

# Spread My Love

By Charmian Knowles

Text used with kind permission of Sufism Reoriented

An Avatar Meher Baba Trust eBook Copyright © Avatar Meher Baba Perpetual Public  
Charitable Trust 2023

## Source: Spread My Love

Copyright © 2004 by Sufism Reoriented

All rights reserved.

All quotes of Meher Baba are the copyright of Avatar Meher Baba Perpetual Public  
Charitable Trust. Used by permission.

ISBN 0-915828-17-0

Printed in the United States of America

Paris Printing, Novato, California

Sufism Reoriented

1300 Boulevard Way Walnut Creek, CA 94595

## 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](mailto: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.

# *Spread My Love*



Charmian Knowles

# *Spread My Love*

– Charmian Knowles –

Sufism Reoriented  
Walnut Creek, California

Copyright © 2004 by Sufism Reoriented  
All rights reserved.

All quotes of Meher Baba are the copyright of  
Avatar Meher Baba Perpetual Public Charitable Trust.  
Used by permission.

ISBN 0-915828-17-0

Printed in the United States of America  
Paris Printing, Novato, California

Sufism Reoriented  
1300 Boulevard Way  
Walnut Creek, CA 94595

## *Acknowledgments*

Charmian Knowles passed away on February 28, 2003. She had prepared the basic manuscript with the collaboration of her husband, Duncan Knowles, prior to her passing. Duncan has worked tirelessly on the final development of the manuscript, offering invaluable comments and suggestions and ensuring a reliable, factual base for the book.

Thanks go to many who helped put the raw material together into a form from which a manuscript could be prepared. This work included typing, scanning, and organizing Charmian's many talks, transcripts and letters and Murshida Duce's daily diaries. They are: Barbara Andersen Reif, Jeanne Kassof, Margie Obendorf, Thea Montandon, Evelyn Shulakoff, Jeanette Segal, Barbara Snow, George Snow, and Rebecca Webb.

Jeanne Kassof is owed a special debt of gratitude for excellent historical research.

Thanks to Meg Mayer and Mary Knowles, for gathering the photos and to Jim Kirkpatrick and Cherie Plumlee for processing them.

Special thanks go to Judith Nielsen Crocker, who edited the manuscript compiled from voluminous notes, letters, articles, and talks spanning many years, ensuring narrative continuity. Judith also researched and provided references to major world events concurrent with the events described in this book. By means of these references, the reader is continually reminded that when the Avatar works with small groups, he affects not only the group and its individual members, He is simultaneously working on all planes and is impacting the entire world.

What is gratifying in following this outline of world events is to note how rapidly advances have occurred all around the globe, emerging out of the cauldron of God's world play. When we consider alone the status of women, children, racial minorities, and the disabled in America and abroad, and the proliferation of democratic forms of government around the world, the changes during the last fifty years are dizzying. This confirms our understanding that meaningful life processes are accelerated in an Avataric Age. We daresay one has already

begun to see the foundations emerging for what Meher Baba called the New Humanity.

There are a few people whose names may not appear in this book but who have been important in Charmian's life or whose help has been exceptional in raising her family, particularly at her home that came to be known as "Tice Valley." She wanted to acknowledge and thank them: Selma Hassen and the Al-Faqih family, Bill and Karin Bodman, Kathy Carroll, Rich Carroll, Dick Clark, Anna and Bill Cook, Connie Cushing, Carol Leigh Duce, Bob Emrich, Ellen and Michael Evans, Aneece Hassen and the Hassen family, Laurel Keeley, Ruth Mann, Caryl Morton Marks, Meg Mayer, Dr. Tighe O'Hanrahan, Ruth Sobel, and Karen and Pete Wells. Her sons, Mark and Michael, and daughter, Mary, appear in the book, but she also extends her loving thanks to others in her immediate family who made her life so much happier:

Stacey, Doug, Alex and Kate Ahrens, Barbara and Matthew Corrinet, Jennifer Corrinet, and Ron Duce.

## *Introduction*

My mother, Ivy Oneita Duce, said that when she met Murshida Martin, she felt she had come home. Sufism had existed over so many endless ages, she knew it had to hold something that was eternal. Being a musician, Mother wanted to study something that would always have new things for her to learn, as music does.

The spiritual message called Sufism goes back to the anteriority of time. It is the unifying essence at the heart of all great religions. It is one of the ageless paths of inner training to awaken and express divinity in everyday life. Though Sufism has had different names at different times, it is always attracted to the light of the Avatar, or Christ, the fresh manifestation of God in human form who comes to earth every seven to fourteen hundred years to clean up the world and give it a spiritual push. In other ages, Sufis have celebrated his coming as Zoroaster, Ram, Krishna, Buddha, Jesus, and Mohammed. The Egyptian mystics, the Magi, and the Hebrew Essenes all were Sufis. The word Sufism simply means wisdom. This wisdom teaches nothing less than the transformation of our own lower nature. To reveal our higher self, we reincarnate many, many times, learning every lesson the world has to offer, even when suffering is needed to learn it.

Our long struggle is filled with pitfalls. Yet these pitfalls can be avoided with the guidance of a living, illumined Teacher, one who has mastered his own lower nature and so can help others do the same. In Sufism, this master is called a *Murshid* (or *Murshida*). The Murshid's role emerges from the love of his students. He strengthens their virtues and helps them overcome weaknesses in the service of God's higher principles of love, harmony, beauty, and the unity of life. Such a Murshid was Hazrat Inayat Khan, who brought Sufism from India to America in 1910. The Murshid knows the destiny of each of his students, and only he can recognize and appoint his successor. Before he passed away in 1927, Inayat Khan placed the Sufi order in the hands of his first American disciple, Murshida Rabia Martin.



When she appointed my mother as her successor, Murshida Martin had already identified a luminous Indian figure named Meher Baba (1894-1969) as the long-awaited Avatar of this Age. After Murshida Martin died, my mother decided to go to Baba's ashram in India to surrender her life to him and lay the Sufi order at his feet. He accepted responsibility for the order and confirmed my mother's role as Murshida, or spiritual head of the order. Later Meher Baba officially "reoriented" Sufism to meet the demands of modern America and wrote a charter establishing Sufism Reoriented. Thus was born a real spiritual school in America, directly under Baba's guidance.

During his advent, Meher Baba traveled throughout the world, visiting the United States three times in the 1930s and three times in the 1950s. I had the privilege of traveling with Baba's entourage on his visits in the 1950s, often serving as his chauffeur. In 1952, the same year he laid new foundations for Sufism, he established a spiritual retreat center in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. Then, while traveling across the United States, he shed his blood on American soil in a long-foretold automobile accident near Prague, Oklahoma. Baba said the accident was God's will and would greatly benefit America and the whole world. Mother and I were called to Baba's side immediately after the accident. Dr. Burleson, who attended Meher Baba in the hospital, wrote to Baba: "From you and your party we have seen a demonstration of most of the teachings of Christ. Many Americans preach these things, but we have never observed so close an application of them. The profound devotion to you which is demonstrated by all of your party convinces us that you deserve all of it. Such devotion cannot be forced; it can only be obtained by love; and to have that demonstrated affection from so many wonderful people is almost unbelievable."

Meher Baba was my Master for more than fifty years. I was with him for twenty-one years while he was on earth, spending one hundred days in his physical company. This is that story.

Charmian Knowles

## *Across the Threshold*

Meher Baba said to reach God we travel for eons on a steep path full of potholes and torn by racing rivers. But the journey I remember was a bumpy car ride across the wheat and sugarcane fields of India's Deccan plains.

There were four of us in the car that morning in January 1948: a chauffeur; our Indian escort, Meherjee Karkaria; my mother, Ivy O. Duce; and me. My mother was really two people in those days. The world saw a traditional housewife and mother, well educated and socially refined, an asset to her oil-executive husband. The other woman, known to only a few, was a lifelong spiritual seeker and a newly appointed teacher, or Murshida, of a Sufi order. As for me, I was an eighteen-year-old coed poised on the unstable bridge between adolescence and adulthood, weary from the travel behind us and wary of the trip ahead.

It was not a tourist's whim, this jaunt to India. We had traveled eight thousand miles simply to meet one man, a man who some said was God Himself. My mother wanted to find out if it was true. I suspected it wouldn't be. And Meherjee already knew.

For most of my childhood, I had followed my mother's search for the Truth with a dutiful and polite detachment. Her study of astrology and numerology, her readings of Theosophical and Vedantic literature, and her consultations with psychics had flavored our lives for many years. I was curious about the horoscopes, intrigued by reincarnation, and interested in, but not impressed with, the various teachers, gurus, and occultists who popped in and out of our unorthodox lives - until Murshida Martin, that is. In this phenomenal woman, who had been given the mantle of Sufi teacher from her Master, Inayat Khan, I finally saw a glimmer of the wisdom and magic my mother had so desperately sought. Mother began studying with Murshida in 1941, and I enthusiastically joined her.

In Murshida I felt I had finally met someone who had real stature – both intellectual and spiritual. She was petite in size, but to me she was

a giant of a woman; she was noble, self-effacing, compassionate, and keenly insightful. She initiated me as a Sufi when I was only fifteen years old. I can't imagine what inspired her to take a wet-behind-the-ears teenager like myself, but she was certainly a most charitable woman. I began my weekly Sufi classes in earnest, and they became the most vital part of my life. Every week I traveled back and forth across the Bay Bridge from my home in Berkeley to Murshida's house in San Francisco, where I received my lessons. I wouldn't have missed a lesson if I'd had to crawl to it, and some days that's exactly what it felt like. But once I arrived, I was renewed both physically and mentally.

I was a somewhat stubborn teenager, lacking in self-confidence. Murshida was always most gentle with my vagaries. Still, when I displeased her, she had a way of drawing her diminutive self up until she looked at least ten feet tall. It is the way with spiritual teachers, I later found. They can seem small or towering, young or ancient, joyous or careworn from one moment to the next.

After a while, Murshida Martin went to New York for a prolonged stay, but she wouldn't tell us the purpose of her trip. Later we discovered she was visiting people who had met a great master in India and were convinced he was a true Perfect Master, a God-incarnate being. His name, she told Mother and me, was Meher Baba. And now our Murshida too was convinced of his divinity.

Murshida Martin began to make plans to visit India and meet Baba, but soon she became gravely ill. In June 1947, with tears streaming down her face, she appointed Mother a Murshida of the Sufi order. "At last, a Murshida; at last, a Murshida," she said. In July she appointed Mother as her successor. In August Murshida Martin passed away. Mother felt the Sufi teachings were so beautiful and so true she couldn't let them die. She also knew that a real Sufi school required a living, illumined Murshid. Since she didn't feel that she was illumined, she resolved that now she must try to see Meher Baba and perhaps find in him a true Master to take over the order. If this Baba was what people said he was ...

Now, four months later, as we drove our way through teeming villages and undulating fields, I considered the likelihood of this. He had certainly welcomed our visit - a telegram made that much clear. And already it seemed as if miracles had occurred to deliver us there. My father's opposition and our travel difficulties had all been swept aside by serendipitous events we couldn't have arranged ourselves. Still, I resisted. We had just come from Arabia, where an attractive young man had been courting me. It was all very romantic, and now I couldn't quite see why I should go running off to India to see some swami or fakir or whatever this Meher Baba might be. Nevertheless, I was here,

Mother was here, and the boy from Arabia wasn't. There was nothing to do but go forward and see if I could stand between my mother and disaster.

My mother and I were joining a long mystical tradition that day. For thousands of years, travelers from the most powerful countries on earth have come to India in search of spiritual wisdom. Here was the birthplace of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism, and an important center of Zoroastrianism, one of the world's oldest surviving religions. Here too was the world's second-largest population of Muslims. In India one's mind cannot help but turn to God. The land is a kaleidoscope of temples, shrines, festivals, candlelit processions, garland-clad sadhus, and painted ascetics. Scholars like to say that every metaphysical thought that ever was or will be has already been given birth in India. It's also said that India has been blessed with more masters than any country in the world. When Alexander the Great returned from the Punjab, his most valued treasure wasn't gold, silks, or spices, but his guru, the yogi Kalyana.

The Deccan Plateau, toward which Meherjee guided us, is the most ancient and stable land surface in India and one of the world's oldest landmasses. Lodged in its rich volcanic soils and lava-covered plateaus are rocks dating back five hundred million years. The cities of the Deccan mirror the rise and fall of Hindu and Muslim kingdoms and dynasties, some of which date back twenty-four centuries. It had once been the epicenter of the great Maratha Empire that under the rule of Shivaji defied the Mughals and unified central India. One of the greatest heroes in Indian history, Shivaji was both a fierce and ingenious warrior and a man of lofty morals. The anecdotes about him border on the mythical. It's said he captured a fort by training lizards to tow ropes up its steep cliffside for his men to climb. It's said he escaped his enemies once by hiding in a basket of fruit. And it's said he disemboweled a treacherous foe with golden tiger claws concealed under his robe.

Shivaji was born on the Deccan and raised in the town of Pune (formerly Poona), the same town in which Meher Baba was born. Later I discovered an even deeper connection. Baba said an Avatar takes a birth of lesser importance between his avataric incarnations. And his last one had been as the great unifier, Shivaji.

Hundreds of shrines of all faiths, almost as old as the religions themselves, speckle the roadways and hillsides of the Deccan. Their exquisite artistry is known worldwide. A little northeast of where we traveled were the world famous Buddhist, Hindu, and Jain caves of Ellora, with their ornate carvings in the volcanic stone that rises above the plateau. The Buddhist caves at Ajanta, which once served as monasteries, offer

some of the oldest surviving Indian paintings, dating back to the second century BC. The holy men who inhabited the caves left a timeless record in stone of their visions of God and the path to His door.

Our thoughts, however, turned not to holy men of the past but the present. Our destination was Meher Baba's ashram, Meherazad, located near the small village of Pimpalgaon. Pimpalgaon and the larger, more famous city to the southwest, Pune, were located in what was then the state of Bombay. Later the southern part of that state was partitioned off, and Pune, Pimpalgaon, and Baba's ashram all became part of the new Maharashtra state, the geographical center of the Indian continent.

The vast and rugged Maharashtra has always played an important role in India's political history. The country's national consciousness was born in the cities of Pune and Mumbai (formerly Bombay), home of the Indian National Congress. It was here that future leaders worked to raise the status of Indians and free them from British rule. Gandhi established his headquarters in Maharashtra during the long struggle for independence, a battle he fought for two years from a prison cell in Pune. Indians call Maharashtra "the state of saints, sages, reformists, and nation builders."

I was only dimly aware of the epic past that echoed in the countryside we passed. The more apparent India was a moving mural of horse-drawn tongas, stray cows and dogs, bright-toed women balancing pots on their heads, pitifully deformed beggars with hands outstretched for *bakshish*, and villagers chomping *paan* in the shade of large palm fronds. Framed by the car window, these images blinked by for miles as we rolled closer and closer to Pimpalgaon. It was midafternoon when we approached the ashram.

In a sense, this wasn't my first meeting with Baba. Two years before, my mother and I had followed in Murshida Martin's footsteps and visited some of his disciples in New York. It was these disciples who encouraged Mother to seek an audience with Baba. This remarkable group of people included three respectable upper-class women, who seemed most unlikely to take up with an Eastern guru. They were Norina Matchabelli, Countess Nadine Tolstoy, and Elizabeth Patterson. Norina had been the wife of Prince Matchabelli when he founded his successful perfume company, but she was also a star in her own right. In the 1920s she had played the Madonna in a stage production of *The Miracle* that captivated audiences in both Europe and America. Nadine was the daughter-in-law of Leo Tolstoy, author of *War and Peace* and a man who was haunted from childhood by his desire to know God and live a divine life. Elizabeth was the daughter of a wealthy American family and had been very

successful in her own businesses. They were all distinguished women of enormous character. Yet none of this impressed me. What did impress me was their united, unquestioning devotion to Meher Baba.

Both Norina and Elizabeth had been followers of Baba for many years. They lived together in New York. Mother and I visited them for an afternoon, and we talked for hours.

While we were being served tea, Mother suddenly burst into tears. Later she said it felt as if she'd been shot by a thunderbolt. She said it was as if she were "a giant tooth being extracted from somewhere." At the moment of her collapse, I saw a man in a white robe pass through the room, sit down on the sofa, and look intently at her. While he sat, he rested his head on the palm of his right hand. Although I had no idea who he was, this man was as real to me as anyone in the room. When my mother later described my experience to Norina, she replied, "That was Baba! And he often sits that way!"

Our visit with the women was so lovely that I later returned alone to spend an entire week with them. It was then December of 1945, the end of a monumental year in world history. Outside Elizabeth's window, New York, like the rest of the nation, was beginning its adjustment to peace and the postwar changes that would restructure modern life. Many GIs were still abroad or were in transit home. Many more had already arrived and had begun their search for jobs, housing, and loans to continue their education. Some arrived back only for a short rest before being shipped off to Korea. For those at home, life was gradually becoming comfortable again. Rationing had just ended, and the manufacture of automobiles had recently resumed. In New York's fashionable uptown streets, women were once again shopping for silk stockings.

Still, the horrors of the last years began to intrude. The Nuremberg War Crimes Tribunal had begun, and more and more information about the atrocities of the war was becoming public. The mood of Americans was both hopeful and wary. They talked of the menace of the atomic bomb and the promise of the newly established United Nations.

At Norina and Elizabeth's, there was almost no talk of the momentous changes in the world. Instead, these very worldly and sophisticated women spoke about karma, reincarnation, saints and masters, and obedience and service. In particular, they talked of an obscure holy man in India who seemed to favor the poor and the mad and who hadn't said a word in twenty years. Their conversation was almost exclusively about Meher Baba. Nadine, who was dying of sclerosis at the time, was unable to speak. But her lips moved over and over, forming an ocean of silent "Meher Baba, Meher Baba, Meher Baba..." that touched my heart.

After my visits with the extraordinary group in New York, I felt enlivened, but the conversations had not awakened me, and my vision of Meher Baba had neither shocked nor transformed me. I'd been experiencing different visions and apparitions since childhood, and they felt almost normal to me. So seeing the man in white, although intriguing, had not convinced me that the claims about this Baba were true.

Bouncing along in the car past flat farmlands of waving crops from Pune to Pimpalgaon, I considered those claims once again. And I wondered which would be worse - if he was God or if he wasn't.

If he *was* God, well, then he could see everything. And what would he see when he looked into *me*? Everything I'd done wrong, not just in this lifetime, but in other lifetimes. All my notions about myself, all my accumulated shame and guilt conspired against me, and I was in a state of near panic. On the other hand, if he wasn't God, well, then he was a charlatan, and all those fine people in New York had been duped, my spiritual teacher had been misled, and my own mother was about to be made a fool of. That in fact was why I was there in the first place - to protect my mother from some swami. Or at least that's why I thought I was there.

We had arrived in India two days earlier, during one of the most turbulent times in its history. Less than five months before, at the stroke of midnight on August 14, India had become independent of Britain and was partitioned into the two countries of India and Pakistan. The dividing line ran straight through the Punjab, and there Hindus and Muslims slaughtered each other without mercy. Muslims swarmed into Pakistan, while Hindus fled south to join people of their own faith. Many never made it. Trains were found in the middle of nowhere, packed with scarred dead bodies. Convoys of trucks were ambushed, and men, women, and children were massacred.

The flow of refugees soon became a flood, and roads were crowded with exhausted, starved, and wounded migrants. Riots between the two groups were erupting throughout India. Only three weeks after our arrival, Mahatma Gandhi, who pleaded and fasted for tolerance among his countrymen, would become a martyr to that cause. India, like much of the world, including Palestine and Eastern Europe, was being shattered and restructured by the shifts of power that seemed to erupt in the wake of World War II.

Around the time of independence, from August 10 through August 16, Meher Baba was "contacting advanced souls." His followers reported that he looked uncommonly weary. During the riots, he was ill with broncho-pneumonia for some time.

By the time the atrocities were over, authorities estimated that one million Indians had died. The evidence of this violence confronted us almost immediately. And so did the evidence of Meher Baba's love.

We were welcomed to Mumbai by Meherjee, who was one of Baba's *mandali*, or closest companions. He and his wife, Homai, arrived with fragrant bouquets of flowers and an invitation to join them at their home for dinner the next day. There Homai told us a frightening story. She had been in downtown Mumbai a few days earlier when a Hindu crowd recognized her driver as a Muslim. They pulled him out of the car and killed him on the spot. She and Meherjee also told us a story with a much happier ending. We learned that their two-year-old daughter had been so ill the week before, there was some doubt as to whether she'd survive. Her parents told me they had taken her to see Meher Baba and he had cured her. That very night she was playing happily on the floor with her pet cat.

While we waited in Mumbai, a telegram arrived from Meher Baba giving specific instructions for every step of our remaining journey. We were told that when we left Mumbai, we were to be at a prescribed place at a specified time. We were to have a drink there and then proceed to the next destination. When we arrived in Pune, we were to rest for an hour and then have lunch. I still remember that hour of rest. I went into the ladies' waiting room at the railroad station and lay down on a bench, where I promptly fell sound asleep.

The last leg of our journey was from Ahmednagar to Meherazad. Meherjee had received clear instructions about escorting us, but he was desperately ill with a fit of malaria and running a high fever. We had worried about him the entire way, even though he insisted that once he got to Baba, he would be fine. These episodes of sickness had apparently occurred before, and Meherjee assured us that Baba had banished them each time. He had no doubt Baba would do it again.

Fever or no, Meherjee did just as he was bidden. We arrived at the ashram of Meherazad at exactly three o'clock, as Meher Baba had directed.

Meherazad is nestled between two ancient shrine-adorned hills. Through the ages, advanced souls have settled in those hills to teach, meditate, and pursue their own internal work with God. Throughout the year, pilgrims from near and far scale the hillsides to pay homage to these advanced souls.

The view from Meherazad hasn't changed in the fifty years since I first set eyes on it that day. In one direction were the vast granite plains cut with deep ravines, in the other, the spreading lowlands with the



lava-enriched soil that produces crops of wheat, sugarcane, millet, and cotton. Farmers, their heads swathed in cotton against the relentless sun, were working their fields with handheld plows drawn by bullocks, as they had for eons. In the foothills, lean boys herded cows and goats with wooden sticks.

The compound itself was a tidy arrangement of simple houses and huts. Among them were lush gardens, bright ornaments in an otherwise modest tapestry. The women's quarters were centered in an oasis of shrubs, shady trees, and splashy flowers. There was another, even more exotic garden in the back, at the foot of Tembi Hill, a hill used by Baba when he worked in seclusion. The gardens were devoutly tended by Mehera and the women mandali. Mehera, a lovely and serene woman of forty-one, was Baba's closest woman disciple, a role traditionally referred to as the Avatar's "consort."

One of the first people to greet us was Princess Norina Matchabelli, looking as chic on the plains of India as she had in Manhattan. After a joyful reunion, she showed us to a large room in one of the houses where we were to stay during our visit. It was next to the room Norina shared with Elizabeth Patterson, so we felt surrounded by friends from the start.

While we were unpacking, Mother and I discussed whether we might work in some sightseeing on the way back to Arabia, where we would catch our flight home. There was a knock on the door, and we were handed a typewritten message that read:

It is spiritual policy that one sees the Perfect One *last*. That is to say: saints, pirs, yogis, sadhus, etc., are visited first - the Emperor last.

The note continued, explaining that if we intended any sightseeing, we must leave the ashram now and do the sightseeing first, then return and spend our time here. Or we could spend the entire time here with Baba. It added:

It is important to have clear in mind that after seeing Him, meeting Him, you have *not* to get involved in other matters - you have to leave India.

That was our first taste of Baba's omniscience and attention to detail. It was also how we discovered that people visiting Baba went straight home after he had finished his work with them. It took only a moment for us to decide what to do. We would forego the sightseeing and spend our entire week with him. After all, we had traveled halfway around the world to do just that.

Meherazad was unlike any place I'd experienced. It seemed enchanted, vitally charged, electric and pulsating, yet suffused with peace and beauty. Everyone, and even the air itself, seemed to radiate happiness. But I had little time to ponder this. Our appointment with Baba was scheduled for only an hour after we arrived.

That afternoon at four o'clock, we were driven about a half mile across a stretch of barren field. In the distance, I could see the small, whitewashed cabin where he waited. It could have been the hut of a simple caretaker.

As we approached it, a powerful force seemed to emanate from that hut. An almost-visible stream of love came pouring from within its walls, enfolding and penetrating our very beings. The atmosphere around it was almost overwhelming. As we drew nearer, the waves grew stronger, until suddenly my mother burst into tears.

I was horrified. I was the daughter of a proper English gentleman who believed in always publicly keeping a stiff upper lip, and here was his wife, my mother, in a state of near collapse. I became all the more determined to stay protectively by her side.

We approached the door and bravely crossed the threshold. There, sitting on a *ghadi* bed at the other end of the room, dressed in white robes, his dark hair flowing around him and his eyes beaming, was Meher Baba. He smiled and beckoned us forth.

For my mother, this first glimpse was the realization she had been seeking. She was instantly convinced that Meher Baba was the God-Man, "the most beautiful being that was ever on the earth." She continued to weep and weep, uncontrollably. Like any teenager worth her salt, I was completely humiliated. I had been grumpy and annoyed even before we entered the room, determined that I wouldn't be "hypnotized" by anybody. Now I flung myself on a bench, crossed my arms, and emanated nothing but sheer outrage.

Since beginning his silence in 1925, Baba had been dictating his messages on an alphabet board while a member of the mandali read it aloud. Baba had previously stated that his silence was no spiritual exercise but was undertaken for the good of the world. He said, "In reality, I am never silent. I am the voice that eternally speaks deep within the heart." We had only been in the room a moment when his fingers began to fly across the painted letters.

"Oh, you two have been with me since ages!" he announced.

It was one of those statements that echo in your mind for years after. I'm not sure what this pronouncement meant to me at the time, but it has provoked many thoughts in the years since. It seemed to me

later that my mother, as a Murshida, had rejoined the Avatar to help his work with humanity. But me? How had I merited this ancient and blessed connection? I usually conclude that I'm simply a slow learner and need eons and special attention to progress. That day in January inside the little hut, my crossed arms and glaring eyes seemed to support this theory.

Baba motioned for Mother to sit beside him, and soon he seemed to help her stop crying. He spent time discussing her role as Murshida of the Sufi order, praised her honesty, and promised to guide her in her work as a teacher. Then all of a sudden, he looked up, and his penetrating gaze met my eyes. "Innocent!" he said. In an instant, all my barriers were dissolved, all my defenses and doubts crumbled. I felt embraced by a love so overwhelming it could almost not be borne. And to my horror, I too burst into tears. Whole rivers flowed down my cheeks, and my entire being felt like one huge puddle. I was mortified. And yet...

In the moment that Baba's eyes met mine, I felt he had known me for eternity, and that he loved me to the very core of my being. All my fears about what God might see in me that was despicable and unworthy were instantly dispelled. I knew that whatever he did see was unconditionally accepted and loved, and that somewhere within was beauty, a beauty he alone recognized. It was as if through his glance, I was able to glimpse my own real self for the first time. This inner embrace evoked such joy and gratitude that even adolescent embarrassment couldn't eclipse it. So though I continued to try to suppress my blubbing, or at least to blubber quietly, I was simultaneously unutterably grateful to have found such love. From then on, nothing seemed important but Baba - not teenage pride, not handsome suitors in Arabia, not sightseeing or monuments. All that mattered was this being whom I'd been dragged unwillingly to see and who had so completely and deeply seen me.

Later that day, Baba suggested I take a walk up Tembi Hill, renamed Seclusion Hill in honor of the universal work he was doing there with the God-intoxicated beings called *masts*. For health reasons, Mother was going to stay behind. However, while we were waiting in the garden, the irrepressible Norina strolled up and in her most dramatic voice exclaimed, "Why, Ivy! Do you mean you aren't going up Baba's Seclusion Hill?" She then proceeded to try to persuade Mother to make the somewhat arduous trek up the hillside.

Not more than two minutes had gone by when the ashram's young woman physician, Dr. Goher Irani, came rushing up to us with a message for Norina. "Baba says Mrs. Duce is not to climb the hill!" In truth, the idea had not seemed wise, as Mother suffered from many physical ailments and the climb was strenuous. But of more interest was that

Baba had not been in the garden or anywhere within mortal hearing of our discussion. We were beginning to learn that he knew our every thought. The discussion of whether Mother would climb the hill was at an end.

I hiked my way upward without her, in the company of Dr. William Donkin, who had documented Baba's extensive work with masts throughout India and later published this information in his book, *The Wayfarers*. At the peak were two small huts where Baba secluded himself for long stretches of time, often drinking and eating little. The hill was vitally charged with his energy. Although I had climbed less than a thousand feet, I felt I had reached a summit immeasurably beyond the world glimpsed below.

There was no electricity at Meherazad, so that night we ate out in the garden by candlelight and retired early. It had only been hours since we'd first entered the nearly hidden gate of the ashram. It seemed like lifetimes.

As I drifted into welcome sleep, a warm breeze swept the gardens, and a crescent moon reflected its light through my window.

Across the compound, in the men's quarters, it shined too on the room where Meherjee stayed. He slept soundly and well, completely free of his fever.

## *Breaking Away*

Every place in Baba's ashram, and every person, was a story waiting to unfold. But I was young, and I was restless. Once I had been out of the compound, up Seclusion Hill and back, all I wanted to do was to venture out of the ashram and explore the neighboring fields. So from time to time I would try. I would amble over to the edge of the garden, thinking I'd take a short stroll into the countryside - just a few minutes, nothing more. Yet every time I did, right at the edge of the garden, Baba would pop out of nowhere. It was as if he'd materialized right in front of me, and I couldn't have been more startled! He would walk up, point at my head, and sign, "Where's your hat?"

It seemed that hats were an important issue at the ashram. Baba had directed everyone to keep their heads covered whenever they were outside. I don't know what spiritual work he may have been doing, but there was certainly a very practical reason to wear hats. The same sun that had shined on Rama and Krishna ages and ages ago now shined more fiercely on the lovers of Meher Baba. Scientists had discovered there were three areas on earth with the highest ultraviolet readings: Jones Beach in New York, a beach in Uruguay, and the Deccan Plateau of India. But in spite of Baba's directive, I always seemed to forget my hat. It wasn't entirely my fault.

I had inherited absent-mindedness from my father, a brilliant and accomplished man with a special talent for forgetting things. He could speak before a Senate committee for six hours on highly technical subjects without any notes at all, but he could seldom remember where his car keys were. Mother swore she could lock either one of us in a room with a grand piano, and when she opened the door, we would have lost it. As a result, in Meherazad my neglected hats stayed behind in the room, giving Baba the perfect opportunity to stop me just as I was thinking of roaming. When he did, I would try to make excuses for my wanderlust, saying, "Oh, Baba! I was just going to go for one minute. You know how it is. I... I..." And then I'd go running off to get my hat, and I'd end up never leaving the compound.

Baba did everything possible to make us comfortable during our

stay. He had thoughtfully invited Dr. Abdul Ghani to be with us much of the time, since Ghani was head of a Sufi group in India. He was an engaging man, and we so enjoyed our conversations with him that we often spent hours dawdling over breakfast. Dr. Ghani's story, well known to many Baba followers, is typical of how one is drawn to and "snared" by the Master.

He had known Baba since they were boys, when they attended school together. Years later, when Ghani had become a doctor and director of a small clinic, Baba came to him dressed in the white robes of a spiritual teacher. Shocked, Dr. Ghani asked, "Can't you find any other way to make a living than that?" Baba responded by simply inviting Ghani to join him on a trip around India. Ghani raised all sorts of objections, but when Baba promised that on their return he would give him whatever was required to make him happy, he finally acquiesced. "I agreed to go and stay with him for one year, and then I planned to return to my clinic," he said. "I just walked out and locked the door and went along."

Mother and I asked, "Did you ever go back to the clinic?"

"Oh no," he said. "We finished our travels six years later, and I'm still with Baba."

Baba had kept his promise, Ghani added. He had made him happy. There were more stories like these from other members of Baba's mandali, each more fascinating than the last - stories of lives left behind, worldly goals and ambitions abandoned, prejudices and passions that evaporated with the glance, the beckoning, the word of Meher Baba. The stories were never told with regret but always with joy and gratitude. It occurred to me as I listened that none of these people were the sort I had associated with religious groups or fanatics. They were sincere people, humble and content to be with Baba and serve him, drawn and held by his radiant light. I believed and trusted every one of them.

I had other meetings with Baba during our week in Meherazad, and each one seemed to yield a new miracle. Already he was working to dissolve my limitations, to awaken me to my possibilities. One of his first tasks was to teach me to ask questions. Asking questions may not seem like a tremendous achievement to most people, but to me it certainly was because I had been unable to ask a simple question for many years. The problem dated back to my school days when I was a young girl full of curiosity and always eager for more information.

I was raised in a family with a deep respect for knowledge and a passion for learning. My mother, who transcended the gender stereotypes of her time, had studied law, traveled by mule over the Andes as an employee of Mercantile Bank, and worked as an editor for *Century*

*Magazine.* At age forty-seven, when most women of the time were canning tomatoes from their victory gardens, she decided to enroll in the University of California. She so impressed her professors that many became lifelong friends.

At the beginning of World War II, Dad was invited to go to Washington, D.C., to head the Foreign Division of the Petroleum Administration of War. His knowledge and skills contributed a great deal to providing oil and gas to the Allied fighting forces around the world. Later Dad headed government relations for the Arabian American Oil Company (Aramco) and was a trusted advisor to the Saudi royal family.

Dad was an avid reader who knew more about more subjects than most professionals knew about their own specialties, whether it was archaeology or theater. I never remember him without a book, magazine, or paper in front of him, except when he was driving, and then he'd have a map. He usually read as many as three books a day, along with several periodicals. When he read to me at night, it was never from children's books, even when I was very young. He'd bring a book of poetry or a piece of classic literature.

There was seldom any small talk in my family. When my parents spoke, it was usually about something they found interesting or "educational." All the time I was growing up, if a subject or question arose at mealtime to which we didn't know the answer, someone went to the dictionary or encyclopedia and looked it up. I was raised to question and to seek answers. When I started school, I simply assumed such questioning would be as encouraged in the classroom as in my home. But it wasn't to be.

One day both my teacher and principal dragged me out of class to lecture me about the evils of asking questions that were ahead of the class's progress. "What do you think you're doing?" they demanded. "If you'd just be quiet and wait, the answers will come, and you won't be taking up class time with things other children aren't ready for yet." They were so adamant, and I was so stubborn, that I made a silent vow then and there to never ask another question as long as I lived! I had pounded that vow into myself so deeply, for so many years, that by the time I met Baba, I could no longer ask a curiosity-based question out loud. One day in the garden it all began to change.

Baba's charming and devoted sister, Mani, was telling stories about her life with him. As I listened, I began to think, "I wish I could ask Baba about that." Then, as the stories continued, "I'd love to know about that, too!" Eventually there were three questions that simply wouldn't go away. So I turned to Mani and said, "I've got some questions I'd just love to ask Baba, but I suppose there's no time for that."

I was wrong. Mani disappeared for a few moments, and when she returned, she told me I could see Baba immediately and pose my questions. I was ecstatic! I rushed to Baba's room, settled myself down, looked into his eyes - and I couldn't remember a single question. Nothing! I was as blank as a new slate. I still remember Baba sitting there, waiting very patiently. Still nothing. Finally he said, "All right, Charmian, now think hard, and then it will come back. Try! See if you can remember."

It took some time and much help from Baba, but eventually, with a lot of effort, one question finally squeezed out. He answered it, and then we started all over again. "Now try hard, Charmian, and maybe you'll get the second one." He was so sweet about it. Once again I concentrated hard, and he helped me remember it. He answered it, and then we set to work on the third question. Success! After he answered that one, I assumed the session was over, but instead he asked, "Well, now, any more?" I told him no, but that maybe tomorrow there would be some.

Very lovingly, he said to me, "If you have any questions tomorrow, you may come and I will answer them. Just let me know."

What an invitation! And I eagerly responded. Every day I would think of three questions and arrive at his doorstep post-haste. And every day I would forget the questions as soon as I entered his room. Somehow, nothing seemed important but being in his presence. So at the start of every visit, we'd go through the whole routine again. I'd sit there blankly, he'd encourage me, and finally the questions would pop out. Gradually, Baba was restoring my ability to ask questions and freeing my long-imprisoned curiosity. Later in my life, I was especially thankful for what he'd done. For years I worked as a project evaluator, and the very essence of my job was asking questions and getting answers. It was Baba who had trained me.

Today I remember little of what I asked Baba and what he answered. I do remember that I questioned him about my relationship with my mother, and he explained we had once been sisters in China. Because I'd been the older sister, I was always trying to raise my mother in this life. That made sense. But the other questions have been lost to time, and although I sometimes wish I could recall them, I know now that the most important thing was the process itself, the crumbling of the pride that stood in the way of my longing to know.

Baba was also meeting with my mother during this period, assuring her that he would help her in her leadership of Sufism. He explained that he had drawn us to him so she could work wholeheartedly for him in the West, building up Sufism. I could understand that. But you may imagine how surprised I was when he went on to say that *I would*



*spread his love wherever I went.* Over the years, that statement grew to be a precious mantra that I treasured in my heart. He confirmed Mother's appointment as head of the Sufi order for the Americas, both North and South, and proclaimed that he wanted Sufism to spread. At the time, Mother suffered from many physical ailments she feared would limit her ability to lead, but Baba promised to help her.

I had a camera with me in Meherazad, and I asked Baba if I might take pictures of him. He consented and seemed to take a lot of interest in my photography. During our stay, he usually wore his long hair in a braided pigtail down his back, but for my photos he had unbraided it and combed it out so it streamed over his shoulders in waves. His hair was brown then, although locks from earlier years show it to be auburn. My camera clicked and clicked away, but his expressions, features, and moods changed so fast I couldn't capture them. Although he was fifty-three, there were moments when he looked twenty. At other moments, he seemed to hold the sorrow of the world in his eyes and looked a million years old. I took numerous photos of him. I wasn't satisfied with any of them.

That evening after our photo session, we received a message from Baba that we were to complete any serious conversations that night because the next day he didn't want us to discuss anything profound - no talk of God or religions, no politics or current events. Instead, he said, "We will play." It was a simple request, and we fully intended to comply with it. But the very next morning at breakfast, our brains seemed to slip a cog, and we found ourselves talking about the volatile situation in Palestine. We had barely opened our mouths when Dr. Goher came around the corner exclaiming, "Baba says you must have forgotten the instructions he gave you last night!" We were embarrassed, of course, but also stunned. Baba had been a full city block away.

After breakfast, we set out for the "play" he'd scheduled. Elizabeth, Norina, Mother, and I strolled through the crimson garden to the house of the women mandali, where Baba sat waiting on a couch. I had no idea what to expect, and it's probably just as well I didn't. Because suddenly he pointed at me and spelled out on his alphabet board: "Tell me a funny story."

It was agonizing trying to tell Baba a joke. I always had the feeling he already knew the ending, so I would stumble faster and faster with the words, trying to beat him to the punch line so he'd laugh. He always did laugh, and heartily. Then he would ask for more. I would have gladly struggled through a hundred more to see him so happy.

He also asked for stories about saints. I was enchanted by the Indian stories told by the women mandali and was greatly taken by the

innocence and merriment of it all. After the stories, Baba left for a moment, only to return with some buttons that bore his photograph. He selected two each for Mother and me and then asked his women mandali to bring the pins they had made. The pins were embroidered in gold and other fine threads, and some of the design was even carried out with strands of Baba's silky hair and some of his nails. "These are only for our intimate circle," Baba said. Mother pinned one of the photo buttons over her heart and shortly after began to look through Mehera's collection of snapshots. She didn't get very far. All of a sudden she collapsed into a chair and sobbed. Baba then stood behind the chair, placed his hands on her shoulders, and kissed the top of her head. It was a powerful moment. Then Baba turned to me and said, "Be kind to your mother. She is very dear to me. She is a jewel of a woman." Later she said she felt as if a javelin had been thrown from across the room, hitting her in the heart. "My heart just overturned," she recalled. "I felt shattered."

A jewel must be cut and polished, and my mother was no exception. The women mandali helped her back to her room, and for quite some time she was filled with an inner fever. All the while, Baba made inquiries as to her condition until, two days later, she was perfectly well again - more well than she'd been in many years. Her glandular system was balanced, her blood pressure had leveled off, and all the ailments that had plagued her for years had completely disappeared.

Mother and I had brought gifts for Baba and his mandali, but compared to what we were receiving, they suddenly seemed insignificant. We offered them just the same. In particular, we had brought a dozen silk scarves that my father had proudly procured for us in New York. Silk had been practically nonexistent during the war and was still a rarity. Unfortunately, my mother was appalled by the scarves. She preferred pastels, and these were filled with reds, greens, and bright yellows. There was one that especially revolted her with its loud design and garish hues. She found it so hideous she almost threw it away - in fact, she almost threw them all away. But we ran out of time to find replacement gifts and hoped instead that in India such bold colors might be appreciated. So after Mother recovered from her fever, she gave all the scarves to Norina to give to Baba as gifts for the women.

Later that afternoon we were both summoned outside, where we found Baba and the women mandali standing with the silk scarves wrapped around their heads in different Indian styles. Baba wore two, arranged like an Arabian headdress, wound one on top of the other. Norina told Baba that Mother had some of the most fantastic hats, so he gestured that he'd like to see them. Mother went back to retrieve

the hats, and I went to get my camera. I took photos of the silk-adorned group, with Baba standing, twinkly eyed, in the center. Then he put one of my hats on his head, returned it, and said, "Now you keep this with you and don't wear it."

Today it's tucked in a hatbox in my closet, and since that afternoon in Meherazad, it has touched no head but his own.

After I'd taken my photos, Baba asked the women mandali to remove their scarves, and then he proceeded to remove his. He unwound the first scarf and gave it to me. This exposed the second scarf underneath, and that second scarf was most familiar to us. There it was - the one Mother had found most ugly, the one with the glaring and garish colors. Then, with a knowing look, Baba removed that one too and handed it to Mother, of course! She was completely taken aback. But later she told me, "He made it beautiful for me. He made it so that I would love it."

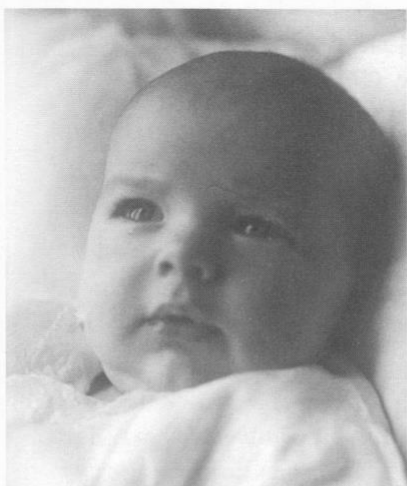
She kept that scarf with her always. Now it's in my possession, and not too long ago, I took another look at it. It *is* beautiful - beautiful because Baba touched it.

My mother continued to prefer pastels in her life, but she'd learned an important lesson about attachments. For her, the lesson came in the form of silken scarves. For me, it came in the form of eggs.

Every morning at the ashram, we'd rise at six o'clock and then have breakfast. Now, I'm a Cancer moonchild, and I normally stay up late and get up late. Furthermore, I'd been very sick in Egypt not long before and had been unconscious for several days. We'd also traveled through five continents and switched countries forty times in three months. So by the time we arrived in Meherazad, I was exhausted. One morning, when the alarm rang as usual at six, I rolled over and said, "Mother, do you think there's any way I could sleep just a little later? I'm *so* tired!" Norina overheard and went running off to ask Baba, who sent back a message that I could sleep until nine o'clock *if* I would eat the breakfast he sent me.

That didn't seem too much to ask. After all, Baba had been giving special attention to our meals, and they were very appealing. Besides, I was a world traveler and adapted to almost every kind of cuisine. The only exception was eggs. I couldn't stomach eggs in any form. Since we had never been served eggs at Meherazad, this wasn't a particular worry, so I quickly said, "Oh sure. Anything. Whatever you want."

I drifted back to sleep until the knock on my door at nine o'clock sharp. I got up, shuffled to the little screened-off table in the garden where we had breakfast, and saw our cook, Kaka, walking toward me carrying a tray of delectable fruit. But next to the fruit was a little bowl. What was in it? I looked more closely and couldn't believe my eyes. In



Charmian, a few months old, 1929.

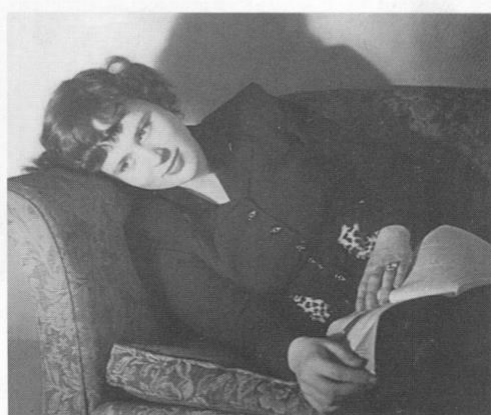


Age 5 with her mother, lifelong companion, and best friend, Ivy Duce.



In her teens in Washington, D.C., with her mother, who loved the inner beauty she saw unfolding in Charmian.

*(Photo by Robert Yarnall Richie)*



At Bennington College, Vermont.



In Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, in late 1947 with her parents. She and her mother would soon fly to India to see Meher Baba for the first time.



In the garden of Meher Baba's ashram, Meherazad, January 1948. The women mandali taught Charmian how to drape her sari.



Meher Baba in 1948,  
photographed by Charmian.  
Baba allowed her to take pictures  
of him, several of which were  
especially memorable.

*Left to right:* Murshida Duce, Mehera, Baba,  
Dr. Goher, Mani, and Charmian (seated).  
Baba and the mandali are wearing the  
scarves given by Charmian and  
her mother, Meherazad, 1948.





the bowl were not only eggs, but two raw eggs! They looked like they hadn't even been walked through hot water. For a moment I simply stared at this offering, the very thing I hated most. Then I remembered my promise to Baba. I thought to myself, "So this is it. Years of spiritual training, and it's come down to this: two raw eggs."

I knew I had to try. The idea occurred to me that I might drown out the taste with some vinegar. Kaka brought me a bottle, and I poured it freely into the bowl. All it did was make the quantity bigger! I tried adding salt and pepper, but that didn't help either. Finally, I just picked up the bowl and drank the eggs down in one big swallow. Whew!

As the day wore on, I put the experience behind me, and soon lunch-time was drawing near. I was busy talking to someone when I was asked what I'd like for lunch. In the middle of a sentence, I turned around and said, "Oh, I don't know. Maybe a couple of scrambled eggs?" Then I returned to my conversation.

Mother looked at me as if I'd lost my mind.

When evening came, I was asked if they could fix me anything special for dinner. This time I said, "How about a couple of poached eggs?"

Mother couldn't stand it any longer. She shook me by the shoulders, saying, "Do you have any idea what you're saying?"

"Well, I think so."

She exclaimed, "But you *hate* eggs!"

All I could say was, "Well, somehow now I think they taste good!" By the end of that day, I had devoured two raw eggs, two scrambled eggs, two poached eggs, and one very hard-boiled fixation.

Baba took something else from me that week too, something that had long caused me trouble. I had clairvoyant abilities that manifested at a very early age, perhaps five or six. We were living in Scarsdale, New York, at the time, and I began having very vivid dreams and nightmares. One night I had a dream of being in a burning city. The fire was fierce and terrifying, and I was trying to help people who had been trapped. The next day, I described the dream to my mother and father. They didn't say anything at the time, but years later I discovered they were stunned. The headlines that morning were all about a city in the Midwest that had been in flames, just as I'd described.

Another time, I dreamt about an enormous flood. When I came downstairs the next morning, still frightened by the dream, I recounted it to my parents. This time my shocked father showed me his newspaper with a banner headline about a huge flood from the Mississippi River.

The incident that startled my mother most occurred after she put me down for a nap one afternoon. I was lying in one of the twin beds in my room when, all of a sudden, I noticed that above the bed on the right, a

very attractive lady was smiling at me. For some reason, this didn't seem to puzzle me. She was a very pretty woman, with alluring light brown curls covering her head, and violet-colored eyes. I'd never seen anyone with violet eyes and found them remarkable. So entranced was I that I called out, "Mother, Mother! Come here!"

Mother came flying into the room, but as she approached, the image of the woman faded. After I described what I'd seen, Mother got a sheaf of photographs, laid them before me, and said, "Now tell me if she looked like any of these."

I looked at the pictures. There she was! I'd never met the lady, but I told Mother, "This is her."

Mother looked at the photo of one of her friends and replied, "That's Nell Peterson."

Just then the doorbell rang, and Mother went quickly down our big, winding staircase to answer it. She always moved very fast, but when she returned a few moments later, she climbed the stairs slowly, a pensive look on her face. There was a telegram in her hand. She said, "This telegram is from Nell's husband. She died today." Then she added, "Nell always did want to see you."

Any other parent might have been horrified because in those days experiences like mine were considered very abnormal. But Mother was always patient. These incidents provoked many questions for her, especially about death and the afterlife.

Experiences like these continued throughout my childhood, and many of them were quite beautiful. When I was outside, it seemed as if I heard everything - from people inside their houses down to the smallest little bird and bug, including plants and the sound of their growing. This formed a symphony that I used to call the "thrill of life." It was like listening to a river of living sound, a whole orchestra of music and movement. I was particularly conscious of the light behind all of life. Although I enjoyed the sensation immensely, it hampered me. I wasn't able to stay grounded in "reality," and at school the teachers misjudged me as inattentive. Furthermore, there was a flip side to the beauty I saw and heard. There was also horror.

During one period, when we lived in Berkeley and were studying with Murshida Martin, I kept seeing hideous things in my bedroom. This was a two-level, two-family home, and we were living on the lower level. Sometimes a huge tarantula-like creature with red saucer eyes would enter my room. At night the door of the closet would slide open and shut as if it were a thoroughfare to hell. I'd wake up feeling like a cat, with back arched and every hair standing on end. Finally one night the feeling of evil was unusually intense. When I turned in my

bed, I became aware of a small, thin old man standing over me with his palsied hand reaching for my neck. I screamed for Mother, and she dashed out of her room. As she tried to cross through my doorway, she bounced back as if she'd hit an invisible wall! The man faded out in patches and then was gone, but the feeling of evil was very strong.

Mother consulted both Murshida Martin and a talented astrologer she'd come to trust. They each said the same thing. Someone in the house was drinking or taking drugs. This perplexed Mother, since she knew it couldn't be anyone in our family. But that same day the doorbell rang, and two sisters from upstairs asked to speak to her. They said, "Mrs. Duce, you know a lot about metaphysics. Could you help us with our brother? He's become a complete alcoholic, and we're desperate over what to do about him."

In one of my sessions with Baba, he talked to me about my clairvoyance. He said, "You have been in that other world, and you will go there again. But it's far better to live in one world at a time. I want you to try to shut all this out, and I will help you."

He did, and that window was closed.

We traveled far with Baba in that brief week in Meherazad, far within and beyond ourselves. Only once did we take a journey outside. On the morning of our last full day, we made the drive to Meherabad, Baba's ashram outside Ahmednagar. Here we met a delightful group of women disciples, some Eastern, some Western, who guided us through the ashram. We saw the wooden "table" under which Baba wrote his unpublished "Bible" and the *dhuni* fire pit where he later "burned away" a drought at the request of desperate villagers. They showed us the small cell in which Baba secluded himself for many months, the tin hut in which he worked, and the tomb where his body would be laid to rest. Baba said the time would come when all the world would seek to make a pilgrimage to that tomb.

The women served us a simple lunch, and for dessert we munched on pieces of sugarcane. It was the perfect accompaniment to their many wonderful stories of love for Baba and faith in him that produced miracles. The people at Meherabad shared the same deep devotion and joy we'd seen in his other followers. To my amazement, I learned that Baba took care of some two hundred families. He saw that they were fed and their children educated, even at colleges like Oxford and Cambridge if they merited it.

I was exhilarated by the marvels we'd seen and heard, but my mother was growing increasingly somber as the moment for our departure grew nearer. It was dusk when we left Meherabad and started the drive back to Meherazad. The sun was sinking over the western horizon, taking



Mother's spirits with it. By the time we returned, she was disconsolate. All she could think of was that we were leaving the next morning, and she had no idea when she would see Baba again. She thought about the tomb we'd just seen and the inevitability that he would leave the earth someday, and she began to cry. When she was called to dinner, she was in such misery that she chose not to go.

Just then there was the sound of a footstep on the threshold, and before Mother knew it, Baba was standing right beside her. He took her by the hand and led her into the garden, where he walked her to the dinner table. Then he sat her down, placing his hands on her back and shoulders. She wept terribly, and again a tooth metaphor came to her mind. In New York, she had felt she was a giant tooth being extracted. But this time, she said she felt as if she'd *lost* a body-sized tooth.

Baba left the table but soon sent Dr. Goher back with the message that Mother should eat well. She returned again later to check on Mother's progress.

On our last night in Meherazad, Baba sent for us to join him in an evening of music. We played records on a hand-cranked Victrola, including some of Mother singing. She had once been an accomplished vocalist, but a severe case of influenza during World War I had ravaged her singing voice and ended all hopes of a career as a performer. We also listened to some records of a talk by Baba devotee Jean Adriel. Then suddenly Baba asked *me* to sing! I stood up and sang "Summertime" from Cole Porter's *Porgy and Bess*. When I finished, Baba said, "Now both of you sing together!"

Mother and I looked at each other in desperation. We didn't know any duets. In fact, we'd only sung together occasionally on long car trips. But then I'd never eaten eggs before, and she was cherishing a scarf she once despised. Anything was possible. We tried to come up with an appropriate song, but for some reason, the only one we could think of was a silly cowboy song. So with much trepidation, the two of us stood before the Lord of the Universe and sang, "I've got spurs that jingle jangle jingle, as I go riding merrily along!" Baba beat time on his knees, and when we finished, he expressed much pleasure. His pleasure, as always, became our joy.

Baba then pointed to the wall clock over his head, which he couldn't possibly see, and dictated on his board: "It is two hours past my usual time that I have stayed up with you. Now kiss me good-bye. I shall not see you when you leave."

We embraced him and went out into the night.

At three o'clock the next morning, the members of the ashram gathered to wave farewell as we began our drive back to Pune, where we

would catch a train to Mumbai. Baba had already returned to Seclusion Hill to continue his work with the masts.

Our car rumbled through the fields again, passing long lines of ox carts that were lumbering through the night. As we approached Pune, our driver, Adi, decided we might like to see the tomb of the Perfect Master Babajan. But just as he mentioned this, the car began to malfunction, so he changed his plans. First he would take us to the railroad station to get our tickets for Mumbai, then we would visit the tomb. However, just as we reached the station, his tire was punctured. The dictate that we were to "visit the Emperor last" had not changed, and Baba seemed to be making sure we followed it.

Mother and I settled into our train compartment, and soon we were watching the mountains roll by as we traveled farther and farther away from Meherazad.

I remembered Mother's story of when I was only several months old and hadn't yet learned to walk. She would sometimes put me in a playpen in the garden, keeping careful eye on me while I napped. But one day she looked out and was shocked to discover I had disappeared. Panic-stricken, she searched everywhere. Finally, the phone rang. It was my godmother, who lived just a block away. "Are you missing someone? Well, she just came up my front path!"

Apparently I had decided to go on my first stroll. I had seen a path, knew where it led, and had toddled cheerfully toward my goal, unaware of the fact that I couldn't walk yet.

I didn't feel sad on the train as I watched the mountains, fields, and rivers that signaled the miles between Baba and us. I could only feel happiness - happiness for the chance to have seen Meher Baba, the most beautiful being I had ever known. The candlelit table in the garden, the sacred hill, and the gentle embraces were far behind us now. But I sensed that up ahead lay yet another irresistible path.

## *A Rough Landing*

The simple explanation for a storm is that two different currents collide and are unable to blend, so they push, repel, and spin about each other instead. It was this turbulent atmosphere that awaited our plane on the journey home from India. It was also the atmosphere that surrounded my life in the years after I met Meher Baba.

Our itinerary was to depart from Mumbai, fly to Karachi in newly created Pakistan, and catch a plane to Bahrain, a small island country in the Persian Gulf that was then a protectorate of Britain. From there we would fly the short distance to Dhahran, in Saudi Arabia. In those days, commercial airlines didn't fly to Arabia, so Dad's company was dispatching its plane to Bahrain for us.

Baba had directed us to leave India by January 16, so we decided to fly up to Karachi the day before. It was a difficult and dangerous time to travel since Indians and Pakistanis were still unofficially at war. Even Mahatma Gandhi, the "father of India," could not persuade his "children" to cease fighting. He fasted himself close to death, yet Muslims and Hindus continued to murder each other in the streets.

Gandhi had a special relationship with Meher Baba. Gandhi met with him on three occasions and corresponded frequently with one of the mandali. Baba loved Gandhi deeply and spoke in particular of his honesty, dedication to India, and accomplishments for the untouchables. In fact, he stated that Gandhi was destined to be a Perfect Master of a future age and was forming his inner circle during this life. Gandhi was drawn to Baba, but he was pulled more strongly by the politics of India and his role as a national leader. He had indicated to Baba that after India won its independence, he would join him, but he became embroiled instead in the tragic fallout of the partition.

We were blessedly shielded from the violence that plagued India but fell victim instead to the milder fallout of a disrupted infrastructure and communication breakdowns.

Before leaving Mumbai, we sent telegrams to representatives of Dad's company in Karachi, informing them of our arrival date and asking them to arrange airline tickets for us to Bahrain. However, we

were unable to receive confirmation because the city was under curfew and telegraph and telephone communications were at a standstill. We flew out of Mumbai with no idea whether our messages had been received and our tickets procured.

When we arrived in Karachi, we had our first indication that the journey home might not be a smooth one. An airline employee informed us there were no tickets in our name and no record of a reservation. For Mother and me, it was *déjà vu*. We had met similar obstacles on our way into India trying to reach Baba. That time we had confirmed hotel reservations in Karachi but were told on arriving that they absolutely didn't exist. The more we insisted, the more the clerk denied it. Now we wondered, were we going to face delays all the way back too?

Just at that moment, the airline agent in charge of distributing tickets commented to me, "How beautiful those flowers are."

In my arms I was carrying two large bouquets that the Baba lovers in Mumbai had given us when we left India.

"Would you like to have them?" I asked. "Oh no," he said, "I couldn't do that."

"Well, they won't keep," I told him. "They're not going to last all the way to Bahrain. So please, it would make me happy if you took them."

He did, and the next thing I knew, he offered us two tickets from Karachi to Bahrain.

Then friends from Dad's company suddenly appeared. Although they hadn't received our cable, they had shown up on the chance that we might have taken the latest plane from Mumbai. They told us that we did indeed have reservations to Bahrain and were scheduled to leave after midnight. The tickets had been reserved in the company's name, not our own - thus the confusion. In only a few minutes, we had gone from no tickets at all to four tickets.

The hotels in Karachi were overflowing with Muslim refugees from India, so our friends kindly took us to their home on the outskirts of the city for dinner and rest. While we were sitting at dinner, a cable was delivered. It was from us, of course, informing them we'd be arriving four hours ago.

When we left our friends' house, we climbed wearily onto an old bus that banged down the road to the docks, where we boarded a great big seaplane. It was slow and lumbering but supposedly steady as the Rock of Gibraltar. The plane was divided into compartments, and we settled into one right at the front. Unfortunately, it had only two benches of two seats each, and the seats didn't recline. Instead, they faced each other across a table in the middle, making it impossible to stretch out.

After we were in the air, the steward asked if we would like to go

upstairs and rest on a cot. Mother accepted the invitation, but I was young and agile and felt there were older women on the plane who would appreciate it more. Instead, I decided to improvise my own bed.

I got a hatbox and tucked it under my hips to support them under the table. Then I put my feet on one seat and my head and shoulders on the other. Finally, the steward covered me tightly with a blanket so I'd be warm and comfortable for the night's flight.

I'd just about dozed off when all of a sudden I slammed into the table with a terrible bang! The hatbox flew out from under me, and I went down under the table, my body folded into a "V." I found myself completely strapped in by the blanket, unable to move. It was a familiar feeling and one I had rebelled against many years ago. It was a feeling that took me all the way back to my crib.

My mother and I had two very different internal thermostats. I was always burning up and she was always freezing. To ensure that I was as warm as she liked to be, she would bundle me in sleeping clothes and wrap me up tightly in a blanket. Then she'd pin the blanket down securely so I wouldn't wriggle free. Nevertheless, one night when she was busy with dinner guests, I managed to squirm my way out, climb to my feet, and hang on to the edge of the crib. From there I could see out my window, and what I saw was magical. Everything was glowing with light, and tiny white things were flying through the air. Snowflakes! The window was slightly open, so I reached out my hand and tried to catch them. But just then I heard my mother's footsteps in the hall. I knew she was coming to stuff me back into that stifling little bed, and I was right.

"Oh, my goodness!" she gasped as she entered the room. "Look at her!" she exclaimed to a guest who had followed. "She must be freezing!"

Bang! went the window. Down I went into the crib, firmly pinned in again.

Mother used to tell people that I slept with my arms in the air. What she didn't know was that this was my defense strategy. As soon as she went to tuck me in I'd think, "Now, how can I keep from getting trapped under the blankets?" My answer was to fling my arms up as soon as she started pinning.

Now I was pinned in a blanket once again, this time on the inhospitable floor of an airplane. I lay there helpless while the plane bounced up and down and seemed to careen all over the skies. I had no idea what was happening.

At some point the steward staggered in, clutching the walls for support. He saw my predicament, reached under the table, and wrapped his

fist in the blanket. Then he yanked as hard as he could. I went spilling out, but managed to grab hold of the seat and gradually hauled myself into it.

Looking out the window, I could see an enormous storm, but this wasn't the delicate white storm of my crib days. Massive clouds were boiling from the bottom upward, swirling violently, and then diving back down again. From the core of it all, lightning bolts streaked and flashed across the sky and thunder bellowed. We would rise with the updrafts, fall with the downdrafts, and shake and rattle as the raging currents whirled about us.

Only once before had I seen anything like it, back when I was six years old and Mom and Dad were taking me to South America. As our cargo ship crossed the Caribbean, it ran smack into a hurricane. I was asleep at the time on a spare cot that wasn't attached to the floor. It went flying back and forth across the cabin as the ship pitched up and down. When we pulled our way to the deck later, we saw gigantic waves towering over us. The ship would struggle up one side of the waves, then down the other. It was like climbing enormous mountains of water. I thought I would never again see anything like it. But here, thousands of feet above the Arabian Sea, was a spectacular encore.

This mad dance of the elements lasted our entire trip. Although I should have been terrified, I found it stupendous. Fear was eclipsed by my lifelong fascination with nature and its wonders. Until now this fascination had been directed toward more gentle wonders like plants, trees, and snowfalls. As a child, whenever I could get away from our house, I wandered in the woods and picked wildflowers. I also had a habit of climbing trees - very tall trees, some three and four stories high. I would clamber up as high as possible, sometimes to the very top, where I'd sit and think. This sometimes caused my mother to panic, especially the day she looked out our attic window and saw me perched eye level on the tip of a beech tree. She shouted in fright, hurried down the stairs and out the door, and ran up the path with Dad by her side. Their panic scared me so, it took them a half hour to talk me through a route down.

The world I loved most dearly had always been the world of nature, and now that world included a front-row seat in a tempest. I was enthralled. I sat there for hours, spellbound by this restless ocean of air.

It was the next morning when we finally arrived in Bahrain, weary but unharmed. This storm was so large and fierce, it was three days before any planes could cross the Arabian Sea. Ours had been the last.

Days earlier we had cabled our friends in Bahrain about our arrival, but when we emerged from the plane, there wasn't a soul to greet us.

Stranded, we were led to an airport rest house for passengers. Suddenly an airline employee approached and asked Mother, "Madame, was that Meher Baba's picture I saw on you?"

Mother was indeed wearing a small Baba button, but it was pinned under the lapel of her suit jacket. Still, the man had spotted it, and now he exclaimed, "My whole family are followers of Baba! Is there *anything* I can do for you?" He was so delighted and anxious to serve, it was as if he were saying, "Can I give you my house?"

We told him about our missing friends, and he immediately went to work to find them. It turned out this was simply another cable gone astray. He found our friends down on the docks seeing their daughter off on a plane to India, where she attended school. Once her plane departed, they came back and took us to their house on Bahrain Island. While we were there, just as in Karachi, our cable finally came, saying we would arrive that morning.

Some time later, our hosts received a phone call from the airline asking, "Was that your daughter who boarded the flight this morning?"

Our host gasped and turned white, fearing the plane had crashed.

"Yes, it was," he stammered. As it turned out, her plane had run into the same storm that had battered us all night, but the pilot had shown the good sense to turn back. They would be returning to Bahrain later that day. Even though the girl was safe, we were all a bit shaken. Our poor host wasn't even able to finish his dinner.

Just days later, a Hindu zealot from Pune tucked a pistol under his coat and positioned himself beside a garden path in New Delhi. The man mistakenly believed that Mahatma Gandhi had demonstrated pro-Muslim sentiments in his opposition to the partition of India. He was waiting when Gandhi strolled down the path on his way to an evening prayer meeting.

When Gandhi was assassinated, a new wave of violence erupted throughout India. Torn from its most unifying leader, the nation succumbed to outrage and vengeance. Had we not left India when Baba instructed, we would have been right in the middle of it.

When we returned to New York City and its snowdrifts, life shifted from the dramatic to the mundane almost at once. One of the first items on our agenda was clothes shopping. Fashions had changed markedly since we'd been away, and we felt obliged to update our wardrobes. Yet only two days after our return, I refused to go out anymore. After the vibrant atmosphere of Meherazad, the streets of New York were as alluring as cardboard. The people on the streets looked like dead fish

compared to the radiant companions of Meher Baba. The memory of Baba's luminous presence cast everything else in a gray shadow. It took me some time to overcome that sensation.

Meanwhile, Mother had struggles of her own. She had returned to America as the Murshida of a Sufi order, now under the active guidance of Meher Baba. One of her first orders of business was to report to her students and Sufi companions the conviction she had obtained in India. Many of the older Sufis greeted her news about Meher Baba's advent with alarm and resentment. They were solidly attached to Inayat Khan and couldn't accept the idea of another figure as the ultimate spiritual authority for the order. Some left. Others, more willing to accept Baba, asked, "If I have Baba, then why do I need a Murshida?" Still others doubted the legitimacy of Mother's succession to Murshida.

Mother wrote to Baba about her problems and how she should respond. He replied:

The only thing that is expected of you is for you to uphold the highest traditions of spirituality. That is Sufism, pure and simple. I will be helping you internally.

Her dedication to those traditions and her commitment to Baba also created problems outside the order. Longtime friends cut their connection with her when they realized she believed an Indian guru was the Christ. Others tried to overlook her "eccentricity," but only because of her husband's importance. In spite of these slights, Mother's heart was now entirely Meher Baba's.

One person anxious to hear Mother's story was the Australian Sufi Francis Brabazon, who was in San Francisco. It was Francis who had come to America to escort Murshida Martin to India to meet Baba, so Francis already knew quite a bit about him. Mother told him of her conviction that Baba was most assuredly the Avatar. She encouraged Francis to return to Australia, work hard, and save his money so he would be able to see Meher Baba himself when the next opportunity arose. Francis followed her advice, and the time did come when he met Baba, but ironically, the meeting occurred in the United States. Two years after his return to Australia, Mother appointed Francis head of the Australian Sufis upon the death of his teacher, Baron van Frankenberg.

During those years, I developed a close friendship with Francis, based on our mutual love for poetry, music, and the arts. At the time, Francis felt very drawn to writing poetry, but he was tentative about his skill and torn between pursuing poetry, painting, or music. Little did he know that he was destined to become the Master's poet and would live



in intimate daily contact with Meher Baba for many years, right to the day of Baba's passing.

While Mother spread the word about Meher Baba, we scoured New York for a new place to live. Finally we found an apartment that was spacious but in terrible condition. The former resident had been a painter who used it as a studio for forty years, never turning from his canvas long enough to do any repairs. But Mother had a special gift for seeing the potential in both people and places. She transformed the apartment into a beautiful and elegant home, and we moved in in March 1948, two months after our return from India. We had no idea the apartment would one day serve as a site for Meher Baba's *darshan*.

In the year after we met Baba, Mother suffered the first of what became a series of injuries and accidents that caused temporary hardship and sometimes permanent discomfort. The first occurred on New Year's Eve, when she fell and broke five bones in her left foot. A doctor set the bones poorly, and then to make matters worse, a nurse giving Mother heat therapy mistakenly cooked the foot clear through. It was just one example of the many trials she had to endure.

My own trials centered more on internal issues. I was trying to follow Baba's guidance while sorting out the waves of feelings and desires typical of an eighteen-year-old. I was especially consumed by dreams of a husband and family, dreams shared by most young women of the era. My own parents had formed a very strong partnership based on mutual respect and commitment. Their natures were very different - Mother was a Pisces with deep, deep feelings, and Dad was a strong, practical Capricorn. But he was inordinately proud of Mother, and she dedicated herself selflessly to the tasks required of the wife of a prestigious oil executive. I think my father provided her with a solid, stable foundation while she brought to him a certain spontaneity and lightheartedness. My luck was to be born to a couple of wise, talented, and loving people who offered me a life of both security and adventure. The impulse to create a similarly happy environment with my own husband and children was strong, and I was somewhat impatient to get it started. No man had yet appeared to capture my heart, and I fretted over when and where he would and who he might be. In India I had shared my romantic dreams with Norina. After we returned home, she wrote me from Baba's ashram:

Dear sweet little wise Charmy,

It is most gratifying to see you grow so near to the Source of this Light-giving Love in your inspired heart. It is being stirred and brought to deeper awareness of feeling in you by our Baba...

Don't force love. Don't speculate - let the right love gravitate towards you. Love is in us and will without failure make its perfect choice. Be joyful to have seen in our great master the joy that is spontaneously giving Grace. To love Baba as you do cannot miss to bring you great benefit.

Baba read your letter with tender attention. He asked me to send you His Blessing and to write to you what you care about - Love. Baba is nodding to you. He is always affirmative to what we honestly, deeply desire. He always says "yes" to our pure Heart's whims.

The greatest adventure is to love Him. This we shall all do one day together - I am so sure of this! - and whosoever shall be the Romeo of your choice, he will join in this Big true feeling for Him, the All-inclusive Being that is: Love that passeth all understanding.

Baba is pleased that you love him. He is glad that you try to keep detached from the world's trouble. He wants you to be serious at your study and become efficient in no matter what you like to work at as your profession.

During our post-India adjustment, Mother sometimes corresponded with Baba about the business of the Sufi order, but there was little direct communication with him because he was in seclusion. He had been in seclusion before Mother and I saw him, and he went right back to it after we left. There was also a period when he specifically asked us not to write letters. For comradeship, we sometimes had the company of other Baba lovers, but the community was small compared to today. We actually knew little of what was going on in the ashram or with Baba's work; we knew only that we loved him. This isolation, combined with increasing adversity, forced us to develop deeper self-reliance and faith. Gradually we got our lives into the best order we could and carried out the worldly business we had before us. When we did hear from Baba, or from Mani, Mehera, or another of the mandali, it was like a burst of sunshine.

Baba gave us a special challenge midway through the year, when he asked us to keep silence for the entire month of July 1949. It is one thing to keep silence in an ashram; it's an entirely different matter to keep silence in the middle of New York City. Mother and I continued to use taxicabs and subways and to shop in stores, all without saying a single word. Our experiences were interesting and sometimes quite amusing. They certainly required ingenuity. We carried little papers with addresses on them to show taxi drivers where we needed to go, and we jotted down notes for store clerks to indicate what we needed

to buy. Many people automatically assumed that since we couldn't talk we couldn't hear, so they usually hollered at us or wrote on paper, as we had. Still, the person who suffered the most was probably my poor father, who didn't take much pleasure in living with two people who refused to talk to him. He spent even more time than usual with his books that month.

At other times, Baba asked us to fast. Once he directed us to repeat the name of God a thousand times a day for an extended period of time. The only way I managed to keep count was by getting a hand-held counter and clicking off each repetition.

On October 16, 1949, Baba began his New Life phase. He described his work at this time as an ending to his old life of "cherished hopes and multifarious activities" and the beginning of one of "complete renunciation and absolute helplessness and hopelessness," depending "wholly and solely upon God." He and his companions traveled all over India, taking almost nothing with them. Because he was cutting off ties with his "old life," it wasn't surprising that very little information reached us about what he was doing. Only later did we learn of the great hardships Baba and his companions endured.

At the same time, Sufism entered its own New Life. Baba eradicated all the ritualistic aspects of the order, and on the very last day of 1949, the Sufi school in Fairfax, California, burned to the ground. The following year, Mother broke her right leg and ankle, just a year and a half after she'd broken her left foot. It was a period of helplessness and hopelessness for her, just as it was for Baba and the mandali in India.

My own experience of the start of the New Life was less a matter of helplessness and more a matter of confusion. I had returned to my studies at Bennington, a small liberal arts college in Vermont with fewer students than many American high schools. Bennington's five-hundred-fifty-acre campus is nestled among the foothills of the Green Mountains, in a rural setting that is well suited to a nature lover. The campus had once been a farm, and some of the buildings that house classrooms and offices were former barns and stables. Their windows look out on the mountains, a central greensward, and the eighty species of trees that grace the campus. Wooded walking paths link the buildings, and students live in colonial-style clapboard houses instead of traditional dormitories. Bennington is quieter and more rustic than the typical university, but it was still very much in the world. Both students and teachers were actively engaged in the work at hand: studying, researching, developing their intellects, and preparing themselves for meaningful careers.

My spiritual beliefs and my worldly activities soon collided, and I began to question my acceptance of Meher Baba. I would say to myself, "Here I am in college. I take psychology from the world-famous Dr. Erich Fromm. I'm doing this, that, and the other thing. God in human form? Here now? I don't think so."

All the while, there was a quiet little voice deep inside me that would repeat, "Yes. That's the way it is!"

And I would respond, "That's ridiculous."

"Sorry," the voice would say, "but it's true."

The voice became more and more insistent, until finally one night I had a remarkable dream. I seemed to be walking up a hill near Baba's ashram in India, when I saw Baba farther up, sitting with all his men mandali. It was obvious he was working with them. As I approached, he suddenly stood up and began to descend the hill toward me. He told me not to come any closer. For the first time, I saw the awesome God side of him. I knew then that he was God in all His power and glory, as well as in His love, and I believed absolutely and wholeheartedly in him.

My faith renewed, I wrote to Baba about some of the issues in my life that were raising new questions. One new development was that college friends and acquaintances were turning to me for guidance on their own lives, and I was unsure how to help them. Another issue was my abiding interest in marriage and my questions about when and with whom it might happen. The answers came quickly from Baba via Dr. Donkin. They read in part:

About your desire to help those who come to you and your doubts as to whether you should do so or not, Baba says, "Every night for five minutes ask God, deep down in your heart, to guide you in your everyday affairs. This will show you clearly whom to help, when to help, and how to help. About a husband, Baba says, "Let God decide, and the right man will come at the right time."

Finally, "Be assured," says Baba, "that my (Baba's!) Love for you and your mother is as it always was."

A new pattern, which I would experience again and again, emerged in my life. I would see Baba, return home, and life would be chaos for a number of years afterward. It always felt as if I'd received something from him that then had to be put into practice, and I was required to do so under a variety of demanding circumstances. The pressure and tension would escalate until I reached a point where I'd cry out, "I can't take any more!"

At the end of this tumultuous period, I'd suddenly wake up one morning, look around, and say, "What was all that about? I feel just fine now. Life seems very peaceful and quiet."

There would be a lull, and I would relax for a while. Then the lull itself became burdensome. I would get restless, anxious to travel. This would last just long enough for me to declare, "I think it's time to see Baba again. I wish there would be a trip to India or that he would come here." And sure enough, it would be arranged. I'd see Baba, fill my cup with his love once again, and off I would go. Life would once more be filled with chaos for another few years, until once again I'd wake up thinking, "What was that all about?" Then we'd start all over again.

So it was that for the first years after Mother and I met Baba, the winds of chaos blew freely through our lives, sweeping away old, stationary patterns and ushering in new ones. By the fourth year, when life had been reconfigured and the atmosphere had settled somewhat, I found myself longing to see him again. The air was too still, the journey too predictable. With perfect timing, he sent word of his plans to visit America.

## *A Promise to Swim*

There was a time millions of years ago when the entire state of South Carolina was under the sea. The hills to the west were once a sandy beach where ancient waters lapped a shore and left shells and rocks of another age. As time passed, the water receded, leaving swamps and wetlands in its path and forming a new beach on what we know today as the Atlantic shore.

It was this beach, halfway between the industrious city of New York and the jet-set playground of Miami, that Meher Baba chose as the site for his center in the West. The Meher Spiritual Center is set in five hundred acres of dense forest, wetlands, marshes, and freshwater lakes that adjoin the ocean north of Myrtle Beach. Years of selfless labor had gone into preparing the site for Baba, and now, in 1952, he was ready to officially open it.

Baba had been to the United States a number of times before, but that was of course before I knew him. His universal work would eventually draw him to the West thirteen times, and six of those trips included visits to America. His previous trips were all made in the 1930s - in 1931 and 1932, and then again in 1934 - when the most "advanced" nation on earth was in the grip of the Great Depression. Baba was here when ruined families shuffled to the soup kitchens and huddled for warmth in cardboard shantytowns; when invincible businesses collapsed and furniture piled up outside the homes of the evicted; when men rode the rails in search of salvation and squatters filled empty office buildings; and when proud Americans suddenly found themselves begging in the streets for work that paid fifty cents a day.

In the twenty-two years since the Depression began, the country had been transformed both materially and spiritually. It had weathered the Depression and emerged both sobered and revitalized. It had witnessed the passing of the bold New Deal years, the horrors of World War II, and the chilling dawn of the Cold War. Americans had created and deployed the deadliest weapon in human history and were struggling

with its ambivalent legacy - hope for the potential of science and a dread of its power.

All this tumult had energized us. The immediate years after the war were a whirlwind of building, inventing, manufacturing, consuming, and even reproducing. The population had burgeoned and continued to grow; a baby was being born somewhere in America every seven seconds. Suburbs and prefabricated houses had become the new American landscape.

In the years since Baba last left our shores, we had discovered or invented the helicopter, plutonium, nylon, antibiotics and antihistamines, the "electronic brain" or computer, and xerography. We had broken the sound barrier, launched a guided missile, synthesized vitamin A, discovered the Rh factor in blood, established NATO, invented the Polaroid camera and the paperback book, and reported our first sightings of "flying saucers." We had launched the humanitarian Marshall Plan to rebuild Europe, "the most unsordid act in history," according to Churchill, and in schizophrenic zeal, had simultaneously trumped the A-bomb with the even deadlier hydrogen bomb.

As a nation, we had learned a great deal in a period of time remarkably short when measured against the sweep of history. Hardship and adversity had reshaped us. We had confronted our own frivolity and arrogance, and also our courage and benevolence. We had been shocked by our vulnerability but uplifted by our resilience. We were stronger now but also less sure. By the time Baba returned to us, the United States was reveling in its prosperity and abundance while struggling to understand its responsibilities in an increasingly complex and divided world.

When Mother and I received word Baba would be visiting in the spring of 1952, the news repeated itself in our souls like a mantra: Baba is coming! Baba is coming! He arrived in New York, where he was met by a small group that included Elizabeth Patterson, who had donated the land for the Meher Spiritual Center. Baba and this group then proceeded by train to South Carolina. Mother and I didn't get to see Baba during his brief stop in New York, but we were anxiously awaiting our trip to join him at the center.

There was a large group of us also leaving New York. That presented certain difficulties in our arrangements since some members of our group were black. We were headed into the South in the pre-civil rights era, into the state that was the first to secede from the Union, fired the opening shots of the Civil War, and almost one hundred years later still flew a Confederate flag over its capitol. At some point, I innocently offered to take one of our black friends in our car, but everyone said, "Oh no, you can't. You don't want to get into trouble."

It wasn't that I would get into trouble but that I, being a white girl, could have caused difficulty for my friend.

While we sorted out our travel arrangements, Baba was in limited seclusion in Myrtle Beach. The plan was that we would leave New York on May 8 to join him, but two days earlier, Dr. Donkin called to tell us Baba wanted us to arrive a day sooner. It was a scramble to get set, but we were all in the car, ready to go the morning of the seventh. Mother and I took our car, accompanied by Francis Brabazon, Sparkie Lukes, a friend of mine from Bennington, and Enid Corfe, a longtime Baba devotee.

I don't think I ever saw anyone as outwardly excited about meeting Baba as Francis was. He had learned about Baba years earlier and had been waiting ever since for the word that would call him to Baba's side. He had even purchased new clothes for that first meeting, a rather jaunty ensemble that included a green sports jacket and a yellow shirt.

It was a day-and-a-half drive from New York to the center, down the Atlantic seaboard, through horse country and tobacco country, and into the fundamentalist Bible Belt, where Baba had chosen to place his "home in the West." We approached the entrance to the center via Highway 17, which follows a pre-colonial Indian trail that came south from Massachusetts. It's the same highway people use today, but both the road and everything around it have been completely transformed since the time of Baba's visits.

At this time, Myrtle Beach was a small resort town that catered mostly to working-class locals. There were more trees than buildings and more squirrels than people. When Meher Baba first visited the property, he said that one day Myrtle Beach would be like New York City and that the center would be like Central Park.

Today Myrtle Beach is the second-fastest-growing metropolitan area in the country and the number-two tourist destination (behind Orlando, Florida). It has grown so fast that one wag joked that the state bird should be the "construction crane." Highway 17 is now a broad speedway that delivers sixteen million annual visitors to the boardwalk, beaches, and an infinite number of shops, restaurants, and arcades.

It's an amazing success story, and it was foreseen many years ago by a visionary family named Burroughs and later by their partner, a man named Simeon Chapin. The Burroughs family began by buying land in Myrtle Beach in the 1800s and eventually acquired thousands of acres that included beach front property the farmers found worthless. Simeon Chapin was a corporate lawyer and outdoorsman who found the land appealing and was willing to take a chance on those beachfront acres that his appraiser, like the farmers, had found undesirable. In



1912 Chapin and the Burroughs family formed a company that split ownership of the land and combined the resources that would soon transform Myrtle Beach. The Burroughs family had the vast real estate holdings. Chapin had financial resources, business acumen, and faith in the future of Myrtle Beach. He also happened to be the father of Elizabeth Patterson.

Chapin became a pioneer developer of Myrtle Beach and, through his partnership with the Burroughs family, helped shape the residential, shopping, and recreational neighborhoods of the city. The company they formed provided land for churches, schools, museums, and nature refuges, and the profits from that company still contribute today to a wide range of community and cultural causes.

This seaside community represents a cross section of America that would have surprised some of the early nineteenth- and twentieth-century speculators who always envisioned Myrtle Beach as a potential resort for the aristocracy. To the south, on Pawley's Island, there was already a luxurious resort that catered to America's wealthiest families, including the Firestones, Vanderbilts, and Goulds. Some investors hoped to do the same with Myrtle Beach, even building a luxurious grand hotel there in the early 1920s in the hope of attracting society's elite. The hotel fell victim to the Depression, and in the ensuing years, small hotels and simple cottages that attracted the working class sprang up.

This was still pretty much the scene at Myrtle Beach in 1952, when Baba made his first visit and we drove down, hearts aglow, to see him. The area was dotted with mom-and-pop hotels, small amusement buildings, and minor regional attractions. It was a modest resort, popular with a few hundred thousand blue-collar and white-collar families from the Carolinas and Tennessee.

In the fifty years since, it has virtually exploded. The big draw is an area called the Grand Strand, which runs from the North Carolina border to historic Georgetown, sixty miles south. Built on a one hundred thousand-year-old barrier sand formation, the Strand is said to be the widest beach in the world. Those beaches and nearby islands are a magnet for swimmers, fishermen, boaters, and beachcombers. The Grand Strand is the most popular resort area of the Atlantic Coast, and the most popular spot on the Strand is Myrtle Beach.

Myrtle Beach is a tourist mecca and a developer's paradise. Travel brochures tout it as the "Seaside Golf Capital of the World" and the "Miniature Golf Capital of the World," to name just two sobriquets. Even though it's also been called the "Redneck Riviera," today's visitors to Myrtle Beach include a mix of blue-collar and white-collar workers, retirees, upscale golfers, corporate staffs, and suburban families.

Baba's center is located midway on the Strand, near the city of North Myrtle Beach, which was established in 1968. It's bordered on one side by the quiet, upscale residential neighborhood known as Briarcliffe Acres. On the other side is an enormous twenty-four-hour Wal-Mart Supercenter. The ocean beach at the center is serene and undisturbed, but directly to its north and south, towering hotels and condominiums beckon a constant flow of renters and timeshare purchasers. Opposite the entrance to the center, across Highway 17, is the Colonial Mall, with department stores, a multiplex theater, and blinking neon signs. The area is called "restaurant row" after its profusion of seafood, rib, and steak houses.

Myrtle Beach is the nation's capital of distraction. Visitors can choose from Las Vegas and Nashville performers, retail outlets, one hundred golf courses, water parks, cotton candy and corn dog stands, and beach stores that specialize in risqué T-shirts, gaudy souvenirs, and cheap paraphernalia for those who swim, sail, windsurf, and tan in the sand. For the hipper set, farther down the road is a Hard Rock Cafe shaped like a pyramid and a Planet Hollywood in the shape of a globe. The cottages, the old bathhouses, and the clapboard amusement buildings are gone, replaced by elegant motels, high-rise hotels, and densely packed condominiums.

In the middle of this paradise of pleasure and consumerism sits the center Baba planned as a retreat for "rest, meditation, and the renewal of the spiritual life." One reaches it through an almost-hidden entrance that leads down a tree-shaded drive to a gate. Beyond the gate is another world, galaxies away from the blinding mirage outside. It can't be seen from the road, and it's almost impossible to find unless you know it's there. Even Elizabeth once searched high and low for it.

It was 1941 when Baba gave Elizabeth and Norina Matchabelli the daunting task of scouting America for a suitable property for his Western center. He had five requirements: equable climate, virgin soil, soil that could be self-sustaining for a large number of people, ample water, and most importantly, land that had to be "given from the heart." They scoured the country for almost two years, until a visit to Elizabeth's father in Myrtle Beach provided a surprisingly simple solution. There, Elizabeth remembered, he and his partners had property with freshwater lakes in the wilderness north of town. She and Norina went exploring and knew as soon as they gazed at Long Lake that this was the place they'd been seeking. At her request, Elizabeth's father gave her the land, and she in turn gave it to Baba - from her heart.

Baba said it was the combination of lake, ocean, and woods that gave the place its unique atmosphere. The woods are a vast arbor of pines

and moss-draped oaks, sweet bay and palmettos, dogwoods, and the flowering myrtles that gave the area its name. Fluttering in their top growth are wrens, cardinals, and the nocturnal whippoorwill, and scurrying in the underbrush are raccoons, possums, foxes, and white-tailed deer, many of which seem unafraid of humans. There is also a startling array of snakes. Some of these snakes are poisonous, and thus shovels are found propped against trees along the center's paths. They're used to whack the unexpected serpent along to a new life, an act that's not only beneficial to us but, according to Baba, is especially beneficial for the snake.

Long Lake, the larger of the two freshwater lakes on the property, runs parallel to the ocean and is separated from it by a length of sand dunes sprouting sea oats. In the marshes, bulrushes and cattails rustle in the breeze, providing shelter for ducks, geese, marsh hens, and the occasional white heron. All of this, said Baba - this thriving refuge of harmony and beauty - was to be preserved "in perpetuity." It would, he said, be "a place of pilgrimage for all time."

It was this verdant wonderland that awaited me in the morning as our car approached the veiled entrance, made all the more wondrous because Baba was waiting inside.

When we arrived, we were taken at once to the cabin area, near the shore of Long Lake. The lake, its surface perforated by the snouts of turtles and alligators, divides the center into two sections. Some of the cabins had been built for the center on site; others were brought in prefabricated. The latter included hutments from a nearby Air Corps base that Elizabeth had transported to the center and converted to cabins. Among these was the little Lagoon Cabin, where Baba was to give interviews to individuals and small groups. It was here that we were headed.

Baba was lying on the couch when we entered, and we were stunned at what we saw. When we'd last seen him in 1948, he had been overpoweringly strong and vibrant. But since then, he'd been through the incredible deprivations of the New Life, and now he looked shockingly frail.

Baba had launched the New Life phase of his work in October 1949, the year after Mother and I first met him in India. We knew this period of "helplessness and hopelessness" had been extremely demanding, but only the sketchiest details had reached us. We had heard that Baba and his companions had traveled by foot through India, crossing hundreds of miles and enduring inconceivable hardships. They slept outside and begged for food, suffering from hunger, exhaustion, and sickness. At other times, Baba contacted masts, went into seclusion, and asked his followers to repeat invocations and prayers.

Two years later, in October 1951, he entered the *Manonash* phase of his New Life, a four-month period representing the "annihilation of the mind." It wasn't just the logical mind he sought to destroy, but also the home of our desires and longings, the storehouse of impressions gathered through eons of lives. In the long process of returning to God, this storehouse - the source of illusion - is gradually exhausted as the seeker advances through seven planes of consciousness ever closer to God. In the end, the mind must be utterly annihilated if we are to join God and experience the I-Am-God state. During his Manonash work, Baba established in the inner worlds the very patterns that future aspirants would follow as they moved toward complete freedom from mind and ego. Manonash has one goal only: to erase all that separates us from God.

When the Manonash phase was over, Baba lit a dhuni fire and burned a paper bearing the words: "All rites, rituals, and ceremonies of all religions of the world are hereby consumed in the flames." Then, with the work of the Manonash and the New Life completed, he came to America.

We couldn't know the full spiritual import of the New Life, but the effect on Baba himself was painfully clear. He looked thin and fragile and had aged more than the years of our separation. With one glance, we began to understand the steep personal price exacted by his work for humanity. Mother was so upset, she began crying. I found myself wishing I could cuddle him, make him chicken soup - anything to make him better. But he smiled radiantly when he saw us, just as he used to do.

"How do I look?" he asked. "Don't you think I look fine? Everybody says I look fine."

Mother was so overcome by the traces of his suffering, she blurted out, "Baba, I think you look terrible."

"Yes, it is the hardships of the New Life."

I added, "Baba, you always look wonderful to us."

Then he asked my mother if she loved him, if she would stick with him to the end, and do his work. She replied, "Yes, Baba."

He turned to me. "Charmian, do you love me? Will you stay with me until the end?"

"Yes, Baba."

"Would you swim across the lake if I told you to?"

My mind flashed on the reptile-spawning waters outside. "Yes, Baba," I said. Trying to be light, I added, "I only worry about two things. I don't know if the alligators would love me enough to leave me alone, or love me enough to make me part of them!"

Baba looked at me seriously, but then he said, "I am very happy."

Finally it was time for the very eager Francis to join us. Baba said to him, "I've known you for ages, but you don't remember it, do you?"

When Francis replied that he didn't, Baba told him, "You will come to know it is true." Then he added, "Now I have two Francises - Francis of Assisi and Francis Brabazon."

Francis couldn't get enough of Baba. He was drinking him in through his eyes. Still, he was somewhat nervous and sitting stiffly on the edge of the couch. Baba encouraged him to be comfortable. "You must know that I am within you, and so if you feel like coughing, cough, for it means that *I* want to cough."

So Francis began to settle back, and just when he was relaxed, Baba dropped his bombshell on him. He asked Francis, "Would you do whatever I tell you?"

"Yes, Baba."

Then Baba instructed him, "Take the fastest means you can, and go back to Australia right away."

Francis had hardly been in Baba's presence more than a few minutes, but he rose immediately and started toward the door.

Baba said, "Not yet, Francis!"

He then explained that he wanted Francis in Australia before July 10, when Baba would begin the next phase of his work, which he called the Full Free Life. So Francis got a reprieve, and it was good for several days.

Baba then talked about Sufism. He said, "I love Sufism with all my heart. All aspects [of mystical paths] belong to me, but Sufism is most dear to me." He asked Mother to turn over her Sufi work in Australia to Francis, and he told both of them they would have to "wear the robe" and be Murshids.

Baba met with Mother nearly every day for a week, often for three or four hours at a time, outlining the central principles of Sufism that were to form the basis for a charter for Sufism in America. Baba said that this charter for Sufism was to retain the pure heart of Sufism while totally reorienting its practice under his guidance. He gave his Sufism a new name, Sufism Reoriented.

The modest Lagoon Cabin was specially planned as Baba's interview cabin, but he himself stayed in a beautiful house Elizabeth had built for him farther up the lake, removed from the other cabins. Baba had chosen the highest ground on the property for this house, in a secluded grove of live oaks, magnolias, and pines. The house is surrounded by an eight-foot fence and an oriental garden of azaleas, roses, and camellias. From the garden is a view of Long Lake and the sea beyond, especially spectacular in a storm, when lightning flashes across the lake and the

sounds of the restless ocean waves rumble across the dunes. Elizabeth had furnished the house with every convenience and filled it with fragrant flowers. Baba gave us a tour, saying, "Palace or cave or hut - it is all the same to me. But Elizabeth has done this with so much love."

Baba was a very early riser. Indeed, he almost never slept. After a week at the center, the mandali told us that Baba's bell had rung every ten minutes all night long and that he had hardly slept during the entire seven days. Only once during our stay did we hear that he had rested for as much as three hours. Each morning around five o'clock, Baba would walk from his house down the wooded path to the Guest House, where the women mandali stayed. The Guest House is on a bluff that overlooks the lake, and the path in front of it leads down to the footbridge that crosses the lagoon. When he could, Baba would cross that bridge with the women and continue on to the beach with them for a walk on the fine white sand. Then he would go to the Lagoon Cabin to give private interviews.

In the afternoon, Baba would resume interviews on the porch of the Guest House, and when there was time, he would suggest outdoor games. He spent early evenings with the women in the Guest House, and at 7:30 p.m. sharp, he would say good-night. We would watch him walk away, never taking our eyes off him until he was out of sight.

When Mother and I came home from India in 1948, we began a prolonged argument over just how tall Baba was. She had the impression he was well over six feet, so strong and like a lion he was. But I remembered his being shorter than I was, about Mother's height. We had argued about this ever since.

"Baba is short!"

"Baba is tall!"

It came as a shock to her in Myrtle Beach to discover Baba was indeed about her height. It had been hard to tell in pictures because people are kneeling in front of him or he's seated. But in several photos in which he's standing next to me, one can see how small he was. Obviously feet and inches are deceptive when it comes to the Avatar. When we were with him, he would become so majestic, it seemed he was at least twelve feet tall.

Summer is traditionally the rainy season in Myrtle Beach, when every sunny day brings the chance of dark thunderclouds and scattered, sometimes monsoon-like rains. Although summer had not yet arrived when we were there, the skies seemed to be rehearsing, and we had several thunderstorms. One storm in particular will always remain with me. Baba had been working all day and at one point was driven to a spot on the center property. As the car stopped, Baba swung his leg out of the

car. At the exact moment he touched his foot to the ground, an incredible bolt of lightning cracked in the air!

I had my own personal lightning bolt that week when Baba extended a tentative but alluring invitation to me. He said that when he left America, he might take me to Europe with him. The prospect of spending an extended time in his presence traveling abroad was electrifying, but I tried to contain my reactions until the plan was definite.

About the time Baba raised the possibility of Europe, he also told Francis it was time to return to Australia. He directed him to tell the Sufis there that he had dissolved their initiations and wished them to stop certain rituals, such as breathing practices and chanting mantras. Francis, who was the soul of obedience, left the very same afternoon. It turned out that by following Baba's orders, he was able to catch the only ship out of New Orleans that could deliver him to Australia before July 10.

Meanwhile we were expecting the arrival of my father, whom Baba had expressed a desire to see. He was on a protracted business trip in Florida, and day after day we were disappointed to see he still hadn't shown up. Mother worried incessantly that he might not make it, until one day Baba looked at her and said, "If you only knew how many husbands and wives you have had down through the ages, you would not worry so over this one!" The very next day, my father arrived.

When Baba met him, Baba said, "I love you dearly. You may think that it has come about by chance, but your coming was destined." He asked my father to work with him on plans to construct four centers on the Myrtle Beach property and to spend a year there once the plans were underway. My father was extremely impressed with Baba but unable to commit himself. He simply said, "I will do all I can."

Sparkie Lukes and I had driven to the airport together to pick up my father. On our way, we saw a sign advertising "Rabbits for Sale" and bought one, thinking the women mandali might have fun playing with it, despite the seller's warning: "Now remember, them's eatin' rabbits, not pettin' rabbits." Later we spied some tiny black frogs and fish in a little inlet, and we thought Baba and the women mandali would find them entertaining too. So we gathered a dozen frogs into a Mason jar, dropped the fish into a pitcher, and arrived back at the center with a whole menagerie.

We showed Baba the creatures first. He then took us over to the Guest House so the women mandali could see them. After that I threw the fish into Long Lake. Then Baba picked up the Mason jar with the frogs. He seemed very happy, and just as he peered most closely at them, they decided to perform for him! They gathered into circles and then

launched into a tumbling act, looking like little pop-eyed acrobats. For a finale, they leaped on top of each other to form a perfect pyramid!

There were other performers at Myrtle Beach that week, most notably the dance troupe of Margaret Craske. Margaret's love for Baba was so strong that it attracted her students to him. Four of them were on tour with the Metropolitan Opera, then performing in Minneapolis. They desperately wanted to see Baba and had asked for leave during the company's move to Indiana. After many refusals, it was finally Rudolph Bing, the legendary director of the Metropolitan, who allowed them to go. They hired a pilot and a small plane to make the trip, but the weather was so bad that the airport authorities denied them permission to leave. For some reason, the pilot made it his personal crusade and fought for permission until it was granted. Once in the air, they began to battle through a terrible thunderstorm.

Meanwhile, Baba was very restless. He asked repeatedly about the dancers. As the storm raged on, their plane burned so much gas they had to put down three times for refueling. Sometime in the evening, they finally limped into Myrtle Beach. When Baba heard they had arrived safely, he said he would see them the next morning. "I was not planning to work," he said, "but love enslaves me."

The next morning the dancers were admitted to his presence one by one. He embraced each individual, then met with them as a group. When it was time for them to leave, he told them, "I was with you in the plane yesterday. Now you must take me back with you." He embraced each one of them again, and they left right away to fly to Indiana. Once they had gone, Baba remarked, "Their plane was in great difficulty, and they were in danger many times throughout the flight."

Our own visit to Myrtle Beach was also drawing to an end. On Saturday, May 17, "Open Day" was held in the Barn from seven in the morning to seven that night, and all who wanted to meet Baba were invited to attend. The Barn was originally a stable for mules. It was moved to the center to fulfill Baba's wish for a meeting place that could hold two to three hundred people. It was a large, rectangular building of weathered cypress, sitting in a grove of moss-covered live oaks. As it turned out, over seven hundred people came to see Baba, and so many human dramas unfolded, they cannot be told. Love radiated from Baba like sunlight and touched us all. When the Open Day was over, I went with Mother and Sparkie to pay a last visit to the women mandali. Just then, Baba came in. He told us, "A thousand years hence, people will be singing about this day in the Barn."

The next day we left the tranquil oasis of Myrtle Beach for our return to New York City. It wasn't a gloomy farewell because Baba



would soon be headed for California, and we planned to join him there. We intended to spend every minute with him we possibly could. I was especially resolved to remain by his side after witnessing what a lack of vigilance could cost.

One day at Myrtle Beach there had been nothing scheduled with Baba so some companions went down to the beach for a swim. The beach there is exquisite and difficult to resist. One mile of pristine sand stretches along the center's borders, unmolested by tourists and developers. The tide speckles it with cockleshells, starfish, sand dollars, and pastel conches that have made their tumbling journey to shore unmarred. The Gulf Stream, a warm undersea river from the tropics, flows about forty miles offshore and heats the waves to a pleasant warmth, attracting an array of marine life, from jellyfish to dolphins. Seagulls and pelicans swoop overhead, and crabs scramble below. One can spend hours exploring the shore for treasures, bobbing in the spa-like water or simply gazing at the shimmering horizon. While some were doing that, back at the cabins Baba called everyone to his side for conversation and the rare gift of his presence. Those who'd gone to the beach missed it. I realized then that when you're with the Beloved, you must stay near; you must be ever alert and ready. When you stray, no one is going to take the time to chase you down.

It was a lesson I never forgot.

## *Blood in the Fabric*

I had the funniest feeling, and it just wouldn't go away.

"Baba, please. Couldn't I drive you to the West Coast?"

"No."

Never before had he been so short with me. But I was stubborn, so the next chance I had, I asked, "Baba, are you sure you won't let me drive the car?"

"NO."

Undaunted, I tried a third time and got an even sharper "NO!"

We were still in Myrtle Beach, and Baba was going to California to see the many people there who were anxious to meet him. Mother and I were soon to leave for New York to prepare to join him on the West Coast. Earlier Baba had asked my father to plan two different routes for his motor trip.

When Baba had announced he was going by car, everyone protested. "But Baba, it would be so much quicker by plane! You'd be there in one day."

He had replied, "Yes, but I have all these people to take with me." That was an expensive proposition, so reluctantly we all accepted that he would go by car. But when he detailed his plan and told us Elizabeth would be driving him, I began to feel uncomfortable. It had nothing to do with Elizabeth because she had driven Baba wonderfully well for many years. Still, I couldn't shake the feeling that something was going to go wrong.

My father drew up the maps, and per Baba's request, he sketched two different routes. One was a fast, straight-through, nonstop route right through Oklahoma. The other was a scenic route that would take a few days longer. At first Baba decided he and his party would take the scenic route, the men mandali would take the faster direct route, and they would meet at Meher Mount in Ojai, California, eighty miles north of Los Angeles. Then, just before they took off, Baba reversed his plan and sent the men mandali on the scenic route, while he headed out on the faster route. Baba was driven by Elizabeth, accompanied by

Mani, Mehera, and Meheru. Another car followed him, driven by his disciple Sarosh Irani. Sarosh was accompanied by Dr. Goher and three Western women, Kitty Davy, Rano Gayley, and Delia DeLeon.

In retrospect, there were clues all along as to what awaited the group. A day or two before he left, Baba went to see Elizabeth's Myrtle Beach home, called Youpon Dunes. He walked through the entire house and seemed especially interested in the number of rooms. People were puzzled as to why. It didn't occur to anyone that the event soon to unfold in Oklahoma would necessitate his returning to Youpon Dunes with his group. Then, on May 20, just as they were about to depart for the west in Elizabeth's blue Nash, Baba asked her if she had her car insurance policy with her. When she replied that she didn't, he made her stop by the house and get it. By then I was back home in New York, still unable to shake my sense of unease.

Baba and the party spent several days driving through South Carolina, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Arkansas. Kitty Davy noted in her book, *Love Alone Prevails*, how mysterious his behavior was that morning of May 24, 1952:

We were up early as usual.... After breakfast, the group stood waiting in front of the motel for Baba's signal to step into the cars. This morning Baba delayed starting, however. He came out of His room and stood quite still for some minutes on the doorstep, withdrawn, sad, and unusually still. No last-minute questions, no haste to be off. Elizabeth sat at the wheel awaiting His signal. Ten minutes elapsed before Baba walked to the car, followed by the Eastern women. The rest of us got into Sarosh's car, as before. After a short distance, Baba's car stopped suddenly, and Baba got out and paced up and down on the right side of the road. We too got out and stood by the car. No word was uttered.

The group traveled on into Oklahoma, where it had rained the night before.

As they came over a low hill, they saw a car speeding straight at them on their side of the road. The other driver didn't see Baba's car until the last moment. Then he put on the brakes, and his car skidded and spun right in front of Baba's. Elizabeth said that just at this moment, Baba stretched out his arm and pointed at the oncoming vehicle. Immediately after, the two cars collided with a terrible crash! Baba, who was sitting in the front seat, took the impact with his head, arm, and leg and was thrown out of the car onto the ground. Years earlier he had said

he would have to shed blood on American soil. Now he was bleeding profusely on the soft, fertile earth of America's heartland.

Baba suffered major injuries in the crash. Two of the women mandali traveling with him, Mehera and Meheru, were also injured, Mehera severely, along with Elizabeth, who was pinned behind the wheel.

The driver in the other car turned out to be a paraplegic Korean War veteran who was driving a specially adapted car for the first time. He and his passengers were unhurt.

Shortly after the collision, a man drove by who was taking his wife to the hospital to have their baby. When he saw the victims sprawled on the ground, he quickly drove on to town and called for two ambulances. The ambulances took Baba and his party seven miles away to a clinic in nearby Prague.

Mother and I were dressing to go to a wedding in New Jersey with my father when the phone rang. It was Sarosh. He told us simply that there had been a terrible accident in Prague, Oklahoma, and that Baba and the women mandali were in the hospital. Baba wanted us to come quickly.

"Tell them we'll be there!" I said.

I had no idea if we could arrange airline tickets because there were few airplanes flying due to a strike and a gasoline shortage. But when we called the airport, we discovered there were exactly two tickets left on one airplane departing for Oklahoma City. It was leaving in four and a half hours. Since we didn't have any cash and it was the weekend, Mother sent me rushing down to the grocery and liquor stores to write checks for all the money I could get. We threw clothes into suitcases and headed down the staircase.

My father, meanwhile, knew nothing of what had happened and was waiting at the bottom of the stairs to escort us to the wedding. Suddenly we were descending the stairs with suitcases in our hands, exclaiming, "We're sorry, we can't go with you! Baba's had an accident! We have to go to Oklahoma!"

"But you can't! We have to go to...."

"We can't do that!" And out the door we went, down to a taxi, and off to the airport.

We flew all night, arriving in Oklahoma City at 4:30 a.m. Immediately we asked someone at the airport desk for directions to Prague.

"Prague? Prague? I don't know any Prague."

We tried maybe four other people and got the same answer. No one seemed to have even heard of the place. Finally one man got a glimmer of light in his eyes and asked, "You mean 'Prayg'?"

Unbeknownst to us, the early settlers of Prague had deliberately changed the pronunciation of its well-known name. Czech farmers founded the town on land that reminded them of the Old Country. When it came time to name their hamlet, they decided on Praha, the Czech word for the capital of their homeland. Later, when it was anglicized to Prague, they agreed to pronounce it "Prayg" to differentiate it from its European counterpart. This innocent compromise between unity and separateness had thrown us into a temporary state of limbo.

There was no direct transport to Prague, so we hired a taxi to drive us the last sixty miles. We went straight to the clinic in Prague, where we were met by a totally distraught Sarosh.

Sarosh felt he was somehow responsible for the accident since he had been a full ten minutes behind Baba and Baba had repeatedly admonished him to keep up. Now he was saying he would have to kill himself because he could never again face Baba's devotees in India. We tried to assure him that it was not his fault and all involved had been instruments of Baba's divine plan. When he seemed a bit calmer, we set out to find Baba.

The clinic in Prague was a small, one-story affair that had been lovingly created by Dr. Ned Burleson and his wife, Julia. It had been designed to treat a few individuals with non-emergency needs, and these severely injured accident victims were stretching it beyond its capacity.

We learned that both Baba's left arm and left leg had been broken. His beautiful aquiline nose was also shattered, and there were painful injuries to his mouth. Dr. Burleson wrote later that when he treated Baba, "I was surprised to see an individual who was injured as badly as he was still smiling. I was also astounded to find that he did not speak a word or make any sound denoting discomfort... The most attractive quality of his personality that first day was the way he looked at me with those big brown eyes, as if he were reading my mind..."

Mehera and Elizabeth were put in beds in the only room available. Mehera had a concussion and a fractured skull. When I saw the x-rays of her head, it looked like a smashed and shattered eggshell. Cracks radiated down into the sinus orbit, and her eyes were swollen like purple beets. But all we heard from her day and night was, "*Arrey, Baba, Arrey, Baba*" (Oh, Baba, Oh, Baba), over and over. Baba had allowed her to suffer physically and to share in his own suffering.

Meheru's injuries included a fractured right arm and several fractured fingers on her left hand. She couldn't pick up or handle anything.

Elizabeth had broken both her arms and her collarbone, so the doctor had encased her in a large cast that covered the top of her body, with her arms across her chest. She was an extraordinarily brave woman, so

brave that she wouldn't even let the doctors touch her without first attending to Baba and the other women. She lay outside the operating room, saying, "I've already waited two hours, so don't let's be in a hurry about this!"

After they put the cast on her, she still suffered intense pain, so they brought in a specialist from Oklahoma City. Around the second or third day, he took off her cast and discovered she had many cracked ribs.

Twenty years earlier in New York, Elizabeth had been walking with Baba in a garden. He picked up a flower and gave it to her, saying she should keep it and remember the date - May 24. He told her that some time in the future it would have special meaning for her. Now she understood.

Baba had been placed on a cot in the doctor's private study. When we went in to see him, he placed a kerchief over his face, out of delicacy for our feelings, and showed us only his eyes. They seemed to me to be truly the eyes of the Christ. He wrote on his board, "You must understand that this was God's will, and it will result in benefit to the whole world."

Baba's sister, Mani, had also been in the car, but she was the only one not seriously injured. She was still in pain, however, because she'd been thrown across the carpeting in the car and suffered scratches and friction burns up and down her legs, arms, and feet. This pain didn't compare to the emotional pain she was feeling. Mani was devastated that she hadn't been given the physical burden to bear that the others had. She cried bitterly. Although she was eager to help the others in any way she could, her remorse was so extreme that Baba finally said to her, "Mani, you can do your share by keeping silence," and he had her begin it later on the trip.

Although Dr. Burleson was doing everything he could to assist the group, his resources were limited. Baba was very uncomfortable on the cot in the doctor's office, so the mandali took turns sitting as a backrest for him, hours at a time. Dr. Burleson sent for more hospital beds from Oklahoma City and called in several specialists to examine the patients. Margaret Craske arrived the evening of the day we reached the clinic and helped exercise Baba's muscles. Kitty Davy stayed in the room with Mehera and Elizabeth and cared for them night and day.

None of those injured in the accident were capable of feeding or tending to themselves, so the rest of us took care of their needs. One day Baba asked me if I would do the laundry for them. I was grateful to help in any way I could.

I went to collect the laundry, which was piled up on the sidewalk outside, and found this enormous stack of bloodstained clothes. It

seemed as if there was a mountain of them. I took them down to the local laundromat, where the equipment was so antiquated that the washing machines still utilized hand wringers. Fortunately, there were big tubs where I could deposit the laundry to soak. Since one of these batches was going to take about an hour, I decided to leave it soaking and dash back to the hospital to spoon-feed Meheru her lunch. I told the supervisor that I needed to get back to the patients (everyone in Prague now referred to them as being "from the accident") but that I would be back soon. When I did return, I found that the women in town had taken the clothes out for me and washed, dried, and folded them most beautifully. It was one of many times that the people of little Prague showed us how large their hearts were.

One night we were sitting in a local restaurant when I expressed the wish that I could bring flowers to the hospital. I asked the restaurant owner if there were any flower shops nearby, but he assured me there wasn't a single one between Prague and Oklahoma City. Then he added, "But if you'd like to come to my house after dinner, I have a big magnolia tree, and we can pick magnolia flowers for them."

He helped us climb the tree and cut armloads of blossoms, which we then delivered to Baba. Baba sent them all to his beloved Mehera. In the days following, flowers began arriving from all over, sent by Baba's devotees, and the townspeople themselves brought both flowers and gifts.

Another day we went to the grocery store to see if we could find something soft for Baba and Mehera to eat, since both had suffered painful injuries to the face and head. I was especially looking for berries or fresh fruit. I found nothing in the store, and when I queried the grocer, he looked at me for a moment, then asked, "You're from the accident, aren't you?"

When I told him we were, he said, "Well, I did put two little boxes of strawberries aside for my family. Why don't you take those? I'd be happy to give them to you."

I'm sure Baba and Mehera enjoyed those strawberries even more for the love that came with them.

In India when a person is ill or injured, it's customary for family members to move into the house to care for them. Baba's "family" of devotees did just the same thing at the clinic. People bustled about, in and out of rooms, and back and forth to town, tending to tasks and searching for ways to provide comfort. And as in any family, there were a variety of emotions and responses. At one point, I began to notice that different people in our group were coming to me repeating the same message from Baba: "Charmian, Baba wants me to tell you to be sure not to worry."

"I'm not worried," I would say. And it was true.

But then someone else came declaring, "Baba says to tell you not to worry about him."

Again, my answer was, "I'm not worried."

Then still another arrived saying, "Baba says to tell you not to worry about the group."

I couldn't understand what this was all about. I wasn't worrying. In fact, it seemed to me the patients were in the best of hands. The doctors were competent and attentive. Things were going quite well. And since God was obviously in charge, why would I worry?

Then all of a sudden, it hit me. Baba knew I wasn't worried. He was sending people to me who *were* worried. By telling me not to worry, they were becoming mindful that *they* shouldn't worry.

Four days rolled by in Oklahoma, and then Baba called my mother and me in and said he had a mission for us. He wanted us to go immediately to the West Coast and meet with his lovers to "tell them about this accident, which was purely God's and Baba's will."

Then he began to dictate on his board a message he wanted us to deliver. By then I'd had some experience interpreting the board, and I was fairly skilled at following his lightning-speed fingers. But this time I kept reading a sentence that just didn't make sense to me: "You tell my West Coast lovers that their patient waiting will bear bitter fruit."

I asked, "Bitter fruit, Baba?"

He spelled it again. And again I asked, "Bitter fruit?"

We tried several more times, and then he slowed down considerably. Finally I exclaimed, "*Better* fruit! Their patient waiting will bear *better* fruit!"

I couldn't believe I couldn't get that word until the end.

Baba and his party stayed in the clinic for about eleven days. Then they returned to Myrtle Beach to recover. No airplane transportation could be arranged due to the continuing strike so the group set out in two ambulances to make the fifteen-hundred-mile trip. According to Margaret Craske, one of those ambulances was in reality a hearse and the other an unidentifiable vehicle with a "most odd appearance." Both, however, were comfortable.

They drove day and night and eventually arrived on June 7, and they went directly to Elizabeth's home, Youpon Dunes. Baba's intense scrutiny of the house three weeks earlier was no longer a mystery.

There was much about Baba's accident that instilled humility and gratitude, especially the "better fruit" harvested for the world's most advanced and materialistic nation, and undoubtedly for the world itself. But I was also thankful for certain divine details, particularly that Baba



had "arranged" for Dr. Burleson to care for the injured party. The doctor was a remarkable man with exceptional devotion to his patients. He was so impressed by Meher Baba, he later wrote him a letter that said:

From you and your party we have seen a demonstration of most of the teachings of Christ. Many Americans preach these things, but we have never observed so close an application of them. The profound devotion to you which is demonstrated by all your party convinces us that you deserve all of it. Such devotion cannot be forced, it can only be obtained by love; and to have that demonstrated affection from so many wonderful people is almost unbelievable.

We are not accustomed to dealing with people who appreciate our efforts as you do, and the manifestation of that appreciation leaves us very humble, with the feeling that we do not deserve it because we realize our limitations and faults. Therefore, instead of efforts being classed as work, they have seemed a pleasure...

Back at Youpon Dunes, Baba dictated this message for his lovers:

The personal disaster, for some years foretold by me, at last happened while crossing the American continent, causing me, through facial injuries, a broken leg and broken arm, much mental and physical suffering. It was necessary that it should happen in America. God willed it so ...

In the 1950s, Prague, Oklahoma prided itself on three things: native son and superstar athlete Jim Thorpe, a three-hundred-year-old statue of the Infant Jesus rescued from communist Czechoslovakia, and the annual Kolache Festival, a celebration of Czech heritage. At the time of the accident, these were what the modest little town was known for.

In the future, it's likely to be remembered for much more.

## *The Taletell Mattress*

It takes weeks or even months for a fractured bone to heal. A fractured heart takes longer. In the months after the accident, doctors in four countries worked to heal the bones of the Avatar, while the Avatar himself worked to heal the hearts of his followers.

By the time Baba left Oklahoma, Mother and I were already in California, where Baba had sent us to reassure his followers on that coast that the accident was his will and that he was progressing well. Although we had all been admonished over the years not to worry, many of Baba's lovers now found this impossible.

Reminded of his all-too-human vulnerability, concerned about his pain and the extent of his recovery, they waited anxiously for any news. Mother and I went first to Los Angeles, where a parade of people came to see us, each wanting all the details: How is he? How is Mehera? How are Mani and Meheru? People began arriving at the hotel at eight in the morning, and we continued to see them until about two the following morning. Then we flew to San Francisco and did the same thing. The demand was so great that we stayed on the West Coast two weeks. Meanwhile, Baba was sending us telegrams that asked, "What is your program?" This seemed a polite way of suggesting we wrap things up and return to New York, so we finally did just that.

We had been home about a month when Baba asked me to return to Myrtle Beach to stay with the group at Youpon Dunes. Mother remained in New York, and I set out for my first solo visit with Baba.

When I arrived in Myrtle Beach, it was the middle of a typically hot and humid summer, reminiscent of the same season in India. I was introduced to my roommate at Youpon Dunes, Baba's longtime disciple Baroness Ruano Bogislav. Ruano was a very beautiful patrician woman with a delightful and infectious sense of humor. She had bright, piercing eyes, an arched nose, and gray hair rolled back in a soft bun. I can still picture her perfectly in her tailored tweed suits and sensible brown shoes. As the days passed, I developed a profound respect and deep affection for Ruano, whom Baba referred to as his "Eagle." He liked to give

people nicknames, and Ruano had earned hers through an uncanny ability to imitate an eagle's cry. Sometimes Baba would spontaneously ask for that imitation, and Ruano would let out a piercing cry and flap her "wings" like an eagle soaring. Baba would always applaud.

Ruano and I felt very blessed because our bedroom was right beneath Baba's. But even feelings of blessedness can trigger misery. I was so overwhelmed by Baba's Godhood that I began to struggle with a sense of unworthiness. I was convinced I didn't deserve this blessing. One night my heart was so filled with pain that I could do nothing but lie there and cry. But each time such feelings threatened to engulf me, Baba would lift them. Suddenly he would remove the weight until all I could feel was joy.

Even while Baba recovered from his debilitating injuries, he continued his diligent work with his followers. On one afternoon in particular, he managed to teach us all a lesson about criticism and tolerance, and he did it with a simple box of cigars.

That day Baba was upstairs in his room, and we were downstairs having lunch. Ruano had excused herself to another room, out of my view but in full view of my companions. Minutes went by, and then I noticed a conversational buzz around the table.

"For heaven's sake, what is she doing?"

"Isn't that terrible?"

I turned around to see the cause of this hubbub and saw Ruano sitting in an easy chair smoking a large, black cigar.

"Really, I don't see how she could do that with Baba resting right upstairs!"

The buzz continued.

Then we suddenly heard Mani racing down the stairs. She had a wrapped box in her hands, and she went directly to Ruano.

"Baba sent these to you, Ruano, but he wants to know if you remember your promise."

"That I was only to smoke six a day," replied Ruano.

"Very good," said Mani. "Baba said that if you remembered your promise, he was sending you this present."

Ruano unwrapped the gift and found a box full of big, black cigars. I have no idea where Baba could have obtained them. He was transported to Myrtle Beach in an ambulance, and it didn't seem likely that anyone had given *him* a gift of cigars. As far as I was concerned, he could have materialized them out of thin air.

Wherever they came from, they promptly put an end to the criticism of Ruano.

While we learned the lessons of tolerance, in New York Mother was struggling to learn patience as she worked to ready our apartment for Baba's arrival. He had sent a message earlier that he would visit New York to meet with his followers and people with a newly awakened interest in him. It was a pattern in Mother's life that her most difficult relationships seemed to be with houses. Now she was enduring a maelstrom of problems as she tried to make our home worthy of a visit by the Avatar. On one especially trying afternoon, the landlord suddenly decided to replace the large picture window in the living room. The workers scattered glass, soot, putty, and dirt all over the place and then just packed up and left. Mother was frantic. Just about this time, Baba told me, "The world is quite mad, and your mother is quite mad today."

I'm not sure why the world was madder than usual. At the time, the Western world was agitated over the increasing threat of communist domination in both Europe and Korea, and we know now that Britain was working on an atomic bomb while America was readying its first hydrogen bomb. It could have been all of those things or none of them. As for Mother, madness centered on the continuing broken appliances, lost items, and botched communications. Such obstacles, said Baba, always occur when the Infinite works through the finite.

My own problems involved that more immediate house known as the body. It started with a terrible and tenacious cold I caught from my roommate, Ruano. The cold would plague me all through summer.

Baba stayed in Youpon Dunes for about five weeks, and when everyone was well enough to travel, our party of fifteen journeyed by train to New York. Mehera had been in seclusion for many years, and the men mandali weren't allowed to communicate with her or even see her. So when we arrived, I was instructed to take the women mandali on a circuitous route through the station that would avoid the men. Mother was at the station to greet us, but I didn't even have time to say hello as we hurried past with Mehera in an attempt to put some distance between her and the men. We whisked her into an elevator, went up one floor to where the cars were waiting, and when the doors opened - there were the men mandali facing us! The route had been planned meticulously, and we'd been so quick, yet there they were. We were in such shock that the doors shut again without our realizing it, and we rode up an additional floor. Finally we got Baba and the women mandali loaded into cars and out to the house in Scarsdale where the group was staying.

The Scarsdale house was a small miracle in itself. Baba had requested a house within fifty miles of the city, so members of our Sufi group had searched Westchester and Long Island while Mother hunted

in New Jersey. However, it was Filis Frederick, who had just met Baba that spring, who finally solved the problem. She asked a lady she had met only once if she would mind letting Baba have her house for two weeks. Amazingly, the woman agreed right away. Also amazingly, Baba received his requested privacy, as all the neighbors whose homes overlooked the garden were away on vacation.

Baba, the women mandali, Elizabeth Patterson, and her nurse all stayed in this house, and arrangements were also made for a cook and helper to assist them.

Some of the men mandali were staying at an apartment on East 72nd Street that served as our Sufi center. We had furnished it with beds, bedding, and all the items necessary to make them comfortable.

It sometimes felt like I too had taken new lodgings that week - in the driver's seat of my car. Baba and the other accident victims had numerous doctor appointments in New York, and they also needed transportation back and forth between Scarsdale and our apartment in the city. Later Marion Florsheim, whom Baba had most appropriately nicknamed "Energy," took over half of the driving. We drove back and forth between Scarsdale and New York, an hour's drive each way, and we made several trips a day. Baba told us, "You don't know how fortunate you are to be driving me."

One day when I was driving out to Scarsdale to pick up Baba, I saw a little bird fluttering on the pavement in the middle of a busy boulevard. A car obviously had struck it, so I pulled over to see if I could help it in any way. But just as I touched it, it died. I said Baba's name and continued on to Scarsdale.

On the return trip, we passed the same place where I'd found the bird, so I asked Baba, "When someone hits a little creature like that with a car and kills it, who gets the sanskaras from this? Does the driver pick up the little bird's sanskaras as a karmic obligation?"

Baba said, "Yes, unless *I* am in the car. If I am in the car, then *I* assume the results of the karma."

Besides my trips with Baba, I was also chauffeuring the women mandali to appointments. Again and again, I took them to doctors and dentists for examinations and treatments of their slowly mending injuries. Mehera still had a large triangular-shaped flap of loose skin on her forehead that wouldn't heal. When I took her to an appointment at Presbyterian Hospital, the doctor didn't show up. His nurse was on vacation, and no one had any information about Mehera. I insisted they check the doctor's book, and they found her name but nothing else. Finally, another physician came in. He had been in India and took an immediate interest in our plight. I was very grateful when he kindly

took responsibility for Mehera and gave her the examination himself. But when he finished, he did what I'm sure he did with all his patients - he shook her hand. Mehera had not been touched by a man for years! That had been Baba's wish. She was sure this unforeseen handshake would make her beloved Baba very unhappy. But Baba later reassured her that it was just fine to be touched by doctors and that the handshake had done no harm.

This was quite an extraordinary event for Mehera. After so many years in seclusion, separated from men, she was now being treated by male doctors and dentists. Still, she bore it with good grace, knowing it was what Baba wanted.

Baba planned to give darshan in our apartment in New York on July 18, 19, and 20. Mother received an astounding seven hundred phone calls asking for appointments with him.

The world of the "finite" began stirring the pot almost as soon as the darshan was announced. One day I was once again driving the women into town for doctor appointments, and they joined Mother and me for lunch at the apartment. Just as they were about to leave, we discovered the elevator had broken down. Since we were fourteen stories up and I didn't want them to miss their appointments, I ran down the stairs and convinced the elevator operator to bring up the service elevator. Now we were really nervous. In less than forty-eight hours, throngs of people would be coming for darshan, with no way up to the Highest of the High. But as often happened in these crises, somehow Baba arranged for the elevator to work in time.

Mother and her students went to great lengths to make the apartment comfortable for Baba. They jury-rigged a sort of couch for him from which he could give darshan, using my mattress and a backrest. They filled the room with flowers, and at Baba's request, they placed a bowl of fruit by the couch. This would be his *prasad*, a gift imbued by his touch with divine love and offered to each person who came to him.

Baba had also asked us to place a poster in the living room and to ask people to read it before seeing him. It read:

I am equally approachable to one and all, big and small,  
To saints who rise and sinners who fall,  
Through all the various Paths that give the Divine Call.  
I am approachable alike to saint whom I adore  
And to sinner whom I am for,  
And equally through Sufism, Vedantism, Christianity, .  
Or Zoroastrianism and Buddhism,  
And other "isms" of any kind

And also directly

Through no medium of "isms" at all.

On the first morning of darshan, July 18, I drove to Scarsdale before dawn to bring Baba to the apartment. He hadn't slept for many nights and was exhausted - so exhausted that at first he said he couldn't go through with the event. But after a while, he agreed, and we were back at the apartment by 6:00 a.m. Once the darshan began, we witnessed an astonishing transformation in Baba. Mother aptly described it by saying that after the first few interviews, Baba looked like a drooping flower that had just been watered. He himself said, "You see, so much love has revived me."

I remember the phone ringing incessantly that week. I remember people coming in to see Baba from all over and from all walks of life. They arrived unsure, curious, hopeful, and sometimes wary, the homeless hearts of the age of science. They left comforted and enraptured. I remember the wondrous sight of people after they had seen him. Many wept from the bottom of their hearts. One woman later wrote me, "The divine love emanating from that Perfect Master was so overpowering, it shook me to the very depths of my being."

During the days of the darshan, Baba told Mother, "Charmian will have to be very, very sick next year." Then he added, "But I will take care of it." I was sick then, still suffering from the cold I'd contracted in Myrtle Beach. The "very, very" part was ahead.

On the twentieth, Baba met with us to discuss further his wishes for the Sufi order and his plans to finish the book *God Speaks*, which he wanted Sufism to publish. He also discussed the charter for Sufism Reoriented, promising to send a completed charter with his signature after he returned to India. He jettisoned many of the old practices of the order and replaced them with only two: the repetition of his name and a daily meditation on him.

When the darshan in our apartment was over, I took my mattress back upstairs to my bedroom. I was ecstatic. The Avatar had spent three days on that mattress, so surely a blissful sleep awaited me. Instead, the nights were torturous! When Mother and I discussed this, we came to understand that although Baba radiated love and light to all who came to see him, inside he was experiencing incalculable suffering for the entire universe, and the mattress was drenched in that suffering.

The day after the darshan, I took Baba to a four o'clock appointment with yet another doctor. On the way, he kept asking me, "Will the doctor be there? Is the appointment going to happen on time?"

I assured him it would because we had called ahead to confirm it.

I had been too confident. When we arrived, the doctor wasn't even there. We waited and waited, and still no sign of him. He finally appeared at five-fifteen but then announced it was too late for an appointment because the x-ray room had been closed. He dismissed us without concern, saying, "I guess you'd better come back tomorrow."

It was clear to me the doctor had other fish to fry, so I wheeled on him, saying, "Don't you know who this man is?"

No response.

Baba told me to ask him a different question, which I did: "Doctor, where is your humanity?"

Suddenly the doctor took a second look at Baba. Then he turned on his heel and escorted him to x-ray. He tended to the whole procedure without another word.

After the darshan, my driving trips expanded to include outings to local sites and events that Baba thought would entertain the women. All of us had suffered a shock with the accident. For many days, anguish had eclipsed our joy and dampened our spirits. Even Mani, who had virtually been raised by Baba, had plunged into despair in Prague, weeping because she wanted a greater share of the suffering. Mehera, though unconcerned about her own injuries, had worried and inquired constantly about Baba's condition. In New York, we were in danger of being consumed by the aftereffects of Prague, the medical appointments, treatments, and health cautions.

Baba seemed resolved to lighten our burden. He devised a program of entertainment and recreation to distract us and renew our sense of delight in the world. And whenever he could, he joined us. Baba was with us on trips to the zoo in Central Park, the larger Bronx Zoo, and the Museum of Natural History. He also took the women to Radio City Music Hall to see the lighthearted movie *Where's Charley?* starring Ray Bolger as an Oxford student whose impersonation of a dowager leads to endless complications. One night they attended the musical play *The King and I*, but that time Baba remained behind because in those days the theater couldn't accommodate a person in a wheelchair. I've always suspected that during this period Baba may have been the archetypal disabled person and that his work had impact on later legislation and changes in awareness about the handicapped.

Throughout his stay, Baba was making plans to visit England and Switzerland on his return trip to India. His lovers there, some of whom had never met him and others of whom numbered among his earliest Western disciples, had longingly called to him. And when the lover calls, the Master hears. I remembered his comment in Myrtle Beach that I might be going too, but I dared not say anything. Then one day,



he suddenly said to Mother, "I think I will take Charmian with me to Europe. Aren't you jealous?"

Beloved soul that she was, she immediately replied, "Of course not, Baba. I love her too, and her happiness is my concern!"

I was thrilled! To travel the world in the company of its Creator - this was almost unimaginable.

I was only twenty-three then, but I was already an experienced traveler with many adventures behind me. I took my first trip, with my parents to Bermuda, when I was only four. I especially remember hotel guests watching with amusement as I whirled around the dance floor after my parents told me it was permissible for one to dance by oneself. After that there were trips to South America, Nova Scotia, Europe, and the Middle East. In my travels, it seemed I had experienced almost everything. I had learned to ride horseback, developed mysterious rashes, got lost on a passenger ship, won first prize dressed in Chinese pajamas at a costume ball, hugged a twelve-foot snake, been bitten by a parrot, and been tossed about in a hurricane. I have often marveled over the extraordinary adventures bestowed on me, even as a child. In fact, so exciting were my early years that I once wondered how the rest of my life could possibly measure up.

Now I knew.

## *The Tour of the Ego*

The Hindus have a name for this era, one the followers of Meher Baba know well: the Kali Yuga. Also called the Dark Age, the Iron Age, the Age of Quarrel, and the Machine Age, it's the last in a cycle of four ages that reoccur perpetually, repeating the same general sequence of events. It's our age, and it's a hard one. The progression of these ages, or *yugas*, is one of successive moral and spiritual decline. By the time we reach the fearsome Kali, humanity is at its most debased. Virtue is engulfed by vice, and truth provokes mockery. In the Kali Yuga, technological progress is mistaken for human progress; material advancement displaces spiritual advancement.

The Kali Yuga is an age of extraordinary paradoxes, and these paradoxes were starkly evident in the years that followed World War II. The world was becoming more divided and more united at the same time. Global society was split into two worlds with opposing ideologies, communism and capitalism, while moving in the direction of one interrelated, interdependent world. New political and humanitarian organizations sought to bring us together; alliances between adversaries alienated us. Radios and televisions linked us; new weapons polarized us.

In the 1950s, the rising star of the Machine Age was the airplane. It was a paradox too. We exploited its destructive effects in aerial warfare. Now we were again exploring its benevolent side. When Baba boarded a plane the day we left for England, commercial aviation was in its youth. Only three months before, the world's first regular jet airliner service had begun in London - a weekly flight to Johannesburg, with five stops along the way in Europe and Africa. Just twenty-five years had passed since Lindbergh made his first lonely flight across the Atlantic, but by the end of 1952, tens of millions were crossing the oceans and continents by plane.

As the women mandali and I followed Baba to our plane on July 30, a herd of reporters snapped photos and jotted down notes for the evening papers. But it wasn't Baba who attracted their attention. It was

Miss Universe and a champion prizefighter, both of whom happened to be traveling on the same plane with us. The media huddled around these two celebrities while the Highest of the High was being carefully hoisted aboard in a chair, unnoticed.

In spite of the commotion, I was happy to finally be on the plane. As always, Baba had arranged for us to arrive at the airport two to three hours early. He liked to work with crowds, and airports provided a most unique opportunity - thousands of people from all over the globe, fully focused, and convened in one place. Baba used the miracles of the Machine Age to full advantage and was the most widely traveled Avatar of our cycle. By 1952 he'd already crossed the length and breadth of India, including what is now Pakistan, and visited the United States, England, France, Italy, Spain, Switzerland, Ceylon, Persia, Egypt, Iraq, Turkey, Hawaii, Japan, and China. He had employed almost every form of transportation available, including trains, ships, cars, bullock carts, and his own restless feet.

Sometime earlier he had told us there was someone he wished to meet at the airport and that when the meeting occurred, we should keep our distance. As he foretold, a man came within about seven feet of Baba and began to make hand gestures while gazing at him. Baba too made hand gestures while returning the gaze. The man finally walked away and disappeared. It seemed likely to us that he was one of Baba's "agents." Their meeting had taken place without a single word.

Since Baba was still in a cast and needed to elevate his foot, the crew on board the plane had removed the armrests from three seats in front and propped him there with pillows. The whole time we were in transit, he worked on his arm and leg exercises. The passengers would look up as every few minutes a white cast flew up in the air above the back of his seat, followed a few moments later by an arm. Everyone on the plane was watching curiously, trying to figure out what was happening.

Even when legs and arms weren't flying, Baba aroused curiosity. I watched as people passed by his seat and became caught by his eyes. They would stop and stare, disappearing into his unfathomable gaze. Little children were especially affected. They would approach him beaming, and he would beam right back. Three or four children stationed themselves right in front of his seat, reaching out their hands or putting their arms around him. I think they would have stayed there for the entire trip if Rano Gayley, an American artist and longtime disciple of Baba, hadn't pried them loose and sent them back to their concerned parents. As soon as their parents looked the other way, the children would sneak right back to Baba. Throughout the flight, he was trying to get some rest, and as always, he had none.

We arrived in England early the next morning, where we were met by Will and Mary Backett and Delia DeLeon, all members of Baba's first group in England, and Dr. Donkin. The Backetts, who were originally Sufis, had been followers of Baba since 1931 and were very dear to him. Delia, who had also joined Baba in 1931, was a charmingly exuberant actress whom Baba had dubbed "Oh, Lord" in honor of her penchant for that expression.

London was still rebuilding itself in the early 1950s, rising up from the ashes of the German blitz with a burst of construction aimed at easing the severe housing shortage that followed the end of the war. One phenomenon of the postwar period was the world's enormous population increase, and England was no exception. Pregnant women, toddlers, and prams navigated their way through the busy London streets. Life was renewing itself.

In response to the population boom, America invented the contraceptive pill in 1952, although it would be many more years before it gained wide popularity. The world population that year was inching toward three billion, and there were concerns about the sufficiency of our food supply. Experts heralded the pill as the solution to this unmanageable growth; fifty years later the world population was six billion.

England was in a state of transition when we arrived. Only five months before, King George VI had died, and the twenty-five-year-old Elizabeth II had taken the throne, promising to dedicate her life fully to her royal duties. The king once said of his daughter, the future sovereign: "She will be lonely all her life."

Elizabeth would rule over a very different empire from her father's. In the fallout after the war, Britain had lost much of its supremacy. It had already relinquished India. Now its colonial rule was being challenged in Nigeria, Uganda, British Guyana, and Malaya. The sun that would never set was slipping steadily closer to the horizon.

Power in the 1950s was shifting from territory to weaponry, so in spite of its waning empire, Britain still managed to hold its place among the world's leaders. The same month the king died, Winston Churchill made the announcement that Britain had its own atomic bomb. Nuclear proliferation had begun.

According to ancient writings on the Kali Yuga, it is when the world is most in peril that the Avatar will come.

For his stay in London, Baba had chosen the Rubens Hotel, a very British hotel in a very royal neighborhood. Just across the road was Buckingham Palace. The hotel was built as a hostel in 1912 to house debutantes attending the "season" at the palace. The Rubens overlooked the Royal parks and the Royal Mews, which housed the ornate

carriages, horses, and motorcars that served the palace. People had watched from the hotel windows as one of those carriages carried the new queen to her coronation.

The Rubens was a luxury hotel that prided itself on service, but all bets are off when traveling with the Avatar. First we discovered that due to the early hour, none of our rooms were vacant except Baba's. So we all set off for his room. Next, the elevator was too small for his wheelchair, so we found a service elevator. We finally made it up to his floor and got him placed on his bed, while the rest of us, a dozen or so, simply milled around him.

This was just the kind of opportunity Baba loved - confused and tired disciples in close quarters where he could easily create a little friction to sandpaper their egos. To begin with, he announced that he liked a very hard mattress and this one was soft. So some of us found boards to put under it while others went in search of a hospital bed. When we found we couldn't get lunch for several hours, Kitty Davy and Dr. Donkin went out for some food. Alas, Baba wasn't pleased with what they found. The fish was too dry; the soup was too weak. So we ordered tea all around. But that led to a debate, refereed by Baba, as to whether we should have bread and butter with the tea. Meanwhile, we discovered the luggage was all mixed up. It was chaos the entire morning, but eventually everyone got fed, the luggage was sorted, and everything calmed down.

It was this day that Baba also complained that I slept ten hours a night and ate five times a day. At one point on our trip he said, "She sleeps like a log, eats like a hog, and looks like a frog." It was true that I slept and ate more than most people, but his description made it sound like a dreadful habit, a shameful waste of time. The point of his chastisement was humiliation, one of the Master's weapons for dissolving the ego. Looking back, I see that first morning in London as another cauldron in which Baba stirred up our egos, presumably so we could discover and confront our own limitations. Baba also used exhaustion to crush and eliminate the ego. We may have been so exhausted that we felt unable to go on, or to go beyond a certain fixed idea of what our mental or physical endurance would stand. At such a time, Baba demanded an extra effort, which drove us over the boundary we'd set for ourselves. In this way, he liberated us from ourselves and our false conceptions. When we discovered that we could, with his help, overreach ourselves, we grew stronger.

When the slap from the Master lands, the embrace is never far behind. The next day I was delighted when Baba suggested I drive the women up to Stratford-upon-Avon to see the land of Shakespeare.

Stratford seemed to me an inspired choice - a restful hamlet in the countryside, replete with history and the lingering essence of the world's most beloved writer. But first I had to get there. I was still nursing the cold I'd contracted in Myrtle Beach, and the plane flight had only exacerbated it. On this day, I was feeling feverish and light-headed, not at all fit to be driving on the "wrong" side of the road on the "wrong" side of a car on unfamiliar streets. So Baba agreed that Delia's sister Minta would drive Mehera, along with Mani, Goher, and Delia, and I would drive Meheru and Rano. With Minta driving ahead and waiting patiently for me at every corner, we finally made it out of town onto the main highway. It was a glorious day, and the hills fairly flew by as we sped across the countryside.

Shakespeare was one of Baba's favorite authors, although he once said there was nothing "spiritual" in his works. Instead, he described Shakespeare as a "genius." He was among many geniuses in that age of renaissance. The year Shakespeare was born, Michelangelo died and Galileo was born.

It was Shakespeare's unique destiny to influence millions of readers for generations to form ideas about heroism, romantic love, duty, morality, and the mosaic of forces that guide humankind. He gave vivid expression to the entire range of emotions and desires that define our behavior through the winding process, when we're forming the endless *sanskaras*, or impressions, that will later have to be unwound for our return to God. Although he provided no spiritual answers, Shakespeare knew it was human fate to forever wrestle with right and wrong and illusion and truth, themes so universal and timeless that his works have endured for over four centuries.

One of those who particularly appreciated Shakespeare's themes was Mehera. She enjoyed reading his plays in school and took special pleasure in *The Tempest*.

Mehera's role as the Avatar's consort was unique and wondrous. We knew that as part of this role, she represented the earth itself, the beauty and glory of God's Creation. And one could see that she tried always to surround Baba with that beauty, especially in her careful tending of the resplendent garden at Meherazad. On many of our outings in Europe, it seemed as if Baba wanted to give her the opportunity to enjoy the very loveliness and grandeur of the world she reflected. One of the first of these was our idyllic afternoon in the countryside of Stratford.

In Shakespeare's time, Stratford was a market town, well known for its fairs and as a venue for traveling entertainers. The Arden Forest that inspired scenes in *As You Like It* once stretched from Avon to Birmingham, but by the time we arrived, it had been replaced by suburbs, as we

liked it or not. Still, the rolling hills, meadows, and undulating farmlands that were tilled by Shakespeare's relatives hadn't changed. Stands of pine, poplar, and chestnut shaded the hillsides, and hedgerows fenced the fields.

The two village brooks he knew meandered yet through town, one directly by his house. Swans still sailed the Avon where it arrives at Stratford, and we crossed the same bridge with its fourteen arches that Shakespeare crossed when he went to and from London. It takes twenty minutes to walk the boundaries of the town and less than that to imagine yourself in the sixteenth century. It was easy to picture the streets bustling with chandlers, millers, wool merchants, and traders hawking candles and feather beds. Or to picture one of those Breughel-like feast days when the town came out to watch the itinerant actors who inspired young William. We saw all of the five buildings associated with his life, including the cottage of his wife, Anne Hathaway, which in spite of its quaintly thatched roof was, with twelve rooms, hardly a cottage at all. On the walls of the house in which he was born, we saw where different pilgrims had scrawled their names, including Washington Irving and Sir Walter Scott.

Shakespeare stayed in London for about twenty years while he was writing and visited Stratford only periodically. But his heart remained there. He invested his money in the town and eventually returned to retire as a country gentleman. Once retired, he sowed flowers instead of words, nurturing a model garden that featured a favorite of his, the white chamomile. The chamomile still flourishes there. Shakespeare's Falstaff said of it, "The more it is trodden on, the faster it grows."

Shakespeare was buried at the same church where he was baptized, and we pondered his tombstone, inscribed with a plea that people not disturb his bones. It wouldn't have mattered if they had. According to comments made by Baba in the 1920s, Shakespeare was reincarnated as a Brahmin in India at that time, taking a leading role in the country's politics.

After Shakespeare died, Ben Jonson wrote a famous dedication to him that read:

Triumph, my Britain, thou hast one to show  
to whom all scenes of Europe homage owe.  
He was not of an age, but for all time!

It was a fitting description of Shakespeare. But I thought I knew one it suited even better.

Through Stratford, Baba awakened us anew to the sparkle of the human spirit - the brilliance, beauty of expression, and quest for understanding that spans all ages, light or dark.

After Stratford, we arranged to meet at the "mulberry bush," or traffic circle, outside Oxford. This was a roundabout with streets veering off in every direction and cars maneuvering their way in and out of the circle. Unfortunately, I didn't realize there were about five of these circles, so Meheru, Rano, and I spent nearly an hour orbiting around one or the other without finding Minta and then went on our way back to London.

It was late when we returned to London so we hurried up the steps and filed into Baba's room, feeling very sheepish. To our surprise, Baba was sitting up in bed, twinkling with happiness. We burst out, "Oh, Baba, we're so sorry!" and babbled on and on until he suddenly held up his hand. "Don't you notice anything different about me?"

We looked at him hard, not quite understanding. "Look at my leg!" he said.

Suddenly we realized his cast was gone! Baba had insisted on visiting an English surgeon known as "the best bone man in the world." And the doctor had announced that his bones had "splinted" and the cast could come off permanently. Only a few days before, a renowned bone specialist in New York had said the cast couldn't be removed for at least two months. Now, here Baba sat with only an Ace bandage, and already he could bend his knee to a forty-five-degree angle. Still, the pangs of returning circulation had started, and he was faced with a period of discomfort due to circulatory difficulties, weak muscles, and scar tissue. He was joyful just the same.

Back on July 10, the anniversary of his silence, Baba had asked many of us to keep silence too. Now he said to us, "You see - July 10 *did* work."

When traveling with Baba, one tried to always be ready for his call, which often came at the most unexpected or awkward times. Later that day, as I began to wash my hair, the thought came to me, "Baba's going to call me. I just know it. I'm going to be right in the middle of this, and he's going to beckon me upstairs." I went forward anyway, and just as I finished rinsing, there was a knock on the door. "Charmian, Baba wants you."

I wrapped a towel around my head, turban style, and put on a Chinese coat with a high collar and frogs down the front. Then I hurried through the staid halls of the hotel to Baba's room. He greeted me with, "Ah! Charmian is in her Chinese mood today." Then he asked me if I would guard his door for an hour while he tried to rest. All the others would be gone.

Whatever my personal mood was at the time, today it's possible to look back on the real "Chinese mood" of the early 1950s - a mood



that served an important role in a global drama being played out on the battlefields of Korea. In 1950 the communists of North Korea had invaded South Korea, which was controlled by the United States. The Soviet Union and communist China were aiding North Korea; South Korea's allies included the United States and numerous members of the United Nations. It was a war of universal significance since it involved the world's three superpowers and pitted East against West.

In early 1952, the world was focused on a continuing flip-flop struggle for a small horseshoe-shaped hill in Korea known as the Hook. The Hook was captured by the Western forces, lost, recaptured by the Marines, attacked again, and finally claimed by the British. The war had escalated while we were in New York when the UN carried out a bombing attack on North Korea. In this unique battle of East vs. West, North vs. South, and communism vs. democracy, the map changed every day, and the outcome was impossible to predict.

The genteel Rubens Hotel seemed far removed from any battlefields, but I had my own minor skirmish there. In my Chinese apparel, and a mood I would describe as earnest, I stationed myself before Baba's door to protect his quiet. When Baba rested, complete silence was vital because he awakened very easily. The slightest creak of a board would disturb him. I sat cross-legged in the hallway near his door, quite sure it would be a simple task to watch over him for one hour. Fate had other designs. First a stream of people began traipsing down the hallway, talking and laughing loudly. I whispered, "Sh-h-h-h," and my peculiar costume and posture drew quizzical stares.

This group was followed by more and more people; the parade seemed endless. The coup de grace came when I heard a loud rattling coming up the stairs. I couldn't imagine what it was. Suddenly a brisk, efficient delivery man emerged from the stairwell carrying a large wicker commode chair that creaked with every step he took. Inside it was an enamel basin, and inside that was an entire china tea set with cups, saucers, and plates, a tea kettle, and a couple of pots. The man was fully prepared to burst into Baba's room when I blocked his way and persuaded him to leave his package in the hall with me. After he left, I resumed my seat, but now I had this wicker commode by my side and became the uncomfortable target of even stranger looks!

I think Baba was lovingly playing with me that day in the hall. And I, distracted by the "urgency" of my task, lost the lightness and whimsy of the moment. How much greater would be his fun if we could only join him in it. The next day I was given another chance.

Throughout the European trip, the men mandali traveled separately from our party. They were due to arrive in London at 1:00 a.m., and

Baba asked Will Backett to meet them at the airport. Just as in Myrtle Beach, I had a premonition something would go wrong, but Baba denied my repeated requests to accompany the Backetts.

In the morning, Baba called us into his room and asked, "Did the mandali come?"

Everyone assured Baba they had heard luggage being moved during the night and surely the mandali were in the hotel at that very moment. "'Bring them to me!" said Baba.

Rano went to call the mandali, got no answer, and hurried to the desk, where she was told they never arrived. Baba had us all scurrying about trying to find out what happened. We phoned around, but no one had seen a group of Indian men wandering about. Then Baba sent just about everybody out in taxis to search for them. Only Delia and I remained behind.

While this was going on, Baba was unusually forceful about the problem. He'd turn to Delia and say, "It's all your fault!" Delia was miserable. After Rano and Dr. Donkin returned, he declared, "It's all Rano's fault." Then Rano too looked miserable. Every time I tried to open my mouth, he'd give me a glare that clearly warned me not to say a single word. After a while, it became all Donkin's fault. Then it was the women mandali's fault. Then it was the men mandali's fault. Then it became *Baba's* fault. And lastly, it was God's will.

Baba often assigned blame to people for incidents in which they were barely involved. If you answered back, you were needled a bit. But if you simply accepted the blame, he would glow and immediately shift the fault to someone else. You were left with the exhilarating knowledge that you had actually triumphed over your formidable ego.

After some time, the Backetts returned, and we all held our breath, expecting a renewed explosion from Baba. But in the sweetest, mildest way, he said, "Will, I don't quite understand how this happened."

Will said he'd waited two hours at the gate, but somehow the mandali had passed him by. He was dreadfully sorry. Baba sent the Backetts out of the room and then blamed us all anew. By now, however, we were aware of the divine chess game being played. A sense of fun began to bubble to the surface, and we found ourselves not wringing our hands or hanging our heads in shame, but laughing. That was when he called Will and Mary back in to give them their share of the scolding. At least that's what we thought he would do. Instead, he sat them on either side of him, took their hands, and told us, "These are my archangels."

Only a few minutes later, the exhausted and disheveled mandali came straggling down the hall. They'd reported to another hotel where Baba planned to hold his interviews and, finding no trace of him, had

spent most of the night searching London. They finally tracked us down by going clear out to Delia's flat in Richmond, where her brother directed them to the proper hotel.

Baba sent us all out of the room, and the mandali went in to face him alone. Time passed without so much as a peep. Then suddenly the door opened, and out they shuffled, heads drooping.

"What happened?" we asked.

With one breath, they moaned, "Baba says it's all our fault!"

They were completely unprepared for our response. We roared with laughter and couldn't stop even when we saw their pained expressions. Finally we explained, "You don't understand! All morning long, Baba's been saying, 'It's all Rano's fault,' 'It's all Delia's fault.' Then it was Donkin's, Mehera's, Mani's, Meheru's, Goher's, Charmian's, and Baba's fault. Then it was God's will."

"Really?" they asked.

Whereupon they cheered up a bit, and off they went.

God, as the Avatar, exhibits human emotions and behaviors. When these human traits are expressed through his human form, we experience them very differently than the way we usually experience these emotions and behaviors. The blame Baba directed at us was imbued with his love and a deeper purpose we could sense, even if we couldn't completely understand it. It held none of the binding anger and pride that normally compel humans to blame others.

I was especially struck by this given the binding of the game of blame taking place in the world at the time, especially in Korea, where angry finger-pointing was stalling peace negotiations. North Korea, China, and the United States were exchanging charges of human rights abuses and violations of the Geneva Conventions. North Korea was charging America with using germ warfare. Americans were accusing the communists of atrocities against prisoners. The UN was called in to mediate. Then truce negotiations were postponed. Then they were started again. After ten months of armistice talks, they still could make no progress. At some truce sessions, the sides would talk for only a few minutes and then spend hours silently glaring at each other. If they reached a settlement, there would be a new battle, then a new dispute. and the talks would begin again.

Korea was only one pawn in the international drama that dominated the postwar years - the rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union. The end of World War II brought the beginning of a prolonged period of tension between the two nations, marked by a lot of saber rattling in other countries.

That day in August, their hostilities were spilling out on the safer terrain of the sports arena. While we were in London, the Summer Olympics were wrapping up in Helsinki. The Soviet Union had joined the games for the first time, in a face-off between superpowers that kept the world riveted. Everyone knew this was more than a contest between athletes. The day the mandali found their way to us, people were tallying the score, which would turn out to be forty gold medals for the United States, twenty-two for the Soviet Union.

Once the mandali had joined the rest of the group in London, Baba began giving interviews at the Charing Cross Hotel, a Victorian landmark situated right in the heart of London, by Trafalgar Square. The hotel held a special place in the hearts of mystery fans. It was there, in the hotel's smoking room, that Sherlock Holmes set his trap for the slippery spy Hugo Oberstein in *The Bruce-Partington Plans*. The hotel was located directly on top of the railroad tracks of Charing Cross Station and housed the station's waiting room, so it tended to attract a large foreign clientele. That week it was not the hotel that did the attracting; it was the guest in Room 46. And there were greater mysteries to unfold than those of Holmes.

Baba had been called to London by a large number of devotees who longed to see him. He spent several days in interviews with people who had traveled from all over the world - Australia, Europe, India, the United States, South America, and many other places. Their devotion pleased Baba deeply, and he returned from each visit glowing. Almost two hundred new seekers found their way to Room 46, and they emerged forever altered. Some spoke of the waves of love that overcame them, others of a pull as irresistible as a magnet. In turn, Baba exhorted them not to feel disheartened, to seek truth with all their hearts, and to strive to live life selflessly. The accident, he reassured them, was "of little importance."

He continued to send us the same message. As busy as he was, Baba found time to arrange more outings for the women mandali, and it was usually my role to accompany them. These outings, borne of his great compassion, seemed to serve many purposes. On one level, he was still helping us recover from the anxiety and worry caused by the accident. Worry, as he so often stated, was harmful both to us and to his work.

Mehera seemed to be the particular focus in our outings. Besides Baba, she had suffered the most in the accident, through her own painful injuries and more so in her concern for him. Now, although she was most happy and complete in Baba's presence, it seemed important that she appreciate that presence in his magnificent world, which she readily

did. So as the traumatic events of Prague faded and life again felt light and free, these excursions took on another, more enduring purpose. The theaters, parks, museums, and countryside gave us the opportunity to adore God through His world, a world the Avatar holds most dear. To understand how deeply he cherishes it, we had only to see how he cherished Mehera, who embodied that world.

I was struck with how Mehera was always in Baba's thoughts and he in hers. Whenever she was away, he would call her or she would call him to make sure the other was well and happy. Baba called or checked on Mehera every single day. When she was with him, he would sit endlessly listening to her most minute descriptions of what she had done or seen that day. She was the moon to his sun, the dearest thing in the universe to him, so it was important to all of us that she be taken good care of. This was at times a somewhat daunting task.

One day started off on the wrong foot when it took me forty-five minutes to get the car out of the garage and filled with petrol. It was a bitterly cold and blustery day, and I discovered to my horror that Mehera had been waiting for my return outside the hotel, with the icy wind whipping about her. The doctors had warned us she must not catch cold. The risk of infection was very high because her skull fracture had penetrated clear down into the orbits of her upper and lower sinuses.

The day picked up when we arrived in Richmond Park, the largest urban park in Britain. Charles I had enclosed it back in the 1600s as his private hunting preserve. The medieval oaks we saw were what remains of the forests that once surrounded London on all sides. The wildlife the medieval royals hunted survived too, in the form of free-roaming deer. It's the deer that make the park famous, and it's the deer that especially delighted Mani. As we were driving along, we saw a magnificent stag lead several deer across the road. Mani got quite entranced and immediately decided to get out and pet them. She danced across the road and picked some grass to help her make friends with them. Though they were too wild to take the grass, they did let her get quite close. I wished later that I'd snapped a picture of her as she skipped so happily across the meadow toward the deer, the deep grass brown from the summer sun. She was as free as the deer and just as lovely, with her black curls blowing in the wind.

The women mandali and I continued our journey into the seventeenth century with a visit to Ham House, one of the grandest Jacobean mansions in London and another marvel for which we can thank Charles I. It was once the home of William Murray, a friend of the king who knew a great deal about accepting blame graciously. Murray served as the king's whipping boy when they were children. When

Charles acted up, it was William who took the beating. In gratitude, Charles gave him Ham House and the surrounding property. The king was a great patron of the arts but a clumsy politician who fought with Parliament and led the country into civil war. In 1649 he undoubtedly wished he could call on his whipping boy just one more time. That's the year Charles was beheaded.

Later Ham House became the home of the Duke and Duchess of Lauderdale. They weren't a very popular couple - in fact, a peer described them as the "coldest friends and most violent enemies ever known" - but what they lacked in charm they made up for in extravagance. The house was a profusion of soothing tapestries, velvet drapes, plaster ornamentation, sumptuous damasks, tulip vases, and lacquer chests. Gods and goddesses watched over it from painted ceilings, and court beauties smiled demurely on the walls. Hedges and trees veiled the house from the river, lending an air of mystery and tranquillity that earned it the nickname "Sleeping Beauty."

The artistry of Ham House was all too successful. I became so absorbed in this opulent mansion that I didn't realize it had begun to rain. When I went to meet Mehera and the others at the front door, I discovered them standing on the porch with the rain splattering all about them. Again Mehera had been dangerously exposed to the cold! We put her in the back of the porch where it was fairly dry while I went to get the car. I was no sooner back than the sun began shining brightly again, and with relief we motored our way to Delia's for tea and a stroll through the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew.

Besides its vast and exotic collection of thirty-eight thousand plant species, some of which are extinct in the wild, Kew is something of a scientific laboratory that has made its own unique mark on history. It was an order for breadfruit from Kew that sent the HMS *Bounty* on its mutiny-doomed voyage to Tahiti in 1789. It was researchers at Kew who first isolated quinine and identified it as an antidote to malaria. And Kew also played a part in the development of rubber, rayon, and acetate. But it was nature, not science, that had always captivated me, and I was dazzled by the array of flora - cherries and crocuses, roses and tulip trees, orchids and a giant water lily with leaves that must have measured six feet across. Mehera, Mani, and I ran from one flower bed to another, exclaiming over every new discovery. Again Baba had foreseen how reacquainting us with the beauty of life would invigorate us.

When we returned to the hotel, it was five o'clock, just as we'd promised Baba. As we entered his room, I could see him sitting on his bed with pillows behind him. But I came to a halt inside the door when I noticed the tenseness of those around him. I started to speak, but he

stopped me with a wave of his hand. Then he suddenly let loose on all of us. "You must have gone mad to keep Mehera out in the cold and wind! She'll get sick and die, and it's all Rano's fault! How could you do such a thing when you know Mehera is so precious to me and needs such care after going through all the horrible difficulties of the accident?"

Baba released his anger at Rano in front of all of us. She got angry and tried to defend herself. Then she started crying. Then Mani got angry. Mehera began protesting. Goher was agitated. Meheru was furious. Delia got a migraine. Meanwhile, I stood ineffectually in the background. Once again, every time I tried to speak and take some responsibility, Baba gave me such a piercing gaze, I dared not open my mouth. His expression seemed to say, "Do not speak now. This is a deeper matter than it seems, and you do not understand."

It felt to me as if life hung in the balance on what was said, and even more on what was not said. Mani left on the verge of tears, and shortly after, we all followed. Before we left, Baba said, "And don't any of you ever argue in my presence again."

Shortly after the conflagration with Baba over Mehera's health, I discovered there was a story behind the story. Mehera had been instructed by doctors to have an injection of penicillin every day as a preventive against colds and infection. But she had an aversion to doctors and hospitals and had simply decided to forego the injections. Baba would never directly order Mehera to do anything - it seemed essential that her obedience flow out of her own willingness to obey, grounded in her love for him. So instead he had dramatically emphasized the fact that she had endangered herself. To prevent further scolding of her companions, Mehera now agreed to take her penicillin, and all was peaceful again.

When I reflected on that explosive afternoon in Baba's room, it seemed strange at first that we could all have been so easily caught up in the passions of the moment - and so forgetful of the higher purposes that impelled his work. I expected as much from myself; I was in my early twenties, the youngest of the group, and the least experienced in the ways of the Master. Mehera was in her mid-forties and Mani in her early thirties, both mature women. Mehera had spent her entire adult life with Baba, and Mani had grown up in his back pocket. It was a revelation for me that even the well-trained mandali experienced the same emotions I did when Baba asked us to do the "impossible," when tasks were difficult and situations confused, when we were scolded or shamed. No sooner would we rebound from one experience and begin to find our love and understanding when another crisis would pop up, and the passions would erupt once more.

From a distance now, I can see that these mundane situations gave Baba the special opportunity to help the overcharged feelings of past and present emerge. This didn't happen by mistake. He deliberately stirred these feelings up and brought them to the surface. No one, not even the veteran mandali, could resist them because they were being pulled forth by divine energy. Once they did emerge, we had our own opportunity: to manage them in different ways, to transform them into love and acceptance. It could be done only with his help, in an atmosphere bathed with his love. But when it was done, it was elating. With the joy came a profound gratitude - gratitude for being freed, gratitude for the immeasurable compassion of he who freed us.

The mandali were far more adept at riding these waves than I. They were calmer in the turbulence, more resilient in change, and more receptive to Baba's will. My task was to watch and learn. I learned especially from Mehera, with her unwavering devotion and constant attentiveness to Baba.

Mehera required special vigilance on all our parts. Up until the time of the accident, Baba had always kept her safe, pure, and shielded from the mundane world. In the early days of his work, Mehera and the other girls were not allowed to see any man except Baba. One couldn't even mention a man's name in front of them. Gradually Baba began to remove these restrictions. By the time they arrived in the West, Mani and Meheru were completely out of seclusion and often saw men. However, Mehera was still never to touch or be touched by men, except doctors. This required all sorts of gymnastics on our parts as we ushered her through the teeming streets and sites of London.

The day after the "explosion" about her exposure to the weather, we went to the Tower of London, followed by a visit to Madame Tussaud's Wax Museum. Those two visits alone provided real challenges as we struggled to keep Mehera safe from the touch of men in crowds that numbered in the hundreds. Our usual procedure was to form a circle around her and link our hands together so she could travel safely in the circle's center. Rano and the other women were so expert at running interference for her that we managed to get by unscathed except for one amusing incident at Madame Tussaud's.

This popular tourist spot is filled with wax replicas of the famous and infamous, and we carefully toured the ground floor with Mehera protected within our circle. So far all was well, but we had yet to navigate the second and third floors. As we went around a guard on the broad staircase, Mehera suddenly let out a piercing, heartrending scream: "He touched me!"



It's difficult to describe Mehera's despair. She was heartbroken, devastated that Baba's wish had been violated. The rest of us plunged into self-recrimination because we had been entrusted with her care. When we reached the top of the stairs, we all turned to look at the offending male. Only then did I realize that the guard was standing perfectly still - like the wax dummy he was.

We laughed heartily, then proceeded to the rest of the exhibits.

They were so engrossing, it became difficult to focus on our responsibility. We'd get absorbed in the displays and then realize one of us had begun to drop hands. It required all our concentration and ingenuity to keep Mehera untouched. In the evening after our visit to Madame Tussaud's, Baba came back from his interviews all smiles and complimented us quite thoroughly on taking such good care of Mehera.

During our stay in London, we also attended several theater performances, usually in the evening. Baba was still encouraging our sense of fun in life, while we were hoping the entertainment might distract him from the pain in his leg. Nothing of course could distract him from his work. Theaters, like airports, offered the crowds Baba so appreciated, where people are massed and focused on one thing and the collective ego is submerged in the story unfolding on the stage - a perfect setting for the Master.

Although he was in great discomfort at the time, Baba managed to take a keen interest in all that transpired on the stage. We saw *South Pacific*; a farce staged by Delia's brother; a rodeo full of Indians and glamorous cowgirls; a spectacular ice show with a cast of hundreds; and the play *Dial M for Murder*. At the Ambassadors Theatre, they were preparing for the premiere of *The Mousetrap*, a new play by Agatha Christie, another of Baba's favorite artists, but we were just a few months too early for the opening. Like us, Christie had struggled with the balance between humor and earnestness. She thought her play had too much comedy for a thriller and predicted it would run for eight months at most. As I write this, it has lasted half a century and is the longest continuously running play in history.

When one attended the theater with Baba, the most interesting shows often took place outside the theater doors. Once we were waiting for the car by a side entrance where Baba was sitting quietly in his wheelchair. Suddenly a stocky man of medium height with brown hair and crinkly eyes came up the nearly deserted sidewalk toward us. As he approached, he slowed his pace and then stopped about ten feet away. Baba looked at him and smiled, as if they were old friends who hadn't seen each other for a long time. The man seemed transfixed. Several minutes went by during which two or three others came to join the first

man. Nothing was said, yet one had the impression that the look Baba gave each of them conveyed everything. I sensed they had a prearranged appointment with him on this street corner, saw him as he *was*, and were given the instructions necessary to carry out whatever work they did. The first man stood rooted to the spot until we were in the car and on our way back home.

On August 6, the day we were to leave England for Switzerland, I was asked to drive Baba and Mehera to the airport. Baba was placed in the back seat, and Mehera sat in front beside me. Driving ahead in a small sports car were Donkin, Adi, and Sarosh, while behind us in a taxi were Mani, Meheru, Goher, Rano, and Delia. I had never driven this particular car before. After the men started down the street, I suddenly realized I couldn't find the starter. I searched frantically along the dashboard, underneath, and on the floor, but I couldn't find a button or a plug! As the men disappeared in the distance, Delia, Rano, and Goher rushed up the street calling, "Stop! Stop! Come back!"

They did, but then we had another problem. Donkin began walking back down the street to show me how to start the car. But how could we allow him to get close to Mehera in the front seat? Someone ran into the hotel and borrowed a blanket, whereupon we covered Mehera completely. Only then was Donkin allowed to approach our car. He showed me where the starter was, and then we traveled in true safari style until we came to a very complex intersection with many converging streams of traffic. As I kept signaling, trying to weave my way through the cars and around a lamppost in the middle of the street, the motor began to stall and the car slowed down. Traffic was bearing down on me. I tried to shift gears, but since it was a new car, the gears were stiff. I pushed the clutch down to the floor and shoved on the gear handle with all my might. My hand just kept going, and I suddenly realized the gearshift had come off in my fist!

The car had come to a dead stop. There we were in the middle of the street, horns tooting all around us, and I had the gearshift in my hand. I heard Baba in the back seat going "snap, snap, snap!" with his fingers: "Faster, faster!"

I could almost hear Baba laughing, but once again my anxiety kept me from joining him. I was near hysteria. Frantically I looked down and saw just a tiny piece of the gearshift sticking out of the floorboard. I leaned under the steering wheel and put my knee on the clutch. Then I reached for the protruding piece of gearshift and hauled with all my weight. With a protesting groan, the transmission went into first. I returned to my upright position and drove around the corner, with Baba and Mehera merrily laughing at my desperate attempts. I managed to

pull over to the side of the road, where I inspected the gearshift. It seemed it must have arrived at the hotel unscrewed to the last thread. So I simply screwed it back on, and we were on our way once more. I was grateful that, as usual, Baba had arranged for us to leave for the airport hours before we were due.

At that busy intersection in London, I had once again felt the force of Baba's work in the ordinary world, and once again it had undone me. It seems absurd now that even with God in the back seat, faith gave way to panic and adventure to crisis. It wasn't only the car that needed to shift gears that day.

When we were finally settled on the plane, I found myself seated next to Delia, who carried a bottle of cologne on the theory that large doses of it warded off airsickness. Once airborne, she waved her perfumed handkerchief while constantly uttering, "Oh, Lord! Oh, Lord!" - an ample demonstration of how she'd earned her nickname, and an apt summary of my first week in Europe with Meher Baba.

That week had held a dizzying mix of experiences - breezy excursions touched with the magical beauty of life, and mundane events that somehow became inflamed with intense emotion and anxiety. Here then, in the age of paradoxes, was the paradox of the seeker: to feel bound and liberated, diminished and enlarged, beleaguered yet adored - to live the lesson of the exuberant white chamomile: *"The more it is trodden on, the faster it grows."*

## *Unpredictable Fireworks*

The fertile and varied Earth is the only planet on which humans can attain perfection. Humanity has etched borders on that planet so that ~ there are now about two hundred countries, each with its own splendor, each another facet of the Creator's boundless imagination. But on a typical day, at least five or six of them are fighting a war. This makes little Switzerland something of an anomaly.

The resolutely neutral Swiss haven't engaged in warfare in five hundred years. During World War II, as in World War I, they sat unperturbed as the rest of Europe exploded around them. There were four Axis countries to Switzerland's north, east, and south, and one Allied country to its west, yet Switzerland emerged unscathed. After World War II, when other nations were scrambling to clear the ruins and scrape together food and resources for their weary citizens, the economy in Switzerland was booming. When we traveled through Switzerland in August of 1952, we saw none of the residual rubble, construction flurry, or scarred veterans that we sometimes saw in London. It was almost like stepping into a dream.

People who maintain that tension is vital to creativity have cited placid Switzerland as their proof, saying it never produced anything but the cuckoo clock. They've overlooked abstract painter Paul Klee; the far-from-placid Dada art movement; *Siddhartha* author Hermann Hesse; psychologist Jean Piaget; and psychoanalyst Carl Jung, who formed his revolutionary idea of the collective unconscious in moderate-minded Zurich.

Jung experienced vivid dreams and visions as I had as a child - so vivid that for a time, he thought he was psychotic. Baba delivered me from mine; Jung transformed his into lessons. They later shaped his interest in myths, mystic symbolism, and paranormal experiences. He was the first in psychology to balance Western intellectualism with the spirituality of the psyche. "Show me a sane man," he said, "and I will cure him for you." Shortly after the war, Jung retired from practice, but he continued his prolific writing. While we were in Switzerland, he was

working on his theories of "synchronicity," a word he created to define those coincidental thoughts, connected events, and prophetic dreams that illustrate life is not pure chance but purposeful arrangement.

Switzerland has a reputation for efficiency, but it seems that any arrival of Baba begins in confusion. Our first experience was a mix-up regarding luggage. After we made our way through customs, someone carted off our bags, and I assumed he was taking them to our cars. Instead, we discovered just in time that they were at the bottom of a big luggage van attached to a bus headed for downtown Zurich. We managed to get our suitcases untangled and into the cars brought by Irene Billo, one of Baba's Swiss followers.

Baba had a handful of devotees in Switzerland, and they were one of the reasons we were there. Another reason was the spectacular beauty of the countryside. In this storybook landscape that Baba had so enjoyed on previous visits, we had another opportunity to contemplate his divine beauty nude manifest in the physical world. That beauty was apparent as soon as we started off across the fields, through Zurich, and over the mountains to the south of Switzerland. Our destination was the home of Hedi Mertens, a longtime devotee who lived outside the town of Locarno, on the southern edge of Switzerland.

Out my window I gazed, enchanted, at the succession of hamlets, picturesque villages, and chateaux of nobility past and present. In the distance floated the country's famous snowcapped peaks, carved by time with ridges and crests, perched among rocky foothills and lush meadows. We eventually drove high into the Alps, where clear, sparkling streams rushed and splashed down the hillsides. As it came close to twilight, we saw goatherds bringing home flocks from their mountain grazing grounds. We stopped for dinner at a little inn, where the food was delicious and the atmosphere and service even better. It had only taken a few hours for me to be completely enraptured by this land of pristine charm and genteel calm.

By the time we finished dinner and started off again, it was dark. We wound down the other side of the Alps in silence, watching the shadows of the peaks against the sky. Because I wasn't fond of heights, I found myself keeping a watchful eye out for the occasional stone wall that signaled a steep drop-off at the edge of the road. Finally the stars appeared, and below us we could see the lights of Lugano and Locarno, twin resort cities in the canton, or state, of Ticino. This would be home for almost two weeks, and I couldn't imagine one more magical.

Ticino is the part of Switzerland that is closest to Italy. Officially it's a Swiss canton, but in culture, spirit, and even language, it's Italian. That made it the best of both worlds - Mediterranean pleasures

combined with Swiss amenities. As the week progressed, I sometimes had to remind myself I was really in Switzerland. The people were dark complexioned, vineyards and olive trees abounded, and the typical home was a stone-roofed cottage high in the hills.

It was quite late when we finally caught up with the lights of Locarno. We rattled over the cobblestones in the shadowy, deserted streets and drove along the trolley tracks into the wider spaces of suburban Solduno. The driver turned off on a narrow road, and finally our cars pulled to a stop near a pink stucco wall with a large wooden door underneath a tiled arch. It was the entrance to the property that held a house on a hillside above a terrace. We had barely pulled the bell at the gate when Hedi was there to meet us.

Baba had his room on the ground floor, with his own entrance into the gardens. The rest of us were on the second floor. There were three bathrooms in the house, but unfortunately one was located right next to Baba's room and another was right above it. So we all decided to use only the one accessed through my room, which I shared with Delia. With about sixteen people in the house, it made quite a parade. The men were to arrive the next day and settle into a house nearby.

There was a collection of animals at Hedi's, including four cats, a small French poodle, a rabbit, and more. Growing in the garden were those surprising grapevines, along with marrow, tomatoes, beans, and other vegetables, colorful flowering shrubs, and assorted blossoms. The flora in town was even more surprising, closer to what one would expect on a tropical island. Gardens of palm, camellia, bougainvillea, cypress, oleander, and magnolia flourished on the lakeside promenades.

Enchanted Locarno has the most hours of sunshine anywhere in Switzerland. The generous sun is one reason tourists flock there. The other is its heart-lifting scenery. Locarno lies in the hollow of a translucent bay of Lago Maggiore, sheltered by the Alps. One can see the Alps reflecting in the clear lake, which is often still as glass. Yachts filled the waterfront, and people strolled leisurely through the cobbled alleys, arcades, and fountain-graced piazzas that make the town so quaint.

Locarno is not all leisure; it has a serious side too. Back in 1925, it had its moment of global fame when it hosted a major conference of European powers trying to settle post-World War I borders. The resulting Treaty of Locarno was an attempt to secure future peace. There were lots of cheers when it was signed, and it even resulted in the award of three Nobel Peace Prizes. But in 1936, Hitler violated the agreement, and the world hurtled again toward war.

I saw much of Locarno and its surroundings because I continued to be given the role of chauffeur in Switzerland. One day Baba called me

to his room and said, "We want you to go downtown and pick up Dr. Donkin. He's at the American Express office."

I had only a vague idea where that office was, somewhere near the railway station. But I knew the rail tracks went past the house and down the hill a way, so I figured, "If I just follow the tracks, eventually I'll come to the station." I was told to take Hedi's car, which was parked out in front.

I'd never seen Hedi's car, but I walked down the street and began looking for it. I searched all around but didn't see anything, so I went back and expressed my puzzlement. They insisted the car was down in front of the garage, so I went out and tried again. Eventually I focused on a little machine sitting there that I'd ignored the first time around. "This can't be it," I thought. "This is a child's toy!" It was a Fiat Topolino, perhaps the smallest car in the world at that time. I squeezed myself in and looked around. Nothing was where I expected it to be. Nevertheless, I got it going and headed off downtown, dutifully following the railroad tracks. When I managed to get myself going the wrong way on a one-way street, I came across a policeman making extravagant gestures with his white-gloved hands. He frowned at me, and I thought, "Now I'm in *big* trouble." I made gestures too - of tearing my hair out. To my relief, he laughed and pointed me toward an appropriate street. I drove around a few blocks and, lo and behold, pulled up in front of American Express.

The Fiat was so low to the ground that when I looked out the window, I saw Dr. Donkin's feet and his legs up to the knees. Then I noticed there were three more pairs of legs! Not only was our six-foot Dr. Donkin there, but also Sarosh, who was even taller, plus two of the other men mandali. I was completely dismayed, but the mandali weren't. Led by the intrepid Dr. Donkin, they crammed themselves in like luggage. We looked like one of those circus acts where numberless clowns stuff themselves into a miniature car. Nevertheless, they assured me they were okay, so we headed back toward the house.

I had just started up the hill near the house when the car gave up the ghost. I tooted the horn, and the mandali went for help. Soon Gisela Haeffliger arrived, got the car running again, and took it the rest of the way up the hill. I walked home feeling my day had ended in humiliation! ·

One day shortly after, Irene and Hedi announced there were to be fireworks over the lake in celebration of Indian Independence Day. It may seem peculiar to be celebrating Indian independence in Switzerland, but the event was arranged by the Indian embassy and was heartily

welcomed by the Swiss, who have a passion for celebration. There are over one hundred festivals a year, including religious, folk, historical, and food festivals. Villagers convene to bless the harvest, drive away winter, and repel evil spirits. These colorful events often include parades, costumes, masks, goatskins, yodeling, flugelhorn playing, and fireworks.

Baba decided we should all attend the independence celebration, so about evening, we piled into different cars and drove into the high hills of Locarno.

The place selected as the best vantage point was a ledge high on a mountain. As usual, we arrived long before the festivities were to start. We made ourselves comfortable on the edge of a cement wall at what seemed to be the top of the world, while below us crowds gathered at the edge of the lake. We watched as eventually a few little red pops went off, but not much more. Then a small pinprick of light appeared near shore. Someone had launched a candle attached to a small wooden base, and it was floating out onto the lake. More followed. Within an hour, hundreds of candles were glowing and bobbing across the dark water. It felt as if for once the heavens had really touched the earth and become one with it.

Soon a stately ship sailed up among the candles, its mast and sails outlined in lights. After docking at the wharf and taking on a load of people, it moved out again to the center of the lake, where it slowed and stopped.

By this time, nearly two hours had elapsed without a single skyrocket. Baba had watched all this with growing signs of impatience. He decided it was time to leave, saying he didn't think much of the fireworks in Switzerland. Obstinate disciples that we were, we pleaded, "But Baba, the fireworks haven't started yet. Really! Just another few minutes."

Every few minutes after that Baba asked, "Well, can we go home now?" and we would argue back. Finally we surrendered to his wish, and just as we were loading ourselves back in the cars, the first fireworks started with a tremendous whiz and a bang! We climbed out again to watch them sparkling up the sky. All of us just sat there quietly, spellbound.

When the last echoing "bang" resounded against the mountain walls, we were reluctant to return home. I think we would rather have stayed there forever, sitting in silence with Baba on the mountaintop.

Another day we went with Baba high up in the mountains to a little cafe that had a big stone terrace looking out a long way down the valley toward the lake. A storm was rising; the sky filled with black clouds



shooting lightning. We watched the storm from above as it traveled through the valley below us. It was awe-inspiring, and Baba sat there for a long time.

Though his body was with us, he was clearly elsewhere. His fingers were moving as he was absorbed in his universal work. I watched his graceful hands and his distant gaze and wondered, futilely, what that work might be. His work often appeared linked with storms with flashes of lightning and thunder. They appeared to us only phenomena of nature, but seemed to be so much more to him. Only later was I aware of invisible storms that were gathering that day. On the mountain, I had no way of knowing that the events in Korea had led the world perilously close to a nuclear war. Some American military advisors had suggested bombing China to subdue the communists, a strategy rejected by the administration.

While the world teetered on the edge of another holocaust, there in Switzerland I was wrapped only in the tranquillity and majesty of the earth and the bounty of Meher Baba.

One time we went up toward the ski areas to a picturesque lodge. We sat down for lunch together in a spacious room, where Baba positioned himself at a table on a raised terrace so we could all see him. Though we hadn't ordered wine, it came with our meals. Baba said he wanted all of us to know it was very unusual for a Master to sit with his disciples while they were having wine.

During this visit to Switzerland, Baba was in a phase of his work he called the Full Free Life. In the years before, he had passed through the New Life and Manonash, with their rigorous physical demands. That was followed by the Complicated Free Life, which he described as a period when binding would dominate freedom. It was in that period in which he suffered his car accident. The Complicated Free Life ended in America, and he had recently entered the Full Free Life, the reverse of the Complicated Free Life. In this phase, freedom would dominate bindings.

All of these periods are of incalculable benefit to humanity, but I reaped a special benefit from the Full Free Life. It was this period of freedom and strength that enabled Baba to participate in the recreation and entertainment we so enjoyed in London and Switzerland. Perhaps this is even why we could share wine in his presence. He would continue in this phase for three more months, until November of 1952. Then he planned to begin the Fiery Free Life, when freedom and binding would be merged into the Divine Life. But for now, life did indeed feel free and strong, and less fiery than sunny.

At the request of Don Stevens, one of Mother's students, who

helped edit *God Speaks*, I approached Baba about taking a film of him, but he said, "No. Absolutely not."

Then I sputtered, "But Baba, Don asked me to ask you."

Baba replied, "Oh? For Don, since he asked, you may take the pictures." And he allowed me to take two short eight-millimeter films of him, the women mandali, and the men mandali. Here was another happy side of the Machine Age - the visage of the Avatar captured on film for lovers and seekers in the future.

Between outings, and while we were off without him, Baba was conducting interviews with many people who had traveled to see him. In Locarno he held darshan for both his followers and people who had never met him and knew little about him. They traveled from throughout Switzerland and also from France. The children who were there were especially drawn to him. Their hearts opened to him as naturally as a flower opens to the dawn.

In the evenings, Baba usually devoted his time to us. In Switzerland he was in what Delia described as his "benign mood." The room he occupied was rather small but comfortable, and we would run for chairs and form a semicircle around his bed. He would sit there smiling at us, sometimes directing a comment to one or another as we settled in. Then he usually waited in silence for a few minutes before calling on us. He might say, as he had on our visit to India, "Who will tell me a funny story?" His other favorite request was, "Tell me a story about a saint."

We would look at each other blankly. "Saint? Oh dear, I must know something about a saint."

Eventually people would pull up some story or another, sometimes about a popular local saint. Baba would smile, wait patiently until they were through, and then say sweetly, "Now, let's talk about *real* saints." Then he might have someone read from the writings of Saint Catherine, Saint Augustine, Saint Theresa, or Saint Francis, or read about Rabia of Basra.

The spirit of Saint Francis was very real in Locarno. Wandering Franciscans built a church there during his time or shortly after his death in 1226. Another Franciscan church floated above the town on a wooded crag, consecrated in 1487 on the spot where the Virgin was said to have appeared to a Franciscan monk. Pilgrims hiked past the hillside's decaying shrines to its sanctuary. I had the privilege, instead, of joining Saint Francis through the company of the One he loved.

After these evenings with us, Baba rarely got any rest. I know because our room was on the second floor and we had a balcony that overlooked the window of Baba's room down below. From the balcony, I could hear a river rushing along, and it sang me to sleep at night. Once

in a while, I'd wake up later, slip out, and take a peek at what was happening below. Baba always had a watchman with him, and it seemed to me I could never ever go out there without seeing Baba's hand moving, motioning to whomever was with him. No matter what hour of the night I went out, Baba was always awake.

During his stay in Switzerland, he was also working on strengthening his leg. The doctors felt he should begin doing some limited weight-bearing. This meant putting his leg on the ground and resting a tiny bit of weight on it. Baba did it, but he complained that it was "Chinese torture."

"You're torturing me; that's what you're trying to do." Over and over he would say this.

Baba's use of the expression "Chinese torture" suggests the torture and suffering occurring beyond Locarno, much of it indeed at the hands of the Chinese. The prisoners of war in Korea, from both American and UN forces, were suffering abominably. At one point, one out of three was dying from starvation, dysentery, or beatings under the brutal treatment of the China-allied North Koreans. When the Chinese took over the camps, conditions eased somewhat, but physical torture was replaced by psychological torture, which many prisoners found even harder to bear. They suffered endless hours of forced indoctrination and the shame of coerced betrayal.

Then there was China itself. Mao Tse-tung had proclaimed the People's Republic of China in 1949, after years of civil war with Chiang Kai-shek. He began to create hundreds of thousands of collective farms, uprooting people from their homes and land. Dissidents were sent to prison, or even worse. Three to five million were executed in the first few years, many by mass shootings that the public was required to attend. When Mao took over China, the "bamboo curtain" descended, the media was censored, and the world was allowed no scrutiny of his conduct. It was many years later that stories of the atrocities and the millions of Chinese who died were confirmed.

I don't know why Baba's leg caused him such torment, but I do know the sufferings of the Avatar always serve humankind. Whom it benefited and how remains his secret.

Although the doctors couldn't understand why such mild exercise was causing Baba "torture," they finally theorized that he was secretly putting more weight on the leg than directed. Baba often pushed his body to the limit for the sake of his work. This time they hatched a plan to stop him.

Dr. Donkin set a bathroom scale on the floor and put several books' next to it in a neat little pile that exactly matched the height of the scale.

Then he had Baba put one foot on the books and one on the scale. Sure enough, he discovered that Baba was throwing all his weight on the injured leg. From then on, the doctors kept the scale there all the time so he couldn't cheat. They were still suspicious, however, and concluded that they wouldn't put it past him to change the balance of the scale.

Sometimes Baba would exercise his leg outside in the garden. One afternoon our three resident doctors, Goher, Donkin, and Nilu, had just brought him into the courtyard and helped him onto the scale when one of the little girls rushed up saying Trixli had been injured.

Trixli was Irene Billo's pet white rabbit, the largest rabbit I'd ever seen, with great big chins and a cuddly, soft coat. The little girl had picked Trixli up to protect her from an oncoming car, but the rabbit had squirmed out of her hands and fallen to the ground. Some of us took it to the living room and laid it on the sofa, but it appeared to have a broken back. When I went to the garden and asked Baba if I could borrow a doctor to confirm this diagnosis, he sent all three. Some time went by as we all hovered around Trixli, until it was decided to send her to a veterinarian. Then suddenly someone looked up and asked, "Who's with Baba?!"

In our concern for the rabbit, we'd left Baba all alone, perched on his scale and his pile of books. The entire group rushed back to the courtyard to find him still standing there patiently, not able to move, waiting for someone to return and rescue him. Yet he asked only one question: "How is the rabbit?"

Later it was Baba who broke the news about the rabbit to Irene and assured her it would be all right, even if it died. "After all," he said, "I have played with it." When Trixli did die some months later, I felt Baba's attention had given her a push upward in the evolutionary process.

While Baba worked with the scales to strengthen his leg, he worked too with the invisible scales that affected all of us. One day he found a rather startling way to balance the past experiences of one devotee with the future experiences of another - namely, me.

Baba was being visited by Anita Vieillard, a follower from Paris who had known him since she was a young woman. As we all sat in a semicircle around Baba, Anita told us many stories about her experiences years before in a German concentration camp. Although she clearly conveyed how ghastly it was, her manner was cheerful, even humorous. I had never before heard anyone speak about such an experience so lightly, but still there was sadness within her.

In one of her stories, she described a barter system she and her companions used. They would receive cigarettes from the Red Cross, walk along and pitch them over a wall, then proceed another twenty feet,

where all of a sudden a chicken would be tossed over the wall to them. They would immediately run inside and devour it because there was so little food to eat.

When Anita finished her stories, she said, "Baba, dear, I will do anything you ask... anything. Whatever it is, it doesn't matter. Just don't make me go back to jail again."

Baba looked at her very seriously and said, "All right, Anita. Let's see... who will go to jail for Anita?"

Everybody held their breath. Baba started at one end of the semicircle and stared into each face, one at a time. He passed by me and went all the way down the other side. Then he went all the way back, staring at each of us again. When he came back around, he passed by me again and looked closely at two or three people beyond me. Suddenly he snapped back to me and said, "*Charmian* can go to jail for Anita!"

When Baba told me I would go to jail for Anita, I obediently replied, "Yes, Baba."

But inside I thought the idea was ridiculous. In spite of what I should have learned from listening to Anita and from observing the world around me, I still naively assumed that good people didn't end up behind bars. And I was a pretty good person. In fact, Baba had given me a nickname, as he did most people. And it was "Good Girl," or "G.G." I felt this name was more in the realm of wishful thinking, but still, I was sure I wasn't the sort to get into serious trouble with the law. It would be two years before I found out how wrong I was.

Even while in Switzerland, the irony of my nickname sometimes occurred to me. This was especially brought home one afternoon when Baba asked me to make tea for him at four o'clock.

I decided I would start the tea at three, and since that was still a few hours away, I went upstairs and curled up to read a book. I had been reading only fifteen minutes when I heard Rano's voice outside calling me. I ran to the balcony and asked her what she needed.

"Baba wants to know if you've started his tea."

"Well no, Rano. I'll start it at three o'clock."

Rano disappeared and I went back to my book. I had read just another two pages when I heard Rano hailing me from down below again. I went outside and asked, "What's the matter?"

She said, "Baba wants to know, will you remember about his tea?"

"Yes. I'll have it started at three o'clock."

Again I returned to my book, a bit irritated this time.

Ten minutes later Rano called me again. I put the book down, went out to the balcony, and said, "Yes, Rano?"

"Baba wants to make sure you haven't forgotten his tea."

"No, Rano. I haven't forgotten Baba's tea."

I went back, picked up the book, and tried to begin reading again. But I was even more irritated now, and it was hard to concentrate. A short time later, Rano called again. I stiffened and walked out on the porch. Rano asked, "Charmian, Baba wants to know, have you started his tea yet?"

That did it! "Rano," I exploded, "I *told* you I'd start the tea at *three o'clock!*"

I found myself boiling with white-hot fury. The anger had come over me so quickly it was stunning. One minute I was simply irritated; the next minute rage was ringing from my toes to the top of my head. With that, I suddenly thought, "What am I doing? I love Rano!" The next moment I was swept with the intensity of that love. It was fully as strong as the fury that had preceded it only a moment before. Now I could literally feel the threads of feeling Baba was pulling out of me.

Once again, it was Baba's sweet love and acceptance that created an atmosphere that allowed such passions to come forth. And it was his love too that helped me transform them into a broader experience of love and acceptance. When the smoke had cleared, I could see this.

Years later people would say to Mother and me, "We're going to go have *sahavas* with Baba. Isn't it wonderful? We're so looking forward to it!"

Yes, it was wonderful. But most people had no idea what was really going to occur in his presence. Every time people were with Baba, they were turned inside out. It was as if we were a batch of little pots, bubbling with love inside but all blackened and encrusted on the outside. And Baba was the Master Dishwasher. He'd scrub those pots until the scum and grime floated to the surface for everyone, including us, to see. This person would be fighting with that one. Someone else would suddenly come unstrung, screaming that they couldn't stay in their hotel room because there was a lizard in it. Someone in high dudgeon might decide to go home and would set out for the train station. Then Baba would send someone after them, and they'd run back to him.

They would run back because, in the end, he was irresistible. With just one glance, smile, or embrace, he could dissolve the deepest despair. Even the most maddening events in the mundane world were so bathed with his love that one willingly returned. So the tug of war went on constantly: the tantrums of the resistive ego, the running back to Baba, the horror at seeing your own limitations, and then the joy at overcoming them and joining him again.

Being with Baba was also physically rigorous. We would rise from bed early, often after retiring late at night. If you weren't up by seven,

you were sleeping late, which was especially difficult for a night person like me. Lunch was at eleven, and dinner, if we had it, was at five. We never went at less than a run - no walking anyplace. If you were on time and didn't forget anything, things could be easy, but if you slipped up, the complications could be overwhelming. Baba was stretching our limits. But every time he did, new strengths emerged. With time, life with him, seemed not restrictive but wondrously expanded.

This is the blessing of all humanity born during this Avataric Age: the opportunity for expansion and emancipation. Causes bring their effects much more rapidly in this age, and while obstacles seem great, they can be more quickly overcome. A sincere lover of God can accomplish far more by bearing all the manifold troubles of the Kali Yuga and steadily triumphing than he can in a myriad of other incarnations.

In spite of some unwelcome self-discovery, my days in Switzerland were exactly what Baba planned them to be, restful and renewing for myself and the women mandali. This renewing energy was a special blessing for Mehera. While in Locarno, Mehera was taken to a highly recommended plastic surgeon. He took the scab off her wound and announced that the skin was perfectly all right and would grow back. She wouldn't need to have any further surgery. Baba called me in and had me look at Mehera's wound. It had healed completely, with hardly a scar, and she only had some slight swelling over one eye. All she needed now was to keep some ointment on it for several days.

After two weeks that seemed like far less and far more, we began to make preparations to leave. When we'd left the States, there had been some discussion of my joining Baba and his group for a trip to Egypt, on their way back to India. But there had been a coup in Cairo.

In May King Farouk had proclaimed himself the direct descendent of Mohammed, further offending a nation already irate over his corruption and extravagant playboy lifestyle. In July there was an uprising, and his sixteen-year reign ended. Farouk departed Egypt in the manner to which he was accustomed, on a magnificent yacht. Egypt was now on its way to becoming a republic, but that goal was still in the future. Meanwhile, it was determined to free itself from British influence. Egyptian nationalists attacked British property and government buildings, demanding an end to the British military presence in Egypt. Riots erupted throughout the country, and both British and Egyptians died in the ensuing melee. Baba decided it was better to alter his plans.

Baba's new plan was for me to accompany the group only to Geneva, which would be their departure point for India. I would then return to the States via England.

Baba sent all the men mandali ahead to India except for Dr. Donkin. On August 18, we waved good-bye to our Swiss friends and set off by car over the Alps toward Geneva. The driver of Baba's car was the same one who had been driving him, since we first arrived in Zurich. He was a big, strapping man with a charming wife and three fine children, and from the moment he saw Baba, he was devoted to him. He wouldn't allow anyone else to lift him in and out of the car or to drive him. And large as he was, he lifted Baba as delicately as if he were a crate of eggs.

We started the long drive across the mountains in our now-familiar safari style, again savoring the views of the Alps and the postcard-perfect scenery that framed them. At lunchtime we stopped along the road where there were pine trees and a steep bank descending toward the valley. Some of us went down the embankment to a ledge of pine needles to eat our meal. We knew we shouldn't begin until Baba and Mehera had started, and since they were out of our sight, we waited for what we thought was a reasonable time. Finally we took out the sandwiches Hedi had packed, but before we could take our first bite, Rano came barreling over the top of the hill, calling, "Baba said for me to tell you that he and Mehera haven't started yet."

Jung would have called this synchronicity. I called it omniscience.

After lunch we drove on to Geneva, in the west of Switzerland. Our stay was to be brief; Geneva was to be simply a departure point. But it was an exciting city even to pass through.

Geneva is the seat of the world's conscience. For although the Swiss keep their distance from the skirmishes of our age, they don't turn their backs on suffering. Geneva plays host to numerous organizations dedicated to human rights, international law, and humanitarian efforts.

Watched over by Mont Blanc and lapped by the shimmering shores of Lac Lemman, Geneva was the site where much of the healing and repair after World War II took place. As the home of the United Nations headquarters for Europe, it was the center of many postwar diplomatic operations, commissions, and conferences. It was also the birthplace and home of the International Red Cross, which administered humanitarian aid throughout the war, for almost a century before, and ever since, including passing cigarettes along to Anita Vieillard.

Between the two world wars, Geneva served as the seat of the League of Nations, an instrument of diplomacy that organized many social and economic welfare activities but was unable to fulfill its chief goal: disarmament and peacekeeping after World War I. It was also here that the Geneva Conventions were established. Switzerland is now the guardian of those conventions, which set compassionate standards about



how nations may treat prisoners of war, the wounded, civilians, and refugees.

It had its work cut out for it in the postwar years, when many parts of the globe were dominated by conflict. There were of course the fireworks in Korea, Egypt, China, and blockaded Berlin. But the French were also skirmishing with the Vietminh in Vietnam, a prelude to the next stormy decade. One of the cruelest overseas conflicts was in Kenya, where the Mau Mau secret society, in a plot to expel the white man, had vowed to kill Europeans and uncooperative Kenyans. The worst massacres in that war were a few months ahead, but the killing had begun. South Africa was in the middle of a civil disobedience campaign. That campaign against apartheid resulted in the imprisonment and murder of both Africans and Europeans. There was additional trouble in the Middle East where the statehood of Israel, only four years old, had provoked neighboring Arabs. The end of the world war had been greeted with raucous celebration and euphoria, and yet somehow the world seemed no less violent. A best seller that year was Norman Vincent Peale's *The Power of Positive Thinking*.

Baba chose the Cornavin Hotel for his stay in Geneva, a grand old hotel with a railroad behind it and views of Mont Blanc. A few years later, the cartoonist Herge made it famous when his beloved boy reporter, Tintin, dashed through in *L'Affaire Tournesol*.

I didn't stay at the Cornavin because Baba's plan was to begin to separate me from his immediate surround. Instead, I stayed at another hotel, and Baba encouraged me to spend time with family friends who lived in Geneva. Among them were Judge Manley Hudson and his wife, Janet. Judge Hudson had built Harvard's International Legal Studies program and was now the chairman of the International Law Commission of the United Nations. The Hudsons were very well connected in Geneva, so I had the pleasure of visiting a number of elegant estates there. I would sit down at the Hudsons' table to some fabulous fancy meal, including wine and cordials, with the upper class of Europe. Then I would go over to the Cornavin and enter the ashram-like atmosphere around Baba. Then I'd go back again to the worldly scene at the Hudsons. And then I would run back to God.

Whenever Baba's work in a place was over, he would be in a hurry to leave. Now he wished to reach India as soon as possible. The day before Baba was scheduled to depart, Air India went on strike and claimed it would be a week before any planes were available. There was pandemonium trying to figure out how to get Baba and his group out of Switzerland. In those early days of plane travel, nobody, including the mandali and me, had much experience in negotiating our way through

the vagaries of the airlines. Many of us trotted off to travel agencies, only to discover that there were planes leaving for India from other cities in Europe, but none within reach. In addition, many European airports were experiencing heavy fog, and departures were limited.

Finally it was decided the group could take a flight that went via Paris, Cairo, and Karachi. Since these places required visas, Baba sent Dr. Donkin out to procure them and to also buy him a new set of crutches.

No sooner was Donkin out the door than the phone rang. It was the airline announcing it could get the group on a plane after all - at 4:00 p.m. But by now they had lost Donkin! I was sitting at lunch at the Hudsons when I received a phone call. It was Delia, exclaiming, "Baba wants you to take off right now and get in a taxi and go find Dr. Donkin!"

I looked at the phone incredulously and replied, "Just a second. Where is Dr. Donkin?"

"Baba doesn't know!"

"Now, wait a minute... "

Frankly, I was a terrible disciple when it came to unquestioning obedience. If the mandali had heard the same request, they would simply have hopped in a cab and been on their way. They were freer than I, and luckier. They were able to enjoy the excitement in trying to fulfill Baba's wish, the adventure of forging into the unknown and being led by him to the goal. But my obedience wasn't of that caliber, and neither was my trust.

"Delia, please go back and ask Baba, does he want me to just run around Geneva in a taxi? Or does he want me to find Dr. Donkin?"

At the time, I thought the first action might not lead to the second. Now I know that with all the responsibilities Baba gave us, all the seemingly impossible tasks and insurmountable challenges, there was one simple solution: Start. Just start. When you do, possibilities present themselves. Answers appear. And the Master himself brings it to fruition.

I told Delia, "Since I don't speak the language here, if Baba wants me to find Dr. Donkin, he might do better to send me with his driver."

She went back to Baba and then came back on the line: "Baba really wants you to find Donkin. The driver is gone for the moment, but he'll be back soon, and he can go with you then."

Still I wasn't satisfied. "Since he isn't coming right away, should I stay here and finish my lunch and come then, or should I come now? What would Baba like?"

She left for a moment, then told me, "Baba says stay for lunch and then come."

When I met the driver, we began our hunt, going to travel agencies, airline offices, and stores that sold crutches. The driver and I covered many of these places three or four times. We both kept saying the same things in different languages, hoping someone would understand something. Baba's other companions were also searching, and visiting the same places we were. It got to the point where I'd walk into an office or store and would barely begin to ask, "Have you seen...?" And all the people would whirl on me and say, "No!" When Rano reached one consulate, she heard someone say in French, "If anyone inquires about this Dr. Donkin, throw him out!"

We knew the group needed visas for Pakistan, but there was no Pakistani embassy or consulate in Geneva. So I went to the Air India office and asked, "Now look, if you were going to India and you had to get a visa for Pakistan in a hurry, where would you go?" They suggested the British embassy. So off we went.

We located the embassy, went down to the visa office in the basement, and there was Dr. Donkin! He'd been there for two hours trying to get visas. We hustled him into the car and raced back to Baba. But by then it was too late to make the plane.

Again the group was stuck. Rano searched at every airline office in the city, and after hours of frustrating refusals, she finally obtained the six tickets Baba needed on an Air France flight to Karachi.

While Baba and his group were stuck in Geneva, I was stuck too. I had run short of cash, and the airline refused to refund my ticket to Egypt until I returned to the United States. I immediately called Mother, who said she would wire money to American Express. I went repeatedly to the office, but each time I was told the money hadn't arrived. Finally, the very day Baba was to leave, I went again to American Express and once more stood there while a clerk riffled through his papers again. But this time I saw him pass by a distinctive pink envelope. "What's that?" I demanded, and I made him drag it out of the pile. There was my check.

So once Baba was able to go, I too was free to go.

I had hoped to visit France and Scotland en route home, but a note from Mother put an end to part of that scheme. "Have a lovely time in Scotland, dear, and stay away from Paris. It's a wicked city, and I'd like to go with you!" Enclosed were the funds for Scotland and nothing more.

We took Baba and the group to the airport, several hours early as usual. Eventually I said good-bye to Baba and my dear companions, and they all flew off to France and toward the Fiery Free Life ahead. I stood there alone but not lonely, still filled with his presence. Then I made my way back to town, where I stayed another week at the hotel near the Hudsons.

When I arrived in Scotland, I went up through Edinburgh to Perth and then took a train across to Glasgow. On the train, I was suffering even more from the terrible cold I had caught back in July in Myrtle Beach, and the waiter in the dining car showed great concern for me. When we arrived in Glasgow, he escorted me to the front desk of a family hotel and asked the clerk to take good care of me: "She's very sick. You better give her a room or she might faint on the spot."

The next morning, it was pouring rain, but I climbed on a boat train and rode one of the boats around the lochs. All that day, I was out in the cold, and the rain soaked me through. When the rain let up, the wind started to blow. It was miserable.

Late in the evening, I arrived back at my hotel, frozen to the marrow of my bones. I managed to eat dinner, then staggered to my bed and collapsed. The cold was much worse now.

Illness was not unfamiliar to me. In fact, illnesses and accidents seemed to be a theme in my life. Even as a child, I had experienced repeated bouts of bronchitis, double mastoid, amoebic dysentery, scarlet fever, and even a case of gangrene that almost cost me a leg. And so it went through life, until I was no stranger to physical discomfort. But here in Scotland, it was different. For the first time in my life, it seemed I might not survive. I thought, "Baba, I'm so sick. Tonight I'm going to have pneumonia and die here and wind up in some heather-covered grave. Nobody knows where I am, and nobody will ever know where I went." Then I went to sleep.

When I woke up the next morning, I wasn't sure I was alive. I sampled the air and felt the bed and looked around me. I couldn't believe it. Not only was I alive, but I felt absolutely fine! I didn't have a vestige of a cold; it was as if I'd never even been sick.

In the coming years, I would see that happen over and over again with people who came to Baba - a series of illnesses and accidents, often followed by a remarkable recovery. Baba had said that illness is one of the quickest ways to burn off sanskaras, those tenacious impressions of past lives. Through God's kindness, we are given these ailments to help us progress and proceed with our spiritual journey.

I don't know how much I progressed that time in Scotland. But I do know that lying there by myself, many miles from anyone I knew, I was never less alone.

## *Out of a Cell, Into a Quandary*

Like a scene in a Hollywood movie, snowcapped mountains dissolved into concrete skyscrapers, and cobblestone lanes faded into asphalt streets choked with taxicabs. I was back in New York, heaved once again from Baba's magical orb into the world of the ordinary. Letters tumbled in from my new European friends who were struggling to reorient themselves. Irene Billo wrote, "I am living in a dream and don't quite know whether it is true that Baba was here or not." Later Hedi Mertens reported: "So many things have happened since that lovely time at Solduno, I had quite a hard time to find myself back to everyday life."

My adjustment was easier than theirs, thanks to that last week in Geneva, when I stayed in a separate hotel and spent much of my time with my parents' friends. At the time, it was unsettling to be dashing back and forth from elegant homes and soirees to Baba and his companions. Now it seemed like a blessing. The transition back to "everyday life" had started even before I left Switzerland.

For me everyday life now centered on Baba's directive that I become a secretary. Only four days after returning from Europe, I enrolled in a secretarial school in the city, along with my friend Sparkie Lukes. I wasn't very enthusiastic about the plan, but not because it interfered with other ambitions. In truth, I had no ambitions. My only dream at that point was a strong and loving marriage, and in this I was not unlike most women of my time. But I had also been somewhat intimidated by the achievements of my unique parents.

Although strong willed as a child, I had always lacked faith in my own abilities. I can remember my mother, who had already packed maybe a dozen lives into the short space of one, saying to me time and time again, "I just don't understand why you don't have more self-confidence." I understood it. I was a little girl living in the shadow of two parents who each seemed a colossus to me. I felt they had done everything, been everywhere, and accomplished more than I could ever hope to. I can remember thinking, "I could never do anything as well

as they could" and "They've done it all, and there's nothing left for me to do."

That self-doubt was reinforced by the notion that I was a disappointment to my father, possibly from the moment of birth. That was the moment he had expected to welcome his new son into the world. My father was a brilliant and generous man who would never criticize me, but conversely, he would seldom offer praise. His perspective was simply that if you were part of his clan, you would of course excel. To him, praise would have been criticism because it implied he had expected less of you. It took me twenty years and an explanation from Mother before I finally understood this. But meanwhile I struggled with a sense of inadequacy. I entered my adulthood believing I might make a good wife and companion but lacking professional goals or any sense of my own talents.

Still, when Baba suggested I learn secretarial skills, I shuddered. This was one of two predictable careers for women in postwar America, the other being nursing. There were few feminists at that time, and I certainly wouldn't have described myself as a feminist, but I still associated secretarial work with restrictive stereotypes. The following year, 1953, Simone de Beauvoir released *The Second Sex*, a best seller that ushered in the women's liberation movement, which eventually freed women to pursue almost any career imaginable. But for now, it was either the thermometer or the steno pad. I found myself remembering a time years earlier when I confronted these cultural constraints head on. I had injured my knee and was consulting a doctor about possible corrective surgery. His response was, "Why bother? Girls just become secretaries anyway."

Now the doctor seemed to have been right. Baba, who had a keen eye for pride, was steering me toward a profession that was both clichéd and undervalued. I tried to put my disappointment aside and set out to master the typewriter and what I called the "wiggles and squiggles" of shorthand.

I knew by now that a period of close contact with this spiritual Master is often followed by a period of intense challenges, both internal and external. It seems we must integrate what we've learned, putting our new understanding to practice in daily life. Secretarial school was part of that process, but there were other challenges, and some of them I imposed on myself. One of those concerned Baba's admonition that we must not criticize others. And since he said criticizing others was one of the harder tendencies to overcome, Sparkie and I felt challenged by it.

Because we were young and enthusiastic, we truly believed that it couldn't be all that difficult to overcome personal weaknesses. We made a pact: an entire week without criticizing anyone. And we worked hard at it. As the week neared its end, not a single critical word had passed our lips. Then, on the last day of our resolution, we were sitting in a cafeteria across from school when a group of girls from Brooklyn entered and sat at an adjoining table. Their conversation went something like this:

"Did you see that girl?" "Did you see what she did?" and so on. It continued around the table, with each one chiming in, until this girl had been thoroughly raked over the coals in absentia. Sparkie and I sat there, growing more and more incensed. After all, *we* knew the importance of avoiding criticism. When the group finally left, the two of us looked at each other and, with practically one voice, exclaimed, "How can they talk about that poor girl that way? Isn't it terrible!"

And there it went - the whole ball game. Just when we had been doing so well, we found ourselves criticizing others for the very fault we were trying to overcome. It was a forceful experience with what we later came to know as the "spiritual ego." It kicks in when you begin to transcend a fault or develop what the Master has defined as a positive attribute. Then you begin to feel very virtuous and proud. Once that spiritual ego erupts, you've got to learn the entire thing over again!

Baba was very insistent that people not be critical of others. Sparkie and I talked about this too, and I've often thought about it since then. One point that continually comes back to me is the importance of respecting and tolerating others. God wants to produce harmony in the world, and there can only be harmony if more than one note is being sung. One can't have a symphony with just a single instrument. And there can't be a chorale without multiple voices. It takes those contrasts and differences. If you're going to plant a beautiful garden, you don't plant just one flower. You plant a variety so that the garden is always blooming, so there's always something beautiful to see and experience.

While I labored to fulfill Baba's wishes, he was busy in India preparing for the next phase of his work, which he called the Fiery Free Life - the life in which both weakness and strength would be "consumed in the fire of divinity." Letters were arriving from all over India from those who wanted to join him in the Fiery Free Life, and Baba was sorting through them. Many people were being summoned to a large meeting scheduled to take place in Meherabad in November. Baba worked on these plans while still suffering from his injuries from the car accident. I learned that he and Mehera had both received diathermy treatment, and although it was beneficial for Mehera and seemed to ease the nerve pain in her cheek, it did little to ease the constant pain

in Baba's arm. As Elizabeth remarked, it seemed Baba had taken all the pain on himself.

Francis Brabazon had hoped to join Baba in India, but he'd been told to stay in Australia. In a letter he sent me that October; he expressed not disappointment but a yogi-like detachment and single-minded desire to do Baba's will:

I have really felt no sense of separation from Baba, or from any of you. I seem to be quite happy carrying on here, trying to do what He asked me to do. I look forward to Baba's "further instructions."

I am so glad you had the business of driving Him around. So very glad. You no doubt had a whale of a time, in spite of, or because of, the various hardships.

Like the rest of us, Francis had learned that life with the Master can be far from peaceful. Because a Master can accelerate your karma, life becomes not easier but more challenging and intense. One learns to expect the unusual and even the calamitous. There were moments after I met Baba when I felt my life itself was in jeopardy. Four of those moments left a strong impression on me.

The first occurred in a crowded elevator in New York. Before the doors closed, an especially large man hopped in, and one of his friends joked, "Don't let John in or the elevator will collapse."

Just as the doors shut, a metallic *sproing* sounded, and I knew immediately that a cable had broken. We started to plummet, faster and faster. Everybody was frozen with fear, including the ashen-faced elevator operator. I said to him, "Isn't there a button you're supposed to push?"

He came out of his shock, hit the emergency button, and soon the elevator began to slow down. It finally came to a stop about thirteen floors down.

Once we were safely out, one of the passengers said to me, "We could have been killed!"

That had been amply clear to me from the moment I heard that *sproing*.

It wasn't necessarily my view that Baba saved me that day. I believed even then that if your time has come, the Master won't interfere. But I knew it was true that his grace speeds up and amplifies life's experiences, and then life can feel like one crisis or adventure after another.

I remember another close call on a flight into Saudi Arabia. The pilots couldn't get one balky wheel to lock. They took the plane through numerous dives and jerks trying to snap the wheel into place, while I watched ambulances and emergency vehicles gathering at the airport.



Eventually we landed and the wheel held. An hour later, we all met at a cocktail party, where the ice clinked more than usual.

On that same trip, I dove off a fishing dhow into the Persian Gulf, right into a school of carnivorous fish with multiple rows of huge teeth. The crew hurled a rope out and dragged me back to the boat as quickly as they could. I arrived unharmed. Another day I found myself tiptoeing across a rickety, corroded dock, twenty feet above water teeming with sea snakes that were only slightly more poisonous than cobras.

All of these episodes occurred in the first few years after I came to Meher Baba, years that dispelled any illusion that a life with the Master is one of comfort and ease. He has asked us not to worry, but he's never pretended there won't be anything to provoke worry. In the challenge to avoid worry, however, I've been fairly successful. That's because for some reason, when I'm in a dangerous situation, I don't feel the danger. It's simply the way I'm structured. I certainly recognize danger, but I do so without fear, at least at the moment. Three days later, I might start shaking. But at the time, my focus always seems to be: What should I do? How can I fix it? What would help? This detachment from emotion has been a blessing in many situations where panic would have seemed a more reasonable response.

In November 1952, just as Baba was beginning his Fiery Free Life, he sent Mother his charter for Sufism Reoriented, complete with his signature. It was crystal clear that he had given a great deal of attention to the order, and he wanted it to last. To me there was one passage in particular that spoke to his intentions:

Sufism Reoriented, emanating from me, to be conceived and practiced, will forge out into one of the few pure channels leading to One God.

That same November, America detonated its first hydrogen bomb at an atoll in the Pacific, upping the ante in the Cold War to another ominous level. Americans were blissfully unaware of this; the explosion wasn't announced until more than a year later when we detonated a second hydrogen bomb, this time on the Pacific atoll of Bikini. Instead, we were focused on the election of a new president, the much-beloved war hero Dwight "Ike" Eisenhower.

The decade that followed was marked by prosperity, patriotism, and social and political conformism. This was the era when the suburban lifestyle blossomed, with its abundance of consumer goods and leisure time. There was a parade of pastimes and gadgets to fill that time, including backyard barbecues, hula hoops, station wagons, and *I Love Lucy*.

In spite of a wary eye on communist expansion and unease about weapon proliferation, Americans would look back on the Eisenhower years as the lull before the storm, the last moment of innocence before the turbulent and violent 1960s. I was an American too, and I shared both that innocence and the concerns over global tensions. But I was aware now of what was different for me. To me, everything that happened was the will of Meher Baba, and every event held the imprint of his divine hand. That year Baba commented that one mast did infinitely greater work for the world than even its strongest leaders, including Churchill and Nehru.

In May of 1953, while headlines trumpeted man's conquest of Everest, the highest peak on the planet, my thoughts were with the Highest of the High and his work in valleys and peaks unseen. Baba was still in his Fiery Free Life, ministering to the poor and contacting saints and masts.

I continued to pound the typewriter keys, but my own thoughts were also consumed by love - both divine and romantic. I was in a serious relationship with a young man, and it seemed to be nudging its way toward marriage. When Mother mentioned this in a letter to Baba in July, he sent the following response:

My Fiery Free Life work ends this month. From August to December end, it is a very critical time for me, for my work and for the world, as I have told all my people in India, and have instructed them not to take on any new venture during that period. I therefore want Charmian to do the same, and to wait till December. She should not marry this boy, and she should not marry anybody else till then, nor get involved in anything new. (She may, however, take on a job till then.) Wait till after December, Charmian, and don't worry in the least about your marriage. It will all turn out perfectly, and you will make an ideal match.

When Baba told me not to marry, I of course obeyed. But it was difficult.

As the Fiery Free Life came to an end, so did one perilous war and one hope for peace. An armistice at the end of July finally halted the long battle in Korea, but shortly after, the Soviet Union responded to America's hydrogen bomb test by detonating its own bomb.

It was a confusing and contradictory time for the world, but for Baba's followers, one message emerged true and clear. In September he dictated "The Highest of the High," one of the clarion messages of

his advent. He stated clearly how people should view him and warned them not to confuse him with saints or gurus. He was, he said, either an ordinary man or the Highest of the High. Five months later, he settled that question by spelling out on his alphabet board, "Say, 'Avatar Meher Baba ki jai!'" For the first time in this age, the Avatar had declared his status to the world.

And so the Avatar continued to live and work on the earth while most of humanity remained oblivious to his presence and longed for his return. A few people, mostly scholars and intellectuals disenchanted with the spiritual bankruptcy of the world, began to experiment with mysticism and hallucinatory drugs. Around the time Baba wrote "The Highest of the High," Aldous Huxley released *The Doors of Perception*, a description of his use of mescaline to induce what he called "visionary states of mind." It was one of the early harbingers of the drug age that followed and brought so many muddled and disillusioned youth to my mother's door.

From my new little apartment in New York, independent from my family for the first time, I wrote to Baba frequently. It seems inconceivable to me now that I could have been corresponding with the Avatar, and even more inconceivable that he, with cosmic burdens on his shoulders, should reply. But he always did, usually through one of the women mandali. They also told me of the darshans, of the increasing love, devotion, and acclaim of those who came to pay homage to him. The rays of his sun seemed to be reaching ever wider.

I enjoyed my apartment and the chance to be alone occasionally, but when Mother and Dad invited me to join them on a trip to Saudi Arabia, I readily agreed. We arrived in Jiddah in the spring of 1954. My parents stayed at the American embassy outside the city, and I stayed at Aramco House in town. My father became ill while we were there, and the doctors diagnosed a heart condition. Mother and I felt we had to be extra careful to protect him, as the doctors had made the dire pronouncement that any shock might prove fatal.

The night before we were scheduled to leave Arabia, I accepted the invitation of an attaché at the embassy to go for a drive. It wasn't difficult to select a route since there was only one paved road at the time, a road that led to Mecca, the holy city of Islam. A certain distance down that road, we knew there was a sign reading "No Christians Allowed Beyond This Point." The Saudis had erected it in fury after two "infidels" tried to sneak into Mecca, and they vowed to behead anyone who tried that again. My friend and I made the obvious decision to turn around when we reached the sign. It was a reasonable plan, but plans mean little when the Avatar takes the wheel.

We drove into the hills and had just crossed over a hillcrest when I suddenly saw an almost indecipherable sign fly by and a blockade ahead of us. "That's the sign!" I shouted. Too late. We pulled to a stop and started to turn around, but guards came running up shouting "Halt! Halt!" and aimed their guns at us. We didn't understand their Arabic commands. But when two armed guards got in our car and pointed down the road to Jiddah, we understood well enough. They took us straight to the city jail.

No one spoke a word of English, and between my futile attempts to communicate, I found myself thinking of my father. "This is terrible! The shock will kill him," I thought. Tears welled up and started coursing down my cheeks. To add to my misery, I was in a deep state of embarrassment over my attire. Arab women of the time were in *pardah*, wearing heavy, black body coverings and veils. Never suspecting I would end up in public, I had dressed for my date in a short-sleeved cocktail dress. Now everyone was staring at this brazen young American who seemed completely lacking in modesty and respect.

I remember looking through the bars on the window at a dusty little man trudging along the road with a bedraggled old donkey carrying produce. He was poor and dirty, yet I'd never envied anyone so much. For the first time, I really understood what freedom was.

When I regained my composure, I realized it was essential that we find an interpreter. Since we weren't locked in, my companion and I agreed that I would simply try to walk out of the jail while he stayed behind to convince the sergeant on duty to come with us and help. So at five o'clock the next morning, I crept slowly out a door and into a courtyard below. The soldiers guarding the gate spotted me and unslung their weapons. When I took another step, they aimed at me, and then I knew if I took one more step, they would fire. But just at that moment, my companion rushed out with the sergeant in tow. Somehow he'd made him understand our intention. The sergeant ordered the guards to let us pass and sent some policemen with us in a car to locate an interpreter. My companion said to me, "If they should get out of the car to find an interpreter, you take off and head for Aramco House."

That's exactly what happened. The police disappeared into a house, and I took off in the dark on a five-block walk to Aramco House. As I crept through the back alleys of that exotic city by the Red Sea, I remember thinking, "My, life is a strange thing."

I arrived at my room in Aramco House, but before I could even use the powder room, which I desperately needed, the police came tearing in. They took me back to jail for a second time. This time, however, there was an interpreter. The police chief had also shown up.

It took hours before anyone would really listen to me, but eventually I got out the information that I was "Mr. Duce's daughter."

My father was well known in Saudi Arabia and had done much for the welfare of both the government and its people. The mention of his name was like a stick of dynamite. The police chief took off for the palace, which then notified the embassy. Then he returned and started ordering furniture to be removed from his office - rugs, tables, and chairs all disappeared. He set up a cell for me that was a lovely, improvised version of an Arab sitting room. I was given food and drink and even shown how to lock the door on my side. But still the morning dragged on, and I could visualize my parents at the airport, waiting for me to materialize so we could fly out of Arabia as scheduled.

Then word arrived that the king had sent a telegram about my incarceration to a local prince. The police chief and I set out together to find the prince, but we scurried all over town to no avail. For the third time, I headed back to jail.

When we arrived, there were limousines outside, and inside there was a large council of older, gray-bearded gentlemen poring over the telegram from the king, which had been delivered in our absence. Sometime in the afternoon, they finally decided to release me and even arranged for my transportation to the airport, where Mother, Dad, and the plane had all been waiting for me since morning. My parents had already received word of my escapades, but to my relief, Dad seemed just fine.

Etched in my mind forever is one moment in that Saudi jail. I was looking out the window of my cell at the shimmering waters of the Red Sea and the community spread out around the bay. It was sunlit and sparkling outside, but I was inside, locked up tight. Suddenly I recalled Baba saying, "Charmian can go to jail for Anita!"

I stood at the window with tears streaking down my cheeks, partly from laughter. *I might have known it would be for a religious offense!*

At the time Baba said it, the idea of going to jail had shocked me. I then felt *convinced* I could never end up in jail because I simply wasn't the "type." Had I taken a look around the world at that time, I would have realized there was no "type." Both innocent and guilty people in both civilized and uncivilized countries were imprisoned by the thousands. There were, of course, the prisoners of war in Korea - eleven thousand Americans and one hundred thirty-two thousand communists. In addition, there were the tens of thousands of dissidents in prisons in China and the Soviet Union, many barely surviving in the most wretched of conditions. In Germany, a new type of prisoner had been created by the Berlin border closing. The month we were in Switzerland, sixteen

thousand people escaped from East to West Berlin. In fact, there was a new category of refugee around the globe during the postwar years: those fleeing from communist rule and persecution. Even in our own democracy, the McCarthy hearings had persecuted and destroyed the lives of "innocents." In the modern era, an entire country could be a prison - or a city or even an idea.

After I returned to the States, I wrote to Baba and told him the whole story of my going to jail in Saudi Arabia. I got a letter back from Mani saying, "Baba seemed quite amused at your jail incident." Later he sent me another message about my imprisonment, and it arrived through its own bizarre series of events.

Mother was in Washington, D.C., when she suddenly felt a strong urge to rush to New York. She followed her instincts and arrived there immediately and found that Malcolm Schloss, one of Baba's devotees, had just arrived from India. He said, "It's strange you should be here, for it has saved me a trip to Washington. The last thing Baba told me was to be sure and go to Ivy Duce's and give her and Charmian each a message."

The message for Mother was that she shouldn't be discouraged if the Sufi school was slow to grow, because the time wasn't yet right. The message for me was that Baba wanted me to know that my experience in Arabia was all his doing, that he had used me for a purpose he wanted to fulfill in that country. Since we believe that Baba was also Mohammed, I suspected this work involved Islam. I've considered the idea that it had something to do with the role of women in Arab countries, for they lived in circumstances that most Western women would consider psychological imprisonment. But it's pointless to try to second-guess the Avatar, and although it's tempting to theorize about his work, in the end we can neither know nor understand. The message made me happy, simply because I hoped that somehow, in some enigmatic way, I had served him.

Equally provocative was the story behind Malcolm's message, which unfolded later. It turned out that before Malcolm left India, Baba had told him to go straight home to America, but instead he'd lingered a few days in France. Just hours after he delivered his message to Mother, he died unexpectedly. If Mother had not flown to New York purely on intuition, we would never have received his messages. And one presumes that if Malcolm had not tarried in France, he would have died at his home in Los Angeles. It is a curious footnote that Baba permanently gave up his alphabet board on the same day Malcolm died.

Whatever my role in the Jiddah jail event, it never affected my fondness for Arabia and its people. After I returned home, the government

of Saudi Arabia made it clear there were no hard feelings on its side either. When I applied to work with its United Nations delegation, I was hired. It seemed to me the most diplomatic way of saying, "You're okay. You did nothing to offend us." The job lasted only for the duration of the General Assembly session, after which I was hired by the new Arab Information Center. I worked ten hours a day, and some of the hardest work required skills they certainly didn't teach in secretarial school. As I wrote to Baba:

I have taken my office as an exercise in devotion and control of my temper. People come up and blow up at me, and I just say, "Yes sir, isn't it awful?" figuring that if I yell back, it just produces a chain reaction that carries over to other people. About once every three months, I break down and cry and swear at myself in the mirror, figuring it's all my fault, because if I were more efficient, the others wouldn't have so much to worry about. I get so tired... I am so conscious of my own imperfections and yet seem too powerless to do anything about them... I just keep trying to do the level best I can from hour to hour. But I must admit that what you said about me reoccurs to me about every hour on the hour: "She sleeps like a log, eats like a hog, and looks like a frog."

In spite of the trials (or because of them, as Francis would say), I loved my work and considered it an exercise in devotion. I told Baba that I wouldn't swap it for anything, except being with him. Meanwhile, I tried to get my life in order in case I was called to his side. I had taken my apartment only on the condition that I had an option to sublet at any time I wished. And I tried to sort out my nebulous wedding plans, now complicated by the fact that I had several suitors and wasn't sure which was the best match. All I knew was that marriage seemed a path to higher love, and I described these views to Baba:

I haven't been really worried about getting married. The problem I have there looks awful small when I look up at the stars at night or around at the millions and billions of people in New York City and in the world. Just doesn't amount to much whether I marry this one or that one, or marry at all. It's only one lifetime to me. But as long as one bases their marriage on giving and on loving unselfishly, I can't see that you can lose by it. Though being a dumb bunny, probably I'm wrong as usual. Anyhow, all I can do is follow where my heart loves, feeling that you can't lose through loving because you become part of another being, as they do of you. I figure that you said I would marry the right man even if you had to make him the right man.

So I have nothing to worry about ...

I continued to shop for furnishings and items I might need if I did marry. I worked, I attended Sufi classes, I helped Mother with the mailing of *God Speaks*. And through it all, I waited anxiously for word that Baba would return to the United States.

In the fall of 1954, Baba had uttered his Final Declaration. His words in that Declaration frightened all of us. They seemed to imply that he would soon be dropping his body, and we confronted the unspeakable possibility that we might never see him in person again. The Declaration caused me special turmoil because it pitted my intuition against his word. I have always had the ability to sense what was impending, such as my unease before Baba set out by car across the United States. And I simply didn't intuit that Baba was going to leave us soon. That made it hard to trust his words, yet I knew that if the Master said it was night in the middle of the day, to the true lover it was indeed night. Later I wrote to Baba about these quandaries:

It wasn't that I didn't think that it couldn't happen... it was just that some place deep down inside of that thing I call being, I felt it wouldn't happen then. So, although I could feel terrible about the possibility, I couldn't basically feel it clear through because I didn't wholeheartedly believe it, for then. I suppose this makes me a rather bad disciple. I often cry at night about my shortcomings.

As time passed and our alarm faded, I continued to think about marriage. It had always been easy for me to picture marriage; it was much harder to picture the right man. Now this choice began to occupy more and more of my thinking. I put the decision in Baba's hands, and we traded many cables. One, in October of 1955, read:

IF YOU HAVE DECIDED TO MARRY... DO SO AND I WILL SEE THAT YOU ARE HAPPY STOP IF YOU'RE NOT SURE YOU WANT TO MARRY... THEN SAY NO... AND WAIT LEAVING EVERYTHING ENTIRELY TO ME AND I WILL DEFINITELY SEE YOU HAPPILY MARRIED WITHIN ONE YEAR.

BABA

It sounded so simple. And in some ways familiar.

My father never gave advice unless asked, but when I did ask, the solution was always so clear to him. In my whole life, I can only remember his responding in one of two ways. He would either say, "Do it. Just do it," or he would say, "Don't. Just don't."

Say yes or say no. Just do it or don't. But still my mind churned.



Dearly Beloved Baba,  
Mother suggested I write you in verse  
And feeling that prose would be much worse,  
I'm sitting down to compose you a poem  
Which probably will amount to a tome.  
She thinks my poems are very funny  
Although they sometimes get quite punny.

I'm finding it very hard to think  
And suspect that my brain has gone on the blink.  
You would probably say G.G.'s mad! Quite mad!  
Which would follow along with some tho'ts I've had.  
But I've finally decided it's not so bad,  
And I'm really not feeling nearly so sad.

I have a pet poet who is named Hoffenstein,  
Who, when someone commented that marriage was fine,  
Took out his pen and he quickly retorted,  
"Marriages made in heaven are not exported."  
I think he was wrong and had probably been took,  
So that's why I never have believed in his book.

Mother's feelings have been metaphysical  
While mine have been being utterly quizzical.  
Discussions have really been waxing quite hot  
On who, how, where, when, and the whichness of what.  
I don't know the answers, I can't claim I do,  
And the resultant confusion's been something to view.

My head tells me one thing, my heart says another,  
And then I come home and I listen to Mother.  
Mother took me home to my Washington pen  
And clucked about like a sweet little hen.  
Now I'm. feeling much better, in fact, very well,  
And my head should be clear as a wee silver bell,  
But Mother doesn't know how much light's illumination  
So this gives me a pause for considerable rumination ...

On how much love really is a love?  
How much is calculated to come from above?  
How much of the thrill  
Is really self-will?  
How much of it's kindness?  
How much feeble-mindness?

I'm really very much at a loss  
As to how to reply to your questions, dear boss!  
The thing I love most in people, you see,  
Is the amount of you which is revealed to me.

I've bought myself a weddin' dress,  
But don't know which man would be really best.  
And you can really see I'm quite at a loss  
As to who to pick for a permanent boss.  
As boss, of course, of departmental section,  
Subject of course to continued inspection  
From ONE who has been, will be, and is  
Boss of it all, from meta to phys.  
So I guess I shall pray, and heave a sigh  
For some heavenly guidance from the Highest of the High!

I wish I could close with a sentence quite fetching,  
But to do it this letter I'd only be stretching,  
And by now your patience must be worn quite thin,  
So I must relieve you of all of this din.  
Whoever I draw, for better or worse,  
I promise not to write the story in verse.

Dearest love, as ever, again,  
From G.G. with the befuddled brain.

In December of 1955, Baba cabled Mother with happy news, and he enclosed a message for me:

INTEND TO BE WITH YOU ALL MIDDLE OF NEXT YEAR  
STOP TELL CHARMIAN BE HAPPY STOP  
LOVE BABA

For once, I could instantly obey his wish.

## *Catching the Light*

My mother used to refer to it as "the beast." It was a term she'd picked up years before from a British schoolboy she met in South America. The boy had just returned from a bullfight, escorted by an American family she knew and their own ten-year-old son. Mother asked the boys how they'd enjoyed it. They both said they'd liked it very much, and then the British boy exclaimed, "Yes, it's the agility of the beast that amazes me!" Mother always remembered that conversation, and years later, when her Sufi students would try to squirm out of their responsibilities, she'd say, "Oh, it's the agility of the beast that amazes me." She was referring of course to the nimble human ego, which will perform all sorts of gymnastics when confronted with its own extinction - as well it should.

"The beast" made its appearance for me some time after we heard that Baba was returning to the United States. I was initially thrilled, but as his visit drew nearer, I found myself manufacturing all kinds of excuses for not seeing him. "If I go, I might lose my job." "It would interfere with this, and it would ruin that." But ultimately even the fiercest ego is no match for the force of its Creator. My love for Baba was so strong that, in the end, I simply quit my job and went.

Early one beautiful morning in July 1956, a group of us drove out to Idlewild Airport to begin what Baba had called a *sahavas* - time in the intimate company of the Master. Many of us represented two New York organizations, the Monday Night Group and Sufism Reoriented, which together had sponsored the trip for Baba and four of his mandali: Eruch, Adi, Meherjee, and Dr. Nilu.

I had been given a special charge for this visit, not one I felt especially confident about. Baba had asked that I make a movie of it. I had only held a movie camera in my hands once before, in Switzerland, where I'd taken two short eight-millimeter films of Baba. That and two years of still photography in college were my only training for making a film about the Avatar. I decided that what I lacked in experience, I could

at least make up for in equipment. We had heard about a new movie camera that had automatic light control and that used film cassettes. It wasn't even on the market yet, but a friend went clear to the factory in Detroit and managed to deliver one to me in New York City. It was the most technologically advanced camera of its time, but there were still drawbacks. Film of that era wasn't as quick to expose an image, so I knew I couldn't shoot indoors without ample artificial lighting. Thus when we arrived at the airport, I waited outside, where my first shots of Baba would be illuminated by the summer sun.

Baba finally appeared, striding out of the terminal in his lovely pink coat, with everyone streaming behind him as if he were the Pied Piper. I began to film him and quickly realized that if I was going to make a movie of Meher Baba, I'd better learn to move fast. He moved so swiftly at times, it seemed his feet didn't even touch the ground. Baba got into a convertible, and the driver lowered the top so we could continue to take our pictures. Baba sat there very patiently, smiling lovingly at all around him, looking resplendent in a garland of flowers. In the meantime, the whole army of us was blocking traffic in every direction, so a policeman came over to investigate and break up the logjam. Just as he approached, one of our mild-mannered Sufis suddenly exclaimed, "For heaven's sake! Don't you know who this is! How can you ask us to move on?" The policeman returned to the crowd and told everyone they'd have to wait. "Some VIP is here."

Eventually our parade moved off to the Delmonico Hotel on Park Avenue in midtown Manhattan. The Delmonico was an old-fashioned but comfortable hotel that offered spacious suites in place of rooms. Its specialty was hosting foreign celebrities and dignitaries, perhaps the most famous of whom arrived eight years later on an airplane from England. When the Beatles launched their invasion of America from the Delmonico, ten thousand fans and hundreds of journalists camped outside the hotel day and night. Our crowd was considerably smaller, but we managed to create our own stir with a constant influx of visitors, disciples, and people running in and out in states of excitement. Since Baba hadn't slept for several days before his arrival, someone suggested he take a rest once he settled into his suite. But Baba responded, "I won't rest until I drop my body," and then added that his refreshment was in seeing his lovers. He started receiving people immediately.

Baba gave many discourses during his visit, and several people took meticulous notes on what he said. We all felt it was crucial to keep detailed records for the generations that would succeed us, and today I'm

glad we did. Now when one reads accounts of what occurred around Baba, they're almost always factual. Even in his presence, we were very focused on details. This meant there was little time to ponder what was happening in an abstract sense, to theorize about the higher meaning of his work. And this was the way he wanted it. As the Avatar, Baba did, and does, his work through the process of life itself. We had to experience. We had to live. His work was practical and grounded. Only after many years were we able to reflect back on our time with him and create plays and musicals that celebrated his work. Then we could begin to see how he worked on so many levels at one time-with individuals, groups, every plane of consciousness, and all of Creation.

Later, as we studied Baba's work and examined it in a historical framework, we began to get a glimmer of understanding. More anecdotes about him emerged, and each brought new insights and inspired greater awe. I remember particularly a story I heard repeatedly from early Baba lovers about a day before World War II when Baba sent one of his disciples to walk the cliffs above the beaches of Normandy. She had no idea at the time that there would be a war and that this site was where the Allies would land to begin the liberation of Europe. Up to the moment of that landing, the Germans were misled into thinking the invasion would occur elsewhere. But the full might of the Allied forces converged at Normandy instead, and had they failed, the course of history might have been dramatically different. Luckily, Baba had put his protection on that spot through the obedient and unknowing action of a disciple.

Seldom did we have any way of knowing the purpose of Baba's work, and we gradually came to understand that implicit obedience was critically important. It was futile to constantly wonder, "Why are you asking this?" "Why do I have to do that?" "What does this mean?" It was better to simply obey, take notes, and leave the answers to future times and future generations.

For me, one comment Baba made during his 1956 visit was especially mysterious. He told my mother, "I have come fifty percent for Charmian and fifty percent for my other lovers." I have never dared think about that comment very much, even to this day. At the time, my mind was very much occupied with the decision over which suitor to marry, so on the surface he could have been referring simply to my romantic dilemma. I had a clear preference for one young man named Jay, with whom I felt a strong and deep connection, but I had told Baba that I would marry whomever he chose. And I meant it. Still, I was nervous, especially when Baba announced he wanted to settle the question the very day he arrived in New York. He kept his word.

That day Baba called my young man and me up to his suite at the Delmonico, where my mother and Eruch were also waiting. He said he had made his decision about which young man I should marry and then, to my joy, announced that it was indeed Jay. He said he wished the marriage to take place because we had long past karma together. Then he sent Eruch off with the request, "Bring me my ring."

Eruch returned with the ring and explained that in India it was the custom for a family to give a boy a ring when he reached puberty and entered manhood. The ring had been given to Baba by his family, and he had worn it. With that, Baba gave me his ring.

The moment in which Baba bequeathed me his ring seemed to me enchanted. It had the very real feeling of a wedding ceremony, and I felt it was clearly a betrothal. I was enormously happy. Afterward we all exchanged congratulations and shared our joy. Then I left to tell my friend Sparkie and the others of our group. All the months of confusion seemed finally resolved and the future full of promise.

As time went by, it dawned on me that Baba's precious ring, made for a man, was very large on my finger. I was afraid that with one hard handshake, I could crack the bones on either side of the ring finger. So I asked Baba if I could have the ring made smaller and more delicate. He thought that was fine, but he wanted to know if I was going to use the original setting or the original stone. When I replied that I thought I would just reset the stone, he seemed very pleased.

Once this was done, another idea occurred to me. I asked Baba if my husband could wear the ring setting. Baba looked at me, and then he looked off into space, as he sometimes did when contemplating a question. It was as if he was peering off into time. Then he got an impish glint in his eye. "That will be fine," he said. "Your husband may wear the ring." But I noticed that certain twinkle in his eyes, suggesting, "I know something you don't know." It was puzzling, but I put it out of my mind and went about my business.

After I was married, I offered the ring to my new husband, but he had no interest in wearing it. I put it away in my jewelry box, and sometime later it tumbled out, prompting me to ask him again. He still wasn't interested. Again I put it back in the jewelry box. Baba had said my husband *could* wear the ring, but he hadn't said my husband *would* wear the ring. Was that the cause of his twinkle? I wasn't sure.

While Baba was at the Delmonico, I spent much time running back and forth on errands for Mother and the many people who came to see him. But my primary assignment was the movie, and I devoted many hours to this project. It was a project with its own special challenges. On the second day, Baba called the entire group to sit with him, and I

readied myself to film this occasion. As people entered, they scattered around the room, and a number of them sat on the floor. I surveyed the room and noticed it was very dark. It was going to require a great deal of artificial lighting, more than I could provide with the one light bar attached to my camera. I'd brought some electric-powered film lights. I thought if I could just place them strategically around the room, they would provide the light I needed. So I asked someone to hold the light just a certain way while I filmed the event. He agreed and held it up as I'd requested. I moved on to other people, asking each to do the same thing. But then I looked back at the first person and saw my light had dropped to the floor, while he sat there gazing at Baba, absolutely lost. I climbed back over the audience to him and said, "You've got to keep it in the air! We can't film otherwise." He heard me and shot the light back up.

By then the second person had become completely entranced too and that light was down on the floor. This continued until four lights were on the floor and my four helpers were sitting mesmerized by Baba's presence. Finally, with gentle reminders, I managed to get a whole line of lights up and climbed up onto a ladder to take what I hoped would be ravishing pictures of the Avatar. I flicked the switch for the light and - instant blackout! It seems I must have blown every light in the hotel. People ran for help, and in the meantime, Baba did something he very rarely did. He asked people to close their eyes and make their minds blank for five minutes. The entire roomful of people sat quietly in the dark. As my eyes adjusted to the darkness, I could see that Baba was working intensely; his fingers made strange movements, and his eyes bore that faraway expression.

Finally I was told the hotel engineer would be able to supply me with five minutes of the electricity I needed, so I quickly asked people to turn on their lights while I switched on my light bar and rolled the film. While I filmed, Baba talked about his family and schoolmates and how they'd come to know and accept him as who he was. He conclude: with, "I am the Ancient One. When I break my silence, the world will know who I am. Let us play now!" Then he began to throw grapes to people, first aiming at this one, then throwing to another. It was a delightful, playful moment. And when my five minutes were up, I climbed down the ladder and went to the little electrical closet where the engineers were. I couldn't believe what I saw. There were enough sparks coming out of that closet to celebrate the Fourth of July! In the middle of the group were two men holding long insulated pliers that were gripping big copper bars bridging two electrical systems. Flame were shooting out of the box. When I told them we were finished, they

let out a sigh of relief and dropped their bars and pliers. I couldn't believe we hadn't burned down the entire hotel. To this day, I'm positive only Baba prevented it.

That evening we went with Baba to see *The Most Happy Fella*, a musical comedy that had just opened on Broadway. The story involved an aging Italian vineyard owner in Napa, California, who proposes by mail to a beautiful waitress who once served him in San Francisco. The highlight was the hit song "Standing on the Corner" ("watching all the girls go by"). But Baba's interest in theater seldom seemed to be the plot or the music. It was the audience and the work he could accomplish while his followers were focused on the stage. Whatever that work was, he must have completed it by intermission because he left then and returned to the hotel.

On Sunday, July 22, he gave a short discourse on giving, which included a statement I found very thought-provoking. He said, "When the Omniscient bestows the real gift of love, He manifests His complete forgetfulness of it by apparently becoming callous toward His lovers."

Callous? Why would God become callous toward his lovers? The idea puzzled me for some time, until I thought again of the analogy of our being little black pots. It seemed to me that Baba stirs those pots, empties them, cleans them, and then fills them once again with more love, up to the brim and overflowing. He gives us as much as we can hold, but if he gave us more, we would explode like balloons. So once he has given his gift, he moves on. In those periods, it must feel as if he has abandoned us.

Time passes. We live life and, hopefully, give love and service to others, which increases our capacity to hold more love. Then Baba draws us back to him and fills us up again. We must do the work to open the space for him. This happens as we endure hardships and experience love, pain, sorrow, and joy. When we respond to those experiences according to our highest knowing, we make room for God to pour yet more love into our hearts.

Baba made another statement at the Delmonico, one that I would cherish for the rest of my life. He said, "If you cannot love me, do not worry. I will be loving you." This thought has sustained me during painful times when I felt my love for him was wanting and that I was unworthy. It seems to me that in the time Baba was with us, he gave us all the messages we needed to continue on the demanding path ahead.

On this day, we were all very excited because, for the first time, we were going to celebrate Baba's birthday in his presence. This may sound strange, since Baba's birthday is really February 25, but we'd decided not to let a little detail like that deter us. When some members of the



group had earlier bemoaned the fact that we never seemed able to share Baba's birthday with him, I told them a story about a little chapel in the Sierra Nevadas that I visited as a girl. The church never had a Christmas ceremony because all the tourists returned home before the deep snows piled up in the fall. To remedy this injustice, a group of us practiced carols all summer long, and before we returned home, we held a Christmas service in the church. I told my Baba companions, "If we could do that, we can certainly celebrate Baba's birthday in July." And so we did.

That evening we went to Longchamps restaurant for dinner and a party. Everything had been exquisitely arranged and decorated. There was a large head table where Baba sat in his white *sadhra* and pink jacket, surrounded by the mandali and some of his Western followers. Behind them was a colorful mural, and throughout the room were bouquets of festive flowers.

A professional photographer took some fabulous shots of Baba at Longchamps, with help from our lights, as he'd forgotten his own. Interestingly, the same thing happened later in Myrtle Beach, when professional photographers needed our lights to film Baba there. In retrospect, it seems to me Baba must have arranged it this way for some reason of his own.

Longchamps was a memorable evening for all of us, but for me there was one particular moment that eclipsed all the rest. I had been talking and was unaware that Baba had risen and was walking among the tables greeting his lovers with a sweet smile or touch. Suddenly I felt a hand on my shoulder. I looked up, expecting to see a friend or a waiter, and I couldn't believe it - it was Baba! Right there, beside me. It was the loveliest feeling, one I can only describe as "jaw-dropping delight." Later I discovered that one of the professional photographers had filmed the moment. After a few seconds, Baba continued on to another table. But the feeling I had as I looked up at him and the memory of how that touch felt have stayed with me all these years.

Whenever Baba would move on to greet somebody else, I never remember thinking, "Oh, I wish it was me." Instead, I remember reliving my delight in my own experiences. I think it was this way for most people. They would beam when he embraced someone else almost as if the embrace was theirs.

Some years earlier, Norina Matchabelli had described Baba as "adorable," and Mother thought it an odd way to talk about God in human form. Yet when I think of the Christian tradition of "adoring God," I can look back now and see that Norina's description was exactly right - Baba *was* adorable. He was in fact the one being worthy of being adored. And he adored back. As he moved through the crowd that day,



Meher Baba's first visit to his center in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, May 1952.

*Left to right: Adele Wolkin, Filis Frederick, Mani, Sparkie Lukes, Charmian, Baba, Mehera, Delia DeLeon, and Meheru.*



Charmian's father, James Terry Duce, head of government relations for the Arabian American Oil Company. He met Baba in Myrtle Beach in 1952, and Baba asked him to plan the routes for his auto journey to California.



Meher Baba conversing with Murshida Duce. Baba instructed her to build a Sufi order under his guidance that would last 700 years. until he comes again.



Diane "3B" Dimpfl and her younger sister Claudia with Baba, Coit Tower, San Francisco, 1956.



Loved ones gather around Meher Baba at the Myrtle Beach center in May 1956. By this time, Baba's two auto accidents had made walking very difficult.



Baba surprises Charmian with a caress, Longchamps restaurant, New York City, July 22, 1956. Of this visit to America, Meher Baba said, "I have come 50 percent for Charmian and 50 percent for my other lovers."



Baba in the Duces' living room, Washington, D.C., 1956.

he reached out and touched this one on the shoulder, gave that one a little pinch, tweaked the cheek of somebody else, or touched another lovingly. He didn't miss anyone, even those hidden in the back of the crowd. After he had been all around the room, everyone felt equally close to his love.

There was much entertainment for Baba's July birthday, including music and songs and poetry readings. I remember someone reading a poem by Francis Brabazon about a young man bringing flowers to the Master. The theme was that when you bring the Master flowers, you shouldn't even smell their fragrance - you mustn't steal any part of them because the gift must be solely for him.

There was of course a birthday cake for Baba, a big white one with flaming candles and the inscription "The Goal of Life - to be United with Him through Love." There was also a Baba flag on top, sporting the seven colors Baba had specified for his personal flag. Two boys placed a garland around Baba's neck, and after he cut his cake, we all burst into a joyous rendition of "Happy Birthday." Baba was almost exactly sixty-two years and five months old.

One woman recalled, "After the cake was offered, with its dazzling candles, Baba walked down the aisles between the tables bestowing his grace. As I watched Baba bringing the Infinite to his finite lovers - giving, giving, giving - I was moved to exultation. The atmosphere of the room was filled with his divine love. I believe no one who was present can ever be quite the same again."

Baba had Eruch convey a message:

I feel very happy to be with you all today. It is your devotion that has made me come to the West during the period of my seclusion. If anything ever touches my universal heart, it is love. I have crossed the limited earthly oceans to bring you all the limitless and shoreless divine Ocean of Love.

Baba hardly touched his food that evening, but he said he had feasted just the same on the love he received from us all. After two hours, he took his leave, and reluctantly we left Longchamps and a most luminous evening behind us.

The next morning, Baba was back in action again, pouring out his love and blessings in meetings and interviews. Although he seldom welcomed publicity, this trip was an exception, and he agreed to meet with reporters in a special room at Delmonico's. They were curious about a variety of topics, especially his silence. One reporter asked if he was confident he would be able to speak again since people who are silent a number of years sometimes lose the power of speech. Baba responded

that he was "one hundred percent" certain he would speak again. He also said that when he did, the world would know that he is the One for whom they were waiting.

Another reporter asked him about the American evangelist Billy Graham. Baba's response was, "Any work done in the name of God or Lord Jesus is a good work. But it must be done sincerely, honestly, without taking any pride in it, without wanting to profit through it." He was asked too about Mahatma Gandhi, whom he referred to as a "good soul" who loved him very much.

Someone also asked him about the popular and controversial book *The Search for Bridey Murphy*, which features a woman who recaptures through hypnosis her experiences from prior lives. A reporter asked, "Was this real? Could this kind of thing be done?"

Baba said that sometimes it could be done, but it was very dangerous. That left me with no desire to pursue *that*.

The lure of the occult is often a strong one for seekers, but years of experience had convinced both my mother and me that it was an area best avoided. In her early explorations, Mother had encountered people who seemed to possess all kinds of psychic skills. There were those who could communicate with animals or flowers or souls who had passed on, who could make predictions, or who could apparently cause desirable events to occur through visualization. None of these abilities seemed indicative of spiritual maturity or status, and most of them appeared laden with risks.

I remember a charismatic leader in California whom Mother stumbled across in the early 1940s. He practiced what he called "placements." If someone wanted something, he would make a "placement," and they would obtain what they desired. Just before the Great Depression, a man had come to him who owned a sizable orange grove. That particular year, the man's oranges were smaller than those of his competitors, and he wasn't able to make the profits they did. This grower asked the leader to make a placement for him, specifying that he wanted the biggest and best oranges in the industry the following year. The next year the man returned to the leader absolutely furious. His oranges were indeed the biggest and best oranges around. But now the Depression had started, and people couldn't afford to buy luxury fruit. They were only buying small fruit, and his entire crop was useless.

This story was a classic example of the adage "Be careful what you ask for. You might get it." Had the man been patient and willing to wait his turn, he would have prospered. Instead, he interfered.

It's not only risky to pursue occult practices, but it's often unethical. A student of esoterica visited my mother. He told Mother he had learned to do astral traveling. In his astral body, he was able to visit the

houses of friends, observe what they were doing, then call them the next day to confirm it. Mother's response was, "For heaven's sake. In other words, you've been learning to be an astral Peeping Tom!"

It's very easy to be drawn by the magic and power of such experiences and to forget about the spiritual and moral implications. I admit that I tried a few experiments with the occult myself. Once I was visiting friends in the Sierras who dropped me off at a bus stop when it came time to return home. When the bus arrived, however, it was full and had to leave without me. I was stranded, miles away from my friends, who were off picnicking somewhere in the wilderness. I thought of those placements I'd learned about, so I asked God to help me in the form of a placement. Then I walked down the street and into a nearby store. When I told my story about missing the bus, the owner said, "Oh, I'll shut the store and take you to your friends."

He closed immediately and drove me around the lake until we located my friends. The placement seemed to have worked, but I felt uneasy about it. I became more and more uncomfortable with the idea of manipulating the store owner and trying to arrange events to serve my own needs. I never used the practice again.

I also once tried to move clouds around, just to see how that worked. Then it occurred to me: If I moved just one cloud, some poor farmer might not receive the rain he needed for his crops. It could trigger a dry year, and many people could end up with nothing. And what would my karma be?

The more I saw of such practices, the more frightened of them I became. Mother and I saw enough negative consequences of such things to destroy any curiosity or interest we might have once had. By the time Baba made his comment that exploration into past lives was "dangerous," I was well prepared to accept it.

There were more questions from the reporters on a variety of subjects, and the session turned out to be quite long. As a final question, a reporter asked Baba how many followers he had all over the world. Baba gestured, "Can you tell me the number of hairs on my head?"

Baba stayed in New York for four days and then left for Myrtle Beach, where about eighty of those "hairs on his head" would be joining him. I carefully packed my state-of-the-art camera for the next round. Between my own filming and that of others, I was confident we had some good footage from his stay in New York and hoped to do even better in the open air of Myrtle Beach. But someone had captured an image that I knew already would be my favorite.

A hand on a shoulder. A pair of knowing eyes gazing into a joyful soul. An upturned face caught unawares by love.

## *A Lesson from the Seashells*

God is a very serious fellow, or so people seem to think. He's often portrayed as stern and absolute, even vengeful. But this isn't the God I knew. Meher Baba was not only consistently loving and forgiving, but he was often just plain fun. During his visit to Myrtle Beach in 1956, Baba had his serious moods, and there were times he seemed oppressed by his intensive work. But what I remember most fondly were his playful and humorous moments. They were in abundance that week.

Baba called the large group of us accompanying him from New <sup>1</sup> York to South Carolina "my doves." We climbed on two buses and headed to Newark, New Jersey, where we caught a plane south. We'd started out grumpy because the promised breakfast was not served. But during the flight, Baba roamed the aisles, greeting each of us with a pat or a smile and tossing peppermint candies as prasad. His attention lightened our hearts immediately.

I was still toting my camera and recognized a good photo opportunity when Baba covered his head with his red woolen scarf and seemed to travel out of his body for his universal work. Just as I began to focus the camera, he raised his hand in front of his concealed face and made his sign for perfection. I was stunned to realize he was not only "there" but watching me, even though covered by the scarf.

Traveling with us was a companion who had previously worked hard on various tasks for Baba. This time he announced: "I'm not going to do anything but sit at the Master's feet and soak it up." So as soon as we arrived, it was inevitable that he was assigned to sort the luggage for two hundred people and see that it was all delivered correctly. Two days later, he shuffled into the center, pale and bearded, obviously worn out from this demanding task. Baba very rarely allowed his followers to just sit at his feet. He wanted us operating on all cylinders. This companion was no exception. My particular role that week continued to be resident filmmaker.

When we arrived at the center gates, Baba's devoted disciple Kitty Davy was there to meet him. She hadn't seen him for four years. Baba

thoughtfully invited her into his car for the short drive to his house. Then he immediately turned his attention to the needs of his other followers. He first went to see Norina Matchabelli, who was ill and resting in her cabin nearby. Next he began looking into the lodging arrangements for his traveling companions.

During his stay, Baba followed a routine that began at 7:00 a.m. when he would arrive for breakfast at the compound outside the Guest House. He might then go to the dining hall (now the Original Kitchen), where guests were having breakfast, and deliver a hug to each one. It was the most perfect way to start a day.

Outside, he'd call one or more people to him for a few precious moments of his presence. In the afternoon, we'd line up along the shore by the lagoon bridge waiting for him. He'd come striding across the bridge and sail up the hill with everybody flowing after him like the tail of a comet. Then he'd head for the Lagoon Cabin for interviews. We would watch as a lucky person climbed the stairs and disappeared through the door. After a while, the person would emerge, eyes brimming with tears. Usually this person would walk to the edge of the peaceful lake and stand above it, looking out, reflecting on what had happened or absorbing what they'd just received.

Often we found ourselves clustered outside the cabin, talking and waiting. By then we had all learned the lesson not to stray because if we did, we could miss Baba, and no one wanted to sacrifice even a single glance. Sure enough, every so often he would call us to join him inside.

One day when the interviews were over, Baba invited us to visit his house, so we walked there together along a half mile of wooded path that roughly paralleled the lake. We were invited to come inside and look around. "But do not run away with anything!" he quipped.

When we finished our tour, he directed us to "Go back to your places. Go swimming. Rest. Eat. Fight. Live. And with all that fighting and living, remember to love me!"

That evening Baba asked that even more guests be accommodated at the center. Among them was a couple named Harold and Virginia Rudd, who were expecting a baby. Baba had told Virginia he had entrusted a "special soul" to her. The Rudds were housed in the screened-in gazebo called the Boat House perched on the edge of Long Lake near the end of the footbridge.

During the night, a fierce lightning storm thundered and crashed over the center, and Mother and I could see bright lightning flashing over the spot where Baba's house stood. It began as pink flares in the sky and spread to encompass the lake and beyond. Then the thunder



exploded, and we watched as great, jagged forks of lightning bolted down to earth toward Baba's house. The storm bellowed for hours. The following morning, Baba appeared very tired. Mother took one look at him and said, "Baba, you worked all night."

He looked in great pain and responded, "Yes, I worked all night. You have no idea. The whole universe is on my shoulders. Nobody knows the weight of it - the burden I carry. I am very unhappy this morning."

If one were to correlate the work of the Avatar with visible events in the world, there were two occurrences that day worth considering. We read later in the newspapers that the Suez Canal had been seized and that an Italian liner, the *Andrea Doria*, had sunk.

The Suez Canal crisis merged two of the most volatile and polarized forces of the twentieth century: the Cold War and the Arab-Israeli conflict. When Egypt sought financial aid to build the Aswan Dam, both the United States and Britain declined, citing Egypt's political and military ties to the Soviet Union. The Soviets eagerly supplied assistance, and from then on, the Western nations viewed Egypt as an ally of the Soviet Union. In retaliation for the refusal of the United States and Britain to finance the dam, Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser, a charismatic nationalist, took control of the Suez Canal from the British and French companies that owned it, thus "nationalizing" it. When Egyptian troops seized the canal, they blocked Israel's outlet to the Red Sea, increasing the ongoing tensions between the two countries. The Suez was a key waterway for world trade, especially for the flow of gulf oil to the industrialized economies of the West. Its seizure prompted a violent, although short, clash in which the British and French troops allied with Israel invaded the Sinai and occupied the Suez. When the Soviets threatened to intervene on Egypt's behalf, President Eisenhower arranged a cease-fire.

The war lasted only a week, but it was a precursor of other wars to come. Because of the lack of a peace settlement, it laid the groundwork for the more deadly Six-Day War in 1967. Although brief, the Suez crisis was a turning point for the Middle East. As a result, Egypt firmly aligned itself with the Soviet Union, which armed Egypt and other Arab nations for the continuing struggle against Israel. Today the Arab-Israeli conflict may be the world's most critical political issue.

The tragedy of the *Andrea Doria* the night Baba "worked" was not a political event, but like the sinking of the *Titanic*, it shattered anew the illusion of invincibility attached to human technology. And the events surrounding the *Andrea Doria* were so replete with human drama that they actually overshadowed the Suez Canal crisis. Like the *Titanic*, the Italian liner was a model of innovation and luxury, thought to be the

most beautiful and safest passenger ship on the sea. When she collided with another liner in the foggy seas off Nantucket, what everyone believed was "impossible" had come to pass. Hours later the \$30 million grande dame of the sea slipped to the bottom of the Atlantic and into maritime legend. Although more than 50 people died, over 1,650 had been saved by a small flotilla of rescue craft that responded to her SOS signals and labored through the night to evacuate the passengers and crew. It was a critical rescue effort because the liner had been unable to launch half its lifeboats. And it was a rescue that mesmerized the public.

One of the characteristics of the Machine Age that differentiates it from previous ages is the impact of mass media. Through those media, a large part of the world can be focused on the same event or idea at the same moment. That night millions of people throughout the world sat riveted to television and radio broadcasts as the drama of the sinking vessel was beamed directly into their homes. It reminded me of the work Baba did with audiences in theaters, only on a global scale, and I wondered if such events, like the plays and movies we saw, were less important in themselves than in their ability to focus the collective human mind.

Baba's serious mood lasted throughout the morning. On his way to the dining room, he stopped by the Boat House and learned that Harold and Virginia Rudd had weathered the night there during the storm. He was very unhappy they hadn't been moved to better shelter and read the riot act to those responsible.

After breakfast there was a solemn moment outside the kitchen when he sat on a pine rail fence overlooking the lake. Filis Frederick, who had first met Baba in Myrtle Beach in 1952, described it best in *The Awakener*:

Presently, He rose and faced west. He was "working" - His fingers *pulsed* with the rapid, characteristic gestures. His head was bowed and His face was drawn and full of suffering. He did indeed look as if the suffering of the world were upon Him... Then Baba crossed to the opposite side of the traffic circle, and faced east. Again, He "worked." Twice more He moved and stood working, so that He had stood at the four compass points. In the end, His face had cleared, His posture changed, and with one of those rapid alternations of His inner spiritual rhythm, He seemed happy and radiant again.

Once Baba was back with us, I took out my camera to record his interaction with my mother. But one person approached me and announced, "Baba said not to take any pictures."

I found myself thinking, "It was Baba who told me to take movies, and if he wants me to stop, he'll tell me to stop." So I put the camera to my eye and began to shoot, and Baba continued right on with what he was doing. Eventually I ran out of film and the camera ground to a halt. At that exact moment, Baba stepped forward and said, "No more pictures."

After more interviews and meetings, we held our second birthday party of his visit, this one for Elizabeth Patterson, who had donated the property for the center. There was a sumptuous cake decorated with roses, and Baba gave Elizabeth a huge bouquet of flowers from all of us. He also gave her seven kisses.

Later Don Stevens got up and read three messages that Baba had dictated earlier. Then Baba asked Don if he understood the messages. Don indicated that he did. Eruch then interpreted the Master's gestures: "Good, because I don't." We laughed in delight at this example of the God-Man's humor.

One of the messages Baba gave was:

Christ said, "Leave all and follow me." What did that mean? ...The meaning behind it was not to leave all these things, not to renounce the world. It was to obey. Leave all thoughts, your own thoughts, your selfish thoughts, and simply obey me. Then you are liberated. You are free. But if you cannot, then more and more bindings are created, for every action creates a binding.

That Friday we had scheduled an "Open Day" at the center. It had been announced in the local papers. The public and dignitaries had been invited to attend and have Baba's darshan. A TV crew from the *Today* show was coming to film the event. Dave Garraway, a popular television personality, hosted this on NBC. Baba, who generally shunned publicity, had already warned my mother, "I may let all of this go through, and I may put a little friction into it!"

Because of the presence of national television, it was decided to repeat the dedication of the center, which had taken place in 1952. Baba would plant a tree near the Barn, just as he had during the first dedication. But as the time approached, the cameramen failed to appear. Since we knew they were flying down from New York, Baba sent Don and another follower to the Myrtle Beach airport to direct the crew to the center.

Meanwhile, we all waited at the Guest House. While we waited, Baba charmed us with his delightful humor and lightness of spirit. When a companion who always tried to stay close to him with a tape recorder decided to step away for a moment, Baba regarded the tape

recorder and said, "Someone had better watch that or I will pinch it. I am the thief of thieves, the Universal Thief. I steal hearts."

It began to look like rain, and still the camera crew was missing, so Baba invited everyone to join him in the Barn. Then he told me to borrow a car, drive to the airport, and buy Don a sandwich! He also directed Mother: "Get someone with a car to drive you to the gate. Wait there fifteen minutes; return here and wait fifteen minutes; go back to the gate and wait fifteen minutes; and keep doing this until they come."

When I returned from the airport, Baba told me to drive back again to deliver something and ask more questions. He had me drive back and forth, over and over again.

We discovered later that while Baba was giving these directions, the cameramen were on an arduous journey. To begin with, their flight had been canceled. So a follower named Bernie Carvalho, who had made the arrangements for their visit, contacted twenty-six companies before he finally procured the loan of a private plane. But to get airborne, the men had to leave their heavy equipment behind, including their lighting. Then they had to fly through a terrible storm, and Bernie himself took the controls to navigate them through it. It seemed the men's lives were in very real danger, and in retrospect, I believe Baba's mysterious actions helped to protect and deliver them safely.

After the crisis with the Garraway crew, I found myself working out my views on whether the Avatar would interfere when a person's life was at stake. Now I believe that since his coming is the springtide of Creation, he's entirely free to change things as he wishes. After all, he said he was doing just that for the world: modifying the timing and intensity of events as they unfolded. It seems to me the Avatar would be especially concerned about someone's welfare when they were journeying to his presence, since this is a once-in-a-thousand-years opportunity. That might hold just as true when they were leaving his presence, since they had been filled with his love and reengineered in a way that would require assimilation over time.

Once we had fulfilled all of Baba's directives, the plane arrived safely, and the men immediately set up their equipment in the Barn. Fortunately, my trusty light bar worked with their camera, and they began to film Baba and the entire group gathered at his side.

One of the most joyful moments with Baba was always when he gave out prasad, a gift of his love in tangible form, to be eaten as soon as it was received. That day in the Barn, he gave out prasad for the benefit of the TV cameras.

On this trip, he most frequently used small white grapes, and he often gave prasad after a discourse, announcing, "Now, let us play." And

play he did. He'd take out those grapes and toss them over the crowd to a specific person. Sometimes he'd gesture to that person first, "This is for you." Then, while looking at the person, he'd throw the grape to someone else. Trying to catch your grape became a game. Sometimes we'd drop the grape, and then he'd gesture for us to try again, to get our hands ready and be careful. "Are you ready? All set now? If I throw it, you'll catch it?"

As the cameramen took their pictures, I chased along trying to take my own shots in the pool of light that followed them. Light problems were a recurrent theme during Baba's visit. When the crew tried to film the interior of his house, the fuse blew. Baba sat there like an island of calm while the rest of us scrambled to restore the electricity. Finally we got the power back, and the cameramen were able to take a few shots.

The Garraway crew was more detached from the events in Myrtle Beach and therefore more comfortable filming them than I was. I often felt very awkward. This was especially true when I took pictures of people meeting Baba for the first time or emerging from the Lagoon Cabin after an interview with him. I knew it was really an invasion of their privacy at the most intensely personal moment of their lives, but I also knew these pictures would be important to people who came later. It would be one of the few ways they could actually see what occurred and how people reacted to Baba. I believed that Baba wanted me to document his visit, and I simply couldn't allow my feelings to interfere.

Throughout his trip, Baba was very helpful with my moviemaking. He made many exceptions for me, including on plane flights. When we landed, it was customary for people to wait for Baba to disembark first, then to follow. But he allowed me to leave first so I could film him descending the stairway.

Baba moved slowly when leaving a plane, but at other times he was so swift it was a struggle to keep up with him. I had to enlist two men to carry my bags of film cartridges so I could keep pace. While Baba strode along, I often found myself in front of him while my helpers were in the back of the crowd. When I'd run out of film, I'd snap the cartridge out, hurl it in the air toward one of them, and he'd send a new one flying back. I always thought we could have formed the nucleus of a good baseball team.

After the filming at Baba's house, we made our way to the Barn for the rededication ceremony, where Baba planted a memorial tree. This one didn't survive, but it's thought that a holly tree that graces the circle

outside the Barn was planted by Baba in 1952. We all continued to film while Baba sat under one of the older trees, his soft, white cotton sadhra draped gracefully about him. It seemed he was doing universal work, as his fingers were dancing constantly, and he was radiating love. He looked so luminous that I kept rolling my movie camera for all it was worth. There were many wondrous photos captured that day, both on film and with still cameras. For some reason, the Garraway footage was never aired on television, although it has since passed into the archives of the Baba community.

In the afternoon of the same day, we accompanied Baba to Brookgreen Gardens, located on the site of what were once four colonial plantations, a little south of Myrtle Beach. Brookgreen was the first public sculpture garden in America and now has one of the largest collections of outdoor statuary in the world. Strolling its grounds was a little like entering a Maxfield Parrish painting. Poised among its two-hundred-fifty-year-old moss-covered oaks, flower-framed lawns, and two thousand species of lush plants were hundreds of stone and metal figures, many from classical mythology. There was Pegasus, suddenly springing from granite clouds. Three bronze horses emerged through the trees, frozen in full gallop. And a bronze Zeus, God of the gods, hovered in a leafy bower, clutching an armful of lightning bolts.

Brookgreen was a breathtaking blend of art and nature, of logic and fantasy. I followed along its serene paths, trying hard to concentrate on my filming of Baba, but he seemed to take a special delight in playing jokes on our little crew. We'd run down the path and line up to take our pictures, sure there was no route Baba could take except right toward us. But suddenly he would take off down some unseen path, the large group of devotees trailing after him. Then he'd turn around, give me a mischievous wink, and disappear. Marble fauns and bronze cupids and sprites wearing impish smiles looked silently on as the Divine Prankster ducked into trees and darted down paths in their garden. I'd look around, trying to think of a way to get in front of him, and then he'd reappear like magic from another unseen path. All I'd have to do is whip my camera to my eye to capture priceless footage. Then the game would begin again.

At one point that day, Baba sat on the ground under a great myrtle tree and started a child's hand game in which his fingers climbed up an invisible ladder and back down again. His dexterity was spellbinding. He could move those fingers like lightning, and he seemed so sweet and childlike. Baba said he was very happy that afternoon in the gardens with us.

Filis Frederick reported in *The Awakener* an especially lovely moment with Baba later that day back at the center:

Some of us... were lucky to sit beside Him quietly as dusk sifted through the tall pines outside. Baba's face, in the half-light, glowed with that ethereal, divine beauty that remains forever etched on one's heart. Every line, every shadow, every movement seemed to proclaim and flame His divinity. He gestured to us silently, "Even the *rishis* and *munis*, meditating for years in the Himalayas, longing for My darshan, do not have the chance you are having to be with Me. And here you are all getting it! So do not think of anything else but Baba!"

That same evening, Baba publicly announced my engagement, saying that he knew the past, present, and future and what was best for everyone. My wedding was now only three months away, but I was focused instead on arranging festivities for Baba's visit. On our drive from New York to Myrtle Beach, I had spotted a roadside fireworks stand, and remembering how much Baba had enjoyed the fireworks display in Switzerland, I convinced everyone to buy a large arsenal of rockets and Roman candles.

One night some of the men came up with a plan for using the fireworks. They decided to take a boat out on the lake and build a launching platform. Unfortunately, every time they tried to hammer a stake into the lake bottom, it appeared to be solid rock. The men abandoned their plan and decided instead to build a floating platform.

On Saturday night everyone, including Baba, lined up on the shore to watch the show. With some friends, we ferried a rowboat and the gondola loaded with fireworks out to the platform. For all the hammering and nailing that had been going on, I was shocked to see the platform was only about one foot square. Nevertheless, we put a one-pound rocket on it and fired it off. It made the appropriate bang but promptly sank the platform. There we were, with a waiting audience, two hundred pounds of pyrotechnics, and no place to set them off.

Quickly we came up with an alternative plan. We would put the fireworks in coffee cans filled with sand, load the cans onto the rowboat, and push it off as far away as we could. Our success was spotty at best. Some of the cans toppled over, shooting skyrockets off in every direction, skipping like snakes across the water. One rocket shot straight across the lake toward where Baba was standing, but thankfully missed him. Meanwhile, we sat huddled in the bottom of the gondola, half expecting to be blown sky high if a rocket landed in our boat, which was already filled with explosives. About midway through this debacle,

Baba retired to his house. We decided the whole affair was too dangerous for amateurs, so we fired off a final salvo and rowed our way back to shore. Ironically, everyone enjoyed the show, particularly the balls of fire careening across the lake toward them, which they thought was a deliberate special effect.

The next morning, we all followed Baba down to the ocean shore, where he said he wanted to find seven seashells to bring home to India for Mehera. First he walked into the warm water and threw a stone out into the Atlantic. Then he sat down on the sand while we all set out to find seven worthy shells.

Normally Myrtle Beach is a treasure trove of exquisite shells. The sand is littered with ebony mussels, gold cockles, angel wings, slipper shells, and scotch bonnets. You can even occasionally find the rare lightning whelk, prized because it grows in a counterclockwise direction. I had found superb shells on my previous visits, and now I was hoping someone might find one of the amazing conches that wash ashore now and then, sometimes all the way from Florida. But there was nothing. It didn't seem that there was one good shell on the entire beach. People filed back cupping shells that were broken and decrepit, nothing but beat-up relics of the pounding surf. I was very disappointed, but still we brought them to Baba and laid them out on the sand.

Gradually the pile of shells around Baba grew. "They're so worn out," I thought. It never occurred to me until later that something *has* to be worn out to earn God's deepest regard. One has to fully complete one stage before moving on to the next, and that's probably just as true for the dainty creatures of the sea.

Lud Dimpfl sat next to Baba that day on the beach, and I remember Baba was especially playful and teasing with him. Lud was a chemical engineer for Standard Oil, a very giving and generous soul who wanted desperately to live with Baba. His wish was denied when Baba discovered he had a wife and children. That day on the beach, Baba suddenly decided to pick Lud up from the sand - he hoisted him up quickly and easily, although Lud was a very sturdy man. Another time he asked Lud to try to pick him up instead. Lud was quite strong, but he couldn't even budge Baba, although Baba was a small man, only about five feet six inches. It was as if Lud was trying to lift stone.

After the shell hunt, we all walked along the beach beside the glittering ocean with Baba, as happy and carefree as children beside a beloved father. After our beach walk, Baba gathered everybody together to talk about some of the troublesome dynamics between his different groups. In those early days, we hadn't yet learned how to behave with each other, and there were often conflicts, not just between individuals,



but between organizations. Some people were questioning the need for organizations at all, including Sufism Reoriented. Baba began by asking Mother, "Are you feeling strong today? Ready for a good fight?" Then he named one critic who had said that anybody who had met Baba did not need any "isms" - they needed only to study Baba's words. Baba asked my mother how she felt about this.

Mother replied that since Baba had reoriented Sufism himself and written its charter, this criticism seemed misdirected. Baba responded that although *he* didn't need groups or centers, there were those who did. "Whoever wants to work spreading my message of love and truth absolutely needs a central office and groups of workers who can function from that central office. There is always a need for a group to have a center." He added, "But there should be cooperation, harmony."

Baba told us, "Ivy once said to me that if I ordered it, she would just dissolve the Sufi order and have nothing to do with it. But I said, 'No.' On the contrary, I gave her a charter to hold meetings, have an office, conduct affairs - which she does. I am the greatest Sufi of the past, present, and future... "

In spite of these serious moments, Baba infused the sahavas with a spirit of fun and merriment. He played Ping-Pong (and won every game), he teased us, and he often asked us to tell him jokes. Sometimes someone would tell a joke that wasn't exactly appropriate, perhaps a little off-color. Then you could be sure Baba would ask them to tell it again, until they realized their mistake. Still it wouldn't be over. He'd have them tell the joke as many as five times, until they were so sick of it, they'd never tell it again.

It's so easy to forget how playful God is. We convince ourselves instead that discourses and meditation are sober experiences and illumination is a solemn process. But God's Creation is His playground - a place where we've come to live, learn, and grow closer to Him, all of which brings Him great joy. It was impossible to be around Baba and not share his sense of fun and whimsy or to wonder at his love.

July 30 was our final day at the center, and that morning Baba went to visit Norina for the last time. He embraced her and gave her a handkerchief, saying, "Keep this under your pillow every night. I am with you always." The handkerchief was still with her when she passed away the following summer.

That morning we boarded a plane for the next leg of the journey, up to Washington, D.C., where we would spend the day before flying to California that night. Mother had earlier arranged for limousines and a bus to meet us at the airport and for Baba to spend a brief time there with

reporters. There was also to be a motorcycle escort to ease him through the city's rush-hour traffic.

Baba had seemed horrified when first told of these plans, asking, "Do you think Jesus would have gone through Washington with a police escort?" In spite of that, he let the plans go forward, while presumably making plans of his own. Somehow the plane magically arrived an hour early, and neither the limousines, the reporters, nor the escort were available yet. We went ahead without them.

Baba stayed in our home in D.C. that afternoon for a short but active five hours in which almost two hundred people came to take his darshan. I managed to show him the fabric for my wedding dress, which he touched and blessed.

Because we wanted some quality photographs of Baba for posterity, Mother arranged for professional photographers to come to our home and take pictures of him. Baba, who seemed more tolerant of publicity this trip, had agreed to the photo session and graciously posed for a series of still shots. Earlier he'd appeared drawn and tired, but he drew on some inner fire for the photos and looked glowing and radiant. Several of the photos were taken in front of our living room fireplace, which had some claim to fame itself. The fireplace was an antique of renowned design. The Eisenhowers later sent the White House architect over to sketch it because they planned on reproducing it for their farm in Pennsylvania.

Mother had arranged a beautiful fish dinner for Baba and the group, and Carsten, our butler, who was going to serve Baba, proudly had boned the fish ahead of time. But Baba had a shock in store for Carsten's pride. After he was served, he reached down into the fish and found three big bones in it. Baba told Carsten that he couldn't eat fish with bones in it. Carsten came back into the kitchen practically hysterical. He exclaimed, "He handed me a bone so big that I swear it couldn't have come out of that fish. It was huge. I couldn't have missed it."

By the time we boarded our plane late that night for Los Angeles, most of us were hoping to get some in-flight sleep. Not Baba. He did his universal work continuously, and the light above his seat stayed on all night long. Around him were forty-four exhausted but vigilant companions and seven used-up shells that had been tumbled and tossed out of the ocean directly into the hands of God.

## *Through the Fog*

When the Avatar makes a promise, he keeps it - sometimes with form and timing only he comprehends, sometimes in the exact way we imagined. Baba's visit to California in 1956 was the latter, a tangible fulfillment of the promise he made to his West Coast followers four years earlier that their patience would bear "better fruit." As we stepped off the plane in Los Angeles, a group of his lovers was anxiously awaiting his arrival, first planned for 1952 but postponed because of his automobile accident. For many, this would be their first meeting with him.

We arrived early on the morning of July 31 and went to the Roosevelt Hotel on Hollywood Boulevard. Known as the "home of the stars," the Roosevelt was a cherished Hollywood landmark that featured elegant cabanas overlooking a courtyard and tropical gardens. In earlier, more glamorous days, it was famous for its lavish parties and celebrity guest lists, which included Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks, Rudy Vallee, and Errol Flynn. Twenty years after Baba's visit, it also served as the getaway where renowned astrologer Linda Goodman wrote her *Sun Signs* and *Love Signs* in a suite "with a haunting quality," where she claimed "many magical and enchanting things happened." Her books were best sellers in that field and helped popularize astrology in the West.

The Roosevelt played a unique role in film history as host of the first Academy Awards ceremony, back in 1929. Baba always had a keen interest in the movie industry and had made previous visits to Hollywood in 1932 and 1934. On those trips, he visited studios and Hollywood homes, where he met several "A-list" stars, among them Mary Pickford, Gary Cooper, Marie Dressler, John Gilbert, Cary Grant, Boris Karloff, and Tallulah Bankhead.

Baba often addressed the spiritual potential of the film world, saying it had "one of the greatest scopes for influencing the lives of myriads" and was obligated to help man in his search for the truth. In 1956, when top films included *The Ten Commandments*, *The King and I*, and the Quaker-inspired *Friendly Persuasion*, it seemed entirely possible

that moviemakers could someday meet Baba's ideal of creating art that would inspire and uplift humanity. Sadly, there are times when I think his warning about the crippling effects of "an overdose of sex and crime films" seems more pertinent today.

Once at the hotel, Baba immediately began interviews. These included sessions with a few reporters, who wrote good pieces about him for the local papers. As in Myrtle Beach, he was more open than usual to the press and publicity.

Followers in California had suffered the same disappointment we did at never sharing Baba's birthday, and they too had organized a festive party for him, complete with a lovely birthday cake. So Baba had three birthdays that year - in February, July, and August. This one was held at a hotel aptly named Garden of Allah, located on Sunset Boulevard. A legend in its own right, the Allah was once the center of Hollywood's bohemian high life. Its series of bungalows and cottages were the setting for numerous parties and gossip-column events frequented by one-name-will-do mega-stars like Gable, Garbo, Bogart, and Olivier. The Garden of Allah was torn down three years after Baba's party, and now a strip mall starring a McDonald's has taken its place. The Roosevelt Hotel still stands, however, in all its Spanish colonial splendor.

Baba was only able to spend a short amount of time at the party before returning to his hotel. Many people seemed disappointed, but he always had his own agenda and often left events as soon as his work with and through that group was completed. He did this at theaters, at movies, and now even at his own birthday party. Perhaps he also needed to rest and prepare for the demanding work ahead. That work started immediately.

The next day, large crowds of followers gathered at the Roosevelt, and he began a long series of interviews. As often happens in a Master's circle, there was sometimes speculation and even resentment about who was spending more time with him. Among the people around Baba, we had our "prickly" personalities of every variety, including me. We had stubborn people, temperamental people, controlling people, and ones who just seemed to consistently rub everyone else the wrong way. It was one of the "prickliest," a man everyone felt behaved most unpleasantly, who became a topic of discussion among us one afternoon. This person was in a room with Baba at that very moment, and in fact had been spending enormous amounts of time with him throughout the trip. We found ourselves wondering why. "After all, he's a really difficult person, while we who love Baba so much are just sitting around hoping to be called."

Finally one of the mandali looked up and said, "Baba spends his time with those who need it." It was one of those simple statements that carry more force than a bolt of lightning. It changed our perspective at once.

It seemed to me that the people close to Baba all had strong personalities. When I considered what I'd learned from conversations with his devotees back in Switzerland, I began to understand why. Baba needs these distinctive personalities for his work. The Avatar gathers around him a representative sampling of humanity, people who function and think in very different ways. In harmonizing those differences, I believe he works through universal problems and can anchor in concrete, physical ways the future of humanity. The magnet that draws these varied personalities is his irresistible love and light - and their own readiness to receive that. It draws others too, people who may spend only a few minutes with him and who may or may not understand why he attracts them so.

One of the interviews Baba gave that second day was with the eminent author Dr. W. Y. Evans-Wentz, a scholar and scientist who had traveled extensively in the East and spent years literally sitting at the feet of a Tibetan lama. Dr. Evans-Wentz translated *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* and *The Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation*, edited a biography of the great saint Milarepa, and wrote the preface to *Autobiography of a Yogi*, books that profoundly influenced the "alternative" generation of the 1960s. Mother had invited him to see Baba in Los Angeles after reading his positive review of *God Speaks*. I don't know what transpired in that interview, but I know Baba was extremely pleased with him.

Baba's visit to California turned out to be a continuous seesaw between city and country, between intimate gatherings indoors and group treks through the vast outdoors. The following morning, we boarded a bus and motored north through orange groves toward Meher Mount, a retreat for Baba created in the coastal mountains of Ojai.

Ojai was and is a small community, quiet and obscure, and unlike Myrtle Beach, known to few people outside its home state. But those who have seen it consider it a uniquely beautiful place. The Ojai Valley is located about eighty miles north of Los Angeles. It's about ten miles long and three miles wide, stretching from the edge of a national forest to the Pacific Ocean and surrounded by mountains. While most mountains in California run north and south, the mountains around Ojai lie east and west, an arrangement that contributes to its unusual charm because the sun rises at one end of the valley and sets at the other, bathing it with lingering sunlight and providing spectacular sunrises and sunsets. Because a brilliant shade of rose illuminates the valley at dusk, locals refer to the Ojai sunset as the "Pink Moment." So lovely

and tranquil is the valley that when film producer Frank Capra made the classic 1937 movie version of *Lost Horizon*, he chose the Ojai Valley as the setting for Shangri-La - the utopian Eden of eternal youth, harmony, and ancient wisdom.

Even beyond its geographical charm is its mystical allure. Residents speak of its "spiritual influences" and an energy that seems to promote creativity and contemplation. One of those attracted to Ojai was the charismatic spiritual figure Krishnamurti, who lived there on and off for sixty years and eventually chose to die there. The Theosophists once proclaimed Krishnamurti the Avatar of the Age, a claim Meher Baba obviously dismissed, as did Krishnamurti himself. But Baba did tell Norina Matchabelli that Krishnamurti was an advanced soul on the fifth plane of consciousness and that he would stay there throughout his life.

While Krishnamurti was in residence, there was always a stream of scholars, seekers, psychologists, authors, and media people pouring into the Ojai Valley to meet him, including Aldous Huxley, Jackson Pollack, Christopher Isherwood, D.H. Lawrence, Charlie Chaplin, Anne Morrow Lindbergh, and Greta Garbo. They sat under the trees with him or accompanied him on his long walks through the sublime valley.

Krishnamurti once said of Ojai, "In India, in Greece, and other civilizations, they find a beautiful spot like this and they put up a temple." In our own twentieth-century way, this is what Agnes Baron tried to do - for Meher Baba.

In the gallery of strong personalities around Meher Baba, Agnes was one of the strongest, a fiercely independent and outspoken woman with an admitted talent for making enemies as easily as friends. Baba called her his "watchdog," a nickname she felt referred to her tendency to "nip at the heels of hypocrites." A former journalist, she had a passion for the underdog and a dedication to liberal causes. Agnes had traveled through Europe in the 1930s, reporting on Hitler's reign of terror for European news agencies. She also lived for a time with Albanian bandits and later with Greek insurgents. The Greek government branded her a Communist and deported her. In Portugal she aided anti-Franco refugees, and back home in America she fought ardently for Jewish refugees, conferring on their plight with Eleanor Roosevelt. In earlier years, she had considered psychology as a profession, studying for a time with Freud but rejecting an offer to become his student because she found him "too macho." Agnes was intelligent and educated - she spoke eleven languages - and equally tough-minded. Her friends called her the Red Baron or Agni, from the Sanskrit for "fire." When admirers in Ojai started calling her "The Saint of Sulphur Mountain," a reference to the mountain on which her property was located, she quickly amended the

title to "The Witch of Sulphur Mountain." Both her fiery spirit and her flinty idealism were valuable assets during the years she tried to establish and maintain a center for Baba in California.

Agnes found the Ojai property in 1946, drawn to it at first by a regal stand of eucalyptus trees. Over the following years, she struggled continuously to raise money to support Meher Mount, sometimes growing and selling strawberries to pay the mortgage. People (including Krishnamurti) constantly asked her to give them the property or to sell it. She complained that developers repeatedly tried to steal it and that in later years they plotted to gain control by trying to make her a ward of the state. She held her own.

When a valley fire swept the property in 1985, Agnes managed to rebuild, but she broke her back in the process. She died on the property in 1994, confined, by choice, to a trailer, confident that the property had been at last secured in Meher Baba's honor.

When we visited Ojai in 1956, the population was small, the roads were unpaved, and the valley's peace untouched by development. Meher Mount sits on 179 acres of woodland and sprawling fields on Sulphur Mountain, twenty-seven hundred feet above the ocean. On a clear day, there's a breathtaking 360-degree view of the valley, mountains, forest, ocean, and the Channel Islands.

As we drove up the mountain to Meher Mount, fog shrouded the mountaintop and concealed the valley below. Still, the center itself looked marvelous. Agnes led us to a guesthouse and swimming pool, through rose and herb gardens, fruit trees, and numerous California oaks, some quite ancient. Baba told us the land was very old and that he had been there before. He seemed happy to be back. He was playful and at one point wound Elizabeth's red scarf around his head like a turban. Then he called each of us to him for a hug. When we arrived at Meher Mount, a follower named Fred Winterfeldt predicted that the fog would soon clear. Later, as we were inside talking, Baba wondered if this had come to pass, but Fred confessed it would need Baba's help.

Baba instructed us: "Go out and see the view and try to love Baba through nature. This is all due to my love... This whole Creation, this nature, all the beauty that you see, all came out of me."

We obediently filed outside, and soon the fog was quickly burning away, unveiling this California Shangri-La with its incredibly beautiful hills and valleys. Baba's words had very real meaning to us. The splendor stretched out before us was his work, and when he comes, he touches everything in Creation. All things, even stones, have life - and how beautiful life was that morning.

Baba toured Meher Mount with Agnes at his side, walking over hills and through groves and around the pool, with everyone tagging

along. Then he gave more interviews before finally climbing into a station wagon for his return to Los Angeles. We boarded the buses and began our own ride back through the "Pink Moment" of the valley, the sun setting over the hills toward the ocean. That day, August 2, 1956, was Baba's only visit to Meher Mount, but he corresponded with Agnes Baron until his passing and expressed his love for the retreat she had labored to protect.

Today the town of Ojai is a center of music, theater, and crafts and a popular pilgrimage for both artists and mystics. Meher Mount is a meditation retreat, described by its guardians as "a universal center open to all for inspiration, education, recreation, ecology, and humanitarian service." Baba lovers gravitate to the "Baba Tree," the five-hundred-year-old live oak under which he reposed in solitude that day, and to the remains of the guesthouse where he gave darshan. All but the fireplace of the house was destroyed in the 1985 fire.

Soon after the visit to pastoral Ojai, we left for the city of San Francisco, where many more people had been waiting years to see Baba. They all came out to the airport with numerous children in tow. We made quite a mob as we followed Baba through the terminal. When we moved into the daylight, young children were hanging joyfully onto his hands.

There was a Republican convention in San Francisco later that month, and most hotel rooms had long been booked, so reservations had been made instead at a tourist inn called Holiday Lodge on Van Ness Avenue, equidistant from Union Square and Fisherman's Wharf. Opened only one year before, the Holiday Lodge was described as a garden oasis with palm trees and flower boxes. We'd been looking forward to hosting Baba in San Francisco for a long time and kept our fingers crossed that his accommodations would suit him perfectly. But that hope was shattered almost instantly.

When shown to his room, Baba immediately began calling people in. He didn't like the room. It was too far from his loved ones, and he wanted to be in another room. In fact, he didn't like the Holiday Lodge itself. This wasn't right and that wasn't right. Fireworks went off in all directions, and people were shuffled around until the arrangements finally satisfied him. It was quite a scene, but it wasn't new to me, and I was far more comfortable with such imbroglios now than I had been in Europe.

By now I was coming to understand that it didn't serve Baba's work if everything ran too smoothly. When life flows easily, people have no opportunity to react to situations or to each other. Masters prefer action. They want their followers involved in all sorts of interchanges, struggling to cope, and concentrating on tasks and challenges. When things



did run smoothly, Baba would make the now familiar remark, "I think I'll put just a little friction in the wheels." Those of us who spent a lot of time with him began to assume that if something could go wrong, it would. We tried to plan for every contingency, usually to no avail. He could always find some way to create that "friction," thus forcing us to confront our limitations and focus on issues deep within ourselves. This often meant developing tolerance and patience with others. In a sense, all of us were struggling to penetrate the fog - to see past the impermanent personalities of our companions to the divinity within.

Eventually everything at the Holiday Lodge settled down, and we were able to eat lunch. After the meal, Baba called us upstairs to his room, where we found him surrounded by at least a dozen children. "Now that the children have monopolized me," he said, "the rest of you will have no chance! I too am a child."

He was true to his word. On a sightseeing trip that afternoon, Baba switched children in and out of his car while the rest of us followed along in the bus. We drove the length of Chinatown down Grant Avenue, then up Telegraph Hill to Coit Tower, which offers a panoramic view of the city and its bay. It was a breezy, sunny day, and our view was splendid. Baba walked around, admiring it from every angle. He even used it to offer guidance to his followers. When Filis Frederick was with Baba at the tower, he pointed meaningfully to the south, toward Los Angeles, and she took it as a sign that her future lay that way. As it turned out, she did eventually put down roots in Los Angeles and, along with Adele Wolkin, became the bedrock of the Meher Baba center there.

When Baba left Coit Tower, Lud suggested a ride down Lombard Street, "the crookedest street in the world." It's also a very steep street, yet Baba insisted they zoom down at top speed. Others in the car were quite unsettled, but Baba was only amused.

After a trip to the Presidio, a military post now turned national park at the south end of the Golden Gate Bridge, we returned to the Holiday Lodge. I enjoyed watching Baba cross to his room, along the open walkways over the pool area, children hanging onto his clothing as he strode along. One time I was filming him walking across the upper porch when he suddenly stopped and looked around. It seemed as if he was counting noses. After a moment, he announced that one of the children was missing. For a while there was a lot of excitement as he talked to the adults, and everyone tried to determine where the child was. It turned out she had been up in Coit Tower with my friend Sparkie when the bus left without them. They walked back together, and all was well, but Baba had showed us how important it is to be thoughtful and aware of others. From that point on, he put Sparkie in charge of the children, and she did an excellent job of chaperoning them.

Baba decided that day he wanted to meet with all of us as a group, so Fred Frey, who was a professional decorator, adorned the Holiday Lodge conference room with flowers and greenery in preparation. That afternoon when Baba invited us to join him there, he asked Fred to lead the way. But Fred couldn't find the room again! It was finally located, but not before Baba took the opportunity to tease Fred a little. "Fred has now become one of my mad disciples," he said.

He was jesting, but it was a jest that made a point and refocused us on the goal: "When you go mad for me, really mad, not in the worldly sense, then you find me. Only those who go mad with love for me find me."

That evening, we planned a trip to the Cow Palace, an arena south of San Francisco that was staging the Ice Capades. As we waited for the cars, Baba emerged wearing a red wool jacket, white pants, and a red paisley scarf. I too was bundled up against the chilly night fog and sported a small, brimless white fur hat known as a toque. Baba admired it and then playfully tried it on. When he returned it, he told me to keep it and never wear it again. Baba left the ice show early in a car that Lud was driving. Lud wasn't feeling well, and by the time they reached the Holiday Lodge, he was running a high fever. Baba laid his hands on Lud's cheeks and gave him some specific instructions, which included calling a doctor in the morning.

Throughout the next week, Baba gave interviews and greeted several Sufis and other aspirants who were meeting him for the first time. When his trip in 1952 was canceled, Mother and I had been especially concerned about several elderly friends of ours we feared might not live long enough to see him. But now they were all here, and each had a heart-touching visit. Over the next few years, many of them passed away.

It was Saturday afternoon, August 4, when we accompanied Baba to our Sufi center in San Francisco, at 406 Sutter Street. For me the most powerful moment of that visit was when he sat in one of the chairs and told us, "I am the Christ. I tell you this with my divine authority. One day all will know." Mother began to cry. Baba called her over and had her sit beside him. After reminiscing awhile, he went into the office and sat down behind a desk. When he stood up, he gestured that he wanted Mother to sit in the same chair. When she did, he put his right hand over her head, with his fingers widespread. He then gestured it was time to leave. The Sufi center has since moved twice, but the chair Baba used has been saved.

After the visit, we returned to the Holiday Lodge, and Baba went to see our ailing Sufi, Lud. "Aren't you glad you got sick?" he asked. "For now Baba has come to see you on a personal visit."

Lud had been diagnosed with pneumonia, but it was Baba who prescribed the treatment. He specified certain foods, promising that in three days Lud would be perfectly well. As promised, on the third day he was his old vigorous self. Baba remarked that he himself had brought about Lud's illness to save him from a much worse catastrophe due to occur in a few months.

On a misty Sunday morning, Baba called the group into his room for an announcement that sent our hearts soaring. He said he was planning a great meeting in India for his Eastern and Western followers, and he wished us to attend. All of us were thrilled, but especially excited were the many people who had never been to India before. India was the setting for many of the wonders of his incarnation, wonders most devotees had only read about - his encounters with the Perfect Master Babajan, his Realization, the early ashrams, his work with the masts, and the travels of the New Life. Now in one trip, we would make pilgrimages both to his sacred homeland and to Baba himself.

He sketched out his plans for the visit and then asked Don Stevens to repeat them. Baba admonished Don to speak loudly, and the room bubbled with laughter when he added, "Baba cannot hear... it must be the fog!"

I probably would have spent all my time dreaming about the sahavas in India if not for the double good fortune that Baba was with us right now and that there were local trips to be made with him almost every day. On one of these expeditions, Baba and a group of us headed south by car to visit the homes of several of his lovers.

One of our stops was the affluent rural community of Woodside, where Mother and Dad had bought a home for their retirement. It was another of Mother's dream homes - a large country house situated on fifteen acres of gardens and orchards above Searsville Lake. Mother harbored a hope it would become a Sufi center and had named it Meherastan, or "threshold of compassion." Baba strolled out on the lawn and stood looking at the glorious view over the lake. I tried hard to capture the moment on film without intruding. He walked under the trees and down by the swimming pool, where I got a nice shot of him standing with Mother. He also toured the house, inspecting every room.

But as idyllic as the Woodside estate seemed, Baba was clearly unhappy with it. Later Mother and Dad would spend only a brief time there before Baba sent word for them to sell it. As it turned out, our centers for Sufism were destined for less secluded areas - Walnut Creek, east of San Francisco, and Washington, D.C. - where they've become firmly established, just as Baba wished.

Don Stevens fared no better with his house in Menlo Park, which

he'd decorated very stylishly in modern Danish furniture. Immediately after Baba saw the house, he told Don, "Sell it!"

Lunch was served that day at yet another Bay Area house, this time the Fred and Carolyn Frey home in Hillsborough, an elite suburb north of Menlo Park and Woodside, closer to San Francisco. The tables were decorated exquisitely, and Fred had a young Filipino to help with the cooking and service. Fred was astounded when the man said he not only knew of Meher Baba but that many islanders knew the Master was on earth. He was overjoyed to meet Baba and prepared a special oriental dish that Baba very much enjoyed.

The Freys had to give up their house too, but under unusually painful circumstances. Some years later, they had a new carpet installed that was permeated with toxins. By the time the truth was uncovered, the Freys had been thoroughly poisoned. Even though the carpet was removed, toxins had impregnated the house itself, and the Freys were by then so sensitive they could never return.

Later that day, Baba called us back together to talk more about his plans for an East-West gathering in India. As the discussion unfolded, he began pointing to different people in the room, saying they "must" come to India for the event. He was very specific with names: "Elizabeth, without question... Mrs. White, even if she's about to drop her body... If Harry Florsheim doesn't die, he must come... " He looked elsewhere and added, "Ben Hayman."

Gradually he worked his way through most of the people in the room, but still he hadn't mentioned me. I began to break into a cold sweat, thinking, "Baba, you're going to say I can go too, aren't you? Please?"

Still I wasn't named. By now I was concentrating as hard as I could, "Me, Baba! Me! Please!"

He went through every single person in the room before he finally turned around and said, "And Charmian can come to India."

But that wasn't all. Then he looked at me and made gestures indicating two little children of different heights, and finally, for a third, he folded his arms like a cradle and rocked an imaginary baby back and forth.

I got the strong feeling I was going to have three children and that Baba wanted me to bring them to him at some future time. I barely had time to consider all this when Baba added a footnote about the children, saying, "And maybe one of those will be the one who loves me as I ought to be loved." It was a beautiful idea, almost too beautiful for my mind to encompass. The dawning of my understanding was still several years away.

Our next outing that week was north into Marin County. On the way, Baba and a small group of us stopped over at the San Francisco home of Joseph and Kari Harb on Faxon Avenue. The Harbs were longtime Baba devotees who later lived in India near his ashram for some time. Baba climbed the long stairs of the house past Joseph's joyful roses, and inside he sat in the chair Joseph used for meditation. I was out in the garden when Baba called for me to take his picture in the chair, and I rushed in just in time to get the shot before he stood up and moved on. He walked all through the house and gardens and distributed prasad to those present. The Harbs' home became yet another Baba-graced home that eventually had to be sold.

After the visit with the Harbs, we drove out across the Golden Gate Bridge and into the countryside to see Muir Woods, one of the last old-growth redwood forests on the planet. The coast redwoods are among the tallest and most stupendous trees in existence. We strolled that day under trees that were 12 feet in diameter and soared 260 feet above us, forming a cool, shady canopy over the fern-lined trails we followed. Some of these California redwoods were already reaching toward the sun when Baba walked the earth as Mohammed, over a thousand years before.

Baba led us along peaceful trails that wound through a misty canyon with creeks running through it. The redwoods were more appreciative of the fog than we were. They require two hundred to five hundred gallons of water a day, and in summer fog is a vital source of moisture. Here summer is the season too of azaleas, aralias, buckeyes, jays, chipmunks - and carefree children. As Baba led us up a stream, and then back down the other side, the children clung to him as if he was their most treasured playmate.

At one point, he stopped and sat under one of the majestic trees while everyone nestled in the giant roots around him. To some of us, it seemed as if the living Buddha had returned and was seated under the bo tree. I couldn't think of a more sacred or beautiful setting for God than this living cathedral of majestic evergreens. The scene was so remarkable, I desperately wanted to film it. I tried to perch myself on the rail of a nearby bridge to get a good angle, but it was too high to reach. If I struggled to climb it, I knew I risked dropping the precious camera into the stream below. Then a friend of mine offered to take the pictures for me and, with gay abandon, leapt onto the rail. I handed him the camera and cautioned, "Now, keep it focused on Baba."

But the lure of the mighty redwoods was too much. He started to film and soon began to point the camera up the tree. "No, no!" I shouted, "Keep it on Baba."

"Oh, I've got enough," he responded, and he continued to move the camera steadily up the two hundred feet of bark, branches, and burls. I knew Baba never sat still for long, and sure enough, my fears were soon realized. By the time the camera was returned to me, Baba had risen and taken off with everybody trailing behind him once again. I was left to mourn the rare and beautiful footage that never was.

In the final film, we ended up with only a quick moment of the Ancient One cradled in his primordial redwood before the viewer is taken foot by foot up that towering tree. I was angry at first. Then I came to appreciate that the man had only been trying to help, and if not for him, we wouldn't have had even that one precious glimpse.

Redwoods have survived millions of years of glaciers, climate changes, volcanoes, and earthquakes. I've been told they play a special role in controlling the climate of the earth. But in the rapid rush for progress that characterizes the Machine Age, redwoods have been cast aside. Today less than 10 percent of them remain. I don't know how much longer we will have even those, but while they live, they are a magnificent reminder of the grandeur of God's creation. And if they fade into history, we must assume that too is part of His plan.

When the next day, August 7, dawned, I awoke with a sense of sadness, knowing I looked forward to what I knew would be a bittersweet day. Although we would have some time with Baba at the Holiday Lodge and the airport, he was then scheduled to fly with the mandali to Australia.

Even on his last day, Baba saw a few new people. Among them was a lady who had missed a chance to see him earlier because she had been told she had to belong to a "group." Baba said that many of his followers belonged to no group at all, but belonged to his *real* group, which included all his lovers and all his groups. His real center was the heart of everyone who loved him.

This message was similar to so many others he gave during this time - messages that replaced archaic formulas and dogmas with an Infinite Truth that embraces every seeker and every path. A few days earlier in San Francisco, a young girl visiting him in his suite had confessed that someone had advised her that Baba wasn't her master. He replied, "Masters, masters! Masters have nothing to do with it! I am your *God!*"

I felt how fortunate we are that he *is* our God. For this is a God who looks not at religion, affiliation, or creed, but at the heart, and whose arms envelop not just the pious but the intoxicated, not just the holy but all of humanity.

At the airport, Baba played with the children but gave no more

embraces. Then he strode down the ramp toward the waiting plane. On the way, he passed the outstretched arms and hands of his devotees, each hoping for one last touch. Baba clasped one hand, then another, and then, too soon, he was walking across the tarmac and up the steps to the plane. As he disappeared inside, we continued waving, and most of us were weeping. A moment passed, and then, through one of the windows, we glimpsed a movement. There was Baba, waving back at us! But inevitably the plane taxied out to the runway and lifted off into the sky. We all stood watching as it disappeared in the distance, unwilling to leave until there was nothing left to see but drifting white clouds.

After Baba left, we all went off to our lives and our particular challenges. Yet his presence stayed fresh for me in many, many ways. I could see his look in the eyes of all his creatures. I felt him in every loving touch, every bit of kindness that came my way. Different colors reminded me of the colors of his coats. His presence was so strong for so many of us that we had already begun to learn the lesson that would someday see us through his physical passing - the lesson that he really *is* with us always, wherever we are, however we feel.

Meanwhile, there was a gathering in India to look forward to. He had promised.

## *Broken and Triumphant*

In the fall of 1956, when the leaves of Washington's maple trees were tumbling red and orange to the ground, I shed my old life and donned a new costume as a married career woman. I was twenty-seven years old and had been dreaming about marriage for almost as long as I could remember. My wedding, elaborately and intricately planned for months, was to be the culmination of that dream. It began instead as a Kafkaesque nightmare, crazy and chaotic beyond all reason.

My mother was so struck with the events leading up to that day that she dedicated eight pages to them in her book *How a Master Works*. It was a gruesome list of nerve-racking complications that included an exploding furnace; stolen turkeys; a leaky roof; arrangements for entertainment, flowers, and champagne that fell through; dresses that didn't fit or never arrived; disappearing place cards; an undelivered entree; and even a hurricane. I vacillated between moments of frantic worry and hysterical laughter over the absurdity of events. A week before the wedding, when the turbulence was at its peak, Baba sent me a telegram that read:

DON'T WORRY STOP ALWAYS TRY BEST AND LEAVE TO GOD  
THE REST STOP LOVE TO YOU ALL

It was only later that he admitted engineering the chaos, news that didn't particularly come as a surprise. But I did resolve to leave it all to Baba and returned to New York after the wedding to launch my "new life" of marriage. My husband and I settled into an apartment in mid-Manhattan. He was working as a probation officer, and I later found work at the Asia Foundation, an organization that helps foster greater openness and prosperity in the Asia Pacific region.

In spite of the exciting changes in my life, my thoughts were consumed by the impending trip to India. We knew that a date had been set for November of the following year, 1957, and waited as patiently as possible for a message with more details. But in early December of 1956, a very different message reached us.



If someone had told me that the horrifying events of Prague, Oklahoma, would be repeated someday, I would have been incredulous. Yet now, four years later, we received word from India that Baba had been in another terrible car accident, with even more dire consequences. This time, Dr. Nilu was killed, and Baba and his other companions in the car were severely injured.

The accident occurred on December 2 during a return ride from Pune, where Baba had spent the day watching a cricket match and visiting his family home. The trip had been unusual in many ways. Baba was fasting that day and had requested that the mandali do the same. On the way to Pune, he had changed places in the car with Nilu, moving from the front to the back seat. Just as they arrived in Pune, the car was forced to stop for a motorcade. A motorcycle escort approached, followed by a car that carried China's premier, Chou En-lai, and India's prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. Dr. Nilu insisted on getting out of the car to watch the motorcade.

Chou and Nehru were both powerful and charismatic men, leaders of the two most populous countries in the world. Nehru was the first leader of independent India. Chou was the first and longest-serving leader of the People's Republic of China. Nehru was leader of the world's largest democracy. Chou was leader of the largest communist nation. And they shared a border.

At the time, there were increasing tensions between the two nations and disputes over territory in Tibet, the Himalayan kingdom of Ladakh, and Kashmir. They had signed treaties in which each conceded certain rights, followed by accusations from each that the treaties had been violated. Full-scale guerrilla warfare had broken out months before in Tibet. Refugees streamed from eastern and northeastern Tibet into Lhasa and later into India, further provoking tensions between the two nations. That year Nehru unintentionally offended the Chinese by inviting the Dalai Lama to visit India to attend a Buddhist celebration. In meetings with both Nehru and Chou, the Dalai Lama admitted he was contemplating political asylum in India, a move the Chinese government would find humiliating.

Both leaders were clever players in the era of superpowers. Chou was the Chinese Communist party's most skillful negotiator and one of the great diplomats of the twentieth century. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger called him "one of the two or three most impressive men I've ever met." As premier, he ran the government from 1949 until his death in 1976 and held primary responsibility for foreign relations. Educated partially in Western missionary schools and in Europe, he was brilliant, pragmatic, and moderate. The Chinese people loved him for

his personal humility and simple lifestyle. World leaders admired him for his reputation as a peacemaker both at home and abroad,

Nehru, who had been mentored by Mahatma Gandhi, had also been educated in the West. He was international in his outlook, loyal, introspective, and sometimes impetuous, more radical than Gandhi but equally idealistic. A practitioner of conflict avoidance, he sought a policy of non-alignment for India, in which his country sided with neither the communists nor the West. Like Chou, he was much loved by his people. His fondness for children was so admired that India named an annual children's day in his honor.

Both men were striving to bring their nations into the modern age, building industry and developing technology while also struggling to feed and educate masses of the poor and illiterate.

When Baba and his party left Pune late in the afternoon, Baba was in the back seat of the car. Later he had the car stopped so he could again switch places with Nilu, who was in the front seat. A few miles later, they reached a grassy spot where Baba had once played a game of cricket with some of his close disciples. The players described that game as especially intense and said their muscles had ached for some time after. Baba recalled that day as the car passed by.

Eruch, though driving at a moderate speed, suddenly found he could no longer control the steering wheel. The car swerved toward a stone culvert and crashed. Baba was crushed in the car. His head and face were badly hurt, his tongue was torn, and his right hip socket was fractured. Eruch, Pendu, and Nilu were all thrown out of the car. Dr. Nilu and Pendu were both unconscious. Pendu suffered a broken pelvis and a head injury, Eruch had fractured ribs, and Vishnu suffered a broken rib and facial lacerations. Dr. Nilu, who had always expressed a wish to die quickly and in Baba's presence, never regained consciousness.

Vishnu, who was the least injured, found Baba reclining in the front seat, his clothes and face covered in blood. But far from seeming distressed, Baba was glowing. Vishnu said the radiance was so blinding he could see nothing else, not the car or the surroundings - only Baba's face "in glorious triumph," like a victorious king. During the medical treatments that followed, Baba was cheerful and downplayed his pain, saying the Hungarians were suffering much more in their struggle against the Soviets, many of them lying wounded and helpless by the road, far from family and loved ones. He said this accident, like his first, had been a blessing for the universe. Later he was even more forthcoming. He told Eruch he had his physical bones broken to break the material aspect of the "Machine" (Machine Age) while keeping its spiritual aspect intact.

If there is one machine that represents the rhythm and force of the

Machine Age, it must surely be the automobile. No other invention has had such a dramatic impact on society and the earthly environment in which we struggle to live, learn, and attain beauty and freedom.

My relationship with cars has been special. Baba often gave me the wonderful privilege of driving or chauffeuring assignments, and sometimes the cars and roads seemed to happily participate in his plan to "throw friction" into our paths. I don't pretend to understand automobiles or their relationship with the Avatar and spiritual energy, but in the metal-intensive life of the Kali Yuga, they seem to play a significant role.

During the last century, cars have multiplied at a staggering rate. There were about four thousand when the twentieth century began, and today there are approximately six hundred million worldwide. As they proliferated, they redefined life on the planet. Our landscape is different now, covered in concrete and asphalt, crisscrossed by millions of miles of highways, many of them congested almost beyond endurance. Because of cars, parking lots and garages have replaced fields and gardens. The automobile has created a new rite of passage from adolescence to adulthood, more perilous and confusing than traditional ones. And while other technologies have lengthened our life span considerably, the automobile has been responsible for millions of deaths and millions more injuries. From the beginning, cars have been a measure of one's status, an indicator of wealth, taste, and even sexual allure. Because of its reliance on oil, the automobile has even profoundly affected international relations and politics, often forcing confrontation or conciliation between the Middle East and West.

Experts say the car, more than any other factor, is responsible for the urban sprawl that now shapes the American terrain and increasingly shapes that of all Western nations. Once cars became available, people no longer needed to live close to work or family; our sense of "neighborhood" and community changed.

The beautiful Creation I gazed upon with Baba from Meher Mount, Swiss mountains, the woods of South Carolina, and the forests of Northern California has also been invisibly scarred by the automobile. Its pollutants threaten all living things, poison our life-sustaining air, and play a key role in acid rain and the climate changes induced by global warming trends. Baba predicted such climate changes many years ago.

Still, the world's in love with the automobile, and understandably. Racing along at the speed a cheetah dashes through the savanna, we can cross an entire continent in only a few days. We can discover and explore neighborhoods, cities, countries, and cultures that would have

been as remote to our ancestors as the North Pole. The automobile has provided a freedom of movement unequalled in human history.

Like the airplane, the automobile became an essential means of transportation and travel for the seventh Avatar in this cycle of Avatars. And in this Age of Iron, the uncompromising and hypnotic reign of the machine, it was also the means of his physical suffering - not once, but twice.

As the months passed following the accident, we heard through letters and circulars about the long and arduous process of Baba's recovery. Mani and others wrote to us about the cast, traction, muscle spasms, fever, severe bouts of pain, excruciating exercises, repeated and contradictory x-rays and diagnoses, and his eventual graduation to crutches and a wheelchair. By April of 1957, four months after the accident, he could walk a little with the aid of two canes. That same month, he announced the November sahasas would be rescheduled for January 1958, a delay we gladly accepted in the hope he would heal with more time and rest.

In spite of his relentless pain, throughout 1957 Baba held meetings with followers, visited his lovers, made short excursions, gave darshan and discourses, and contacted masters. In spite of suffering that was intense, he continued to be cheerful and uncomplaining. The women mandali once found him sitting in bed weeping, but he explained, "The tears were not for the suffering of my body, but for the suffering of the world."

In July he announced that the medical remedies had been useless and that he suffered day and night. In August he began deep physical therapy to arrest an osteo-arthritic condition in his hip, and by November he had called in a chiropractor for regular treatments. By the end of the year, he decided an East-West sahasas was no longer feasible and that he would have to split the gathering into two events, one in the East and one in the West.

I HAVE DECIDED AS GOD IN MY DIVINE KNOWLEDGE AND  
AS HUMAN PATIENT THROUGH DR KENMORE'S KNOWLEDGE  
THAT COMBINED EAST WEST SAHAVAS IN INDIA IS  
ABSOLUTELY INADVISABLE STOP WILL DEFINITELY GIVE  
SAHAVAS TO MY WESTERN LOVERS IN MYRTLE BEACH FOR  
FIFTEEN DAYS MAY 1958 AND FIVE DAYS AUSTRALIA STOP  
SPEEDILY INFORM ALL STOP MANI WRITING DETAILS  
SHORTLY MY ETERNAL LOVE TO YOU EACH

BABA

As much as we'd longed to visit him in India, any disappointment was effaced by the assurance we would see him in May and by our overriding concern for his well-being. Every letter was searched hungrily for news of improvement. It was a slow process, and he continued to suffer pain well into 1958. In retrospect, I doubt he ever made a complete recovery. He once said that his entire physical frame was shattered by the two accidents.

The cancellation of the united sahasas was one of many plans that unraveled during this time. For my mother, it was the year her dream of retirement to the lovely hills of Woodside began to fracture. She and Dad moved into their spacious dream home in January 1958, Mother still harboring the idea it could someday be a Sufi center. Dad had retired by then, but even that was unsustainable. His replacement at Aramco died unexpectedly, and the company asked him to stay in Washington for one more year. Mother, who was then approaching sixty-three, was left to manage alone the endless series of problems that began to plague the Woodside house almost as soon as she set foot in it. My letters from her reflected a growing exasperation that affected everyone involved, including her servants, Helen and Carsten.

Feb. 13, 1958

Dear Enfant,

Every day is full of crises - each one more expensive than the past one. We have had a weather-stripper here three full days trying to make windows open and shut and put weather guards on the French doors outside. Getting stone (flagstones for paving) tomorrow because Helen couldn't get her car into the barn. The electricians get one thing fixed and something else comes unfixed. Furnace men here yesterday - always there is some part missing or something that has to be replaced.

Carsten almost went crazy with fear and pain because he got some abrasive caustic stuff in his good eye while trying to get old wax and lacquer off the kitchen floor. He has been in a tizzy for three days, but it not only is improving, but he could see his hand with his blind eye yesterday. Don't ask me what is going on.

I am physically weary enough to go to bed for a week. Fred Frey got deathly sick from the stripping chemical he used... and has been out completely for several days. Only the good lord knows where our stove is.

It has rained day and night ever since before your daddy left and more promised tomorrow. My dearest love enfolds you both.

Devotedly,  
Mother

Feb. 25, 1958

Charmy dear,

I couldn't let my birthday pass without a few lines to my chick. I don't know when I wrote last so I don't know what disaster to relate first. Daddy phoned me last night to say "many happy returns of the day," but after hearing my day, he refrained.

Saturday we did a marathon trying to clean up as much as possible for the Sufi party Sunday, and praying for just one sunny day. When we got the table laid and candles set, Carsten put out my big Venetian lotus bowl for flowers. I came thru the room just as Fred was pouring water into it. He left for the garage to pick up his flowers and I stepped into the hall a minute. As I headed back into the dining room, the bowl fell apart into seven or eight huge pieces - didn't even make a noise. Water poured all over the clean tablecloth. Carsten almost burst into tears, and it ruined his day completely. That glass was over an inch thick, so it is a mystery.

After we got to bed around 10:30 p.m., a great storm came up - winds and gales of fifty miles per hour. It carried on all night and all yesterday. I was hardly able to walk because of standing so much on Sunday, but Helen and I spent all day mopping all the windows - we laid napkins of paper on all the crosspieces, towels at bases to protect floors. We had to make the rounds constantly. The rain came right thru the windows despite all the putty. If my drapes had been up, it would have been the last straw. At 4:00 p.m. the electricity went off - no light, no refrigeration, no clocks, no heat, no stove. We had a cold "doings" supper and crawled to bed by candlelight - would not have had candles had it not been for the birthday - spent over an hour trying to get the Gas and Electric Co. and finally called the police who reached them eventually.

Woke up today on my birthday to a stone-cold house and more rain. I might add for laughs that the painter, after grouting the bathrooms, put some solution on the tile floors to make them more waterproof. Said it would dry in two hours. That was five or six days ago. We have not been able to walk into one yet without sticking to the floor. I didn't want to ruin my shoes, so I now have waterproof feet.

My dearest love attends you both. Keep well and happy!

Devotedly,

Mother

Like the events leading up to my wedding, Mother's travails with her house seemed to be the product of an especially energetic *Maya*. Maya is the principle of ignorance, and her main sport is opposing the work of the Avatar. This manifests in all sorts of trials and obstacles that interfere with his plans and that test the faith and patience of his followers. Baba once referred to Maya as a "showman," and if so, her performance after his 1956 visit was worthy of Barnum & Bailey.

While Mother was lighting candles against the dark in California, Baba was celebrating their shared birthday in India with the help of thousands of followers. He was sixty-four that year, still suffering from hip pain but emanating only happiness. The mandali and his followers decorated Meherabad with flowers, flags, and streamers and entertained him with music and speeches. Followers and visitors from neighboring towns and villages flocked to see him, and in spite of his continuing discomfort, he gave darshan to nearly five thousand people. The sahavas Baba held in India that month became the Eastern half of the East-West sahavas originally planned.

Mother would continue to harbor hopes for a peaceful life at Meherastan for almost another two years, but the writing was already on the water-stained wall. Eventually she found that besides the endless household problems, she was too isolated in Woodside. Carsten wouldn't drive at night, and in fact wasn't particularly keen about driving in the daytime. Helen had always lived in flat country and was scared to death of driving in the hills. As a result, it was a major production for Mother even to get to the hairdresser, much less to San Francisco for Sufi classes. As the months passed, it became more and more difficult for Mother and Dad to live out their dream life in their "house to end all houses."

In New York, I too watched as a cherished dream began to crumble. My marriage, anticipated for so many years and so joyously celebrated, had been difficult from the beginning. Even our honeymoon was troubled. I struggled to understand what was happening and, in my confusion, began the painful spiral into self-blame, assuming that any problems were surely my own fault and that it was therefore my responsibility to fix them. Even as I worked desperately to improve the relationship, it was becoming more apparent every day that my romantic dreams about marriage had been just illusions.

It had been two years since I'd seen Baba, and I longed for the comfort and light of his presence. As far as I was concerned, it didn't matter if I saw him in India, the United States, or Timbuktu. I prayed that he would soon be released from the pain that he said had "fallen in love" with him, that there would be no more delays to the sahavas, and that he would arrive in May as planned. My mother, and I'm sure many

others, felt the same. We were worn out by our troubles, almost overwhelmed by the complications of our lives, and much in need of rest and refreshment.

I could only hope that Maya, after all her high jinks, was equally in need of rest.



## *For the Sake of His Smile*

To dwell in neither the past nor the future and to center oneself fully in the present - this is the goal of the mystic, and it's a goal I found especially challenging in the early months of 1958. As the first tulips sprang forth in Central Park, I found myself repeatedly looking to the days ahead and two events that held the promise of love and renewal - the sahavas with Baba in May and the birth of my first child, due in October. The sahavas was to be held in Myrtle Beach. It would be Baba's third visit there, and mine also.

"I want this sahavas to be above all a close companionship between your beloved and his lovers," Baba's message had read. "And if you wish to maintain this unique relationship, then do not come with questions or the desire to seek discourses and explanations."

Baba had once spent considerable time teaching me to ask questions, but I was quite happy to suspend the privilege. I had discovered over the years that my most meaningful moments with him had little to do with information and discourses and everything to do with the sublime and ineffable feelings of his silent presence. It was Hafiz, a Perfect Master and favorite poet of Baba who wrote, as rendered by Daniel Ladinsky in *I Heard God Laughing*:

If you think that the truth can be known  
From words,  
If you think that the Sun and the Ocean  
Can pass through that tiny opening  
Called the mouth,  
O someone should start laughing!

I did feel like laughing. Baba's message told us to be prepared to receive fully what he may give, a message that filled me with joyous anticipation. It also contained a hint as to what *we* might give. "Come," he said, "with the thought of being completely resigned to my will."

There was the usual flurry of activity that preceded any visit by Baba - notifying people, sending telegrams back and forth making arrangements, and coordinating travel plans. It was good that

we had tasks. Everyone needed outlets for their almost uncontrollable excitement.

Baba was arriving in New York on Saturday, May 17, but he'd already sent word that he wouldn't meet with anyone there and would immediately continue on to Myrtle Beach. He did, however, request my husband's presence at the airport. My husband went out and saw Baba through customs, then waited for a few hours until Baba and the four mandali accompanying him were on their way to South Carolina.

We had been instructed to follow Baba by two days, arriving in Myrtle Beach on May 19 and not a moment before. I remember the plane flight well, mostly because of my discomfort. The trip was bouncy and boiling hot, especially trying conditions for a pregnant woman. We kept alighting in cities along the way, then sweltering in the heat while the plane waited on the black tarmac for passengers to unload. While we made our halting way south, people were arriving in Myrtle Beach from Europe, Israel, Mexico, and all over the United States. There were over two hundred followers migrating to his side, including all those he'd invited in San Francisco back in 1956.

Being with Baba felt to me like it always did - as if I had come home. It was easy to get swept up in the fervor at the center, but I tried hard to restrain myself for the welfare of my baby. I had already made changes in my lifestyle and abandoned habits that I thought might be detrimental to the child's health. First I had given up liquor. Then, when Baba asked all of us to give up something personal, I had also quit smoking. I made these decisions based on maternal instinct, not on medical advice.

In the 1950s we were all blissfully ignorant of the health dangers of these indulgences. Almost half of Americans smoked a pack of cigarettes a day, and the majority drank alcohol every night. Even our food choices would seem unenlightened now. The favorite American meal was steak and potatoes followed by apple pie à la mode. There were no surgeon general's warnings, no reports on fetal alcohol syndrome, and no articles about cholesterol or heart disease to dissuade us. Still, I had certain intuitions about my pregnancy and felt a conviction that neither liquor nor cigarettes would be good for the baby. I remember traveling to Myrtle Beach with the thought that I had everything well under control and that my worst habits had been vanquished. Baba dissolved this complacency at once.

Only moments after I walked into his cabin, he asked me, "How many cups of coffee do you drink each day?"

I hadn't even considered coffee. It was, after all, a national pastime, and most Americans drank four to five cups a day. Most, that is.

"Oh, I guess maybe ten, Baba."

I left the meeting with a new limit on my caffeine habit.

Baba didn't impose such restrictions as an exercise in power. He did them for the benefit of the follower, benefits that could manifest in different ways and that sometimes required faith rather than understanding. I also found that he never *ordered* me to do anything. He would suggest or ask instead. In the case of the coffee drinking, he said something like, "I think it would be very nice if you'd cut back to two cups. Do you think you could do this for me?"

Did I think I could do it? Of course I could do it. It was a simple request, demanding very little on my part. Why wouldn't I be able to do it?

That is what I thought, anyway. Like most aspirants, I was naive about my ability to serve the Master. We find ourselves saying, "Let me climb a mountain for you! Let me show you how brave and strong and true I can be for you!" Then he gives us a small hill, and we can barely crawl our way to the top of it.

Baba never allowed his lovers to make the heroic gesture. Service and divinity were in the little things - or at least they seemed little. I left my meeting with him convinced I could easily limit myself to two cups of coffee a day. But in the days that followed, I'd have one cup of coffee, then I'd pour myself another, and later I'd find myself reaching for the pot again. Then it would hit me: "Oh, no! Wait a minute. Baba told me to only have two."

This occurred again and again throughout the day, with one very important result. Each time it happened, my thoughts turned to Baba. And it would happen hour in and hour out, day and night, month after month. All because of a simple cup of coffee, Baba entered my mind many times a day. The habit now was not coffee but remembrance of God. After this had continued for some time, Baba said, "Now you can drink that coffee if you want."

Later, when my baby, Mark, had been born and I resumed smoking, the process was repeated all over again.

"How many cigarettes do you smoke a day?" he asked. "Less than a pack, Baba."

"It would be good to cut back and smoke just six."

I would go home, convinced again that this was a challenge I could easily meet. But over and over throughout each day, I would reach for a cigarette and have to stop myself. It seemed like every second! Each time I'd come face to face with Baba's wish and my own weaknesses. I'd think, "Oh, no! Baba, help me! I can only have six, and I want to save one for after dinner and one for before bed. What am I to do? Meher

Baba, Meher Baba, Meher Baba." And through this discipline, Baba helped me remember him over and over, to repeat his name silently every day. This measure was most useful when we were separated from him, lost and entangled in the world and its diversions. ·

During the sahavas at Myrtle Beach, it was impossible to think of anything but Baba, and I had no desire to. This of course was one of the purposes of a sahavas. Baba described them to us a little further on the morning of our second day in Myrtle Beach. That day he was carried into the Barn in a special chair lifted by four young men, giving us a glimpse of the toll the accident had taken. There were about 225 people gathered in the Barn, and each one had their eyes focused solely on him.

"What is sahavas?" he asked. "It is companionship with God. It means that I come to your level or you rise to my level. We are not on the same level. Either I come to yours or you come up to mine. Sahavas means God becoming human."

He did look human that day, in his physical frailty and suffering. We could see that he was still in discomfort from his injuries. Yet through the suffering, his divinity radiated as always, transcending the form of the man, emanating from his weary but luminous eyes.

Baba then introduced the topic of love and obedience. Obedience is a subject Masters have talked about for eons, one that seems the very key to a student's progress, yet one that most students, especially in the independent-minded West, find particularly challenging. Baba told us what he wanted: "What I want is your love and obedience, 100 percent. I want one who does his best... If you love me 100 percent, you will be able to hold on to me. Obey me at all costs ... It is only those who love and obey Baba 100 percent who will be able to hold on to him in the nick of time."

It was an ominous phrase, "in the nick of time." Was he referring to the age in which we live, shadowed in the darkness of materialism, hurtling toward its own destruction? "The Kali Age cannot harm those who are devoted to their Teachers," the ancient seers wrote in the Mahabharata. Or perhaps Baba was referring to our own path and the critical moment when we can choose between reaching toward the sun or remaining huddled on the warm, familiar earth.

He said there was no room for compromise on the spiritual path. And then he said, "Raise your hands, who cannot obey me."

Not a soul raised their hand.

"Now raise your hands, all who will *try* to obey me!"

Arms and hands shot into the air.

"The raising of hands has made me very happy... It is impossible

to obey me 100 percent unless you have 100 percent love for me and accept me 100 percent as God incarnate. So it is for you who have raised your hands to do my will. The purpose of my coming to the West has been accomplished."

The group's affirmative response seemed crucial to Baba. He appeared to view this as more than a simple expression of our love for him, and he would refer to our pledge several times over the coming days.

On Thursday, May 22, we gathered in the Barn again, where we could see that Baba was suffering acutely. He told us that the night before had been his worst and that he was crushed by his work. His pain had intensified, and he was running a fever. He told us he was considering ending the American sahavas, canceling his plans for the subsequent sahavas in Australia, and returning immediately to India.

Seeing our concern, he told us not to worry. "No one need worry about this because the day before yesterday all raised your hands to obey me. So my first instruction, whether the sahavas is cut short or not, is to remain happy."

On Friday, May 23, Baba said, "I decided this morning to stay until the thirtieth. On the thirtieth, I leave for Australia, thus cutting short the sahavas by four days." Perhaps our acceptance of Baba's will helped in some way to gain us this extra week.

That morning Baba gave us the choice of whether we wanted him to give individual interviews or to continue to meet with us all as a group. Since it seemed to serve everyone and not just the few, we chose to meet with him as a group.

Later Baba went on a tour of the center, carried in his special chair attached to long lifting poles. Margaret Craske's dance students were attending the sahavas, and it was the male dancers, fit and flexible, who generally carried Baba. However, one day he told us that if anyone else wanted to carry him a short way, they could. So one by one, his lovers took their turns, then made way for another to step in. At one point, I tried it. I never felt anything so heavy in my entire life. Even with the help of the lifting poles and other companions, picking up Baba was like trying to pick up the universe. I lasted for perhaps two minutes.

The afternoon of the twenty-second, we had accompanied Baba to a theater in Myrtle Beach owned by a local woman named Jane Barry Haynes, a recent addition to the Baba community who would prove to be an energetic asset to the center and to his work. I later came to know Jane well and love her dearly. The trip was a particularly special event for me because the film we were to see was my very own, the movie I had shot of Baba during his visit in 1956. Baba seemed very pleased with the film, and I in turn was deeply happy.

So whenever possible, I was still taking movie footage on this visit. Sometimes Baba would be carried around the circle in front of the Original Kitchen, followed by many people. I would sail around him with my camera, trying to get a good shot. Since I was expecting, I was beginning to grow a bit bulky. As I circled him, I remember thinking that I felt like one of the *Queen Mary's* tugboats.

Once when Baba was being carried in his chair, I darted out in front to get the best angle. I had to back up while filming, and just as we crossed the top of the circle, I saw a look of alarm come over Baba's face, almost as if he were frightened. The next thing I knew, I had backed into a log. Both the camera and I flew into the air, where I struggled to regain my balance. But in that instant, I felt as if Baba caught me in midair and set me down safely. I found myself standing upright on the far side of the log, stunned that I wasn't lying in a broken heap. I glanced at Baba and saw a look of clear relief on his face. The camera, miraculously, hadn't even missed a frame.

The film of Baba's 1958 visit was the last movie footage I ever shot. I felt that I had made a movie of God and there was no way to top that, so I quit while I was ahead. Later, as Mother and I were editing the film, we were very careful not to turn the film stock over. We wanted the images to accurately reflect the direction in which people walked the circle. Mother said she didn't want to make a mistake and have us all going around the Ka'aba in the opposite direction!

My family and I thought the child I was expecting was likely to be a boy because my husband's family had a long history of male children. Therefore we had chosen the name Mark. But on the off chance it might be a girl, I took the opportunity of Baba's presence to ask him what girl's name would be suitable for the baby. Baba said if we had a little girl, we should call her Mary. As this child did prove to be a boy, we did name him Mark. But as always, Baba knew far more about the future than we did.

It had now become a tradition to celebrate Baba's birthday when he was with us, so Elizabeth had planned a party for May 24. I went into town to take a picture of the huge cake for Baba, which was on display in a bakery there. As it turned out, my ride back was delayed, and I had to wait for an hour, an hour in which I had the unusual opportunity of seeing the reactions of customers who stopped to look at the cake. I was fascinated. I remember especially two women who circled the cake trying to read the unusual inscription on the base of it. One of the ladies drawled out in her southern accent, "The Goal of Life is to be u-nited with Him' - with *him*! What in the world does *that* mean?"

Her companion responded, "Oh, yes! Don't you know that Baa-Baa is up there again? Been there a week already. And what's more, he's got more'n two hundred and fifty of *them* up there too!"

The salesgirl was quite embarrassed because she knew I had come from the center and was one of "them" myself. But she needn't have been. Far from being upset, I found it interesting to see people's reactions to something so foreign to them. There was simply no training or exposure in the West regarding the concept of spiritual Masters, although today that has changed somewhat. Furthermore, I felt that given just one moment with Meher Baba, they would experience a complete change of heart.

Even those of us who did know something about Masters and who had followed Baba for years were still struggling to understand our roles as students and the behaviors and attitudes that were helpful to his work. For example, as I returned from town one evening and drove slowly along the road in the center, my headlights picked up a follower walking along in the pitch dark without a flashlight. Baba had given very explicit orders that we were never to walk at night without a light because there were so many snakes on the grounds, many of them dangerous. I reminded this man of Baba's rule, but he replied, "Oh, there aren't any snakes here. That's nonsense."

The next day he returned to his cabin to find a poisonous snake coiled up on his very own steps and was forced to kill it. During the entire week of *sahavas*, it was the only snake seen.

We had all readily vowed our obedience to Baba, but it would be a lifelong task to keep that vow in our consciousness and to remain vigilant about whether we were remaining true to it. At the end of the week, on a Saturday morning in the Barn, Baba asked us to join him in the Prayer of Repentance, saying that if we did so with sincerity, "God in His Infinite Compassion will forgive all your weaknesses, shortcomings, and failures up to date. Let the prayer sink deep into you and concentrate on me." I was astounded that this could be done and perplexed as to what exactly it might mean.

My confusion increased sometime later when, still pregnant, I stepped out of a cab, fell into a ditch, and broke my toe. I assumed such a fall, like all similar incidents, was a result of karma. Yet I wondered:

How, if God has forgiven me all my past failures, can past karma still be affecting me? I pondered the idea that even if we're forgiven, we must still live out our past karma. But that only raised more questions: What then is the point of being forgiven? If it doesn't alter anything, why does He do it?

Fortunately, Baba himself addressed almost every subject related to spiritual evolution and processes. The topic of forgiveness was no exception. He had described it on a few occasions, including an earlier *sahavas* in India, when he explained, "Forgiveness consists in loosening the bindings of duality in Maya, which makes you feel and find the One as many. Therefore, 'I forgive you' amounts to a loosening of your bindings." With a little effort, we can find an answer from Baba to almost any question that might occur to us.

Although Baba had warned us not to come to the *sahavas* *expecting* discourses, this didn't mean we didn't receive them. On this trip, he gave many memorable discourses, and many directives on how we might love and serve him. One, called "My Wish," was a very simple and powerful personal guide for approaching life. If there is ever any doubt about what obedience to him means, I suspect the answer is always and ever in these six simple requests. There is no "mountain climbing" here - just a day-to-day program for holding him near while living an externally ordinary life.

### My Wish

The lover has to keep the wish of the Beloved. My wish for My lovers is as follows:

1. Do not shirk your responsibilities.
2. Attend faithfully to your worldly duties, but keep always at the back of your mind that all this is Baba's.
3. When you feel happy, think: "Baba wants me to be happy." When you suffer, think: "Baba wants me to suffer."
4. Be resigned to every situation and think honestly and sincerely: "Baba has placed me in this situation." '
5. With the understanding that Baba is in everyone, try to help and serve others.
6. I say with My Divine Authority to each and all that whosoever takes My name at the time of breathing his last comes to Me; so do not forget to remember Me in your last moments, Unless you start remembering Me from now on, it will be difficult to remember Me when your end approaches. You should start practicing from now on. Even if you take My name only once every day, you will not forget to remember Me in your dying moments.

It was later that day that Baba was carried to his birthday party, where several youngsters placed garlands of flowers around his neck. Baba embraced each of the forty children there, while one sat on his



father's shoulders, shouting out, "Baba! Baba!" Then Baba cut the cake that had elicited so much curiosity at the bakery, and everyone joined in singing "Happy Birthday."

Baba seemed to take special delight in being with the children that day. He ladled lemonade into paper cups for each one, gave them prasad, and played with them. They seemed to just adore him. At the end, the children all climbed into the gondola and took a gleeful ride on the lake.

The next day, Sunday, we all gathered in the Barn again. It was pouring rain, and Baba began by saying, "Fine weather today. It is my mood reflected. You have no idea how I suffered last night. This morning I am very happy. I want you all to take care of your health. Don't get colds. One will catch it from the other. Then all will get it, and then it will come to me!"

As was so often the case, Baba wanted music that day. So after a brief poetry reading, we played a recording of Cole Porter's "Begin the Beguine," one of Baba's favorite songs. Written for the 1935 stage musical *Jubilee*, the song is a lover's lament for his lost beloved and the paradisiacal moments they once shared. It expresses both lyrically and musically a deep longing to recapture the ecstasy he once knew. Baba said the song had an eternal meaning, and he kept time to the music with his fingers on the arm of a chair. He told us he always listened to a record of "Begin the Beguine" when he visited Nariman's home in Mumbai. Nariman was one of the mandali present with him in Myrtle Beach that week.

After "Begin the Beguine," we listened to recordings of music from India. Baba told us quite a bit about the music and described his preferences. He said he didn't appreciate Indian classical music or singers and that he favored *qawali*. The word *qawali* is from the Arabic *qal*, which loosely means "axiom" or "philosophical saying." But it has specifically come to refer to songs based on the mystical love poetry of Sufi saints. Qawalis are the ecstatic devotional music of the Sufis. Although a very ancient form of Islamic song, they were inspired and propagated for centuries by the Chishti school of Sufism.

Qawalis are an experience to hear, quite unique in style and rhythm. They blend the poetry of longing for God with euphoric, often improvised, singing and an ever-intensifying beat. The words are sung repeatedly, with variations, until the subtle meanings of the lyrics emerge. The goal of a qawali is for the listeners and performers to experience closeness to God. Unlike most musical forms, the audience is considered an active participant in a qawali performance, and audience and singers alike can reach states of extreme fervor.

"There is a depth to what they say and to the words they use," Baba explained. Whether it was music, poetry, or film, Baba always left us with the impression that true art strives to reflect Infinite Truth and to lead both artist and audience into a closer relationship with their Creator.

In Myrtle Beach, we didn't need art or qawalis to accomplish this, since Baba's presence charged the air with his love and nearness. I had an especially close moment with him at his house at the center, thanks to a very thoughtful gesture on the part of Mehera. Mehera, who didn't accompany Baba on this trip, had sent along gifts for about twenty women whom she'd either met or corresponded with. Baba called us to his house so he could present them to us. However, he ran into a little difficulty at first. Mehera had been very specific about who was to receive what, but he apparently couldn't remember her instructions. He told us that at the time he'd nodded his head, but now he couldn't recall any of it! He could solve universal problems, he said, but not *this* problem. Somehow it was all sorted out, and we also received a gift that she wanted every one of us to have: a picture of Baba as a young boy and of Mehera as a young girl. I was deeply moved by this, and moved too by my own personal gift from Mehera, a very charming necklace - as delicate and sweet as she was.

The gift giving continued, even after Mehera's presents. Next Baba showed us a lock of his hair, cut when he was younger. We marveled at its auburn color and curliness. Then he took a second lock and gave each of us some hair from it, telling us to leave as soon as we received it.

There came a time when it was our turn to give to Baba, and the best gift we could think of after his intense suffering was the gift of laughter. I was part of a group that used to gather after dinner in the dining room overlooking the lake. There we would tell jokes and prepare for the next day while we watched the alligators swim up and down the lake. Eventually we came to be known as the "Alligator Club."

At some point, the men in the group decided they would put on a show for Baba, and so we all launched into action, writing scripts, improvising costumes, and making decorations for the Barn. Anita Vieillard was quite famous as a modern artist, so I asked her to help. She laughed and exclaimed, "Why, my dear, it's been years since I painted anything that looked like anything!" But she pitched right in and painted alligators.

The show turned out to be a series of farcical skits, brimming over with slapstick, corny jokes, songs, sight gags, and many a spiritual pun, all of which seemed to amuse Baba immensely. Earlier the men had

announced that Baba would be initiated into the Supreme and Ancient Order of Alligator Watchers at the end of the performance. Before that honor was conferred, however, he happily sat through all kinds of antics. He was presented with a big stuffed alligator, a silly little toy alligator that beat a drum, and a small alligator bell.

When Baba saw the three "Viennese doctors" - Dr. Pfunster, Dr. Schmaltz and another - he covered his eyes with his hands. Dr. Pfunster told Baba that a "new kind of alligator bait" had been invented, and just then a man dressed as a nursemaid rolled in a wheelbarrow holding another man dressed like a baby, complete with a bottle. In one ridiculous scene, a doctor performed emergency surgery on a companion "swollen with sanskaras." He pulled out multicolored tissue papers, and just then a balloon was burst! Baba silently laughed so hard that his face grew pink and his shoulders shook. He seemed to enjoy ringing his alligator bell as applause.

Several "alligators" told humorous stories, including one about two monkeys who survived an atomic war. One of them said to other, "Oh dear, I guess we'll have to start all over again." And someone handed Baba a sign that read: "If you can keep a level head in this confusion, you just don't understand the situation." There were more jokes and shenanigans until the finale, when Baba was dubbed the Supreme High Alligator because he had seen a record number of six alligators on the lake at one time.

At one point during the show, Baba said, "I've never laughed so much in this incarnation as I laughed today!" When it was over, he added, "Today's performance is one of the few things I shall miss in my next incarnation!" Then he embraced all the performers. It was the best review we could have dreamed of.

We were all happy, indescribably happy, to have seen him smile and laugh so and to see that he genuinely enjoyed the afternoon. But just as he was about to leave the Barn, a look of infinite suffering suddenly came over his face. He remained in his chair, and his gaze drifted far away, beyond our reach. The room grew completely silent. Baba then shifted into his carrying chair, but he stayed there some time without moving. After a while, he was carried back to the Lagoon Cabin, but still he remained seated, doing his universal work within.

As our days with Baba dwindled down, I wrote to Mehera to thank her for the lovely necklace and for something even more precious:

Baba had several of the ladies attending the sahavas visit his house, and you can imagine our surprise and delight when he gave us all the beautiful gifts that you had sent with him. Everyone was in rapture over them, and I am so happy with my

necklace, which is so sweet and dainty and, in general, Mehera-like. It is just beautiful, and we all owe you so many thanks, but most of all, our deepest thanks, most heartfelt, for parting with your greatest treasure, Baba, to let him be amongst us once more.

The time came when Baba began to talk about his upcoming departure from Myrtle Beach for the sahavas in Australia. I suspect he talked about it ahead of time to prepare us and ease our sense of loss. He told us about the early hour he would be leaving for the airport in Wilmington, North Carolina, and said, "Kitty tells me all are going to the airport. Is it necessary? Are only the women going, or are all going?"

I'm sure many hearts stopped beating at the possibility that they might not be with Baba to the last precious minute. But Kitty mercifully declared, "All, Baba!"

Baba didn't protest. Instead he joked about the challenges in getting one of our sleepier companions out of bed so early. Then he told us, "I am happy today, very happy. This morning I wrote to Goher to convey to Mehera that I gave more of my love here than at the Meherabad sahavas. It's a fact. Eruch says I am devoting more time to you here."

That time was running short, and we were all aware of it. We were anxious to spend every possible remaining minute with him, but he was evasive about how many of those minutes we would have. Regarding his plans for the following day, he teased, "All are free to go to town tomorrow, but nothing can be certain with me. I might come to the Lagoon Cabin, or I may not come at all. I may just play with my toy alligator!"

As it turned out, he did manage to give us more of his time. He announced that he was going to the beach for five minutes and we were welcome to join him. At the gate to the beach, he called for Charles Purdom, one of his earliest followers from England, to come and sit in the car with him. On entering the car, Charles got his thumb caught in the door, injuring it. Right away Baba sent for ice, while everyone else stood by. Baba said, "Because of Charles, you all have an extra five minutes in my presence." That made Charles a hero, and everyone cheered him enthusiastically.

After Charles had been tended to, the men carried Baba down to the water's edge, where he removed his sandals and dipped his feet in the Atlantic Ocean.

It was May 30 when Baba emerged from his home at sunrise to leave for California and from there to travel to Australia. We'd experienced the real meaning of the term "sahavas" in Myrtle Beach - God's love given to and received by His lovers while keeping His company. Yet I

was still greedy, sad that this time we wouldn't be accompanying him west as we did in 1956. Only Lud Dimpfl had that privilege because Baba was to stay overnight in Lud's house in Marin County, north of San Francisco.

Baba departed by car and arrived at the Wilmington airport, surrounded by a sea of mournful faces. He gestured at us to smile and be cheerful, our obedience now tested by our despair at parting from him. But when one follower arrived late and asked how long he had been there, Baba responded, "Since eternity! I never come and I never go. I am present everywhere. Isn't it wonderful that I never leave?"

It was shortly after this that I changed the subject from sad departures to happy arrivals by mentioning my baby. A few days earlier, I had purchased two pairs of booties downtown, especially whimsical ones with little figures on them, a style that was quite new then. At the airport, it suddenly occurred to me that Baba might enjoy seeing them, so I passed them up to him through the large crowd. When Baba saw them, he looked at me, then back at the booties, then back at me again, at which point he gestured, "Two?"

I said, "Uhhh, well no, Baba. I'm only expecting *one* baby. But I bought two pairs of booties for him."

"Charmian must not have twins," he said.

If God said I wasn't to have twins, it seemed to me the question was settled. I continued to prepare for one baby.

Baba, in pink and white like spring itself, boarded his plane and waved at us until it taxied onto the runway bordered by pine woods. Then we watched through moist eyes as it took off into the sky and disappeared, carrying the Avatar toward California and to the waiting hearts of his lovers in Australia.

Baba returned to India after Australia, but he didn't forget those of us he'd left behind. He cabled:

ARRIVED IN INDIA WITH ALL YOU LOVERS IN MY HEART  
STOP INFORM ALL

BABA

So the word went out to lovers again dispersed far and wide. Our teary farewells had all been for naught.

## *The Distance Between*

The life of a spiritual aspirant vacillates between the exalted moments when we feel unity with God and the anguished ones when we feel separate. I knew Meher Baba for twenty-one years. And in that time, I spent a total of one hundred days in his physical presence. For the thousands of other days, my challenge was to experience him within, a state sometimes bestowed, unbidden, by grace, but which often had to be evoked by sheer effort, through my own thoughts and practices.

When Baba was in India, he was often in seclusion and inaccessible. So his Western followers relied on circulars and newsletters to keep them up to date, and most especially on correspondence with the mandali. Over the years, numerous letters winged their way back and forth between Mehera, Mani, and others close to Baba and those of us who found ourselves thousands of miles away from his ashram. I cherished this correspondence. Not only was I deeply fond of Mehera and Mani in their own right, but they also provided that precious, tangible link to Baba that seemed important even when I felt his presence intangibly.

June 4, 1958

Dearest Mehera,

Everybody seems to be suffering from a general letdown after Baba's departure for Australia, and they also are feeling a bit isolated from people, since many of them live off in the country or in places where there are no other people close by who are personally acquainted with Baba. I finally told one of them to go find a rabbit or a bird to talk to if he was lonesome since God was in them as much as in people...

Our thoughts are constantly with Baba, as are our hopes that his journey back to you has been an easy one.

I haven't felt much like food since I came home. The flight up to New York was a very rough one, despite the most beautiful, clear weather. I think it was just the heat waves coming up from the ground. All I could think of was Baba telling me

I mustn't jiggle or bounce, and there wasn't a thing I could do about it unless I wanted to go for a quick hike in the air at ten thousand feet up, and since I have apparently not reached the plane where such things can be done in solo fashion, I just had to sit still (relatively, that is).

Baba might be amused to hear Kari Harb's farewell to me at the airport. I had said to her that the baby was kicking so much, I was sure it had four feet. So when she said good-bye, she said, "Well dear, I am sure that you won't have a bit of a problem when the baby arrives and that everything will go smoothly. Just remember, dear, that we'll love it... even if it is a centipede!"

I find at the moment that I am having a great deal of trouble typing baby instead of BABA. However, I guess the two are pretty synonymous anyway.

Off I go! Love to all, and dearest love to you!

G.G.

About a month after the sahavas, Baba sent personal instructions to each of us who had attended, and they were to be followed from June 10 until the anniversary of his silence on July 10. I received four. I was to repeat audibly, five hundred times a day, the following: "Beloved God, Thy will has come to pass in that all our Baba has declared will soon come to pass this year." I was to give up one cherished habit, and I was to be ready to quit my job when the time was "ripe." I was also told not to correspond with either Baba or Eruch until further notice. Still, news about events in India reached us through the intimate network of his followers.

On the evening before Silence Day, Baba held a gathering of two hundred people in Meherabad and showed them several films, including the one I had taken in 1956 in New York, Myrtle Beach, and California. Mehera, who had not seen it before, sent me a warm telegram expressing her pleasure with it.

By July the district around Baba's ashram had already suffered through several weeks of a relentless drought. The fields were parched, and crops withered before they could ripen. Villagers focused their eyes on the horizon in hopes of glimpsing rain clouds and saw instead the specter of famine. In desperation, they came to Baba, who asked that a dhuni fire be lit at midnight on the ninth. Almost as soon as the flames flickered to life, the skies opened and rain began to fall... and fall... and fall. It rained so hard and long that rail service to Mumbai was suspended. Mani wrote to me that when the next morning dawned, the

trees and gardens looked reborn, and the birds were singing loudly as if to proclaim Baba's glory.

On that newly fertile morning, when the dew hung like pearls and seeds stirred to life, Baba told the gathering, "I have come not to teach but to awaken." He was, for the first time, presenting the world with his "Universal Message." This and "The Highest of the High" would be the two seminal messages of his advent.

#### Universal Message

I have come not to teach but to awaken. Understand therefore that I lay down no precepts.

Throughout eternity I have laid down principles and precepts, but mankind has ignored them. Man's inability to live God's words makes the Avatar's teaching a mockery. Instead of practicing the compassion He taught, man has waged crusades in His name. Instead of living the humility, purity, and truth of His words, man has given way to hatred, greed, and violence.

Because man has been deaf to the principles and precepts laid down by God in the past, in this present avataric form I observe silence. You have asked for and been given enough words - it is now time to live them. To get nearer and nearer to God, you have to get further and further away from "I," "my," "me," and "mine." You have not to renounce anything but your own self. It is as simple as that, though found to be almost impossible. It is possible for you to renounce your limited self by my grace. I have come to release that grace.

I repeat, I lay down no precepts. When I release the tide of Truth which I have come to give, men's daily lives will be the living precept. The words I have not spoken will come to life in them.

I veil myself from man by his own curtain of ignorance, and manifest my glory to a few. My present avataric form is the last incarnation of this cycle of time, hence my manifestation will be the greatest. When I break my silence, the impact of my Love will be universal, and all life in creation will know, feel, and receive of it. It will help every individual to break himself free from his own bondage in his own way.

I am the Divine Beloved who loves you more than you can ever love yourself. The breaking of my silence will help you to help yourself in knowing your real Self.



All this world confusion and chaos was inevitable and no one is to blame. What had to happen has happened; and what has to happen will happen. There was and is no way out except through my coming in your midst. I had to come, and I have come. *I am the Ancient One.*

After giving the "Universal Message," he told all present that his recent trips to America and Australia would be his last visits to the West. Many of us found this hard to believe and hoped perhaps his meaning was not in our language, but his. However, as the years passed, it would become clear he had meant exactly what he said. \

During this period in 1958, Baba's inner work appeared to be intensifying. Mani wrote that the atmosphere around him could be compared to sitting quietly on a volcano. Sometimes the volcano erupted. Once when a domestic problem was brought to his attention, Baba responded, "Why do you worry over a trivial thing like that when the whole world is at stake!"

I don't know whether he was speaking of the inner world or the material world, or both, since they seem intrinsically joined. The world seemed relatively quiet on the surface, but in retrospect we were all sitting quietly on that volcano, the lava boiling covertly toward the top, where it would surface in the years that followed.

Here in the States, it was the South that seemed most likely to explode. Desegregation efforts were polarizing the nation in what felt like a thematic reprise of the Civil War era. The same pattern of events seemed to repeat itself over and over: The government would order that schools be integrated, governors or mayors would respond by closing the schools or barring the way to minority students, mobs would gather and fling insults and rocks at each other, and troops would be called in to restore peace. The civil rights movement was gathering both momentum and media attention. It would soon spread from Confederate-flag-waving counties in Mississippi, Alabama, and Arkansas to every state in the union. It seems to me that one of the beneficial characteristics of the ubiquitous television, one of the advancements of the Machine Age, is its ability to shine a glaring light on our defects and pretensions.

The other national concern was Cuba, located only ninety miles from Florida. There an insurgent named Fidel Castro had declared "total war" against dictator Fulgencio Batista, with help from a loyal cadre of guerrilla fighters. The unstable politics of Cuba and the as-yet-unclear plans of socialist Castro were cause for some alarm in these Cold War years, when communism within miles of our own democratic shores

seemed an ominous threat. Castro started out as a moderate, but within a year, he would design a radical Marxist state. His triumph would usher in the creation of the only communist state in the Americas, and Castro quickly became one of the United States' main antagonists.

The rise of Fidel Castro was the start of years of conflict between our two countries, one of which brought the world to the brink of nuclear war. We would have been astounded then to know he would still be in power over forty years later, one of the most enduring leaders of our times. Cuba remains the only orthodox Marxist country in the world.

The economy had people unsettled too. We had been experiencing a serious recession since spring, and unemployment had now climbed to over 7 percent, the highest in many years. My father, at sixty-five, was one of the few doing his best to join the ranks of the unemployed. He tried again to retire that year but just couldn't seem to get out of his work harness. President Eisenhower asked him to prepare briefing materials for a Middle Eastern oil summit, an enormous and pressing task that consumed all his time and energy. Mother, meanwhile, was still trying her best in Woodside to create a dream home out of a nightmare house. She wrote to me regularly about her progress.

Our road is almost done and certainly makes the place look much better. I am going to pave it up to the barn as a surprise for Daddy. I figure your family and we may have some twenty years of the pleasure of this place before I leave the body, and I do everything with that in mind.

My own work continued at the Asia Foundation in the Carnegie Building, a building I especially remember because of one brief encounter I had that year. A terrible storm was raging when I arrived one day, so I hurried into the lobby and into the elevator, where a very nice lady and I began to talk about the weather. We chatted on about a variety of topics, just like old friends, until we reached her floor. I had been thinking throughout that the woman seemed familiar, but it wasn't until she got off and the elevator doors closed behind her that I realized she was Eleanor Roosevelt, the former First Lady and widow of President Franklin Roosevelt. I never forgot Mrs. Roosevelt's kind and open manner or the way she made me feel so instantly comfortable with her. In that short moment, I caught a glimpse of the compassion that had so earned the respect and love of the American people. Just that year she had topped a Gallup Poll as the most admired woman in the United States.

I discovered later that Mrs. Roosevelt had an office in the Carnegie Building, and I wondered what history-making work was being

completed there, a few floors beneath my own. At the time, she was on sabbatical from her position at the United Nations, but her humanitarian convictions found many other outlets. She was lobbying for civil rights, maintaining a long-distance dialogue with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who was in the South working for desegregation. And she was planning a trip to the USSR to interview Premier Khrushchev for the *New York Post*.

In her daily newspaper column, Mrs. Roosevelt, like many people in America, was also monitoring communist expansion in Europe. She was especially concerned about Hungary, where the Soviets had used massive force to crush popular uprisings against communist control.

The year before, 1957, it looked like the Soviets would expand beyond Europe and, in fact, beyond Earth itself. At the beginning of October, the USSR launched Sputnik, the first space satellite. Today, with spacecraft probing the distant planets and footprints imprinted on the moon, it's hard to understand the excitement generated by Sputnik.

But Sputnik was never merely a satellite. It was a turning point for the United States, both psychologically and technologically. Suddenly Americans felt woefully behind their communist adversaries, especially in education, and more specifically in science. So when Sputnik was fired into orbit, it was like the starting gun in the space race, a race that climaxed in the moon landing twelve years later. The United States established NASA in 1958 to administer the exploration of space, an exploration our leaders were determined to dominate.

Like the rise of the industrial age, the takeoff of the space age raised certain philosophical questions. People debated whether it was time and money misspent and whether the conquering of space would ultimately reap rewards or regrets. Baba's perspective on the matter was quite clear:

Whether men soar to outer space or dive to the bottom of the deepest ocean, they will find themselves as they are, unchanged, because they will not have forgotten themselves nor remembered to exercise the charity of forgiveness.

Satellites would rapidly advance global communications. In 1958 I had an experience of how a much simpler form of communication was powerful in the hands of the Avatar.

My baby was due at the end of October, and I was experiencing a long and difficult labor. On October 22, a cable arrived from Baba. He wanted to know how I was and asked that we wire him immediately when the baby was delivered. At exactly the moment the cable arrived,

so finally did the baby boy - all nine pounds, four ounces of him. I saw Baba use telegrams for his work over and over, and his timing was always perfect. Later he sent another telegram, delivering his "sanction and love" to baby Mark.

When Mark was two months old, my parents set out on a farewell tour of Europe and the Middle East to visit people and places associated with Dad's work. In Beirut, the government of Lebanon decorated Dad with the Order of the Cedars of Lebanon award for his long years of devoted service on behalf of all the people of the Middle East.

In January of 1959, while Mom and Dad were in Saudi Arabia, Dad got a telegram from King Saud saying he would like to see him in Jiddah. So Mother dashed off to India to see the Emperor, Meher Baba! He had been working intensely in seclusion, and when someone asked when he would come out, he replied, "I am really the only one who is not in seclusion. It is the rest of humanity that is in seclusion - and I have come to make it emerge into eternal freedom."

Mother asked Baba for only a glimpse of him, knowing that one moment in the presence of the Master is worth lifetimes, but Baba offered her five minutes! And once she arrived, he allowed her to return the next day and spend hours watching him give darshan.

During her visit, the subject turned to my baby. Baba wanted Mother to assure him that Mark was as beautiful as he'd promised, so she showed him a photograph. Mother wrote to me that he "chuckled" over it and studied it for a while. Reading that at home in New York, I felt grateful and blessed that my first child should have such a welcome into the world. However, when Mother tried at my request to get Baba's advice on Mark's education, he grinned broadly, twinkled, and would only say, "Oh, there's plenty of time for that!"

At the time Mother left the States, I was in a predicament in New York. The lease was up on our apartment, and my husband and I had been unable to find a new one. I was no longer working, and he had been talking about relocating to the West Coast to seek better employment opportunities. No decisions had been made yet, and we seemed to be in limbo. Mother used some of her precious minutes with Baba to ask about our dilemma, and he told her not to worry about it, that he would take care of it. So I simply tried to relax and leave it all to him.

After Mother's visit, I received another letter from Mehera.

Dear Charmian,

We had a very happy surprise to receive the pictures of young Mark. Beloved looked at each study with loving interest

and picked out two of the studies He liked best, though young Mark looks cute in all his different expressions...

You write in your letter about Mark's baptism. Baba says you should do as you think best so that Jay too may be happy about it. You should not worry in the least, for as you know, Baba is God and above religions.

Beloved says that Mark is His God-son and His nazar is always on him. When he grows up, Mark will come to know that religions don't matter, only Truth (Baba) matters - so again Baba says do not worry about anything but keep happy in His Love...

Lovingly,

Mehera

Mother and Dad returned to the United States still determined to make a go of it with the house in Woodside. In 1959 my husband and I made the decision to move to California to try to make a better life for ourselves. Mother and Dad invited us to stay with them until we got settled, an idea that seemed quite practical at the time.

There were eight of us living together in Woodside, and then there was the ninth, the most difficult personality of all - the house itself. My husband and Mark and I were almost immediately swept up in the chaos that enveloped it, like Dorothy and Toto pulled into that spinning tornado. Everything electrical seemed possessed - the washing machine, dryer, garbage disposal, deep freeze, stove, furnace, shavers, even the baby's bottle warmer. Anything with a motor also got in on the fun - the lawn mower, pool vacuum, and water pumps. Then came the march of the bugs - ants, bees, yellow jackets, and oak moths followed by the parade of animals, including gophers and snakes.

Complicating every crisis further was the clash of personalities among the eight of us, made worse by our strenuous circumstances. In addition, things weren't working out financially for my husband and me. We weren't certain whether we should even stay in California. I finally wrote to Baba, who cabled that we should stick it out until the end of November. That was three months away, and I thought I could just bear it.

In August more news of Baba reached us, this time through Mani's *Family Letters*, and it was good news indeed.

What is more wonderfully reminiscent of real "old times" is something we have not seen for several years, something we had resigned ourselves to never perhaps expecting to see: Baba walking back and forth to the mandali's unaided and unaccompanied. The sound of that sudden clap so dearly familiar

and we run out to find Him walking over to our cottage, open umbrella in hand and with a not-so-noticeable limp. We are not quite used to all this and can still find ourselves joyously startled when He suddenly gets up and walks over by Himself to another room. This is not only contrary to our most optimistic expectations, but contrary to the emphatic opinions and advice of eminent doctors and specialists who had been concerned in the matter and knew the extent of the injury. One of them who has seen the transformation said, "It is exactly the condition that would have resulted from the operation we advised. It seems He has performed His own operation!"

During this period, my son, Mark, was trying out his walking legs for the first time, and I was toddling along with him, trying to learn the right steps of parenting and hoping I wouldn't stumble too badly. One day I took him to a park, where I learned a lesson I've always remembered. I was talking to another mother when Mark started toward a slide and began to climb the ladder. When I ran to fetch him, the other mother called out, "Where are you going?"

"To rescue him and get him down," I explained.

"Why?" she asked. "My son slid down at age one."

I looked at her both puzzled and frightened.

She explained, "Your job isn't to stop him from climbing. It's to stand underneath and catch him if he falls."

From that brief encounter in the park, my parenting philosophy took root. Let the children climb and let them do it alone. But be there to catch them if they fall.

While I worked to learn the keys to successful parenting, Mother and Dad continued their exertions to shape a life around the house in Woodside. Now financial troubles were added to their woes. Consulting jobs promised to my father unexpectedly fell through. He and Mother calculated their newly strained finances and concluded it was impossible to maintain their beloved dream home. Mother wrote to Baba, and that's when he told her to sell the house "as it has served its purpose."

Mother sold the house like lightning and arranged for Dad and her to move to an apartment in San Francisco. The dream was over, but so at last were the years of stress and sacrifice trying to realize it. Mani told us that when one of Mother's letters detailing some of these Woodside woes was read to Baba, he said, "It has to be, for lovers like her have to share some of my suffering happily."

In spite of his dramatic improvement since the car accident, Baba's suffering continued. In 1960 he was in seclusion doing his universal

work when he developed a most painful case of shingles on the right side of his tongue, palate, and face and his right ear. I wondered at the coincidence that my son Mark - Baba's God-son - came down with it at the same time.

The year 1960 was one in which the tensions of the Cold War escalated and began to hurtle toward some sort of inevitable confrontation. The problems started early in the year when an American U-2 spy plane was shot down over the USSR, and its pilot, Francis Gary Powers, was taken prisoner. The United States admitted it was flying reconnaissance missions over the USSR, but the confession did little to appease Premier Khrushchev. He revoked his invitation for President Eisenhower to visit the USSR, and more importantly, the entire affair led to cancellation of a planned Paris summit meeting. Relations between the USSR and the United States deteriorated even more after that. Khrushchev visited India that year, but his itinerary, alas, did not include Meherabad.

At home there was more mob violence and vandalism over attempts to integrate schools, and there were several sit-ins by blacks in cities throughout the South.

All these issues, and more, were hotly argued on television in the historic televised debates between presidential candidates Richard M. Nixon and John F. Kennedy. It was, to many analysts, the first time television decided an election. The charismatic Kennedy emerged from the debates the proclaimed winner and proved it later, in November. It was he who would bear the burden of the most perilous and climactic moment of the Cold War, and his death would be a tragic consequence of our political violence.

As the beginning of the new decade passed, my little family and I moved into a large development in San Francisco called Stonestown, where we prepared for a new child. Our second son was born in the evening of September 5, 1961. We had learned that Baba liked names beginning with the letter "M," presumably because it is so close to the primal sound of *Om*, so we named our boy Michael to go along with our other "M" child, Mark. His middle name was Terry, after my father. Michael was greeted with the same joy and warmth in India as his older brother had been. A few months later Mehera wrote to us:

Michael with awakening curiosity must be taking an interest in other things besides eating and sleeping. As this will be his very first Christmas, I am enclosing Beloved Baba's picture special for him. Mark must be a proud elder brother wanting to show him off to everyone.

Reading your letter, I had a chuckle about the discussion you and your husband had over naming the baby - whether it was to be Mary or not - and Baba must have looked on with an enigmatic smile, knowing all the time that it would be Michael.

Although I hadn't seen Baba for three years, other Western followers proved luckier. Early in 1962, my Sufi companions Kari and Joseph Harb traveled to India with the intention of settling there to be close to Baba. Kari wrote of seeing pictures of my family and said that everyone commented on the "Asiatic" features of little Michael. She said the women mandali all decided he must have been a Buddhist monk, but Baba only smiled and remained silent about the "previous" identities of Michael and his brother, Mark. As distant as I was, I nevertheless glimpsed Baba's responses to my children through the thoughtful and prolific pens of my companions in India.

Kari also reported that she asked Baba about the Arab-Israeli conflict, expressing her grief that such a sacred part of the world would be in a state of such turmoil. She wrote that his smile disappeared when she mentioned these problems, and a look of sad thoughtfulness replaced it. So Kari hastened to ask, "Is it like the Bible says, 'This too shall pass away?'"

At that, Baba's face brightened again, and he smiled and nodded emphatically, "Yes, yes, yes."

The animosity between Israel and Arab states has continued ever since, with renewed vigor in recent times. I still take hope in Baba's promise that it will all pass, although we cannot begin to guess his timing.

There were many more conflicts Kari could have asked about. One of the most dramatic took place in the divided former capital of Germany. To restrict the flow of refugees, East Berlin was sealed from West Berlin with a concrete and barbed-wire wall, guarded by East German and Soviet troops. It soon became known as the Berlin Wall, and many an East German died trying to scale it to freedom. The wall became a symbol of two worlds set apart. East and West were separated by only a few meters, and yet the distance between them was unreachably vast.

It seemed as if so much those days was measured by East and West. East and West Berlin. Eastern Europe and Western Europe. Eastern and Western religions. West and East Pakistan. Only Baba seemed interested in dissolving these superficial differences and establishing one borderless humanity.

Of all the *Family Letters* from Mani, none was more joyously received than the one that arrived in March of 1962:



I know how much you are looking forward to this letter in which I promised to tell you your fortunes for 1962: whether or not you will see your Beloved... Beloved Baba wishes me to tell you that He will give His company to His lovers, Easterners and Westerners alike, for one week in November.

At last! I anxiously awaited more details, and steadily they began to emerge. Baba planned to give darshan in Pune at the Guruprasad bungalow, a residence the Maharani of Baroda had offered to him for his personal use. The gathering would be exclusively for his lovers and those who were close to him in his love, not for the general public. As Baba was in strict seclusion, he asked us not to seek interviews, advice on personal matters, answers to questions, or spiritual discourses.

As time passed, the week for the gathering was reduced to four days, but we would be allowed to stay in Pune for seven days to tour those places associated with his incarnation. Seven days or four days, it didn't really matter to me. Even one day with Baba would be heaven. I felt it would be enough just to see him and gaze again into his lovely eyes.

As the end of summer approached and the gathering grew nearer, I began to turn my attention to travel arrangements and all the other details such a trip entails. I went about my tasks energetically, in a state of bubbling happiness over where they would lead. But at the end of August, I was momentarily sobered by one of the most extraordinarily sad situations I have ever encountered.

Ilona Piller was a very sweet Hungarian lady whom I'd hired to help take care of my new baby and me when we returned from the hospital and who continued to babysit for Michael as he grew older. Early on, Mrs. Piller showed me a picture of her daughter Hajna, a chorus girl in San Francisco and one of the most gorgeous women I had ever seen. Several weeks later, she told me how happy she was that Hajna was engaged to be married in July. Her fiancé, Geza deKaplany, was a handsome doctor who had been a Hungarian freedom fighter. He was also, although no one knew it at the time, dangerously disturbed.

Early one August morning, I received a phone call from Mrs. Piller that was as shocking as any I've ever received. She was crying hysterically, beside herself with agony. When her story finally tumbled out, it was almost too ghastly to believe.

DeKaplany had tied her beautiful daughter to a chair and tortured her, painting her with acid and slashing her with a knife. The entire time he threatened to go do the same to her mother if she screamed. Hajna kept silent as long as possible but finally could bear it no more. Neighbors heard her screams and sent for the police, who arrested her husband while Hajna was rushed to the hospital.

Mrs. Piller was calling me from that hospital, where Hajna was in very critical condition. After calming down a bit, she asked me for help. Mrs. Piller, confronted now with the prospect of staggering medical bills, had heard that newspapers sometimes helped people in financial straits by printing their stories and gathering donations. She wondered if I could find such a paper.

This crisis was certainly the most appalling I had ever experienced, and I tried to focus on what I could do and how I could help. Thankfully, Mrs. Piller had given me the direction I needed.

With Mother's help, I contacted a reporter from the *San Francisco Chronicle*. The reporter, her photographer, and I all sped our way to the hospital. During the ride, I told them all I knew about Mrs. Piller and Hajna, stressing Mrs. Piller's kindness and sincerity. When we arrived at the hospital, the reporter took Mrs. Piller to a restaurant for a private interview, while I waited outside.

We then returned to the hospital, where Mrs. Piller asked me to see Hajna. I entered the room and found the once-beautiful girl lying silent and unresponsive. There was almost no resemblance to the photograph I had seen months earlier. Her skin and face were burned black, and her hair was spread out in a fan above her head, all pale lime, white, and orange. I stayed only a minute or so to whisper a silent prayer. Then I withdrew to leave Mrs. Piller alone with her child, whose life was fading even as she watched.

The news photographer took no photos, realizing they would be unsuitable. As time went by, the media did all they could for Mrs. Piller, even finding her a job that allowed her to rent a place near her daughter.

The newspaper printed my phone number so that people could volunteer their help. There were few calls, and the Hungarian community itself refused to offer any assistance. Ensuing media coverage of the grisly events had scared them away. There was also the not-uncommon view that when something this dreadful happens, the victims themselves must be dreadful people and are somehow responsible.

It's a callous view, yet it unwittingly intuits the law of karma, in which past and present actions determine our future experiences. Ultimately we must conclude there are no real innocents and no victims and that everyone in some way gets only what they themselves initiated in a past life. But this doesn't seem to me any reason to withhold our compassion! I wonder how people are ever to learn if they are not loved and taken care of, even when suffering necessary consequences.

I took great comfort in remembering that Hajna was Meher Baba's child too, and though we must suffer in our search for God, he never

gives us more than we can bear. He was right there with her all of the time, supporting her internally with his love.

Lovely Hajna died a month later, at the end of September. Her brutal ordeal resulted in California's first trial for murder by torture. DeKaplany seemed so transparently insane that the jury found itself unable to vote for the death penalty. He was given life imprisonment, was paroled after thirteen years, and was allowed to emigrate to Taiwan to practice medicine. The workings of karma are often unfathomable.

When I first heard Mrs. Filler's story, I of course wrote immediately to Baba, although he was in seclusion and I didn't really expect an answer. But to my surprise, I received the following letter from Adi:

Ahmednagar

Sept. 12, 1962

Dear Charmian:

Though I was so pleased to receive your letter of August 29, I was at the same time shocked to read the gruesome details therein, and especially the newspaper cuttings.

Considering what you wrote in your letter about the Piller family, I made bold to send it over to Baba at Meherazad, though generally I do not disturb Him in His seclusion.

On a suitable opportunity, your letter and press clippings were read out and the photos shown to Him, and He was touched to hear the contents and see the photos. Baba tells me to convey to you His Love.

I would ask you to convey to Mrs. Piller that she should have courage and fortitude and, since the event had to take place, to face up to the tragedy and remember Baba (God) with a sincere heart in this unbearable calamity. I know words could hardly give solace to her aggrieved heart. She will know that beloved Baba, the Master of the Universe, was informed and His thought will bring peace to her daughter.

I am sure our ever-compassionate Baba will help her inwardly to brave this utmost agonizing occurrence.

Love to you and Mrs. Piller.

Yours as ever,

Adi

The Piller incident provoked the same question that has tested the faith of spiritual students since ancient times: "Why should misery perpetually exist on earth in spite of God's infinite love and mercy?" Baba was asked this question too, and he replied:

The source of eternal bliss is the Self in all, and the cause of perpetual misery is the selfishness of all. As long as satisfaction is derived through selfish pursuits, misery will always exist. Only because of the infinite love and mercy of God can man learn to realize, through the lessons of misery on earth, that inherent in him is the source of infinite bliss, and that all suffering is his labor of love to unveil his own Infinite Self.

The age of the seventh Avatar is the most arduous age of this cycle. It asks much of the lover of God. Spiritual unity is obscured by self-interest. Man's inhumanity to man reaches the darkest, most vile depths. People of charity, mercy, and wisdom are no longer the rule but the exception. And it seems as if no one - atheist, aspirant, or anything in between - can avoid the atrocities of the times, for they confront us either directly or indirectly every day.

But every experience Baba gives us, including the most abhorrent, is for the sole purpose of our learning. Through the terrible days with Mrs. Piller, I came to understand more deeply what is expected of us. Not to join in the cruelty, of course, but also not to join in the grief. To be as helpful in our actions and as elevated in our thoughts as possible. To trust and know that everything is part of God's plan and every experience ultimately benefits everyone involved.

This age has its challenges, but also rare and sacred opportunities. The Avatar has come. That's why so many people have incarnated, why the world's population has swelled almost beyond its capacity. The Avatar brings enormous waves of divine energy. He initiates a bright future out of the depths of the Kali Yuga.

Baba had said that throughout time, there have been those who knew of this approaching age and what it portended. Mehera reported a story Baba told about when he was Rama. At the time of Rama, people were rather good, and the world was very different from what it is now. But Baba, as Rama, told his devotees and disciples that it would not always be so, that when the Kali Yuga, or Iron Age, came, it would be the worst and most destructive in the world's history - that there would be much war, degeneration, and depravity. The word spread among his followers, and they came to him and begged, "Lord Rama, please do not let us incarnate in the dreadful Kali Yuga!"

"So," said Mehera, "here we all are."

A few weeks after Mrs. Piller lost her beloved daughter, the entire world was forced to confront the consequences of Kali Yuga madness and the collective fear it instills.

The crisis was triggered by aerial photographs of Cuba taken by our intelligence operatives and passed on to President Kennedy. They showed that Soviet nuclear missiles had been secretly installed in Cuba, well within range of major population centers in the United States. Events tumbled along like unstable dominoes after that. Kennedy considered invading Cuba but decided to start with a more moderate approach. He ordered a blockade of Cuba and demanded that Khrushchev withdraw the missiles. Khrushchev refused and sent Soviet ships steaming toward the blockade.

This initiated perhaps the most dangerous week of the twentieth century. While it inched its way agonizingly along, America's school children practiced air-raid drills, families scurried to convert basements into fallout shelters, and hardware stores rushed to restock flashlights and batteries. Everyone knew what was at stake. After all, much of America had just finished one of the year's most popular books, *Fail Safe*, a story about the accidental launching of a nuclear strike against the Soviet Union. This time, however, none of us expected that any strike, American or Soviet, would be accidental.

The Cuban missile crisis erupted the week before I was due to fly to India for the East-West Gathering, as I was busy preparing and making travel plans. I had been especially concerned about leaving my two boys, who were then only one and four, too young to make the trip with me. I searched around for someone I could trust to care for them while I was gone and finally procured the services of a wonderful English nanny named Nancy.

I was particularly worried about one-year-old Michael, since he had been sick for the better part of his first year. Michael was a very thoughtful child who would stand for hours observing people, sometimes imitating their motions. He was a sweet boy but somewhat distant. Never would he come running across the floor with his arms outstretched for his mother, as most children would. He seemed to live within himself. I had never really been away from Michael, or from Mark either, and the looming separation tugged at my heart. Still, all I could do was place their well-being in Baba's hands.

As the Cuban drama unfolded, I suddenly became desperately ill with a high fever and pneumonia-like symptoms. I was so ill, I wondered if I was even going to be able to get on the plane. Miraculously, the sickness faded just as my departure date dawned.

While Mother and I flew off to India, the missile crisis deepened. The U.S. Navy boarded and searched a Soviet freighter en route to Havana. One day later, an American U-2 reconnaissance plane was shot

down over Cuba. Fidel Castro believed an American invasion of his country was imminent and urged the Soviets to make a nuclear strike on the United States if it happened. The world held its breath.

On October 28, Khrushchev finally agreed to withdraw Soviet missiles from Cuba, and Kennedy in turn promised to lift the blockade and pledged the United States wouldn't invade Cuba. It was the same day we arrived in India.

Things were not much cheerier in India, which had been struggling with its own crisis during this historic week. Communist Chinese troops had crossed India's northern border, and the entire nation of India was mobilizing for war.

During these fiery days, Baba was suffering intensely from his universal work. He knew what the rest of us did not - that Soviet field commanders in Cuba had been authorized to use nuclear weapons if the country was invaded. The fate of millions of people was hanging in the balance, just as Baba was drawing his lovers to him from all over the world.

Later Baba told us it had been touch-and-go throughout the missile crisis and that he had carried the whole burden on his own shoulders. "The world situation is weighing on me," he said. "Jesus Christ suffered... I suffer."

He held up two fingers with a minute space between them and told us, "You have no idea how close the world came to nuclear holocaust. And how hard I had to work to prevent it."

As we were all taking our places under a bright canopy at the East-West Gathering, the missile bases in Cuba were being dismantled, and President Kennedy reported to the nation that "progress is now being made toward restoration of peace in the Caribbean."

I think today of Myrtle Beach and a woman swollen and clumsy with child, who tumbled over a log and catapulted into the air. I think of so much of the world driven by fear and ambition, seemingly propelling itself toward its own destruction. And I think of the Perfect Parent. He gives us the freedom to stumble. He allows us to ride that perilous slide. But if we find ourselves falling... he is there to catch us.

## *The Longed-for Embrace*

When we arrived in India, thousands of lanterns lit our path to Meher Baba, and colorful patterns of fireworks illuminated the night sky. It was the week of Diwali, India's most important and widely celebrated festival and also its most magical. For five days at the end of the lunar calendar, both Hindus and Sikhs celebrate the lifting of spiritual darkness by garlanding their homes with flowers and filling their windows with small earthen lamps that suffuse the night with a radiant orange glow. To Hindus, Diwali commemorates the return of King Rama and Queen Sita from their fourteen-year exile, as told in the great Hindu epic, the Ramayana.

But the legends and traditions of Diwali date back to a period before history was written, and its trail of light is the progress through centuries of human longing. The lamps symbolize the Truth and Light within us; the flames represent purification and the eternal existence of God.

I was traveling to India with three other women - my mother, Helen Webb, and Della Ault. None of them was in top form. Mother had a variety of physical ailments, Helen had back problems, and Della, who was elderly, had sprained her foot during our stopover in Hawaii. Since they weren't able to carry their own luggage, I found myself trudging through every airport like one of those much-burdened donkeys, loaded with carry-ons, camera bags, and layers of suitcases. I came to suspect that Baba had given me my own illness before we left so I would be free to help everybody else. They needed even more help after we arrived in India because each one of them became quite ill.

We arrived in Mumbai late at night on October 28, 1962, and were greeted by people from the local Baba community. We spent a luxurious night in the Taj Mahal Hotel, yet as always in India, one could easily be overcome by the view outside, where the poor and disabled wandered the streets in rags.

In the morning, we were joined by other Westerners and took a train to Pune, where we checked into the Turf Club, near the racetrack.

Nearby was a little lane where, years before, Baba used to walk with the mandali. We were feeling closer and closer to him with each moment.

Mother and I stayed in a little cabin at the Turf Club that seemed to be a magnet for nature's creatures. Among those was a chipmunk that scampered in through a high window and fell into our empty bathtub. It tried its best to climb out, but its claws scratched futilely on the slippery sides. Finally we captured it and turned it loose. On another night, I saw what looked like a large worm crawling across the floor. I grabbed a bunch of tissues and reached down to pick it up, only to see a hood flaring out from the "worm's" head. I realized that what I was holding in my hand was a baby cobra! What to do? Since I already had a firm grip on it, it made no sense to drop it, so I carried it outside and threw it in the grass.

On Tuesday, October 30, the Westerners were to be taken on a grand tour of all the locations in Pune associated with Baba's life. As we gathered at the buses, I was reunited with so many old friends that I felt, to paraphrase Churchill, I'd never been smooched so much so fast by so many. Among them were also many people new to us, each of whom we greeted with an embrace.

We began our tour with the house where Baba grew up and proceeded on to St. Vincent's High School, where he was a student, then on to the tomb of the Perfect Master Babajan, to the neem tree where she sat with Baba after giving him Realization, and to Bund Gardens to see a mango tree where they also met. Our next stop was Deccan College, the school Baba was attending when he had his first encounter with Babajan. Then we ended at the beginning, with a stop at Sassoon Hospital, where Baba was born.

At that time, Baba lovers were building the new center that would become their meeting place in Pune, so before returning to the hotel, we took a drive by the construction site.

It was evening as we were driven back to our lodgings, and the flickering lamps and exploding firecrackers of Diwali made it seem like a trip through Fantasyland. We passed Guruprasad twice but caught no glimpse of Baba and reminded ourselves to be patient, as our meeting with him, scheduled for the morning, was now only hours away.

Wednesday, October 31, was the time Baba had set aside for a special visit with the Western women. He did this even though people from all over India were streaming in to see him, and he'd been greeting them from three in the morning until midnight. We were driven to the door



of Guruprasad, where Eruch greeted us and ushered us inside. I wrote home to my family:

Inside was Baba on the couch and Mehera, beautiful in a gold and purple sari, Mani in a sea-green sari, Goher in a sky-blue sari, Meheru in blue, red, and gold, and of course others of our old friends, Rano, Kitty, etc.

Baba greeted each of us with an embrace. And tears flowed down many happy faces, too full of heart to contain their joy. Then all of us sat on the thick carpets and had about two or more hours of fun and discourse with Baba.

There were about sixty Western women gathered that morning, yet Baba made personal comments and asked many questions.

"Charmian, are you worried about your husband and children?"

I replied, "No, Baba. They're your beloved infidel and God-children, not mine, so they're in your hands!" That got a chuckle.

I made no mention of how I had earlier fretted over leaving them and how especially concerned I had been about my introverted Michael.

Baba spoke of the missile crisis, the India-China conflict, and the suffering they both caused him. Brief but bitter, the conflict was a result of those still-unresolved territorial disputes between the two leaders who passed Baba in a car on the day he suffered his second accident. Nehru had questioned the borders shown on official Chinese maps (which were drawn up by British colonial rulers), leading Chou En-lai to reply that his government never recognized the borders and to then lay claim to fifty thousand square miles of Indian territory. Skirmishes over the land triggered a surprise Chinese invasion at the end of October that ended millennia of peaceful coexistence between the two Asian giants. Baba told us, "Maybe the Chinese will come and you can't leave."

When we applauded loudly, Baba said, "Well then, I shall leave you all to guard Guruprasad, and I'll go to Meherabad."

But his mood turned serious when he explained:

You see, such things are hard on me, being in both the Indians and the Chinese. I must hurt one to please the other. This is simple. But your Cuban situation was hard. It sat on my head like a rock. And what a fine balance - the least little thing. But now it is fixed and all right... But I carry this whole burden... I look all right on the outside, but on the inside I am like a volcano. The world situation is weighing on me. Jesus Christ suffered. I suffer.

Baba's statements on the war impressed me deeply. I had never really considered before what we do to God when we attack each other, how we place Him on a cross between us. That day I had a glimpse of what we force Him to endure. On the other hand, I had to remind myself that it was God Himself engineering all this for the ultimate benefit of mankind. His love is not for the few, but for all.

I decided then that the one gift we could give Baba in return was exactly what he'd always requested - for us to "be happy," to try to maintain a positive, joyous attitude about life and the world around us. In the years to come, I would remember his comments about being within us, and if I was feeling sad, I would say to myself, "Oh, Baba is feeling that. I don't want him to feel sad. I want to make him happy." Then I would try to cheer up, for his sake. After a while, it began to work splendidly.

The question of how to love Baba more fully was one that consumed all of us. In *The Awakener* magazine, Filis Frederick described it well in her beautiful account of our homecoming:

All our hearts concentrating on Him, and His return of that love seemed to fill the room with an actual radiance and peace. What a long-awaited moment - to see our dear Master again, and here - in His homeland of India! He felt at home - and somehow I think we all felt "at home" too, especially together as we were now, with His precious dear family of Eastern women ...

As the room vibrated with Baba's living Presence, all problems - even those unknown ones buried deep in the mind - seemed to dissolve. The only problem I felt was: "How can I love Baba more? How can I fill my heart up with love for Him? All that love comes from Him... I am helpless even to love Him without His grace."

When our time with Baba was up that day, we returned to the buses while Baba and the mandali prepared to greet the Western men. People were flooding into town for the next day's gathering. I could hear buses passing by, loaded with devotees chanting Baba's name in loud huzzahs of exaltation at reaching their Master.

As we approached Guruprasad the next morning, the area was bustling with activity. Festive stalls lined the street outside, offering an array of merchandise and pamphlets to those attending the afternoon session. The air was filled with excitement; it was our own local Diwali in the midst of a celebrating nation.

This day marked the very first gathering at which I sat by Baba in his chair. In the past, I had always lingered in the back, partly because I was taking photographs or filming. But I was also a bit shy, and in addition I can see now that I was somewhat smug. Since I had spent so much time with Baba, I let others who had had less contact with him go first. Earlier Baba had looked at me and asked, "Why aren't you up here next to me? Why aren't you coming up like the others?"

In his own way, Baba made me realize that I had some pride in this area, even though I had disguised it as magnanimity. So when the opportunity arose this time, I *ran* to him. I went directly to the front and sat right at his feet.

This morning's meeting included both Western women and men. It was a serious and lighthearted session, all at one time. I remember a companion asking Baba if he'd slept well and his responding, "I cannot go to sleep now or I would wake up in seven hundred years!"

When he told another woman not to worry about her child but to worry about him, I took it as good advice for me too.

One of the men sang "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands," a favorite of Baba's, and then Baba gave discourses on the meaning of true death and the role of the Perfect Master in bringing Hafiz, and all of us, to Realization.

Baba then told us, "Come back to the Meeting Hall at two forty-five. There won't be any discourses or explanations then. Just sit there quietly and be witnesses. There is nothing beyond sitting near me, loving me, remembering me." When we did return, a huge canopy, or *pandal*, had been erected behind Guruprasad.

That day I wrote home:

There is just no way to explain the general atmosphere here - except that it's like New Year's Eve, Christmas, and St. Valentine's day all rolled into one. So much love is generally floating about that as a feeling of it, all I can say is that at our meeting with Baba today, we all felt like a thirsty man who had come from forty days upon the desert with nothing - to find ourselves in a green oasis with a table of plenty before us.

Having carefully warned everyone for several days that we always have a gigantic storm when Baba works with us, all us old-timers arrived at this mammoth tent behind Guruprasad to join the couple of thousand or so Indian close followers of Baba, all dressed in our Sunday best, as they were. The colors were dazzling - beautiful saris, the men's turbans, Sikhs with their

lovely beards carefully curled into nets, Brahmins, everything. And this gigantic canopy in red, yellow, orange, green stretches back into a vast hall supported by red and white poles. An orchestra. And such a lot of joy.

The Westerners were seated at the front, with the women on one side and the men on the other. When Baba appeared on the platform, we all stood and shouted in one thundering voice, "Avatar Meher Baba ki jai!"

Eruch spoke out a greeting from Baba, which was translated into Hindi, Marathi, and Telugu. Baba formally announced that this was "the first day of the East-West Gathering" and then asked the Easterners to approach one by one and put their heads on his knees. He would pat each one, and that would be his "embrace." In my letter, I described what happened that day:

Each one laid their head on his knees in passing, usually garlanding his neck as they did so! This all sounds simple, but was not. The crush of those trying to reach the stage was fantastic. The mandali and the Westerners, men and boys, were hard put to keep all of them moving. At times people became frenzied and literally hurled themselves or their children on and at Baba, having to be forcibly restrained by the mandali.

I was fascinated with how the workers managed this huge crowd of people so anxious to come close to Baba. It was like being around a movie star when .. a mob suddenly decides to rush forward. It could be very frightening, and it had to be handled efficiently but gently.

The Parvardigar Prayer was read, and immediately after, a strange phenomenon took place. Until then the sky had been clear and the weather calm but, as I wrote, suddenly...

The sky opened... and down came a cloudburst, which nearly drowned us, and I am not kidding. The ground flooded, and the clothes of all of us were saturated, our hair stringing down.

The rain brought not despair, but merriment. None of us had packed rain clothes, but still we laughed all through it.

It had been a long time since I'd seen that much rain come down that quickly. The canopy was of thin cloth, so it didn't protect us from the torrent of water. When the rain finally passed, Baba called the Western women to the stage and asked the women mandali to take us to their room and give us dry clothes. We followed along and watched as they pulled out practically every garment they had and started to dress

us. We found out later that before the women mandali left Meherazad, Baba had insisted they pack all the clothing they could carry, even though they protested they couldn't possibly use so much.

In a room at Guruprasad, the Westerners donned Eastern saris, Punjabi garments, and Mother Hubbard-looking outfits made of combinations of unlikely odds and ends. That day I wrote home:

We were each garbed in some fashion - what fashion we never figured out, only that we looked hilarious. I wish I'd taken pictures. They'd have been worth a fortune - in blackmail, if nothing else! Mother in a vivid red and white pinstriped shirt and vividly floral and plaid skirt of multi-colors that reached to her ankles was a sight to behold. The rest fared no better, and me in an orange blouse with white polka dots and a maroon skirt.

On the very first day, Baba had already mixed up East and West in what was surely more than a quirky fashion statement. When we were all newly attired, Baba sent word that we were to come at once to take his darshan, and he gave us each a special embrace.

Through all this, the Easterners sat quietly in their seats, still soaked yet focused completely on Baba, while the line of people continued to pass endlessly in front of him. Many placed gorgeous leis around his neck, some decorated with real gold and silver. When the leis numbered up to five deep, Eruch would strip them off and place them on a chair, where the pile just grew and grew. If they hadn't been removed from Baba's neck, he would have been buried.

I was especially interested in two men who sat on the dais by Baba's chair. One was a yogi dressed in saffron robes and a turban, with the white beard and kindly face we traditionally associate with a saint. The other was a young man garbed only in a dark red loincloth and deep blue belt. This man had the body and face of a young god. We came to learn that both were highly regarded by masses of people in their areas. Yet they came and bowed before Baba and attended his meetings since they both accepted him as their true Master. Baba said they had not yet experienced divinity and that he had to constantly warn them not to permit others to bow down to them.

As I watched, the crowds continued to grow and press forward. The mandali and others formed a human chain around Baba so the river of people would quickly pass by him and out of the pandal. On the women's side of the tent, the chain was made up of young Indian girls, but the crush became so bad that two brothers were added. This created something of a dilemma since custom prevented Indian girls from holding hands with young men. To solve the problem, I offered my own

services, since I was a Westerner, a married woman, had worked for Baba for years, and was quite sure he wouldn't mind. It took some convincing, but it was finally agreed that I could step in as the neutral link between the Indian girls and boys.

Later that day, seven women mounted the stage and performed Baba's *arti* (song of praise and dedication). Each was dressed in one color of Baba's flag. Baba then asked a Western dancer to join the women, further integrating East and West. As dusk was falling, music filled the tent, and thousands of people in the audience joined in singing the *arti*, while the Western woman sat facing Baba and the seven Eastern women swayed with trays of lighted camphor. It was lovely beyond description.

The next morning we arrived early so we decided to tour the stalls by the front gate. They were selling Baba lockets, photos, calendars, artwork, and song recordings. I was particularly struck by an oil painting of Baba that I considered one of the first really fine portraits of him I'd seen. Everyone else seemed to agree, for as soon as I bought it, they all wanted one too. There was only one picture at the time, but I suspect more were produced to meet the unexpected demand.

There were already five thousand people from India at the gathering, and that afternoon even more would pour in. Baba warned us, "Be ready for the rush and struggle!" We could only imagine what he did to prepare. He told us:

When I give public darshan, the masses don't realize I am in human form. They fall on me. The mandali have to stop them from breaking coconuts at my feet, throwing colored powders and rice over my head. They do not realize the *kum kum* (colored powder) can get into my eyes.

Baba also spoke of the rainstorm:

I was infinitely bored, so I brought on the showers. I would like to retire to my Sound Sleep State for seven hundred years. But I have to give my Word to the world. The heart of the world has to feel the impact of my Word. I can't help it, though I would like to go to sleep for seven hundred years!

After querying people about who got wet in the storm, Baba continued, "When you feel completely wet, soaked in love for God, it will be so glorious that even the brilliance of the sun will be dim before that glory. You must become saturated with love."

I was already feeling saturated with love, but I was always ready for more. That afternoon I took my place under the pandal with six thousand others and listened to longtime disciple Darwin Shaw read a

message from Baba entitled "My Dear Children." Then Baba asked the Eastern women to come forward, and the darshan began.

I had never been good at sitting still for long periods, and there were times during the gathering when I grew restless and even bored. My interest was in Baba, not in the pageantry around him, so as the thousands of followers made their way slowly to his chair, I would often leave my seat and roam about. I was careful, however, not to move into spaces that seemed reserved for Baba's close ones. Mani, who was always sensitive, noticed this and said, "But we always think of you as one of us!"

She said this only because I had traveled and lived with them. Yet I was grateful for her comment because it freed me of self-imposed boundaries. From then on, I sometimes wandered to where I could see different views of Baba or find better camera angles. I would drift into the small room on the side of Guruprasad where the men mandali sat, or I would enter the women's area of the bungalow. From there one could see Baba's back. Sometimes he wore his hair loose, but at gatherings like this, it would be braided very neatly, and we could see the little pigtail down the back of his head. We could also see the faces of people passing in front of him.

Years later the Sufis performed plays on phases of Meher Baba's life, and one was based on the East-West Gathering. A most touching scene featured Mehera at this very spot in Guruprasad, singing about seeing Baba reflected in the eyes of his lovers in front of him. Written by Hank Mindlin, the song was entitled "A Thousand Faces."

I see his face in a thousand faces  
See his light in a thousand eyes

It was the afternoon of this second day when the group from Australia arrived, having had to travel part of the way by ship. The government had commandeered their plane when India was put on war alert. The Australians filed up to the dais, overflowing with joy at their first embrace from Baba. The gathering was concluded that day with another deeply moving arti ceremony.

The next morning, villagers from Andhra and some fishermen and their families came to see Baba on the porch. They had been at the bus station about to leave Pune without having had an opportunity to receive Baba's 'embrace. They were both surprised and overcome when they discovered that Baba knew this and had sent for them. He asked them to sing for him, and they did. Eruch said that Baba was very moved by the devotion expressed in their song. He gave each of them prasad and an embrace.

The Sufi group had a chance to meet separately with Baba that morning, and he gave us specific instructions on how to live our lives fully for him. He said:

Do your duty, but don't feel worried about it. Remain 100 percent happy, 100 percent honest! Do the best you can; then at night, relax and forget about everything. Keep happy - that is your duty! And remain honest; don't compromise. When you do, you get a fear complex in the heart.

There were three young men in our group who were having a little trouble not worrying at that point since they had no clarity about what careers to pursue. Baba told each of them what to do. He advised Jimmy (later Brynner) Mehl to continue with his plans to be a dancer; he approved Gary Mullins's plan to become a teacher and Khaled Al-Faqih's idea to be a doctor.

In the afternoon, we gathered again with the Easterners, and a *ghazal* (short love poem) was sung and the group from Andhra staged a dramatization in which one man narrated Baba's life in song. Baba told us that he would give the Westerners a parting embrace on the morning of the fifth. Originally we were scheduled to part from him on the fourth, so this extra day was an unexpected bonus. We were thrilled!

Later qawali songs were performed, and Baba once again expressed his love for them and went to great effort to give us more understanding of their depth. He said, "They are full of love - it is the language of the heart."

He told us too that we were the select few who dared to drink the wine of love and that great daring was required of us. "One must be prepared to carry one's head on the palm of one's hand. It is no joke to love."

By the time Baba met with us the next morning, the fourth, he had already embraced three thousand people, and he looked exhausted. But he had told us that the love of his lovers renewed him, and today he proclaimed, "Now you will help."

How could we help but help; how could we help but love him? Soon afterward he did indeed seem refreshed, but he has said God is insatiable, and this day He wanted more. Baba noticed the Westerners who were absent and asked for them. That included my mother and Helen Webb, who were ill with the "Pune flu" and unable to get out of bed. When told that they were both sick, Baba decided to send for them anyway, saying it would be their last chance to see him in his physical form. So I rushed over to our cabin and said, "Hurry and dress, Mother! Baba wants you to come."



Mother bravely rose from bed and pulled her clothes on. She was worried not about herself but about transmitting the flu to Baba and the others, and I told her Baba had already thought of that. He'd instructed her to wear a scarf over her mouth. When we arrived at Guruprasad, Mother took a chair at the back of the hall. But Baba had her move to a chair in front of the open door where the breeze was streaming in. Mother could only think to herself, "If I have to die, this is the best place to do it, close to the Master."

As the morning session ended, Baba called Mother up to him, looked at her sternly, and said, "Now this sickness - you don't worry about it. This too will pass."

Mother responded that sickness or no, she was glad Baba had sent for her. The morning went on, and Baba caught Dr. Kenmore yawning. When Baba tweaked him about it, he replied he was just relaxing. Baba said, "If I relaxed, everything would collapse."

That afternoon was to be the last of the darshan. It was very hot, but Baba put the weather into perspective, saying, "If you were inside the sun itself, that would be no comparison with the heat of love within the true lover of God. There God the Beloved doesn't allow one to use fans, but here Beloved Baba does permit you to have fans!"

Baba had both his "Universal Message" and the Prayer of Repentance read out and asked us to forget and forgive everything of the past.

His next request came as a complete surprise to the mandali. For the first time in twenty years, he allowed them to come one by one and bow down to him. I didn't know the purpose of it, but I couldn't help feeling that something deeply significant was taking place.

The crowds continued to stream past Baba that day, and I especially remember an Indian Gypsy tribe, their clothes shimmering with embroidered mirrors. They had walked twelve miles to be there. Baba told us:

These are nomadic tribes. I have visited their huts. Each one has a photo of me. They worship me as the living God... I am in the least one of them and in every one of you. No one is low and no one high in my nazar. Because God is One, I am One, you are all One; there is no difference of tall or short, man or woman, beautiful or ugly, rich or poor. All are One in my nazar.

By this time, the queue extended a third of a mile outside the gates, and Eruch reported there were seven thousand people present. Among those was a family bearing a lock of hair they had cut from the head of their baby. Baba explained that it was a custom to cut a child's hair and drop the locks in the Ganges, but for his lovers, the Ganges was here at his feet.

We women were invited to go inside Guruprasad to say good-bye to Mehera, Mani, and the other women mandali. By then it was 4:30 p.m., and the line to Baba was as long as ever. ·

Finally the gates of Guruprasad were closed, and those remaining had their chance to pass in front of their living Lord. And then came the arti, the final one of the darshan. Baba ended the formal gathering by saying, "All of you - take me with you."

In *The Awakener* Filis Frederick observed:

As we left the Pandal, it was twilight, with spectacular colored clouds piled high around a slender moon. I looked back at Baba's white figure seated in His chair under the soft glare of the lamps, still surrounded by the colorful throngs of His lovers. The Avatar in person was still showering His love, after having embraced over ten thousand souls. Truly He is the inexhaustible Source of Grace in our time. Later, we heard the crowds had broken down the closed gate of Guruprasad in their intense desire to see Baba, who then, in His mercy, drove out among them in a car and in this way gave all of them a glimpse and His blessing.

Later that evening, Khaled had the idea that he and the other two young men who had received career guidance from Baba should prepare a short comedy skit based on the three professions Baba had approved for them. The idea was mentioned to Mani, who in turn took it to Baba, who in turn gave his permission. Now all of a sudden, what had been a fanciful idea had become a scheduled event. The curtain was going up in twelve hours, we didn't even have the ghost of a script, and the audience was none other than God Himself. We had been told never to worry, but still...

We put together a little scriptwriting team and sat on the porch until late at night trying to figure out how to cleverly execute our ideas. We finally came up with the concept of an incident involving Lord Krishna and one of his gopis. Jimmy Mehl wrote of that night in *The Awakener*:

One by one, the lights and the houseboys were taking leave. Ideas began to flow slowly - desperately; after many false starts, it wasn't until midnight that we got things sketched mentally. Due to the hour and the vague states of mind, trying to rehearse was like trying to make a pincushion jump by sticking it with a pin! We all collapsed in good-humored despair and vowed to rehearse in the morning. Little did we know that this was also not to be.

The poignant "September Song" goes, "and the days dwindled down to a precious few." The next morning, we were down to the most

precious day of all - our last one with Baba. On the morning of November 5, we gathered with him at Guruprasad, where Baba admonished us not to be sad and reminded us again to take him with us in our hearts. He also told us that the next day we would travel to Ahmednagar to visit his final resting place at Meherabad and his residence at Meherazad. Then he asked, "How many are not going to Ahmednagar?"

My mother was among those who raised their hands since she was still ill with the flu and had visited these places before. But Baba looked at her and stated emphatically, "You *must* go!"

Therefore, sick as she was, she dutifully made plans to travel to Meherabad. Looking back, we felt it was important to Baba that Mother be part of this trip so she could lay down a pattern for Sufi pilgrims in the future.

It was after this discussion that it came time to perform our spontaneously conceived and ill-rehearsed little skit. I was the announcer, and I began with the title of the show, which was "Forgive Us Lord Our Little Jokes on Thee and We'll Forgive Thee Thy Great Big Joke on We."

After that, doctor-to-be Khaled performed a farcical examination of Baba in which he found such ailments as "an enlarged heart," "high grace pressure," and "coconuts on the knees and babies on the foot," the latter a reference to the offerings of his Indian followers at the darshan. Khaled's big moment came when he declared, "Baba, I must check your throat condition - please open your mouth and say 'Om.'" But in spite of Khaled's terror that he might actually do it, Baba only cringed in mock horror and solemnly gestured, "No, no, not now."

Baba laughed and seemed highly amused by Khaled's performance, and at the end he tweaked his cheeks and gave him a loving embrace.

The next skit featured Lord Krishna, a gopi, and a cow, but the gopi (Khaled garbed in a sheet) tripped over the audience, and the entire cast somehow skipped the last third of the script. I had the final lines of the play, but they no longer made sense without the third act, so I improvised and came up with something like, "The moral of our story is that all love is dependent on the Avatar's Whim, and only he has love enough for all!"

Baba had great fun with the performance, blunders and all, and he gave us each an embrace. So in the end, it couldn't have gone better.

Afterward Baba invited us to join him outside, where his brother Beheram took movie footage. It was a light moment, made all the lighter by Beheram, who kept directing his brother to liven things up with a few gestures.

We then went back inside, where Indian musicians performed songs for us, including a farewell piece for the Westerners requested by

Baba. It was a song about a bride leaving her mother's house to go to her husband's home. Baba gestured "tears are falling" as the music poured forth, and indeed, there were tears falling.

When the music was over, he asked each of us to come forward for our final embrace. Some approached him directly, while others flung themselves down full length in front of him. I was watching this with the Australian poet Francis Brabazon, and each time someone prostrated themselves, he would say, "Ah! Another one for India."

When I asked him what he meant, he said those who flung themselves down in the Indian manner were likely to be reborn in India in their next life. I have no idea if he was joking or if he really knew something.

I received my embrace from Baba and was leaving his presence for what I thought was the last time at the gathering when he snapped his fingers and gestured, "Come!"

He wanted me to return right away and sit at his feet for a second time. I was battling hard to remain cheerful, and he knew it. He looked down at me with great compassion, and the person reading his gestures said, "Charmian, Baba wants you to know one thing."

I said, "Yes, Baba?"

Baba replied, "I want you to know that you and Ivy have really done something for me in this lifetime."

He looked off in the distance, and his eyes got that mischievous twinkle in them. Then he looked back at me and added, "But you'll never know what it was!"

I left him sitting in the hall of Guruprasad in his long, white sadhra, his kind words and twinkling eyes forever emblazoned in my heart. I suppose my soul knew then what my mind could not: that I would never be with him again.

Sometimes in the years since, when life has gotten a bit tough or when I've felt that things just hadn't turned out as well as I'd intended, I'd say to myself, "Well, Baba said I had really done something for him. And that will be quite enough for this lifetime." Maybe once I simply brushed a speck of dust off his sandal. Whatever it was, if Baba wanted me to know about it, I would. And although I sometimes can't help wishing that I understood more, for now the knowledge that something *was* done will suffice.

At the last minute before we left Guruprasad, Khaled told me he was concerned that he hadn't accurately described to Baba his thoughts about becoming a doctor. In truth, he said, it hadn't been his idea but his mother's. He himself didn't know what profession he preferred. And he wondered: If Baba knew the full story, would his response be the same?

I told him, "Baba is still here. Go quickly. Get in the doorway, and maybe he'll let you ask your question."

Khaled went back in, and Baba said, "Yes, what is it?"

Khaled asked his question, and Baba said, "All right, if Baba wants you to be a doctor, will you do it?"

"Yes."

"Then be a doctor."

Years later Khaled told me how grateful he was that he returned to ask that question. "Do you realize," he said, "that's the last time I ever saw him?"

As Baba wished, we set out the next day on a trip to Meherazad and to Meherabad to see Baba's tomb. At Meherazad, Mother and I couldn't help but reminisce about our trip there in 1948, over fourteen years earlier, when we'd first met Baba. The ashram had a sense of timelessness about it, although the garden had grown and changed since our earlier visit, and Baba's room had been moved from the top floor to the first floor after his car accident. Still, this visit evoked old memories for us.

Francis Brabazon had become a permanent resident and gave tours of Meherazad. At the front gate, we encountered the mast named Twelve Coats waiting for Baba to return. He was one of those rare beings totally absorbed in love of God and barely aware of the world around them. Masts often have idiosyncrasies, and Twelve Coats's habit was just that - he wore twelve coats at one time. He would also sometimes smoke a whole batch of cigarettes at once. Yet we could sense his love for God and see it in his luminous eyes. He did a little dance, and someone asked him, "Who is Baba?"

He replied, "Baba is my God."

We then traveled to Baba's ashram at Meherabad, the site of a great deal of Baba history. Baba has called it the "Mecca of tomorrow" because it will become a holy destination for future generations of pilgrims. At the East-West Gathering, he said, "Meherabad, where I will rest after dropping my body, is now like a desert. After one hundred years it will flourish... People from all over the world will want to visit it in their lifetime. It has a definite atmosphere." It was here that he began his silence in 1925 and where he wrote the book that for many years was considered missing. We now know Baba said that 90 percent of his book was in *God Speaks* and the remaining 10 percent was in *The Nothing and the Everything*.

In Meherabad we saw Mohammed, who lived with Baba for many years and was one of his five favorite masts. Back in 1937, Baba even took Mohammed to France for his work there. Mohammed seemed

very happy to see us, and we gave him lots of little gifts.

We then walked up the hill to visit Baba's tomb-to-be. It was a simple affair, capped with a shining white dome. On the corners of the roof were symbols of the world's great religions, and over the doorway was inscribed "Mastery in Servitude." We were all allowed to enter the tomb and walk around the crypt. I am glad now for the veils that conceal the future from us. Had I realized that it was here, under this dome, that I would next be in the presence of Meher Baba's form, I don't know if I could ever have left him.

Before we came to India, Baba had said there would be no restrictions on sightseeing. Therefore Mother, Helen, Della, and I had arranged to visit both New Delhi and the Taj Mahal at Agra. Still, someone at the gathering had told us that now Baba was opposed to sightseeing and that we should turn our tickets in. Baba heard about it and told us instead, "It will be fine for you to go. It's all working out."

Since the day the Chinese had invaded northern India, commercial planes had been mobilized to transport the army, and it was difficult to get travel reservations. But sure enough, the army completed its transports as our trip approached, and we were able to fly to New Delhi after all.

As it turned out, we four were the only ones allowed by Baba to travel there. Once we got to New Delhi, a wire arrived from Baba conveying his love and asking us to wire him on our departure. Evidently, after we left Pune, he said that the war front would be quiet as long as we were in New Delhi. As I said in a letter home, I felt somewhat as if we should stay in Delhi indefinitely, for the sake of India. Nevertheless, we eventually flew to Hong Kong to begin our journey home.

An Indian Air Force colonel who was a disciple of Baba later told Mother, "When we were in Pune, those of us from the military were worried about the war... I went to Baba and asked if he felt we should cut short our stay at the sahas and return to our posts. If so, would he graciously give his permission? Baba said, 'No, stay for the entire sahas!' He then pointed at you, Mrs. Duce, where you were standing across the room, and said to me, 'As long as she is in Delhi, it will be all right.'"

Later that month, on the twenty-first, the Chinese troops did withdraw from their attack on the Indian border, declaring a unilateral cease-fire.

When I had last visited India, it was shortly after World War II, and the sidewalks and streets were teeming with beggars. Even in the posh Taj Mahal Hotel, the floors of the marble-lined halls were carpeted at

night with the sleeping homeless. I found the particular atmosphere of this poverty emotionally wrenching. I had seen poverty many times in my life, in my travels in South America and the Middle East. But nothing was as sad as what I saw in India in 1948 because there it was as if the people had given up hope. In the Arab countries, poor people still seemed to be alert, curious, and blessed with initiative. I didn't see that in India, where the people seemed defeated and withdrawn.

It was a different India that greeted me in 1962. The degree of poverty, or at least overt poverty, had greatly diminished. We still encountered it, but not at every step, as it seemed in 1948. I could see that things had improved a great deal, although I doubted much of this would be readily apparent to the eye without prior experience. I was especially taken with the progress that had been made in eliminating the caste system. It seemed to me that India had worked very hard at finding work for the poor and liberating them from ancient bindings. Seeing the results of these efforts was touching. I wrote home that my feelings had completely about-faced and that I had fallen in love with both the country and its people.

While we were in India, Baba told all of us that he knew we were worried about our children and our loved ones we'd left at home. But he also told us that he was in all those babies crying everywhere in the world and that he would take care of them. He wanted us to concentrate on him while we were there. So I tried very hard to do that. Nevertheless, as the time to return home approached, I was naturally excited and anxious to see my two sons again.

When I arrived, Nancy, the English governess, spoke to me about Michael, knowing how concerned I'd been about his remoteness. She had fared no better than I. She said, "Charmian, I'm sorry, but I don't think that child of yours is ever going to come to anyone."

But a sahas has no ending point. And the pandal under which we were cleansed by Baba's rain and reshaped by his love stretched far beyond the boundaries of Guruprasad.

A week after I returned, Michael suddenly came running across the room and climbed into my lap. He put both arms around my neck in a big, warm hug. And I was happy - so very, very happy.

## *A World Upside Down*

When I returned from the East-West Gathering, I returned to the same house and family, but not to the same life. Already the forces were at work that would disassemble and reconstruct that life in ways that would require my deepest strength and understanding. Similar forces would also shake and transform America.

In the first months after the sahavas, life continued as usual, and I was immersed again in the duties of motherhood and the contributions I could make to Meher Baba's work in the West. A month or so after we returned from India, Baba invited us all to write him one letter. I decided to ask about some issues regarding my children and whether I might sell the photos taken at the sahavas and donate the profits to his work. His response came through Eruch.

29 December 1962

Meherazad

Dear Charmian,

Your letter of the fourteenth was read to Beloved Baba, and He indicated His satisfaction to hear from you that you feel refreshed after the trip abroad.

Baba sends His LOVE to you, Jay, Mark, and Michael and wants you all to live happily in His LOVE and remembrance. In reply to your queries, Baba directs me to inform you that:

- 1) You can send the pictures from the trip to different groups for sale orders, and any small profit from it should go to Murshida for her to use as she feels best.
- 2) You and Jay decide mutually for the schooling of the children.
- 3) Your suggestion of dear little Michael's baptism is okayed by Baba.

Baba wants you NOT to worry about things that seem to worry you for the day and are no more the next day. He wants



you to keep happy in His LOVE always, knowing you and yours are very dear to Him.

Yours Sincerely,

Eruch

*Not to worry . . .* How many times over the years did he plead with me, and all of us, to follow this simple directive, and yet how difficult it always seemed!

My worries were chiefly personal and seemed especially insignificant when I looked at the daunting challenges facing my father. Shortly after I arrived back, he was asked by the government to intervene in a crisis with Saudi Arabia involving the newly formed country of the Yemen Arab Republic. It centered around one of those ancient and complex territorial disputes so common in the Middle East.

Since World War I, the north area of Yemen had been ruled by an Islamic imam. Southern Yemen remained a part of the British Empire. In 1934 the tribes of north Yemen, determined to have their own leader in power, allied with Saudi Arabia, which eventually took control of part of the region. During the thirty years that followed, north Yemen remained isolated and under-developed. By the 1960s, there were still no paved roads, few doctors, and widespread illiteracy. In 1962, when the imam died, a group of army officers staged a coup and founded the Yemen Arab Republic.

The Saudis were furious with the United States for giving official recognition to the revolutionaries, and the State Department asked Dad to meet with Saudi Arabia's acting leader, Prince Faisal, to try to reestablish friendship between our two countries. It wasn't a job Dad wanted. His health was poor, and he tried to convince the government to send someone else. They remained adamant that he was the best one for the job, although they did agree that Mother could go along and watch over him.

That winter turned out to be one of the coldest in centuries in the Middle East and Europe, and it tested my parents' endurance to the utmost. Nevertheless, they did their best, and their efforts ultimately restored relations between the Saudis and the United States. This friendship was invaluable to the United States in future years when we became increasingly dependent on Middle Eastern oil reserves. During the Gulf War thirty years later, it was America's connection with the Saudis that saved the United Nations' gulf alliance from unraveling and enabled UN forces to defeat Iraq.

As Mother and Dad struggled to mend an international rift, I wrote to Baba and to Mehera and the other women mandali about my life raising Mark and Michael and enclosed some photos of the boys. Mehera

was a faithful correspondent, and her letters often carried the routine reminder from Baba about worrying.

16 February 1963  
Meherazad

Dear Charmian,

I read your letter to Beloved Baba. Baba is happy with you and does not want you to worry. His nazar is on you.

We were delighted with the lovely pictures of the children. Mark seems to grow sweeter and brighter and resembles you more day by day. Little Michael Terry is darling. He looks so wise, as if already he has all the answers!

Yesterday we were shown the movie of the November East-West Gathering. It has come out most beautifully in colors. It brought back vividly the days you all spent with Beloved Baba.

Baba's Love is with you and the dear children.

My love to you,  
Mehera

As 1963 began, international organizers were planning their own "gathering" of sorts, the latest production of the World's Fair, to be held in New York City. The fair would run for two years and host exhibits and visitors from around the globe. Jane Barry Haynes had the idea that this World's Fair might be the perfect venue for spreading Baba's message of Love and Truth. She envisioned a booth that would feature photos of Baba and literature about his work. It would be a staggering task because the fair was already designed and scheduled to open in a year. Still, Jane was committed to trying.

Baba approved the project and asked Jane to find space in the Western section of the fair. He must have "turned his key" because a small space was procured in the American Interiors Pavilion. After Baba cabled his lovers everywhere to help, several groups, including Sufism Reoriented, gathered funds and sent them to Jane. She and her companions went to work printing hundreds of thousands of pamphlets about Baba, which included his "Universal Message," and they began scheduling coverage of the booth for the coming two years.

While this project of global unity proceeded, it was divisiveness that characterized my own world. My relationship with my husband, long troubled, was fracturing along many lines that seemed irreparable. After months of soul-searching and futile efforts to resolve the problems, I became convinced that my marriage couldn't continue on its present course. In July both Mother and I cabled Baba about it, and he responded with this telegram:

1963 JULY 28  
AHMEDNAGAR

CHARMIAN C/O IVY DUCE

RECEIVED BOTH YOUR CABLES STOP SINCE MARRIAGE IS  
INTOLERABLE YOU MAY SEPARATE STOP DON'T WORRY MY  
NAZAR IS ON YOU I SEND MY LOVE TO YOU MARK MICHAEL  
TERRY AND IVY

BABA

Thus began a long process of separation in which dreams and ideals were dissolved and life and love were agonizingly redefined. Although I gradually discovered new strengths, in retrospect I believe it would have been impossible to endure this process without the love and guidance of Baba. After receiving his telegram, I began to craft a new life as a single mother of two children, ever mindful of his constant admonishments to not worry and to happily accept our fate. Still, it would be years before I knew true contentment again.

Change was not solely my province - it seemed to be in the very atmosphere those days. Around this time, Sufism Reoriented found it necessary to relocate its center in San Francisco. It had served us well for fifteen years and was especially cherished by Sufis because Baba had visited it in 1956. New owners had raised the rent until it was now beyond our means. In the end, the resolution was a serendipitous and happy one.

We found suitable quarters only eight blocks away and discovered some remarkable coincidences about the new building. It was there that Norina Matchabelli had delivered her first San Francisco lecture on Meher Baba and where Murshida Martin first met Norina and Elizabeth Patterson. It seemed that Baba did indeed have his nazar on us. We moved shortly after Christmas, when the nation was in grief and still reeling from its shock over an event that had taken place the previous month.

November of 1963 remains one of the watershed months in American history. In spite of its date, some historians say this was the point at which the complacent fifties really ended and the tumultuous sixties began. It was the month that President John Kennedy was assassinated and the years of disenchantment and division began.

Baba had foretold this era. At the East-West Gathering, he warned us, "After 1962, everything will be upside down." And in the next few years, that "upside-down-ness" began to manifest in countless ways. Only now, many years later, have I begun to understand the enormity of what Baba was telling us. The changes that have come over the world since have been nothing short of tumultuous.

To me, the forces at work are all about helping humanity move

closer to God. The Avatar of the Age initiated this vast social change to burn away old, institutionalized forms of external control over the individual. Clearly, a great struggle has ensued. But as the controlling power of these external forms dissipates, the individual is freed to look for what is right and true within. And whether one knows it or not, this search is in the direction where God dwells.

In the decades that followed the East-West Gathering, these dramatic changes were most apparent in the West, especially in the United States. But they occurred in the East too, as in the erosion of the caste system in India.

In Western arenas, the ones I'd seen close at hand, the mid-sixties were dominated by struggles between "the people" and those with entrenched power. There were student riots, first in Berkeley, then across the nation, culminating in the killing of four students at Kent State University in Ohio. The civil rights movement against bigotry and the suppression of the Negro was highlighted by Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech before two hundred fifty thousand freedom marchers in Washington, D.C. The anti-war movement, born in the rubble and carnage of Vietnam, was propelled by marches, sit-ins, moratoriums, and protests across America. Crusades against corporate abuses of power gave birth to the consumer movement. The environmental movement brought checks on those polluting our planet. The battle for women's rights transformed laws, workplaces, the media, relationships, and families. Alternative lifestyles, which rejected materialism and "success," were explored. The flight from religion and ritual led to exploration of mysticism, Eastern philosophy, and "New Age" thinking. I remember that in the *New York Times*, author Paul Goodman wrote, "The situation is very like 1510, when Luther went to Rome. There is everywhere protest, revaluation, and attack on the Establishment."

Ever since the sixties, social structures have been in metamorphosis. That unique decade, which continued well into the 1970s, not only marked the end of much that guided us externally but the beginning of a new life of discovery within.

I think this is very much the result of Meher Baba's universal work to bring about the New Humanity. I watched the changes exploding around me, and in my own life, with the sense that Meher Baba had laid down the pattern for it long before. Where the social changes would ultimately lead, I could not know - except, of course, that they would lead to God. Not a God worshipped through rites and rituals, all of which he'd burned in his dhuni fire in 1952, but a God discovered by each of us within ourselves.

When people lose their external signposts, they're in jeopardy for a

while. Many young people found themselves at loose ends in the sixties. They dropped out of college and turned their backs on traditional jobs and careers. They formed communes. They experimented with drugs as part of their search for meaning and enlightenment. But they often grew more disillusioned and confused than when they began. And some of them who were genuinely seeking something deeper in their lives began to appear at the door of Sufism Reoriented.

When these genuine searchers heard about an elderly lady who had been appointed by Meher Baba, a lady who genuinely had their welfare at heart and was qualified to guide them, they went out of their way to contact her. Some wrote or called, others just rang her doorbell. It was in this period that I really began to see the role Baba had in mind for my mother, the Murshida of Sufism Reoriented. She reoriented them toward God and helped them reintegrate into His world. Murshida's work was to guide her students toward productive lives in the external world - lives internally given in service to Meher Baba. This she saw as the highest potential of life itself. Throughout the sixties, desperate young seekers who had sought truth outside the conventions and through drugs came to Mother in droves and were transformed.

In April of 1964, the World's Fair opened in New York with the dual themes "Man on a Shrinking Globe in an Expanding Universe" and "Peace Through Understanding." Humanity continued to dream of peace in a world that had hardly witnessed a single day of peace throughout its written history. That year was plagued by racial violence and riots in major U.S. cities. The nation was horrified when three young civil rights workers were murdered in Mississippi during "Freedom Summer." At the same time, U.S. military forces launched attacks on North Vietnam in response to an erroneous report of an attack on a U.S. destroyer off the Vietnamese coast, and Congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution giving the president greater freedom to authorize combat actions in Vietnam. Protests against our involvement in Vietnam were brewing, especially on college campuses.

Elsewhere, there were the ever-present conflicts in the Middle East, escalating tensions in Berlin, and the prolonged ethnic dispute between Turkish and Greek Cypriots that boiled over in Cyprus.

The 1964 World's Fair, sponsored largely by corporate America, turned out to be an extravagant homage to technology and materialism. We were then at the crest of postwar technology and economic prowess, when Americans were infatuated with the space program. It was also the dawn of the information revolution, and the fair prophesied that rapid, globalized communications would draw people together and break down barriers of misunderstanding.

Organizers carefully planned and buried a time capsule at the fair to be unearthed in five thousand years, providing a sketch of our twentieth-century culture. It included a bikini, birth control pills, a Beatles record, credit cards, and tranquilizers. There was also wood from one of the giant redwoods of Northern California in case they are extinct by the time the capsule is opened.

Amid all the technological and scientific clatter of the fair was an inconspicuous booth that featured the Indian spiritual leader Meher Baba. It was incongruously located in the American Interiors Pavilion, among designer furniture, fabrics, floor coverings, paints, and tableware.

Jane Haynes reported in the *Family Letters*:

The most vital thing standing out in one's mind about Baba's beautiful space is the strong, radiant, loving, powerful Presence that is felt by all who serve. As soon as one enters the circular space, all white and soft and lit so strikingly, one begins to feel the warmth and sweetness of the Beloved's presence. He tells us: *I am with you; I am with you always...* In Baba's little corner, He makes it such a reality that we are newly aware of the miracle of His ever-present omniscient Self

Baba lovers throughout the world had contributed their time and money to making the booth a success, and Baba himself had consciously put his love and attention into the project. When it opened, he sent the following cable:

BLESSED IS THE LOVE OF MY LOVERS IN AMERICA THAT  
HAS ADORNED NEW YORK WORLD'S FAIR WITH MEHER  
BABA'S UNIVERSAL MESSAGE STOP I SEND MY BLESSING OF  
LOVE TO ALL MY LOVERS AND WORKERS WHO MADE IT  
POSSIBLE AND WHO WILL STAFF THE BOOTH FOR THE  
DURATION OF THE WORLD'S FAIR

MEHER BABA

We can't know the results of the Baba booth, but we do have records of some of the visitors' responses, including this letter from a woman who first heard of Baba at the fair and wrote to followers Fred and Ella Winterfeldt:

On this, my first "Christmas with Baba," I am so happy I could shout with joy. For so many Christmas-times, I sought him but could not find him. The abstract concept for God was not enough. I wanted Him in human form; and now, in Meher Baba, I have found Him. He is now so real, so warm and human, so close to me. He is now so real to me that I almost expect Him

to pop around the corner at any moment, so grand, so loving, with that twinkle in His eye - and that warm embrace.

The most popular attraction at the 1964 World's Fair was the General Motors Futurama, followed by the Vatican Pavilion, which featured Michelangelo's exquisite sculpture of the Pieta. It was the most lavish fair of all time, but attendance was unexpectedly low. People had been scared away by high prices and threats of racial violence. We have no exact record of how many people filed by the Meher Baba booth, but estimates put it at hundreds of thousands. In the end, investors lost money on the fair, and many critics panned it as a "cultural desert." To us, it was a triumph.

The fair continued into 1965, and so did the social changes in America. We became increasingly focused on the conflict in Vietnam, and anti-war protests, sporadic and small until then, now spread across the country. In March the first U.S. combat forces landed in Vietnam. In June we launched the first massive bombing raid. In July the number of our troops there was doubled. The protests at home became larger and louder, and the schisms between right and left and old and young grew wider.

I faced my own dark abyss that year and a schism that could not be bridged. After a year's separation from my husband, we were now headed toward divorce. My greatest fears concerned my children's future and how I might best care for them independently. After writing Baba, I received this reply:

1965 JAN 10

AHMEDNAGAR

CHARMIAN

YOUR CABLE AND LETTER RECEIVED BE RESIGNED TO  
DIVINE WILL MY NAZAR IS ON YOU AND CHILDREN AND MY  
LOVE IS WITH YOU

MEHER BABA

The message was ever the same and yet ever new, for our need for reassurance during times of crisis is persistent and his need to remind us of what matters is endless. I steeled myself to be brave for the challenges ahead, a task made much easier by Baba's announcement a few months earlier that he would give darshan to his Eastern lovers in May and to his Western lovers in December. That announcement quickened the hearts of all of us, but it also included a caveat: The darshan was subject to the condition of Baba's health.

Baba was now almost seventy-one years old, but he still maintained a rigorous work schedule. In April of 1965, Adi issued a circular telling us that Baba's universal work had increased manyfold and his universal suffering had increased proportionately. This was now telling greatly

on his physical body, and the mandali reported that they had never seen him suffer so. The doctors believed there was deterioration of bone and muscle in his cervical area. It was a symptom of his love - years of bowing to thousands of people a day.

In spite of Baba's pain, the Eastern sahavas went forward in early May as planned. Even a few Westerners attended, including Joseph Harb, who told us Baba asked after Mother during a walk in the garden. Joseph told Baba that she was despairing because Sufism wasn't growing as she hoped it would. Baba said, "It can't - it isn't the time!" He then compared Sufism to a great oak, which must first force strong roots deeply into the soil to support itself. He said Mother and her group were putting down those roots before the strong Sufi order Baba intended could be built.

After the Eastern sahavas, Baba's health deteriorated further, and in September Mother received the following cable:

AHMEDNAGAR

INFORM ALL CONCERNED AT YOUR END I HAVE CANCELED  
DECEMBER SAHAVAS STOP I KNOW HOW DISAPPOINTED MY  
LOVERS WILL BE BUT I ALSO KNOW MY LOVERS WILL  
ACCEPT MY DECISION WITH COMPLETE RESIGNATION TO  
MY WILL STOP WHAT I HAVE DECIDED IS IN ACCORDANCE  
WITH MY HEAVY BURDEN OF UNIVERSAL WORK AND SUFFERING  
AND IS FOR THE GOOD OF ALL STOP SOMETIME  
SOMEWHERE SOMEHOW I WILL MEET MY OLD AND NEW  
WESTERN FOLLOWERS BEFORE I BREAK MY SILENCE MY  
LOVE AND BLESSING TO ALL MY LOVERS STOP CABLE  
ACKNOWLEDGMENT

MEHER BABA

Mani reported in the *Family Letters*:

There was a look of infinite fatigue and sorrow in His eyes as He announced this. Baba said (in gestures interpreted by Eruch), "The world situation is very bad, and growing worse daily. The pressure of my universal work is affecting my health tremendously, and the pain in my neck is beyond limit. It is the universal Cross that I bear."

We were all deeply disappointed, but as Baba had expected, we trusted that he knew best and accepted his decision. I took a deep breath and simply went forward, hoping, as we all did, that another opportunity to see him would arise soon.

Baba's cable arrived during a period of deep anxiety and great emotional turmoil for me. My failed marriage and the ensuing divorce proceedings were overwhelming, and although I was only thirty-six,



I felt like I had come to the end of the world. I was living north of San Francisco in Santa Rosa at the time, and I remember a particular day when I seemed to reach an emotional nadir.

I walked into the living room and began flipping through the mail that had just arrived. I opened a nationally popular magazine to a photo of a young man that seemed to epitomize for me all I had lost and would never reclaim. He was rolling down a sunlit; poppy-covered California hill, and although I couldn't see his features distinctly, he was obviously joyful. I took one look at the picture, and something about it touched me so deeply that I burst into tears. I cried and cried and cried. Here I was, feeling life was over, and there he was, rejoicing in life. I felt I would never know anyone like that again or experience that kind of carefree happiness. The loss felt unbearable.

Only a short time later, my father fell ill and went into a coma. When Mother cabled her concerns to Baba, he responded that she should resign herself to his will and know that his nazar was on my father.

Dad was in a San Francisco hospital, but since his room seemed more like a cell, we decided to relocate him to a more pleasant nursing hospital in Santa Rosa. We were pleased with the new arrangement because sometimes he opened his eyes, and the room had floor-to-ceiling windows that overlooked a beautiful garden full of the flowers he loved so much. It was he who had first taught me the names of many of those flowers and had shown me how to plant and grow them.

In mid-August of 1965, Mother came up for the weekend, and we spent several hours with my father on Sunday. Afterward, I returned home, and she left for San Francisco. Only a few minutes later, I received the call telling me he had died.

I went to the hospital with a friend, Lilli Remer. I was very grateful to her because while I tended to things, Lilli stood at the side of the room and repeated Meher Baba's name over and over. I know this was a blessing for Dad, as it was for me. In San Francisco, Mother arranged for Halsted & Co. funeral home to collect Dad's body and bring it to the city for his service. When I returned home to make additional arrangements, I was interrupted by an unexpected call from the county coroner, a very angry call.

"What are you people trying to pull! What do you mean, you're shifting the body to San Francisco?"

I stiffened in shock and horror. "What?"

"You're not taking him anywhere! For all I know, you've poisoned him! I'm sending my own men, and we'll perform an autopsy."

It was an effort for me not to simply faint dead away. The coroner's men arrived and carted Dad's body away, and a few minutes later the

Halsted men arrived. I told them what had happened and was deeply grateful for their kindness after the belligerence of the coroner. They made a few discreet inquiries and then disappeared to see what they could do.

A few hours later, Mother called to say that Dad was on his way to San Francisco. Mother and I owe the compassionate staff at Halsted's a debt of gratitude. I was so appreciative of their efforts that years later, when Mother passed away in Orinda, I hired them to handle her funeral, even though they were located miles away in San Francisco.

The night after my father died, when I returned home, I could hear his footsteps all over the house. Although it was soothing to feel his presence, I said to him, "You have to go to Meher Baba." He disappeared then, and later Mother received a short but heart-lifting cable that read:

TERRY HAS COME TO ME

MEHER BABA

My first reaction when my father died was not unlike that of many people who lose a parent, at any age. I wanted to lie down on the floor and pound my fists and scream, "I want my daddy!" That primal response faded with his visit that night and the reminder that death and separation are only illusions. Although I felt the selfish sorrow of not having him with me, the sorrow passed quickly. It's simply impossible to feel as deeply about death when you know there is life after death - many lives, in fact, and many deaths. I worked quickly through my grief over losing my father and delighted in the fact that he was with Baba. I reflected on my lifetime with him, how bright and erudite he was, how unique a father and how rare a man.

The year 1965 rolled toward an end, taking with it my marriage, with all the ideals and expectations attached to it, my father, and my hopes of a reunion with Baba. I dutifully accepted Baba's decision and remained optimistic he would call us to him later.

But healing from the ruptured marriage was a longer, more delicate process. I worked through some of my pain with the help of a psychologist. For the remaining pain, I relied on time and on Baba. Later I read a biography of the Mother, a remarkable spiritual teacher and disciple of Sri Aurobindo. It was comforting to know that she too had an impossible marriage. Over time I realized I had developed strengths, resilience, and even certain wiles in coping with my marital difficulties.

It may seem strange to some people that Meher Baba gave his permission and blessing to a marriage that caused such anguish and sorrow and ultimately disintegrated. Why would he sanction a marriage doomed to fail? When he looks at two people, he sees the big picture - their entire

united past and all the karmic entanglements and debts. Marriage is the closest sanskaric relationship of all, and his concern is not with our superficial happiness but with our spiritual progress and the loosening of the bindings between us. (I might also add that he may have given his permission because I was hell-bent on marrying, and this was the only way to assure my obedience!)

Through the years, I've often seen spiritual Masters give their encouragement to marriages that later (and sometimes sooner) ended in separation or divorce. I've even seen them throw elaborate, joyous celebrations for some of these marriages. It doesn't seem likely they were celebrating the romance and sentimental dreams of these couples. I think they were celebrating the opportunity for balancing sanskaras, those binding impressions left from previous lives together. I suspect "happily ever after" has an entirely different connotation to a Master.

By fall my divorce lawyer was asking me to file for bankruptcy, and Mother was unable to help financially. She'd been left with barely enough to live on, and certainly not in the style to which she had become accustomed, so she decided to move to smaller quarters on Jones Street in San Francisco. Her students came to her rescue and helped her move, but the new apartment was so small she had to give up many of the beautiful possessions she so loved having near her.

To earn a living for my two boys and myself, I enrolled in Sonoma State College so I could get a teaching credential. Mother sold her fine custom-made furniture, china, crystal, linens, art, library, and accessories to help keep us going.

By the holidays, our situation had stabilized somewhat, but we knew it would still be a very difficult Christmas since it would be the first without my father. I invited Mother to spend it with me in Santa Rosa, but she thought she might receive messages or packages at her home in San Francisco so she decided to come a day or so later. I turned my attention to decorations and gifts that might make Christmas as "normal" as possible for my children. I started with the tree.

The boys' father had made arrangements with the owner of a Christmas tree lot to give them a tree of their choice. When we arrived, the boys asked me, "Any tree we want?"

"Yes," I said, as I did mental gymnastics to figure out whether we could afford the difference between a plain tree and one of the flocked ones they were likely to request. Sure enough, that's exactly what they asked for. There were blue and pink trees on the lot, so the owner asked, "Which color would you like?"

Both boys chorused, "Purple!"

The owner and I were nonplussed. I don't think either of us had ever seen a purple tree before, nor could we imagine one. But I was anxious to make this Christmas as happy for the boys as possible.

"Could you?" I asked him timidly.

"I can try," he stammered.

When we came back later to pick it up, the owner told us, "More people have tried to buy that tree than any other on the lot."

It was a lovely pale lavender and simply enchanting.

On Christmas afternoon, I called Mother in San Francisco. No packages or messages had been delivered. No one had come by. She was more truly alone than she had ever been in her life. Our mutual reaction was reflected from a line in an old song: "Thank God we've got each other!"

At home the boys and I had decorated our lavender tree with blue lights and blue and silver balls. It looked like a tall, snowcapped pine tree standing alone in the deep forest moonlight. In a year when the world had been turned upside down and my life had been turned inside out, it was instant serenity. I have never forgotten it.

## *The Flowers Bow Down*

The Master's work has been compared to a divine chess game in which he is the player and people and events are the pieces. Sometimes one can almost feel his hand moving us from square to square and positioning other pieces that will support us, block us, or help us move in new directions. There are times when life is full of those coincidences and "chance" encounters that lead everyone unerringly to their destiny. I saw this especially in the ways new people were led to Meher Baba and to Sufism Reoriented.

In the mid-1960s, there was a sudden explosion in the number of people discovering Baba and, in turn, discovering the Sufi order. My mother's life as Murshida ignited in just the way Baba had predicted. She not only continued her work with her students, but now she counseled thousands of other people who sought her guidance. They were people, like all of us, caught up in a world that seemed to have fallen off its axis.

In 1966 the conflict in Vietnam escalated into a major war and created almost as much havoc at home as it did in the jungles and fields of Southeast Asia. By the end of the year, the United States had four hundred thousand troops in Vietnam, and American casualties numbered in the tens of thousands. At home there were tens of thousands of protesters. Fueled largely by the young and by college students, antiwar rallies claimed the headlines almost as frequently as battle statistics. In March there were parades and rallies in seven U.S. cities and seven foreign cities in support of the International Days of Protest. In May ten thousand people picketed the White House. That same day a rally at the Washington Monument included the pledges of sixty-three thousand voters to elect only anti-war candidates. In August, on the anniversary of Hiroshima, there were demonstrations across the country, including a thousands-strong march to Times Square.

When anti-war protests weren't making the news, civil rights marches were. The cause became more inflamed and complex with the emergence in 1966 of black militants who challenged Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s non-violent, pro-integration stance, thus splintering

the once-united movement. This was the year the term "black power" came into popular use. Also the word "psychedelic."

In an atmosphere of social chaos and psychological disarray, many people were searching for an alternative reality. Drugs, notably LSD and other hallucinogens, were now a national phenomenon. Some of the people who found their way to Murshida had experimented with drugs and discovered that they offered not illumination but only a more vivid form of illusion. She said it was her task to "put these people back together" and guide them to an authentic path toward Truth.

While people fought and marched and protested here on earth, the United States sent up a steady stream of robotic spacecraft probing a way to a moon landing. One of them transmitted eleven thousand photos of the moon's surface, showing that it was strong enough to support astronauts. Another took photos of dome-like formations that proved there had once been volcanic activity on the moon. People barely paid attention - there was enough "volcanic" activity here on earth.

As the year progressed, the bombing raids in Vietnam intensified, there were more American casualties, and people here were becoming shell-shocked by recurrent images of scorched villages, ravaged peasants, and self-immolating Buddhist monks. If Baba had wanted to plunge the world's most advanced and powerful nation into the deepest soul-searching, he had chosen the perfect vehicle.

I was struggling my own way toward peace in 1966, working out my divorce so I could untangle myself from the past and move forward. I wrote to Baba about the details, and this time he responded through Mani:

Meherazad

7-7-66

Dear Charmy,

Your letter, along with the explanatory points concerning the divorce settlement, were read to beloved Baba. Baba says His nazar is on you, and you should not feel nervous in the least. He wants you to complete all formalities and get the divorce finalized, to keep happy in His Love, and remain resigned to His divine will. Baba was very happy at your saying that you are more than prepared to accept His will in all things and that you are not worried one whit about it. Baba is indeed proud of His G.G., of her understanding and love! He wants you to remember that whatever you have to go thru, He is by your side. Baba sends His Love to you and Ivy and to darlings Mark and Mike. Mehera and all of us send you our fondest thoughts and love,

dear Charmy - you've really been thru the sanskaric grinder, but it has brought out stronger than ever the fragrance of your love for Baba! Have noted that you will simply send a cable when the thing is finished.

With heaps of love to Ivy and the children and to your sweet self,

Mani

Mother and I greeted the 1967 New Year with my lawyer's announcement that the final divorce decree had been granted. As far as I was concerned, the institution of marriage was behind me. I never suspected that Baba was strategically moving new pieces into place.

In April he directed Adi to reply to a young man named Duncan Knowles who lived in Nevada and wanted to move to India to serve him. Adi wrote: "Baba now wants you to stay in the United States and use your art of journalism to convey to the Americans His message of Love and Truth... He wants you to come to India and see Him after 1967, when he might permit His Western lovers to visit Him... Beloved Baba sends His Love and Blessings to you."

At practically the same time, a man in Nevada asked Duncan if he would consider driving him to San Francisco. The man didn't have a car, and he had an appointment in the city the following week with a woman named Ivy Duce, whom they had heard was a spiritual teacher under Meher Baba's direction. He even suggested that Duncan could join him in the meeting. So it was my mother who first met my future husband.

Duncan remembers that day in San Francisco as the pivotal moment in which the direction of his life suddenly crystallized:

Murshida turned and looked at me. In the simplest way, she asked, "And what do *you* do, dear?"

The question may have been simple, but the force behind it was like Mt. Everest falling on me. Murshida's question pierced me to my soul. Her very being carried such honesty that she compelled me to be honest in response.

As I stumbled to speak, I found myself searching my vocabulary and testing each word to see if it *was* the truth. Layers and layers of formerly easy-to-give responses simply would not come out of my mouth.

Finally, I said, "Tm... working... to... pay off... my debts."

How silly I must have looked, and how totally shocked I was. In that moment, my life changed. I had found the most

precious thing I could ever ask for - my teacher. More accurately, my teacher had found me.

Murshida invited Duncan and his friend to the Sufi center the next day to see a film on Baba. They did, and after the meeting Duncan began to tell Mother that he wanted to move to California and be with her. Before he could even complete his thought, she said, "I know. But first you must go back and pay off your debts and then make enough money to go see Meher Baba when he calls us. You should also put away some surplus funds because it's not easy to get a job down here." Duncan dutifully returned to Nevada to fulfill her wishes.

That same April saw an even greater escalation in the Vietnam War and the protests against it. More American forces died in the first ten months of 1967 than in all the previous five years of conflict. Efforts by both the United States and the UN to achieve peace were unsuccessful, and the UN secretary-general claimed that continual bombing by America of North Vietnam was causing the impasse. In the middle of April, a crowd of several hundred thousand anti-war demonstrators marched from Central Park to the UN headquarters in New York City. A similar protest in San Francisco drew fifty thousand people. Still, the war continued, and the casualties mounted. The first week of June saw the greatest weekly toll of all - three hundred thirteen killed and over twenty-six hundred wounded.

Ours was not the only country in tumult. In the border-shifting Six-Day War, Israel battled Egypt, Jordan, and Syria, all three of which received aid from Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and Algeria. When it was over, more than eighteen thousand people were dead, and Israel had gained all of Jerusalem, the Golan Heights, the Sinai, the Gaza Strip, and the West Bank. Those were just the territorial results. The defeat of the Arab countries demoralized their people for many years, altered political orientations in the Arab world, and increased tensions between Arab countries and the West. While the turbulence continued in the Middle East, the sleeping giant, China, detonated its first hydrogen bomb.

Shortly after, America found itself suffering through a stormy three-month period that became known as "The Long Hot Summer," a season scarred by the worst race riots in American history, in no fewer than one hundred cities. In July the National Guard was called in after riots in Newark, New Jersey, left twenty-six dead and thirteen hundred wounded. About two weeks later, the worst of the riots exploded in Detroit, causing forty-three deaths and \$200 million in damage. And on it went throughout the summer, until it seemed at times that the



nation itself was in flames and the burning cities were the symbols of a social structure in ashes.

Baba was in seclusion at this time, and his health was increasingly erratic. His devotees everywhere were so concerned that he finally allowed many to visit him at Guruprasad just to see him walk and thus feel reassured. Mani told us in the *Family Letters*:

They stood in rows along both sides of the entire veranda... Smiling and radiant, Baba emerged from His room and walked through the rows of His lovers, striding past them in the "twinkling of an eye," filling their hearts with wonder and joy. They who had never expected to see Baba walk as in the old days could not help calling it a "miracle"!

Mother had continued to correspond with Duncan after his return to Nevada, and in one letter she told him I was vacationing at Lake Tahoe with my children. She thought that since I had traveled with Baba, Duncan might like to visit me there and hear some of my stories. Furthermore, Duncan's uncle had some property in the Sierras that she wanted me to see and evaluate as a possible Sufi retreat. Mark, Michael, Duncan, and I all enjoyed each other's company. We picnicked on the beach, talked late into the night, and simply felt happy to be together.

Later, Duncan met his obligations in Nevada and moved to San Francisco to be near Mother and Sufism. He was without work for some time, as Mother had predicted, so he was free to drive her wherever she needed. That included trips to Santa Rosa on the weekends to visit the children and me. It was clear that Duncan really took to Mark and Michael, and soon he and I began spending more time together.

Baba's seclusion deepened during this period. Mani wrote in the *Family Letters*:

The more we see Baba withdrawing from outward activity, the more Baba-activity is evident wherever we turn... From all sides, "new" ones wander into the kingdom of Baba's love, lay down their load of doubts and desires at His feet, and take hold of His *damaan* in firm conviction and surrender. Across the U.S.A. - from Ivy Duce on the West Coast to Fred and Ella Winterfeldt on the East - those conducting Baba groups write how busy they are kept with this sudden inflow of people who have "discovered" Baba, men and women who in turn lead others from the fog of shadow-chasing frustrations into the clarity and sanity of the God-Man's Love.

This meant too that more and more people were being drawn to the Sufi order.

In America young seekers using drugs were caught in a fog of shadow-chasing frustrations. By 1967 the drug culture had permeated almost every arena of American life, influencing books, movies, language, and theater. A resulting stage phenomenon was *Hair*, an anti-war, anti-establishment, pro-love musical that shocked the older generation and enthralled the young.

But the drug culture expressed itself most strongly in music, especially in the psychedelic sounds of rock stars such as Jimi Hendrix and of course the Beatles, whose release of the album *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* transformed both the music and message of rock and roll. The Beatles were also responsible for an East-West musical marriage that strongly influenced their generation and those that followed. They made a spiritual pilgrimage to India in 1967 to meditate with a guru, and when they returned, the music of Ravi Shankar and the Indian sitar came with them.

Drug experimentation was often seen as a means of expanding one's consciousness, so hallucinogens had a special and dangerous allure for young spiritual seekers. Baba spoke clearly about the spiritual dangers of drugs in a letter written by Adi to a young seeker:

No drug, whatever its great promise, can help one to attain the spiritual Goal. There is no shortcut to the Goal except through the grace of the Perfect Master; and drugs, LSD more than others, give only a semblance of "spiritual experience," a glimpse of false Reality. The experience you elaborate in your letter and book are as far removed from Reality as is a mirage from water. No matter how much you pursue the mirage, you will never reach water, and the search for God through drugs must end in disillusionment. Meher Baba, who knows the Way, who is the Way, cannot approve the continued pursuance of a method that not only must prove fruitless but leads away from the Path that leads to Reality.

Baba gave seekers a clear signpost on the spiritual path: "Desist from taking drugs, for they are harmful - physically, mentally, and spiritually." Baba further said, "If God can be found through the medium of any drug, God is not worthy of being God."

Mother and her students worked to spread his message about the harmful effects of drugs. They talked on television and radio, to reporters, and on college campuses. Mother published a pamphlet on Baba's views that received wide circulation, called *God in a Pill*. She was almost seventy years old, and some questioned her authority on drugs, since she had never taken them. Her response was that a doctor didn't have

to give birth to a baby to know what the mother was going through in childbirth. Many of these people accepted Baba's teachings, and the Sufi order really began to grow.

On campuses drugs were only one dimension of the college culture. There was worldwide confusion in university life created by student unrest and dissent over the war and over establishment policies on almost any given issue. Although these days of peace and protest have often been trivialized since, dismissed as a passing trend or as the mindless rebellion of a pampered generation, there was at its core a sincere idealism and a longing for meaningful interaction with the world. The trite slogans and sometimes futile demonstrations were symptoms of angst-ridden souls who yearned for deeper liberation. According to Baba's teachings, the sixties' vision of an age, to quote the lyrics from *Hair*, when "peace will guide the planets and love will steer the stars" was not naive, simply premature.

In October of 1967, it was announced in a circular: "Avatar Meher Baba wishes all His lovers to know that His Seclusion will not end on 21 November this year... Meher Baba says that the fate of the universe hangs on His Seclusion, and the redemption of mankind depends upon His Manifestation, and He wants to remain absolutely undisturbed."

The year 1967 ended as it had begun, on a note of protest. Anti-war demonstrators tried to shut down the New York City draft induction center. Among the protesters arrested was Dr. Benjamin Spock, the pediatrician who through his books on child-rearing had guided the upbringing of many of the children now in revolt.

At the beginning of 1968, Mani wrote in the *Family Letters* about the burden of Baba's work:

With the stepping in of the new year, we find a quick stepping up of Baba's seclusion work, not so much by what we perceive as by what we can dare to conceive. Baba says, "You can only see what you see me doing outwardly, but I am continually working on all planes of consciousness at the same time. As my manifestation time is closing in, the pressure of my work is tremendous. You cannot have an iota of an idea of it."

On January 31, the Tet offensive in Vietnam increased anti-war sentiment at home, and demonstrations broke out on campuses east and west. In April, the nation's attention shifted from rice paddies and campuses to a motel in Memphis, where another gunman felled another national hero, the civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. His murder prompted a week of renewed rioting in urban black ghettos, including a riot that disabled the nation's capital.

That same month the United States and the North Vietnamese reached an agreement about peace talks, temporarily easing the political tension at home. The talks began on May 10 in Paris.

In the midst of all this, I wanted so badly to see Baba and be with him again. And just then he sent a message to all his lovers:

I know how you feel. I know your love. I know the agony of your longing to see me. I know what I am doing and what I have to do. I know when the time will be right for you to see me, and at that time I will call you. Until that time comes, until I announce that I will see my lovers, I want you all to be patient, to wait with complete trust in my word, with complete faith in my Love for you, with complete obedience to my wishes.

I am happy with your love for me, which makes you proclaim to the world my message of Love and Truth. I am happy with your obedience, which has helped me in my work for the universe. I am with you. I give my Love to you.

Baba ended his seclusion in May 1968, but then he began a period of exclusion, in which his lovers were excluded from seeing him. Mani wrote, "We understand from Him, this period of exclusion is the threshold leading to Inclusion, the time that will include all to His darshan!"

Only a short time later, Americans, still trying to absorb the killing of Dr. King, watched on television as Senator Robert Kennedy, brother of the former president, was assassinated in Los Angeles after delivering his victory speech in the California Democratic primary election. That same month, the Vietnam war became the longest war in American history, and the peace talks seemed to be off to a slow start.

The forty-third anniversary of Baba's silence came and went on July 10 with no official message from him, although he often dictated messages for his lovers on Silence Day. We learned later from the *Family Letters* that he had indeed prepared a message but hadn't released it:

DIVINE FATHER HELP YOUR BELOVED SON TO CARRY OUT  
ALL YOUR WORK THIS YEAR, FOR JULY OF THIS YEAR WILL  
MARK THE LAST YEAR OF HIS SILENCE.

MEHER BABA

At home another summer of riots was underway. Race riots in Cleveland shut the city down for four days and were followed by similar riots in Miami.

On July 30 Baba declared, "My work is done. It is completed 100 percent to my satisfaction."

On the one hand, I felt happy that Baba had been able to finish his

work. On the other, I had the fleeting thought, "Baba wouldn't leave us now, would he, without our seeing him again?"

Not only did I want to see him again, but the world, so desperate and fractured, seemed to need him more than ever. Still, the hints kept coming. Near the same time, he dictated, "Coming, coming, coming - CAME! I am tired of the illusion game."

In America the next month, the much-cherished democratic process disintegrated into unprecedented violence at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago. Hundreds of people, including bystanders and reporters, were beaten by police in full view of the television cameras as anti-war protesters clashed with police and National Guardsmen.

In Europe Soviet tanks rolled into Prague in an attempt to quash the liberal reformist movement of the USSR's wayward satellite, Czechoslovakia. The Czechs earned the admiration of the world when they met the half-million troops and legions of tanks with non-violent resistance that included strikes and the disruption of transportation and communications.

On the first of November 1968, Baba issued the circular we'd been waiting a long time to receive. He announced he would give his darshan in 1969 in Pune, from April 10 to June 10. He told some of his followers:

No doubt you people and my lovers everywhere have been wondering why, when my period of intense Work in seclusion has finished, I have still not allowed my lovers to see me.

The strain of that eighteen months' Work was tremendous. I used to sit alone in my room for some hours each day while complete silence was imposed on the mandali and no one of them was permitted to enter the room during those hours every day. The strain was not in the Work itself, although I was working on all planes of consciousness, but in keeping my link with the gross plane. To keep this link, I had to continuously hammer my right thigh with my fist. Now, although my health is good and I would like to fulfill immediately the longing of my lovers to come to me - many to see me for the first time - it will yet take some time for all traces of the strain to disappear and for me to be 100 percent fit to see them all ...

The 1962 East-West Gathering was nothing compared with what this gathering will be.

Now I could finally relax some. Baba wasn't leaving after all. Not only that, he was planning another gathering, and I could expect to see him again in only a matter of months. He had also told his followers:

I have been saying: The Time is near, it is fast approaching, it is close at hand. Today I say: *The Time has come*. Remember this!

The time for what? The gathering? The fruition of his work? The undoing of the world? It seemed anything was possible.

In fall, as a new semester started, the students of America continued to rebel against the bureaucracy and the ongoing war. San Francisco State University was thrown into four months of turmoil when students launched a strike to demand educational reforms, especially in the area of black studies. Eventually the police were called in to restore order, a move that inflamed the students further.

The violence in public arenas was matched by the less-visible violence overtaking the streets of downtown America. For the first time, the Gallup Poll reported that crime ranked as the number one concern of the American people. It had increased 57 percent just since 1960, shattering a foundation of security and trust in less than a decade.

As the darshan neared, we learned of severe problems with Baba's health. As Mani wrote in the *Family Letters*:

Beloved Avatar Meher Baba wishes all His lovers to know that His three years of intense work has shattered His health. In spite of this, He has invited His lovers from all over the world to come to Him for His darshan next summer, for it is the time for them to come to Him and receive His Love... But with the present condition of His health, how Beloved Baba will give His darshan to the thousands who will come yet remains to be determined - but it will be.

Baba answered this concern about his health to his mandali as follows:

It will be easy for me to give my lovers my darshan, so you are not to feel concerned about it. I will give darshan reclining, and that will be no strain on my body.

It will be different from all previous darshans, and it will be the last in silence. It will be the darshan of darshans - unparalleled. Although I will be reclining, I will be very strong. My physical condition now is because of my work, but by then my work will be complete and my exultation will be great.

The darshan in India was to be staged so that a different group would be with Baba each week. Mother spoke up quickly for the Sufis, and we were scheduled to attend the first week. By now the number of Mother's students and contacts had grown so much that we planned on chartering two jets to transport us all. It was an enormous project to make all the arrangements and manage the funds of those wanting to attend.

I was especially happy about the upcoming trip for two reasons. One was that I was going to be able to take my sons, Mark and Michael, to meet Baba. The second was that I was going to ask his permission to marry Duncan.

My attitude toward marriage had vacillated dramatically over the years. In my youth, I had idealized and longed for it, and after my divorce, I was determined to avoid it. But I hadn't really considered my children. Later, when a friend asked me, "Has it occurred to you that your boys might want a father?" I began to feel my views shifting yet again. I remembered too that when I told Baba about the difficulties in my marriage, he had promised I would have a perfect husband. He had also mentioned, ten years earlier in San Francisco, that I would have a third child. I considered all of this, and by the time Duncan came along, I was warming up to the idea of marriage. As the months passed and I spent more time with him, I found that my resistance steadily dissolved as I fell in love.

By the time Duncan asked me to marry him, I had traveled full circle on the topic of matrimony, and I accepted immediately. He had already sought the approval of my mother, his Murshida, and she had been fully supportive. Still, she felt we really ought to ask Baba because, after all, she had given me to him years before. Since we were all going for the darshan, we decided to keep the engagement secret until we could get Baba's blessing. It was just one more reason this darshan promised to be the most special of all. Baba had already said it would not only be his last in silence, but it would be unparalleled.

The year of the darshan, 1969, began with prolonged and bloody fighting between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland. There, as in the Middle East, religion and politics had blurred, and modern problems had cast a harsh new light on old perceptions. In the United States, the year started with both the routine turmoil and one glimmer of hope. Richard Nixon was inaugurated as president at ceremonies marked by anti-war protests, but the peace talks seemed to be progressing in Paris. None of us knew whether we could look forward to a year of war or peace, of dissent or harmony. I looked forward only to the darshan. It was now just three months away, and when I imagined Baba, my children, Duncan, and me all in one place, I was jubilant.

Then the Master Chess Player made a most unexpected move.

Sometime after midnight on January 31, I received a call from Mother telling me something I couldn't begin to fathom. She had just received word from India via London that about noon India time, Meher Baba had dropped his body.

We were stunned and couldn't comprehend. "Is there some mistake?" we asked each other. "Is there a chance it's really true?"

Soon afterward, the mandali in India confirmed what we had heard. Meher Baba - in that beautiful, graceful, embraceable form - was gone.

Adi cabled us:

AVATAR MEHER BABA DROPPED HIS PHYSICAL BODY AT TWELVE NOON 31 JANUARY AT MEHERAZAD TO LIVE ETERNALLY IN THE HEARTS OF ALL HIS LOVERS. BELOVED'S BODY WILL BE INTERRED AT MEHERABAD ARANGAON ON 1 FEBRUARY AT 10 A.M. IN THE TOMB HE HAD ORDERED TO BE BUILT LONG AGO.

The men and women mandali bravely contained their overwhelming grief, and people began flocking to India from all over the world to be there with Baba for one last moment before the interment. Mani reported in the *Family Letters*:

Overnight Meherabad was transformed from an isolated retreat into a crowded pilgrimage-ground. It swarmed with people, buses, cycles, taxis, cars, tongas, bullock carts... Every foot of indoor and outdoor space was used for their camping in during those days and nights... A railway track runs between upper and lower Meherabad, and trains obliged by stopping there to disgorge their load of lovers from Mumbai and Andhra. Throughout the seven days, and for days after, we could hear passing trains give a long whistle as they went by the Hill - the drivers were saluting the Avatar of the Age.

My first thoughts were for Mehera, Mani, and the other women mandali I so loved and whose hearts were totally Baba's. I wrote them this note:

February 1, 1969

Dearest Mehera, Mani, and the girls,

The news of Beloved's passing just reached me this morning.

I felt Baba with me so strongly today all day, and as I drove my car... for a second I let some selfish tears well up and made a silly driving error. I quickly corrected it, but I swear I could hear Baba's fingers snapping in the back seat as they so often used to do, and a quiet chuckle and a "G.G., get on with it. Hurry!"

So I "got on with it," plowing up the hill and to work. But as I looked at so many things I see each day, I noticed that I had a deeper sense of appreciation for each thing I saw.



That little flower—  
 Ah yes! Beloved wore them  
 In a lei.  
 How green that tree is,  
 Just like the one He sat under  
 In the Bund Garden in Poona.  
 That golden color—  
 I've seen His eyes flecked with it  
 As a lover passed!  
 That shade of white!  
 That's how His garment was shaded  
 By the barn at Myrtle Beach.  
 That pink house!  
 Baba once wore a jacket  
 Just that shade.  
 That soft, warm, brown fence—  
 His eyes held that shade!  
 How green the grass, like  
 The grass in the park on which  
 He sat to play finger games  
 With Peter in Carolina.  
 The frogs are singing—  
 I wonder if they will ever  
 Do a tumbling act as they  
 Did for Him?  
 A million thoughts of Baba.  
 And for now—  
 All the flowers bow down  
 Their heads with the passing  
 Of the wind  
 While the world bows its  
 With the passing of the Avatar!

Our spirits are good here! We will continue to sing His song and to march as close to His drum's beat as we humanly can.

Our concern now is only for you all and His dear ones in India. If Baba's death has been a shock for us, we can only dimly imagine what it must be for all of you who have been with Him so very long, so closely!

Our love is with you! If there is anything we can do, please let us know. You are on our minds constantly. Everyone joins me in sending our dearest love,

G.G.

From our area, Dr. Allan Cohen and Aneece Hassen made the hurried trip to India along with Rick Chapman. Mother wanted so much to go, but she realized her place was with her students, who needed her comfort and guidance at a difficult time.

Since so many people wanted to travel to India, the mandali were uncertain whether to proceed with the interment right away. The doctors were examining Baba's body each day and finding it fresh and lovely. Then Mehera suddenly remembered what Baba had said on that last morning, January 31. The mandali had been distraught over his overwhelming suffering, and he told them, "Today is my crucifixion." But he also added that after seven days, he would be 100 percent free. At the time, the mandali interpreted that to mean free from suffering, but now his statement had new meaning. They decided to wait seven days and inter Baba's body in his tomb on February 7.

Meanwhile, thousands upon thousands of people from around the globe traveled night and day on the mere chance they would get one last glimpse of their beautiful Master.

At 12:15 p.m. on February 7, these thousands and many others joined in singing his name and shouting, "Avatar Meher Baba ki jai!" as the entombment began. This Age had had its final look at the divinely human form that suffered so much out of God's love for His Creation.

As our hearts expanded to join him Beyond, the transformation he bestowed on Creation continued.

## *The Ocean Unbound*

The passing of the Avatar went unnoticed by the world, just as his life had. The year 1969 was remembered instead for its monumental news event, the first moon landing. In the United States it was also remembered for the Woodstock festival and the Vietnam moratorium.

Millions of people around the globe clustered around televisions to watch when the lunar module Eagle from Apollo 11 became the first manned vehicle to land on a heavenly body other than Earth. Several hours later, two astronauts walked across its boulder-strewn surface, while on Earth, people stood outside peering at the luminous orb over two hundred thousand miles away, trying to comprehend that somewhere out there human beings were leaving their footprints. A few months later, Apollo 12 landed two more visitors on the moon. The first landing was at the Sea of Tranquility, the second at the Ocean of Storms, apt symbols of the duality of humanity's aspirations and afflictions.

While scientists pored over rocks and dust for signs of earlier life on the moon, swarms of young people descended on Bethel, New York, to revel in life in the here and now. The Woodstock Music and Art Festival was designed as a free concert for ten thousand people and became instead a three-day "be-in" for four hundred fifty thousand. It was the culmination of the so-called hippie era and psychedelic age, a peaceful albeit drug-hazed orgy of counterculture music punctuated by messages of freedom and solidarity. Among the performers was The Who, including Baba lover Pete Townshend, whom our family came to know and love dearly. Baba himself made an appearance of sorts. In an award-winning documentary on the festival, his smiling face appears from a poster tacked to a tree on Yasgur's farm, where the festival took place.

· If Woodstock was the ultimate expression of the rock music generation, the Vietnam moratorium was the culmination of its political force. The one-day suspension of work and classes was observed by millions of pacifists across the country and even abroad. They donned black armbands and held prayer vigils, candlelight processions, and mass rallies.

It was the first and clearest sign that the anti-war movement had gone mainstream and now crossed age, class, and even political barriers.

In the end, 1969 was dubbed "The Year of the Moon." Everyone would say what a truly remarkable year it was, one of the most climactic in history, or certainly in American history. Yet none of its headlines or news bulletins made mention of the passing of the Avatar of the Age or the true "one giant leap for mankind" he effected. Meher Baba left life on earth as silently as he lived it, his passing recognized by only a few.

In April some of those few gathered in India to celebrate the blessing of his coming and his eternal presence among us. The mandali, although undoubtedly feeling an overwhelming sense of loss, had resolved to carry out Baba's wish to hold a last darshan. We in Sufism were equally anxious to honor his plan by attending. He had once predicted that he would give his last darshan "reclining," and now this too would come to pass.

Since our group was to be the first to attend, we decided to nuke every effort to bring some cheer to the mandali. Mother's students had already staged many original performances for different Baba occasions, so she asked the mandali if we might have a few hours to entertain them with music and skits. They agreed, and soon everyone was busy writing, making costumes, and rehearsing.

Then, as the date of the darshan neared, it suddenly seemed as if I might miss it. I was teaching in Cloverdale at the time, and because of my long commute and busy schedule, I was late getting my travel shots. It was a week before our departure date, and I still hadn't received a smallpox vaccination. Just then, one of the children in my classroom became quite sick, directly in front of me. The next day I got word he had the mumps. I anxiously thought back on my life and could remember no incidence of mumps, although I had suffered swollen glands before. I quickly calculated the incubation period and realized that if I had contracted mumps this time, they would break out while I was in India. I immediately made an appointment with my doctor.

"This is terrible," he said. "Since you've been exposed to mumps, I can't give you the smallpox vaccination. I don't know what to do."

He told me that while there was no immunization for mumps, there was a test that could confirm whether or not I'd had them. It would be a gamble. If the test showed I had never had mumps, then he would have to refuse me the smallpox vaccination. I decided to take my chances.

By the grace of God, it turned out some of those "swollen glands" in childhood had indeed been mumps, and I was thoroughly immune. At the last minute, I was able to join Mother and her students and climb

on the plane for India. With me were my sons - Mark, who was ten, and Michael, who was seven. I remembered Baba telling me I would someday come to see him with two children and a baby in my arms, and I wondered momentarily about the baby.

The trip was exhausting, and we landed in Mumbai before dawn, further depleted by the humidity and terrible heat, which was unexpected at such an early hour. All our defenses were down as we left the customs area of the terminal, when suddenly we heard voices shouting, "Jai Baba! Jai Baba!" There at this early hour were Baba lovers from Mumbai who had made the trip to the airport just to welcome us. They had garlands and smiles and loving embraces for all of us. It was so surprising and so moving that many of us broke into tears.

These Indian lovers had also arranged for a bus to take us to our hotel, and they rode along with us, telling stories about Baba as we went. One described how, just after Baba dropped his body, glorious roses had suddenly bloomed in a lover's garden where they had never grown before. He took them to the mandali, and the roses proved to be just enough to cover Baba's body.

We spent the day resting at the Taj Mahal Hotel, and that evening we flew to Pune. Meherjee had arranged for Mother and several of us to stay at the Turf Club, while others were taken to the best hotels.

The darshan was still two days away, so Mother took advantage of the time to meet with Eruch, Mani, and Francis Brabazon to work on the project Baba had previously assigned to her - the publication of a new edition of *God Speaks*. In spite of the tremendous pressure of his universal work and its impact on his physical body, Baba had been able to elaborate on several points for the book and to review the entire glossary. Eruch gave this material to Mother, and she included it in the new edition.

The women mandali invited the female travelers to meet with them at Guruprasad, and the men had the opportunity to spend time with the men mandali. This was a dream come true for our traveling companions. The meeting was like a visit with Baba himself. Guruprasad still had his chair and the other furnishings from his stay there, and his presence was palpable. Mani told enchanting stories about her life with Baba, and later she and Mehera kindly posed for a photograph with Mark and Michael, a picture I have always treasured.

The first day of what would be called the Great Darshan or Last Darshan was April 10. It was an oppressively hot morning with temperatures over 100 degrees, but our hearts and minds were focused completely on what was before us as we entered the main hall at Guruprasad. Baba's chair was at the center of one end of the room, and it held a large picture

of him garlanded with flowers. The women mandali were seated in front to the left, and a microphone stood to the right. Though Baba wasn't there physically, the air was supercharged with his presence.

Eruch announced the beginning of the darshan at 9:00 a.m. This was exactly the day and time Baba had prescribed when announcing the darshan a year earlier, and here we were. With deep gratitude, we all shouted, "Avatar Meher Baba ki jai!"

Eruch asked us to recite the Master's Prayer, and then Mehera came to the microphone to say, "Jai Baba." She looked drawn and frail, but still like Creation's loveliest flower.

Mani spoke next, saying, "Mehera and I, all of us, are very, very happy to see you all gathered here today to have Beloved Baba's darshan and to receive his love. We bow to *your* love for Baba." Then the women mandali sang the Gujarati Arti, which Baba himself had composed in the early years for his disciples. The beauty and strength of the arti opened a window on feelings of devotion that are seldom experienced in the West.

It was then that our old friend Francis Brabazon rose to speak. He had been living with Baba and the mandali for many years now, and his clear, poetic statements were both eloquent and penetrating.

I am amazed and filled with joy to discover that the Beloved I have been serving for many years is truly a very mighty Beloved... Who but the Beloved of Beloveds could speak his Word silently in your hearts and make you come from across the world to take his darshan, to bow down to him in your hearts? Such a thing has never happened before. I have been at mass-darshans where tens of thousands came and bowed down to his Man-form. But to come tens of thousand of miles to bow down to him in one's own heart, that is of an entirely different order of devotion.

Why has Beloved Baba given you people this extraordinary privilege? Because he required a few to do what the many, what everyone, must eventually do: journey across the world of illusion to take darshan of him in their hearts. What a Beloved is our Beloved; what a mighty Beloved.

Next, Eruch recalled that when Baba announced the darshan in late 1968, those close to him didn't understand what he meant by a "darshan on my own terms." But Francis's description of taking darshan in our hearts had illustrated Baba's meaning beautifully.

At 10:00 a.m., each of us took a turn approaching Baba's chair. It was an experience that moved us all deeply. One of Mother's students,

John Krchniak, described it this way:

One by one, we went to Baba's chair and did obeisance. It had a pattern to it as we filed by... the embracing of His hands and kissing His feet. It was emotionally most moving... one would think that we were embracing space... something in an empty chair ... and it could have been quite humorous. But the silence was so powerful, the room so charged with His Love, that one's heart was pounding with the beauty of the responding love within us.

When my turn came, I was suddenly very happy. I resisted the impulse to kiss His picture, and followed like a sheep in the pattern set by the previous devotees.

I kissed His hands and His feet and thanked Him for coming again. I was bubbling over with happiness ...

Eventually it came time for one of the youngest attendees to make his short pilgrimage to the chair - my seven-year-old son, Michael. As young as he was, Michael had already made his own emotional journey before reaching Guruprasad and his first darshan.

Some years back, when I had written to Baba of a concern about my oldest son, Mark, he had written back describing Mark as his "real God-son." As a little boy, Michael had occasionally heard us referring to this note.

One day we came into our living room and found little Michael lying on the couch sobbing uncontrollably.

I said, "Michael! What happened? Are you all right?"

And he poignantly responded, "Mark says Baba said he was his real God-son and he never said anything about me." So I wrote and told Baba about this.

He wrote back in tones of astonishment, "Of course he's my real God-son. What else could he be?"

So now this God-son made his own short pilgrimage to the chair with Duncan by his side. He had asked Duncan to accompany him to show him how to properly pay his respects.

Later we all went to Baba's room, where he had spent such long hours doing his universal work. The room was furnished very simply and included Baba's bed, his chair, his sadhra and jacket, and other personal items. This was the room where Baba hammered his thigh continuously for hours to keep the link between the gross and reality. His thigh eventually became hard as stone.

The first day had been incredibly powerful and fulfilling for all of us. And we felt that the grieving mandali, who had endured so much, were beginning to revive.

For me, there was still a goal on this trip that now seemed out of reach. I had not only expected to take darshan with Baba, but I had hoped to gain his blessing on my engagement to Duncan. Although my engagement was still secret, Mother had mentioned it to Mehera the previous evening. Still, I was unsure how to proceed. But just as we were leaving Guruprasad, Mani came rushing up calling, "Charmian, Mehera wants to see you!"

As I came into the room, Mehera gave me a hug and asked, "Was that young man who was standing there with Michael the man who wants to marry you?"

"Yes. That's him, Mehera."

She said, "Oh, I want you to believe me. You know, Baba was really there today."

"I do believe that."

She continued, "All those years ago, Baba told me I would know his own when they came to him, and I wondered how this would be. But today I know. And I want *you* to know that this young man, he is one of Baba's old, old friends. And this marriage makes Baba very happy."

We hugged each other, crying in our mutual joy. I left and found myself wondering, "How do I tell Duncan what's happened?" I was feeling a little embarrassed.

But Mother said, "Well, you have to tell him this."

We all went up to my room, and Mother left us for a few minutes so we would have privacy. When Duncan heard my story, he hurled himself on the bed, glowing, and said, "At last, now I know I've come home!"

"Not quite yet!" I chuckled.

When Mother returned, we all talked and laughed together for some time, so happy were we. It was a very touching moment, one I hold dear to my heart. And it was a joyous reminder that God is ever present and watching, whether in the body or not.

On the second morning of darshan, we had our chance to entertain the mandali, who had so graciously hosted and entertained us on many occasions before. Mother gave a brief introduction:

Baba told us in 1956 that Sufis must be *goofy* with love for God. Remembering the perfect sense of humor of our Beloved, for several years now our young Sufis have devised "goofy" programs to commemorate Christmas and Baba's birthday, which I have had the privilege of sharing. He told us often that when two or three were gathered together in his name, there would he be also. So the Sufis' only desire was to lift his burden for even one moment. I hope no one will regard our little skits as



irreverent. They were only aimed at the target of his smile. And as Mehera is as the moon to Baba's sun, reflecting his love and beauty everywhere, it is our dearest wish that our joy in him will be reflected as a smile upon her face.

We opened with a devotional song called "Wondrous One" and then performed a skit based on used-car dealers in America. The central character was a Used Karma Dealer named Sam S. Kara. It was clever and corny and made everyone laugh, including the mandali. We were especially pleased because we felt that Baba was smiling and enjoying it too.

The morning program contained a variety of performances that well reflected our creative life at the Sufi center in California: lovely songs about Baba that had become our favorites, skits, a composition for guitar, a recitative about Baba, and even a piece written for and sung by the children, including Mark and Michael. But it was the final piece that was most moving.

The last performance of the morning was the debut presentation of an arti to Baba written by Hank Mindlin. The song had been sent to Baba for his review, and he changed only one line of the lyrics before approving it. As soon as the song began, the room seemed to swell with Baba's presence. We felt as if we'd joined a river of majesty, and as Sufi dancers moved in harmony to the music, we were swept up in currents of devotion so strong that when the song ended, there was only a stunned silence. Then, after a moment, shouts of "Avatar Meher Baba ki jai" filled the air.

Finally, Eruch spoke: "We are overwhelmed to see what we have seen, to hear what we have heard, and to feel what our hearts have felt. We all, the mandali, bow down to the image of Avatar Meher Baba that has been established in the hearts of all his lovers from abroad. I bow down to all of you."

On the morning of the third day, rain helped cool the searing temperatures. As we gathered again at Guruprasad, the lights went dark and the microphone crackled. I'd been asked to introduce the program, and as Baba always wanted events to begin on time, there was nothing to do but go forward. As I should have expected, everything turned out beautifully. Hank started us off with a particularly touching Baba song that got everyone clapping in unison.

Every time Baba's name was sung out by his Western lovers, one could practically feel the hearts of the mandali responding. It was as if withered plants were drinking in sweet water from a cool rain after a long dry spell. Later we came to learn that before Baba left his body, he

had told the mandali, "Wait until Ivy's young Sufis come here - they are so full of love - you have never seen such love. It will renew your lives!"

Our group also staged a skit that day about a political convention, but with a twist. This was a Hierarchy Convention - a gathering of those advanced souls who carry out God's master plan for Creation.

Mother had a student, Marty Kentfield, who lived near the famous Haight-Ashbury district in San Francisco, and she offered a monologue about Baba told in "hip" slang. Since Baba was born in Poona, she called him "The Poon." In spite of the cultural gap between East and West, the mandali got into the spirit of the program and seemed to love it.

The next day, we boarded buses for Meherabad and Meherazad. All this traveling was a hardship for Mother, who was seventy-four at the time, but she joined her students for their journey to Baba's ashram and his tomb. This seemed to fulfill the prototypic role he set for her back in 1962 when he insisted she make this same trip, even while very ill.

Several hours later, after our bus passed through Ahmednagar, we could see Baba's flag flying from the tower next to his tomb on top of the hill at Meherabad. I suppose an entire range of feelings settled into the people on the bus, especially those who were visiting for the first time and who had once hoped to meet Baba here in physical form. As we stepped off the bus and began our walk up the hill, local villagers came dancing toward us, joyfully beating drums and cymbals and playing instruments. We felt honored they had come to share their love of Baba and to honor in turn the love carried by the Western pilgrims.

Only small groups of people were allowed into the tomb at one time so their experience would be as intimate as possible. When I entered, I saw a friend sitting at the far end of the tomb, weeping and weeping. As I sat down, I thought to myself, "Maybe I ought to be crying. Maybe I ought to feel sadder about it. After all, I won't be able to touch Baba again, or ever have his embrace."

With that, my eyes were drawn to the sunlight outside the window, and I looked off at the hill where some trees were silhouetted against the sky. Everything danced and sparkled, and I could hear Baba saying, "You silly child. Do you think I'm tied to that tomb? Don't you know I'm out here too? I'm everywhere."

I was receiving a different form of his embrace now. And from that day on, I've never had the feeling that Baba was anywhere but right with me, wherever I was. It started almost immediately at the darshan. Afterward, practically every place I went I'd see reminders of him: perhaps something in pink or turquoise that evoked his jackets, or his image in flowers - the flowers that used to hum with life and sing to me as a

child. I'd see him every place I went until it simply became impossible to feel like he'd gone.

"Even if you can't love me, remember I'll be loving you," he had said. And I know he does. Again and again since January 1969, I've had ample proof of that - proof that he's here, that he watches over us and attends to the minutest details of our well-being.

Of course all of us go through periods when we don't have the privilege of feeling his presence. And it is a privilege, a blessing, to know and feel him in our lives. I think it can be very cold and dark when we lose that connection. I have been lucky, especially in these later years, to be surrounded with a sense of his love, to only have to think of him to summon his presence. So in a very real sense, the passing of Baba has meant little to me.

After the walk down the hill from Upper Meherabad, we encountered the mast Mohammed outside his quarters. We'd last seen him in 1962, but he had changed little in the six years since and still had his delightfully childlike nature. My own child Michael was carrying a collapsible drinking cup, and someone suggested he show it to Mohammed. Because my mother had given the cup to Michael, he was a little hesitant at first, but after a moment, he held it out anyway. Mohammed took the cup in his hand, and a gigantic smile lit his face. He seemed to enjoy teasing Michael and was clearly delighted with the cup. We never saw it again!

On the last morning of darshan, April 14, Eruch welcomed us and spoke from his heart with loving praise for my mother:

You all know her love for Baba. You all know about her lifelong service in the cause of the Ancient One. You all know how she has gathered each one of you under her wings, mothered you, given you hope - and sowed seeds of love for the Ancient One in your hearts.

I know how happy she is to find all her chicks at the feet of the Beloved, picking up bits of love from the dust around Baba, from Baba's atmosphere... And all of us wish that there comes soon a day when she brings back a greater consignment of chicks...

My heart is full today with all the work she has done, with all the love she has bestowed on you, so that you can love Baba all the more. She has led a dedicated life in Baba's cause. We wish that Baba blesses her with a longer life, many more years, so that she can be with you all, all the more, despite her weak condition of health. We ask Baba to give her good health so

that she can work diligently as she has been doing continuously. With these words, I bow down to her love for Baba and say "Jai Baba!" to Ivy.

On behalf of the men and women mandali, Eruch then spoke to the Westerners about the love they held for Baba. "We are deeply touched. May that love ever grow to give shade and shelter to many a heart so that they can one day also pay similar visits to the places of pilgrimage in India and enjoy and cherish Baba's love evermore."

The Los Angeles group then sang songs, inviting us to sing along, and offered a prayer to Baba. Finally, they asked everyone in the room to join hands in silence. I was deeply moved by this moment of unity and shared adoration. After Francis Brabazon read from his latest writings, we repeated Baba's Prayer of Repentance and sang the arti for the final time. At 10:00 a.m. Eruch told us, "You all start taking Baba's darshan and prepare to take him with you."

That was exactly what we did.

On our return to the United States, Mother and I sent Mehera a telegram expressing our appreciation for all the mandali had done to make the darshan so memorable. Mehera sent this reply:

Your loving telegram has made me very happy. The time of the darshan days Beloved Baba specified are now over. Just a few Western Baba lovers who await their planes are here. Truly Baba had said this would be an unparalleled darshan, for we could almost tangibly feel the love that has been poured at Baba's feet and the love that each one received.

Whenever I have told anyone how happy I was that they were honoring Baba's invitation, the usual reply was they were so grateful for the invitation, for they needed this darshan so much and Baba has given them so much.

We also have been so happily busy and realize anew how compassionate indeed is our Baba, for we have seen Beloved in each one we have embraced. It brings home to us again Francis's words in his welcome address, saying, "What a mighty Beloved we have been serving."

Mehera

Mani's touching recollections came later in her letter of August 1969:

To have what one wants is to have everything. To us, being with Baba was everything - and we had it. Staying with God and sharing His humanness was such completeness for us that it has left nothing besides to want for. We're not looking for any

happenings to manifest. We are simply waiting - waiting for His Will to manifest in whatever forms He may choose that we might keep on carrying it out with our imperfect obedience and His perfect grace.

Mani's letter gave us a deeply personal glimpse into how the mandali would live the rest of their lives without the physical presence of their Beloved.

How I would live my life had already been revealed in a glance through a window that offered a clear view of a world radiating with his presence. I would live it as I always had - with Baba by my side.

## *The Sweetest Prasad of All*

The gifts from a Master continue to arrive and multiply long after he has left the earth. For the Sufi order, these included the evolution of artistic talents that enabled us to celebrate his life and our own devotion more fully. For me life brought new and unexpected sources of love and the most touching reminders of how he had shaped my destiny.

Within a few months of the Last Darshan, a new stage of my life began when Duncan and I were married. We took our vows on September 13, 1969, and lived our first year of marriage in a house in Lafayette, east of San Francisco, across the Bay Bridge. After our wedding, we received the following cable from Ahmednagar:

CHARMIAN DUNCAN

MAY BELOVED BABA'S LOVE BLESSINGS BE ON YOU HIS  
VERY DEAR CHILDREN YOUR MEHERAZAD FAMILY WISH  
YOU HAPPY MARRIED LIFE IN BABA'S LOVE SERVICE

MEHERA MANI

Baba's blessing on the marriage had already made itself apparent, first through Mehera's recognition of Duncan at the Last Darshan and then through a remarkable coincidence that occurred one night shortly before our wedding. On that night, Dee (Duncan's nickname) and I were sitting at dinner, and I was feeling great happiness. My contentment made me think back in contrast to that terrible mid-divorce day in 1965 when I was crying miserably over a magazine picture of a joyous young man rolling down a sunlit hill.

I decided to tell Dee this story and began to describe the picture. I didn't get very far. Dee took over and described the photo and accompanying article in far more detail than I could have. He could do so, I was stunned to learn, because *he* was the man in the photograph! It turned out that years earlier, he'd been living on a ranch near Cloverdale when a photographer came up to shoot pictures and asked Dee to pose for him. One of those pictures showed him rolling down a bright green California hill with poppies growing in the sunlight. It was this picture,

later published in a magazine, that had so utterly broken my heart. And now the man who seemed once to embody all that was beyond my grasp was to be my husband. With what sweetness had Baba laid his plans!

Baba's blessing and presence in my marriage manifested in other equally wondrous ways, and in one case, came tumbling out of my jewelry case. I had completely forgotten about Baba's ring, the one from which I'd removed the stone, when I suddenly came upon it one day as I rummaged for another piece of jewelry. Even though my first husband had no interest in the ring, I called for Duncan as soon as I saw it.

"Look what I found. I don't know if you know it or not, but this was Meher Baba's ring. Baba said that my husband could wear it. Would you be interested?"

Duncan took one look and reached out for the ring with both hands. Nothing would satisfy him but that we shop for a stone immediately, practically that minute. Then it dawned on me why Baba had that little twinkle in his eye when he said years ago that my husband could wear the ring.

Even though my mother was seventy-four, she continued to work diligently for Baba and her students. It had been so long since she had a vacation - eight years in fact - that Duncan and I tried to arrange one for her. We all flew to San Diego and then headed by car to a highly recommended hotel in the desert. But the further we drove, the colder it became, and as we ascended the mountains, it began to snow. The car heater blew air right into Mother's face but completely failed to warm her frozen feet. As we slipped and slid along the snow-covered highway, she exclaimed, "I've waited eight years for *this*?"

By the time we reached the hotel, it had grown so cold that we had to bundle up like Eskimos just to walk across to the restaurant. When we returned to San Diego, we found the airlines had mixed up our flight plans, and, to add insult to injury, they later lost our luggage.

We had tried our best, but a relaxing vacation was just not in the cards for Mother.

In February of 1970, the Sufis staged a Meher Baba birthday celebration in Berkeley that was filled to overflowing. Mother's birthday was the same day as Meher Baba's, and since this was to be her seventy-fifth, her students decided to also write and stage a musical drama to honor her life.

The play that her students produced was an enormous project. Although we had produced small skits and playlets before, we'd never tried anything close to this magnitude. Nevertheless, we selected key stories from her life, wrote a script and original songs and music, and reserved a large hall. The play was entitled *She's Lovely (but we never get a chance*

*to tell her*). The performance was a great success, and Mother's heart was overflowing.

Mother's first thought was always of Meher Baba. She decided that since we had uncovered these new theatrical talents, we should write and stage a play every year about a period in Baba's life as a gift to him on his birthday. It was partly through collaborating on the design and writing of these plays that Duncan was able to "use his art of journalism" to convey Baba's message of Love and Truth, just as Baba had asked.

We sent a recording of the play to Mehera and the other women mandali, along with news of the latest surprise in our lives, one that was surely a direct gift from Baba. As Baba had foretold years ago, I was expecting a third child. Mehera responded with her own prediction:

Meherazad  
April 15, '70

'Jai Baba" Dearest Charmian,

The joyful news of the brand new Baba baby on the way made me very happy. Just remain Baba's G.G., look after yourself, and do as the doctor says. I pray by Beloved Baba's grace all goes well and He gives you His prasad of a lovely daughter. After all, Mark and Michael each have a brother, and I am quite sure they too wish for a sister...

Listening to the audiotape of the play was so enjoyable that I can imagine how entertaining it was on the stage. We all think the play was superbly done... Dear Ivy must have had a lovely surprise. The love and respect for Murshida was most beautifully portrayed ...

On Beloved Baba's birthday, we placed a flower jali at His samadhi also on behalf of His Western lovers. Bowing down at the Tomb... we felt the peace and His love and compassion...

Love in Beloved Baba to you, dear Charmy, and Duncan and dear Mark and Mike. Love to dear Ivy and all Beloved Baba's dear children ...

Mehera

Years earlier, when I was certain I would never marry again, I wondered how Baba's prediction of three children could ever come to be. So once again I was left in awe of his omniscience and the artful means by which he fulfilled his promises and manifested his will.

On June 19, 1970, our Baba baby arrived as expected - a daughter, just as Mehera had hoped. We named her Ivy Mehera after the two people we held most dear.

Shortly after she was born, the doctors handed me a sedative. And



once it had taken effect, they told me the startling news about our baby. I decided then to keep a diary for her, and this was my first entry:

June 19: At about 9:00 a.m. Dr. Kronick informed me Ivy is afflicted with Down syndrome.

"After all, God has to have somewhere to send His broken angels, and where else should He send them but to one of his own?" - Selma Hassen

Although the sedative had dulled my reactions considerably, I was still shocked by the diagnosis. The doctors broke the news slowly, after first reciting a list of her other disorders. There was, they said, an intestinal defect, one that could be fatal. An x-ray had revealed, among other things, an intestinal blockage. Furthermore, she had a heart problem. Then, after telling me that they could perform exploratory surgery, they added, "But she has Down syndrome, so you might not want to bother."

They were wrong. I was resolved at once that she should have every chance at life. Mother and Duncan were present, and it was clear that this was also what they wanted. After we made our decision known, Dee and Mother scooped the baby up and whisked her to Children's Hospital in Oakland, where a surgeon was standing by.

I didn't have time to succumb to emotions and instead switched to my crisis mode. That mode is to take action and do whatever can be done to help. Almost everyone around me had the same response. Nobody said, "Oh, my goodness." They said instead, "How can we help? What can we do?" At this early stage, there was little anyone could do. My baby's fate was in the hands of the doctors and, ultimately, in the loving hands of Baba.

June 21: I returned home. Ivy made it through surgery okay and is in Intensive Care Unit. The intestine was developed, but the pancreas had wrapped about it and strictured it off. This was loosened and freed at one end. One intestinal coil had to be turned over. Her appendix was removed! Poor baby love!

I was almost forty-one when Ivy was born, and when the doctors explained to me that there is a higher incidence of Down syndrome in older mothers, I asked them to tell Duncan immediately. I feared he would be blaming himself because of his experimentation with psychedelic drugs in the 1960s. As it turned out, that's exactly what he was doing.

Because of my own complications, I was confined to bed and wasn't even allowed to see my baby. I noted in my diary:

Jenny said she was told that I was "taking the problems with Ivy splendidly." I must say I feel anything but splendid. It just breaks my heart to have her suffering like this and not be able to be near her or hold her or comfort her. I can only hope that with such an inauspicious start in life, the rest of her life will go comparatively smoothly. Jai Baba.

June 25: At last! My turn! Ned Foote took Mother and me for a visit to see Ivy Mehera. Found myself looking for anomalies but, of course, not seeing them. Realized this is not right. The essence of mothering is in finding and encouraging the positive or "good" things in a child. One cannot go looking for things that are wrong, though one must be cognizant of them as they are brought to our attention! Said to Dee in the evening, "All you ever have with another loved one, whether husband-wife, lovers, parent-child, is the right to give them all your love for the while they are with you and to part with them gracefully when the time comes, as it inevitably does, for separation. The only difference with Ivy is that the time may be a little shorter."

Ivy's critical complications and the possibility of major surgery that might or might not save her life forced me to think deeply about life and death. I knew that although it usually causes distress and grief to loved ones, death means little to the person who dies, since they don't even perceive it as death. And for those who are older or very ill, it's often a relief to lay that body aside. By then it's been worn out by all the things we came to earth to experience, learn from, and give love to in God's service. Sometimes death is late, sometimes early, sometimes sudden, and sometimes slow. But it's always His timing and His way, and it's always exactly right.

One mustn't cling to the person or submit to grief. Instead we should celebrate their life and achievements and the love they shared and inspired. This was what I experienced when Baba passed away. Now the fullness of my learning would perhaps be tested again, through my own precious child.

June 27: To hospital with Dee! He was so sweet with her and loving! How blessed I am! Ivy was so sleepy she could barely get one eye open at a time. I kept assuring Dee she had two, and she finally got them both open for a second and also produced a good startle reaction when the custodian banged a trash can in the hall.

June 28: Dee and I went to see her for 2:00 p.m. feeding. Very sleepy little girl. We left her to sleep, knowing tomorrow we could keep her for our own!

June 29: Ivy Mehera came home. Dr. Agnew had an EKG run on her. She does have a heart anomaly, but again God is good! She has only a very small murmur, which may or may not cause any problem. Again, watch and wait.

She still has the tube in her tummy! Told Mark more about her. He swears he's going to buy her the biggest stuffed animal he can find for her first birthday and a savings bond. Michael thinks she's adorable. I am well pleased with my sons.

July 1: Mrs. Hicks in. I told her what we had heard so far from the doctors. She checked Ivy first and said if we hadn't a doctor's diagnosis, you would think this a normal baby. Head well shaped, pretty ears, normal hand lines, etc. After I caught her up to date and she had observed Ivy, she said, "As it is really too early, I probably shouldn't say this, but somehow I can't help feeling that after this is through, I shan't be at all surprised when they tell you you now have a normal, healthy baby on your hands."

Wouldn't that be wonderful!

I told Dee about it in the evening, and he immediately told me I shouldn't hope. I found myself very rebellious about that. For me it's impossible not to hope. I think too that maybe thinking positively helps the baby. Certainly it makes me happier, which, as Dee pointed out, is the one thing we can do for her, i.e., be happy around her. I know it is his concern that I not let myself be carried away with hope, only to come crashing down to earth if it doesn't pan out the way my hopes indicate. I think, though, that the old Biblical quote "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" applies. I can face things as they arise, but meantime it is my nature to be happier with hope and thus do a better job of mothering. Somehow it is very hard for me to feel hopeless AND helpless.

As I said to Dee through my tears-of-a-moment last night, "She's just so little!"

A night or two before, I was sorrowful for a second or two, thinking, "She was just big enough to fit in the palm of God's hand!"

I shall simply hope and be happy. Mothers should *never* give

up. When they do, the child is lost. If the mother cannot hope, how can the child?

Later I explained to Dee the importance of mothers remaining hopeful, and he understood completely. Then the doctors themselves began to waver on Ivy's diagnosis.

July 10: Silence Day! Ivy Mehera is three weeks old. I took Ivy to see Dr. Kronick yesterday. He too thought she looked normal and wanted to know if the Down diagnosis had been confirmed. He asked about chromosome check, so must query Wong on it. The whole office thought she was very cute and pretty. She was awake and active while I was there. It is interesting that Dr. Kronick doubts his own diagnosis since he was the first to make it. But there is no doubt but that her appearance has changed radically since she was born.

July 11: Dee looked so sweet tonight curled up on the couch with Ivy in his arms listening to music.

July 13: Ivy and I got home okay from the doctors'. Dr. Ahearn says also that any real distress from the murmur would take two to three days to develop, so I don't need to hang anxiously over her crib day and night.

Back when Ivy was born, Mother had written right away to Mani and Mehera about our problems, and Mani answered immediately:

Dearest Ivy,

What can we say! When feeling is deep, words are helpless conveyors, and I wish the unseen tears of our hearts could wash away some of the agony that dear Charmy is going through. Mehera went immediately to the Beloved's room and prayed to Him to help the whole family and to give strength and courage to His very dear G.G. and Duncan in accepting the bitter prasad He has given. We bow to the love of you dear ones who have bowed to His will. You have done your best for Baby, and now the rest is in His compassionate hands. Baba appeared in a vision to Fred Winterfeldt while he was lying in hospital in a very depressed state after a terrible accident and said, "It had to be."

This much we know (just as you do), that however difficult it is for us to understand, Baba, the All-Seeing and All-Knowing, allows to happen only what is necessary for the ultimate spiritual good. We feel the baby is a special one whose sanskaras are to be spent in His care and love given through Charmy and

Duncan and yourself - maybe it is the baby's last incarnation before its involution journey...

We also pray that Charmy keeps well thru this severe trial and doesn't neglect her health - Baba would never want that and would tell His G.G., "Don't worry. My nazar is on you." He will take care of it all.

Dear love to you and Charmy and Duncan and Mark and Michael, in beloved Baba,

From Mehera and Mani

I wrote a response to this wise and loving letter, even though it had been sent to my mother, and in it I enclosed the latest news about Ivy:

Dearest Mehera,

My dearest thanks to you and Mani for your sweet letter to Murshida. Our little "bitter prasad" is really very sweet, and as soon as I can get Dee to take some, I will send you a picture. What a change there has been in her looks since the day of her birth. She looked then like a gray-purple wine grape, with a mop of black hair and all very floppy limbs. Her eyes were open and she cried. Considering what faced her as a welcome, she can hardly be blamed for yelling a bit. By the next day, they had told me the worst of it, and after one brief visit they removed her to Children's Hospital in Oakland for the operation. It barely gave me time to say Baba's name to her the thirty-three times. But I got it in...

The next morning the doctors operated on her. Now she has a seam from one side of her tummy to the other...

They said it would be three weeks until she could come home, but that Friday her doctor popped his head around the corner and asked if I would like to take her home Monday, after just ten days.

"WOULD I EVER!" said I, and so Monday we brought her home.

She is now, at three weeks, all pink and white. They had shaved both sides of her head at the hospital, so she looked like one of our Apache Indians, but it's growing back now. We find she has a heart murmur - but it's very, very small and is the least kind possible. Anyhow, the heart man assures me it is minor and can be fixed later if it should cause her any trouble. Aside from that, she gives every appearance of a healthy, normal baby. However, we won't know how close she will come to that for at least one to two years. It depends on how her brain is affected.

However, so far she seems bright, and her development is going along even a little ahead of the norm.

As I said, she is very sweet, and one cannot help but love her. Her eyes are big and wide and drinking in the world about her - as much as she can see of it.

I really debated a bit before I named her at the hospital. She seemed to have so little chance of life that I was not sure you and Murshida would want her to have your names, but still it seemed she really needed to have all the help she could get, so finally I went ahead as we had planned and called her Ivy Mehera Knowles. It took Cindy to point out it made her I. M. Knowles, from which we deduce she will probably be a young lady of decided opinions.

Duncan has just been a pillar of love and strength for me and baby all through this period, bless him. He is certainly a marvelous man.

I can only say now that at least stage one of the crisis is over, and our little Ivy Mehera is home with us and will live for at least some while. For the rest we can only wait, and in Baba's own time the answers will come. So we remain, as ever, obedient to and resigned to His will.

After all, the most that will happen is that Ivy Mehera will go home to Him, and that's pretty super as a thought. She has Baba's picture in her bassinet with her and stares at it all the time. Above it is a little Baba flag... so she is nestled in a really good spot.

I hope you are all well. "Be happy and don't worry!" My heart is full of hope in the embracing love of our Beloved...

Charmy

(G.G.)

After we brought Ivy Mehera home to start her new life with her family, I sent Mehera a tape of news, stories, and songs and received a note in return. It contained reminders of Baba's love for me and my family, her pleasure in the Sufi songs we included, and one rather startling reminder:

I remember so well the interest Baba took when Michael was on the way and you asked what name to give if a girl was born. Baba had chosen the name Mary. Now it is for you to make the choice...

Ever lovingly,

Mehera

Somehow, with the passage of years, the busy demands of life, and the drama around our baby's birth, I had completely forgotten Baba's preference for the name Mary. Mehera's reminder had a big impact on both Duncan and me. We had already named her Ivy Mehera. What to do? We finally decided to lengthen her name to Ivy Mehera Mary, but from that moment on, we called her "Mary."

We approached life with our little Mary one day at a time, and that time passed quickly. Months later, I wrote in her diary-

After Daddy's birthday, we thought we would go up to Lake Tahoe for a couple of weeks. All was going well with plans, and Dr. Wong agreed you could go and was delighted with your progress. But the next week I took you to see Dr. Ahearn. When I mentioned a vacation, he said, "That's nice. Where were you thinking of going?"

"Lake Tahoe," I answered.

"Not with a cardiac patient of mine, you're not!" he stated adamantly.

"Okay," I answered. "The baby comes first."

Nevertheless, he spent the next fifteen minutes telling me why not. What it boils down to is that over five thousand feet, one needs extra oxygen, and the altitude is too high at Tahoe and would be a strain on you until the baby vein is completely gone.

We considered other vacation spots. One of Mary's godmothers was of Cherokee extraction and had told us that children need to sleep under the stars before their first birthday or they will never develop a love for nature. We liked that idea so we packed our car with camping equipment and headed north to the redwood forests.

Dearest Mehera,

We have been camping up in the coastal redwoods at one of the state parks. If you could only have seen I. M. Mary tucked in her little white bassinet under the open sky with the giant trees towering above her and some big scolding blue jays keeping her company above, you would have laughed

Ivy Mehera is up to almost fourteen pounds and getting very strong. The doctors regard her continuing good health and development as akin to the miraculous. They say if the little heart murmur doesn't clear up in the next three months (and the chances of it doing so are very slim by now, and it would take a real miracle for it to do so at this point), they will go in and

operate when she is between one year and one year and a half and remove the little piece of vein between the two arteries that is the culprit. There is evidently some risk in doing this, but it's worse if they don't. So, we will just leave it to Baba's will

We think of you all the time, and send our love, in which Duncan, the boys, and Mary join me.

All my love always,  
Charmy

Mehera's response to my letter was very touching and filled with news:

Meherazad  
Nov. 10, '70

Jai Baba dearest Charmian,

When I opened your letter, I stood before Beloved Baba's image and kept repeating "Baba, Baba, Meher Baba" and hoped it would be good news. Often have I prayed to Beloved Baba to keep His sweet Nazar on little Ivy Mehera Mary, and when we saw her photo, we were happy to see what a bonnie baby she is - a real sweet Baba baby. I pray that by Beloved Baba's grace, her heart condition improves and she is quite normal in health.

There is a steady trickle of visitors to M'azad from East and West. It is so interesting to hear of their experiences and how they were drawn to Baba.

A month ago a Parsi family from Mumbai visited us. One of them, Alu by name, told us a touching incident that took place when she had gone to Surat for Baba's darshan.

It was a mass darshan, and the place was packed with people.

Alu, some distance away, awaited her turn when she saw Baba giving rose petals to some lovers near Him. The thought came to her: "How fortunate are those near Baba who are receiving His Prasad. I am so far away.

Almost instantly Baba turned in her direction and looked at her. He took a rose and aimed it straight at her. It hit her full on the chin, and a single petal clung to her lip. Immediately Baba signed to her to eat it.

This touching incident and many like it show clearly the awareness Beloved Baba has of the love of His lovers. His Nazar is on all of us.

The children must be so happy with their baby sister - give her a sweet kiss from me.



Beloved Baba's love is with you, His dear family.

Ever lovingly,  
Mehera

One day a package arrived for Mary from Mehera. I opened it to find a dainty little hairbrush and comb set, along with a note that read:

To darling little I. M. Mary.  
This little gift I send with my love.

Jai Baba  
Mehera

December 1970

Dearest Mehera,

Ivy Mehera Mary continues to grow and thrive. The doctors keep looking puzzled and continue to come up with good news about her.

However, the diagnosis of Down syndrome is definite now. She has what they call "trisome mosaic," where she has an extra twenty-first chromosome in some cells. They say, however, that she appears to have been minimally affected by it, and that she will easily be in the trainable/educable group, which is of itself a real miracle. Jai Baba!

Our next appointment with the heart specialist sounds hopeful since it comes on your birthday. So maybe I will have some really happy news for you on your anniversary day. It would certainly be nice if she didn't have to have that operation next year.

Her hair is staying so much nicer since we got your lovely comb and brush set. It seems funny to think that a little baby her age could get tangles in her hair, but her hair is so fine and little feathers from her pillow would creep into it in back and make a snarl. So I brush it now with your lovely soft brush, and they come right out, and I say beloved Baba's name while I do it. She loves to have her hair brushed. In fact, funny as it might seem, having had two boys, I didn't realize little girls are so very feminine right from the start. Ivy Mehera Mary's little hands and feet are so graceful and very feminine in the way she handles them, and she just loves to be dressed up in a pretty dress and fussed over. I really think Mark and Mike had to be tied down to get clothes on them, but she just loves it.

One of the characteristics of these children is that they tend to be a bit double-jointed, and so she uses her hands and feet

with all the stylized posture of a Balinese dancer. They are like little flowers unfolding.

Thank you so very much for the lovely gift for her. As I said, the brush is just a joy to her, and to me too. We even saved the wrapping to put in her baby book, with a note about it coming from her dear Mehera.

Ivy Mehera Mary, Mark, Michael, and Duncan all join me in sending our dearest love always, and our very, very best wishes for a happy, happy birthday and New Year to you,

Always,

Charmy

As we closed out the old year and began a new one, we couldn't help but be grateful for what 1970 had bequeathed us.

Jan. 2: Dear little one, here it is six months later, and to our complete joy, you are still with us, thriving, and we have had so many lovely adventures.

You are adorable and do much to bring joy to our days. Dr. Bachman at Kaiser did a chromosome study on you and confirms (not that it means much) that you do have Down syndrome... so we will see what we will see!

To us you're perfect and perfectly super. I just hope it causes you no more problems. You are doing so very well now. We have that one more operation to do, and then it's all okay. That's to remove the darn old baby vein. Dr. Ahearn says there is some risk to it, but it has to be done. I'll find out more later this week.

I just hate the idea of any risk to you at all, little dear one. You have become so infinitely precious to us all that to part from you would be terrible. You're right at our heart in our lives.

In any event, I know that we must just take one day at a time, and whatever comes, we'll do our best to be courageous. I'm so lucky to have the love of your wonderful daddy, and so are you, my precious little one, and I know you know it for your face lights up as mine does when he comes in the room.

I wanted so much to express what Mary meant to us, so that same day I wrote a little poem to include in her diary:

The Lily Maid

An amaryllis child!

So fast she grew

And gloriously fragrant,

Perfumed our lives.

We hung above her  
 Breathless  
 As each petal uncurled  
 Revealing a heart of  
 Matchless hue  
 So warm and  
 Soft  
 We knew  
 How close to God  
 Our spirits walk!

Our visit to Dr. Ahearn gave us some encouragement. Mary's baby vein hadn't closed, but he told us it could still shut down in the intervening months so we should wait until she was at least a year old before proceeding with the operation. There was still hope, and we went about our lives.

In February, as a gift to Meher Baba on his birthday, Mother had her students stage the first of a series of musical dramas on phases of his life. This one covered the period of Baba's mast tours, when he traveled extensively to contact God-intoxicated souls.

The play required an immense amount of work by very many people, most of them working on intense, almost-impossible schedules. Zuheir Al-Faqih, Hank Mindlin, Duncan, and I wrote and rewrote the bulk of it over and over between Christmas and the middle of January. Then it went into production.

On top of the usual day's work for all involved, there were rehearsals almost every night and on weekends. New dialogue and music were being written almost daily. Even on the day before the performance, when it was to be filmed, a befuddled chorus was being handed new music and lyrics just written the night before. We had made an extensive search to find a theater and finally found one, but it seated seven hundred fifty. We were afraid we wouldn't fill half of it. Instead it was overflowing, with at least fifty people standing in the aisles.

Mother's students were superb throughout. They were all caught at one time or another with their egos showing (as was I), but they took it in good humor. They raced hither and yon at a moment's notice, changed their plans to accommodate rehearsal schedules, and moved like waves across the San Francisco Bay on a daily basis, sometimes changing directions at the last moment, when the place and time for a rehearsal was suddenly changed. They worked themselves ragged and gave themselves to it fully with love for Baba.

Zuheir Al-Faqih played Baba magnificently. It was so convincing that even the cast began to believe he was Baba. It was so realistic I couldn't believe my eyes. When the play ended, something happened that, in all my years of theater-going both here and abroad, I had never experienced. There was complete silence in the entire theater. It continued for what seemed to be an eternity. Then the audience began to applaud, which soon segued into a standing ovation - one that began at the back of the theater and moved forward in a spontaneous wave. I had never seen one like it.

As the Sufis continued to find new and more expressive ways to celebrate Meher Baba, people from all walks of life continued to discover him and to awaken to his divinity. We heard stories of these new arrivals at Baba's door from all over the United States and Europe and from the mandali, who received many of these people at Meherazad.

The mandali wrote too of some of the hardships they had faced since Baba's passing, most notably with a trust he had created. Before dropping his body, Baba had thoughtfully created a perpetual trust to administer his property and care for those who had lived their lives completely under his close supervision. But the man who directed the trust later took an adversarial position, causing stress for everyone concerned. The opposition probably served to strengthen the mandali's ability to deal with worldly issues, and eventually they were able to have the man removed from his post. Mehera referred to this troublesome situation in a letter I received in April 1971.

Dearest Charmy,

Every day Mani, Rano, and two of the men mandali go to 'Nagar to attend the trust office till things are more settled. [The director of the trust] has done much to make things difficult for the other trustees. He has even taken the case to court in the hope of being reinstated. I guess Beloved Baba had a purpose in all this, and one thing it has done is it has shaken all the trustees wide awake to matters regarding His trust. They can feel Beloved Baba's hand helping and guiding them at every step....

Goher's dispensary is as busy as ever, and people from several surrounding villages come for treatment. Thru the services they receive, they are awakening to Baba's love. Because of their faith in Baba, often the simplest remedies are so effective that even Goher is surprised.

One Zoroastrian couple from Iran had come for the Amartithi with their children. Formerly the husband, Khudabux, was very against Baba and would try and dissuade Baba lovers

in Iran from believing in Him. Over the years, when arguments failed, he thought that by reading Baba's books he would be able to show up the Avatar as false. This had the opposite effect. When he opened the book and saw Baba's photo, he kept looking at it for some time. And reading Baba's words wrought a change of heart in him. The more he read, the more he began to believe in Baba and realize the Truth of His words and how utterly mistaken he himself had been. There is quite a story of the interesting experiences he had of Baba thru dreams which convinced him of Beloved Baba's divinity - that He is the One to whom Khudabux had been praying as Zoroaster...

It is heartening to see what a bonny little Baba baby I. M. Mary is from her lovely photographs - a sweet kiss to her. Always I pray that she grows beautiful in Baba's love....

Ever lovingly,

Mehera

P.S. Dear Charmy, I know that it will interest you to learn that Beloved Baba was seen in His chair in the darshan hall by one of us women. He looked very beautiful in His white sadhra and pink coat with His feet bare and was seen for just two seconds. This occurred on evening of Feb. 1, the same day we had returned to M'azad after the Amartithi.

It had been two years since Baba's passing, yet he was still to be seen everywhere, in a million different forms. He continued to toss rose petals with unerring aim at his grateful lovers. They scattered at the feet of dancers and singers who extolled his life on stage. They floated into the slumbering souls of those whose time had come to awaken. And one of them drifted into a bassinet adorned with Baba's flag, which held a heart whose every beat was a miracle.

## *Under One Roof*

In 1922 Meher Baba directed his mandali to locate a suitable abode in Mumbai for his first ashram. After an intense search, they found a bungalow, which they then renovated. They made carpentry repairs, partitioned the house into different rooms, established a kitchen, and made the house suitable for group living. Baba named it *Manzil-e-Meem*, "the house of the master." Ten months later, he disbanded the ashram.

The following year, Baba directed extensive work near the small village of Arangaon on the Deccan Plateau near Ahmednagar. The mandali labored so hard repairing and whitewashing the buildings that their hands became severely blistered. Baba also announced plans to farm the land and asked the mandali to order bullocks and a pump for the well. Then he abruptly canceled these orders. Finally, after renaming the site Meherabad, Baba announced they would quit that location altogether. But after several months of travel, he led them back to that site and assigned the mandali to demolish some of the buildings they had worked on and do more repair work on others. The men spent long days molding clay bricks, digging up and carrying stones, and toting heavy loads of earth.

Over the next few years, Baba had a number of Meherabad buildings repaired or erected to house a school, dispensary, hospital, leper asylum, and other activities. Then he directed the mandali to dismantle them, saying they were just the scaffolding for his work and were unnecessary once the "real structure is completed." For weeks the men worked from five in the morning until late in the evening to level what they had labored to build.

On Meherabad Hill when Baba was forming a school for young boys, later called the Prem Ashram, he ordered some of the mandali to begin razing some of the structures while directing other mandali to make repairs and erect new buildings. The men were confused - he seemed to be demolishing and constructing all at one time! Three months later, he had them abandon the site altogether and move the school to Toka.

Foundations and walls, roofs, doors, and windows: These are what make up a building. But I think they also provide the external structure for internal growth. Baba seemed to use these physical structures to anchor the spiritual changes in his mandali and to facilitate his universal work. It's been my experience that Masters often work this way, ushering in new phases of inner growth with corresponding changes in physical structures. Perhaps that's why houses and all the activities around them can seem like such intense work for spiritual students. This work can be fraught with obstacles and complications and imbued with a significance that seems to transcend the building itself.

Houses played a central role in my mother's life and in my own. We moved many times in my early years, mostly because of my father's work. Each time, Mother worked hard to find a place that would suit us better than the last. She was hoping that someday she would find the "perfect" house. Each house was to be the ideal home where Mother and Dad would live through retirement. These houses were indeed perfectly comfortable and attractive, but life had a way of compelling my parents to keep moving to the next one. We moved seven times just in the years before I reached thirteen, sometimes back and forth from coast to coast - New York to San Francisco, back to New York, again to San Francisco, and then to Washington, D.C.

The first dream house I remember is the one they began building in Scarsdale, New York, when I was six years old. I can still see them sitting around a table for hours going over the plans laid out in front of them. They seemed especially focused on closets and electric outlets. At one point, the architect told Mother that what she really wanted was a million closets with some walls around them she could call a house.

Soon after this project started, Dad's company sent him on an extended business trip to South America, leaving Mother to struggle with the builder. Dad's business trips were a recurring theme in our lives. Often he was gone from six months to two years at a time. Mother was forced to take on myriad tasks that women in those days were ill-prepared to handle. She would shovel snow off the driveway and see to the maintenance of the cars, plumbing, electricity, and heating. She always managed, but it was never, never easy.

While Dad was in South America, Mother continued with the building of this latest "house to end all houses," and in the end it was indeed very beautiful - a stately colonial home of brick, set back from the road at the end of a gently curving path. It had picture windows in many rooms and bay windows in the living and dining rooms, Mother's bedroom, and my bedroom. There was a suite for the housekeeper and a study for my father that Mother decorated with antique maps from

around the world and his collection of Indian spears. The rooms were all good-sized and decorated in arresting colors. The living room was robin's-egg blue with rust-colored carpet. The dining room was yellow with a pattern of ivy on the curtains and the wallpaper. The house was exquisite, and when my father returned, he was very pleased.

Although the house in Scarsdale seemed to fulfill all my mother's lofty ideals, it gradually began to slip through her fingers. Father's work called him to California, and we followed, settling temporarily in San Francisco. We rented the Scarsdale house to a family that owned a number of grocery stores. Mother was soon appalled to discover that they had redecorated every room and painted the house in bizarre colors without her permission. Worse yet, the man of the house was despondent and later committed suicide in the basement. Because of all that, Mother had trouble finding a buyer when it became clear we would need to be in California for a prolonged period of time. She had to sell the house at a loss, which would be the case with practically all her real estate ventures.

As an adult, I continued the migratory ways of my family for a while, moving from home to home and from East Coast to West Coast. After I married Duncan, life began to settle down some. We had been renting a house in Lafayette, California, for some months when we decided to look for one to buy. Our one particular criterion was that it be large enough so that someday Mother could join us there.

Our search seemed to lead us to some of the most eccentric and abused houses in the area. One promising house we found was in the Orinda hills. I was especially drawn to the expansive living room, which I felt could serve as a location for the rehearsal of our Baba plays. I took Duncan and a contractor friend named Terry Curtis to see it. When we examined it closely, we discovered the owner had been a do-it-yourselfer who had indeed done it himself - all over the house. But apparently he never finished one project before starting the next. Most extraordinary of all was the large fireplace at one end of the living room, with doors on either side leading to another room. On the floor leading to this fireplace was a Persian carpet. But the carpet didn't end at the fireplace - it went under it! When we walked into the next room, we discovered the same Persian carpet coming out from under the wall. Driving home, Dee and Terry were in shock, repeating over and over, "He built the wall right over the carpet!"

We continued our search. I was working with a very bright young real estate agent named Evie, and she had confidently informed me that she was very good at zeroing in on what people want. "I can usually fill a client's needs within three visits to available homes," she had said.



But Evie found us unusual. After the third day of visiting houses, she said, "I just can't figure you out. After every house you say, 'Well, it's very nice. But somehow it's just not for me.'"

I couldn't explain my reactions; I was waiting for an intuitive confirmation. Suddenly Evie looked at me and said, "Huh! I wonder... No..."

We drove on a little way. Intrigued, I urged her to tell me what she was thinking.

"No, no," she replied. "You wouldn't be interested."

"Evie, tell me."

"Well, I don't know. It's just... I heard them talking the other day at the office, and they were discussing whether or not to put the house on the open market or to sell it through a private sale."

I cried, "Evie! Now! Where is the house?"

But Evie was convinced I wouldn't like this mystery house and insisted instead that I view five other houses first. "No, Evie," I said. "Now." So we got a key and drove out to Tice Valley in Walnut Creek. She told me a family had lived in the house, but the wife had died quite suddenly. One son remained, but he had moved out into a shed in the backyard with a few of his friends. It was their habit to sit out there and shoot bottles with air guns. I noticed the backyard was littered with broken glass. A dozen cats wandered in and out of the house at will, along with a large dog. Inside, it looked like kids had made peanut butter sandwiches and then trailed their smudgy hands down the walls.

We toured the house from one end to the other, and it only got worse. The entire place was a disaster.

I went home and told Mother, "I think I may have found the house."

Shortly after, Mother went with Dee to look at it. By now a four-hundred-dollar cleaning crew had labored on it, but to no avail. It still looked dreadful. Dee was shocked at its condition and became increasingly anxious when he realized Mother wasn't dismissing it out of hand. He would do anything his Murshida suggested, but now he found himself hoping against hope that she wouldn't suggest this was to be our new home.

Finally, Mother said to Dee, "Well, dear, it has possibilities."

That seemed to cinch it.

When they arrived home and sat down for dinner, both of them looked grim. Finally I said, "Well?"

"I don't even want to think about it," replied Dee. "I know it's our house, but I don't even want to think about it!"

We all broke into laughter, and shortly after, we bought the house.

Tice Valley itself was a beautiful country area with lots of sunny

open space. Our home was on a half acre and faced a horse pasture across a little lane that connected our neighbors to the main street.

From the very start, the Tice Valley house was a cooperative Sufi project. When we started moving in, friends traveled from miles around to help clean, with teams of people working everywhere at once like an old-fashioned barn raising. Even then, the cleaning was a long and arduous process. I was about to walk into the kitchen once when they were removing an old stove, and someone called out, "Charmian, stop! Don't go in there."

They didn't want me to see how bad it was. When I peeked through the door anyway, I saw the kitchen in shambles. One of my companions had a hoe and another had a railroad spike and a hammer. They were chiseling and knocking years of accumulated dirt out from the area where the stove had been.

Another day a friend disappeared into the family room carrying a bucket and a scrub brush. She emerged five hours later, lugging the bucket dejectedly beside her. "I've scrubbed every single wall two times, and I can't tell that anything has happened."

From another room, someone yelled, "Oh, that's nothing. We're on our fifth scrubbing."

Eventually we got all the walls and floors cleaned, and as laborious as it was, it was also one of the loveliest times I can remember. I was sleeping on a cot in the back room and cooking on a hot plate. In the evening, we'd go out on the back porch with the workers, sit on rolls of old carpet, and have our dinner there. We could look up at the heavens and see stars by the thousands in a blanket over our heads. As the moon came up between the trees, we'd sing songs about Baba.

From the beginning, there was little doubt in my mind that Baba was directing this entire project. That became even more clear as the work progressed and the "friction" progressed with it.

We had so much furniture and so many possessions that we decided to buy two large storage sheds from Montgomery Ward and install them at the side of the house. Thinking of the termites in California, we also ordered steel floors for the sheds. In a few days, a truck rolled up and delivered the unassembled sheds along with a couple of large boxes. I called the group of friends who were going to help me assemble them, and we opened the boxes. There were two *wood* floors inside. So everyone went back home while I called Montgomery Ward to complain.

A couple of days later, Ward delivered two new boxes, but failed to take the old ones back. We gathered our friends again and opened the boxes. When we peered inside, we couldn't believe our eyes - now we had four wood floors!

Once more I complained to Ward, and soon another truck arrived,

off-loaded its cargo, and left. We opened the cartons, and now we had *six* wood floors. This meant over six hundred square feet of wood flooring stored in our garage.

Another call. Another delivery. This time a friend was smart enough to have the driver open the boxes while they were still on the truck. As we suspected, they were wood, and they were sent back with the truck.

Duncan got into the act at this point and worked his way up the hierarchy of Montgomery Ward to a department manager. The fellow was incredulous at our story and wanted to come out and see for himself. Duncan told him, "That's fine, but when you come, will you please bring two *steel* floors with you!" And that's how we finally got the right floors.

Just as we began to assemble the sheds, the temperature soared up above one hundred degrees. The interiors were like ovens for our friends trying to assemble them. The former owners had left behind an old silk parachute, which I had kept without knowing how it would be useful. Now we strung it up over our work area to provide some shade.

Meanwhile, the tribulations outside were equaled by those inside. The interior hallways of the house were dark, and we decided to paint them off-white to reflect light. It was a bigger project than we thought, and we had to send out for additional paint on several occasions. Late one night, our companions were just about to complete a hallway when I heard a yell of dismay. Three crews had been painting separate sections of the hall, and when they finally met, they discovered each section was a slightly different color. One can of paint had been correct, a second had no tint, and the third seemed to have a double dose.

There was just as much confusion around the wallpaper. Duncan had suggested we remove the blue wallpaper from the back bedroom and paint the walls a different color. So when two of the men asked me what they could do next, I suggested they strip the wallpaper off the back bedroom at the far end of the hallway. They disappeared down the hall, and I got busy with something else.

A couple of hours passed, and I went to see how things were progressing. When I got to the back bedroom, I was surprised to see that nothing had changed. I was wondering where on earth the men could be. Then I cried out, "Oh no!" There was one *other* bedroom at an earlier curve of the hallway that also had wallpaper. But it was a cheerful floral pattern, and we hadn't planned to change it. I went running back, and sure enough, the floral paper was almost completely removed from one wall. With resignation, I said, "All right. We'll trim it at the corner and paint the wall so it blends with the paper. It will be a nice room."

Not long after that, the phone rang. It was Duncan: "Charmian, I've

been thinking about that back bedroom. I really *like* that blue wallpaper. Maybe we ought to keep it and work around that color scheme."

I simply said, "Oh, that will be fine, dear."

Somehow Baba always brought us through these things. Usually we persevered with good humor, often laughing as we went. When it was completed, it was a wonderful home, filled with the love of all who helped create it. Among our Sufi companions, it became known simply as "Tice Valley," and we would spend many years under its protecting roof

There was almost never a time when I was totally alone in our Tice Valley house, but one of those rare moments occurred one day when I was standing at the sink doing dishes and concentrating on my chores. Suddenly I felt a hand on my shoulder. I knew that touch and the incredible thrill and delight it evoked. It was the exact same feeling I had had in 1956 in Longchamps restaurant when Baba suddenly walked up behind me and laid his hand on my shoulder.

I looked up and there, to me, was Baba again. "Baba!" I cried out. "You're here!"

I reached out and grabbed his hand and said, "You've come to see our new house. Look! Come look at it!"

Anybody watching would have thought I had gone completely mad, but I was ecstatic. I hurried from room to room, saying, "Baba, look here, look here! This is the dining room. Here's the living room. Here's the family room. Now come outside, Baba, and see this!"

I opened the porch door and went into the garden, exclaiming, "Look at these flowers. See the beautiful tree we have over there, and the walnuts!"

But as I was going through the garden, I realized that Baba's sweet presence had vanished. It was as if he'd come just to pay our house a quick visit and see that we were all right. Baba's visit to Tice Valley was just as real, just as physical, and just as special as his touch on my shoulder, and I considered it a wonderful augury for our new home.

Just about this time, we were also trying to mentally and emotionally prepare to take little Mary in for surgery because the latest EKG showed she still had the vein problem in her heart. Mehera was always concerned about Mary, and I received several loving notes from her. One said:

Sept. 15, 1971

Jai Baba, Dearest Charmian,

Mani had received a letter from dear Ivy about little Ivy Mehera Mary - I feel very deeply for her and for you, Duncan, and Ivy. Beloved Baba has always said to take medical advice,

and I am sure you have gone to the best doctors. So often I pray to Beloved Baba to keep His sweet nazar on the little one and help her in every way. Everything is in Beloved Baba's hands, and He does as he sees fit according to our karma. I pray to Baba to give you strength, strength to love Him and be resigned to His will.

Sarosh, hardly a month back from the States, has had a severe heart attack and is in hospital. His condition is critical - in fact he himself says it is only due to Baba that he is alive. When the attack came, Sarosh was in a state of shock, and he experienced Baba's presence, and in the midst of dazzling light, he saw Beloved Baba ...

I hope dear Mark and Mike are keeping fit and growing fast in Baba's love. Give them love and a special Jai Baba ...

Ever in His Infinite Love and Compassion,  
Mehera

In another letter, Mehera sent a gift for Mary - with phenomenal repercussions.

Jai Baba, Dear Charmian,

Enclosed in this envelope are some petals of a rose offered at Beloved Baba's Samadhi.

Take Beloved Baba's name and give dear little I. M. Mary one petal each day in a way easy for her to take - it may be mixed with a little milk.

May Beloved Baba bless little Mary with His sweet nazar so that she may grow up normal in every way - beautiful in Baba's love.

Love,  
Mehera

To prepare for the surgery, we took Mary to Dr. Ahearn's office for a preadmission examination. When we arrived, his aide admitted us and performed another EKG, after which we met with the doctor. Dr. Ahearn was about to proceed with the next steps when he was handed the test results. He was perplexed; his plan had been simply to proceed with the surgery without a test since Mary's previous EKG had been performed so recently. But apparently there had been a mix-up in communications. Still, the doctor decided to look at the results, and now his confusion turned to astonishment. Mary's heart problem had vanished completely.

This wondrous day was a major turning point for us. It felt like the lingering storm clouds had parted, and we could finally see the road ahead of us. It was a road we welcomed and one on which we wanted

Mary with us every step of the way. When we first discovered that Mary had Down syndrome, we hadn't realized that God had sent us a gift, one more precious than we could ever have wished for. Yet we soon came to understand that Baba was blessing us beyond measure, and to this day we continue to thank him from the depths of our hearts.

I wrote Mehera to tell her the good news. And now that Mary had healed, we were able to make our long-awaited trip to the Sierra Nevadas. I wrote to Mehera again with a report of our adventures at Lake Tahoe:

October 7, 1971

Dearest Mehera,

I. M. Mary immediately decided... that she had at last found a bathtub big enough to suit her, and took much joy in paddling way out in the lake with her auntie Kathy Childers or with her mommy and daddy... Babies Mary's age (fifteen months) tend to be a bit frightened of large bodies of water, so I heard some mothers on shore exclaiming, "Look at that little bitty tyke way out in the water! And she isn't at all afraid!" ...

The mothers descended on me with much the same comment, and without thinking, I replied, "Well, she shouldn't be afraid! After all, she's been taking swimming lessons for over a month now!"

Their expressions were so funny. They looked at Ivy Mary and me and then went into a "You're putting me ON!" look...

I. M. Mary is now all over the place - crawling, walking along things, and touring the house supported by a pair of friendly spare hands who have the time to help her walk. She is beginning to take a real interest in toys.

Now, to tell you about the rose petals. Firstly, a heart full of thanks from all of us. Secondly, they were all given as directed, taking Beloved Baba's name on five consecutive nights. The day after we had given her the second rose petal, Kathy came back to my room muttering to herself I said, "What's going on, Kathy?"

Kathy exclaimed, "Boy! Those rose petals sure work fast!" So I dashed out to the family room to see what Kathy was talking about. There was I. M. Mary, standing in her playpen, saying over and over again, "Meher Baba! Meher Baba!" It was really miraculous...

Always and always dearest love,  
Charmy

Nov. 30, 1971

Jai Baba

Dearest Charmian,

I was very happy to hear how much dear little Ivy Mehera Mary is improving in health. I am grateful to Beloved Baba for hearing my prayer. It is all Beloved Baba's doing. His sweet nazar is on her. May she and dear Mark and Mike ever grow in Baba's love...

Mehera

Life in Tice Valley unfolded for us in wonderful ways. Mary especially seemed to enjoy living there. Each night before going to bed, she would go out in the backyard and say, "Good night, tree. Good night, bush. Good night, rose." She opened our hearts at every turn.

The inhabitants at Tice Valley were all endearing, and that included several from the animal world. There were eight raccoons, two dogs, our duck, and a black cat. There was also a little gray cat named Grayling, who was wild. We never knew where Grayling slept, but he would come to be fed and was certainly an affectionate little animal. He would push up against you, and he'd stand on his hind legs when you'd lean over to pat him. Numerous times I came out of the house to find him and a raccoon sitting side by side waiting for dinner. Or I'd look out the window and see Grayling sitting calmly while a possum ate out of his food bowl. The animals seemed truly to be friends, as if they'd really gotten into the spirit of Baba's message that we should all be kind to each other, no matter our differences.

The duck who waddled about our backyard was a little female mallard with a broken wing. We named her Quackers, and she would wander around the yard as part of our family. But finally it was time to return her to her own kind, so we took her to a quiet, secluded lake in Walnut Creek that was home to many other ducks. When we set Quackers down in the lake and moved back up to shore, it was clear she had no intention of joining the wild ducks floating on the lake. She scooted along the water as fast as she could, trying to get back to shore with us. Each time she came back, the children picked her up and took her out to the end of the pier to drop her in the lake again. The last time we did this, we ran hurriedly away, but our hearts were breaking. We were going to miss this little duck very much. Yet this is where she needed to be, and it occurred to me that what we did for our duck is exactly what Baba does with us - placing us in the most appropriate situation, even though sometimes we too try to scurry from our fate, just as Quackers did.

We asked a friend who lived near the lake to keep checking on Quackers, and after a while we went back ourselves. We found our lady floating across the lake in the company of a very elegant mallard gentleman and a whole row of ducklings. She was at home on her lake at last, and we were very happy.

The menagerie in our backyard was just part of a larger collection of possessions and responsibilities that Duncan never imagined he would have. When I first met him, he would say that he didn't have any wants in life. But Mother would always proclaim, "You have to *have* something before you can give it up."

Apparently not desiring things isn't the same as releasing them. You have to *get* them and *then* release them. I had told Duncan, "The time will come. You'll have a wife and children and a house and animals that you'll have to tend. Then you'll have to put in the landscaping and the garden, and then you'll get a pool. Then you'll add a second pool for the children. Once you get it all shipshape, the children will move out, and you'll move on to something simpler." And that's exactly how it worked. We got married, wound up with a big house and garden, lots of animals, and two fishponds. One must accumulate before one can divest, and Tice Valley was the setting for the years of accumulation.

I too had to make the shift into a new role during these years of the early 1970s. There came a time when the number of Sufi students became so large that Mother needed help. In the late 1960s, she had cabled Baba a list of names, asking him if they might be allowed to help her teach. Although he was always careful to admonish people not to be spiritual teachers, he had required my mother to teach, and she hoped he might approve others to assist her. Baba wired back approving her choices, and at the end of the telegram he added, "And, of course, Charmian, if she has time."

I had never thought of teaching. There is a Sufi adage that if you want to teach, you aren't ready. Most spiritual teachers would rather do anything else. I procrastinated about it for a long time because it seemed to me my "house" wasn't in order. At the time, I was still in the middle of my divorce and attending college to earn a teaching credential for elementary school. So it wasn't until I married Duncan, had our child, and could feel the foundation and framing in place that I finally said to Mother, "Well, I guess maybe now things are in order."

Still, I kept wondering what Baba had meant when he said "if she has time." I learned soon enough. Even though my teaching was restricted to our own students in the Sufi order, I had a new job that had me dashing from coast to coast doing evaluations of programs aimed at



drug abuse and juvenile justice. At the same time, I had to raise three children and keep a huge house in order. When I realized what Baba had meant, I had to smile. Fortunately, he also blessed us with wonderful helpers, friends, and Sufi companions who enabled us to get on with our lives and not have a moment's worry about our dear children.

Being a Sufi teacher was challenging, but I tried never to "teach" anyone except those Sufis to whom I'd been assigned under Baba's guidance. Trying to help others sort out their lives toward a spiritual goal is a dangerous proposition unless done under the auspices of a true spiritual Master. I simply made an effort to carry out Baba's wish and leave the results to him. The "teacher" was always Baba, and there was never a moment in any of our lives when there was any doubt about that.

Once we had settled into Tice Valley, Mother would come to visit us on weekends from her apartment in San Francisco. She was over seventy-five now, yet working harder than ever. Living in the big city was a constant assault on her senses. Sirens screamed all hours of the day and night, and garbage collectors banged cans in the dark hours of the morning. So when Mother arrived in the peaceful Tice Valley, we could see her "armor" fall off, and she would begin to relax and recuperate. However, just a day or two later, she would have to buckle the armor on again and return to the city. We all felt she wasn't getting the deep rest she needed.

Over and over, we tried to get Mother to come live with us. Finally we persuaded her, but she was very insistent that she didn't want to interfere in our lives. She would agree to the move only if we built new quarters. Ideally they would be separated from the main house but connected by a little breezeway. That would help distance her from the sounds of children playing and other noises of an active family. We gladly agreed.

Our Sufi architect and builder friends set to work and designed a marvelous building that contained a large living room, a bedroom with adjoining bath, and a study where Mother could work with her secretary. They added a little kitchen to give her the independence that would make her comfortable and happy.

The plans were submitted to the county authorities for approval. Then the inevitable obstacles began to rise.

The next thing we knew, notices of public hearings appeared on telephone poles all around the neighborhood. We learned that our proposal - basically a second house - wasn't within the code for properties of our half-acre size. We went to the hearing and found many neighbors there who spoke up politely but firmly against our plans. Finally someone mentioned that if we had proposed a simple addition to our existing

house, the neighbors wouldn't have objected. The commissioner said that he too would approve such plans.

A lightbulb went on. Of course! Let's just eliminate the breezeway and connect Murshida's "house" directly with ours. We could still give her practically everything she required.

When we took the new plans to the county office, the commissioner was away on vacation, but he'd left word that he'd already approved them. The man at the desk looked at the plans and was surprised to see they called for a second kitchen. That was definitely against code. But since his boss had already approved the plans, he approved them too. This would never have occurred if our plans had not been detoured by the public hearing. It seemed like Baba had us surmount all those hurdles in order to give Mother her own kitchen! Indeed, that space turned out to mean a great deal to her and contributed significantly to her comfort.

As the project grew close to completion, one evening before dinner, I got a frantic phone call from Terry Curtis, who was supervising construction. He said we were behind schedule and that although we'd managed to get the Sheetrock up, there'd been no time to sand it. The next day the tapers were arriving, and he couldn't find enough people to help prepare the walls for them.

I told him my Sufi class was meeting that night, and I would ask them if they'd be willing to do some sanding.

As it turned out, everybody was perfectly happy to help. I told them to wear their oldest clothes, and that night I sat in the corner of the living room reading out loud the class lessons that had been approved by Baba while my class worked on the walls of Mother's living room and bedroom. As they sanded and sanded, the dust from the plaster drifted down on them and slowly turned them into white ghosts. By the end of the lesson, they looked as if they'd been dipped in a flour barrel. We often thought back on that night and laughed about it.

Through all the building, sanding, and painting, there wasn't a moment of time when Baba's love wasn't poured into Mother's new home. She moved in on September 15, 1973, and her home was to be the hub of Sufi activities until 1979. We welcomed her with open arms. Baba's welcome was palpable but unseen. One of the last things the Sufis did before the walls were finished was to write his name on practically every joist. There wasn't a section of her wing that didn't have his name written again and again all through it, so that now the house itself perpetually intoned the name Mother loved best: "Meher Baba," "Meher Baba," "Meher Baba."

## *A Rose Comes Forth*

They appeared at our door expecting a solemn master in a turban and long white robes or an ascetic draped in gunnysack and wearing sandals. Instead they found my mother.

With her neatly coiffed white hair and pearls, Mother looked less like a guru and more like someone's kindly old grandmother - which indeed she was. But she was also much more, and her eyes would twinkle in amusement when she saw the surprise on her visitors' faces. Then she would quickly put them at ease with great good humor and friendly conversation, punctuated with insightful comments and penetrating questions that gradually revealed the depths of her understanding.

After Mother moved into our Tice Valley home, the stream of people coming to see her was constant. It didn't escape the notice of our neighbors, middle-class suburbanites unaccustomed to viewing pilgrimages from their picture windows. They were all very nice people, but they were people caught unawares. I remember some years later attending a local homeowners' meeting where a man turned to me and said, "We really have to be careful. You know, there was that guru who lived down on Tice Valley Lane, and parking was always a problem. We have to keep an eye on these things."

I responded, "Oh yes, I know. We felt so terrible about it. That was my mother."

The man looked stunned. He'd been acquainted with us for some time through these meetings but had never made the connection. It simply didn't occur to him "that guru" might have a family and, guru or no, might in many ways be quite conventional.

The shock waves generated by my mother sometimes ricocheted my way as well. It was often me, clad in a muumuu or work clothes, who answered the door when people came to meet her. Other times people would come expressly to meet me, as Murshida's daughter. Some clearly expected a dignified, elegantly dressed lady, and I could see this in the formal and stylish way they themselves had dressed. But there I would be, in the scruffiest clothes I had, struggling with the housecleaning,

or the dogs and cats and raccoons and possums, or laying out manure on the garden. They would quickly recover from their shock, and soon we'd be chatting away like old friends.

It's difficult to overcome our expectations of other people, but I've discovered through the years that I'm much happier when I expect more of myself. Donning a muumuu and cleaning the house was one of the ways I did this. I had learned long before that opportunities to grow and serve are often disguised in the most routine, unglamorous tasks.

I remember trying to put this principle into action during one of Mary's hospital stays. There was a bathroom beyond the nurses' station that was often dirty on weekends when the cleaning crews were off. The nurses were working very hard just to care for the children, many of whom were seriously ill. I knew what it felt like to be a parent whose child's life was on the line, to be under such stress, and to then enter a bathroom that looked so forlorn. So occasionally I'd sneak in and pick up the litter, scrub the ashtrays, and wipe down the counters. It was a small contribution, but I was thinking how nice it would be if one of the parents or nurses went in and found the room shining a little bit, hopefully with God's light.

I always considered this sort of gesture one of Baba's essential lessons for us: that we should try to leave each place a little shinier than we find it. If we all did that, what an uplifting world we'd have, all gleaming with light and love. This is precisely what love is to me: being of service to his world. St. Theresa once told her nuns, "Christ has no body now on earth but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours." We have the freedom and privilege to choose to be his hands and feet, but we have to discipline ourselves to do it.

The catch with this practice is that if you clean one thing, you find everything around it suddenly needs the same treatment. You can't scrub a small section of your kitchen wall without feeling dissatisfied with the other sections, now even dirtier by contrast. So you feel compelled to go back and do the entire wall, and then the entire room, sometimes from wall to wall and room to room through the entire house. Then it's on to the floors and ceilings.

So it is with spiritual students. We can't tackle one problem or overcome one weakness and assume that's the end of it. The others then stand out and demand attention. A very wise man once said, "Well, you know what your reward is for solving problems, don't you? A bigger and better problem to solve!"

His name was Dr. James MacKie, and his wisdom was a guiding force in my life, and the lives of many others, for over twenty-five

years - remarkable years that began soon after Mother moved into our Tice Valley home.

Over the years, Mother and I had often talked about her successor as Murshida of the Sufi order. Baba had said he intended Sufism to last seven hundred years, until his return, and that he would provide Mother with an illumined Murshid to follow her. Although she was ever vigilant, she was now well into her seventies and still hadn't identified a possible successor.

When Dr. MacKie arrived to visit Mother in 1974, he was a brilliant professional with a broad and successful career whose life had recently been turned upside down by the indomitable force of Meher Baba. He was well known as the editor of an important psychiatric journal, and he taught in graduate schools of social work, clinical psychology, and psychiatry, as well as anthropology. He was also widely respected as an educational innovator for programs with multi-handicapped children. Dr. MacKie was charming, refined in manner and taste, erudite and witty, sophisticated and humble, and one of the most extraordinary spiritual figures of our time. My mother knew this almost instantly.

What first drew Mother's attention to Jim MacKie was his incomparable insight into the nature and working of sanskaras, the impressions left predominantly from one's actions in past lives that in turn shape current experiences. When Baba chartered the course for Sufism Reoriented, he told Mother it would be concerned with the unwinding of sanskaras, the process that underlies our return journey to God. Mother candidly replied that she knew nothing about the subject, but Baba assured her he would provide the knowledge when the time was right. Later he added that he was preparing a younger man to come to help her. Jim was forty-two when he arrived at her doorstep without any possessions - but possessed of the most profound understanding of God she had ever known.

As we came to learn, Jim's knowledge of sanskaras and spiritual processes arose out of his direct perception. Inner realms of understanding had been open to him as a child but had closed when he was eight years old. Now, in 1974, these realms had been reopened when he found himself in the presence of a photograph of Meher Baba. He came to know that he was to offer his life in the service of Murshida Duce, and in May, the month of his birth, he arrived to meet her. Mother had been encountering highly gifted people throughout her entire life, but in Jim MacKie she recognized something exceptional. Thus began her phase of getting to know him as only a Murshida can.

This same year, a group of young new Baba lovers in England invited Mother to visit them in London. Baba had first journeyed to

England in 1931, where a cadre of people became his lifelong followers. The explosion of interest in him during the 1960s had touched England too, and now it called to Mother. Even at seventy-nine, she readily responded. Duncan and I accompanied her, and we were greeted at the London airport by rock star Pete Townshend, recording artist Billy Nichols, and two of their friends.

We were taken to the Durrants Hotel, where we were welcomed by our old friend Delia DeLeon and several new Baba followers. Our trip had been grueling, and Mother had been unable to sleep. But there was an urgent yearning in the air, and she immediately made herself available to those who had come to see her. Indeed, as soon as she entered the hotel, a bellman declared, "Phone call for Mrs. Duce."

Mother slept poorly that night, and at 4:00 a.m. the three of us were awake and starving, so we sat on her bed and ate sandwiches. Duncan and I were deeply concerned about Mother's fatigue, a recurring burden in her life. She'd never had a natural reserve of energy, and whatever she accomplished, she did through sheer determination. So what was about to transpire in England showed her willpower at its most incandescent.

In the morning, Duncan and I could barely drag ourselves out of bed, but Mother was already up and gone, meeting with those who had asked to see her. This pattern continued throughout our stay. Wherever and whenever hearts were beckoning, she was there. This was the first contact for many of these people with a spiritual teacher, and she gave of herself unstintingly. Later that evening, the London group staged a special reception for her at the Star and Garter Hotel, where Baba had stayed years earlier. Fittingly, they held it in the Ivy Room.

The next morning, we were awakened early by loud banging noises. It turned out the hotel was expanding, and construction work was underway right on the other side of our wall. Apparently one worker's entire task was to sit and beat a pipe incessantly. Mother's interviews were scheduled to begin at 10:00 a.m., but the young woman who was first arrived a half hour late. "That's just the way I am," she said. This threw everybody who followed off schedule, and consequently Murshida skipped a planned rest after lunch. I saw her steel herself to continue, and at 6:30 p.m. she finally came to the room absolutely exhausted. She had just drifted off to sleep when the phone rang - someone wanted to see her before she left. Of course Mother made time available.

The role of a Murshida or Murshid in Sufism Reoriented is not one many people understand. A real Murshid has the authority to teach and guide students' lives through karmic situations and help them unfold their hearts. As this intensive week progressed, I felt these young people had begun to realize that a true teacher was indeed in their midst, and as

this awareness spread, more and more people clamored to see Mother. Still, not everyone comprehended. At one of Mother's talks, a young man asked, "I understand that when the pupil's ready, the teacher appears. Are we to assume, then, that if we're ready, we can expect a teacher to come to England?"

Mother looked him in the eye and said, "I'm here. You don't know a teacher when you see one." Her voice seemed to me like a golden hammer.

That evening she gave more interviews, and the interest level was so high that afterward some of the Londoners gathered with Murshida at a nearby hotel for more discussion.

At 5:00 a.m. on our last day, we all awoke to what sounded like an explosion in our room. We jumped out of bed and tried to determine what had happened. Was it a gunshot? A boiler exploding? After a quick look around, we found a bottle of champagne, given earlier to Mother, that was now bubbling over. Either Maya, the force of illusion, had popped the cork to celebrate Mother's departure from England - or God was toasting her for a job well done!

Mother was very taken with the people she'd met, and some of them later moved to America to become her students. Pete Townshend brought his family to California and stayed a month to be near Mother. Her love for Pete was very, very deep, and he in turn was a valuable help on some of our Sufi projects.

Mother had poured herself into helping the London Baba community, and the toll on her health was abundantly clear when we left London for a prearranged vacation in Scotland. It was a vacation, like all others for Mother, that had its trials.

By the time we arrived, it was fall, and icy Arctic winds were blowing across the land. Mother was chilled to the bone and had to bundle up from head to toe as we toured Edinburgh, Dunfermline, Bannockburn, the Trossach Mountains, and the isle of Arran. It was a repetition of our winter "vacation" a few years earlier in the California desert. But even though the journey was cold and uncomfortable, it was still a happy trip, and we talked about it for years to come.

In December, two months after we'd returned to the States, Mother found herself suffering from a gall bladder illness. It was a tradition on Christmas Eve for Sufis to visit our house and sing Christmas carols to her. This year, when she was ill, they gathered in the backyard outside her windows with candles in their hands to light the way. Mother loved that night. With Mary by her side, she came to her window to smile and wave at them, and they all scrunched up close to get a glimpse of her.

By now little Ivy Mehera Mary was four years old, and we had a new challenge before us. She would need a very special school to attend, one that could accept and serve her unique needs while also encouraging her particular gifts. But no such school seemed to exist.

Until then Mary had been attending a treatment center, but she had just passed the upper age limit. The center's principal, who loved her dearly, had broken down in tears because she couldn't think of any options for a child like Mary. I had been discussing this with a companion named Ellen Sirota, and we both approached Mother with our concerns. We discovered that Mother was already thinking along the same lines herself.

The connection between Mary and Mother was very strong. Mary adored her grandmother Murshida. It was Mother who had held Mary in her lap when she was driven to Children's Hospital for surgery after she was born. Mother had enveloped her with her love and blessings through the entire trip, which I believe contributed to the success of Mary's surgery.

After Mother came to live with us, she and Mary would go for walks together each day, up the street and back. In the evenings, Mary would sit on her grandma's lap as she read to her. They watched television together, and they even traveled together to Hawaii (with Duncan and me along for the ride). I remember a morning when I went in to see Mother, and Mary followed a few minutes later. She entered the room and said, "Why, Grandma, you have a headache!" Mother exclaimed, "Yes, Mary. I *do* have a headache. But how did you know? I haven't told anybody." Mary's exquisite sensitivity to her grandmother was especially touching.

Now her beloved Grandma was committed to finding a school environment for Mary, and since none seemed to exist, it looked like we would have to create it. Although Mary was the catalyst for this project, Mother knew that a number of her young married students also had children and that they too needed a school that could offer not just solid academics but a grounding in love, honesty, fairness, respect, and service to others. Mother decided to found such a school and have her qualified students manage and staff it. She invited Jim MacKie to help us with the details and lend both his professional expertise and his uncommon insight.

I joined Mother and Jim in these meetings whenever I could, and my affection and respect for him grew steadily deeper. He was dedicated solely to fulfilling Mother's wishes and her vision of what the school could become.



Mother modeled the school on the educational principles Meher Baba had demonstrated in his work with the children at the Prem Ashram, his "School for Love" in India. Mother's ideal was a school that offered an excellent non-sectarian education in an atmosphere of free-flowing love that nourished personal growth and learning. The school opened in 1975 in space rented from a local church and was named the White Pony School after the symbol for the Avatar of the Age - the white horse. Ellen became its first principal.

Mother would visit the school often as Murshida, and as Grandma she would drop in to see Mary. As soon as the White Pony was up and running, I took Mary's former principal from the treatment center to see it. She thought it was perfect for Mary, and so it was. It was a school that managed to integrate children with handicaps into normal classrooms. Mary attended the school for seven years and was never isolated for her disability, but always embraced and supported. The teachers and staff all dedicated their lives to bringing about an environment that invited students to learn to express love in their lives, and since Mary's nature was so purely loving, she grew and responded with a love of her own that melted one's heart.

Word spread about the school, and today it is a popular, fully accredited school with its own campus. It's known now as The Meher Schools and operates as a service to the community with preschool, elementary, and daycare programs for three hundred eighty students. Mother's vision has not only been realized but also wonderfully expanded. Today after-school enrichment programs offer word processing, art, drama, video production, sports, crafts, and woodworking. Summer day camps have included drama, arts and crafts, and sports. Three children's choirs rehearse and perform. What is most unique is that the professional staff and volunteering parents are supported by close to two hundred regular Sufi volunteers. They quietly clean the entire school in the evenings, maintain the buildings and grounds, prepare classroom materials, and assist in classes and resource centers. To me, this is remarkable and truly unique.

The number of Sufis was growing rapidly during these years, and I found myself remembering a time in the early days when Baba had sent Mother the message that predicted this growth. As the years passed, she began to wonder where exactly these people were and when she might expect them. Yet when more and more people did begin to arrive, I think she never failed to be surprised.

By now we were outgrowing our center in San Francisco, and it became evident we needed to leave the city. At first we searched for a new location down the San Francisco peninsula, where our former home

had been. We were doubtful that we could find a building in the Walnut Creek area that would support our large and growing group. But one day a companion, Aneece Hassen, called us and said he'd found a possible place and wanted us to see it.

When Murshida sent a group of us to check it out, we found a building in Walnut Creek owned by the Holy Ghost Society and currently housing a restaurant, nightclub, and bar. One had to overlook the decor to see the potential of the space. This place had offices, a large room upstairs that could serve as a meeting room, and even a stage. Most importantly, it had ample space for us. What surprised us the most was that it was right down the street from our house in Tice Valley! We bought the building in December 1975 and set right to work putting it in order.

Walnut Creek was a most ideal setting. Both the city of Walnut Creek and its county of Contra Costa are areas in which the energy seems especially conducive to rapid growth and expansion. Maybe the mountain has something to do with it.

Walnut Creek sits under a solitary, majestic, and unfortunately named mountain that rises about four thousand feet in the air and overlooks one of the most vital and popular regions in America.

Mount Diablo, or Devil Mountain, began about 165 million years ago as volcanic rock beneath the surface of the Pacific Ocean, and by about 2 million years BC, it had worked its way up as low-lying hills. Today it towers above everything for miles, making it the most prominent natural feature of the county. On clear days, the view from its rocky peak is phenomenal. There are only a few places on earth where one can see more land.

The Indians who inhabited the area before highways, mass transit, and office buildings replaced the lupines and buttercups considered Mount Diablo sacred. According to their ancient myths, the summit of this mountain was the site where the Creator made the world and the people to inhabit it, providing them with everything, everywhere so they can live. Another Indian group knew it as the place from which the formerly dark world was lit.

It was the Spanish who gave the mountain its current profane name. Although struck with its beauty and vast view - "Its end cannot be seen," they reported - they were even more struck with the uncanny ability of the local Indians to escape their grasp. When the Indians took cover in a thicket one night to avoid being herded off to the missions, the Spaniards decided to camp and roust them in the morning. But before dawn, the natives escaped across the Carquinez Strait, a feat the Spaniards considered possible only with the help of Satan. The thicket was thereafter

labeled "Monte del Diablo." Later English settlers mistook the Spanish word for "thicket" as "mountain," and so it was from a linguistic error that the mountain was thereafter known as the Devil Mountain. Many years later when the county was incorporated and officials were trying to decide what to name it, they favored Diablo County, a choice that was blocked by a coalition of outraged religious groups.

Its unholy name aside, the mountain has always been revered by Californians. In 1860 a traveler wrote: "Almost every Californian has seen Monte Diablo. It is the great central landmark of the state. Whether we are walking in the streets of San Francisco, or sailing on any of our bays and navigable rivers, or riding on any of the roads in the Sacramento and San Joaquin Valleys, or standing on the elevated ridges of the mining districts before us - in lonely boldness, and at almost every turn, we see Monte Diablo."

One of its first, most ardent admirers was the conservationist John Muir, eponym of Muir Woods where we once strolled with Baba. During one California sunrise, he noted: "Beautiful silvery haze on Mount Diablo this morning, on it and over it - outlines melting, wonderfully luminous." The mountain has stirred many another creative soul, including that of Eugene O'Neill, who once lived in nearby Danville. O'Neill recorded his mystical ponderings while gazing at the mountain: "Mount Diablo, a mass of purple in the morning. Nature is always lovely, invincible, glad whatever is done or suffered by her creatures. All scars she heals; whether in rocks or waters or sky or heart."

Close to the foothills of this stalwart, light-reflecting guardian sits Walnut Creek, the home of our center. Originally Walnut Creek was called "The Corners" because it was here that roads leading from the north and west converged. Its growth has been amazingly swift since then. An initial explosion occurred in the 1800s, when it became a link to the transcontinental railroad. More explosions followed in the twentieth century, triggered by tunnels and freeways connecting it to Oakland and San Francisco, by a station in the Bay Area Rapid Transit System, and by many other external factors.

The growth rate in the Walnut Creek area has been so rapid that it was named one of the fastest growing cities in the nation. In the last thirty years, I've seen it blossom from a quiet suburb to a bustling city with a vital white-collar business community, high-tech office buildings, upscale shopping centers, and cultural and arts centers. Creeks still navigate their way through sprawling residential areas, but the acres of walnut groves are gone, an occasional backyard tree, like ours in Tice Valley, their only living testament.

In this provocative setting, we set out to create our new center in a building owned by the Holy Ghost Society near an old crossroads beneath a luminous mountain, thought to be named for the devil, where Creation once mythically spawned. We were well prepared for the tasks ahead. Before building Mother's home in Tice Valley, her students had little experience or skill in construction and never dreamed such work would become central to their spiritual lives. But by now they were accomplished builders and remodelers.

Baba seems to frequently work this way. A new project would begin, we would find ourselves in over our heads, wondering how we were going to manage, and then we'd find ourselves accomplishing what we thought was impossible. It seemed we were always discovering new skills and learning to use them in service. So as the 1970s progressed, we - men and women alike - learned to drive nails, scrape walls, and prepare surfaces. We painted endless miles of walls trying to make our new center as beautiful as possible. Then we decorated it with lovely portraits of Baba painted by our own students, many of whom were accomplished artists. The building continued to expand, and the number of Sufis continued to grow, just as the city itself was burgeoning.

Nearby, at our home in Tice Valley, this fertile energy was equally apparent in my garden. Everything seemed to thrive there, even redwood trees. Since I so dearly loved redwoods, I had brought a few back from a trip to the Sierras and bravely planted them out front, although Sierra redwoods traditionally require a higher altitude. They did so well, however, that I added a coastal redwood and later a Dawn redwood given to me by a good friend, Dick Clark. The coastal redwoods like fog, which we lacked in Walnut Creek, and the Dawn redwoods liked cold winters, which we also lacked. It didn't seem to matter. Everything we planted behaved as if the environment was perfect.

The climate in the Walnut Creek area grants a longer growing season for more varieties of plants than almost anywhere in the world. This was a special boon to our roses. We'd lived in many other climates, and it had always been a struggle to grow roses. But here they would start to bloom early in spring and continue almost to Christmas. As a result, I planted numerous roses down the side of Mother's house. Among these were my first three rose bushes, transplanted from my home in Santa Rosa: Tropicana, which is bright orange; Bewitched, an old standby with beautiful, huge pink flowers; and a lavender gray named Sterling Silver, which had a special destiny with Mother.

When I planted Bewitched, I was amazed to find myself picking roses off fifteen-foot stems that reached up into our walnut tree. Mother

especially enjoyed the flowers from that particular bush. The Tropicana was a rather fussy rose, prone to mildew. It required just the right conditions, and it didn't like change, so we were careful not to disturb it when digging the foundation for Mother's house. Even with ditches running just four feet away, it produced hundreds of blooms and never looked healthier. It was as if it knew she was coming.

Mother loved these roses, but for some reason she wasn't as fond of the Sterling Silver. For exercise, she would try to take a short walk around the grounds each day. But when she passed by the Sterling Silver, she would ignore it. Instead she'd praise the other two roses, pat the dog on the head, and return to her house. The poor Sterling Silver was getting smaller and weaker and sadder. I felt it knew she didn't like it. So finally I said to her, "Mother, you have got to stop neglecting that Sterling Silver. It's going to die if you keep this up."

"What do you mean?" she asked.

I explained her impact on the rose, and then I described what I thought was its particular virtue: "It's the only Sufi rose in the garden," I said. "It's not very exciting by itself, but it makes all the other roses look good. You put it with Tropicana, and suddenly the orange color just pops out. You put it with Bewitched, and by contrast the pink looks stunning. The Sterling Silver just wants to be a background."

So on her walks through the garden, Mother started patting and talking sweetly to this little Sterling Silver. I'd see her when she thought I wasn't watching. And I'd hear her say, "I really like you. You're a very nice rose."

Gradually the Sterling Silver began to regain its strength. As the months went by, it began growing and producing more flowers. Soon it was flourishing again. Such is the power of loving thoughts.

One night in January of 1976, Mother grew terribly ill with a severe gall bladder attack. At six the next morning, her condition had so deteriorated that we took her to the hospital, and they operated on her that same day. Mother came very close to death. The Sufis all gathered together in prayer groups and sent loving thoughts and feelings to her. A week later she was able to return home, where she made a complete recovery.

After we finished our new center, the first major event we staged was a play for Baba's birthday about the 1962 East-West Gathering. Each year more and more people came to see our musical dramas on Baba's life, and this year we found ourselves staging multiple performances to packed houses over several days.

When word spread around the country about the plays, people would often write Mother asking for a copy of the scripts so they could

stage the plays themselves. She would explain to them that the productions were enormous tasks that required vast resources. Each required a crew of about 180 people, including actors, directors, and assistant directors, producers, choreographers, costume designers, a sewing crew, an orchestra and chorus, composers, arrangers, music copyists, sound and lighting technicians, make-up specialists, and set designers and builders. It usually took a full year to write and stage each play, and when we finished one, we would soon start working on the next. Once people understood the work and resources involved, they usually decided to skip it.

Even with the large number of students Mother had, we were always stretched to the limit on our productions. But she once said, "These plays are my ashram." And indeed the plays forced us all into closer relationships and taught us many lessons about cooperation, tolerance, and flexibility. Being part of them was our joy.

After Mother met Meher Baba, she was vitally concerned with ensuring that future generations would have as much information about him as possible. In 1976 she finished writing a chronicle of her life with Baba entitled *How a Master Works*. I thought it was a prodigious and unique accomplishment because it was written on several levels and had something to offer people at every stage of the spiritual path.

While all the building and creative work was occurring in California, Mother also had a Sufi group in Washington, D.C., that required her attention. The group had been started when we lived there, and now that Mother had settled in California, she had two teachers who were helping the students in Washington. They held meetings in a rented room in a church and had a meditation room on the bottom floor of their apartment building. But there was no center. Mother would stay in a hotel when visiting her students in Washington, an arrangement that grew less comfortable as she grew older.

The person who noticed this and set out to correct it was Dr. James MacKie. Totally devoted to Mother, Jim created a beautiful residential center for her use in Washington, which he named Meher House. Mother stayed there on numerous occasions and loved it dearly, partly because it had been prepared with such love. It also delighted her to see that the students at Meher House were learning new patterns of service through living and working together, thus growing closer to Meher Baba.

I accompanied Mother on some of her visits, and it was during these times that Jim captured my heart completely. It was abundantly clear that he cared more for the students than for himself. Many a night when every bed was filled, Jim slept on the floor of the upstairs landing.

Most important to me was his constant and total regard and respect for Mother. He spent all his time on the quiet tasks of service needed to make her stay there a happy experience. I was struck too by the beauty of his love for Meher Baba. It was never overt, but I saw it nevertheless, and I could sense that it ran very, very deep.

I also began to see an extraordinary quality of Jim's: Whatever he touched or set his hand to was transformed. It would become more and more beautiful in the elegance that only true simplicity can engender. Like the Sterling Silver rose, his quietness, his humility, his simple elegance transformed even the most ordinary into the most beautiful.

Soon more and more students came to Mother from the Washington, D.C. area, and since Meher House was a leased townhouse, it became apparent we needed a permanent Sufi center in the city. A search was launched by Jim's companions for possible sites, and a beautiful album was assembled for Mother to review. Mother chose a large Georgian house in northwest Washington to visit. Coincidentally, this house belonged to a group called the Brotherhood of the Holy Ghost, and our center in California had belonged to the Holy Ghost Society.

The D.C. building was a majestic and stately mansion just off 16th Street, which leads directly to the White House, about four and a half miles south. It had served as a Catholic retreat for returning missionaries and was located in a section of Washington replete with churches of every conceivable denomination from Baptist to Buddhist. We were grateful that the building contained enough space to hold our group, though it was very run-down and would need substantial remodeling. We purchased it in December of 1979.

Once again Sufis were painting, scraping, and refurbishing, by now experts even at bricklaying and masonry. The only constant in modern life and the only constant in our order has always been change. Personal change. Change in everything. I believe God loves this change and loves diversity. It's what I see when I look at a statue of Shiva dancing, with arms moving in every direction.

Change pays dividends, and change also takes its toll, as life does. My mother had now worked over thirty years in the service of Baba and led a life in the service of Truth, and now her health was beginning to decline. In 1980 she and I both began to realize that her time was running out. In preparation, she made it very clear to me that Jim MacKie was to succeed her as Murshid.

The talk of her impending departure made me unutterably sad. Jim saw this, as he saw everything, and he helped me understand that I needed to attain a degree of independence and build a personal circle of friends. To pave the way, a group of students under his direction began to prepare a home for Mother in the hills of Orinda, just a few miles

away. Neither Mother nor I really wanted her to move from Tice Valley, but both of us knew it was the right thing to do.

Jim asked me who I thought would be a good companion for Mother during the last phase of her life, and I suggested Dr. Carol Weyland.

Carol had arrived in our life with Dr. MacKie and had been his student on the East Coast. She had a successful psychotherapy practice in Washington, D.C., and I didn't think she would be able to remove herself from it, but I nevertheless thought she would make the perfect companion for Mother. She was a very mature individual for her age, which was then thirty-seven, and she was extremely competent and lived a life directed toward service. She was also educated and cultured and would make a good conversationalist for Mother, and more importantly, she was restful and capable of silence.

I knew that Carol would be completely focused on making my mother comfortable and happy. There was also a link in their destinies that would not reveal itself to the world for another twenty-one years but that served as the basis of an intimate and instinctive kinship between them.

Jim talked to Carol, and successful career or no, she was practically on the next plane to California.

The Orinda home Jim prepared for Mother's last days was yet another example of his magical gift for transformation. It was done with so much love and good taste that she felt surrounded with radiant beauty. After all her years of searching, Mother said, "This is the house I've been looking for all my life." She had at last found the home of her dreams - the "house to end all houses."

About this time we released a film about Mother's life, *Murshida, the Story of a Spiritual Guide*, produced with help from Pete Townshend. It was an epic story that told of her spiritual search, her coming to Baba, and Baba's guidance of her life and work. Woven throughout were the stories of several of her students, showing personal dramas in their lives as they unfolded. I remember especially the festive night we premiered the film at the center, with the men dressed in tuxedos and the women in elegant dresses.

The Sufi order continued to grow, and we found we were also outgrowing our center in Walnut Creek, so yet another search began for a new location. We contemplated building a center from the ground up and trudged around endless pieces of property, but nothing quite suited our needs. Finally, in the spring of 1981, we decided instead to expand our existing center. A plan was prepared, and in late June a call went out to the students inviting their help. With great organization and dedication, we soon doubled the size of our meeting room and restructured it on an incline so everyone in the audience would have a better view of



the stage. Even in the early phases, it was clear the center too was going to be transformed.

In August Mother began to feel exhausted and "pulled down." Jim flew in from Washington, and we took her to the hospital for tests. A day and a half later, she was diagnosed with pneumonia. Then a bone marrow test was ordered, which revealed she was terminally ill. At her request, we drove her to her Orinda home for the last time. Mother was slowly slipping her bonds to the earth.

Some days later I saw a companion leaving the Sufi center with Mother's gold heart-and-wings necklace, which she was going to place in a bank vault. I suggested she hold on to it. "We'll need it shortly," I said.

A few days later my mother, Murshida Duce, passed away.

Perhaps the greatest lesson of all came for me at the end of Mother's life as I watched the constant and unending love, the unflagging respect, the deep submission, the steady service, and the overwhelming joy that Jim gave so unstintingly to her as his gift. I've often been moved to tears when I recall it. Beloved Baba had once said, "Perhaps someday one will come who will love me as I ought to be loved."

For our Murshida, that was Jim MacKie.

The center renovation was still in midstream at the time of Mother's death, but we all wanted to hold the service there to honor her. A friend of mine, Suzy Habachy, who had known Mother and me for many years, flew in from the East Coast for the service. She came from an old Coptic Christian family in which it was customary to weep and wail over the death of a loved one. Nevertheless, she set out with great courage across the country to attend what she presumed would be a mournful event.

When she arrived, the first thing I did was drag out an old dress for her to wear and enlist her help at the center. As she walked in, I could see the shock and disbelief written on her face. Here was an army of cheerful people singing while sweeping, cleaning, painting, and hanging draperies. Some were on scaffolds spray-painting the ceiling from one end to another. Suzy pitched right in. Within no time, the center was repainted and draped and looked entirely new. We were able to hold the memorial service there for Mother just as we had hoped.

When I was younger, I went to visit one of the mothers in the Ursuline Convent in Santa Rosa. She had just lost the woman who'd been her mentor all the way through her novitiate. When I arrived, she came running across a meadow to greet me and asked, "How can I help you, dear?"

I looked very serious and replied, "Well, Mother Theresa, I don't want to disturb you today. I understand Mother Mary passed away, and

I know how close you were. It must be very hard for you. You're probably feeling very sad."

But a look came over her - she was literally beaming. "Sad?" she said. "What are you talking about? She's in the garden of our blessed Lord!"

Mother Theresa made a deep impression on me. I thought, "Of course! That's the way it should be. Why weep about these things? No matter who has passed away, they've done the best they could with this lifetime, and now they've completed their work. Why not accept that they're where God wishes them to be - with Him, just as we're with Him? Why not be joyful about it?"

I tried to remember that after Mother's passing. Yet one day her desk was delivered to me, and the memories surrounding it began to make me feel sad. That evening I was going through the desk when I found some papers in a drawer that reminded me of the awesome responsibilities she had had. Just then I reached the bottom of the stack where I found a card that read, "Cheer up! Things could be worse. You could have *my* job!" My sadness vanished into laughter.

On a different day, something came up that I instinctively wanted to share with Mother, so I picked up the phone to call her. As I started to dial, I thought, "Oh! I can't call her. I can't ever call her again!" For a moment, I felt lost. But as quickly as that sad thought had come, I heard Mother's voice scolding me, saying, "Charmian, that's ridiculous! You can talk to me anytime you want. And you don't even need to pay the phone company!"

The one person I worried about after Mother died was Mary, who was then eleven years old and, being a Down syndrome child, lacked the tools to express verbally what she was feeling. She had said nothing about her grandmother's death, but knowing how close the two of them were, I suspected it was affecting her deeply. I went to Jim and asked him what I could say to help her, and he gave me a few sentences to memorize. On the way to Mary's swimming lesson, I managed to insert those sentences into the conversation we were having.

The next evening, a number of us were sitting in the kitchen when Mary came in carrying a piece of paper. She had drawn crayon sketches on it and then written the words she couldn't speak. Things like: "My Grandma is gone. I miss my Grandma." It was as if suddenly a pathway had opened from her mind that allowed her to speak in her own way. We posted her words and drawings on the kitchen window.

Death brings with it reflection, and for me the time after Mother's death was filled with appreciation and insight into my remarkable relationship with her. It was a relationship that had progressed through

many stages, as I suppose all mother-daughter relationships do. But ours was unique, and the stages more pronounced, since she was both my mother and my spiritual teacher, and I was both her daughter and her student. Throughout my adult life, I called her both Mother and Murshida, with equal respect and love. This too had evolved.

When Mother was first appointed Murshida by Murshida Martin in 1947, I called her Murshida out of simple politeness. It was just a title to me, and I still thought of her more as a mother than as a teacher. But there came a time, within only a year or two, when I knew inside myself that she was a true spiritual guide. From then on, it felt more natural to call her Murshida, and I used the title with the full reverence it merited. But I never abandoned the affectionate title of Mother and would switch back and forth, depending on the situation. In my role as a preceptor or teacher, I called her Murshida, as I did when I was with other students who called her the same. But in more casual or intimate times, I would often call her Mother.

Looking back, I can see it was easier to feel like Mother's student when I was in close proximity to her. I was away during most of the years of my first marriage, and thus more independent. But after my divorce, I returned to her life more fully, and it seemed very simple to function together in the teacher-student relationship. Then I remarried, and because my new husband adored her, I was able to spend large amounts of time and even share a house with her. When she appointed me a preceptor, my relationship to her as Murshida was even more complete.

Yet as full and rich as our teacher-student relationship was, we never stopped operating as mother and daughter. Even after she had been a Murshida for many years, we were still acting out patterns of behavior that started in my childhood.

Mother was born to advise people, and when I was younger she never let a day go by, and sometimes not an hour, without advising me what to do next. Occasionally I thought she practiced advice for the entire Sufi order on me. Even in her later years, when my own children were grown, she could still slip into her maternal role and say, "Well, have you got your glasses? Your car keys? Where's your coat?" Then I'd say, "Mother, doesn't it ever strike you as odd that an eighty-four-year-old, white-haired woman is reminding her gray-haired, fifty-year-old daughter to wear her coat?" We'd both start laughing, and that would be the end of it. These mother-daughter roles became vastly amusing to both of us in her old age. But before that they had provoked many a quarrel.

I suppose the chief tension in a mother-daughter relationship arises when the daughter grows old enough to have her own opinions and

ideas, and the mother has different ones. Mother and I had that same tension, but with a twist. In ordinary situations, it's acceptable for a grown daughter to express different views and decide against her mother's wishes. It's more complicated when your mother is also your spiritual guide. In a teacher-disciple relationship, the aim is to follow the perceived will of the teacher, no matter what you personally desire. So the challenge when your mother is a Murshida becomes: "Do I do what she says unquestioningly? Or do I do what I think best?" In the early days, I sometimes did as I felt best. But once I realized she was indeed a spiritual teacher with real authority, I listened more closely to what she said and tried to act accordingly.

This was all made even more complex because we had once been sisters in China, and I was the older sister. It was Baba who told us this. In this life, he said, I was therefore always trying to bring my mother up rather than the other way around. So besides everything else, the impetus of past relationships also impinged on us. Nevertheless, it became increasingly clear to both of us how much of our lives were tied to roles that we were playing. At some point, I had talked to her about our arguing, how we brought everything into it except the kitchen sink. She simply said, "Oh." And then we never argued again.

Generally speaking, I think teachers grow in their position and become better able to handle their students. In our particular case, as time passed, we were both changing, and we grew to know that being "mother" and "daughter" were only roles, so we wore them more lightly. I think that being a real spiritual teacher may have made it easier for her to detach from those roles. So in the end, we acted out the roles while also knowing they made no difference. Underneath it all, we simply loved each other so fully that roles were irrelevant. When she passed away, I felt how wonderful it was that we had spent the last years of her life without arguing and that I had had the pleasure to cherish her and do everything I could to help her.

In Sufi orders, each Murshid appoints the next one. In Sufi teaching, it's called the "chain of Murshids" - links of light down through the ages. When the new Murshid is appointed, students then turn toward him, or her as the next living teacher in this sacred line. Murshida had made it clear in her will that Dr. James MacKie was to be our new Murshid. A few days after her death, his investiture took place. Jim was wearing the same necklace that Inayat Khan, Rabia Martin, and Ivy Duce had worn in their lives as Murshid and Murshidas, a beautiful necklace that paled in the radiant aura of the man who wore it.

The time after Mother's passing was very sweet for her students because Murshid Jim arranged many lovely evenings spent reviewing her

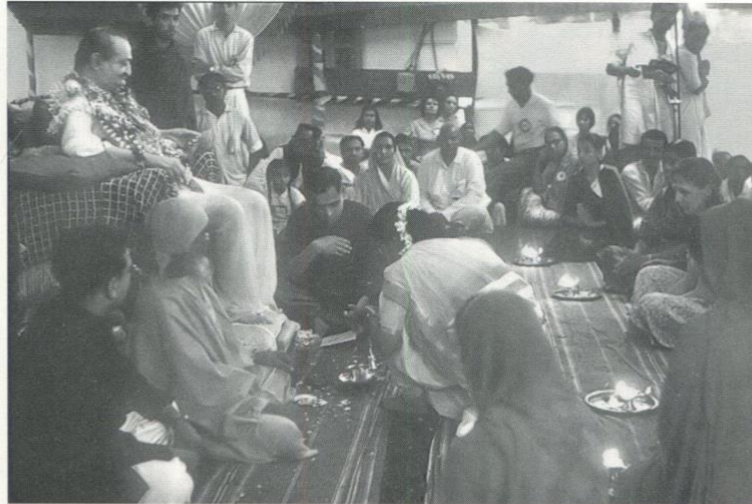
life and the lessons she had taught us. We sang songs about her and celebrated her connection with Baba and his guidance and love for all of us.

I have retained that joy, and I still silently celebrate my life with her. But I also still miss my mother. There are so many times when I see or hear something and think, "If only Murshida were here." But I know it was true when she "told" me I could still talk to her. And I know too that she lives still, in me, in her students, in the order, and in the flame-bearing successors who will build on what she established.

Shortly before Mother died, I had gone to visit her at her dream house in Orinda. I carried with me a pretty white Fuji chrysanthemum as a gift for her. Mother was in a coma then, undoubtedly surrounded by visions of beauty beyond our perception and drifting farther from us and closer to Baba.

On the way to her room, I passed the door to Dr. MacKie's room, and I paused. I had been bringing Mother flowers my entire life. To me they were symbols of perfection, of the heart unfolding to its Master. Now Mother was joining Meher Baba, the one who could offer far more than I could offer. And with his guidance, she had already arranged the next link in the continuum of beauty and light that would bless Sufis and their world for another seven hundred years.

I left the flowers beside Jim's door and then continued on my way.



Baba's arti being performed by Eastern devotees at the East-West Gathering in Pune, November 1962. Baba asked one of the Westerners to join the group, further blending East and West.



*Left to right:* Lori Converse, Charmian's son Mark, Mani, Mehera, Charmian's son Michael, outside Guruprasad, Pune, 1969.



After Baba's passing, Murshida Duce was invited frequently to speak to Baba groups, and Charmian traveled with her, here in Los Angeles, March 1972.

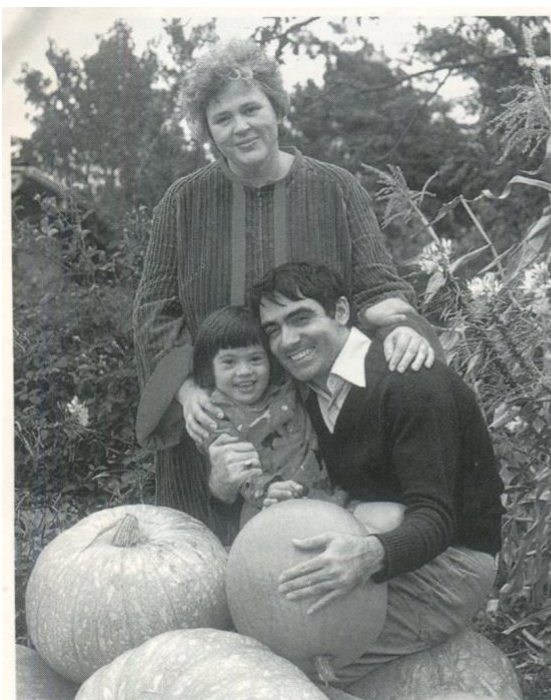


To celebrate Baba's birthday in 1973, Sufism Reoriented staged a musical drama based on Baba's visit to America in 1952. Charmian played her mother.



With Delia DeLeon, England, 1974.





Charmian with daughter, Mary, and husband, Duncan, and her homegrown pumpkins, 1976.



With Duncan and Mary, Sufi center, Walnut Creek, mid-1980s.



Mary with her grandmother and other children of Sufis, Sufi center, Walnut Creek, 1979. (Photo by Roc Dzikielewski)

With Dr. James MacKie and Adi K. Irani, Meher Baba's secretary, during Adi's 1979 visit to Meher House in Washington, D.C. Before Murshida passed away, she appointed Dr. MacKie as the next Murshid of Sufism.



## *The Ring Inviolable*

The deep kindness Murshid Jim had extended to us while my mother was dying continued even more lavishly after she died. With Duncan's and my children growing older and setting off to school, it became clear after Mother's passing that we would be more comfortable in a smaller home. In leaving Tice Valley, we would be leaving more than a house; we would be leaving some of the most loving and poignant memories of our life with Mother.

To our amazement, Murshid took on the entire task of making our transition an easy and happy one. He helped us purchase a condominium near the center, redesigned it, and gathered his students to bring his vision to life. While the work went forward, he made arrangements for us to stay in an apartment, and meanwhile he had the Tice Valley house renovated to make it more presentable for sale. We stayed in the apartment for many months, without even a glimpse of the work taking place in the condominium.

Finally, one afternoon we received a call from Murshid's secretary, telling us it was ready. That evening, with Murshid by our side, we entered our new home for the first time - and found ourselves speechless.

The space was beautiful beyond compare - simply elegant and elegantly simple. It was once again our Sufi companions, working under Murshid's guidance, who had created this sublime setting and who had filled it with flowers to welcome us. They had done the construction, resurfaced the floors, finished the furniture, stitched the upholstery, and painted and framed the paintings that adorned the walls. We found ourselves the grateful beneficiaries of the wondrous ability of Sufis to give of themselves selflessly and to manifest beauty in the world around them. Our experience was not unique.

From the moment Murshid donned the mantle of Sufism, every Sufi was led through a door that opened into spaces of beauty and transformation we had never before experienced. Everything in our communal lives became gradually more refined, more elegant, and more *perfect* - from dinners and performances, to lifestyle and dress, from the largest events to the smallest details of daily life.



One of the early subjects of Murshid's transforming touch was Duncan's ring, the one Baba had worn and given me in keeping for my future husband. I was still wearing the stone from Baba's ring in a new setting made to fit my smaller finger, while Duncan wore the original band, reset with a piece of jade. As the years had passed, that jade had become worn, and by the time Murshid arrived, Duncan was ready to replace it. Unsure what kind of stone to select, he had sought Murshid's advice.

Murshid asked a Sufi jeweler to show Duncan several stones, which he examined carefully. Then, just on the verge of a decision, he realized that his true desire was for Murshid to make the choice. Although the jeweler urged him to make a selection, Duncan resisted, and the gems and ring were taken away to be laid before Murshid.

Time passed. Then one day the jeweler returned with the ring completely finished and strikingly transformed. Meher Baba's ring was now lovingly safeguarded for the future inside an entirely new gold band that had been specially constructed to surround and protect it. Vibrant lapis lazuli stones had been set into the new casing, creating a strong but elegant man's ring that would perfectly complement Duncan's daily attire of blue business suits. I had never seen anything so artistically and tastefully executed. It was an extraordinary piece of work and symbolic of the work Murshid was completing throughout the entire order.

The beauty and perfection of Murshid Jim's work, although gloriously evident to us, remained hidden to the world and misunderstood by many of our dear friends in the larger Baba community. Maya took the form of human opposition and made an early appearance in his work, testing the faith and understanding of both Sufis and Baba followers, East and West. These difficulties seemed typical to me of the times when one Sufi Murshid dies and is replaced by a successor. Rumors had been circulated that Murshid Jim was so charismatic that Sufis worshipped him above Meher Baba. This was ironic to those of us who saw how Murshid consistently focused our attention on Baba and strove to bring us ever closer to God.

Eruch had felt strongly that Meher Baba was telling him to denounce Jim MacKie to the Baba community, and when that happened, it felt as if Sufism had become sealed off from the rest of the Baba world. We were all in anguish over this. We knew what a selfless and loving being Jim was and that he lived Meher Baba's principles with a completeness to which we could only aspire. I would wonder, "How could Eruch be so mistaken? How could he believe that Baba would want him to speak out this way?"

Now I know that Eruch was *not* mistaken about what Baba wanted. There are no mistakes in Baba's divine work. Whatever Eruch did was

what Baba compelled him to do, and in retrospect, the benefits to Sufism must have been enormous. Baba had once said, "I love Sufism with all my heart," and this opposition was a manifestation of that love. I believe it was time for him to seal off Sufism so that the love and energy it held could be internalized. Just as in cooking, one must sear something on high heat to seal in the juices, this external heat on Sufism sealed what was held inside. It's the same kind of pressure that creates diamonds out of coal.

Today I know that this heat and pressure, induced by opposition, was another stage of Baba's work and assured Sufism would mature and last another seven hundred years, until he comes again. Murshid Jim was the being Baba made ready to guide the spiritual processes needed to accomplish this. Jim understood this fiery energy, and he worked with it. I have always believed that he was a very, very advanced soul.

Even as the opposition mounted, Sufism flourished under Murshid's guidance. He had said early on that his time with us would be "short," yet it seems now as if he packed centuries into that time. His work was broad, full, and varied - a dynamic fusion of classes, workshops, travel, celebrations, and projects and activities that encompassed and promoted a vast range of growth-producing experiences.

I saw early on that Murshid would completely honor the trust that Murshida Duce had reposed in him. He began his stewardship of Sufism by organizing a series of musical stage performances that were presented in the cities associated with Murshida's life and work. It became clear almost from the beginning that one of Murshid's vehicles for spiritual transformation and devotion would be the arts. The order became a wellspring of music, song, dance, and drama, and its students became a most unique cast of performers - performers who practiced their art for an audience of One.

In the early and mid-1980s, Murshid personally directed numerous Sufi plays, choral performances, and concerts. He was involved in every production detail, including lighting, staging, sound, costumes, and camera angles. Over the years, we would continue to be astounded by his attention to even the most minute detail within the broadest, most universal vision.

During these ebullient honeymoon years, there were also nights of spontaneous singing and dancing at the Walnut Creek center, including an impromptu conga line to the spirited "Manonash Calypso" and a delirious dance to "Dance Your Way to God." Sufis often sat up late at night with Murshid, and conversation and laughter could continue until past midnight. It was a struggle for his bleary-eyed students to maintain their work schedules during the day, but delight and devotion

brought them back to the center every night. The tavern was open, and the tavern keeper was dispensing the intoxicating wine of divine love.

In 1983 Murshid started drama classes for his students and recorded their performances on videotape. Video would play an increasingly important role in his work over the years and eventually became the chief medium for his teachings. After a year of acting classes, Sufi students wrote and performed skits based on the lives of saints, following Baba's directions in our charter that we study the lives and works of illumined souls of the past. Most of these skits were also taped. Some years later, Murshid himself played Socrates in a riveting one-man show that portrayed not the familiar philosopher but the spiritual Master unrecognized by historians.

Murshid also instructed that film footage of Meher Baba in the possession of Sufism be reviewed for possible editing for the production of videotapes. The eventual products were exquisite - moving videos of Baba at his ashram, on tour in India, in Myrtle Beach, giving prasad, holding darshan, loving and joking with his followers, all set to original music. These videos have become the centerpiece of many a class and celebration, and they leave a vivid and moving record of the Avatar for future generations.

Although the projects and celebrations of Sufism were generally contained within the center, they reached far beyond the walls. A few years after his investiture, Murshid organized a small group of students to help Duncan create a proposal for the Bank of America. The project, called "Igniting the Spirit of Service," was designed to reawaken bank employees to their founding values and higher principles of service through a series of live performances and videos. Murshid supervised every aspect of the work, and although the project was never adopted by the bank, over the next few years, some Sufi videos and performers did find their way into bank programs and events.

It was in the middle of the 1980s, a decade so criticized for its materialism and self-interest that it became known as the "Me Decade," that our Sufis began to dance... and dance and dance. Devotion, Murshid taught us, is expressed not just in the heart or the mind but also through the body - literally. Service to others and to God is released through the hands. And through the feet.

Toward the end of 1985, Murshid had us learn to dance - not the sporadic, improvised dancing of previous years but formal and disciplined dancing, with form, style, and grace. With the help of a few experienced students, he began classes at the center in everything from the fox-trot and the waltz to the cha-cha and swing. The music was eclectic, including recordings by contemporary artists like the Pointer Sisters, Cyndi Lauper, Manhattan Transfer, and the Jefferson Starship.

Meher Baba has always provided Sufism with all the skill and talent it needs for every phase of its work for him. We had students experienced in construction and design who guided us through the ongoing renovations of our two centers. When the time came to celebrate God through the arts, we had abundant resources to draw on. Among our students were professional and semi-professional actors, dancers, writers, editors, composers, and musicians. Along the way, students developed skills at directing, editing, and publishing. During the Murshid years, it seemed as if the focus was on developing and utilizing one's talents, teaching them to others, and giving them freely in service to God. It was a time when skills were to be used and every potential realized.

The dance classes climaxed in a winter solstice celebration at Manchester House, our center in Washington, D.C., that included the surprise wedding of two of our students. That was followed a few months later by a birthday ball for Baba at the Mark Hopkins Hotel in San Francisco. On this birthday, in 1986, Murshid focused on Baba's "Highest of the High" message. At the center in Walnut Creek, a celebration of the "Highest of the High" included the "solstice dancers" from Washington as well as California dancers, who performed to songs that powerfully conveyed the essence of that message: freedom from attachments, the death of illusion, surrender, and the incomparable and ineffable joy of wanting nothing and therefore having everything.

After the celebration, dance classes became even more intense. Hundreds of Sufis gathered several times a week to perfect their tango moves and their rumba steps, learning to perform with partners and in groups, mastering choreography that was sometimes quite intricate. The culmination of these classes was a ball held at the Gift Center in San Francisco. Murshid made a stunning entrance in a glass elevator from above. He was mesmerizing, and the energy that night of exultation and delight in our beautiful Avatar Meher Baba was extremely powerful.

In this same period, Murshid began to work with his students in what he called "workshops." He would bring Californians to Washington to spend time with him there at the East Coast center. Through the years, he would also resettle California Sufis in Washington and vice versa, thus reshuffling and balancing the energy at each. As part of the workshops, and sometimes independently, he would take us on local excursions. There were trips to Wilmington, Delaware, and the Longwood Gardens in Pennsylvania, with hundreds of acres of gardens, colorful fountains, and an enchanting lakeside gazebo, built by the du Pont family. And there was a trip to the restored colonial town of Williamsburg, Virginia, complete with blacksmiths, coopers, silversmiths, and even taverns. He liked such excursions, and his students were thrilled to join him in them.

Still, some of the most memorable times with our Murshid were spent at the centers on each coast - evenings of conversation in his suite, in the meeting rooms, or at dinners held in a beautiful dining room under sparkling chandeliers. Sometimes the mood was silent and transcendent, but like Baba, Murshid could often be enormous fun. His wit was quick and incisive, his humor liberal and bold. One could often hear uproarious laughter, and *his* laugh was the heartiest of all; he would throw his head back and laugh from deep in his soul. One had the sense that his amusement sprang not just from the joke at hand but from some cosmic joke that was his alone. We would laugh along anyway because to join him was always our greatest delight.

Certainly Murshid Jim could wield the divine sword, as all Masters can and must, slicing through pretense and ego and shredding falsity and illusion. But he was also an expert at divine playfulness, like his own Master. He clapped while we danced, he sang with us, and when the Sufis visited Baba sites in Italy, he surprised us with a trip to the casino in Monte Carlo. He held Christmas parties for children with desserts piled high with frosting and whipped cream, he blew giant bubbles with bubble gum, and he taught us to laugh at our foibles, to see the sport in the sometimes grueling process of spiritual growth, and always to "live life lightly."

As we were gradually discovering the many facets of our new Master, the criticism of him from the Baba community was continuing. Even a series of candid letters and a personal visit paid to the mandali by Sufi representatives hadn't dissolved it. One day as I strode down the front stairs at the center in Walnut Creek, I found Murshid Jim walking along beside me. I commented to him that although I didn't really mind what other people were thinking about us, I did wish that I could see Mehera. The idea that she might think we'd deserted our Beloved was very painful to me. Jim looked thoughtfully off into space and said, "Well, that might be arranged."

And so it was. In 1987 Murshid organized a group pilgrimage to India to visit Meherazad, Meherabad, and the mandali. Several hundred Sufis made plans to go, and there weren't enough hotel rooms in Pune to accommodate them. So we were to travel in different groups over a sequential period of weeks in the spring.

I was especially excited about the trip because after years of correspondence and gifts demonstrating Mehera's tender concern for Mary, this would be the first opportunity for the two of them to meet in person. I became even more excited when, at the last minute, my son Mark tearfully announced that he wanted to go but feared there was no time to make the necessary preparations. We were leaving on Monday, and it was now already Friday. We offered to lend him the money for

the trip. Amazingly, through an exercise in sheer will, Mark managed to get his necessary shots, a new passport, a visa, and plane reservations, all within two days. Though it was too late for him to be included in our group flight arrangements, he did catch up with us in India.

Our group stayed at the Blue Diamond Hotel in Pune, and each day we made the several-hour round trip by bus to Meherazad or Meherabad. Most of our days were spent at Baba's tomb. On the first morning, some Sufis entered the tomb one at a time while others sang waves of beautiful Baba songs that expressed our deep love for him.

Mary sat on the other side of the crowd from Duncan and me, and we waited for her to reach us when it was time to leave for lunch. As she crossed closer to the tomb, I saw that her feet were moving more slowly. When she was finally opposite the door to the tomb, she suddenly made an abrupt turn and shot over to the threshold, where she dropped to her knees in respect, then rose again gracefully, and disappeared through the door. Duncan and I followed her inside and, to our astonishment, found her kneeling and weeping, with her arms outstretched over Beloved's tomb. "Why, God-father?" she implored. "I wanted so much to see you."

Tears welled in our own eyes as we knelt down on either side of her. Like most Down syndrome children, Mary has no societal shield over her emotions or her feelings for others. What you see is unfiltered and is very real indeed.

Wednesday was to be a very special day because we were scheduled to visit Mehera, Mani, and the other women mandali at Meherazad. But at about 5:00 a.m., we awoke to find poor Mary terribly sick to her stomach. Her pediatrician, who was blessedly in the same travel group, came to our room laden with antibiotics. Though he was able to start her on them right away, she wasn't well enough to travel, and Dee and I stayed behind to see her through the ordeal. One of our primary reasons for traveling halfway around the world was to be with our friends at Meherazad, and now it appeared we'd missed our chance. It was the compassion of our Murshid that saved us.

The next day as we were returning from the tomb with our Sufi companions, I heard someone say, "We'd better start making the arrangements for the departure on Saturday."

My deep desire to have Mary meet Mehera and the mandali lent me courage, so I leaned over and asked Murshid if my little family might stay another week.

It wasn't a simple request, but after a moment of thought, he said once again, "I think that might be arranged."

Since there were no hotel rooms available in the Blue Diamond for the following week, it was arranged for us to stay at Viloo Irani's home

in Ahmednagar. Viloo was the widow of Baba disciple Sarosh Irani, who had been driving the car behind Baba's at the time of his accident near Prague, Oklahoma. Her home in Ahmednagar was a villa that she frequently made available to Baba lovers.

On the morning of our group's final visit to Baba's tomb, Mary, who was still feeling poorly and refusing to eat, suddenly fell to her knees sobbing. It was clear that the emotional and physical rigors of the trip had been too much for her. We held her close, and then I made a hasty call to Viloo. Viloo generously suggested that we bring Mary to her immediately so she could care for her while Duncan and I returned to Pune and packed our bags. We would then return to Viloo's home the next day.

We were a little worried about leaving Mary at Viloo's, but once we arrived, all fears were dispelled. We were shown into a bedroom that had three beds, so I chose one for Mary, one for Dee, and one for me. A second later, in bustling Viloo. When she discovered that Mary wanted a different bed than the one I'd assigned her, she said, "Well, don't pay any attention to your mother. She and Duncan will stay next door, and you pick out whatever bed you want!" Mary liked that a lot.

Then Viloo asked Mary if she would like some watermelon. Mary's eyes got very big, and soon a plate of watermelon slices appeared. Along with them came clothes, pajamas, and a stack of comic books. When the time came for our departure, she was making great inroads into her watermelon and barely looked up to say good-bye. I could have cheered.

When we arrived back at Viloo's the next day, Mary was looking like her old cheerful self, full of life and ready to eat a huge lunch. Thus we began our second week and our second chance.

The following days were a blur. Every morning I would dress Mary and myself in saris, and then Viloo would promptly remove them and re-drape them on us so they looked infinitely neater and prettier. Then we'd head out on the day's adventures.

Later in the week, Mary and I were invited to tea with Mehera, Mani, Meheru, and Goher. When Mary approached Mehera for the first time, Mehera embraced her with such love that it filled Mary's heart to overflowing. From that moment, she attached herself to Mehera so strongly that it was hard to pry her loose. Mary also fell in love with Mani and the other women, and she obviously felt part of the group, even as we chatted on about old times.

Duncan and I have often commented about Mary's good taste in people. Given any gathering at Meherazad, if Mehera was there, that's where Mary would be. At home in the States, if Murshid Jim was present, Mary would be with him. A whole crowd couldn't keep her away, not that anyone ever tried. For some reason, the group would ripple



On the 1987 pilgrimage to India, Mary was overjoyed to meet Mehera for the first time. Mehera helped Mary from Baba's room near his tomb in Upper Meherabad.



Mary with Baba's sister, Mani, Meherazad, 1987.



Mehera by an image of Meher Baba that appeared on the tree outside her window after his passing, Meherazad. (Photo by Cindy Ceteras)





On vacation in the Sierra Nevada mountains, California, 1987.



On a luminous morning in England in 1988, Charmian explored ruins in the mystical countryside of King Arthur legends.



Charmian constantly encouraged Mary, who won numerous awards and trophies. Here with friend Deborah Levick at the 1989 California Special Olympics in Los Angeles. Later Mary's volleyball team won a medal in the International Special Olympics.

In 1992 the refined and beautiful Greenbrier Hotel in West Virginia was the setting for companionship and song with Murshid MacKie to celebrate life with Meher Baba.



apart like a field of grain, and the first thing you'd know, Mary would be next to her chosen one.

One day Mehera and the other women mandali took us to Baba's tomb to help clean the tomb and freshen up the flowers. A touchingly dear scene occurred when Mehera, Mary, and the other women exited Baba's room adjacent to the tomb. Mehera expressed concern about Mary's ability to negotiate the steps, so she personally took her by the arm and led her down. She had the other women help also. This happened in such a painstaking fashion that Mehera's compassion enveloped us all.

We had one more opportunity to visit Meherazad with our Sufi group before leaving. As our companions sang songs and told stories, Mehera sat on her porch with Mary in the chair next to her, holding her hand.

Our visit with the women mandali was joyful, and even though I hadn't seen them for almost eighteen years, it was as if we'd never parted. Mehera was now eighty and Mani was approaching seventy, but it seemed to me as if they were as vibrant and radiant as ever. Our time in India felt so fulfilling and complete that it was with some sadness we left for home and prepared to take up our normal lives once more.

After Duncan and I married, my personal life had begun to stabilize. My girlhood dream of building a strong partnership with a husband and raising children together was being realized. During this long period in the 1980s, there was little to report of a personal nature compared to the tumult of my early years. Instead I simply, quietly centered my life on Baba's first order to me: to spread his love wherever I went.

In small ways, I took enormous delight in sharing the sweet fountain of his love with those I encountered on daily domestic rounds: a harried clerk in the supermarket, the mailman, a frustrated driver on the highway, a weary parking attendant, and so on. And I especially tried to hold my door open wide to anyone with a special need, who more than others needed an infusion of love at that moment of their life. Though quiet and without noteworthy outward events, this seemed a thoroughly satisfying way to pass through life, knowing that it is pleasing to Baba, the one whose door is always open to his children. And above all, the sense of Baba's light and presence, in nature and in the people whose lives intersected mine, was brighter than ever.

For Duncan, life revolved much around his work as an officer at the world headquarters of Bank of America in San Francisco. That year, 1987, the Golden Gate Bridge was about to celebrate its fiftieth anniversary, and the bank had played a key role in its history. Few people know that in the early 1930s, the bridge project appeared hopeless because the Great Depression was settling on the world. In 1932 A.P. Giannini,

founder of the Bank of America, came forward and arranged the financing because he believed the finished bridge would be a symbol of hope to people everywhere.

For the anniversary of the bridge, Duncan arranged to have a permanent plaque installed in the gardens at the San Francisco end of the bridge to commemorate the roles of Giannini and Joseph Strauss, the chief engineer, whose vision and drive got the bridge constructed. It's a plaque that holds a secret.

Duncan arranged for Sufi artist Diane Cobb to design and produce the plaque, which was to be installed on a five-ton granite monument. Diane was the daughter of Lud Dimpfl, the Standard Oil engineer who had wanted so badly to live with Baba and whom Baba had once lifted from the sand on the shore at Myrtle Beach. As a child, Diane had spent time with Baba during several of his visits to America, and he'd given her the nickname 3B for "Baba's Beloved Baby." Over the years, she had grown into a skilled artist, and her lifelike portraits of Baba graced our center as well as stationery and cards that Murshid often sent to his students. Diane's design for the plaque was outstanding, but what makes it of special interest to the Baba community is the faint image at the upper right. There in the clouds, smiling down on Giannini and Strauss, is the face of Meher Baba.

I sent photos of the project to Mehera. She replied:

Meherazad  
26 Sept '87

Dear Charmian:

With much interest we read your letter with all the data you gave not only of the plaque so beautifully done by 3B - but also the construction of the Golden Gate Bridge. They both made quite a story of human perseverance directed in the creation of something beautiful and useful.

3B's work as always is exceptional. She is so talented and pains-taking. Not only is there the likeness of the two figures but something of their personality. And of course the best part of it is Beloved Baba's face subtly merging in the background benevolently smiling over all - and in such a beautiful garden setting.

We were glad Duncan insisted on this work being given to 3B. I believe Baba had been on the bridge - and talking of bridges, do you remember driving us over George Washington Bridge - New York?

We were really happy to have seen you again and met dear Mary. She is such a sweet girl.

Just now we have two Baba girls like her [Down syndrome girls from America and France]. The little French girl comes with her mother from Paris. Her mother has been here several times - almost every year if possible. The little girl is about four years old - an adorable child exuding happiness and love. The way she goes up to each one of us with her arms wide open and gives us a warm hug, saying, "Jai Meher Baba," is so touchingly sweet.

This season we have had more pilgrims here than previous years, especially in July. So many parents bringing their seven-year-olds for the first time.

Dear Charmian, you are much remembered, and all of us send love in Baba to you and Duncan from all your Meherazad family. A special warm hug and kiss to sweet Mary. With love to you in Baba's love.

Mehera

Enclosed with the letter were several charming pieces of costume jewelry. I felt they were perhaps offered as special mementos for Mary and me because Mehera's time was drawing to a close. I was sadly proven correct.

After the Sufis had returned from their pilgrimage to India, Murshid made a return trip at the request of several Baba groups there. He took with him a small group of students, who performed for and made presentations to Baba lovers in several cities and at about forty centers. Traveling by bus, the group carried with them materials and videos that had been prepared at our center in California especially for this tour. Those who participated in the trip, which lasted about a month, described it as very strenuous.

This time they traveled throughout southeastern India and to a few centers in the north, including Dehra Dun, in the foothills of the Himalayas, where Baba gave his "Highest of the High" address. They also made a special trip to Byramangala near Bangalore, where Murshid helped inaugurate the new construction at Baba's Universal Spiritual Center. The Byramangala Baba group asked Murshid to return in the future and help dedicate the center when it was completed.

Although the trip was arduous, Murshid launched right into work when he returned. Only two days later, he was directing a videotaping of the "Highest of the High" dances at the Gift Center in San Francisco. His energy was phenomenal, and although there were times over the years when he seemed tired, his dedication to Baba's work remained constant.

In the spring of 1989, we received sobering news from India. After nine months of welcoming pilgrims at Meherazad, Mehera spent three weeks in Pune on holiday with Mani, Goher, and Meheru. On her return, doctors discovered she had a brain tumor. Within the blessedly short space of a week, on May 20 she left this world to be once again with her most Beloved Baba. I was now especially grateful that we had managed to visit her in 1987 and that Mary had had a chance to get to know her.

Soon after, Meheru wrote us several notes, one of which read:

Beloved Baba has given us such an emotionally mixed time - and every moment thankfully busy. In dear Mehera's passing, we are happy for her, knowing that she has returned to the loving arms of her Beloved, where she had so longed to go these many years. Yet so beautifully she had fulfilled the role her Beloved had asked of her. But we, we miss her every moment of the day.

We were so happy for you and all the Sufis who took the opportunity that you were able to make your pilgrimage here again in '87. You spent as much time as possible with dear Mehera. I know she loved seeing you again - chatting with you like old buddies - and we did too.

For us, Mehera's going took us all by surprise. It still has a dream-like quality that we feel we will wake out of. We feel her absence very deeply, and with her absence, things can never feel the same for us.

I remembered back to the last letter I'd received from Mehera, just a few months before she died - a letter, as always, focused on Baba.

Meherazad  
Feb. 5, '88

Jai Baba, Dear Charmian,

Your visit here to us last year is very fresh in our memories. It was also a joy to meet Mary. I have a special place in my heart for her and hope she is doing well and keeping well.

Everyone is limping back to normal after the nineteenth Amartithi of our Beloved Avatar Meher Baba. In His compassion, He does not give us any time or room to think what Amartithi means, of the years spent without His physical Presence - for His Presence and love is very strong around us, especially at Amartithi.

Greeting the many thousands who come to bow down in respect and love at His samadhi, we feel how present is Beloved

Baba in our midst - in the lives and hearts of all we meet at Amartithi.

Much love in Beloved Baba to you, dear Charmian, and to Duncan and dear Mary from each and all of your Meherazad family.

Mehera

Scarcely two weeks after Mehera's passing, thousands of students massed in Tiananmen Square in Beijing demanding an end to the suppression of individual liberties by the People's Republic of China. Though thousands of people died in the conflict that followed, it marked the beginning of the end of this totalitarian regime as it had been known. It was followed by a gradual opening up of the country to the West and an amelioration of China's policies.

Then, in the ensuing weeks and months, the world watched with still more fascination as rigid, entrenched totalitarian structures were challenged and fell one after the other in Eastern and Central Europe. In some cases, they seemed to just melt away. Country after country overthrew its communist leaders and moved away from the Soviet camp. This seemed more remarkable in that not a single shot was fired by the USSR as these countries sought self-determination and democratic leaders.

Prior to this time, the Soviet Union had held an iron grip over these oppressive regimes. At the same time, Soviet Premier Gorbachev's policy of *glasnost* (openness or transparency) had led to general freedom of speech and publication in the USSR. By June that year, 1989, the Cold War had come to an end.

Then in the fall, the Berlin Wall, a symbol of the schism between East and West, came down.

Everywhere could be seen an advance of individual freedom and democratic institutions. It seemed fitting that this dramatic global step forward in human welfare should follow in the wake of the passing of Baba's beloved Mehera.

There were no more trips organized by Murshid to Meherabad or Meherazad during the years that followed, although Murshid organized many other trips, both near and far, for his students. In 1990 he arranged two pilgrimages, one in spring and one in fall, to follow in Baba's footsteps through Italy. As always, he had attended to every possible detail. On an earlier scouting trip, he and six companions had searched for a place that might serve as a base of operations - a central meeting place where Murshid could stay and spend time with his students. Eventually he chose hotels in Portofino and Santa Margherita on the Ligurian coast, one of Meher Baba's favorite places. Throughout Italy, Sufi

groups visited places Baba had visited on his own trips there, including St. Mark's Square in Venice, where they posed with flocking pigeons just as Baba had done.

I believe Murshid wanted his students to see firsthand the glorification of the Avatar as Jesus in the stunning cathedrals, basilicas, and chapels they visited and in the remarkable paintings and sculptures by Giotto, Raphael, Michelangelo, Tintoretto, Bernini, and other artists whose works they saw at the museums.

It was a reminder that in this age we will begin the glorification of Meher Baba through our own paintings, sculpture, and music and the buildings we dedicate to him.

There were other trips after Italy - to the Greenbrier Hotel in West Virginia and the Phoenician Hotel in Arizona. Murshid always chose an elegant and refined environment for his students and was devoted to their every comfort and enjoyment. These became the settings for spiritual dialogues and devotional meetings that I suspect were unprecedented in the Western world.

When we weren't sitting in exquisite dining rooms with our Murshid or walking quaint cobbled streets by his side, we could often see him in our weekly classes. In 1991 he began to lead these classes through a now-omnipresent wonder of the Machine Age: video recording. He taped his classes in California and sent copies to be shown in Washington and to smaller groups in other cities.

We would gather on class nights and sit quietly listening to rounds of Meher Baba's name. Then we would sing our *zikr*, "God alone is real and the goal of life is to be united with Him through love," for five minutes as Baba specified in the Sufi charter. The lights would dim until the room was enveloped in darkness and silence. Soft music would rise, and Murshid's smiling face would gradually come into view on a large screen before us. He would begin to talk in his dulcet, resonant voice, which seemed to bypass the ears and enter straight to the heart. So strong was his presence, it was often impossible to believe he was on a screen and not among us.

Murshid must have been the first Master in our age to teach his students through electronic media, something I'm sure could never have been imagined by the pilgrims who sat with Hafiz in the garden or whirled around Rumi. Baba had spoken of the power of film; now Murshid seemed to explore that power in new ways. During this period, video became an increasingly important focus of his work.

Sufism gradually bought sophisticated equipment and built an editing studio that allowed us to produce tapes of professional quality. Out of that studio came exquisite videos about Baba and his work and numerous Sufi classes.

In 1994 Murshid directed a series of videotapes on the centennial of Baba's birthday that included Baba's favorite people, places, and things: Italy, Charlie Chaplin, Paul Robeson, Marian Anderson, and qawali music, to name a few. There were also tapes honoring some of Mother's favorites, including the opera *Turandot*. Murshid spent countless hours and many late nights reviewing video footage of various performances, taking notes, and selecting the scenes he felt were best.

Classes were central in our lives as Sufis, and the breadth of topics Murshid covered in them was astounding - sanskaras, meditation, Baba's life and messages, winding and unwinding phases of learning, stages and experiences of spiritual unfolding, the lives of saints and Baba's mandali, and much more. The classes were a vehicle for his group work. His more individual work was sometimes completed in private interviews with his students or through his voluminous correspondence. Students showered him with letters of every kind - the informative, the grateful, the beseeching, and the exalting. He read them all, and he responded to them all - sometimes on paper, sometimes in internal ways.

At the end of 1994, Murshid returned to Byramangala with about ninety Sufis to fulfill his promise that he would help the Baba group there dedicate its new Universal Spiritual Center. The site had been under construction for many years, and workers had just completed the main structures, including a central pavilion. Some of the earlier structures dated back to Baba's days in the 1930s, and in fact it was Baba himself who had laid out the plans for future buildings. In the interim, the area of India near Bangalore had burgeoned from a rural outpost into a technological and industrial center comparable to the Silicon Valley in California. At the dedication, Murshid cut the ribbons to the new buildings, each dedicated to a Perfect Master or Avatar. Then he entered each one to meditate.

More travels followed when Murshid returned to the United States. Among them was a trip to Middleburg, Virginia, a quaint village rich in Revolutionary and Civil War lore, located in the center of what is known as "the nation's horse and hunt capital." Murshid led a group of Sufis on a stroll down Middleburg's main street, where they visited shops and art galleries, eventually stopping for lunch at historic Mosby's Tavern in the Red Fox Inn.

Murshid also arranged trips to New York City with both California and Washington Sufis, including one in which the group became snowbound. He had first scouted the city for hotels and Broadway shows he thought his students would enjoy. He chose *Showboat*, *Bring in 'Da Noise, Bring in 'Da Funk*, and *Rent*. His interest in the arts was extensive, and he often escorted his students to public shows and performances, some of them at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. Some groups



of students also visited the Delmonico Hotel in New York, where Baba had given me his ring back in 1956.

As Sufis who had met Meher Baba and the mandali grew older, Sufi video production began to serve a new role: the celebration on tape of the lives of people who had loved and served Meher Baba and were now completing their incarnations. One of those to whom Murshid paid tribute on tape was Baba's beautiful, sparkling jewel of a sister, Mani.

In 1996, seven years after Mehera passed away, Mani too left us. It felt to me as if a light had gone out on a most entrancing Christmas tree. Her illness was more prolonged than Mehera's, but that only gave the world a chance to see the purity of her love and her surrender to Baba's will.

The following year, Meheru wrote to me about life at Meherazad, now missing two of its most beloved residents but still filled with the love of the Master to whom they had dedicated their lives.

Meherazad  
Feb. 26, '97

Dear Charmian,

Beloved Baba's birthday was as always so powerfully charged with His Presence and love, as well as that of dear Mehera and Mani, that though we missed them so much with memories of our many birthdays of our Beloved celebrated together, yet the predominant feeling was the joyfulness of this Day of days and the significance of the Advent.

As always we collected in Baba's room before 5:00 a.m. and quietly under our breaths, said "Yezdan, Yezdan" till the stroke of five, as we used to when Beloved Baba was physically present with us. I was so engrossed in picturing Him seated on His bed that it was not till the men mandali in Mandali Hall called out Baba's Jai that I realized it was time, and we too called out "Beloved Avatar Meher Baba Ki Jai" seven times in heartfelt unison.

Of course Baba's room and the whole house were decorated with flowers and garlands offered at His photos, and we went and admired the decorations in Mandali Hall and took darshan at Baba's chair while the men mandali came over to Baba's room to do likewise in His Home.

We went to Meherabad for darshan at Baba's samadhi as well as honouring our dear Mehera and Mani - and greeting many if not all the many Baba lovers gathered there.

Naturally we sang "Happy Birthday" to Baba on the different occasions. The singing of this song as well as the arti every

night in Meherazad is different from all other performances when our dogs, especially Tippu, participate in their own brand of singing. It is difficult to hear ourselves sing and keep a straight face when they do.

Naturally we missed our dear Mansari's presence at Meherabad. We have received messages and condolences from so many of our Sufi Baba family on her behalf. We are touched by your love and the beautiful Baba cards.

Much love to you and Duncan and all the family from your M'azad family.

Love in Him,  
Meheru

Any personal grief for Mani would have been born from my own selfishness, for Mani was surely euphoric in the company of her Beloved. Baba had told us over and over again that the only death that mattered - the only *real* death - is the death of the ego, the annihilation of the mind, that keeps us separate from God. This was the death Hafiz described, as rendered by Daniel Ladinsky in *I Heard God Laughing*, when he said:

My dear,  
After such a long, long journey,  
God has made another soul  
Free!

Murshid, like Baba, had a deep love for Hafiz and dedicated much of his later work in Sufism to celebrating Hafiz's divine messages in poetic form. Sufism published the book of Hafiz poems rendered by Daniel Ladinsky. Sufi musicians composed and performed songs inspired by the poems and released CDs of the music. And Murshid directed the production of fourteen video classes on Hafiz and his work. Late in 1998, he opened the "Tavern" at our Walnut Creek center, evenings of elegant dinners and entertainment at which Murshid served as maitre d'. The Tavern was based on Hafiz's allusion to the Master as the wine keeper. Evenings at the Tavern often had a theme, and they also served to welcome special visitors and guests. Again, Murshid supervised every detail, even helping to develop the menus.

As the new millennium dawned, Duncan and I saw little of Murshid. He left for the Washington center in spring of 2000 with the intention of spending three weeks there with his students. He ended up staying a year.

During that year, he invited people up to his suite at night as often as possible for music, singing, and conversation. But his health was declining. His lungs had been severely weakened from past respiratory

problems, and his intensive work for Baba had left his body more and more fragile. Still, even as his energy waned, he continued his work. And although his body grew frail, the divine force it carried never weakened and at times seemed to grow even stronger. His gaze was as penetrating, his smile as joyful, his presence as effulgent as always.

In 2001 Murshid directed the publication of an English edition of *God Speaks* that could be sold in India for only three dollars. Sufism subsidized this so that the book would be available to many people in India who wouldn't otherwise be able to afford it. He also initiated two other publishing projects in honor of the upcoming Sufi jubilee - the fiftieth anniversary, in November 2002, of the signing of our Sufi charter by Meher Baba. Murshid never saw the completion of these projects, or at least not from this world. In May 2001, he left Washington for the last time.

We had all been aware that Murshid's health was fragile and that his work for Meher Baba and his students had been all-consuming. In the last few years, we had watched as he became steadily less accessible and less able to take part in more strenuous activities as he had in the early years. There had been the occasional dinners and interviews, and the video classes continued, but Sufis had begun to realize that time spent with their Master was becoming a rarer, and therefore even more treasured, experience.

Still, it was a great shock to hear on June 10, 2001, that he had passed away at his newly finished home near the center in Walnut Creek, just a few weeks after returning from Washington, D.C. His body had been completely used up in Meher Baba's work, every last ounce of energy given to God's cause.

Time, health, and distance had prevented me from participating in many of the events and excursions organized by Murshid, but they were part of his work and part of Sufism, so they were intrinsically part of my life. In recent times, there had been long gaps when I hadn't seen him, either because he was away in Washington or elsewhere or because he was in semi-seclusion. But somehow I was always aware of his loving, protective presence. I still am.

Even though Murshid left the physical plane, there have been moments when I have felt him most powerfully. Several times just before a Sufi meeting at the center began, I found myself in a reflective state. Then all of a sudden I felt his presence enter the room with such immediacy, beauty, and force that I knew he was truly there with us. I could almost see him in my mind's eye.

In spite of our deep personal and communal sense of loss, it was with the greatest delight that I discovered Jim had appointed Carol Weyland

Conner, who had so selflessly attended my mother during the last phase of her life, to succeed him. She formally became the new head of the Sufi order at an investiture held a few weeks after Murshid's passing. There had been some changes in Carol's life in the years since Mother passed away. She had married, and interestingly, she and her husband, Gary, had lived for some time in the Tice Valley house Duncan and I once shared with Mother. Over the years, Carol seemed to only grow more radiant and beautiful. To me, she was a jewel, and every inch a Murshida.

When I visited Myrtle Beach after Carol's investiture, someone in the audience asked me how we were getting along with our new Murshida. I responded that it was our great joy to see her and particularly to watch her during meditations when her mind would be on Meher Baba and her face would so luminously reflect his glory and her love for him.

With Murshid Jim gone and Murshida Carol at the head of Sufism, we entered yet another phase in our order, so closely and meticulously guarded and maintained by Baba. A time will come when we have yet another Murshid or Murshida, appointed by the previous one. But the student's connection with God will not change. Behind and within each Teacher is Baba himself.

Sometimes people would ask me what the Sufis would do if they lost their Murshid or Murshida. How would they know the next Murshid would be an authentic Teacher dedicated to Baba? How *do* we know? We know because Baba promised us. I was there when he guaranteed us a succession of illumined Masters to sustain Sufism for the next seven hundred years, until he comes again. He's God. He ought to know.

And I believe him.

One day years ago, Mother, Duncan, and I were leaving our Sufi center in San Francisco in the company of our guest speaker, a woman who was an expert on reincarnation. A companion approached to help us into the car, and since I knew he had been working outside the room where our guest had spoken, it occurred to me he hadn't had a chance to participate. So I rolled down my window and said, "Do you want to ask any questions?"

"Well, just one," he responded. "I have a beautiful wife and a wonderful Murshida. I'd just like to know what I did in a past life to deserve this so I can do it again!"

Me, too.

As I contemplate my life, I find myself replaying that scene by the car over and over.

Yes, if one could only know what one did, and then do it again.

I think back on how fortunate I have been, for my opportunities

to love God fully have been blessedly abundant. I have had the grace of sharing my life with Meher Baba. And I have had three wonderful Murshidas and one extraordinary Murshid.

All of these Teachers were very different. Yet all were the same.

I was only a young schoolgirl when I was with Murshida Martin, but I can still vividly remember her. She would sit in a low, beautifully ornate chair, and I would sit on a little stool in front of her. Then she would go over my Sufi lessons. In those years, Sufis had their lessons alone with their Murshida and weren't necessarily acquainted with other members of the order. I remember being very excited when we were all invited to tea at the center, then in Fairfax, California, because for the first time I was able to meet some of the other students. So my student-teacher experience with Murshida Martin was more private, more individualized than those with my other teachers.

She was a dear, bright, and intelligent lady, well traveled and well schooled. Just as she knew that my mother was her successor, I believe she knew that I was my mother's *chela* - someone who takes particular care of a teacher's personal needs and helps them with daily tasks. She had the insight and intuition required of a Sufi Teacher, and I still find it remarkable that she accepted someone as young and inexperienced as I into her care.

My mother as a Murshida was to me the personification of love. And her students responded by loving her with all their hearts. Her work was basic, very basic. Meher Baba had charged her with putting Sufism Reoriented on a firm footing so it would last seven hundred years, until he returns. It was she who built the real foundation for the order, driving pilings deep into the ground, providing a solid base on which to build and grow.

Mother once said of her role, "It is very simple - to help *mureeds* [students] to balance their karma and keep them from getting into more karmic messes that they will have to spend lifetimes correcting; to help them learn the moral way of behaving; to help them overcome the seven deadly sins so they won't have to worry about them again."

In fact, her role was far from simple. Most of her students were young. Many sprang from the sixties, a time when many people had lost their moral compass. They had quit school and burned bridges with their parents and were wasting their life's potential. She *reoriented* them. She advised them to return to school and earn their degrees, to rebuild relationships with family and friends, to find work and earn their way through life, and to develop an inner "surplus" so they could help others and share their lives with them. She used the plays about Baba's life and other activities as vehicles through which they could learn to get along with other people, to grow and mature.

It was Murshida Duce who helped us realize Baba's directive that mysticism and spirituality were not to be vague, abstract concepts carried out in a cave in the Himalayas. They were instead intensely practical and had meaning only when integrated into one's daily life. I think of the story that Sufi mureed Allen Cohen once told about being on a retreat with a group of psychedelic drug leaders in the 1960s. After dinner they were all discussing love and service, but no one wanted to get up and do the dishes. Yet true spirituality is exactly that. Mother was a "do-the-dishes" Murshida.

Murshida Duce was the guide, the model, the loving mother who was always encouraging and supportive, who could always draw out the best in her students so that they could fulfill their potential. She embodied love for us so fully that it's still beyond our comprehension.

Her successor, Murshid MacKie, was the rarest of souls. Before I met him, I really believed, after all my years of study, that I knew something about loving, serving, and making others happy. But to a degree I'd never seen before, Jim MacKie loved and honored my mother, Murshida Duce. Not only was her wish his command, but he was able to see her deepest unexpressed wishes and make them come true for her. This was his greatest pleasure. He took pleasure in serving and helping *everyone*.

I think especially of a time when my daughter, Mary, had withdrawn into psychosis, and the situation seemed hopeless. It was Murshid who set out to help her. He found a school in Santa Barbara that was ideal for her needs, and with his support, she eventually pulled out of that dark mental abyss and became refocused. She went on to graduate from high school.

Murshid Jim was a totally selfless being, and by being so, he taught us to aspire to the same. When he slept on the floor that night at Meher House so every guest would have a bed, we all felt that we would happily give up our own beds. At every moment, he was a living example of love and service. Murshid once said about Moin-ud-din Chishti, the founder of the Chishti order of Sufis in India, "He demonstrated principles of unity in the only way one can demonstrate any principles: by living them."

That too is what Murshid did. It is what every Murshid and Murshida cannot help but do.

Murshid was also a striking example of the power of love and service to transform, both externally and internally. His understanding of beauty was unparalleled - beauty of thought, word, and deed; beauty of principles. Sufism has always worked with higher thoughts and feelings, and it has drawn on music, dance, and art to express those feelings. Murshid nurtured these expressions. Other than Meher Baba's,

his "seeing" of the Way was greater than anyone's I have ever known. He lived fully in a divine inner place that was beyond our awareness, but one that inflamed us. Under his direction, Sufism deepened enormously.

Now we have Murshida Conner, just at the beginning of her stewardship of Sufism. Jim served as her mentor and teacher even long before he became Murshid, so her period of training and preparation has been full.

To me, Murshida Conner radiates beauty of the soul. She embodies balance, maturity, compassion, wisdom, and love. And I'm ready to do whatever she asks.

Looking at the sweep of all these luminous Teachers, it's as if there's a huge musical scale, and each of the Murshids, in following the last, sings one note further up this scale. They take Sufism and lift it higher and higher and ever higher, toward the Maestro.

All my Murshids have overwhelming love for God and for others. The dominant quality they all have shared is that they have loved us with all their hearts and have had the wisdom to help our own love unfold. This love has never been a gushy, sentimental love. It's firm, clear, and practical.

My life truly began on that day when I walked through a door in India and into the radiant orbit of Meher Baba. From that moment on, he guided and reoriented me in much the same way he did the Sufi order. After that, there was no separation - no separation between Sufism and Baba; no separation between my life and Baba; no separation between my Murshids and Baba. Each Murshid has seen everything as emanating from Baba and has directed everything toward him. Baba laid down a path toward God, and they have guided and cleared my way down that path.

## *The Return Journey*

In May of 2002, on the fiftieth anniversary of Meher Baba's automobile accident in America, I made a return journey to Prague, Oklahoma - a journey that could not be measured in either miles or years.

At the time of the accident, I was twenty-two years old, an ardent and sometimes confused companion of the Avatar, daughter of a Murshida, and student in a fledgling spiritual order that was the first of its kind in the Western world. Now I was a seventy-two-year-old grandmother, the Avatar had long since left the earth, and the order that once struggled to plant roots had sprouted glorious wings. I had seen my mother complete her work and pass away, a succeeding Murshid transform our order and depart, and yet another Murshida assume the charge of leading us ever closer to God.

In those ensuing years, everything had changed, and nothing had changed.

Since 1952 America has passed through many ages, with science and technology forging the way. I have seen half a century of rapid-fire advances in transportation, medicine, communications, computing, and aerospace. But our search for eternal truth continues. And no modern technology carries the power of the little Nash sedan that journeyed with travelers from the East and collided with a car from the West, spilling the Avatar and his blood into the center of America.

To commemorate the anniversary of Baba's accident, there was a special sahas in Oklahoma that drew followers from across the nation. I was among the speakers who were invited to share their memories of Baba or insights into the accident and Baba's work in America. Other speakers included Espandiar Vesali, a student at the Prem Ashram and one of the few living links to that early phase of Baba's work; Leatrice Shaw Johnson, who first met Baba in Myrtle Beach only two weeks before the accident; the daughters of Doctor Burleson, the physician who treated Baba at his clinic in Prague; and our new Murshida, Carol Conner, who was born in Oklahoma and who offered her extraordinary insights into the significance of the accident. In addition, Vishnu Hade,



the vice counsel general of India in Houston, told us how Meher Baba guided his life. Ed Flanagan gave readings about the accident from David Fenster's book, *Mehera-Meher, A Divine Romance*. And Phil Lutgendorf charmed us all with his vibrant account of coming to Prague in 1970 and meeting Dr. Burleson, Baba's nurse, and the farmer who brought blankets out to Baba and the others as they lay by his driveway.

The newspaper in Prague had announced our visit the day before it began: "A caravan of eighty followers of Master Meher Baba will be in Prague Friday, May 24, observing the fiftieth anniversary of his auto accident west of Prague." The event was scheduled to last four days, and each day began with an arti.

On May 23, I spoke about the afternoon in 1948 when Mother and I first walked into the little white hut in India and met a pair of eyes that seemed to hold the secrets of the universe. A few days later, someone in the audience asked me how long it took before I realized Baba was God. My answer was: "About ten minutes."

On the second day, May 24, the exact anniversary of the accident, visitors gathered on the road where a heart-shaped garland marked the site of the collision. At 10:15 a.m., the moment of the accident, Murshida read a prayer of loving thanks to the Avatar who had shed his blood on American soil, as he had foretold years before. Then people sang an arti and bowed down to the spot where Baba had lain.

Later the two daughters of Dr. Burleson spoke, sharing childhood memories of their experiences with Baba and his group after the accident. Both had met Baba during his hospital stay, and they mentioned that, like their father, they were especially struck with Baba's eyes. They remembered Mani too - how she used to visit them in their home and get down on the floor to play with them. They reminisced about what a remarkable man their father was and told us many stories about him, new information that was eagerly received by those of us who have learned everything we could about Baba's life.

The group visited the hospital and the room in which Baba convalesced, as well as the waiting room, which has a corner dedicated solely to Baba, complete with his photograph and a copy of *God Speaks* and his *Discourses*. We also toured the town museum, which has a large portrait of Baba taken during his visit to my parents' home in Washington, D.C., in 1956.

That night, with thunder rumbling in the background, Murshida spoke about the significance of the accident and its spiritual impact on America and the world. These were issues I had barely considered in 1952. Baba never gave us time to step back and draw conclusions about the larger meaning of events, and the accident was no exception.

Instead, he kept us focused on the practical tasks at hand and the immediate fulfillment of his directions or wishes. It is only in later years that I've had the opportunity to reflect on the meaning of events and, in this case, on the accident near Prague.

I now think one has to look at the accident in the context of what America really represents and how Baba intends to use this nation in his universal work. What does America stand for? What is its purpose? What were its founding values? I've come to think that America has a very special role in the world. Like Noah's Ark, which carried life forms safely through the flood, America has become the ark of this age, carrying a most precious cargo - a belief in the sanctity and value of individuals and their right to explore and hold beliefs that are different from their neighbors'. This gives one the freedom to search for God within, without an intermediary priest, rite, or ritual.

At its best, our system of government honors and supports that ideal. This is the exact opposite philosophy of the Taliban in Afghanistan, with whom we found ourselves in an adversarial position at the start of the millennium. The Taliban executed people who didn't conform to their dogma in even the most trivial ways.

I'm not suggesting that America is perfect or that it ever was perfect. When the founding fathers created our country, they wrote down their ideals on paper - the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. But as powerful as these ideals were, they weren't fully reflected in American life. Slavery existed in almost every state. Women struggled for basic rights. Young children worked in miserable conditions in mines and factories. Once in a while, I hear someone talk about the "American journey." But the deeper story of America has been the journey to close the gap between these ideals and reality. This is the real American journey. And the deepest journey of all is the one of discovering God within one's own heart, even within a national heart. Surely these are the realms in which Baba worked.

On September 11, 2001, the date of the terrorist bombings in New York and Washington, Duncan, Mary, and I were visiting Myrtle Beach. We were off center property at the time, and when we returned, Duncan had a strong experience of Baba. Just as we got out of the car to open the gate to the center, he felt Baba's presence powerfully. At that particular moment, he said, the entire property seemed to be holding Baba's loving presence in great measure. And it struck him that this overpowering presence was directly linked to the tragic events that had taken place in America only hours before.

Later that day, we went to the beach. And we stood on the shoreline of America, the nation that had just been so terribly violated. Yet

at that moment, Baba's sweet presence. on that beach was as redolent as perfume. To Duncan there was a feeling of enormous sacrifice - and triumph - for a higher divine purpose for America. Duncan's sensation was similar to what Vishnu said when he saw Baba's face after the car accident in 1956 in India: "Never in my life have I seen such utter radiance and luster!"

I believe the nation we live in has a special calling, and the accident near Prague was part of Meher Baba's larger work to prepare it for the role it is to assume in the future - his future. The spiritual groundwork for that future was being laid even before our ancestors arrived from Europe.

Baba's spiritual agent in charge of America was an Indian, whom he contacted in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Indians of different tribes have lived on the American continent for thousands and thousands of years. They must certainly have had advanced souls among them, and they must have held and protected the divine force needed for the future of this land. On my return visit to Prague, a companion made some fascinating observations about one particular event in Native American history - the tragic "Trail of Tears."

In May of 1838, the United States government forced the migration of the Cherokee Nation from its ancestral lands, a march that began in North Carolina and ended in Oklahoma. By the time the Trail of Tears had ended, four thousand Indians had perished from exposure and disease, and more than sixty different Indian tribes were concentrated in one place: Oklahoma.

On our drive into Prague, we passed through areas with signs that carried announcements such as "Entering the Sac and Fox Nation." I became aware that we were right in the center of the nations and lands of many American Indians, and that this was the same area where Meher Baba had his "accident."

Later a companion showed me two maps he had drawn. The first displayed the route of the Trail of Tears - beginning in Murphy, North Carolina, trekking westward to Chattanooga, Tennessee, then through Kentucky, Missouri, and Arkansas before ending in Oklahoma. His second map showed Meher Baba's route west. The two routes were absolutely parallel and practically identical. I think this is more than coincidence. Meher Baba's accident seems to have had some connection with Native Americans, who in turn had deep connections with America as caretakers of the land and preparers for its future. His divine plan for America stretches far back in time, and I believe his plan for the Sufi order in America does also.

When I study the history of Sufism, it seems to me that the Avatar

was constructing a spiritual lineage that would eventually bring true spiritual Teachers to America. After all, it was Inayat Khan, descended in the chain of illumined Masters from the eleventh-century Perfect Master Moin-ud-din Chishti who brought Islamic Sufism to India, who in turn brought it to America in the early part of the twentieth century. From there, Baba completely "reoriented" this ancient lineage, giving it a fresh start, on a new continent, solely under his patronage.

I have been blessed to live at a time when I could reap the benefits of that work, through four Sufi teachers, including my present Murshida, Carol Conner. In Prague, Murshida talked most eloquently about the spiritual destiny of America. She described the tremendous amount of energy our country holds, energy clearly evident in our social and technological progress, but energy with an even greater purpose - to help usher in what Baba called "a great spiritual revival."

America's role in that revival will be central. Murshida recalled Baba telling us that although our bountiful energy was currently misdirected, it would someday be yoked to Baba's higher purposes of love, unity, and brotherhood. She also remembered Baba saying that for all its materialism and rational thought, America has a deep inner longing for God and strong heart qualities.

Through the accident, said Murshida, Baba was able to give a spiritual boost to America, and through America, to the whole world. Among other things, it created a model for a new spiritual identity, partly through the people involved in the accident and the archetypes they represent. This identity blends the unfolding of the highest levels of spiritual consciousness, traditionally associated with the East, with the complex material culture of the West. Thus it creates a new model for the spiritual pilgrim - one who lives fully in the world but in a spirit of detachment and with total dedication to God.

This model was familiar to me. It was the one that has guided and inspired the students of Sufism Reoriented for many years now. The "boost" that Baba had given to America has been no less felt by our order. He wrote the charter for Sufism the same year he had the accident, when there were only a handful of Sufis, perhaps fifteen or so active initiated members. Today the number of active participants in Sufism Reoriented is nearing five hundred.

The day after Murshida's presentation, I spoke about my travels in Europe with Baba and the mandali after the accident. That night I was asked to help light a dhuni fire, whose crackling blaze accompanied songs and hymns of love for our Master.

On the last day of the anniversary events, I spoke again about my first meeting with Baba. So in a sense, I ended where I began.

This trip to Prague marked my first return since the accident fifty years before. Like the world around it, Prague had changed. Old, familiar buildings had been torn down, and new ones had risen to take their place. The laundromat where I washed the bloody clothes of Baba and the other victims is now just a vacant lot. But there was one feature of Prague that hadn't changed: the wonderful compassion and solicitude of its people.

I still felt the graciousness that had so eased our burdens during those first days after the accident. And it came from people of every age and station: a gas station owner who served free coffee to the pilgrims; the highway patrolmen who let me sit in their car while they controlled traffic to ensure the safety of our group during roadside prayers; the members of the Methodist Church who, on short notice, allowed one hundred strangers to eat lunch in their meeting room; the Prague school children in the Royal Court of the Kolache Queen who came in costume to welcome us and teach us their traditional "chicken dance"; the staff of the Prague Historical Museum who allowed us to dedicate a picture of Meher Baba there; and the doctors, nurses, and staff of the Prague Municipal Hospital who offered us free access to the rooms where Baba and the accident party stayed. The heart in these people of America's heartland has remained as strong as ever.

My own heart was deeply moved by these gestures and by the gathering itself. I was struck by the love and sincerity of the Baba lovers who staged the anniversary event and that of the young devotees who made the trek to Oklahoma from both coasts and many different states. They didn't come for a vacation or for luxury service in a fine hotel. They came to love Baba and to share that love with others. Back home they were doctors, computer specialists, screenwriters, musicians, and educators. But they left their worldly roles at the door and blended into a loving oneness of Baba-spirit that was very special. Now they have returned to those worldly roles, knowing that as long as they love him and dedicate every task to him, God will be present.

Returning to Prague so many years later, it would have been easy to disappear into my own emotions, especially my feelings of being so undeserving of Meher Baba's sacrifice. The enormity of what Baba did for humanity on that lonely road outside Prague is beyond my heart to hold. I saw firsthand the pain and suffering that he and others in the car were experiencing. And in some ways, those moments have stood still.

In spite of the changes in my own life since 1952, I can easily feel like that young woman again, the one who rushed about town gathering flowers and fruit for her Master and his injured companions. I can still invoke the anxious feeling that I should leave the Prague

laundromat and get back to the clinic to feed Meheru, who needed nourishment after such a shock and couldn't feed herself. All of that is just below the surface.

But by Baba's grace, in Prague I was able to focus on the many wonderful moments that followed the accident - the tasks and privilege Baba offered me. First he sent Mother and me to California on a mission to contact his lovers there, then he called me to Youpon Dunes, and later I accompanied him to New York, England, and Switzerland. The accident in Oklahoma simply initiated another phase of my life with Baba, a life that had many phases, all of them rich and wondrous.

When I review those phases, it feels like a hundred lifetimes have passed, and yet it feels no time has passed. On the outside, I'm physically older, but inside the reality is quite different. I think that's often the case as people age, and I know it was the case with my mother. She used to say that when she looked in the mirror, she was surprised to see an "old" face staring back at her, when inside she still felt youthful. This seems natural to me. Inside are the soul and the heart that grow wiser and more able, but never age.

Perhaps the most poignant change in my life since 1952 is that almost all my companions from those days are gone now. Only Meheru, Dr. Goher, and I are left to remember the serene smile on Baba's broken face and the outpouring of love from a town that served the Avatar unknowingly. Gone are the other players in this Middle American passion play: Mehera, Mani, Elizabeth, Sarosh, Kitty, Rano, Delia, Margaret Craske, who arrived late the same day we did to help Baba exercise his injured limbs, and of course, Mother. And gone is Dr. Burleson, who remembered until the end the big brown eyes that seemed to read his mind.

Baba has taken unto himself so many of my other companions from my life with him: Norina, Nadine, Ruano, Francis, Filis, Eruch, and Meherjee, who drove my mother and me straight to the door of the Avatar and into a new and transformed life. When I think of them, I sometimes feel like I did on that day in California so long ago when we were all seated at Baba's feet and he was naming those who should come to India for his East-West Gathering. He went through every person in the room before he finally came to me. All I could do was sit and silently plead, "Don't forget me, Baba!"

I lovingly remember all my companions who have left. But I also remember a particular day with Baba and some of those companions in the dark hours after the accident in Prague. The clinic was deathly quiet when suddenly the cry of a newborn baby penetrated the stillness. The doctor came out of the delivery room and exclaimed, "Life goes on, you know!"

Indeed it does. Life goes on at Meherabad and Meherazad in the abiding love for Meher Baba, and life goes on for each of us, everywhere, as we try to love him more and more fully.

Of all the words that echo back to me from my return to Prague, the strongest come from those spoken by Espandiar Vesali, the Prem Ashram boy, now an elderly man who came to the sahavas in a wheelchair. Espandiar listened to question after question from the audience asking him about his experiences, his present state, and his advice. He received many questions. In essence, he gave only one answer. It is the same answer Meher Baba sings down through the ages, revealing the path home:

"Love God. There is nothing else."



"Meher Baba said that he drew me to him so that I would spread his love wherever I went. Meher Baba was my Master for more than fifty years. I was with him for twenty-one years while he was on earth, spending one hundred days in his physical company. This is that story."