turned to Goher asking, "At what time did I have the prayers said yesterday?" She replied that they had been said at 2:00 in the afternoon. Baba then sent me to the women's quarters to have tea and relax, directing Goher to tell Mehera and Mani what had happened. I was warmly embraced by both of them, and they were quite startled and concerned to hear about the accident; even the word itself must have brought back their painful memories of Beloved Baba's accident just a year earlier.

An hour later while we were eating lunch, Baba turned to me and said, "You have no idea what you have been saved from!" After a pause He repeated to the others, "You all have no idea what Arnavaz has been saved from!" Then He told me, "I saved you once and I saved you a second time." After lunch Baba instructed me to rest. While I was lying down, Goher came to tell me what had happened at Meherazad the previous day. Baba had been very upset. While normally He would retire to His bedroom on the first floor of the big bungalow at 5:00 or 6:00, that day He retired at 2:00, telling Mehera to pray and giving His own words for the prayer. Everyone present could see that Baba was restless. They could sense that He was doing intense work and felt He was saving someone from disaster. Since Dr. Harry Kenmore had been flying to the United States from India at the time, they all thought that his plane was in danger. Goher said, "We didn't suspect it was you Baba was saving from a fatal accident."

A year earlier, while Nariman and I were on a holiday trip, we had met a man who was interested in palmistry. He had read the palms of several people staying in the hotel, and one day he asked to see mine. I had never allowed anyone to read my horoscope or my palm because I knew that my destiny was entirely

Gift of God

in Baba's hands. He could change it the way He liked and mould it the way He wanted. What was the point? Knowing the future creates unnecessary worries. The man who wanted to read my palm assured me he would not tell me what he saw, but after looking at it he gently asked, "Do you drive a machine?" I asked, "What machine?" Then he joked, "Airplane." I was very surprised and puzzled. He laughed and said, "What I mean is, do you drive a car?" I said, "No, I have not learned driving." He asked me if I intended to learn to drive. When I said, "Never," he told me, "Look, now that you have told me that you are never going to learn to drive an automobile, I am telling you never to drive one in your whole life, because if you do, you will have a fatal accident!" At one time I had started learning to drive, but immediately after Baba's accident in the United States, I stopped, feeling that the permission Baba had given me had clearly been extracted from Him, and He did not *wish* me to drive a car. When I remembered this man's words, I understood how Baba's love and compassion had saved me, changing my destiny.

After ten quiet days in Meherazad Nariman and I returned to Bombay to prepare for Baba's coming. As scheduled, He and the men and women mandali arrived at Ashiana for a two-week stay. Baba had come to do mast work and we celebrated Mehera's birthday with a small, intimate party. Before returning to Meherazad, Baba told us that He would come again in January, this time to see *The Ten Commandments*, a movie directed by Cecil B. de Mille. Baba told me to purchase the tickets in advance; He wanted to see the movie with the men on one day, and the women would go on another. He very strictly added that He wanted no one to see Him during this visit.

Baba and the others arrived the third week in January. One day He called me into the room where He was talking with the men mandali and made me sit on the stool where He had been resting His feet. Looking at me intently, He said, "Suppose I were to tell you that Nariman's brother Hoshang had broken his arm. Would you feel sad and cry?" I answered, "No, Baba," yet I sensed that a bomb was about to fall. Baba kept me in suspense while He turned to speak with someone else. Nariman, Jim and Huma were present, and as I looked at their grim faces, I prepared myself for a

Gift of God

shock. Baba finally turned back to me and said, "My brother has died." Taking His statement literally, I asked Him which one. Baba gazed directly into my eyes and told me that a telegramme had come from Adi Sr. saying that Khurshed Talati, Dina's son, had died of a heart attack in London.

My heart stopped. Khurshed was like a brother to our family, and I knew this news would be a devastating blow to Dina, a widow for twenty years, who was devoted to her only son. When Baba asked me what I thought should be done, I said, "Call Dina here to see You." Baba immediately reminded me, "Have you forgotten My order that no one should see Me?" I was so numb I had failed to remember it, and I immediately said, "I'm sorry, Baba. Do as You wish." Baba then turned to Eruch and my brother Huma, telling them to go to Dina's, gently break the news of Khurshed's death, and then bring Dina and her two daughters to Him. Huma was also in shock, as he had just returned from five years of working in London, where he had seen Khurshed regularly, and he had no idea that his friend had a heart problem.

Eruch and Huma did their best, but poor Dina was grief-stricken. They brought her to Ashiana and Baba lovingly comforted her - then gave her an order not to shed any tears. Khurshed's death was agony enough, but with this extreme order Baba seemed to be pushing the limits of her endurance. After Dina and her daughters had been with Baba for about an hour, He sent them home. Under the circumstances I did not want them to be alone, so I phoned Nargis, telling her to bring them to her house, where she, Roda, Dr. Alu and Kharmanmasi were staying, cooking Baba's food.

After Dina left, my heart was so heavy that I felt like crying. Despite Baba's Presence, I was filled with pain, but with so many people in the house there was no quiet corner where I could cry in privacy. Although I tried to control myself, my eyes were always wet, and whenever I did have the chance, the tears flowed. Baba repeatedly called me to Him and embraced me, but surprisingly He did not forbid me to cry. Several times He asked Mehera and Mani if I were still crying.

Gift of God

As soon as everyone had finished lunch, Baba told me to go rest for an hour and not to get up for anything. I lay down, but I was so emotionally exhausted that I couldn't sleep. After half an hour Baba called me to Him and asked if I had slept. When I replied that I had only been resting on my bed, Baba took my head in His hands and kissed me on the centre of my forehead, between the eyes. The touch of Beloved Baba's lips remained with me the rest of the day, and I was reminded of a dream I had had four months earlier. In the dream I was standing alone in one room, looking through two rooms that lay ahead of me, and Baba was sitting in the third room. I went from the first to the second room, and as I was about to cross the threshold of the third, Baba pointed His finger straight at my forehead and said with absolute authority, "See Me with your internal eyes!" When I awoke from the dream, I felt the touch of Baba's finger on my forehead, even though He had only pointed at me. It was the same lingering sensation I was experiencing from Baba's kiss. I remembered this dream vividly, having shared it with Nariman. That same night he had dreamed that Baba had pointed at him and lovingly said, "You are my message."

After kissing me on the forehead, Baba gave me a copy of *God Speaks*, saying, "I am giving you this *God Speaks* with My own hands." I held the book to my heart as if I were holding a baby. Baba sent me back to rest, but I continued to hold the book tightly as I lay on the bed, and I felt very comforted. That night I placed *God Speaks* under my pillow and went right to sleep. The next morning Baba called me and said, "I need the copy of *God Speaks* that I gave you. I want to give it to someone and I don't have another." Something within me died as I silently handed the book to Baba. My heart was broken, but I had to accept His wish. The following day Baba called me to His room, as He frequently did for one thing or another. "Here is your *God Speaks*," He said, handing me the book, but I did not experience the same feelings I had before. I took the book without saying a word and immediately wrote on the inside page, "This *God Speaks* is given by Beloved Baba."

The day after Khurshed's death Nargis phoned to say that Dina seemed to have reached a breaking point. Nargis and the others could hardly bear to see her in such agony, especially as she

Gift of God

struggled to obey Baba's order not to cry. That evening Baba called Dina to Him and before she arrived, He told Mehera, Mani and me to help her cry. When Dina came, we took her to the bedroom and told her to let her tears fall, but she replied that she had Baba's order not to cry. Even after Mehera told Dina that Baba wanted her to cry, she couldn't immediately let go. But once she did, the sounds were heartbreaking, and Baba, hearing her wailing, called her to Him, tenderly holding her for quite some time and letting her cry her heart out. Dina, who had been unable to eat anything since hearing the news of her son's death, took the tea and biscuits Baba gave her. Just before she left, Baba asked if I had purchased tickets to see *The Ten Commandments* for her and her daughters. I had, as Baba always allowed my sisters and others to accompany us whenever I took the women to a movie. Baba turned to Dina and said, "I want you to go to this movie." Dina said, "Yes, Baba, I will go."

As planned, Baba and the men mandali, accompanied by a few others including my brothers Dara and Huma, went to see the movie first. Dara had trouble with his knees due to a football injury, so he was limping, and Huma had always limped because of hip trouble. To enter the theatre, one had to climb six or seven steps. Baba did not want to use the lift chair, so holding Dara's hand on one side and Huma's on the other, He climbed the stairs with them. After they reached the top, He smiled and gestured to the men. "What will people think, seeing three lame persons climbing the steps together?"

Baba used to see many films; He said that He did important work through movies, but in the early days He would usually stay for only half an hour or so before leaving. Uncle Chanji used to say that Baba always left during the most interesting and intense part of a film. The mandali would naturally follow Baba out, but even as they left the cinema hall, their eyes would be fixed on the screen, trying to see as much of the movie as they could. After sitting through half of *The Ten Commandments*, Baba returned to Ashiana with Eruch, this time allowing the others to see the whole movie. As usual before retiring, He called Mehera and the rest of us to Him. He said that this movie was the best He had ever seen and confirmed that when Moses went up to Mount Sinai, he indeed

Gift of God

heard the voice of God and was given the Ten Commandments. Baba also told us that Moses was on the sixth plane and became God-realized at the time of his death. A year later Baba had Adi Sr. send Nariman a copy of a letter from Cecil B. de Mille, the director of *The Ten Commandments*. A Baba lover in the United States had written to tell him that Baba had seen his film and enjoyed it, and de Mille, who had met Baba in Hollywood in the 1930's, replied that he was happy to learn that "this venerable religious leader" remembered their meeting. He also expressed his appreciation for Baba's "...silent, prayerful work... and prophetic leadership."

Two days after Baba and the men saw *The Ten Commandments*, Mehera and the rest of us women went to see it. Dina was in pitiful condition, and I seated her next to me so I could comfort her. During the scenes depicting Moses' mother in terrible agony over losing her son, Dina again cried and cried, her empathy with Moses' mother helping in her grief over the loss of Khurshed. If she had been spotted by her neighbours or relatives, they would have been shocked by her presence in a theatre five days after her son's death. But when we live in obedience to Baba, we have to cast aside many worldly concerns, even if that means being humiliated in front of those who do not understand.

The following month, February 1958, Baba held a gathering for Easterners at Lower Meherabad. By Baba's order Dina had sent to England for her son's ashes, which she brought to the Sahavas. When she gave the packet of ashes to Baba, He held it on His lap, cradling it as if He were holding a child. He told Dina that Khurshed's ashes would be buried in Meherabad.

The Eastern Sahavas, attended by hundreds of Baba lovers, was a memorable, intimate, and heart-filling event. Two groups came for five days each, first those who spoke Hindi and Marathi, then those who spoke Gujarati and the South Indian languages. Four large tents were put up, one for a women's dormitory, one for a men's dormitory, one for a dining hall, and one in which Baba gave sahavas and darshan to His lovers. Each morning He would come from Meherazad to spend the entire day with His lovers.

Gift of God

Prior to the Sahavas Baba had sent circulars to all who were to attend, asking us to obey certain orders, among them that no one was to bring Him flowers or garlands. Baba began the Sahavas by giving darshan and, as always, flower sellers from town had gathered by the roadside. In India offering flowers is such a long-standing tradition that despite Baba's order, several people in the long queue were holding garlands to offer Him. Then, unexpectedly, Baba had it announced that anyone who wanted to could bring flowers for Him. Everybody ran to get some, and I was going for money myself when someone came up to me, asking if I wanted one of the two garlands she had. I took one and immediately felt a pang of doubt in my heart. I thought, "What am I doing? I am not obeying Baba's original order." In the circular Baba had said that no one should bring flowers; now He had said, "*If you want to...*" I was forgetting to heed Baba's *exact* words, and I wanted to obey His original order. Holding the garland in my hand, wondering what I should do with it, I was relieved when someone approached me and asked where I had bought it. I gave it to her straight away, feeling great relief that Baba had helped me to obey Him *implicitly*.

Baba gave a specific discourse during that Sahavas about obedience and faith in which He explained three types of obedience. Using as an example a man named Gadekar, who was seated in front of Him, Baba said, "You all have seen Gadekar sitting here. Suppose I were to tell you that he is not sitting in front of Me. The first type of obedience would be simply to agree that he is not there. The second type of obedience would be to agree, thinking there must be some special meaning attached to My statement. The third, and rarest, type of obedience would be *not to see* Gadekar sitting there."

One strong memory I have of the Sahavas is that for three consecutive days, exactly at 4:00, Baba coughed violently. On the first and second days He said nothing about it, but on the third day He commented, "This cough is reminding me of the black cloud that is drawing very near." Baba never explained what He was referring to.

This Sahavas was also the occasion for a joyous celebration of Baba's birthday, one of the rare times it was observed publicly.

Gift of God

On 24th February, Baba called me to His cabin where He was having lunch to tell me that He wanted some festivities for His birthday. Excited about this news, I immediately got together some women to begin practicing birthday songs in Gujarati, Hindi and English. On auspicious occasions such as birthdays, marriages and engagements, a *ses* is always prepared, so I ordered one from a Baba family in Ahmednagar. On the morning of His birthday Baba was taken by car in a procession from His room to the darshan tent. Two of us carried the *ses* and walked in front of Baba's car, the others following behind it. Gaimai, Eruch's mother, had been chosen as the elder of the family to place the *tili* (red mark) on Baba's forehead, and when He arrived at the foot of the platform, she dipped her right thumb in the red paste, put a round shape of it on the middle of Baba's forehead, and pressed a few grains of rice over it. Then, as is the custom, Gaimai took the coconut from the tray and tried to break it open on the stone floor, to the right of Baba. She tried twice, but the coconut wouldn't break. She turned nervously to me, as if to ask what she should do next. Deciding to try again with a very forceful bang, she finally broke it. Baba, who always enjoyed something serious becoming funny, had a hearty laugh.

Baba then walked up the three steps and sat on the platform. The women gathered below Him and sang the songs they had rehearsed, after which all those present joined in singing "Happy Birthday" to Beloved Baba, rejoicing to see Him enjoying Himself. This was to be the last time that Baba's birthday was celebrated in His presence with a large number of His lovers.

Five days later, when the second part of the Sahavas had come to an end, a special reserved train stopped right at Meherabad for those who had attended this gathering. Hundreds of hands reached out the windows to wave to Baba, who stood beside the tracks, His sadra and hair blowing in the wind, waving goodbye to His lovers as the train pulled away.

Nariman and I didn't have long to wait before seeing Baba again, as He came to Bombay in March and again in May of 1958, this time to leave on a trip around the world with stops in Europe, the United States and Australia, His last trip to the West. Nariman

Gift of God

accompanied Baba, and among other tasks, he shared with Adi Sr. the responsibility of keeping watch for Baba at night. Although I stayed by myself in Bombay, I was never lonely. Whenever Nariman was with Baba, I had the unique experience of feeling that I was in His company too.

After this journey Baba no longer travelled anywhere except for frequent visits to Poona or Bombay. He was at Ashiana several times between July and December of that year and celebrated Mehera's birthday there a second time in December. He told us He would next come at the beginning of March. I decided to redecorate in the two months before His return, but as it happened, Baba called Nariman and me to Meherazad at the end of December, and when we returned in January, I had only six weeks to finish everything. We had all the rooms painted and ordered new curtains and slipcovers. We had been renting an air-conditioner until that time, but we decided to buy one since Baba was coming to Bombay so often. By the time everything was ready, I was quite exhausted.

The day of Baba's visit arrived, and I realized just as the car approached the house that I had forgotten to send for the particular brand of soda water Baba liked to drink. Quickly I sent my brother Huma to buy a carton while Baba was brought up by the lift chair. Baba immediately noticed that everything was new. After embracing Nariman and me, He went from room to room, admiring the colours of the walls, the polished furniture, the curtains and slipcovers. I had chosen very colourful fabrics, as I knew Baba would like them. He noticed every little thing, including the new air-conditioner. Sitting down at the dining table, He asked me, "How much did you spend on the house?" His question embarrassed me, but I had to tell Him. I replied, "Baba, 7,000 rupees," and in those days Rs. 7,000 was a lot of money. The air-conditioner had cost nearly half that amount. Baba said, "You spent 7,000 rupees just for Me?" "Yes, Baba," I said. "You installed a new air-conditioner just for Me?" He seemed very pleased, but all the while there were butterflies in my stomach, and I was hoping that Huma would bring the soda before Baba asked for it.

Then, as I had feared, Baba said, "I'm very thirsty. I want a soda." My heart stopped as I answered, "Baba, Huma has gone to

Gift of God

get some." Baba, looking straight at me, said, "What? You do not have soda ready for Me? You spent seven thousand rupees on the apartment, and you could not remember two *annas* worth of soda?" Baba repeated His words, adding to their impact. I realized that even if I had spent seven million for Baba, that would not have made up for my lack of attention. Although everything I had done was for Baba, I had overlooked a routine item which He expected me to provide. Even if we do ninety-nine percent, Baba will show us the one percent we missed, thereby giving us the opportunity to try to please Him more and more. Whatever we do for Baba, it can never be enough. When Huma returned after half an hour, I gave Baba the soda, but His words remained with me, chipping away at my ego. I had taken pleasure in redecorating the apartment for Baba. It was a labour of love, but any pride that might have been growing inside of me needed to be broken. Whether or not we are conscious of pride, Baba will root it out of us.

On 14th March Baba gave darshan and served food to my family with His own hands. My father, Nargis, Roda, Jim, Dara and Huma were all with us at Ashiana. Everyone stood around the table and one by one we held our plates out to Baba, who served each of us a piece of fried fish. My father had been a vegetarian for sixty years, and when Baba put the fish on his plate, he did not utter a word. At first Baba ignored his dilemma and continued to serve the others. Then He asked my father, "You don't eat meat or fish?" Father replied, "No, Baba." Baba said, "Eat the fish today and from then on remain a vegetarian," and my father obeyed Him. Any action may become an attachment. By giving a piece of fish to my father, who had not touched meat for sixty years, Baba broke his attachment to being a vegetarian.

A couple of days before leaving, Baba said to Nariman and me, "Nothing is yours. You, yourselves, are not yours. You are Mine. Everything is Mine." We were touched by Baba's endearing, powerful words, and although I felt small and undeserving, there was great happiness in my heart, knowing that we were His completely.

Baba was to leave Bombay for Meherazad on 15th March, my birthday. After lunch, while the mandali were busy arranging the

Gift of God

luggage in the car, I glanced into the sitting room and saw Beloved Baba all by Himself on a chair. I ran to Him and asked if He wanted anything. There was an air of sadness about Baba as He shook His head, "No," and after a short pause He gestured, "I will never come to Bombay again." He repeated, "I will never come to Bombay again." A few minutes later Nariman came into the room, indicating that everything was packed. Baba got up and embraced Nariman very lovingly. Nariman said, "Baba, come back soon!" He didn't know what Baba had told me only moments before. I could see Baba's face from where I was standing. He looked at me as if He were saying, "Remember, I said that I was never coming back," but to Nariman He did not say "Yes" or "No." He took a step forward, then took a step backward, then nodded to Nariman as if to say "Yes." Smiling happily, Beloved Baba left Ashiana, and Bombay, for the last time.

When I remember Baba at Ashiana, one moment stands out among all the others, and I think He must have wanted me to have a glimpse of His divinity that would remain etched in my heart and mind forever. Very early one morning He was alone in the open doorway of the back verandah. As I passed on my way from the sitting room, I saw Beloved Baba's form illuminated from behind by the rays of the rising sun. I was transfixed by the glorious sight of His beauty as the light radiated from His body and sparkled through His flowing hair.

Chapter Eighteen

*"Obedience is the
surrendrance of love to Love in
which the wish of the Beloved
becomes the happiness of the
lover."*

- Meher Baba

Nariman and I decided we would give Beloved Baba a car for His birthday in 1960. My brother Huma found a dark blue 1956 De Soto in excellent condition with only one previous owner, and he thought it was the ideal car for Baba, so we bought the De Soto and had Huma drive it to Meherazad on Baba's birthday. On the way he stopped and bought flowers to decorate the car, then drove it right to the front of the bungalow at Meherazad. Mehera brought Baba from the dining table to the porch, pretending she wanted to show him something else. When He saw the car, Baba was delighted. Nariman had also written a poem for Baba, which he sent along with the car:

*Two tiny creatures
have gathered courage
to offer,
To the Lord
of this universe
our Beloved Baba
On this day of days
His Birthday,
this insignificant gift –
and pray
He in His infinite mercy,
and grace*

Gift of God

*accepts it.
It being understood that,
the one who steers it
and the water that propels it
be borne by us,
till breath do us part.*

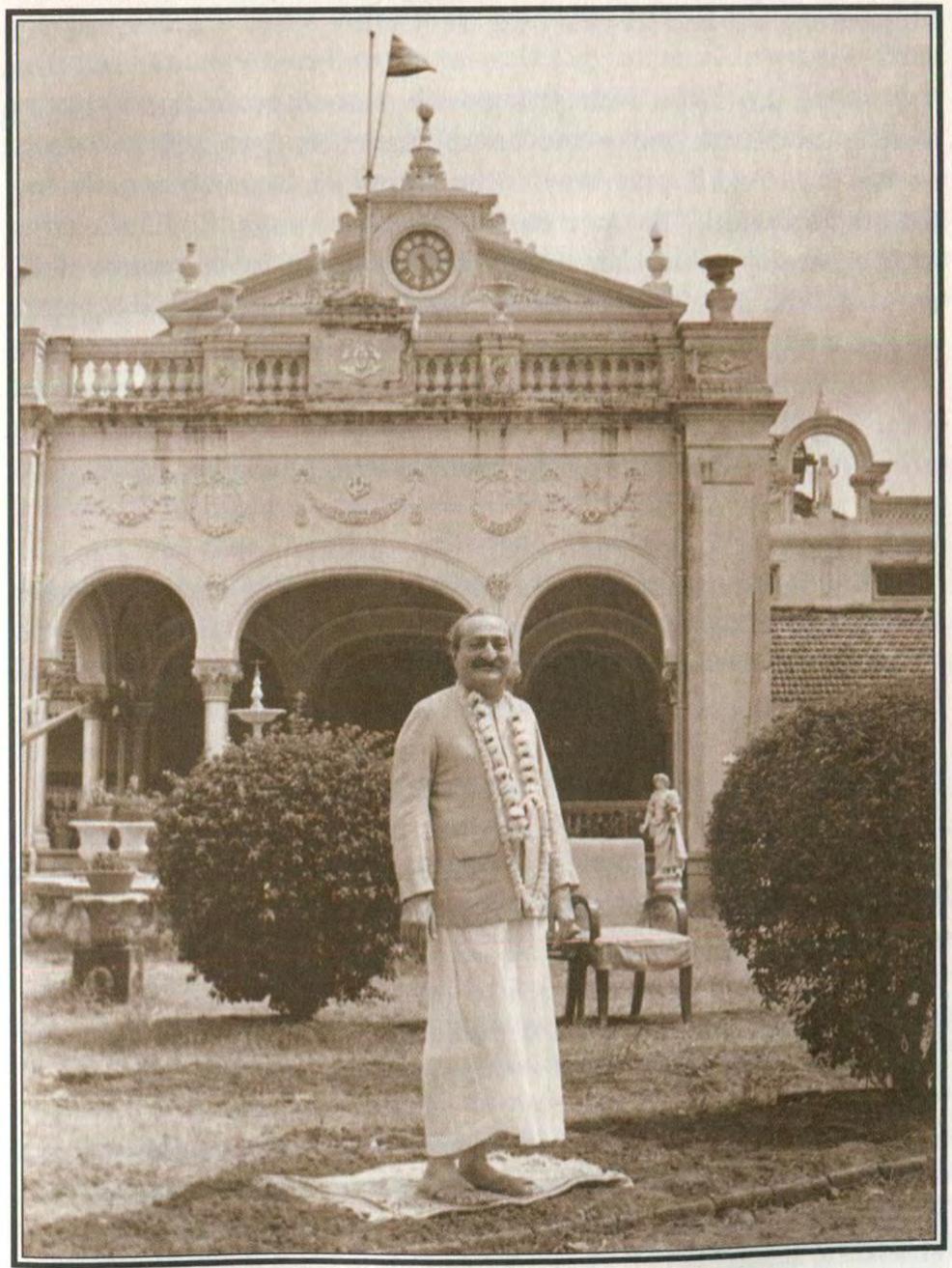
a. n.

· Although Baba was no longer travelling as extensively as He once had, He used the car until 1968 to go to and from Poona, where He had begun spending every summer, April through June. Shanta Devi, the Maharani of Baroda, had given Baba the use of Guruprasad, her summer palace, where He gave darshan to large and small groups until He began periodically going into seclusion in 1967. Baba gave Narirnan a standing order to be at Guruprasad every weekend, so he would arrive in Poona on Friday evening and leave on Monday morning. Baba also asked him to spend one three-week period there each summer, whenever he was able to leave his work. Although Baba had no regular schedule for me, I spent most of each summer in Poona with short intervals in Bombay.

Most of Baba's public activity during the last ten years of His life was centred around Guruprasad. From 1960-1965 people from Bombay would actually go to stay in Poona during the summer just to be there in case Baba called them, as His lovers were no longer allowed to see Him uninvited. In November of 1962 Baba called together a large group of Easterners and Westerners to a sahasvas that later came to be known as the East-West Gathering. People arrived from all over the world to attend, and on 31st October, the day before the programme was to start, Baba gave darshan to the Western women, many of whom had not seen Him for years. Since it was Nariman's birthday, Baba also invited me to attend. The following day we all gathered under a *pandal* (a large awning) that had been built to shade us from the sun. Within fifteen minutes of the programme starting, however, it rained so heavily for half an hour that few people escaped getting wet, and most sat through the darshan soaked to the skin. Baba was usually concerned about people getting wet, and was always cautioning them about catching chills, but aside from the fact that He had the women mandali take

Gift of God

all the Western women inside and give them dry clothes, Baba continued with the darshan as if nothing were happening. We looked pretty bedraggled, as the colours from the badges we had been given to wear ran all over our clothing, but none of us caught colds; we stayed healthy and happy. It is very unusual for Poona to have rain in November, so we were surprised when a second storm arrived just before the programme ended on the last day. Although



Baba at Guruprasad

Gift of God

Baba gave discourses to the Westerners in the mornings, the East-West gathering was otherwise a continuous darshan.

I have many sweet, happy memories of being with Baba at Guruprasad. Because we were there during the hot summer months, we looked forward to cool sherbet drinks, which Baba put me in charge of making whenever I was there. Every afternoon at 2:00 He would call me to mandali hall and say, "Sherbet master, prepare sherbet and let everyone feel cool."

One day Baba was sitting with a small group, periodically tossing candies to one or another of His lovers from a jar of sweets on His lap. As He played with the empty jar, opening and closing the lid, Baba said, "To open the lid is in *your* hands. To fill the jar is in *My* hands!" Another time a big group of lovers was sitting around Baba and He was giving rose petals to the few who were immediately in front of Him. One Baba lover was seated all the way in the back, wishing with all her heart that she was in the front receiving a rose petal from Baba. Suddenly she felt something drop into her lap, and to her delight she found that Baba had tossed her a whole rose.

On many occasions we observed a child's spontaneous recognition of Baba's divinity. Once at Guruprasad a woman with a year-old baby was seated a few feet in front of Baba. As the child began to crawl out of his mother's lap toward Baba, she reached out to pull him back. Baba stopped the mother with a gesture of His hand, allowing the child to crawl toward His feet. Twice the child put his head down at Baba's feet and sat up. Then he put his tiny hands on Baba's sadra and, holding tightly to the sadra, pulled himself up, bowing his head down on Baba's knees, straightening up, then bowing down again. Once more he put his head down on Baba's feet, then crawled back to his mother and sat on her lap. Baba sat very still as the child made contact with Him. Everyone in the room was silent, every eye on Baba and the baby.

Sometimes Baba surprised us by saying something unimaginable. One day He was sitting with a group around Him, when a black ant crawled onto His hand and then onto the sleeve of His white sadra. Everyone sitting nearby noticed the ant, and Eruch got up to flick it off, but Baba stopped him. Pausing, He gestured,

Gift of God

"This ant will take human birth." For me this was a time of seeing Baba as Creator, the One holding infinite power - not just to alter the length of a single human life, but to allow an ant to bypass millions of life forms and be born as a human. I was stunned.

Baba often said that His slightest movement had meaning and pertained to His work. Despite this fact, He wanted everyone to accept His movements and activities as natural and normal. People often wasted time trying to attribute meanings to His actions. Once when Baba was walking up and down the front verandah of Guruprasad, He smiled at us, saying, "I am only digesting My food, although some people must be thinking that I am doing My work." Baba wanted our concentration to be on Him; He did not want us to analyze or try to understand His work. He just wanted us to be wholeheartedly with Him. Still, there were times when we could not help but see Baba's hand in the events that were taking place around us.

Baba usually spent April, May and June at Guruprasad, but the summer of 1964 He stayed into July, our monsoon season, and He called Nariman at that time. I accompanied Nariman to Poona, as Naja was there to have her tonsils removed. During the day I stayed with Naja at the hospital and at night slept at Gaimai's house. On 8th July we brought Naja home from the hospital, even though the doctor wanted her to stay for a short time longer, as we had to observe silence on 10th July, as per Baba's order.

On the same day we brought Naja to Gaimai's, Baba had gone with the mandali to Bund Garden. It had been raining heavily, and just after Baba and the others reached Guruprasad, a dam on the outskirts of Poona burst. Human beings and animals were swept away in the raging water, and the city area became inaccessible from other parts of Poona. The water came right up to the level of the bridge where Baba had been standing just a short time earlier. Because of the danger that another part of the dam might burst, putting all of Poona - including Guruprasad - underwater, everyone was extremely tense. Gaimai, fearing their ground floor apartment would be flooded, started moving things up to the first storey. Later we learned that the hospital where Naja had been staying was affected, with water rising twelve feet, up to the level of her room. We were sure that Baba had remained in

Gift of God

Poona past His usual time .in order to save the city where He was born from further disaster.

More and more during this period Baba was sending Mehera and the women out into the public. Every year during their stay at Guruprasad, whenever I was there Baba would ask me to take them to see good films. One movie, *The Wrong Man* starring Henry Fonda, was based on the true story of a deeply religious man who was still living at the time. Because he resembled a man who had committed a theft, he was wrongly accused of the crime, and the evidence against him was so strong that even his wife began to doubt his innocence. Before he was convicted, the man visited his mother. Looking up at a picture of Jesus on the wall, he asked her if he should pray for help. His mother told him to pray for strength. After he was judged guilty and put in jail, his distraught wife was committed to a mental institution.

Later the police officer who had done the investigation saw two other officers bringing in a man identical in appearance to the man who was in jail. The officer questioned the man being arrested and determined that the wrong man had been convicted. When the innocent man was released from prison, he went to the mental institution to get his wife, but she was not yet well enough to go home. (We later read in a magazine that she eventually regained her balance and was released from the hospital.) When we returned from the movie, Mehera and Mani told Baba the entire story. After they finished, He said, "Because the man suffered so much through no fault of his own, many of his future lives have been cut off. And because you have told his story to Me, several more of his lifetimes have been cut off."

Mehera and the rest of us also thoroughly enjoyed *The Absent-minded Professor*, starring Fred MacMurray. Mehera told Baba that He should see this hilarious movie, so He did. Baba said He enjoyed it so much He ached from laughing so hard. That was the last movie He saw, as the next year He went into strict seclusion. During April, May and June of 1967 Baba asked me daily if any good movies were listed in the paper, and He often sent the women and men mandali to films on different days. Finally,

Gift of God

however, Mehera said, "Please, Baba, we are tired of seeing movies!" and after that He quit sending them.

Some of my other memories of Guruprasad involve more personal experiences with Baba. Even after all my years with Him, and despite the fact that Nariman called worry "interest paid on trouble before it falls due," I still worried. Baba once sternly said, "Why are you worrying? You must not worry. Forget all! I have kept you with Mehera and Me, and in that you are very fortunate." Years later Baba again asked, "Why are you worrying about others? Even if everyone were to die, what is that to you?" He then very pointedly told me, "You have shown enough concern for everyone. Now you must think only of Me, Nariman, and Mehera." I knew I was not capable of thinking only of them, but I left it to Baba, knowing that He would help me to do what He wanted.

Twice Baba used unusual methods to deal with my health problems. Over the years I had developed a tendency to faint whenever I vomited, as my blood pressure would drop very low. This had happened a few times while I was staying with Baba at Meherazad, and once at Guruprasad I became nauseated and threw up during the night. I fainted, and Goher, with help, put me to bed. When I regained consciousness, she gave me a sedative and I slept soundly. In the morning Goher told Baba what had happened, and when I awoke at 9:00, Baba, Mehera and Goher came to my bedside. Baba looked at me and smiled, gesturing, "Someone has sent big, tasty *wadas* (potato cutlets). I have eaten and enjoyed them, and you will also like them, so you eat two wadas." I said, "Yes, Baba," but the very mention of food made me nauseous. Baba told Goher to bring two wadas for me. Concerned for me, she started to protest, but I stopped her with a look. After Baba left, Goher asked me, "How will you tolerate them?" I told her, "Just bring the wadas to me. It is Baba's order, and I must eat them. At the most I'll throw up again!" She brought the wadas, and with great difficulty I managed to choke them down, but within a few minutes they came back up - although this time I didn't faint. Baba gave no response to this news when Goher told him, but since then I have not fainted after vomiting again.

Gift of God

Another time, just six days before I was to leave for Guruprasad, my left sacroiliac joint got locked in place and I could barely move. When Nariman went to Poona, he told Baba about my ailment, but Baba insisted that I come anyway. With great difficulty I travelled by train to Poona, and as soon as I arrived, Baba told Goher to give me an injection in my hip. Immediately after the injection Baba told me to walk around the room for a few minutes. Although the injection made me drowsy, the pain was still intense, but because Baba had ordered me to walk, I limped around the room until He told me to stop. The joint gave me no further trouble for fifteen years. Goher said she thought I was beginning to get osteoarthritis, and I believe Baba saved me from permanent disability.

No matter how unusual Baba's orders might seem, I tried to obey Him, knowing that if I would leave matters in His hands, He would take care of all my real needs. Baba once said of His lovers, "The trouble with you is that you don't leave everything entirely to Me. If you had a hundred percent faith in Me and left it entirely to Me, the burden would automatically fall on My shoulders...." To leave everything to Baba requires obedience and surrender, and although I sometimes failed, I tried my best to carry out His orders and leave everything to Him. At the time I was staying at Gaimai's during the Poona flood, Baba had given an order that no one was to see Him. Naturally He asked about me, and Nariman told Him where I was. Every evening Eruch came to Gaimai's to sleep, and on the second evening he suggested that I phone Mani or Goher. I told him I thought Baba's order that no one was to see Him meant no contact of any kind with Guruprasad, and I wanted to obey Baba. The next day Baba asked Eruch what I was doing and whether or not he had talked with me. When Eruch told Him about our conversation, Baba said, "Yes, Arnavaz knows how to obey me. Tell her I am very happy."

Chapter Nineteen

"My work is the conscious realization of Myself in all creation. I alone do my work but I allow you, my close ones, to work for me so you have the opportunity to use your talents and capabilities selflessly so as to draw closer to Me."

- Meher Baba

During Baba's days at Guruprasad several important events concerning both my family and Nariman's took place. My family had always consulted Baba before making any important decision, and when my brother Dara wanted to marry Freny, the woman he loved, he explained to her that he obeyed Baba in everything, and he could not marry her without Baba's consent. Dara also told her that while he would not push Baba on her, she would have to respect Him and allow Dara to continue his relationship with Him. Freny agreed.

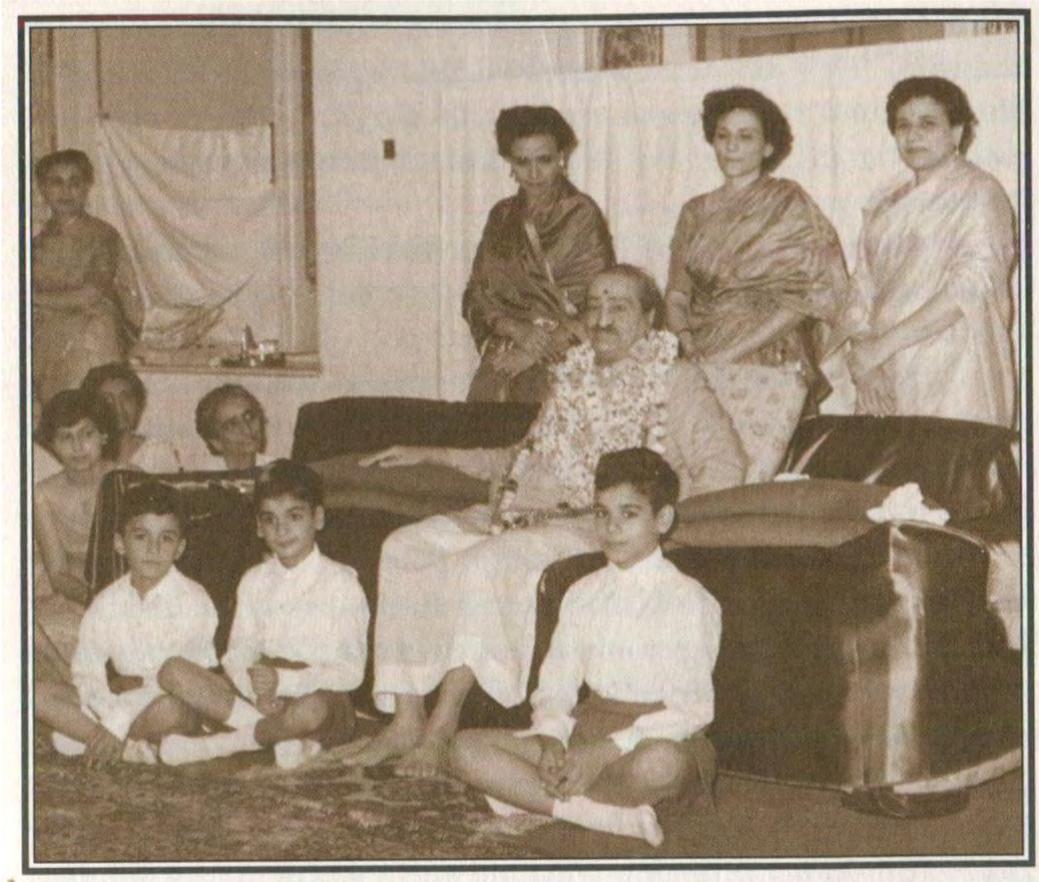
When Baba was next giving darshan at Guruprasad, Dara asked Freny to go with Him to meet Baba and ask His approval. Freny was naturally very nervous, knowing that Dara would abide by whatever decision Baba gave him. I was there when they arrived for darshan, and I told Baba that Dara had brought the woman he wanted to marry. Baba called them both in to see Him, and after Dara had introduced Freny, Baba picked up two sweets wrapped in paper. He unwrapped both, giving one to Dara and the other to Freny, thus giving His consent to their engagement. Although Freny's family had some reservations about Baba, they liked Dara and agreed to the match. After a short time Dara and Freny were married.

Gift of God

During the 1960's Baba also performed several more family *Navjotes* at Guru Prasad. Just as He had gradually led us to give up the traditional ceremonies for the dead, Baba brought us over the years to give up the rituals ordinarily performed by a Zoroastrian priest during this elaborate ceremony. In their early days with Baba, my parents had never imagined that He might perform a Navjote. Then, back in 1938, Baba had said that He Himself would put the *sadras* and *kustis* on my brothers Huma and Dara Himself, although He then told my parents to have the usual ceremonies performed by a priest in Bombay. At that time it would have been difficult for my family, especially my young brothers, to explain to friends and relatives why the traditional ceremonies had not taken place. But twenty years later Baba was regularly performing Navjotes for our family and others without any ceremonies. At each of the Navjotes at Guruprasad He stressed the importance of becoming free from the bindings of religious rituals. In 1960, at the Navjote for Roda and Jim's sons Merwan, Sarosh, and Framroze, Baba gave the following message: "May Ahuramazda, Zoroaster, and Meher Baba free you from the superfluous binding of *shariat* (religious ceremony) and help you to lead a life of good thoughts, good words and good deeds, and bestow on you the grace of loving Me. I have given you this emblem of superficial binding to make you free from this binding and give you the real binding of Love." Three years later at the Navjote for Armaiti, the daughter of Nariman's brother Behram, Baba said, "Unless we free ourselves from the bindings of ceremonies and begin to Love God as He should be loved, we can never, never know the Truth."

Baba's words impressed Merwan and Sarosh so deeply that both refused to go through the traditional marriage ceremony performed by a priest. Merwan and his wife Zenobia were married in a civil ceremony in 1975. Then in 1982 when Sarosh and Meherrukh, the daughter of Nariman's brother Hoshang, were married, they bowed down together and put rings on one another's fingers at Baba's Samadhi. After signing the civil register in Ahmednagar, they celebrated this happy occasion in Meherazad with Mehera and the mandali. In 1984, when Merwan

Gift of God



*Baba with Arnavaz, Roda and Nargis at Navjote
for Roda and Jim's sons Merwan, Framroze (Falu) and Sarosh*

and Zenobia expressed their wish that Baba's beloved Mehera perform the Navjote for their three children, Rabia, Ayat and Jamshed, Mehera happily agreed.

It was also during the Guruprasad days that Nariman's family came to love and revere Baba. When we first lived at Ashiana, most of his family had little interest. Although they came to see Baba a few times, they did so mostly to please Nariman. In 1948, when Nariman's youngest brother Hoshang was eighteen years old, I had needed a second driver to bring Baba, Nariman and quite a few of the men mandali from the railway station in Bombay to our apartment. I decided to give Hoshang the opportunity to drive Baba in hopes that this contact might spark his interest. When Baba arrived, He embraced me and we sat in the living room while the men were busy bringing the luggage from the car. Baba said, "Tell me about Hoshang."

Gift of God

When I told Him that Hoshang was a very sweet boy, Baba smiled and said, "He's all Mine. When the time is right, he will come to Me like this!" And He snapped His fingers. From then on I realized the importance of Baba's timing. Baba draws new lovers to Himself in His time, not ours, and it was twelve more years before Nariman's whole family - his mother, his brothers, their wives, and even their wives' families - had come to Baba.

One morning while the women mandali and I were having breakfast with Baba in Guruprasad, my thoughts kept returning to Nariman's family, who were having some difficulties. I had been trying to help them by talking about Baba and encouraging them to come for His darshan. Although Behram, Nariman's second brother, and his wife Banoo loved Baba, his other brothers, Rustom and Hoshang, their wives Freny and Havovi, and his mother were not yet Baba lovers. As I sat thinking, Baba looked straight into my eyes and, with a smile, gestured, "Don't worry; everything will be all right." Even though I seldom approached Baba with problems, He would often draw them out of me or answer questions without my having said a word.

When Nariman's family once came to me for advice about their problems, I tried to impress upon them that only Baba could help them. They said they had no faith in Him. Explaining that sincerity about wanting to solve their problems was all they needed, I suggested that they simply bow down to Baba and say, "Please, Baba, help us to do what is right." My heart told me that Baba would bring Nariman's family to Him if they would just approach Him now. They all came for a public darshan programme, and the first day went smoothly. Baba agreed to allow them to return fifteen days later, when He had planned a private darshan. The second day Baba called only the family, and later He told Nariman, "Do you know that your brother Hoshang was disrespectful and did not bow down to Me today? I want you to scold him severely."

Nariman was in anguish over Baba's order to confront Hoshang, whom he loved very much, and he was certain that his brother hadn't meant to be disrespectful. He told me that perhaps Hoshang didn't realize what he'd done, but whether or not

Gift of God

Hoshang had been disrespectful was not the point. Baba wanted Nariman to scold him. I stated my conviction that Baba was working on his family to bring them to Him and that, without another thought, Nariman should do what Baba wanted. Nariman went directly to the hotel where the family was staying and put on a strong display of anger. Hoshang was shocked. At first he wasn't sure whether he had bowed to Baba or not, but he had certainly intended no disrespect. The more he thought about it, the more sure he was that he *had* bowed down. Nariman went on accusing him, asking him why he would come all the way from Bombay and then not bow down to Baba. Hoshang was left stunned and confused, almost to the point of tears.

Nariman came back to Guruprasad and told Baba what had taken place between them. My sister-in-law Havovi said later that Hoshang cried all the way back to Bombay, and she was also very upset. Hoshang kept saying he was quite sure he had bowed down and didn't understand why Baba would say that he hadn't. When Nariman and I discussed this situation, I suggested to him that he go to his brothers and their wives and tell them emphatically that he wanted them to respect Baba.

I stayed on at Guruprasad while Nariman went to Bombay. He was sure that Baba was working on his family, and where Baba's work was concerned, Nariman did not have second thoughts; he just acted. He was very firm with his family, and they in turn became even more upset. They thought Nariman was being unreasonable, and they did not want to come again to Guruprasad, even though they had previously promised they would. Despite their anger toward Nariman, however, they decided to keep their word.

The family arrived in Poona thinking that this visit would be their last. After they had taken Baba's darshan, my sisters-in-law Freny and Havovi asked me if they could talk with me before returning to Bombay. We met later that evening, after Baba had retired, and they began telling me everything that had happened in Bombay. Havovi said that if I had been there, I would never have allowed Nariman to talk to them the way he had. He had been quite unreasonable, so forceful that he had shocked them.

Gift of God

They decided they did not want to have anything more to do with Baba and had come to Guruprasad unwillingly and taken Baba's darshan simply to keep their promise. However, something truly amazing had happened. When their turn for darshan came, one by one they had reluctantly put their heads on Baba's feet, expecting to feel nothing. But as they bowed down to Baba, they were filled with the love and compassion flowing from Him, and all the anger they had felt toward Nariman dissolved. Smiling, I said to myself, "Beloved Baba, You have done Your work." I did not even hint that I had encouraged Nariman to admonish them. We found out later that it was actually another member of the family who had not bowed down to Baba at the earlier darshan.

From then on all of Nariman's family, with the exception of his mother, began coming to Poona every summer and staying in a hotel in order to have as many opportunities as possible for Beloved Baba's darshan. During the summer of 1962, after much persuasion, we even brought Nariman's mother to Poona for three months. She was still not interested in Baba, but we were sure that He would help her. Her life had been filled with suffering. She and Nariman's father had been separated for long periods of time; years earlier he had gone to Bombay in search of work, while she stayed in Karachi with her young sons. He had since died, and no matter how much Nariman and his brothers did for her, she could not find happiness. By this time her mental health had deteriorated to the point where we thought she was losing her mind. In Poona she became more and more confused, so we took her to see a psychiatrist. At first she refused the medication he prescribed, but we finally coaxed her into taking it. Everyone was worried about her, but when I told Baba about her emotional problems, He only smiled knowingly. Her condition did not change until July, when we returned to Bombay, but as her state of mind improved, she began showing a real interest in Baba.

Four months later, in November of 1962, we all went to the East-West Gathering at Guruprasad; Nariman's mother participated willingly and happily. The love that she had developed for Baba and Mehera within this short time amazed us. She was delighted when, for Mehera's birthday celebration in

Gift of God

1963, all the women in Nariman's and my family were invited to stay at Meherazad for a few days. About fifty other women were invited to attend the birthday festivities, but they were to stay in Ahmednagar. Nariman's mother prepared for months ahead; she had a whole new set of clothes made to bring with her, and she was filled with joyful anticipation.

Nariman and I went to Meherazad a week before Mehera's birthday. At midnight, just a few hours after we left, Nariman's mother was taken to the hospital with kidney failure. The following morning a telegramme came saying that she was in critical condition. Nariman was with the men mandali, but I was with Baba and the women having breakfast when Mani brought the telegramme and read it aloud. Baba turned to me and said, "You won't go if she dies." He didn't say, "Don't go," but "You won't go." During the day I did not see Nariman, but in the evening, after Baba had retired, I went to the men's side to be with him. I told him what Baba had said, that even if his mother were to die, we would not go to Bombay.

The next morning, when word came that Nariman's mother had died, Baba called me from the women's side to join Nariman in mandali hall and said, "We will send a telegramme to the family." Naturally, everyone would expect Nariman, as the oldest son and head of the family, to be present in Bombay. As Baba dictated, Eruch wrote, "You represent Mama by being here with Me...." Then Baba stopped. He turned to the mandali and asked, "Are these words all right?" Francis Brabazon, Baba's poet from Australia, replied that something didn't sound quite right, so Baba asked him, "Then what shall we write?" Francis reworded the message and the telegramme was sent. Baba's first phrasing of the telegramme had not been for those in Bombay, but for Nariman and me. In this way He let us know how important it was for us to be at Meherazad with Him when Nariman's mother died. Baba timed the situation in such a way that Banoo, Freny and Havovi were able to be in Bombay for the Zoroastrian four days' death ceremony and then at Meherazad in time for Mehera's birthday celebration.

Gift of God

In the midst of this joyful atmosphere, Nariman struggled quietly to contain his grief. He had loved his mother very much, and it was painful for him to remember her life-long misery. No matter how hard he had tried, he had never been able to give his mother happiness. Baba, in His all-knowing compassion, came up to Nariman and took this burden from him, saying, "Don't worry. *I* will see to her happiness."

Chapter Twenty

*"I have taken on the form of
Man to take on the suffering of man."*

- Meher Baba

When I had first met Beloved Baba, His beauty was indescribable. In the early years His eyes were like fiery, radiant pools, and as a teenager I sometimes trembled after bowing down to Him. Baba's entire physical form was expressive, His hands eloquently gesturing, as if He were performing a dance. Sometimes when I looked at Him, I would feel that He looked like Jesus. Over the years Baba's eyes changed, softening and shining with even more love and compassion, and His once graceful walk became laboured. After the second accident the doctors had not expected Baba to walk again; although He did, walking was both difficult and painful for Him. As more years went by, we could see Baba's tremendous universal suffering increasingly taking its toll on Him physically. Despite what those of us closest to Him saw in the privacy of Meherazad or Guruprasad, however, when our Beloved God-Man sat in His chair at a darshan programme, He appeared renewed, His face glowing. Those who had come for His darshan would never have guessed what agony we saw when He returned to His room afterwards, drawn and exhausted.

At the time of His birthday in 1967, Baba was extremely restless; He was also experiencing a great deal of pain. During lunch on 24th February He said, "My time has come. My time is very near." We were to hear Baba repeat these words frequently from then on. The following morning, His birthday, Baba was feeling quite low. Although He was dizzy, He tried hard to appear cheerful, as He wanted all of us to be happy. We placed the pink cake I had brought from Bombay before Him. After lighting the candles and singing "Happy Birthday" to Baba, we read aloud all of the many birthday telegrammes He had received.

Gift of God

We celebrated quietly in Meherazad, but that evening a big birthday programme featuring Begum Akhtar, one of the most famous ghazal singers in India, took place at the Ahmednagar Baba Centre. She had sung for Baba twice at Guruprasad, and at her request Baba allowed her to come to Meherazad. We were happy to see the joy that her singing brought to Baba's face. Begum Akhtar was going to Mecca on a pilgrimage, and Baba asked her who would accompany her. When she told Him she was going alone, Baba said, "Am I not going with you?" He then gave her a handkerchief, asking her to place it on the *Kaaba* (the holy site of pilgrimage for all Muslims) and then bring it back to Him. After returning from Mecca she wrote Baba a letter, sadly telling Him that she had lost the handkerchief on the way there.

On the evening of His birthday, after Baba had retired, the women gathered in the sitting room and our conversation drifted to Jesus. We discussed books such as *The Robe*, *The Emperor's Physician*, and *The Great Fisherman*. I remembered Baba once saying that Jesus had also broken a hip, but not in an accident - Jesus had made His disciples break His hip with a big stone. Another time when Baba was sitting on His bed before supper, looking very tired and helpless, He told us that Jesus had been crucified once, but He was being crucified every moment.

Seeing Baba's suffering made our own seem insignificant. Whenever we went to Meherazad, Nariman and I would greet Baba together in mandali hall, and He always inquired about Nariman's business and our health. Once Baba asked Nariman, who was suffering from the after-effects of surgery for glaucoma, "How is your eye?" Nariman replied, "Baba, just the same. The strain and gritty feeling are still there." Baba said, "I worry about your eye. So does Mehera. She keeps asking Me to relieve your pain, as you are so important to Me. But what are these eyes? When I open your third eye, it will be beyond your conception!" Baba then turned to me and asked about my chronic cold and rheumatic pain. I smiled and said, "Baba, it goes on. It's the same." Then Baba said, "I suffer so much, and I give you just a few drops. You are very fortunate." Baba's words reminded me of the time one of His close ones in Bombay, in an outburst of love, said, "Baba, why don't You give me some of Your suffering?" Later I said to her, "Do you realize what you are asking for? We're not capable of enduring even an iota of Baba's burden." I also

Gift of God

remembered a lover once asking to keep silence in order to help Baba in His silence. Baba replied, "My one second of silence is equivalent to your hundred years of keeping silence."

During the last years, when Baba was no longer giving darshan programmes, He did not conceal His suffering, and all those around Him looked for ways to distract Him from His pain and entertain Him, often by reading to Him. One story from *Reader's Digest* that particularly struck me concerned an artist who wanted to paint Jesus as a child. He found a beautiful young boy for a model and completed the painting. Many years later the artist was again looking for a model, this time to portray Judas. After a long search he found in a tavern a miserable looking man dressed in tattered clothes. This man agreed to pose for the artist because he needed money, but in the end, when he was paid, he began to cry. The artist asked him what was wrong, and the man replied, "I am crying because you have painted me as Judas, but as a small boy I was your model when you painted the Christ child." Baba, obviously touched by this story, said, "Judas loved Jesus very much. If there had been no Judas, there would be no Jesus." Jesus, being the God-Man, was the Highest of the High, yet He needed others to play certain roles for His work to be done. Judas had to act as he did in order that Jesus be crucified and suffer for humanity.

When someone was reading aloud, Baba was very particular that everyone listen intently to the story. He wanted everyone's attention on a single focal point, and He always knew if someone's concentration had drifted. Baba would snap His fingers and say, "Listen to the story. Don't let your thoughts wander." Sometimes Baba would lie down on His bed while Mani read a story to Him. He would appear to have fallen asleep, and we would sometimes even hear Him snoring. As soon as Mani stopped reading, however, Baba would say, "Why have you stopped? I am listening. Go on." Other times we felt that Baba's attention was far away, that there was something else on His mind. Looking at His eyes, we would feel that He wasn't "there" with us, that He was elsewhere. Even then, if Mani stopped reading, Baba would say, "Go on. I am listening."

When *Time* magazine arrived each week it was Rano, the only one of the American women mandali living at Meherazad, who read it aloud to Baba over a period of two or three days. Baba's

Gift of God

favourite reading material, however, was the detective story; he particularly liked the novels of Edgar Wallace and the Nero Wolfe series by Rex Stout. Rano was reading an Edgar Wallace story to Baba one morning while I was massaging Him. After lunch we reassembled in Baba's room, and Mani began to read a Nero Wolfe story, which she continued reading after dinner. I suddenly wondered what had happened to a character named Thomas, so I asked. Rano said, "Oh, Arnavaz, you're confused. Thomas is in my book, not in Mani's." Hearing two murder mysteries at the same time and switching from one to the other was too much for me. Baba enjoyed the joke and laughed silently, gesturing and smiling, His eyes full of mischief. It was a joy to see His suffering alleviated, even for a moment.

On 31st January, 1968, an important event took place that indicated some of the dramatic changes that were to come. Beloved Baba called all the men mandali from Meherabad and a few intimate ones from Ahmednagar together with those who were living at Meherazad. The men filed past Baba, who was seated on the front verandah of the main house with Mehera standing at His side. Following Baba's order, she folded her hands and said, "Jai Baba" to each man, and each said "Jai Baba" to her in return. This was the first time that Mehera had greeted male Baba lovers. To prepare her for greeting these men, Baba had previously introduced her to Dr. Harry Kenmore, who was blind. In the past Mehera had been kept in strict seclusion, in the early days from even seeing men or hearing their voices. Now, through this brief meeting with men, Baba was preparing Mehera for what she would face later, though at this time she had no way of knowing what the future held for her.

Baba went into deeper seclusion in 1968, and although He went to Guruprasad for the summer months as usual, not even the very intimate ones in Poona were allowed to see Him, nor were the mandali allowed to leave Guruprasad. For a few hours in the morning Baba would sit alone in His bedroom in a big chair, which no one except Mehera was allowed to touch. He would hit His thighs until they were black and blue; He said His universal work was so heavy at that time that He was using the pain to keep Himself connected to the gross world. Every day Baba listened to the songs of Jim Reeves, especially "Diamond in the Sky" and "There's a Heartache Following Me." Baba said there was great

Gift of God

dard (pathos) in Jim Reeves' voice, and these songs helped to relieve the strain of His work.

During this period Baba sent a circular to His lovers all over the world, saying that He wanted them to repeat The Parvardigar Prayer and the Prayer of Repentance audibly, once a day, for the months of April, May and June. Twice every day Baba would have these prayers said, once by the men mandali and once by the women, Baba joining in both times. Due to His intensely heavy work and the constant pounding on His thighs, Baba had become very frail and weak. He sometimes supported Himself on the arms of the men on either side of Him in order to remain standing through the prayers. Once when Baba couldn't stand alone, the mandali suggested that He sit down, but Baba said, "Continue the prayers." After they were finished, Baba said, "By My standing and participating in these prayers, all those who say them after I drop My body will be greatly benefitted." When I was told about Baba's words, I felt He was giving an indirect order to repeat the prayers regularly, and from that time on I have done so daily.

In October Baba called lovers in charge of Baba centres from all over India to Meherazad to discuss the arrangements for the darshan He was planning to give at Guruprasad during the summer of 1969. Later Nariman and I were also called to make arrangements for an entirely different programme to be held in December to celebrate Mehera's birthday. At the same time Baba would perform the Navjote of four children: Hoshang's daughter Meherrukh and his son Rayomand, my brother Dara's son Nozer, and my cousin Dolly Dastur's niece Mehernaaz. The final part of the programme would be the engagement and wedding of Baba's nephew Dara, Adi Jr.'s son, and Shatrughan Kumar's daughter Amrit from Dehra Dun.

While we were there Baba said to us, "Henceforth you don't need to tell or ask Me anything. I will give you internal guidance." Baba had previously told Eruch and Mani to reply to letters from Baba lovers without asking Him what they should write. Beloved Baba was preparing us for the time when He would no longer be with us in the physical body.

In the third week of November Baba's health began to fail

Gift of God

rapidly. Early in December, when He heard that Eruch's uncle had been given a blood transfusion, Baba said, "Meherji Mama was given a blood transfusion, so why am I not given one?" Baba was given two transfusions, and we later learned that the blood had come from a farmer. His condition did not improve, however, and he only grew weaker as the December programme approached, showing little interest in His surroundings.

As usual, we women gathered around Baba in His bedroom in the mornings, when He would often listen to His favourite ghazals on the radio. One morning Mani thought of playing the record "Precious Lord," which she knew He liked. Baba was sitting on the edge of His bed with His feet resting on a cushion on the floor. As I watched Beloved Baba listening to the words, "I'm tired, I'm weary, I'm worn," I felt as though He Himself were singing the words to convey to us what He was going through. Because Baba also wanted His men mandali to know the intensity of His suffering, He told Mani to type the words of "Precious Lord," and He gave a copy to each of the men, including Nariman. Baba then told Mani to carry the gramophone to mandali hall, where the record was played that afternoon in His Presence.

The atmosphere was heavy with Beloved Baba's suffering, His helplessness and hopelessness. As God-Man, He seemed to be beseeching God-Infinite to release Him from the tremendous burden He had carried during His physical life span, a burden that now appeared to be beyond His endurance. Not only was our darling Baba suffering from the physical pressures of His last universal work, but He also had to bear His knowledge of the agony all His mandali and lovers - especially His beloved Mehera - would have to endure without Him after He dropped His body. Baba carried this heavy cross alone; we could not fathom the weight of His load.

On 22nd December Mehera's birthday was celebrated along with the Navjote of the four children and the engagement of Dara and Amrit. After about two hundred Baba lovers were seated in the garden, Baba was brought in a wheelchair to the verandah of the main bungalow. I put Mehera's birthday cake with its single candle on a trolley and took it to Baba, who smiled and touched the cake, which was later distributed to the guests. The four children were then brought to stand before Baba for the Navjote,

Gift of God

their parents standing behind them. Baba's message to the children, once again stressing that He had come to free us from religious ceremonies, was read out: "Religious ceremonies, instead of freeing one from Maya, keep one firmly bound to Maya. I have come to make people do away with ceremonies. God can be attained only through Love; therefore, Love Me more and more until you know who I am."

Following the Navjote Dara and Amrit's engagement took place. Baba held the rings before they placed them on one another's fingers, and they garlanded and embraced Him before returning to their seats. After the engagement Baba remained seated on the verandah while everyone took darshan, filing past Him at a distance with folded hands. A brief entertainment followed with some dancing and several funny songs, especially for Him.

Baba said to all those present, "My time has come. My time is near. My work is done. You who are here are very, very fortunate because you see Me sitting in front of you. At the Poona darshan in April, you won't be able to see Me like this." Baba gestured with His hand from head to foot. When Baba said this, I imagined there would be such a rush in Poona that all those who had been with Baba for many years would be at the back in order to give a chance to the newcomers. Baba then went to His bedroom, while Mehera stayed with the guests in the garden. After some time He called me to His bedroom and asked whether Mehera was enjoying herself and was happy. Baba knew Mehera was concerned that He was not well. I assured Him that all those around Mehera were keeping her company. Lying on His bed, Beloved Baba gestured for me to come forward so that He could give me an embrace, which in those days, due to His frail health, was a rare treasure.

The next day, 23rd December, was the marriage of Dara and Amrit. They had a civil ceremony at Viloo Villa, Sarosh's home, after which Baba sent the De Soto to bring them to Meherazad. Amrit and Dara sat on the verandah in two chairs, waiting for Baba. When He was brought out in the wheelchair, He again held their rings before they placed them on one another's fingers. After they had garlanded Baba, He gestured to the pile of garlands at His feet, brought to Him by His lovers, and told Dara and Amrit to garland each other. All those present again filed past Baba for His

Gift of God

darshan, and following entertainment and refreshments they left, bringing the last darshan in Baba's physical Presence to an end. A few guests, including Nargis and Amrit's parents, stayed over for a few days; then Baba said to Nariman and me, "Let all the guests go, but I want you to stay."

On New Year's Day we had hoped to cheer Baba up, to make Him a little more lively and happy, but we did not know how to bring a smile to His face. Everyone was depressed until Mani thought of the new tape recorder which had just been given to Baba, and she brought it to His room so that He could hear some of His favourite ghazals. Baba's face had been pale, but when He heard the music, His colour changed a little. Since it was chilly, Mehera had placed a bright shawl, knitted in the rainbow colours of Baba's flag, on His lap and over His feet. Suddenly we saw the big toe of Baba's right foot peek out from under the shawl, keeping time to the music. For a moment our hearts swelled, seeing Beloved Baba's temporary relief. However, it lasted only as long as the music was playing.

Sarosh Irani's son-in-law, Dr. Hirji Adenwala, was in Ahmednagar at the time, having come for Dara and Amrit's wedding. Goher was so desperate that she wrote him a note asking him to come the following day to see Baba, despite the fact that He had not allowed her to consult other doctors about His present condition. Hirji came to Meherazad as soon as he received the note, arriving in the evening after Baba had retired. He had not come to examine Baba at that time, but only to discuss with Goher every detail of Baba's symptoms.

Baba heard the car drive up and sent His night watchman to ask who had arrived. Even though He never received visitors after He had retired at night, Baba allowed Hirji to come to His bedroom and agreed to an examination. Hirji very gently questioned Baba and was surprised to find Him so alert since His blood urea had tested very high. When Hirji, who had not brought his medical bag with him, asked Goher for a stethoscope, Baba told him, "Never mind. Just put your ear to My chest." Hirji was very touched by such an intimate gesture. Normally the breath of a person with such high blood urea would smell strongly, but as Hirji raised his head from Baba's chest, he was surprised that no odour came from Baba's mouth. He very gently suggested to Baba that

Gift of God

He consult specialists about His condition, even if only to please the mandali, who were so worried about Him. Baba's response to Hirji's urging was a smile and a short spiritual discourse. This meeting was the key that opened Hirji's heart to Baba.

Our Beloved Baba's condition worsened daily to the point where He could not even sit up on His own. It took at least four people to help Him, one supporting Baba's neck, the second holding His shoulders, another supporting His back, and someone holding His legs under the knees. Slowly they would lift Baba to a sitting position on the edge of His bed with His feet on a pillow on the floor. Another pillow would be placed behind Baba's back, and someone would sit against it, back to back with Baba, to give Him support. Even this position was very painful for Him, and Baba could sit for barely half an hour.

At times Baba would implore Goher to help Him, saying, "Oh I am dying! Do something!" Yet He kept refusing to let her call a specialist. She would say, "I don't know what to do, Baba. Now only You can tell me what I should do for You!" Finally it was impossible for Goher to bear Baba's suffering any longer, and all the mandali agreed that she should arrange for an ambulance to take Baba to Poona for tests. She suspected there was something terribly wrong internally, as Baba was complaining of pain in His abdomen. Eruch's brother Meherwan made arrangements for a hospital room in Poona, and Eruch and Goher very gently pleaded with Baba to go. I was present in the room at the time and saw Baba firmly say, "No!" When Goher and Eruch continued to plead with Him, Baba, with a very stern face, finally said, "Don't take Me to Poona! I know everything. I am not mad. If you want Me to drop this body, then take Me to Poona." With these words Goher and Eruch fell silent, and they did not bring the subject up again. From that time on Goher simply tried to make Baba more comfortable, and she arranged for a surgical bed on which Baba spent His last days. This bed was later placed in the Blue Bus, where it has remained ever since.

Helplessness and despondency overcame us. I cannot describe the agony of those days. Baba was suffering so much and we could do *nothing* to alleviate His pain. He stopped eating; then He didn't even want to drink anything. Only with great persuasion would He have some juice or other liquid prepared by

Gift of God

His beloved Mehera. He said that He had "a choking feeling," and He grew weaker and weaker. Dear Naja, who had cooked for Baba and the mandali for years, would prepare ten or twelve of His favourite dishes just in case He showed a desire for one of them, but He would not eat even a morsel.

One afternoon Mehera gave me a warm drink to take to Eruch, who was waiting to give it to Baba. As I was about to hand the cup to Eruch, Baba gestured that I should feed Him. Baba was lying down, and I tenderly spooned the liquid into His mouth. His eyes looked directly into mine, flooding me with love, yet I saw a sadness in them that filled my heart with anguish. In His love and compassion Beloved Baba allowed me to feed Him that day, knowing He would be with us for only a short time more. I realized later that despite his frail condition, He was finding a moment to give each of us as much love as He could in the time He had left. Later we all reminisced about these special moments with our Beloved.

Throughout the days, we took turns being with Baba, reading to Him, massaging Him, trying to get Him to eat something. Rano often read to Him while I massaged His hands, legs, or wherever He gestured. One day Baba sent Rano for lunch, leaving me alone with Him. For quite some time Baba had been having spasms in every part of His body - hands, legs, neck, everywhere - but they had been mild and infrequent. Now they were intense, increasing at a terrific rate. I was massaging Him when a spasm jerked His left leg so violently that my hands flew into the air. Startled, I shouted "Baba!" and quickly searched His face to see if He was all right. Baba looked at me knowingly, as if He wanted me to understand something, but I did not know what it was.

Twice during those days I noticed blue-grey shadows across Baba's pale face. His lips were dark gray and His eyes unfocused. I asked Goher and the others if they saw gray patches on Baba's face, but they said they saw nothing. I thought it strange that no one else saw them when they seemed so obvious to me. Then, when I was sitting alone with Him one day while He quietly rested with His eyes closed, the sight of Beloved Baba in His long white sadra brought an image to me of His lifeless body. I was horrified; I started perspiring and my heart pounded as I pushed the thought away, not wanting even to consider it.

Chapter Twenty-one

*"Your being with Me
physically is immaterial.
It is My being with you that
matters. So keep Me with
you always."*

- Meher Baba

We remained in Meherazad with Baba after the December programme, but we knew that we might have to return to Bombay on short notice. Because of Nariman's increasing health problems Baba had agreed two years earlier that he should sell his factory, and a potential buyer had indicated interest shortly before we left for Meherazad. In January Hoshang sent word for Nariman to call him in Bombay.

Nariman returned from town after phoning and told Baba that the terms for selling the factory had been settled. His brothers were now waiting for him to come and finalize the sale. Baba told him, "I have arranged everything. You and Arnavaz go to Bombay and complete the work and come back soon to Meherazad. Leave your other business responsibilities to your brothers, and come stay with Me for six months." Baba told us to go on 19th January, and when we were all packed and ready to leave Meherazad, we went to Baba's bedroom for His darshan. I intended to embrace Baba lightly, so as not to hurt Him in His extremely delicate condition, but He surprised me by holding me tightly in His loving arms. Such strength from our darling Baba lifted Nariman's and my spirits; we could not have guessed that this was the last physical embrace we would ever receive from our Beloved God-Man, that it would be Baba's precious body, lying in the crypt, that we would return to.

Gift of God

When we got back to Bombay, plans concerning the sale of the factory moved right along, and a meeting was set to sign the final papers on the afternoon of 31st January. At 7:00 that morning I was still lying in bed with my eyes closed, when I saw a vision. Many people had gathered in a big hall, and I was outside, looking in through the window. Everyone was dressed in pure white, as if it were a Zoroastrian funeral. Then I looked down and saw that I was wearing a white sari. I opened my eyes and lay quietly with a dreadful feeling in the pit of my stomach.

Locking my mind against the thoughts that were churning inside, I went about my daily routine. At 3:00 that afternoon, while Nariman and his brothers were at the office with the buyers, Adi Sr. phoned from Ahmednagar. He said, "Arnavaz, listen carefully and patiently. Beloved Baba dropped His body at 12:15 p.m., and He will be interred tomorrow morning. You must convey the news to all lovers in Bombay." Not wanting to believe what Adi had told me, I cried out to Beloved Baba for help, then asked Adi, "Is it really true?" He very gently said, "Arnavaz, I wouldn't be giving such news as a joke." Coming to my senses, I said, "Adi, I'm sorry. I didn't mean that - it just slipped out." Adi told me that Baba had finally allowed Goher to call one of His lovers, Dr. Ram Ginde, an eminent neurosurgeon in Bombay. Dr. Ginde had reached Adi's office at about 11:15 that morning, but he requested half an hour of rest before going out to see Beloved Baba, as he had a serious heart condition and had felt pain in his chest during his journey. When Dr. Ginde and Adi reached Meherazad, they found Eruch trying to revive Baba by giving Him mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. No one wanted to accept what had happened, but Dr. Ginde very gently and solemnly confirmed that Baba was no longer in the physical body. It was Dr. Goher's sad duty to fill out the death certificate of our most precious Lord Meher Baba.

I put down the phone and sat there dazed, not knowing what to do. Then, gathering courage, I phoned Behram at the office, as I could not bear to give such heart-wrenching news directly to my dear Nariman. On hearing about Baba, Nariman contained his emotions but immediately cancelled the meeting, leaving the office to come home and prepare to go to Ahmednagar. I next phoned Nargis, but my brother Huma picked up the phone; Sarosh had

Gift of God

just arrived at their house from Ahmednagar, but had obviously not heard about Baba. Huma was so devastated that he put Sarosh on the phone to speak with me. When Sarosh started sobbing, I knew neither Nariman nor Sarosh would have been able to stand the initial shock if they had been present when Baba dropped His body. It seemed to me that Beloved Baba, in His compassion, had sent them both away, Nariman to take care of selling the factory and Sarosh to attend to some work for Him. As I couldn't bear to continue repeating this heartbreaking news, I made only one more call, asking someone else to inform all Baba's lovers in Bombay. To add to my agony, however, everyone immediately started calling me to verify what they had been told. Nariman arrived home, Katie came from her office, and Sarosh came from Nargis and Huma's house. The four of us left immediately in Sarosh's car for the long, anguish-filled drive to Ahmednagar, with our families and other Baba lovers from Bombay following some time later.

When we reached Meherabad, we were told that Beloved Baba's body had been placed in the crypt. We went straight up the Hill to His Samadhi, where we found Padri and several others. Padri told us that Mehera had broken down and Eruch and others, unable to bear seeing her in such pain and fearing that she would collapse, had convinced Mani and the other women to take her back to Meherazad for the night. He felt that after the whole day's ordeal the women would not have been able to withstand spending all that night and the following day in Meherabad. Padri opened the door of the Samadhi, and Katie, Sarosh, Nariman and I went inside. Beloved Baba's body was lying in the crypt, but when I looked down my shock at seeing Him the way I had imagined a few weeks earlier made it seem as though He were lying fifty feet below us. Padri, seeing our stunned expressions, immediately told Sarosh to take us to his house for the night.

The following morning at 4:00 we returned to Upper Meherabad to wait at the Samadhi for Mehera, Mani and the other women to come. When their car arrived, I opened the door and Mehera got out. I was about to embrace her when she cried out in anguish, "What will I do without Baba? How will I live without Him?" There was nothing I could say, so I silently held her in my arms. Mehera's grief was so deep that we all suppressed our own in an attempt to console her.

Gift of God

It is impossible to describe the experience of being present when the Avatar of the Age leaves His human body. Baba lovers from all over India started phoning and sending telegrammes to Adi Sr., begging him to postpone the interment of Beloved Baba's body. Dr. Ginde said that His body could remain uncovered in the crypt for darshan as long as it showed no signs of deterioration, and he instructed Goher to examine Baba's body every day to determine when to cover it and close the crypt. Day after day thousands of lovers flocked to Meherabad by plane, train, bus, car and bullock cart, even on foot; as one group left, another arrived, singing bhajans to our Beloved Lord. Even though we were heartbroken, we were sustained by the love that flowed from the hearts of those who had come to bow down to Him and gaze upon His face one last time.

Years later I was looking at the picture of Christ I kept in the room with the photograph of Baba that He had given Nariman and me at our wedding. For the first time I noticed the words "Jesus in the Sepulcher" written beneath it. Suddenly it struck me that Jesus looked very much the way Baba had looked while His body was lying in the crypt in His Samadhi. I knew at that moment why I had been compelled to buy the picture and remembered the day when Baba had asked me about it and told me to keep a lamp under His photograph burning twenty-four hours a day. The light from the lamp reminded me that even though Beloved Baba had dropped His physical body, the light of His Divine Presence would continue to burn eternally.

During the days before Baba's interment we women stayed by Mehera's side wherever she was. She cried inconsolably to Baba in the Samadhi, and it was good that her tears flowed easily. Had she not expressed her anguish, it would have been very difficult for her to maintain her mental and emotional balance. Her grief showed others how deeply she loved her Beloved Darling Baba. When we could bear Mehera's tears no longer, we would take her to Baba's cabin and sit talking with her near the stretcher that had borne His body from Meherazad to the Samadhi. Sometimes she would become quiet and composed, greeting with great poise the women who came to her with folded hands, saying "Jai Baba." Men with folded hands would also try to catch a glimpse of dear Mehera.

Gift of God

Those closest to her had witnessed the total devotion Mehera had for Baba, and we honoured her as Baba's beloved. Now Mehera was to leave the secluded life she had led thus far, so that all of Baba's lovers, both men and women, would witness the perfect love of His closest disciple. I felt that Baba had left her behind to play the very important role that He had been gradually preparing her for, carrying on His mission of Pure Love. In order for Mehera to play this role, she had to accustom herself to many new situations, among them learning to converse with men, something she had not done before. Baba led me intuitively to use the circumstances to help Mehera take a first step in this direction. When some of the Western men arrived in Meherabad, I took the opportunity to ask Don Stevens if he would like to say "Jai Baba" to Mehera. Surprised, Don asked if that were possible. Then I went to Mehera and told her that Don Stevens wanted to say "Jai Baba" to her. Mehera, in her grief, agreed automatically, so I brought Don into Baba's cabin. Facing Mehera, he said "Jai Baba." Mehera, without looking at him, softly said "Jai Baba" and told me something to say to Don for her. Don said a few words in response. The next day I told several men to stand outside the Samadhi in a row and, one at a time, say "Jai Baba, Mehera" when she came out. They did so, and she replied "Jai Baba" in return. Mehera was in a state of shock and responded to the words "Jai Baba" without giving any thought to the fact that she was speaking to men.

Although Baba's body never showed any sign of deterioration, the mandali decided that on the seventh day the crypt should be closed. The atmosphere of grief had become so suffocating that we could no longer postpone the inevitable moment of Baba's interment. It was 7th February, the date of Baba's birthday that year according to the Zoroastrian calendar. As His precious body was covered, it seemed as if the very essence which had sustained our lives was being ripped away from us. We cried silently, knowing Baba wanted us to accept what had happened. Beloved Baba was our heart and soul, our only light, and we all felt lost but, like machines, we continued with whatever tasks needed to be done. Even though He had dropped His physical body, Baba was still asking for our complete resignation, expecting us to surrender to His wish, even at this time of

Gift of God

helplessness and hopelessness. We were orphans now, yet in all our anguish Baba's gentle, loving hands were ever on us.

Later we heard stories from Baba lovers around the world of unusual events occurring at the time Baba dropped His body, but the most amazing was the account we read in the papers of the heavy rainfall in Mecca, ordinarily a desert. Muslims on pilgrimage were unable to approach the flooded Kaaba for seven days, 1st February until 7th February, the exact time that Beloved Baba's body was lying in state.

In His compassion Baba arranged everything in a way that helped us to carry on, however slowly. After He dropped His body, telegrammes and phone calls kept coming in from the groups that Baba had contacted, everyone wanting to know whether the plans that He had made for the darshan in Poona would be carried out. We began to remember and discuss the various comments Baba had made prior to 31st January. When, because of His health, the mandali had wanted Baba to cancel the darshan, He had said, "The darshan programme *must* take place. It should not be cancelled." He then asked, "Is it all right if I give darshan lying down?" He had also said, "In March we will march to Poona." Putting all these statements together was like doing a puzzle, all of us having different parts which fit together to make a whole picture. By the end of February it was clear to us that the darshan Baba had scheduled for April to June, 1969, should be held despite His physical absence.

During this time I had a dream from which I awoke overcome with emotion. In the dream I was standing in a doorway watching Baba and Mehera. She was coming down a staircase, walking toward Baba, who entered through another door. He extended His hands, saying, "Come, Mehera, and we will do the prayers." Because Baba was no longer in the body, Mehera hesitated, as if wondering how she could touch Him. Baba extended His hands toward hers until their fingertips were touching, and her whole countenance suddenly changed. I could see Baba pouring a transparent liquid from His hands into Mehera's. From the expression on her face it was clear that her whole being was undergoing a transformation, that something mystical was taking place.

Gift of God

By the end of March we were all in Poona preparing for this Great Darshan. Our grief was still raw, and arriving at Guruprasad without Baba had been terribly painful. The palace felt cold and empty. Mehera's emotional state was particularly fragile, and Baba lessened our agony by giving us the task of sustaining her. I remembered that the previous October Mehera had shown Baba a pink sari embroidered in gold, telling Him she wanted to give it to Dina Talati's daughter Parviz as a wedding present. Baba said, "But it's so beautiful. Why don't you wear it?" Mehera replied, "Where can I wear it? I'm old and it won't suit me anymore." Baba responded, "Old? Just wait and see how beautiful you'll become after six months." Baba's words rang in my ears as I counted the months and realized that He must have been referring to this time. Mehera had always been kept in the background, but now she would participate in this darshan, and her inner strength and purity would shine for all to see.

On the first morning of the darshan, just before 9:00, we all gathered in the hall. We had placed a large photograph of Baba in His empty chair. It was nearing time to open the doors for the first flood of Western lovers who had come from distant places to be with Baba in a wholly new way. Suddenly Mehera broke down and cried, "What do we do without Baba?" We pleaded with her not to cry, telling her that she had to keep her spirits up, that Baba lovers had come thousands of miles and she needed to help them by displaying strength and courage. Mehera composed herself, the doors were opened, and people poured into the hall and sat in rows on the floor. As the clock struck nine, Eruch said to all those who had entered, "You have kept your appointment with God."

Despite the fact that Baba was no longer in His physical body and there was no one who would or could ever take His place, His lovers still came in groups from all over the world for a week at a time. In the morning the Westerners came to Guruprasad, and in the afternoons the Easterners, with musical offerings to their Beloved. Baba's grace rained upon us, and love poured forth from all His lovers. Some who had been fortunate enough to have been in Baba's physical presence were terribly pained by His physical absence, and they wept loudly as they bowed down before His chair, Ironically, those of us who had been most deeply wounded

Gift of God

by losing Baba were suddenly called upon to console them. However, we witnessed the force of Baba's Divine Presence as His love touched those who had never met Him. The love that poured from their open hearts day after day gave us respite from our sorrow as the darshan continued, and the numbness we had experienced began to melt temporarily. We could all feel Baba deeply within us, saying, "My work has to go on. My love will sustain you. I am here with you."

Shanta Devi, who owned Guruprasad, was at the darshan for a number of days. On the first day, after she had greeted Mehera and Mani at the doorway, she came into the hall to greet me. As she turned to look back at Mehera, she suddenly said, "It's like Baba standing there." Although Mehera didn't physically resemble Baba, she did look different to me, and I was to overhear remarks of this kind rather frequently from then on.

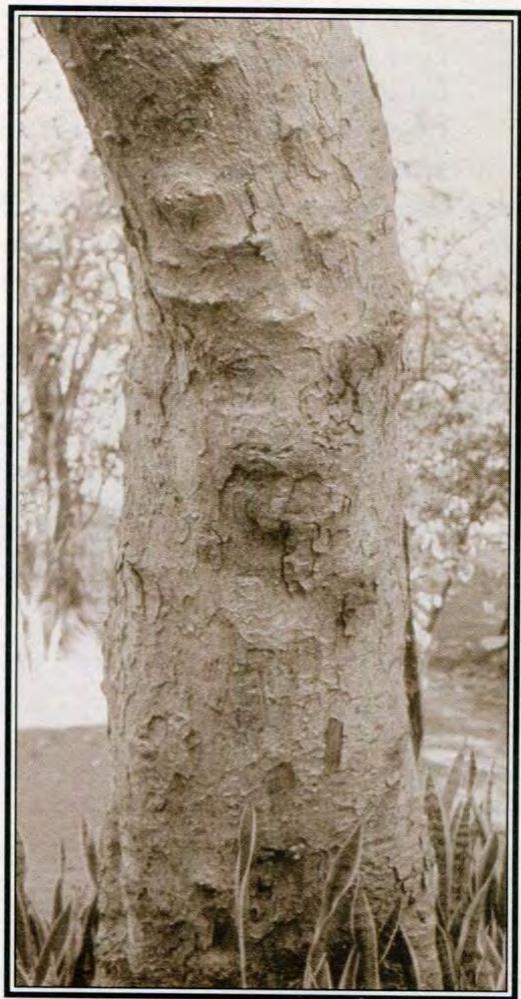
At the end of three months we had to face the inevitable and lonely return to Meherazad. All of us were still grieving, and I often sat quietly, thinking about different moments with Baba. He had left the body when a violent spasm seized Him and stopped His breathing. My mind kept returning to the day, months earlier, when a spasm in His leg had thrown my arm into the air while I was massaging Him. The look in His eyes had been trying to convey to me that a spasm would bring about His death. I also now understood the grey shadows I had seen on His beautiful face.

Around this time I had another dream of Baba in which He was seated on a bed. His face was white and dark blue, and His eyes were almond shaped. I knew that He had dropped His body, and I stood in the corner of the room, looking at Him, feeling very sad. Baba extended His hands to me, and I asked, "Baba, what should I do?" He gestured to me that He was giving me His hands, so why didn't I take them? Since He was not in His body, I wondered how I could. But then I gently took His hands in mine, kissed them, and pressed them to my eyes. I began to sob but was unable to really cry. I said internally, "Oh Baba, why did you go away?" and then awoke sobbing.

Gift of God

Only Baba's grace could have sustained Mehera through those first difficult months at home in Meherazad without Him, as she remained immersed in sorrow. Not only was she missing Baba's physical presence, but she often berated herself for not having done enough for her Beloved, and she deeply regretted that some members of her family did not recognize Baba as God. We continued to try to console her, and when she asked me, "When will I go to Baba?" I would answer, "You will, Mehera, but first Baba wants you here. He's left you behind for a purpose. Baba has given you so much love; now it's your turn to show others how to love Baba."

Mehera was standing near her bedroom window looking out into the garden one day in July when she suddenly noticed that Baba's face had clearly appeared in the bark on the trunk of the tree directly in front of her. She couldn't believe what she saw, so she called Mani, and the two of them confirmed for each other this wonderful event. When Baba's image appeared on the tree, she found great consolation in gazing upon this tangible sign of His Presence. With this image Beloved Baba was beginning to draw Mehera out of her sorrow, for only if she were happy would she be able to share her love for Him with others.

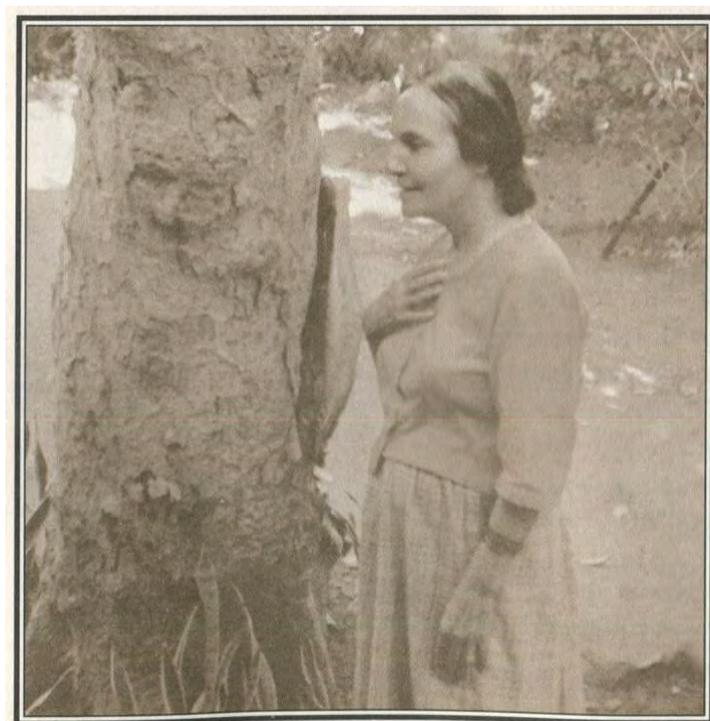


*Baba's image on the tree outside
Mehera's room*

Gift of God

Six months later Mehera wrote the following message for all of Baba's lovers. Despite her heavy heart, she read it aloud at the first Amartithi (the anniversary of Baba's dropping His body) on 31st January, 1970, to those gathered outside the Samadhi:

Beloved Baba's very dear lovers,
Beloved Baba was love, He is love and He always will
be love.
Beloved Baba for His love for us, His beloved children,
has suffered and given of Himself.
We must love Him more and more to be worthy of His
very dear love for us.
Serve Him by spreading His message of love and truth.
Love Him above everything. Love and live His words.
Beloved Baba has warned us to hold on to His daaman.
Whatever happens, this is very important.
He is the Beloved God-Man....
May we all be true to His beautiful love for us and His
trust in us. May Beloved Baba bless you each, His
dear ones. Jai Baba.



Mehera at the tree

Chapter Twenty-two

"...through the intelligent handling of marriage a person may traverse so much of the spiritual path that it needs only a touch by a Perfect Master to raise him into the sanctuary of Eternal Life."

- Meher Baba

Back in January of 1961 I had received a confidential letter dictated by Baba with a warning never to mention the contents, particularly to Mehera, when I visited either Meherazad or Guru Prasad:

*Meherazad,
Ahmednagar
10 January 1961*

Strictly confidential

My dear Arnavaz,

Yesterda... Baba informed me that He had already told the women now living at Meherazad that in case Mehera survived after He dropped His body - which may not at all happen - then Mani, Goher, Meheru, Naja and Rano should continue as far as possible to live together with Mehera, whether... in Meherazad or on Meherabad hill....

Baba... also wishes you to stay as far as possible with Mehera as long as she lives and wherever she

Gift of God

prefers to live.... (Of course, in the remote eventuality of Mehera surviving Baba.)

...[H]owever, Baba gives you full permission to be with Nariman at Bombay or elsewhere as and when you or Nariman would want it to be so. But, Baba says, He would want you most of the time to stay with Mehera, and now and again pay visits to Nariman - and Nariman too can now and again pay visits to you to the place wherever you are with Mehera.... in which case Nariman will be staying with the mandali as usual, for some of the mandali have been instructed to be near at hand as now.

Baba wants you to show this letter to Nariman and to keep this strictly confidential. Baba also wishes you to show this letter to Katie, as she too has received instructions on the subject. You must not let anyone else know of this, and Baba wants you to remember NOT to mention anything of this to Mehera if you happen to visit Meherazad or Guruprasad in the near future.

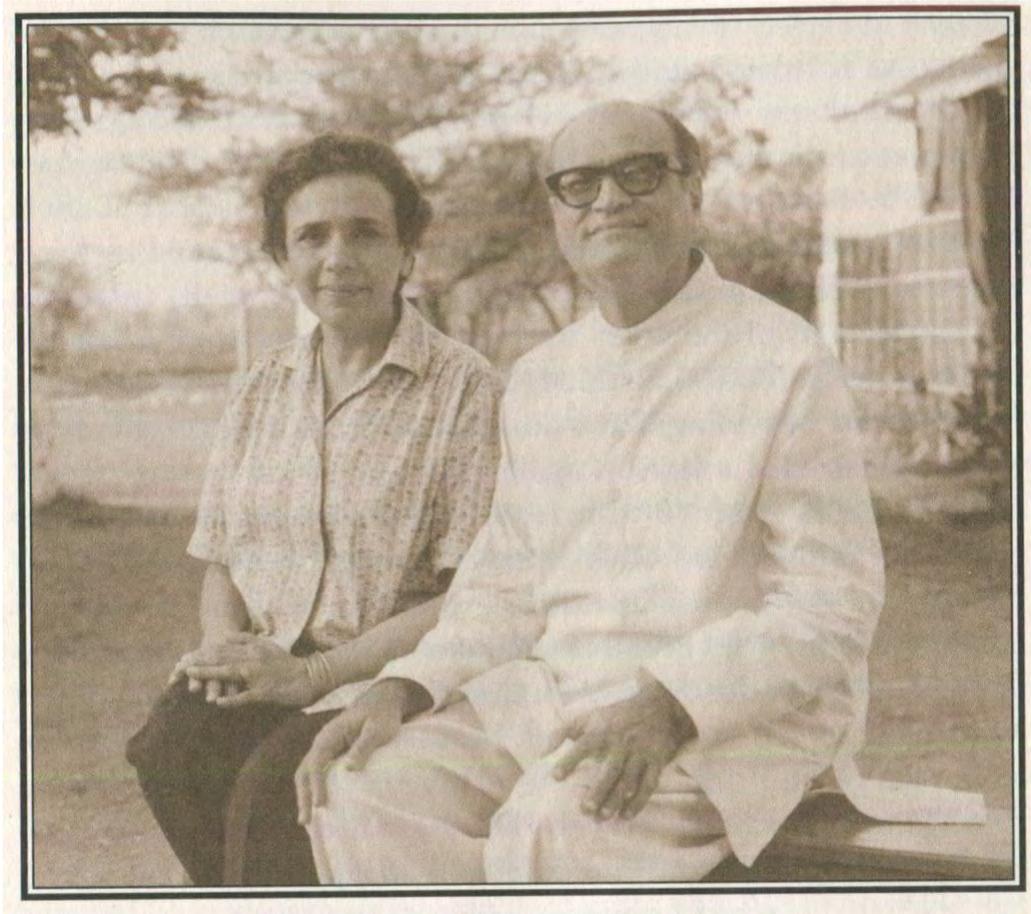
Baba wants you to write an acknowledgement jointly with Nariman, and He does NOT want either of you to feel in the least worried over anything untoward happening, for nothing is going to happen that is beyond the knowledge of your Beloved Baba. Baba's health is steadily on the side of a very gradual improvement, and He wants me to send His LOVE to you both, who are dear and close to Him.

Yours lovingly,

Eruch

P.S. Baba expressly wants me to add: "Don't think about this unnecessarily. You may all die before Me." This, of course, is just what came out while we were talking, and Baba expressed His wish.

Gift of God



With Nariman at Meherabad

Nariman and I considered Baba, Mehera and the mandali to be our family; still we were honoured by Baba's request, and we had written back immediately telling Baba that of course we would do as He wished. At the time I had momentarily wondered what Nariman would do if I went to live at Meherazad. Then, five months after Baba dropped His Body, Nariman completed the sale of his factory and joined me in Meherazad, and I realized that Beloved Baba had laid the groundwork for both of us to live there. Although we kept Ashiana and periodically spent time in Bombay, we lived in Meherazad most of the time from then on. Along with Goher I assumed responsibility for the running of Meherazad since there were no Baba lovers to help us and very few servants at that time.

Nariman was greatly affected by the loss of Baba's physical presence. He had never been the type to talk about his feelings, and now he became even quieter and more withdrawn, unable to

Gift of God

express his grief. I did not know how to bring him out of this shell. As it turned out; Beloved Baba pulled him out of the disinterested state he was in and put him to work. Nariman had been made a trustee of the Avatar Meher Baba Trust when it was formed by Baba in 1959, but the Trust had no function until after He dropped His body. It was soon apparent that the first chairman wanted to take full control of the Trust, totally ignoring the suggestions of the other trustees, all of whom were upset by his irregular practices. Nariman came out of his depression to do Baba's work, becoming like a lion for the Trust, particularly after the chairman filed a lawsuit against the rest of the trustees when they voted to remove him from office and make Mani the chairman. Most of the other trustees, having spent their lives in the ashram with Baba, had little experience with business and legal problems. However, Nariman knew the ways of the world, so they all depended greatly on him for his wisdom and advice. Mani used to call him "Skipper" because of the capable way he took charge and organized the other trustees, steering them through rough waters. When the original chairman suddenly died in March 1973 and the case was dropped, Nariman again became very detached from everyone and everything.

Then, in October of that year, Nariman was stricken with malaria while we were in Bombay; his temperature rose to 107 degrees, and he was taken to the hospital and put in ice packs. He appeared to be unconscious until the doctors brought his temperature down to 104 degrees. Then he opened his eyes, looked at me and said, "I've been on a long journey and have returned from a place far away." He was kept on ice packs for hours, as the doctors did not want his temperature to rise again. They thought that Nariman would probably be mentally affected by the high fever, but he was not. He was quite himself, a model patient, never irritable and always cooperative with the medical staff. In fact, a nurse once teased, "Mr. Dadachanji, at least say *no sometimes*."

During this illness Nariman felt very strongly that he was going to die, and afterwards he told one of the mandali that he was living on borrowed time. One night I was sitting quietly by Baba's photo in our second bedroom, thinking of Nariman. His health

Gift of God

had become quite fragile, as the high temperature had put a great strain on his already weakened heart and left him with an erratic pulse. The seriousness of Nariman's condition suddenly struck me, and I was filled with pangs of loss. I asked Baba, "Why do You make me suffer now? Let me suffer when the time comes." A voice within me said, "I am giving you suffering now so that you will suffer less at that time."

Nine months later, on 21st June, 1974, Nariman had a severe heart attack while we were again in Bombay. When I told him he had to go to the hospital, he looked at me with such a sad expression that it pierced my heart. He must have sensed that he would never return home. He was admitted to intensive care, and I was greatly relieved that Dr. Alu was in Bombay for some work, as she was permitted to see Nariman at any time. His condition improved, and after four days in the intensive care unit he was moved to an ordinary room in the hospital.

Nariman's condition was so serious that we were told he would not be able to leave the hospital for at least two months. As Silence Day approached, I began to wonder how Nariman, Alu and I would manage to keep silence, as Nariman had frequent pains in his chest and needed someone to be with him all the time. He was sleeping and I was sitting nearby, thinking about this problem, when a feeling of peace swept over me and a voice inside me said, "You won't be able to keep silence here." I immediately stopped worrying. The following morning, however, I again started wondering how we could observe silence at the hospital. The voice within me repeated, "You won't be able to keep silence here." I spontaneously asked, "Where? In Meherabad?" The thought of Nariman's body being taken to Meherabad crossed my mind. The voice then said, "You and Nariman will lead a different type of life for ten years." After I heard the voice, the whole episode was completely erased from my mind. I stopped worrying about how we would manage on Silence Day; I knew Baba would help us to find a solution.

As Nariman's pain increased day by day, I sat quietly by His side, repeating Baba's name. Sometimes I held his hand, and once [felt his pain move through his hand and into mine. Then, on 2nd

Gift of God

July, as I was preparing tea for him, he suddenly asked for a pill. He was dizzy and sweating profusely, and he had turned very pale. Alu ran out and called for help. Sensing that Nariman was having a massive heart attack, I told him to take Baba's name silently, as speaking was too great a strain for him. The doctor arrived and gave orders that Nariman be moved immediately to the intensive care unit. After he was moved from intensive care the first time, Nariman had told me how uncomfortable and miserable he had been and asked me not to allow the doctors to put him there again. To soothe him, I had agreed.

Alu knew that Nariman needed to be in intensive care, but she loved him and wanted to please him, so she argued with the medical staff about moving him. The other doctors were very angry with her. They could not understand why a doctor, who should know better, was trying to prevent them from taking a patient in critical condition to intensive care. My heart was torn, as I had assured Nariman that I would not permit him to be taken there, but because he had been through such agony, I would have promised him anything just to give him some relief. Trying to ease his mind, I put a kerchief over his eyes while he was moved to a stretcher. When the attendants stopped at the door of the unit, he removed the kerchief to see where he had been taken. He didn't say a word, but his sad eyes broke my heart. Dr. Alu stayed with him, as I was not allowed inside. I wanted so much to be with Nariman; I could feel the intense pain he was experiencing, but I was helpless to do anything about it, so I sat outside the room, quietly taking Baba's name. Nariman sent word through Alu telling me not to worry, that he was coming home.

Another specialist who was called in to examine Nariman told me that his condition was very critical, but if he pulled through the next three days, the immediate danger would be over. Continuing to take Baba's name, I locked out all the thoughts trying to rush through my mind, as only then could I surrender my heart to His wish and will. An hour later the doctor, knowing that Nariman was dying and that I would want to be with him, took me inside. Nariman looked at me and said, "Don't worry." I knew he was suffering more emotionally than physically at that moment as he struggled with his attachment to me. Baba gave me such

Gift of God

strength that I said with unexpected courage, "Nariman, I am not worrying, so don't you worry either." Knowing he didn't believe me, I said with more conviction, "In Baba's name I am telling you that I am *not* worrying," and at that moment Baba took all worry from me. Despite my pain, I wanted Nariman to be released from his *mayavic* connection with me. Not knowing what else to do, I started singing the *Bujawe Nar arti* very softly, close to his ear. Nariman loved this arti, composed by Baba Himself, and an expression of great peace came over his face. When I had finished singing the arti, I said, "Avatar Meher Baba *Ki Jai*." With the words *Ki Jai* Alu called the doctor, as she could no longer feel Nariman's pulse. He asked me to stand outside the screen while he gave emergency treatment. I had been taking Baba's name continuously for about fifteen minutes when the doctor looked out at me from behind the screen and shook his head, saying, "Nariman is no more."

Nariman died at 2:00 p.m., and it took several hours to make all the arrangements to take his body to Meherabad, so we didn't arrive there until 2:00 the following morning. The mini-bus we hired had to go very slowly, as it was raining, and we had to go over the Lonavla *ghats* (mountain passes) in the dark. All the men and women mandali were waiting in Meherabad when Nariman's casket arrived. Everyone had high regard and affection for him. I was surprised and especially touched by the presence of Mehera, as she had never attended a man's funeral before, and it was very unusual for her to come out in the middle of the night. After Nariman's casket was placed on the *Dhuni* platform, we recited the Parvardigar prayer and sang the *Bujawe Nar arti*. Mehera laid the first rose on Nariman's chest, and the others did so in turn. As a special gesture Eruch placed a garland on Nariman. Mehera stayed by my side, holding my arm. Suddenly she pointed to the sky and said, "Arnavaz, look!" Clouds covered the moon, yet its glow illuminated them, creating a lovely, clear image of our Beloved Baba's face looking down upon us.

The casket was taken from the *Dhuni* platform, and as it was lowered into the grave, everyone tossed flowers on top of it. Baba's image appeared once again, this time on the far inside wall of the grave, where His face and upper torso appeared to be carved into

Gift of God

the earth. The image resembled one in a mural in His Samadhi which is on the right wall as one enters. Little by little Baba's image disappeared as the earth was thrown into the grave. Baba's gift of His Presence in these images comforted me. I was able to feel Nariman's peace and joy at the same time that I was feeling the pain of our separation. Baba alone knows what I experienced.

I have no words to express what I received from Beloved Baba through the pain and sorrow I felt after Nariman's death. I was reminded of a saying I had learned in school which has always remained with me: "The path of sorrow and that path alone leads to the land where sorrow is unknown." Physically and emotionally I was drained, and outwardly it might have appeared that I was grieving, but my separation from Nariman was not a loss; it was a gain. Again and again I found myself saying to Baba, "How can I ever thank You for what You are giving me in this agony. What can I do for You, my Beloved Baba; what can I say to You?" Baba drew me ever closer to Him, and through this deep and intense experience I also felt closer to Nariman than I had ever felt before.

Years later I had a powerful dream of Baba and Nariman. I was in a large room, and just inside the door was a big photo of Baba with an oil lamp burning in front of it. It was Nariman's birthday, and he entered the room looking radiant. As he took a few steps toward me, I said loudly, "Nariman, first bow down to Beloved Baba's photo." Nariman didn't seem to hear, and he continued walking toward me. I repeated myself. Then, when Nariman was just ten feet away from me, he was suddenly transformed into Beloved Baba.

Nariman was all love. A man of great humility and dignity, he was soft-hearted and selfless in his dealings with others. A prayer he wrote shows these qualities clearly:

*Teach me my Lord to be sweet and gentle
In all the events of life -
In disappointments
In the thoughtlessness of others
In the insincerity of those I trusted
In the unfaithfulness of those on whom I rely*

Gift of God

*Let me put myself aside,
To think of the happiness of others
To hide my little pains and heartaches
So that I may be the only one to suffer
from them.*

Nariman loved Baba with all his heart, but when it came to talking about His Beloved, he was always very reticent. A few years after Baba dropped His body, His lovers were asking some of us to relate our experiences with the God-Man. When Nariman was asked, his reply was, "I met Baba, I fell in love with Him, and I followed Him. That is my experience." During the times Baba stayed with us at Ashiana, Nariman always accompanied Him around Bombay when He was contacting masts. In the early days Nariman sometimes found it embarrassing when someone recognized him or his car while Baba was bowing down to a mast on a crowded footpath, but in later years he no longer cared what anyone thought; all that mattered was pleasing Baba.

In every way Nariman lived up to the meaning of his name: "honest and faithful man." He had been so considerate, especially where I was concerned, always trying to keep me happy. This kind of love is rare. Knowing how much he loved me, I cannot even imagine how much love he had for Beloved Baba. After Baba dropped His body, Nariman used to say that I was his only attachment. He depended on me so much that I thought if I were to die first, it would be very difficult for him to adjust to life without me, especially missing Baba the way he did. I often remembered the birthday poem he had written for me way back in 1940:

*Here's to you dear friend, may you
live a thousand years,
Just to keep things smiling in this
vale of human tears;
And may I live a thousand too –
a thousand less a day,
Because I wouldn't care to be on earth
and hear you'd passed away.*

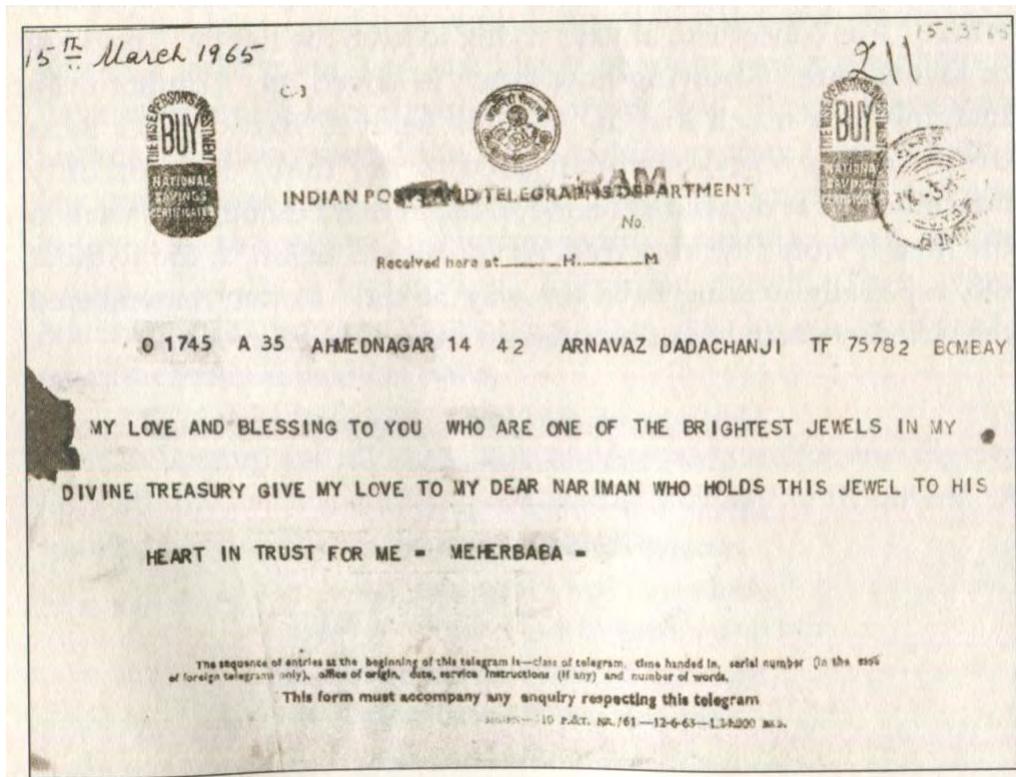
No matter how painful losing him would be, I had always felt it would be best if Nariman died before me, and I knew Baba loved

Gift of God

him so much that He would take care of everything. Baba had already arranged for me to stay in Meherazad, and I would be able to adjust to life alone.

After his death I found myself remembering moments when Baba had shown His special love for Nariman. Once when we were in Poona, Baba felt that something had upset Nariman and asked me to find out what had happened and let Him know. With great difficulty, because he kept problems to himself if he thought they might hurt me, Nariman told me why he was upset and I informed Baba. "Why didn't Nariman tell Me?" He asked. Baba then gave me this message for him: "Today after seeing the expression on your face, my heart was lacerated. I love you more than you can know. Everything will change. Keep happy. Sleep well. Eat well." Then Baba said to me, "Whenever Nariman feels unhappy, My heart is distressed."

Even though Nariman would never talk about his troubles or pains to Baba, bearing everything silently, Baba in His all-knowing would often convey His love through letters or by phone. One



Birthday telegramme Baba sent me in 1965

Gift of God

time when I was with Baba in Guruprasad and Nariman was in Bombay, Baba told Eruch to phone him with the following message: "Be happy and don't think about anything. If you will remain happy, Baba will be happy. Baba says, 'I know everything. Don't think about anything. Everything will be all right.' Baba sends much love to you." Another time, in mandali hall, Baba said to Nariman, "When you need Me, I am there. When I need you, you are there." Baba told me that He felt happy when Nariman and I came to stay with Him. He said, "My greatest lovers in Bombay are Arnavaz and Nariman. They are My best lovers. There is no pair like this." Baba even referred to Nariman as a saint. Once when my family were all at Ashiana and Baba was discussing certain problems with us, He said, "You have no idea who Nariman is. There is no one comparable to him. It is difficult to find one like him. He is a saint."

Nariman and I had great rapport and respect for each other's intuition, but there were still many difficulties and quiet sufferings in our marriage. In the early years Nariman was working so hard, seven days a week, that I began to feel neglected. He would come home too tired to talk, and it seemed as though we had lost the wonderful companionship we had before we were married. Preoccupied with business matters, he might forget to keep an appointment for a party. Of course he would feel terrible afterwards, and I knew the reason he was working so hard was to provide for me and his family. I also reminded myself he had far more responsibilities than I, but still, being human, I felt hurt at times.

Although Nariman and I never fought, we did argue, sometimes over personal matters, but we tried to help each other to please Baba. Once he wanted to dismiss an employee, a Baba lover, who was causing a great deal of trouble at work, spoiling the atmosphere for everyone. Baba had told him to employ this man, and I advised Nariman to be patient, that Baba would take care of the situation. Nariman was convinced, and after only a couple of months the man told Baba that he wanted to leave Bombay for another job, and he quit working for Nariman of his own accord.

We also had to deal with the little irritations that every married couple must face. We were, after all, two different

Gift of God

personalities. Nariman's focus was on Baba and his business, and he wasn't interested in spending time on such activities as shopping. I bought all his clothes for him with the exception of shoes - those he had to try on. I used to have to remind him again and again to buy shoes when he needed them, sometimes for months, and when he finally agreed to go shopping for them, I would try to get him to buy three or four pair so that we wouldn't have to go through this process very often.

I had my own weaknesses and shortcomings, which Nariman endured with love and tolerance. Because of illnesses and deaths in my family, I sometimes stayed with them for extended periods. Nariman wouldn't say anything, and sometimes he would come and stay with me, but then he would gently prod me to come back to Ashiana. I realized later that he felt neglected when I took on too many responsibilities for my family or other Baba lovers. While the many deaths we had to face brought us closer to one another, there were also problems to face as we adjusted to the losses.

Despite our little difficulties, however, we had periods of great harmony in our marriage. After Nariman's business had become successful and he had more time, I looked forward to him coming home in the evening. We would have long talks, both of us enjoying the companionship that I feared we had lost in the early years of our marriage. Above all, we were good friends. Baba wanted to develop a selfless, unattached love between us, and true love always involves both pain and joy. Baba said that true love is sacrifice, and sacrifice in marriage means learning to want to please one's partner. The ego does not want to please the other, but rather to please itself, and selfishness makes us want to satisfy ourselves rather than consider the needs of others. Choosing another's happiness over our own does not come easily, so Nariman and I, like anyone else, had to make a real effort. Love is a partnership; if each partner remembers to think of the other, then neither will fear being taken advantage of. And Baba will not allow one person to take from another indefinitely. He will see to it that the one who is being spoiled eventually learns how to give also.

No marriage is easy, but the difficulties show us where our weaknesses are and challenge us to change, to choose to give, yield, be honest, and try to understand the other. If instead of

Gift of God

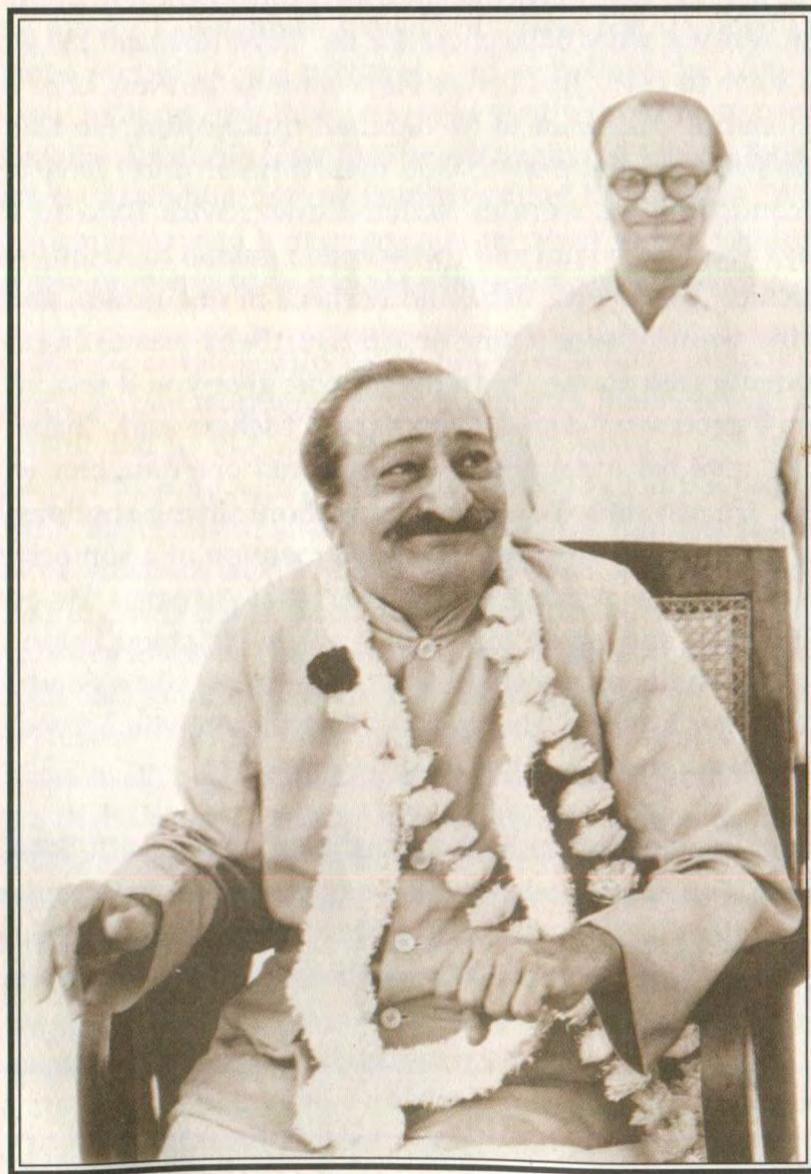
being demanding and critical, we ask Baba for His help in understanding how to love the way He wants us to, He will show us the way. I knew I had to discipline myself every day to make choices befitting a married woman. Despite the fact that I had not wanted to marry, believing the path of spirituality to lie outside of marriage, I obeyed Baba, and I have thanked Him again and again for giving me such a wonderful man as my husband.

Without our asking, Baba told Nariman and me on three separate occasions that He would give us a son. My mother had also told me that my horoscope indicated three children, but in the end that was not what Baba chose for us. Baba first said He would give us a son in 1949. Just before He went into the New Life, when He was calling Nariman to Meherabad quite often, He told Dr. Ghani to stand up and pray to God that Nariman and I have a son. The second time we were in Mahableshtar with Baba in 1952. One day I went with Him and the women mandali to Arthur's Seat for a picnic. I was with Baba and Mehera in one group, and the rest of the women were sitting separately. Baba was eating when He suddenly said to me, "Arnavaz, I will give you a son. I will give you a good son." I said, "Yes, Baba." Mehera said, "Baba, You must also give her a daughter. One son and one daughter would be nice." He just smiled and nodded without saying anything, but He had a twinkle in His eye. The third mention of a son occurred in 1956 when I was serving Baba breakfast at Ashiana. He got up from His chair and made me sit in it while He stood behind me and put His hands on my shoulders. "I will give you a good son," He said. After a pause, He repeated, "I will give you a good son, but I will take him away when he grows up."

Later, in 1963, when a few of us were sitting with Baba, He said to me, "Look after others. Be a mother to everyone, and keep giving to others." As I was leaving the room, Baba clapped and I turned. He said, "You are My mother; you are also Mehera's mother." When I heard these words, my mind became totally blank. I had no idea what Baba meant, but a couple of years earlier at Guruprasad He had held Nariman's hand and said, "I am your son." Only years later did I begin to understand the meaning of Baba's words. Just as children are everything to their parents, Baba and Mehera were everything to Nariman and me.

Gift of God

Despite Baba's statements that He would give us children, Nariman and I were happy that we did not have any. If there had been children for us to look after, then Baba, who was so practical and down to earth, would not have come to our apartment at short notice the way He often did. He would have thought about who would look after the children and where they would stay while He was there. Having no children, we were always ready for Baba's call, always prepared to have Him visit us in our home. I am so grateful to Baba for keeping us free, just for Him.



Baba and Nariman

Chapter Twenty-three

„You should look upon physical and mental suffering as gifts from God. They bring their own lessons of the futility of the passing and of the intrinsic worth of the Eternal.”

- Meher Baba

From the moment she smiled at me in Meherabad in February of 1938, Mehera held a special place in my heart. That moment was the beginning of our relationship, one that continued to grow deeper with the passing years. When I first met Mehera, she was extremely quiet, oblivious to everything around her, as she had eyes only for Baba. She was with Him nearly all the time, except for periods when He was away, and I remember her weeping when Baba would leave for His mast work. In those days Baba was very strict with Mehera, keeping her almost in seclusion, and she was not allowed even to utter a man's name. The women rmandali as well as visitors had orders never to mention a man's name in passing conversation, and at the time of His birthday in 1938 Baba had signs posted around Upper Meherabad reminding all who had been invited of this order. When they were travelling, Baba would have Mehera wear dark glasses; she would keep her eyes lowered, not looking at anyone. One woman walked in front of her, another behind her, and one on either side, and Baba usually did not allow anyone except Mani to touch her.

This earlier phase of Mehera's life in the ashram changed gradually as Baba brought her more into the world. Just before the Blue Bus tour started in 1938, He relaxed the restrictions He had placed on her, allowing her to read books and see movies in the privacy of the ashram. By the time she and the other women

Gift of God

mandali first came to Ashiana in 1947, Baba was permitting Mehera to go out more in public with even fewer restrictions, allowing her to eat in restaurants and see movies in theatres, and she accompanied the other women on special outings. Despite these new freedoms, however, Baba still imposed specific orders regarding Mehera's activities. When we went to a public cinema, for instance, we reserved all the seats in the back row and sat there so that nobody could accidentally touch her, and the social gatherings with Baba families that she attended included only women. Mehera, who had been so quiet in the early days, gradually became more communicative, especially after accompanying Baba in the New Life, although she could never have imagined the role she was to play after Baba dropped His body.

Mehera had done everything for Baba with regard to His personal grooming. She combed His hair, trimmed His nails, and looked after his clothing. When Baba washed His face, one of the other women held the wash basin while Mehera gave Baba the soap and poured water into His hands; then another would hand Mehera a towel to give to Him. I always enjoyed helping Mehera during these moments with Baba.

Once Mehera reminded me of something Baba had done on His last visit to Ashiana. Someone had given her a lovely mauve and pink print sari, and she wrapped it around Baba's shoulders, then stood back to admire Him. "Oh, Baba, You look so beautiful," she said. Baba suddenly pulled the sari from around Him and tossed it to me, saying, "This is for your birthday." From the expression on Mehera's face, I could see that she was very surprised. When she mentioned this incident years later, she said, "Oh, Arnavaz, Baba loved you so much! Do you remember that pink sari? Even though He knew how much I liked it, Baba gave it to you." She said these words with great love.

Whenever I was at Meherazad, Baba used to allow me to help Mehera tuck in the mosquito net on His bed before He went to sleep. One evening I entered the room to find Him sitting on the edge of the bed talking with Mehera. I stood beside her and Baba looked at me and said, "Mehera is your daughter." He then turned to Mehera and said, "Mehera, listen! You are Arnavaz's daughter."

Gift of God

Once again Baba's saying that I was Mehera's mother overwhelmed me and I could not even think about what He meant by these words. After a few minutes Mehera asked Baba, "What is the meaning of 'Arnavaz'?" I was surprised by Mehera's question, as I had never before known that my name had a meaning. Baba lovingly replied, "Gift of God."

Mehera had great affection for Nariman, and she paid particular attention to honouring his memory. Exactly a month after his death, Mehera and Mani arranged a special visit to Baba's Samadhi for the women. After we had taken darshan and spent time in the Samadhi, we went down the hill to Nariman's tomb. Dear Mehera placed a rose on his tomb and then read out these words she had written, praising his love for Baba:

*Jai Baba. Beloved Baba, Your dearly loved Nariman is living with You and is making You happy with his love for You. Nariman has served You wholeheartedly and loved You with all his heart. Dear Nariman was true to Your love for him and his love for You. He will forever love You and make You happy always. Beloved Baba, Your lovers who love You dearly as Nariman did will forever live in You, Beloved Baba. Nariman's soul is ever in peace and happiness to be near His dearly Beloved. He loved Beloved Baba. Avatar Meher Baba
Ki Jail*

I also found great comfort in the words Mehera wrote to me while I was in Bombay sorting through our personal effects at Ashiana before returning to Meherazad:

*Jai Baba
Meherazad
October 21, 1974*

My dearest Arnavaz:

How are you dear? I hope you are keeping well and are being brave in Beloved Baba's love and making Him and dear Nariman happy by taking up the threads

Gift of God

of life with Beloved Baba's help and entering into life's activities as though Nariman were with you.

It was by Baha's wish and His blessings that you and Nariman were married and unitedly lived for Beloved Baba to love and serve Him - the Ancient One - the God Man - these many years. You are very fortunate, for few couples have had such a chance to be so closely connected with Baba.

Now that Baba asks this of you, you must rise to the occasion as you have always done, and carry out His wishes both outwardly and inwardly.

Beloved Baba, the Ocean of Bliss and Infinite Compassion and Love, took on for us all so much suffering in His Human form. None of His close ones have been untouched by suffering in some way or another.

We went to Meherabad last Sunday to bow down in love at Beloved Baba's Samadhi. Later on at lower Meherabad we laid a jali [flowers stitched together to form a net] of jasmine flowers at dear Nariman's physical resting place - saying aloud Baba's Jai, and I told the few westerners who were with us that Beloved Baba had told Nariman that He (Baba) was his Son and I was Arnavaz's daughter.

On Nariman's birthday [according to the Zoroastrian calendar] a garland of flowers was offered at Beloved's Samadhi and one at dear Nariman's grave. Nagar has had more than sufficient rain and all the wells in lower Meherabad are filled to high level.

I just received your letter which came with your dear love, and I am happy to learn how much you are trying to make Baba happy by being brave and not worrying. Yes, it is good you keep yourself occupied with Baba's [photo] albums and household and other duties.

Gift of God

We are happy dear Rano is prolonging her stay in Bombay to be with you. Mani and the others say it is quite all right just now. Dear Alu is trying to get a replacement so that she can come and stay with you and later on maybe Tehmina [Alu's cousin] will come.

I remember you most often - most especially at breakfast time and our talks together. We are all looking forward to seeing you again return home to Meherazad when you wish and can conveniently come.

Dear Arnavaz, all your sisters send you much love. Also to dear Katie and Rano. My love to you always in Beloved Baba's sweet love,

Mehera

*Beloved Baba is infinite love.
He is infinite compassion.
He came for His love for us.
Love Him above everything
For He is worthy to be Loved.*

*He came to lift His babies
Out of jail.
Those who loved Him & love Him
Will live in Him forever.*

I thought about Mehera a great deal while in Bombay and one night dreamed that she was with me at Ashiana. Goher and I were in the apartment, and Mehera was on the back verandah. It was late at night and, thinking Mehera must have lost track of the time, I went out to call her to go to bed. We stood near the parapet, and I remember holding on to the hem of her blouse. There were no buildings around, only trees, and a very short distance away we could see Seclusion Hill at Meherazad. Touching the top of the hill was a very large star, ten times the size of all the others. I gazed in awe. Mehera said, "Look, Arnavaz, look at the left slope of the hill." But my gaze remained fixed on the shining star. Mehera repeated, firmly this time, "Why don't you look at the left slope?"

Gift of God

I immediately shifted my gaze and saw a figure with flowing hair, dressed in a white sadra. He was carrying an Aladdin shaped lantern, and the flame was perfectly round and very bright. As the figure moved toward the crest, I realized that it was Baba. As He walked from the hill, through the air, toward Mehera and me, Mehera began repeating "Avatar Meher Baba Ki Jai!" while I said Baba's name over and over again. Baba continued coming closer until He was about twenty feet from us. I awoke happy and exuberant, as though the experience had really happened.

When I returned from Bombay, I was happy and relieved to settle into the daily life of Meherazad. Years earlier Mani had suggested that since she had to leave for the Trust Office early in the morning and Goher had her work at the clinic, we should all have breakfast according to our own schedules. Since that time I



*Meheru, Mani, Mehera, Rano (partially hidden),
Arnavaz, Goher and Naja at Meherazad*

Gift of God

had made it a point always to wait for Mehera, who generally ate last; I kept tea ready for her, and breakfast became a time for intimate conversation. In the evenings she and I would often sit together and talk or walk in the garden, which flourished under her touch. Mehera, who loved nature, would point out the magnificence of the sky at sunset or a particularly beautiful bird. Sometimes we spoke of the past, of the precious time we had spent with Beloved Baba. She told me that during the day she was too busy to reflect on her life with Baba, but at night she remembered Him, reminiscing about what they had done and where they had gone. That was the only time she had to give wholly to Him. As the years passed, she stayed up later and later each night to spend time alone with her Beloved.

Every morning and evening we women gathered in Baba's bedroom to recite the prayers with Mehera, and we accompanied her to Baba's Samadhi every fortnight and on special occasions to take Baba's darshan and sing His arti. On 1st August, 1983, we were in Meherabad for arti, and everyone except Goher and me had taken darshan. As I knelt to put my head on the marble, a wasp flew out of the garlands we had just placed on Beloved Baba's tomb, stinging me on the forehead. It felt as if I had been stuck with a sharp, thick needle. Not knowing what had happened, I put my hand tightly over the spot to try to stop the pain, which was spreading all around my head, somehow managing to finish taking darshan. Goher, who had seen the wasp, started treating me as soon as I came out of the Samadhi, but I had a very difficult hour before we got back to Meherabad.

A few days later I had a dream in which Nariman was driving a big blue car. The seat to his left was empty. I was standing outside and knew the vacant seat was for me. Although I felt somehow that I was in the car, in the back seat, I also remained standing outside, watching Nariman drive. Just before I woke up, he said he wanted to take me to a new house. It wasn't long before the meaning of this dream became clear.

One week after being stung by the wasp I had a heart attack during the night. Goher couldn't find my pulse at first, and she

Gift of God

thought I was gone, although the attack turned out to be less serious than it had first appeared. After recovering from the initial trauma, I realized that the dream was Baba's way of telling me I would survive. Two weeks after that I began to have recurring attacks of angina. The injections I was given for pain made my whole body feel very relaxed, and after each one I had the sensation that Baba was pouring Himself into me. This feeling brought back something Baba said to me in 1959: "I am in your entire being." I continued having frequent angina attacks, and each time I was given an injection by Shelley Marrich, a young Western resident who was called from Meherabad to look after me, I would go into ecstasy and feel Baba strongly within me.

Soon after my heart attack Mehera and the rest of the women went again to Meherabad for Baba's darshan. At around noon, while they were in the Samadhi, I suddenly felt very sleepy. I closed my eyes, but instead of falling asleep, I became oblivious to my surroundings and had the feeling that I was present in the Samadhi. When my lunch arrived about an hour later, I got up to sit on the verandah. The feeling of being in the Samadhi was still with me, and while eating, I saw Baba's face in the leaves of the bougainvillea on the wall opposite me. That seemed to be the turning point in my illness; although I was weak for another few days, my energy slowly returned. Throughout the ordeal Mehera visited me daily; we would sit and talk and she was always very loving, often bringing me something to eat.

Along with angina I had frequent attacks of flu, colds, or digestive problems, so it took a long time for me to regain my strength, yet the whole experience was somehow beautiful. A year before my heart attack I had dreamt that a group was gathered for Baba's darshan. Baba was sitting on the ground with His legs stretched out. As I approached and bowed down, Beloved Baba put the sole of His foot on my heart, saying, "I want to change your heart." I touched His foot, held it in my hands, kissed it, and pressed it to my eyes. It was during this time that I had begun to feel as if there were no time for Baba in my day. After the death of Naja, who had been in charge of the kitchen at Meherazad, I had taken over her responsibilities. I was also working for hours every day with Baba's nephew Dara, who was recording the story of my

Gift of God

life with Baba, and I was exhausted. Two months before my heart attack I had said to Him in desperation, "Baba, I have no time for You." During my illness Baba gave me a beautiful time alone with Him. I was surprisingly relaxed and happy throughout, never experiencing a day of boredom.

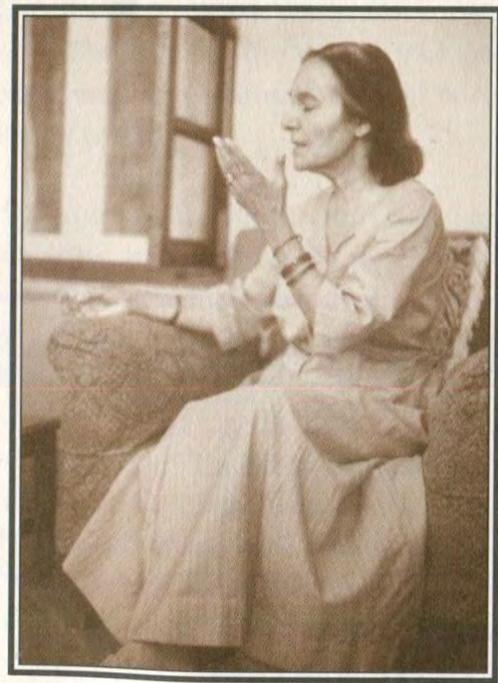
On 18th December, Mehera's birthday according to the Zoroastrian calendar that year, I went to Beloved Baba's bedroom for the first time since my illness, to say the prayers with Mehera and give her a Baba card and a present. I was still feeling weak the following Tuesday when I heard Mehera beginning the arti in Baba's room, so I stood before a photo of Baba in my room where I had been repeating the prayers in unison with the others during my illness. That day Mehera stopped in the middle of the arti to call me to join them in Baba's room. I was very touched that she did this for me. Mehera's loving attention throughout my illness was a source of great comfort and joy, and I have no words to express the tranquillity that being in her presence brought to me. The language of the heart is silent.

Chapter Twenty-four

*"Real living is dying for God.
... One must die to one's own self
to be able to live in all other
selves. One who dies for God
lives forever."*

- Meher Baba

When Baba was with us, Mehera was behind the scenes, but after He dropped His body, He brought her into the spotlight. She sat on the verandah of the main house and talked with the groups of Baba lovers who came on pilgrimage to Meherabad and Meherazad. In the beginning she used to feel sad, often crying while talking about Baba, and she was not able to look directly at the men. But as she gained more confidence and her grief diminished, she shone in her role, playing it with charm and grace, and she grew relatively happy as the years passed. She told wonderful stories, and it was a delight to watch her gestures and expressions and hear her laughter as she gave of herself untiringly to those who came from all over the world, filling them with her love for Baba. When she talked, expressing Baba's message of truth and love, all listened to her with rapt



Mehera on the verandah, Meherazad

Gift of God

attention, her presence so compelling that some would not want to leave her side. The little trinkets that she gave as gifts became priceless treasures. Though Mehera was not conscious of the importance of her presence to people, many who came to Meherazad were profoundly affected by her pure, divine love for Beloved Baba and her complete focus on Him.

The day before Mehera, Mani, Goher and Meheru were leaving to go to Poona for their summer vacation in April of 1989, I was experiencing another bout of angina, and Mehera came to sit with me on the small verandah. Something very strong and beautiful flowed from her to me that day - I will never forget it. Although the pilgrim season had just ended and Mehera was obviously tired, she was very relaxed. Despite repeated calls from the others to come arrange the flowers in Baba's room before arti, she remained with me for a full hour.

The women spent a restful three weeks in Poona, enjoying their normal range of activities - watching videos, taking walks in the old gardens where they used to go with Baba, visiting the Guruprasad memorial and the Perfect Master Babajan's tomb, and spending time with Baba's family and friends. When they returned to Meherazad at the end of April, however, I was shocked to see dear Mehera's condition. She had begun experiencing problems with her speech and coordination, and she found it increasingly difficult to remember the names of familiar people and objects. We had our usual morning tea and talk together, but she sometimes spilled the sugar while putting it in her tea or used the wrong word for something. Whenever I could not understand what she meant, I would just take Baba's name and answer anything that came to mind in response to her confused speech. It was difficult to believe that just two months earlier she had been able to perform a Navjote for Sarosh and Meherrukh's two daughters Gulrukh and Meher. Someone was with Mehera at all times, day and night, and a few residents tried to help her overcome her aphasia; her struggle to remember the names of simple, ordinary objects was heartbreaking. When Mehera used to tell Baba that she was getting forgetful, He would answer that it didn't matter what she forgot as long as she remembered Him. And even with all her difficulties during this time, Mehera could still say the prayers and sing the arti without missing a word.

Gift of God

Every evening I went to the main bungalow to say "Jai Baba" to Mehera. Once I arrived just as she was being taken to her room in a wheelchair. Her back was to me, and I decided that I would give her time to get settled for the night and return later, but she suddenly turned her head and said clearly, "Jai Baba."

Mehera's condition deteriorated so rapidly that Goher called Dr. Arvind Chopra from Poona to come examine her. He thought it best that she have a C.T. scan, so on Sunday, 14th May she was taken to Poona. Mehera calmly accepted the situation, as though Baba had drawn a veil over her consciousness so that she was not wholly aware of what was happening. The C.T. scan revealed a large, inoperable brain tumor. Ordinarily, a biopsy might have been indicated, but Goher, not wanting Mehera to have to endure unnecessary pain just for the sake of a complete diagnosis, said, "Leave her to Baba." Dr. Chopra agreed, and Mehera was brought back to Meherazad the same day.

On Monday afternoon I awoke from a nap, having dreamed of her. In the dream I was in a very big room. In the far right hand corner dear Mehera was asleep on a bed, and in the opposite corner I saw two beds joined together with rose pink transparent curtains draped all around them from top to bottom. The wind was moving the curtains gently in waves. When I saw all of this, I exclaimed, "Oh, Mehera is all alone and no one is there to look after her, to keep watch on the saline drip bottle." But there was no saline bottle, and dear Mehera was absolutely still, as though she was no longer in her body. I woke up still feeling the shock of seeing her like that; it was as though I had not really been asleep.

Because of the seriousness of her condition, Dr. Arvind Chopra came again from Poona to see Mehera. On Tuesday morning she greeted him cheerfully when he arrived, but that same evening she closed her eyes and we could not get her to open them. Her right hand and arm became so swollen due to the many bottles of saline drip and i.v. injections she was given that her three glass bangles and one gold one had to be broken off with a nail cutter. It was obvious that she would not be with us much longer, and although we all felt tremendous pain as we waited for the inevitable to happen, we left everything in Baba's hands, grateful

Gift of God

that she did not appear to be suffering. I felt somehow that she was no longer in this world, that she was somewhere between it and the next. Our last week with Mehera had a dreamlike quality to it, and Baba gave us the strength and courage to keep going.

Despite the efforts of Mani and the others to get Mehera to open her eyes, speaking to her of Baba and holding pictures of Him in front of her, she did not respond, and the end came very quickly. On Saturday morning we were sitting with Mehera, singing Baba's name. Mani was on her left, near her head, Goher was on her right, and I sat near her feet and held them. After half an hour her pulse began beating rapidly and her blood pressure fell, clear signs that she was leaving us. The men mandali were called and they stood quietly in the room. At 9:15 Mehera suddenly opened her eyes, and from the look in them we all knew that she was gazing on the glory of her Beloved Lord. Baba had left her with us for twenty years after He dropped His body, and despite our sorrow we tried to feel happy that Baba and Mehera were now at last united.

Mani and Goher washed dear Mehera's body, dressing her in a pink skirt and flowered blouse and wrapping a pink chiffon scarf around her head. In the evening she was taken first to Baba's bedroom and then to mandali hall, where an all-night vigil was held with singing and reminiscing. Mehera had a subtle smile on her face - radiant and serene, so sublime that no artist could ever have captured it. She looked astonishingly young and beautiful, very much the way she had looked when I first met her. As I was leaving mandali hall that night, I happened to look up at the moon peeking through the clouds. Stopped by its beauty, I felt a kind of expectation, as though I might see Beloved Baba's face, so I was searching. But instead I saw in a timeless moment the serene, lovely face of dear Mehera, gazing down on the garden like the Madonna. The following morning she was taken to Meherabad and her body was lowered into the grave just outside Baba's Samadhi, to remain eternally by the side of her Beloved.

Mehera's special position was clear to all of His most intimate lovers from the very beginning. Baba told us, "I have affection for everyone and everything. I love you all for yourselves, but I love Mehera for Myself. She is My beloved. She is My very breath,

Gift of God

without which I cannot live." He kept her pure, and because of her unblemished purity she was childlike and innocent. He said, "Mehera is illuminated, but she is veiled, so she sees everything from the human level." Mehera played the role of Baba's *Maha Maya* (perfection of creation). She represented His creation, His maya. She was to Baba what Sita was to Ram, Radha to Krishna, Mary to Jesus.

Mehera was the one chosen to be the beloved of the God-Man, Meher Baba, ordained to be the most blessed one in the whole universe. Her loving attention to detail reflected her desire to please Baba in every way: to create beauty around Him, to make Him comfortable, to see to His every need. She played her role perfectly, helping Baba, giving Him relief, and sustaining Him in His universal work. Baba said, "Mehera loves Me as I should be loved." Mehera's name will remain immortally linked with Avatar Meher Baba's, and songs of praise will be sung to her for thousands of years to come. Baba said time after time, "If you please Mehera, You please Me." We can please Mehera by asking her to help us love Baba as He should be loved and remembering the words of her last public message given in July of 1988.

When each of you tries one hundred percent to do as Baba wants, He is surely near you helping you. To do so is often not easy, but with Baba's help it is not impossible. Beloved Avatar Meher Baba's advent on earth as man is to help us on our spiritual journey. Know that He does help and guide us on the path to the Goal, which is to Himself. And by offering us His Daaman to hold, Beloved Baba is making the journey so much easier for us. So hold fast to Meher's Daaman with both hands and love Him more and more.

After Baba's beloved Mehera passed away, I felt a chasm within me which could not be filled, an ache nothing could relieve. Baba had given me great joy in allowing me to live with His darling Mehera, and without her, life simply lost its charm. I was surprised at the intensity of my feelings, as I had come through the deaths of most of the rest of my family with varying degrees of detachment. My father had died in 1967 of a heart attack, but he

Gift of God

had lived a good long life and while I missed him, I was resigned to his absence.

Then in 1980 my brother Dara, who was only forty-eight, had a heart attack, and I momentarily forgot myself. As I sat holding his hand at the hospital, I was shocked to notice how short his life line was. I said, "Baba, I haven't asked you for anything, not even to save Nariman, but please let Dara live." He had little money and his wife Freny and two children to support; their son Nozer was in college, but their daughter Mehera was only twelve years old. The moment the words were out of my mouth, however, I knew I had failed Baba. Knowing that what we ask for may bring greater suffering later on, I said, "Baba, forgive me. Let Your wish and will be done." Dara had another heart attack and died the following night, and even in her grief, Freny felt Baba's love and compassion. Ever since Dara's death, she has been totally His.

Six years later my brother Huma, who had been burdened with numerous and chronic health problems since childhood, had to undergo bypass surgery. Just a week after coming home from the hospital he had gone into a coma and spent forty-five days in intensive care before he died. And two months after Mehera's death my sister Nargis, who had been too ill to come for Mehera's entombment, came for Baba's darshan and died in Meherabad, leaving only Roda and me.

All these deaths I was able to accept, but my sorrow over losing Mehera was so intense that all I could do was retreat, keeping to myself, silent and withdrawn. I felt as though the tide of love in my heart had ebbed with no chance of it ever flowing in again. When Nariman and I were in Meherazad in 1967, Baba had told me that from then on I was to think only of Him, Nariman and Mehera. Now they were all gone, and at first I wept, feeling I had lost everything. With the loss of Mehera, Baba took me to the limits of my human endurance, but the beauty in this experience was that He wove a cocoon around me in which only He and I lived. Through all my pain and silent suffering, His love and compassion sustained me as He brought me to the understanding that He wanted me to be completely detached from everything and everyone. Baba made me realize that He is our only Real Friend;

Gift of God

He is the only One who truly understands every heart, and He helped and guided me to do what He wanted. Eventually I felt free of attachments, free to live only for Him.

Almost exactly two years after Mehera was reunited with Baba, I had a dream expressing this freedom. I was standing on a road, and I saw someone pointing at me and saying, "You have committed a murder." Very calmly I said, "No, I have not." My accuser said, "Yes you have. There is proof." The scene changed and I was sitting in the witness box of a courtroom. The judge declared, "You have committed a murder." Unaffected and poised, I replied, "No, I have not committed a murder." The judge argued, "You have. Your fingerprints are on the gun." I smiled and said, "I don't even know how to use a gun." The judge answered, "There is proof and you are sentenced to the electric chair." The scene changed again, and I was made to sit in the electric chair. Three executioners stood in front of me, ready for the order to switch on the current. Then, although I was still sitting in the electric chair, I realized that I could see what was happening behind me. Suddenly Beloved Baba appeared, dressed in a white sadra, His hair flowing. To His right was gentle Lord Jesus, a maroon shawl over His shoulder. Both of Them stood twelve feet tall, and the room was surcharged with the majesty of Their Presence. The three executioners were so shocked that they raced out of the room, shouting loudly, "It's a miracle! It's a miracle! She's innocent." I was half conscious, dazed by the unearthly beauty of Beloved Baba and Jesus. Two men helped me gently from the electric chair and led me out of the room and into an open passage to take me to a car that was waiting for me. At the end of the passage was a gate with a crowd of people gathered outside it. As I walked feebly toward the gate, I repeatedly said, "Please see that nobody touches my feet." (It is Baba's order not to allow anyone to pay homage to another by touching the feet.) I woke up with a feeling of weightlessness and ecstasy, holding onto the bed.

This dream seemed to represent the culmination of my life, with all the residue of my attachments taken away. As I look back at the varied experiences I have been through in my relationship with Beloved Baba, I realize how He freed me by giving me the courage and strength necessary to live a normal life in the world,

Gift of God

gradually helping me to understand the true meaning of renunciation, which takes place within. When I first met Baba, I was a young girl completely wrapped up in a world of school and family; over the years He brought me to a state of detachment that keeps me poised, trusting in Him completely, no matter how painful or frightening the circumstances, knowing He will take care of everything. The time came to let go of Ashiana, which I had maintained all these years because it held such beautiful memories of the time Nariman and I spent there with Beloved Baba and Mehera. After settling the lease, I gave away the entire contents of the apartment, along with most of my personal possessions, to our family, who would cherish them because of their association with Baba. This was the third stage of the vision that Baba had given me before Nariman and I were married, the life of renunciation that He had promised me after I had played out my role for Him in the world. I felt free.

Chapter Twenty-five

"I am the Highest of the High and want you to love Me not for any spiritual or material gain, nor for the impending breaking of My Silence or My Manifestation, but I want you to love Me for Myself, as being God in human form."

- Meher Baba

During the span of His physical Presence on earth, those close to the God-Man struggled to obey Him with total surrender under all circumstances. Each one of us was expected to carry out the duties assigned by Beloved Baba diligently and carefully without missing any detail, however insignificant it might seem. Baba gave responsibilities according to the capacity of each person. Whether one was educated or uneducated, lived in the ashram or in the world, did not matter in the least. We all had our own roles to play, ordained by God.

After Beloved Baba dropped His body, we had to continue to carry out our duties without His physical direction and loving company. As Baba's lovers began coming from every corner of the world for darshan at His Samadhi, we met many who felt Baba's love but had not seen Him in His physical form, and they wanted to know about Him as God-Man. We were all called upon to give our time and energy to relating our experiences with Baba, explaining how He had worked with us in minute detail, and showing how His love and compassion had sustained us through intense suffering. In this way we still continue to share Baba's message of love and truth.

Gift of God

These new lovers helped me to overcome the shock and pain of losing Baba's physical Presence. It was very difficult talking to them in the beginning. I felt so empty; nothing would come out of me. I wondered how I could have spent my whole life with my Beloved God and now be unable to think of anything to say. But Baba gently pushed me more and more into my role, until talking about Him became for me a constant meditation. Baba had given so much to us over the years; it was as if He were telling us that now it was our turn to give to others for Him.

For twenty-five years now Baba has sent young people to all of us with their questions about marriage, sex, work, family relationships, and living in the world while trying to obey Baba and please Him. In responding to them, I have reflected on my life with Baba and tried to do what He asked of me at Guruprasad when He said, "Look after others. Be a mother to everyone, and keep giving to others." I knew that it was His wish that I give to others the love and understanding which He had given me throughout my life. Like a mother, I could pass on my understanding of how to serve God through loving and serving others. Those with whom I spoke could then hand down this understanding to their own children. I could see that all the major lessons Baba had taken me through contained messages for those who came to me. Obedience and faith had been the essential beginning for me, and then love had come. But these young ones came with love, and now they had to learn obedience and surrender .

Year after year I have witnessed the suffering of Baba's dear young ones as they discuss with me the many painful situations they struggle with. I can, from my own experience, encourage them to hold tight to Baba, assuring them that their pain is not the result of their having failed to obey Baba, but that it is a necessary part of growing closer to Him. Baba said of pain, "It is My grace. This is My real mercy which descends on a very, very select few. These are My *friends*. These are My *lovers* to whom I give the gift of sorrow and distress. It is a gift much greater than gold - of incalculable value - and not given to all. This gift is only for My beloved children.... Remember that I love most those whose hearts I pierce and who, though their hearts are wounded, stay with Me...."

Gift of God

To explain the necessity of the suffering that one goes through on the path to God, Baba once told us the story of the sugar cane. It is a long, difficult and messy process to make pure, sweet sugar from the raw cane. First it is cut from the stalk and then squeezed through a press. The juice that is extracted is put into a huge cauldron and boiled for a long time. While it is boiling, a thick, dark scum rises to the top of the cauldron, and an awful smell comes from the boiling juice. But after the whole process is finished, the end result is a sweet, clear golden liquid.

Sometimes people come to me saying that they love Baba, yet all they are feeling is pain, frustration and confusion, and they don't know what to do. I tell them to ask Baba to give them the strength to go through whatever they need to and to help them resign to His will and trust in Him completely. Until we learn to surrender to Baba, it is very difficult to cope with the despair that comes from not being able to accept His will over our own, and the result may be anger toward Baba. But our anger does not affect Him - it only hurts us. When I see someone who is upset with Baba, I tell that person to repeat over and over, "Baba, I am angry with you, and I am sorry. Please forgive me and help me to resign to Your wish and will." Even if one does not really mean these words at first, repeating them will gradually help the anger to go.

Other people have come to me angry about the actions of another person, and I have reminded them of what Baba told us: "Don't waste your life in judging others." One day when some of the men mandali and I were sitting with Him at Ashiana, Baba suddenly asked, "What is 'good' and what is 'bad'?" He continued, "There was a thief who used to steal and therefore he was pointed out as being bad. One day the thief went to a house to rob it, but there he found a woman in great pain, just about to give birth to a child. She was all alone, so instead of robbing her house, the thief helped her to deliver the baby and made her comfortable. Then he went out to steal food and clothing for the woman. He stayed with her until he knew that she was all right. He then went on his way and continued to steal from others." Baba paused to give us an inquiring look, then said, "Well, now what do you think of this man? Is he bad or is he good? You could call him bad because he is a thief, but then he did a good turn and you could call him good.

Gift of God

So there is nothing like 'good' or 'bad'. But there are things I don't like... lust, greed, and anger, and anger is the worst...."

Living the life Baba has ordained for each of us means learning to carry out our responsibilities selflessly. We must learn to live in the world but not be of it; all that matters is total dedication to God. Baba said, "Be happy in whatever situation you find yourself in because it is I who have placed you there." He wants us to face, accept, and deal with whatever circumstances we encounter. What He asks of us is not easy, but He encourages us, saying, "Do what you have to do, try your best, and leave the results to Me." When we are able to leave the results to Baba, we are beginning to develop detachment. Baba slowly brings about this detachment through our experiences, while we are doing all that has to be done in life; what we need to do is to keep seeking to please Him. Baba said, "Let my wish and will be done in everything." Detachment comes through pain, grief, anguish, frustration, and dejection, as these experiences gradually break down the strong ties of maya. And it is with detachment that we discover real Love. Beloved Baba sustains us through the difficulties of our journey, bringing us ultimately to the realization that nothing is real but Love for God.

Gift of God

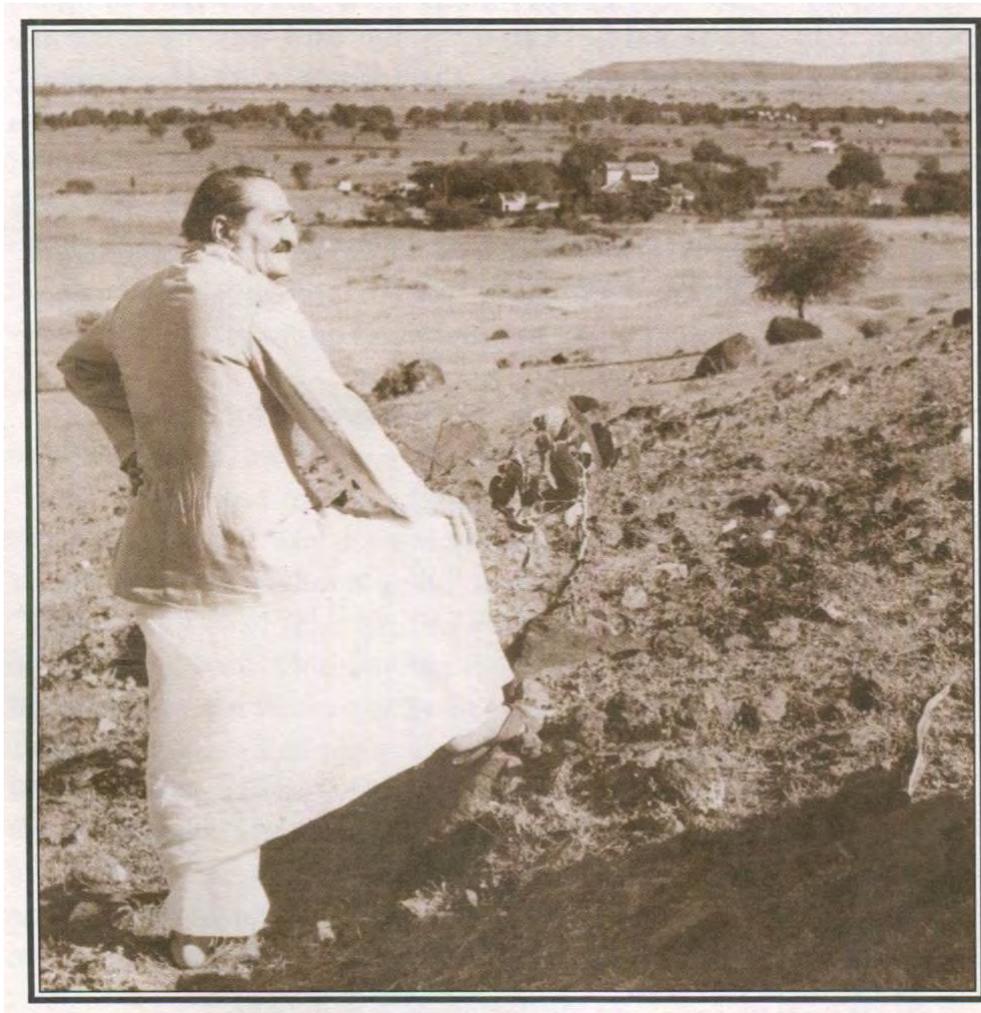
For the occasion of His seventy-fifth birthday, less than a month after He dropped His body, Baba left the following message for His lovers:

To love Me for what I may give you is not loving Me at all.

To sacrifice anything in My cause to gain something for yourself is like a blind man sacrificing his eyes for sight.

I am the Divine Beloved worthy of being Loved because I am Love.

He who loves Me because of this will be blessed with unlimited sight and will see Me as I am.



Baba on Seclusion Hill, Meherazad in background

Gift of God

I am never born, I never die.

*At every moment I take birth and undergo
death.*

*Although I am present everywhere eternally in
my formless infinite state, from time to
time I take form, and the taking of the
form and the leaving it is termed my
physical birth and death.*

*In this sense, I am born and I die when my
universal work is finished.*

*When I drop my body, I will remain in all who
love me.*

I can never die.

Love me, obey me, and you will find me.

- Avatar Meher Baba

Acknowledgements

It is Beloved Baba's Love and Compassion which gave me His dear ones Deborah Mann Smith and Nancy Wall to help me with *Gift of God*. They lovingly devoted their time and worked diligently and tirelessly with me both here in Meherazad and from the U.S.A. to help me organize my memoirs, Beloved Baba's signed letters, and those of His beloved Mehera. After assisting me in writing the manuscript, they completed the arduous task of editing and re-editing for final publication. Their personal contributions were invaluable, and their dedication to keeping the focus on Beloved Baba allowed the essence of His Love to shine through each chapter.

I wish to acknowledge with gratitude the following people who also made important contributions to the publication of this book:

To Dara Irani, Baba's nephew, who over several months in 1982 spent patient hours with me recording my story on audio tapes which served as the foundation for this book.

To Evie Lindemann, who had these tapes transcribed in the United States and then later spent weeks working with me in India, editing and retyping the transcriptions and inserting additional stories.

To Meherrukh Mistry, my niece, who over several months of working with me retyped the entire manuscript, making corrections and additions where necessary.

To Shirla and Jerry Edwards, who entered the manuscript on computer.

To Sheryl and Rick Chapman, who contributed their time and numerous archival supplies over many years to preserve the articles, documents and precious signed letters of Beloved Baba and His beloved Mehera which are an integral part of my book.

Gift of God

To Daniel Sparks, who assisted Deborah and Nancy with editing and proofreading.

To Lawrence Reiter and Meelan Studios for photographs.

To Zarin Mavalwalla, who gave me her valuable time to make the final corrections on the manuscript.

To Shelley Marrich, who offered editorial assistance and, most importantly, has lovingly looked after my health for many years.

To Paul Comar for his continued love and support.

To Naosherwan Anzar for his longterm friendship and dedicated work in bringing material about Meher Baba into print.

Most of all I wish to express my unbounded gratitude to Beloved Meher Baba, whose unfailing love is the only *real* gift of God.

Arnavaz N. Dadachanji

GLOSSARY

agent, Baba's - special incarnate souls who help Baba with His work and are known only to Him

Ahuramazda - Almighty God (Zoroastrian)

arti - a devotional song or prayer with a refrain or theme which expresses the yearning for the offering of oneself to the One worshipped; the performance of devotional songs or prayers.

ashram - a simple, humble retreat; the abode of a spiritual teacher.

Avatar - literally, "descent of God"; the term refers to the appearance of God in human form, which constitutes The Advent.

bhajan - a devotional song sung in India in praise of God.

Bujawe Nar Arti - arti composed by Avatar Meher Baba in Gujarati.

carrom - a board game commonly played in India.

daaman - literally, "the hem of a garment"; the meaning is derived from the idea of a child holding on to the *daaman* of its mother's skirt for safety and security; holding onto the *daaman* with regard to Meher Baba means obeying Him completely.

darshan - literally, "sight," refers to a sight of the Master; it also refers to the act of seeing, folding of hands in adoration of or bowing at the feet of one's Master to express devotion to the one worshipped.

dharmshala - a rest house for travellers

dhuni - a fire, usually in a small pit, which symbolizes the purifying inner fire of Divine Love; Meher Baba lighted a *dhuni* at a particular spot at Lower Meherabad on a number of occasions, and He instructed one of His close disciples to ensure that this *dhuni* be lighted on the twelfth of every month.

Diwali - Hindu Festival of Lights

Faqir - one who chooses a life of poverty in devotion to God; an itinerant monk.

ghazal - a poetic composition, especially in Persian or Urdu, best exemplified by the poetry of the Persian Perfect Master Hafiz.

Gujarati - the language spoken in Gujarat State.

Gift of God

guru - a teacher; generally referred to as a spiritual master.

jai; ki jai - short for *jaya*, which literally means "victory"; it is a common form of greeting in India when followed by one of the Names of a Divine Incarnation, such as "*Jai Ram*" or *Jai Baba*."

kusti - a flat, handwoven woollen string which is tied around the waist of the *sadra* at a *Navjote*.

lakh - 100,000 (Hindi)

mast - pronounced *must*; a word Meher Baba used to designate a God-intoxicated soul on the spiritual path.

maya - illusion; the shadow of God. Adj. form *mayavic*.

Meher Theatre - theatre in Nasik, also known as the Circle Cinema.

Navjote - confirmation ceremony for Zoroastrian children, during which they are first given a *sadra* and *kusti* to wear.

Parvardigar Prayer - prayer given by Meher Baba.

Perfect Master - a God-Realized soul who retains God-consciousness and creation-consciousness simultaneously, and who works in creation to help other souls toward the Realization of God.

prasad - a gift of love from the Master to a seeker, usually edible but not necessarily so.

Prayer of Repentance - prayer given by Meher Baba.

qawwali - a type of spiritual song based on a verse from the Koran or a mystic poem and sung to spontaneously improvised music.

Quit India Movement - Indian Nationalist movement organized to end British rule and attain self-government.

Radha - the beloved of Lord Krishna.

Rahuri Cabin - Baba's cabin at the Rahuri *mast ashram* of 1936-38; it was moved to Meherabad when the *ashram* was closed.

Sadguru - see Perfect Master.

sadra - a thin muslin shirt traditionally worn by Zoroastrians; Meher Baba adapted the *sadra* into an ankle-length garment which He regularly wore.

Gift of God

sahavas - a gathering held by the Master so that His devotees may enjoy His company.

samadhi - meditative trance; absorption; union; it also refers to the tomb-shrine of a spiritual master.

sanskaras - impressions; accumulated imprints of past experiences, which determine one's desires and actions.

sanyasi (masc.); *sanyasin* (fem.) - one who has renounced the world.

ses - a big silver tray holding a *soparo* (a cone-shaped object filled with sugar), a *gulabas* (a decanter holding rose water) and a *pighani* (a small container of red paste, called *kunku*). These three pieces are arranged on the tray along with a flower garland, a coconut, and a few grains of raw rice.

Sita - the beloved of Lord Rama.

Silence Day - the anniversary of the day Avatar Meher Baba began His forty-four year silence, July 10, 1925; Baba's lovers keep silence on this day each year.

Tower of Silence - a circular tower used by Zoroastrians for the disposal of their dead.

walla - used as a suffix to indicate one's trade or role. Literally means "man."

work, Baba's - No one knows exactly what this work is, but it is accomplished during the Advent of the Avatar.

yogi - a soul who is travelling the spiritual path.

Zoroaster - one of the earliest known of the Avatars.

Meher Baba captured the heart» of all my family when I was only eight years old. From the first moment we saw His beautiful form, we were spontaneously drawn to Him, and He gradually deepened our faith and developed our understanding of His ways. My Life with Baba shows clearly how He draws to Himself His chosen ones, who knowingly and even unknowingly yearn to be with him.

Preface, Gift Of God

Register of Editorial Alterations

Page ix, para 2, line 2, aescetic changed to ascetic
Page 12, para 3, line 5, poltice changed to poultice
Page 27, para 2, line 5, despondant changed to despondent
Page 31, para 2, line 7, delerious changed to delirious
Page 55, para 1, line 3, farenheit changed to fahrenheit
Page 62, para 2, line 11, Although changed to Although
Page 76, para 3, line 2, Whenever changed to Whenever
Page 102, para 4, line 2, engagment changed to engagement
Page 216, para 1, line 7, accidently changed to accidentally