

Avataric Advents

*Meher Baba's Perspective
on the Descent of God on Earth*

by James H. McGrew

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

Source: Avataric Advents

© Meher Baba Information 2006

First Printing

All rights reserved. No part or parts of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner without written permission except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.

For information, address Meher Baba Information,
PO. Box 1101, Berkeley,
California 94701, USA.

Website: www.MeherBabainformation.org
ISBN: 0-940700-12-3

eBooks at the Avatar Meher Baba Trust Web Site

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

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

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

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

AVATARIC ADVENTS

Meher Baba's Perspective
on the Descent of God on Earth

James H. McGrew

AVATARIC ADVENTS

*Meher Baba's Perspective
on the Descent of God on Earth*

James H. McGrew



The Beguine Library

© Meher Baba Information 2006

First Printing

All rights reserved. No part or parts of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner without written permission except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.

For information, address Meher Baba Information,

PO. Box 1101, Berkeley,

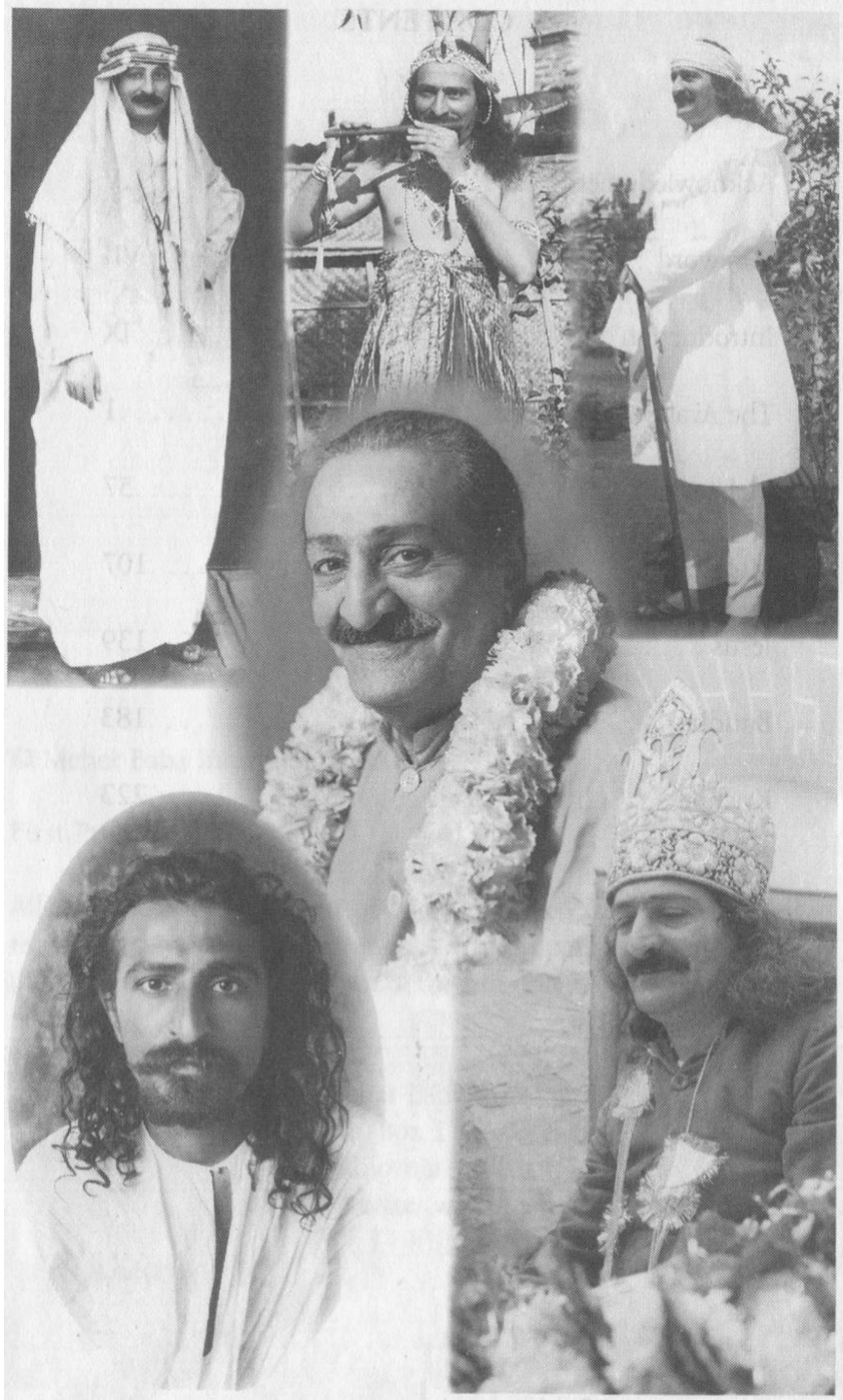
California 94701, USA.

Website: www.MeherBabainformation.org

ISBN: 0-940700-12-3

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	v
Foreword	vii
Introduction.	ix
The Avatar.	1
Meher Baba	57
Muhammad	107
Jesus	139
Buddha	183
Krishna	223
Rama	253
Zarathustra.	277
The Next Avatar	297
Select Bibliography	303



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Although it has been my privilege and good fortune to put this book together, the project was made possible only by the work and contributions of countless individuals. First and foremost, in His compassion Meher Baba left a legacy of His own words and stories about Himself and other advents that form the backbone of this book. Humanity is most fortunate to have a profound pool of Avataric wisdom from which to draw directly for the next 700 years. No formal acknowledgment could possibly express gratitude for this priceless gift from God Himself.

Meher Baba entrusted books and articles by Him and about Him to a variety of individuals and organizations. They are the trustees of His legacy. I am pleased to acknowledge their kind and generous help. Where a book or publication is listed below, the complete information may be obtained in the bibliography at the end of this book or in the endnotes following the individual citations.

Quotations and citations to *Love Alone Prevails* and *Treasures from the Meher Baba Journals* are copyright Meher Spiritual Center Inc. and are used by permission. Material from *Stay With God* is used by permission of Avatar's Abode Trust, which holds the copyright on that book. Quotations from and citations to *The Beloved* and *The Ancient One* are used by permission of Naosherwan Anzar, Beloved Archives, Inc. Material from *Listen! The New Humanity* is used by permission of Don E. Stevens.

Sufism Reoriented, Inc. holds the copyright on a variety of books by and about Meher Baba, including *God Speaks*, *The Theme of Creation and Its Purpose*; *Beams from Meher Baba on the Spiritual Panorama*; *Life at Its Best*; *Listen, Humanity*; and *How a Master Works*. Material from these works is used by permission from Sufism Reoriented, Inc.

The following works are copyright Avatar Meher Baba Perpetual Public Charitable Trust and used by permission: *Ramjoo's Diaries 1922-1929*; *Lord Meher*; *The Awakener*; *Discourses*; *The Wayfarers*;

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Eighty-two Family Letters; Tales from the New Life With Meher Baba; That's How It Was; The Nothing and The Everything; Glimpses of the God-Man; The God-Man; The Perfect Master; The Samadhi; Meher Baba's "Universal Message"; Meher Baba's "The Prayer of Repentance"; and Meher Baba's "How to Love God."

The photograph of Meher Baba as Zarathustra on page 278 (from the Elizabeth Chapin Patterson Photo Archives, copyright Connor) is used with the permission of Buz and Wendy Connor. The remaining photographs of Meher Baba that appear in this book were provided by and are used with the permission of Lawrence Reiter (Hermes).

My dear friend of nearly fifty years, Rick Chapman, kindly agreed to help with the publication of this book through Meher Baba Information. Rick, my deepest thanks for seeing it through with all its twists and turns and for putting up with my idiosyncrasies.

Jim McGrew

FOREWORD

For the past several years, it has been my enormous privilege to "write" a book on the most sublime theme of themes: God in human form. This work has been nothing but a labor of love, and I give Meher Baba my profound thanks for permitting me the privilege of working on a book that in truth was written in its significant aspects by Him. If I have done my job well - and I hope I have - then there will be very little of "me" in this book, and the profound, moving, and entertaining words and word-pictures of Meher Baba will be free to fill the pages of the book.

We can at best "see through a glass darkly" when we try to understand the Avatar. The attempt to understand the Avatar with our human or finite intellects may be an heroic exercise, but it is doomed to failure. The finite human mind cannot understand infinite God, and the Avatar is God in human form. Fortunately, for the first time in recorded history, God Himself has chosen to explain the Avatar to us, not in small snippets of insight but in detailed, fascinating discussions of who the Avatar is and how He works. I have tried to bring together many (but certainly not all) of these marvelous gems to provide a unique form of biography, the lives or advents of the one Avatar as explained by the Avatar Himself, who is the same individual who returns to us time and time again to point the way to God.

A few comments will suffice to introduce the reader to this gold mine of Avataric comments on the Avatar. The "H" is capitalized when referring to any Avatar, as in Him or His or He. Some authors find the constant capitalization tedious and annoying. After deliberating, I concluded that the capital "H" fits the theme. The Avatar is God, and we traditionally capitalize the "H" when referring to "His" words or "Him." Just because we are referring to Buddha or Rama, there did not seem to be a reason to depart from the traditional capitalization.

Those who earnestly hope that the Avatar of this age, Meher Baba, would clear up all the academic mysteries about the historical

FOREWORD

Avatars will be disappointed. Meher Baba seems to have made a calculated decision to focus on certain salient details of each Avatar's life to explain or to clarify; He was not particularly interested in the "archeological" details of each Avataric life. Those who hunger for meticulous details of the Avatar's life are able to satisfy that hunger with all the many details available about Meher Baba's life. In particular, Bhau Kalchuri's magnificent biography, *Lord Meher*, is approximately 7,000 pages, and in itself will provide a spiritual feast all its own. Beyond *Lord Meher*, there are books, articles, still pictures, movies (now available to individuals in videotape format) and paintings of Meher Baba. The Avatar has provided something for everyone in this advent.

Finally, dear reader, bring along your sense of humor. Life is empty without love and humor. The Avatar's life is filled with both, and He radiates His love and humor in everything He does. The pious, stuffy, humorless picture of the Avatar that religions have handed down is simply not the Avatar as measured by Meher Baba's life. The Avatar has come among us again to point the way to God and to establish the true foundation of happiness. I hope with all my heart that you enjoy this book. For my part, I have known great joy in putting it together, and for that joy I give my deepest thanks.

Jim McGrew

Washington, D. C.

February 2006

INTRODUCTION

I first met Jim McGrew in the 1950s at South High School in Denver. We were both students there and shared some of the same classes, and we became friends. We spent a good deal of time together during our junior and senior years, and then, having both been accepted at Harvard, in late summer of 1961 we set out together for college, driving from Denver to Cambridge in my newly acquired but well-used English Ford convertible.

Throughout our time in college we shared an intense spiritual search, leading us, both separately and together, through various groups and paths. Eventually I came to know about Meher Baba, and I shared with Jim my discovery that the Avatar of this Age was alive on earth, living in India. Through the Peace Corps, Jim went to India and met Baba in 1966, just about four months before I would have the same remarkable opportunity as a Fulbright Student. How utterly amazing it remains to me that these two high school chums ended up meeting the God-Man years later in India through completely different avenues.

Meher Baba permitted Jim to meet Him during His very strict seclusion, in April, 1966, at Guruprasad Bungalow in Poona. The meeting was, in a word, life-changing, and shortly thereafter Jim cut short his Peace Corps stint in India and returned to America. He had met the God-Man not only in person but also at a deeper level than he could ever have imagined, and he was now Baba's through and through.

After his return Jim attended Harvard Law School and eventually became a lawyer. For twenty-five years he has practiced law in Washington, D.C., while at the same time continuing to nurture his deep and abiding interest in Meher Baba. From early on Jim had a desire to write about Baba, and his desire has taken shape in this book with the idea of bringing together everything he could possibly find that Meher Baba has communicated about the Avatar. The result drives home how unique this Avataric Advent has been: never before in history accessible to us has the Avatar revealed so much

INTRODUCTION

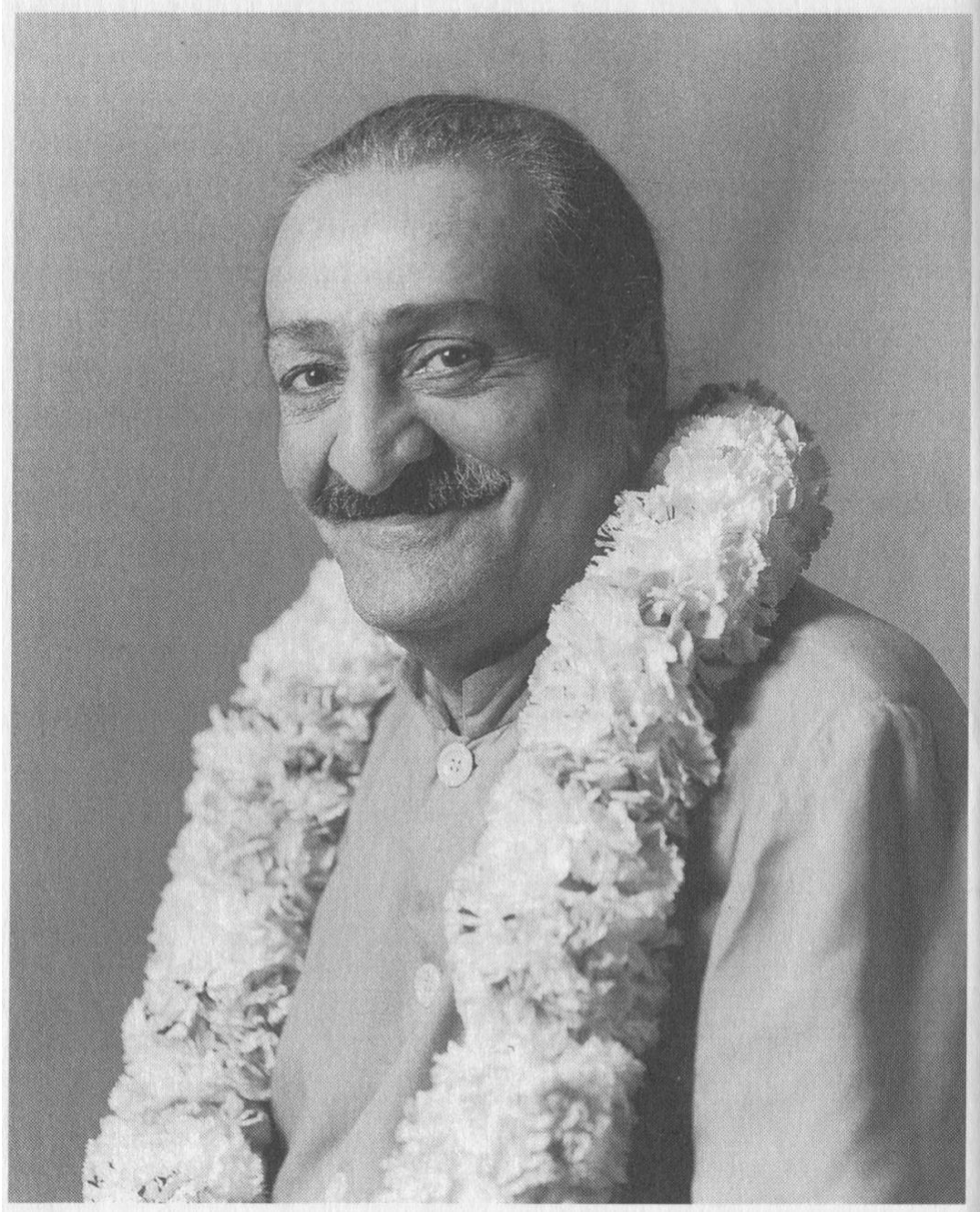
about His periodic visits to earth and His work with mankind and all of Creation during those visits.

With His numerous statements about God's Incarnations as Zarathustra, as Ram, as Krishna, as Buddha, as Jesus, as Muhammad, and in this age as Meher Baba, Baba discloses countless previously unknown details and provides incredible insight about the single most important subject of all. For what, really, could be more important than the only event on earth when Reality meets Illusion? When Reality *becomes* Illusion for the sole purpose of *dispelling* Illusion? That, in essence, is what the Avataric Advent is all about, wherever and whenever it occurs, whatever its historical context and whatever religion is inevitably based upon it.

This book goes a long way toward illuminating the true meaning of the "God-Man," and it will remain a key text for all lovers of God for a very long time to come. Be grateful that it was written in time for you to read it, so early in the unfolding of this most recent Advent of God in human form.

Rick Chapman
Oakland, California
February 2006

THE AVATAR



THE AVATAR

Age after age, amidst the clamor of disruptions, wars, fear and chaos, rings the Avatar's Call: "Come all unto Me!" Although, because of the veil of illusion, this call of the Ancient One may appear as a voice in the wilderness, its echo and re-echo nevertheless pervade through time and space, to rouse at first a few, and eventually millions, from their deep slumber of ignorance. And in the midst of illusion, as the Voice behind all voices, it awakens humanity to bear witness to the manifestation of God amidst mankind. The time is come. I repeat the call, and bid all to come unto me.¹

Who Is the Avatar?

In the West, the word "Avatar" is often used carelessly, sometimes as a pseudo-intellectual synonym for "embodiment" or "form," and sometimes for a person who pretends to spirituality. Despite this confusion, "Avatar" is a precise word referring to one specific individual. Meher Baba tells us:

The conscious descent of God into the limited form of man is the *Avatar*.²

Who is the Avatar and what is His role? For the first time in recorded history, we have the pleasure of the Avatar's own explanations of this key subject.

Creation began with what Meher Baba calls the original "whim," so-called because the urge of formless God to become conscious of Himself cannot be rationally described in any other fashion. This whim created the first soul, which traveled an incredible journey through an endless variety of subhuman forms, such as gas, mineral, vegetable, fish, bird, and animal forms, before attaining the human form and human consciousness. With

THE AVATAR

great persistence and courage, that first soul went through a variety of incarnations in the human form. The consciousness then involved through seven planes of inner consciousness until the first soul achieved union with God, the goal of life. That first soul became the Avatar. Meher Baba tells the story of the creation and its purpose in rich detail in His book, *God Speaks*,³ and Bhau Kalchuri elaborates on those themes in *The Nothing and the Everything*.⁴ Those two books are incomparable guides to understanding this complex subject matter.

The Avatar is the first man to successfully make the journey from the original minuscule form of consciousness to God realization in the human form:

On the journey of the First Soul, Adam, Shiva, there was no Master to call upon for help to realize God. The First Human Being was alone at the moment of His Realization and attained the Realization of Himself independently. The First Man became God-Realized through His own efforts and He came down back into creation (illusion) on His own. At that moment He became the First Sadguru and the First Avatar.⁵

This first soul (who has now become the Avatar) returns to earth again and again approximately every 700 to 1400 years solely to help humanity to advance spiritually.⁶ Having achieved God Realization, that first soul has nothing to gain and nothing to prove because He achieved the goal of creation. He returns to human form out of pity for lost and suffering humanity still struggling without a sense of how to achieve the goal of life.⁷

The Avatar always returns in a male form⁸ and will always be born in Asia.⁹ (Meher Baba's definition of Asia is broad enough to include what we think of as the Middle East.) He may be born in privileged circumstances, as were Buddha and Rama, or He may be born into humble circumstances, as were Jesus and Muhammad. The religious community into which He is born almost always gives the Avatar tremendous opposition.¹⁰ The

THE AVATAR

Avatars discussed in this book are those Avatars discussed in detail by Meher Baba, but Baba also hints that there were other Avatars in other ages.¹¹ Since the purpose of this book is to explore Baba's revelations about the Avatar, the book is limited to those Avatars on whom Baba focused His attention.

The Avatar's Early Life

When God "descends" into a human form as the Avatar, He lives the first part of His life as a "normal" person, going through childhood and early manhood until He begins His unique work. The catalysts of each descent are five Perfect Masters, who monitor the descent and the development of the Avatar.¹² These God-Realized beings "bring down" the Avatar, watch His growth, and then unveil Him to His true identity.

Baba explains that the individual soul goes through an extended process of reincarnation prior to achieving the goal of life, union with God. The individual human soul has no choice about this process; one reincarnates until one achieves the goal of life. However, the Avatar's periodic descent into human form is not caused by karma (the law of cause and effect) and sanskaras (mental impressions) which compel the reincarnation process for ordinary human beings. Meher Baba clarifies:

The direct descent of God on earth as *Avatar* is that **independent status** of God when God **directly becomes man without undergoing or passing through the processes of evolution, reincarnation and involution of consciousness**. Consequently, God directly becomes **God-Man**, and lives the life of man amongst mankind, realizing His divine status of the Highest of the High, or the Ancient One, through these *Qutubs* or *Sadgurus* or Perfect Masters of the time.¹³

The work of "bringing down" the Avatar into Creation is not a process that may be easily explained. The Perfect Masters closely

THE AVATAR

watch the young Avatar and, at the appointed time, unveil Him to His true consciousness and His mission in life. Although we know little about the unveiling of other advents of the Avatar, Meher Baba has given an extraordinary amount of detail about His own unveiling, including identifying each Perfect Master who assisted in the unveiling process.¹⁴ The Perfect Masters help the Avatar make a transition from a young man with ordinary consciousness to a man with perfect consciousness, including full consciousness of the gross, subtle and mental planes of consciousness and full consciousness of the divine reality beyond the illusory creation. The whole process takes years and is unimaginably arduous and painful.

The Avatar's Mission

!

Once the Perfect Masters have unveiled the Avatar and prepared Him for His work, He takes charge of the affairs of the Creation. He becomes, as it were, the Chairman of the Board of the Creation. Meher Baba explains:

During the *Avataric* period, the one, from amongst the then living five Perfect Masters, who used to function as *Qutub-e-Irshad* [the Head Perfect Master], ceases to hold this divine office with the advent of the *Avatar* and delivers his **duty** and **charge** of the sole responsibility for the affairs of the universe into the hands of the God-Man as soon as He is able to assume His office as the Christ - the *Avatar* of the Age - and remains himself, as long as he is in a gross body, holding the same office of *Qutub* as the other four hold.¹⁵

The question of what the Avatar "does" must be answered on three levels: First, the physical: What are the mundane details of the Avatar's life? Second, the internal: What does the Avatar do to change the spiritual course of the universe? Third, the purpose: Why does He come? Perhaps the easiest question to answer is the third. God comes down to this world as the Avatar to awaken love of God and to stimulate spiritual progress toward God. Baba

THE AVATAR

explains that the goal of life is to unite with God through love. Everything the Avatar does serves His purpose of moving the souls of the universe toward God. The Avatar has absolutely nothing to gain for Himself by descending into the world because He has already achieved the goal of life.

The answer to the first question has tantalized and frustrated biographers for centuries. With the exception of Meher Baba, previous Avatars lived in an age before the printing press and the camera. The search for details about previous Avatars has been heroic but often doomed to failure. We are left with the details that the oral tradition and relatively primitive modes of written transcription have handed down. As Baba's glosses of the lives of those previous Avatars shows, historians and religionists have never had the Avatar firmly in their grasp.

Baba has cured for all time the lack of reliable detail about the Avatar's life. Posterity now has films (also converted into videotapes), still pictures, His own writings, and a wide variety of biographical material about Baba's life. In particular, we have Bhau Kalchuri's *Lord Meher*, a definitive biography of Meher Baba which comprises twenty volumes and almost 7,000 pages. Since the Avatar is the same individual who simply returns to earth from time to time, *Lord Meher* gives us a valuable insight not only into Meher Baba but into the Avataric personality since all advents of the Avatar share certain characteristics.

As to the second question, the Avatar's inner work with the Creation itself cannot be intuitively gleaned from the biographical details of His external life. Fortunately, we have Baba's detailed descriptions of the Avatar's unique "work" to enlighten us in this area. The Avatar gives the entire Creation a spiritual "push" toward the goal of union with God. Baba summarizes this process succinctly:

Whenever God manifests on earth as *Avatar*, His Godhood gives a universal push and the result is universal, *i.e.*, not only the humanity reaps the benefit but everything in the whole Creation reaps the benefit of the universal push.¹⁶

THE AVATAR

This spiritual push includes meticulously planning the destiny of the world for hundreds or thousands of years into the future.¹⁷ Although the Avatar is Himself in charge of this meticulous planning, He enlists the help of members of the spiritual hierarchy.¹⁸ The concept of the spiritual hierarchy is yet another invaluable contribution Baba makes to the pool of knowledge about spirituality. Although the scope of this book does not permit a detailed description of the spiritual hierarchy, the reader will find such a description on pages 254-257 of *God Speaks*. There Baba explains that the functioning spiritual hierarchy consists of 7,000 individuals other than the Avatar Himself. Each of these individuals is on (or between) one of the inner planes of consciousness. These souls are the spiritually advanced souls of the world, very few of whom are known to the world at large.

The Avatar's Teaching

Although every Avatar's core message is "Love God," His external life and His teaching are tailored to the unique time and culture in which He appears. The lives of the various Avatars show God's extraordinary versatility. The Avatar, however, does not see His work merely in the time frame of one lifetime; He foresees the course of history for centuries to come. The result of the work of all recent Avatars is that at least one religion inspired by an Avatar has penetrated into almost every corner of the world. Baba remarked:

The Avatar's exterior way of life is regulated by the habits and customs of the times, and he adopts that attitude which is most suited to serve as an example to his contemporaries. But in essence, all Avatars embody the same ideal of life.

* * * * *

The Avatars incarnate in this world at different times and their teachings have therefore to be adapted to the mentality of their epoch. At times, the Avatar bases his teaching on the search for the

THE AVATAR

personal God, and at other times, on the search for the impersonal God.

It may be compared to a hospital, where the sick complain of thirst at different times. The doctor will prescribe tea or coffee in the morning to those who complain in the morning, water or fruit juice in the afternoon, buttermilk in the evening and hot milk before sleep. The doctor is the same and the complaint is the same, but the thirst is quenched in different ways according to the different conditions at different times.

God, manifesting as the Avatar in different periods of time, quenches the thirst of man in different ways. All human beings, either consciously or unconsciously, have the same thirst for Truth.¹⁹

The Avatar's Humor

The Avatar is unfailingly a leader: fearless, charismatic, energetic, chivalrous, full of life and humor. Humor is a constant refrain of each Avataric lifetime even though the unique humor of the Avatars often gets buried in the mythology and stuffy sanctimony of the portrait of the Avatar embraced by the orthodox religion that springs up in His name. The Avatar's ability to laugh at everything in life is stunning in its scope:

It is said that once *Rasool-e-Khuda*, the Messenger of God, felt indisposed, and someone suggested that it was due to an evil eye and that he should sleep on a pillow with an open knife underneath it. He did so, and thereafter declared himself to be all right. Call it ordinary or call it divine; it was Prophet Muhammad's sense of humor.

It is a fact that during the childhood of his grandsons, Hassan and Hussain, the Prophet predicted the Moharrum [martyrdom] "Karbala" to his daughter Fatima, the mother of the martyrs.

THE AVATAR

Now, if the Prophet who, in fact, turned the then savages of Arabia into the torchbearers of faith, love and truth for the world did not even try to avoid the greatest tragedy in Islam, or to stop the most horrible end for his own and only two grandsons, that was only because of God's divine sense of humor in Muhammad.

Likewise, the strife between the Kauravas and the Pandavas and the consequent bloodshed was not only due to the divine sense of humor in Krishna, but its height was reached when Krishna Himself died through an arrow that accidentally struck one of his legs from the bow of an ordinary hunter who never had any intention of harming the *Rangila* (colorful, playful) Avatar in any way.

The kindhearted Jesus knew very well that his nearest disciple would betray him and thus lead to his crucifixion. But, because of the divine sense of humor, Jesus Christ could not help getting himself crucified, although the world rightly continues to look upon him as the Savior of humanity.

The funniest divine sense of humor was on the part of Buddha when he died of simple dysentery, though his "medicine" for the spiritual *beemaries* (illnesses) of mankind holds the field to this day.

In short, except for a change in the circumstances, the atmosphere and the surroundings, the same old, old story goes on repeating again and again, which by itself proves the divine sense of humor or the leela of God. The manifestation of the divine sport or leela, however, depends upon the Great Ones of God who achieve Oneness with God. And thus, in spite of raising themselves above the law of duality, they still retain the divine sense of humor to uphold the universal law of ignorance through which Knowledge Divine is achieved for all eternity.

THE AVATAR

Those who were with me at the spot at the time of my car accident in America can alone well describe my own sense of humor as to how thoroughly battered, bruised and literally helpless and hopeless I was when lying with broken bones in a pool of my own blood together with my dearest ones. Yet I maintained my silence and my consciousness throughout the crisis and the long period of convalescence.²⁰

As incredible as it may seem, the Avatar can think even of crucifixion (and many other forms of death) with humor. For Him, life and death are not serious; God is serious. The search for God and the yearning for achievement of the goal of union with God never end. Baba explains clearly that the soul goes through countless incarnations until the goal is reached. From the Avatar's perspective, the passing away of one body is nothing more than the changing of a suit of clothes.

History and religious orthodoxy dull the Avatar's humor and humanity. The Avatar manifests all human qualities with a degree of refinement and perfection that delights those around Him. As one of Meher Baba's disciples wryly observed: "There is no reason why God should not have a sense of humour. In fact, if He hadn't, we couldn't - something cannot come from nowhere: every limited quality must come from an unlimited one."²¹

The Avatar's Divine Fire

As full of humor as the Avatar is, any portrait of the Avatar as a "happy go lucky" man who only laughs at death and takes life lightly would be incorrect. The Avatar is absolutely serious about God and is dedicated to awakening people to live as God wants them to live. Baba observes:

There should be no misunderstanding about the Avatar or Sadgurus [God Realized beings or Perfect Masters]. They are like fire. If you touch fire, you will be burned. If you seek to use it from

THE AVATAR

a distance, it will give you warmth, cook your food, warm your water and be useful to you in every way.

I repeat, the Avatar and Sadgurus are like fire. Those outside the circle should be wary of them. They should not be misled by their talks and outward behavior. Sai Baba was a Sadguru, but occasionally his behavior was strange. Once, on seeing a naked child, he inquired, "Is it a boy or a girl?" He also used to ask for money from those who came to him. Seeing such behavior on the part of Sadgurus, people doubt them, misunderstand them and take them for ordinary beings. This is the downfall of those who so misunderstand.

If I give a loose rein to someone and permit him to do whatever he likes, however improper or impractical it may appear from a worldly viewpoint, I do it with an object in view, with a farsightedness that is beyond the grasp of the mind. It may be that I wish that the person concerned should do it only as a pastime, or to avoid a particular situation. So, by leaving the rein loose to divert his mind to other things, I am just giving him a plaything, because I know that in the end, he will get tired of it and throw it away.

If the Avatar or a Sadguru wishes his disciples to renounce something, he resorts to one of two methods. One way is that he snatches the thing away from him or has it stolen. Another is that he gives it such an importance that the person himself becomes fed up and gives it up.²²

The Avatar cannot be categorized. His ways are never fully comprehensible to the ordinary mind:

People say that I am the Avatar, but when it is impossible for rishis and munis to understand me, how can they know me? Only the Perfect

THE AVATAR

Masters know me. I am that Ancient One – Zarathustra, Ram, Krishna, Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad. But how will you know that I am the *Adi Purush* (Supreme Power)? Rare are those who have the fortune to know me. So do one thing. Leave the thought of understanding me altogether. Love me, obey me; that is all.²³

The Avatar and Religions

The Avatar devotes enormous energy to opposing the hypocrisy and rigid orthodoxies of the religions of His time and age. In this advent, Meher Baba did not intend to establish a religion. He tells us:

I belong to no religion. Every religion belongs to me. My own personal religion is of my being the Ancient Infinite One, and the religion I teach to all is of love for God.

This love can be practiced by anyone, high, low, rich, poor; and everyone of every caste and creed can love God. The one God who resides equally in us all is approachable to everyone through love. So I give my blessings that at least some of you will love God as He is to be loved.²⁴

People in the West find it hard to grasp that all religions have a common basis. In the East, there is a sense that "All rivers flow to the sea," but in the West, there is a sense that only one religion can possibly be true. The Avatar, however, looks at religions from His own perspective. We return to God as individuals, and thus the "way" or the "path" to God must be traveled on an individual basis. The essence of religions is the fundamental challenge to "Love God." In the passage of time, the external rites, rituals, practices, and dogmas obscure this internal essence of the religion. Every religion becomes stale and rigid in the course of time. Meher Baba explains:

I shall change the history of the whole world. As Jesus came to impart spirituality to a material-

THE AVATAR

istic age, so have I come to impart a spiritual push to present-day mankind. There is always a fixed time for such divine workings, and when the hour is ripe I shall reveal my true nature to the entire world.

The great teachers of religion - Zarathustra, Ram, Krishna, Buddha, Jesus, and Muhammed - do not differ in their essential doctrines. All these Prophets came from God. These Divine Ones appeared in public when their spiritual help was most needed, when spirituality was at its lowest ebb and materialism was apparently victorious everywhere. Mankind is rapidly approaching such a time.

At present, the whole world is enmeshed in sensual desires, in racial prejudice, selfishness and money-worship. God is forsaken! True religion is abused. Man seeks life and the priests give him stones! God, therefore, must send his *True Prophet* among men once again to establish true worship and to awaken people out of their materialistic stupor. I but follow in the line of those earlier Prophets. This is my mission.

The Prophets lay down certain rules and regulations to help the masses lead better lives and to incline them toward God. These rules become the tenets of an organized religion; but the idealistic spirit and motive force, which prevail during the Avatar's lifetime, gradually disappear after his death. That is why organizations cannot bring spiritual truth home to people. Religious organizations become like archaeological departments trying to resuscitate the past. Therefore, I shall not attempt to establish any new religion, cult or organization. I shall rejuvenate the religious thought of all people and instill a higher understanding of life in them.

THE AVATAR

Remember, though, that the fundamental truth of all religions is really the same, because all issue from the same source - God. But the Avatar considers the times, circumstances and prevailing mentality of the people before his public manifestation. He therefore preaches doctrines best understood and best suited to such conditions.²⁵

The Avatar's relationship with organized religion is both simple and complex. The simplicity is plain from the core messages of the Avatars. Zarathustra emphasized "Good thoughts, good words, and good deeds." Buddha postulated the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path. Jesus stressed two commandments, loving God and loving one's neighbor. Muhummad stressed faith in Allah and surrender to Him. These ideals are not religions but spiritual guidelines, which are common to all religions.

At the same time, there is a complexity in the Avatar's relationship with organized religion. He inevitably encounters intense opposition from the very religious community or tradition into which He was born. Zarathustra's passionate monotheism enraged the priests who resented the threat to their own paganism and polytheism. Muhammad's own tribe, the Quraish, persecuted Him and drove Him from Mecca to Medina.

Jesus experienced intense opposition from the rabbis in Israel. One of Meher Baba's close disciples made the following observations about the opposition from within the Avatar's own community:

The law creates opposition in the community of his birth. The Avatar gains ascendance over such opposition. It is because of his extreme compassion for the fallen community that he triumphs over the forces of opposition by trying to bring the spiritual good to the community. It is because of the law that the community turns a deaf ear to the silent voice of the Avatar. For such an act of denial, animosity and aggression against the personality of the Avatar, the community

THE AVATAR

becomes a subject of retribution and suffering by being humiliated and oppressed by posterity.

The community is not at fault. The law takes its course. The law upholds itself and becomes instrumental in manifesting the infinite compassion and generosity of the Avatar. The forces of compassion and aggression have been from great antiquity carrying on their play of opposites in repeated crises of the material against the spiritual.

Out of his infinite compassion, the more Baba tries to draw near him those of his community, the more it misunderstands and agitates against him. Its oft-repeated stale versions are too illogical to be convincing. They are:

"Here is a lad who had just grown up as one amongst us. What wisdom can he ever give us?"

Such an attitude leads the community to a defiance of him. But because of the inherent righteousness in every man and a thirst for gratifying his longing for something higher, a Zoroastrian runs after saints and *sadhus*, *faquirs* and *walis*, temples and tombs. He hardly realizes the spiritual waste of such gropings. Turning away from the Real, he hankers for the imitation that appears so alluring. Giving up the real diamond, He yields to the attraction of the valueless glittering of stones to which he offers his prayerful worship.

Baba has taken birth in the Zoroastrian community He is the Avatar of the age. Because of the law upholding itself, the community has been despising him with bitterness and aggression known best to itself. ²⁶

The Inevitable Opposition to the Avatar

The Avatar takes on the opposition not only of His own religious community but of the materialistic world itself. The Avatar comes to

THE AVATAR

deliver a message that most people don't want to hear, namely that God is the only truth in life. The Avatar attracts opposition from the vast majority of mankind, who find their meaning in material things. His main focus is on encouraging movement toward God, who is beyond all religions.

Although the compassion of the Avatar for individuals is unlimited, He has no illusions about the degeneration of the religions that inevitably occurs between His visits to Creation:

The light of Zarathustra has been extinguished by his followers themselves. His was the highest form of *Sufism*. If Zarathustra were born again in this material world, he would find it difficult to recognize his own religious tenets, as practiced by the present day followers of his creed. The same is true of all religions. The Muslim *mullas*, Hindu *pundits*, and Zoroastrian *dastoors* and Christian *priests* have mutilated the original religion for their own selfish ends.²⁷

From the Avatar's perspective, religion itself can become more of an obstacle to the heartfelt search for God than a help. "The priests establish rites and rituals in the name of religion to line their pockets and the real essence of the religion is wiped out."²⁸ It is thus no surprise that the Avatar does not join an established religion but instead works outside the framework of the religious orthodoxy of His age. Religion itself is not the goal or the meaning of life:

Religion is a cage and the people who follow it are all birds locked up inside. It is meaningless to leave one's religion to adopt another. It is like going from one cage to another. The wire binding the wings of the bird must be cut.... Love God; for when the Sadguru comes he snaps the cord and frees the bird.²⁹

The Avatar is uncompromising in His cold-eyed view of religion in general, but He rarely singles out individuals for his criticism. He seems to be able to combine love for all individuals with a harsh appraisal of the limitations of organized religion:

THE AVATAR

The organized religions of the world often fail to express the real vision of those who have been the fountainhead of inspiration for their very coming into existence. Dogmas and beliefs, rituals and ceremonies, can never be the essence of true spiritual life. When religion has become merely a matter of external rituals and ceremonies, it has become a cage for the soul. Nor does it help very far to change one religion for another. It is like going from one cage to another. If religion does not help man to emancipate the soul from spiritual bondage and realize God, it has no useful purpose to serve. Then it is time that religion should go to make room for God!

I am, therefore, not interested in founding a new religion. The world is already divided by numberless sects, based upon dogmas and beliefs. I have not come to give another cage for man, but to impart to the world the illimitable Truth. The world needs awakening and not mere verbal instruction; it needs the freedom and the amplitude of divine life, and not the superficiality of mechanized and pompous forms; it needs love, and not the display of power.³⁰

The Avatar's Love of Those Who Love God

Even though the Avatar's assessment of religions is harsh, His treatment of individual practitioners can be most loving. On the occasion of giving His blessing to Father Anthony, the principal of St. Catherine of Siena School in Bombay, Baba made the following remarks:

I am well pleased with your work among destitute and abandoned children. By serving the

THE AVATAR

abandoned, you are really serving Jesus Christ, because he was also abandoned by all, even by his own apostles. The emblem of abandonment is the cross. Hence, to serve the abandoned is to serve the Christ, and I am he, undoubtedly.

I am with you in your work, as I am myself in you. Difficulties, lack of sympathy, and hostile opposition there will be in your work, but I will help you. You have my blessing and love.

The cross of Christ is also the symbol of sacrifice. Hence, I say that you should sacrifice your whole self and plunge yourself unreservedly into the work of helping the destitute children. By sacrificing your everything, you will find *All*.³¹

The Avatar is not so much against religion as He is for living a life of whole-heartedly loving God. To the extent that religion can inspire such a life, the Avatar is pleased. Too often, however, religion degenerates into hollow rituals and excuses for priests to exploit people:

What is wrong with the world today and with India in particular? Such, and allied, questions are bound to arise in thinking minds, but the answers are not altogether honest and straight. The diagnosis given and the remedies adopted have all been biased and one-sided; the whole situation stands hopelessly vague and undetermined.

The crux of the situation lies in the correct understanding and reinterpreting of the ancient word "*religion*." The West has very little of religion, and whenever we hear of it, it is subservient to politics, or at best a handmaid of material life.

The East is suffering from an overdose of religion, and, consequently it is desperately hankering for a material antidote thereto. Religion in the West is synonymous with scientific progress, which is destructive in its manifestation. In the

THE AVATAR

East, and particularly in India, religion, instead of establishing the *Kingdom of God* on earth, has gone underground in the guise of crude ceremonies, rude rituals and dead dogmas.

Instead of engendering the seeds of peace and plenty, the under-driven religion tries to shoot out communalism, fanaticism, nationalism and patriotism, which have become bywords for leadership and greatness, suffering and sanctity. In short, religion, as a living force, has become obsolete! The urgent need of today, to resuscitate religion, is to dig it out of its narrow and dark hidings and coverings, and let the spirit of man shine out once again in its pristine glory.

The most practical thing to do in the world is to be spiritually-minded. It needs no special time, place or circumstances. It is not necessarily concerned with anything out of the way of anyone's daily life and day-to-day routine. It is never too late or too early to be spiritual. It is just a simple question of having a right attitude of mind toward lasting values, changing circumstances, avoidable eventualities and a sense of the inevitable.

Spirituality is neither restricted to, nor can it be restricted by, anyone or anything anywhere at any-time. It covers all life for all time, yet it can very easily be achieved with selfless service and pure love that know no bondage and seek no boundaries. A mighty surge of this spirituality is about to sweep over the world. My blessings to you all.³²

As Baba explains, organized religion can become an obstacle to the search for truth because of its inevitable tendency to degenerate into rituals, ceremony and hypocritical accommodation to material values. On the other hand, Baba was extraordinarily loving to individual members of the clergy, and the Avatar knows that billions of souls find meaning and direction in organized religion and would be

THE AVATAR

lost without organized religion. Enlivening organized religion itself is also part of the spiritual push the Avatar comes to give to the creation. Baba says that He intends "bringing together all religions and cults like beads on one string and revitalize them for individual and collective needs."³³ He also observed that even though the organized religions of the world had dried up, the Ocean [God] would have to flood the rivers to give them water.

The Physical Characteristics of the Avatar

Although we know exactly what Meher Baba looked like, we cannot be positive about the physical appearance of the other Avatars. Baba has observed that the other Avatars have His face and hair.³⁴ By nature, they have extraordinarily charismatic personalities because masses of people will inevitably be drawn to them. The Avatar also suffers physically. For example, Meher Baba had a hole in His cheek (a fistula)³⁵ and suffered injuries to both legs and other parts of His body in two automobile accidents. Jesus limped; Rama's leg was injured in battle; and Krishna died of injuries to His leg.³⁶

The Avatar has unfathomable endurance and energy. Reading about Baba's life leaves one feeling exhausted by His capacity for physical activity, including extended fasts, travel, working with groups and individuals, and periods of seclusion. The other Avatars had the same boundless energy.

Some people believe that the Avatar is some kind of superman who does not feel hunger, pain, cold, heat, and the ordinary physical responses to life. The reverse is true; the Avatar feels everything acutely, yet He endures all physical discomfort and suffering with incomparable cheerfulness and patience. On His first visit to England, for example, Baba's followers assumed that He would not feel susceptible to cold, yet He cheerfully endured the English chill in thin clothes suitable for India. Similarly, He suffered excruciating pain in His two automobile accidents, yet He maintained His sense of humor and selflessly considered the welfare of those around Him.

THE AVATAR

The Avatar's Disciples

The process by which disciples become drawn to the Avatar is very precise. Baba explains that there are "circles" of disciples or followers who take birth to offer their lives in service to the Avatar. There are ten such circles of twelve people each, with two additional positions occupied by women in the first circle, making that first circle total fourteen in all. Since members of the first circle earn God-realization during the lifetime of the Avatar or during the period preceding His next advent, the positions in the first circle open up, as it were, to the individuals in the contiguous circle. This process is something like school, in which the new class of seniors takes over the positions of the graduating seniors, the incoming juniors take the place left by the juniors who became seniors, and so forth. As Baba clarifies:

In the case of the Avatar, it is different [from the circles of a Perfect Master]. He [the Avatar] has ten circles in all. The *first* or *inner circle* of the Avatar consists of twelve men with an appendage of two women; and each of the following nine outer circles consists of twelve persons, both men and women. In all there are one hundred and twenty persons in the ten circles of the Avatar, plus the two women of the inner circle, who are but the appendage to that particular circle - one hundred and twenty-two in all.

Either one or more of the one hundred and eight members of the nine outer circles realize the God-state during or after the life span of the Avatar, and some in the next incarnation, or after a few more incarnations.

As in the case of the Perfect Master's circle, the inner circle of the Avatar consists of only twelve men, with an appendage of two women. The difference between the circle of the Perfect Master and the inner circle of the Avatar is that the Perfect Master *establishes* his circle from among those who

THE AVATAR

were closely connected with him right from the evolutionary stages of their consciousness; but the Avatar who, in his recurrent advents, neither passes through the process of evolution, reincarnation, nor involution, does not therefore have the same links of association to establish anew his inner circle with every advent. In short, whereas the Perfect Master establishes his circle, the Avatar is directly allied with his inner circle, which is always the same [parts or positions] in all his advents. With his descent on earth, the Avatar, as it were, brings along with him the association [or position of roles] of his inner circle.

The connection of the inner circle in relation to the Avatar may be compared to that of a man who directly associates himself with the fourteen parts of his own body - two eyes, two ears, two nostrils, one mouth, two hands, two legs, and the trunk of the body itself; plus the external genitals and anus that act as the appendage to the body as a whole. As soon as a man is born, he directly makes use of these fourteen parts of his body, and these parts, in turn, respond to his dictates individually and collectively.

Similarly, with the advent of the Avatar on earth, his inner circle of the same twelve individuals and the appendage of the same two individualities directly begins to function, individually and collectively, according to the dictates of the Avatar himself.

With every advent of the Avatar on earth, the twelve men of the inner circle and its appendage of two women gather round the personality of the Avatar, as the selfsame fourteen *types* of individualities, who in the *shape* of different personalities, always occupy their respective offices when the Avatar manifests on earth. And, during and after

THE AVATAR

the life span of the Avatar, they individually and collectively function in the same way as their predecessors, who had held and functioned in the same offices of the inner circle during the past advents of the Avatar.

Therefore, it would *not* be wrong to say that with Christ's coming again come Peter, Judas, and all his apostles. But, this can never mean that the *very same* Peter, or the selfsame Judas, reincarnates again and again. These can never incarnate, because all of the twelve individual personalities of the Avatar's inner circle attain God-Realization in every Avataric period, either during or soon after the life span of the Avatar.

Once God-Realization is attained, reincarnation is impossible. The only exception to this rule is the Avatar himself, who comes again and again to redeem humanity.

It is not the same individualized personalities of the inner circle that reincarnate; it is the *individualities of their particular offices* that come with every advent of the Avatar. It is because, in all the Avatar's advents, each of the twelve men and two women of the inner circle hold exactly the same office and function in exactly the same manner; that is why it is said that the Avatar always brings with him the same circle.

As soon as the veil [Vidnyani] with which the Avatar descends on earth is rent by the then-living Perfect Master or Masters, and the Avatar realizes his Avatarhood, the twelve men and two women automatically group round the personality of the Avatar to occupy their respective position in the inner circle, and to function as usual according to the dictates of the Avatar of the age.

The position of the Avatar in regard to the inner circle and its function may be compared to

THE AVATAR

a man asleep. As soon as the man is made to wake up through some external agency, and no sooner he is awake, than he spontaneously finds that all the fourteen parts of his body, as mentioned before, are already there in their individual roles, ready to function at the slightest wish of the man. Similarly, as soon as the Avatar is made to realize his Avatarhood through one or more of the five Perfect Masters of the time, he also realizes that the fourteen personalities in their characteristic roles of the inner circle are ready at hand to discharge their duties.

To explain in detail why only these fourteen particular personalities hold such positions in every advent of the Avatar would take a volume of explanations. Who can become the fourteen members, and how do they become attached to the inner circle of the Avatar? These questions would require more volumes of explanations.

Suffice it to say that each of these fourteen particular personalities, when occupying the office and function of the inner circle, not only must resemble the characteristic individuality of his or her predecessor in the previous advents of the Avatar, but must be exactly similar in all respects. For example, one of the offices of the inner circle of Jesus Christ was held by Peter. At the second advent of Christ, this particular office must be held by another Peter, who may be named "A," but having the same quality of mind and heart and other characteristics as of *the Peter*. The same applies to the office held by Judas, John, James, et cetera, of the inner circle in the time of Christ.

All the fourteen members of the Avatar's inner circle realize God by the grace of the Avatar during the same Avataric period, which is of one hun-

THE AVATAR

dred years' duration after the manifestation of the Avatar on earth. Regarding the outer circles of the Avatar, none of the one hundred and eight persons in the nine circles holds any office similar to that held by those of the inner circle; and all of these one hundred and eight persons attain God-Realization by the grace of the Avatar, but not necessarily during the Avataric period.

These one hundred and eight persons of the outer circles have their respective places in the nine circles in accordance with their past connections with the members of the circle ahead of them. For example, the members of the second circle of the twelve persons, next to the inner circle, are grouped round the Avatar in accordance with their past connection with the members of the inner circle. Similarly, the twelve persons of the third circle, next to the second circle, are grouped round the Avatar in accordance with their past connections with the members of the second circle, and so on with all the remaining seven circles.

The number of men and women in each circle is as follows:

First Inner Circle - consists of twelve men and two women

Second Outer Circle - consists of eight men and four women

Third Outer Circle - consists of four men and eight women

Fourth Outer Circle - consists of eight men and four women

Fifth Outer Circle - consists of four men and eight women

Sixth Outer Circle - consists of eight men and four women

Seventh Outer Circle - consists of six men and six women

THE AVATAR

Eighth Outer Circle - consists of eight men and four women

Ninth Outer Circle - consists of eight men and four women

Tenth Outer Circle - consists of ten men and two women³⁷

The innermost circle serves two key functions. The members of the inner circle attend to the Avatar's personal needs and also assist Him in his work for the benefit of the world. In serving the Avatar, the members of the inner circle also serve themselves because, by the grace of the Avatar, they achieve union with God. As Meher Baba explains, no one can attain the goal of life by sheer will power or "good works." Only a Perfect Master or the Avatar can bestow God-realization.

Baba's description of the Avatar's circles shows how meticulously choreographed is the life's work of the Avatar. Although the 122 men and women in the ten circles play key roles and are assuredly the souls closest to the Avatar, it would be a mistake for anyone to despair because he or she may not be among the 122 closest souls to the Avatar. The Avatar comes for everyone, and the challenge of moving closer to God is a full time adventure for each soul. Life is rich with meaning wherever one finds oneself, and living up to the Avatar's standards demands every ounce of a person's spiritual strength.

The Avatar's Happiness

The Avatar is the embodiment of life, joy, humor, love, and happiness. The stuffy picture of Jesus that has emerged from history, for example, is the antithesis of the Avatar. With regard to the internal activities of the Avatar, Meher Baba observed that "only God and those who are one with God can know and understand."³⁸ As to His external activities, Baba provided the following summary:

I enjoy games, chiefly cricket, playing marbles, flying kites and also listening to music, although I can do so only on rare occasions. From

THE AVATAR

time immemorial, I have been playing with the Mayavic universe and this enjoyment of playing still persists. I sometimes see motion pictures (mostly humorous ones), and enjoy my real state of being the eternal Producer of the vast, everchanging, never-ending film called the universe. I also find relaxation in listening to humorous stories, all the time being aware of the humor that lies in the aspect of the soul, which is the source of infinite power and glory, being made to feel so helpless in its human bondage of ignorance arising from its various forms of duality.

I allow vegetarians to follow their diet and non-vegetarians to eat meat, fish, etc. However, those who stay with me have as a rule vegetarian diet according to my instructions, unless on occasion I instruct otherwise. Once in a great while I give wine to my lovers and make them understand that it is not this wine of grapes but the pure wine of love, giving divine intoxication, that helps towards union with God.

I do not interfere with any religion and permit all to follow unhindered their own creeds. When compared with love for God, external ceremonials have no value. Love for God automatically and naturally results in self-denial, mental control and ego-annihilation, irrespective of the lovers' following or renouncing these external forms.

Once in a while I give "darshan" and "prasad" of love to the people, each person benefitting according to his or her own receptivity. I give "updes" (spiritual advice) in the form of instructions to those who are closely connected with me. Perfect Masters can impart divine knowledge, bestow divine love and shower the grace of God-union by a mere glance, touch or single divine thought.

THE AVATAR

From the beginningless beginning to the present day I Am What I Am, irrespective of praise or universal opposition, and will remain so to the endless end.³⁹

The Avatar is spiritually connected with every soul in the universe. The sharing of life and the work with the close ones while the Avatar is in the body is only a microcosm of the connections the Avatar eternally has with the entire Creation. Every soul has that connection, and those who wish to make the most rapid spiritual progress are conscious of that connection and seek to make the most of it. The Avatar is a spiritual guide whose teachings and life provide the spiritual help men and women need in their daily lives for centuries to come after His death:

There are individual as well as national and universal problems, which need the spiritual guidance of Perfect Masters and Avatars. Age after age these God-Men guide humanity through their divine messages. Even after the absence of their physical bodies, these messages are carried to the remotest corners of the world by their disciples, devotees and followers, who spread the Beloved's word even at the cost of their life.

The Avatars and Perfect Masters give their guidance and protection to the human race and the world in their own unique and imperceptible ways, which are beyond the grasp of human intellect. The Perfect Masters are the true Saviors of mankind and not of the selected few only. Their love and grace alone sustain the universe.⁴⁰

Because of the many Avataric advents in recorded history, almost every person in the world has access to the teachings of at least one Avatar. The religions that developed after each of the Avataric advents spread to the various corners of the world. Baba tells us that everyone incarnates in the East and in the West, as male and female, rich and poor, sick and healthy, famous and ordinary, and so forth. In the course of these millions of incarnations, everyone has the

THE AVATAR

opportunity to practice every religion many times over, just as everyone will spend lifetimes without any religion. From Baba's perspective, intolerance of someone else's religion is both pathetic and humorous. God doesn't ask His followers to extinguish religions other than their own. All religions emanate from the same God; all religions are His own; all religions are intended to point the way back to God.

God structures the Creation to provide the path by which each soul returns to God. "All roads lead to Rome." Spiritual progress occurs with the help and support of the Avatar and carries one back to the Avatar, even if one does not believe in the Avatar:

The Avatar must use the Creation he sustains for God's purpose, to expedite to a maximum the development and perfecting of the myriads of individual contributions of consciousness. By the time that a drop of consciousness has gotten to the human stage the building phase has been completed and the goal now is to free it from the compulsions imposed by the sanskaric habit patterns. It would be a sad contribution indeed to God's infinite consciousness if each iota were still tied up in knots and dangling strings.

At the human stage of development the play is one of liberation. One of the Avatar's jobs is to devise the best possible scheme for freeing each individual consciousness. He does not necessarily come to build a higher level of technological or cultural achievement. But his job does not on the other hand exclude this goal. Again, despite the periodic down-falls of whole great civilizations, there is too much evidence indicating that the entire social scheme on our planet is slowly evolving, too.⁴¹

The internal connections between the Avatar and each of the souls in the Creation is too complex to fathom. What God wants from us is not intellectual understanding but a life that pleases Him:

THE AVATAR

Rare are those who have the fortune to know me. So do one thing. Leave the thought of understanding me altogether. Love me, obey me; that is all. ⁴²

The spiritual student advances by practicing the guidance of the teacher. On one occasion, after listening to a church service by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Baba remarked: "Those in the church all speak of Christ our Lord, but do not follow him."⁴³ This concept of obedience is more familiar to the Eastern mind than to the Western mind because of the tradition in the East of gurus and disciples. Still the West has its examples of obedience: Abraham's willingness to kill Isaac at God's instruction; the willingness of Jesus' disciples to follow Him; the Ten Commandments.

How one lives has meaning; mere intellectual understanding has no meaning if one does not live it. Baba underscored the paramount importance of thoughts, words and deeds by His silence:

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 practising 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.⁴⁴

Obedience as a Spiritual Tool

What does the Avatar mean by obedience? The obedience stressed by the Avatars bears some similarity to the obedience of a soldier yet differs from military obedience in important ways. Although the

THE AVATAR

Avatar expects His instructions to be carried out strictly (as a military officer would expect), the relationship between a spiritual master and his disciple must be based on love. Baba particularly loved St. Francis of Assisi: "If you have that love for Me which St. Francis had for Jesus, then not only will you realize Me but you will please Me."⁴⁵ Obedience is the key to bringing one closer to the Avatar whether He is in the body or has left the body (as between advents):

There is no reason at all for any of you to worry Baba was, Baba is and Baba will also be eternally existent. Severance of external relations does not mean the termination of internal links. It was only for establishing the internal connection that external contacts had been maintained until now. The time has now come for being bound in the chain of internal connections. Hence, external contact is no longer necessary. It is possible to establish the internal link by obeying Baba's orders. I give you all my blessings for strengthening these internal links.

I am always with you and I am not away from you. I was, am and will remain eternally with you, and it is for promoting this realization that I have severed external contact. This will enable all persons to realize Truth by being bound to each other with internal links.⁴⁶

The Example of Perfection in Human Form

Although the Avatar embodies perfection in human form, He is not a role model. People are ill advised to try to replicate His unique life. Lovers of Meher Baba should not (absent instructions from Him) attempt to impose silence upon themselves, to engage in long periods of fasting and seclusion, or attempt to work with the God-intoxicated advanced souls. Similarly, devout Muslims should not present themselves as the Messenger of Gabriel or the pure instrument of Allah. Christians should not attempt to walk on water or to perform miracles, and so forth.

THE AVATAR

The Avatar is the goal of life for those who have not achieved the goal. The Avatar "trues the standard of human values by interpreting them in terms of divinely human life."⁴⁷ He demonstrates that a life of purity and selflessness is not just for saints or renunciates and may be lived by ordinary human beings coping with the challenges of daily life in the age in which He appears.

The Avataric example of perfection inspires people for generations to come:

The Avatar awakens contemporary humanity to a realization of its true spiritual nature, gives Liberation to those who are ready, and quickens the life of the spirit in His time. For posterity is left the stimulating power of His divinely human example - of the nobility of a life supremely lived, of a love unmixed with desire, of a power unused except for others, of a peace untroubled by ambition, of a knowledge undimmed by illusion. He has demonstrated the possibility of a divine life for all humanity, of a heavenly life on earth. Those who have the necessary courage and integrity can follow when they will.⁴⁸

Patterns of the Avatar

Certain patterns of behavior tend to repeat themselves in each Avataric advent. In each advent the Avatar works to improve the status of women. Baba particularly called on a number of women to help carry out His work in the West, and there are innumerable examples of His calling on women to perform key roles in his work. The world has witnessed a continuing revolution in the status of women during and after the Avatar's life in the twentieth century, including women assuming roles in business and the professions as well as becoming heads of state in India and Pakistan. Muhammad took birth in a culture which treated women as mere chattels and, although He permitted polygamy, imposed a religious duty on all men to marry the women with whom they had relationships. Jesus

THE AVATAR

permitted women to follow Him along with the men, changing the pattern of segregation between men and women in Jewish tradition. Buddha set up an order of nuns for women, thus allowing women to live the life of renunciation as well as men.

The Avatar's work on a cosmic level often has its counterpart to the daily events of His life. Baba's closest female disciple, Mehera Irani, was injured along with Him in his automobile accident in Oklahoma in 1952. That accident caused Mehera to have increasing contact with men. One of Baba's close disciples who was called to help after the accident gave the following report:

Another plan that he [Meher Baba] was working out seems to me to have been the freedom of women all over the world. Mehera had been completely secluded and kept away from all men up to this point. After the accident Baba began a gradual process of reintroducing her to men and to the world at large. Since the Avatar uses the two women of his circle in his work against *Maya*, it would seem that he broke the bonds of womankind throughout the world by freeing Mehera from all of her former restrictions.⁴⁹

The Avatar also works with children, with the poor, with the mentally ill, with those who are ostracized from society, with the sick and disabled, as well as with the spiritually inclined. We cannot infer from this work that the Avatar seeks to bring about a utopia or a completely egalitarian society, as those ideals may be posited in certain political systems. Although a completely spiritual world will inevitably solve most social problems for which we now seek political solutions, the goal of the Avatar's work will never be to bring about materialistic perfection *per se* because the Creation is illusory, the shadow of God.

The Avatar inevitably spends large amounts of time in seclusion which do not resemble the seclusion observed by ordinary people for artistic, spiritual or misanthropic reasons. As a Perfect Being, the Avatar does not need to accomplish anything for Himself or to acquire spiritual abilities. Baba commented on His own periods of seclusion:

THE AVATAR

This physical confinement is apparent, not *real*. It does not inconvenience me in the slightest. Certain kinds of work which I have to do in *nonphysical realms* automatically prompt me to shut myself up in a small area. After becoming perfect, Jesus stayed for forty days and nights on a mountain for the same reason, and did not allow even his apostles to approach him.⁵⁰

The Avatar spends a large portion of His life traveling or wandering. Baba made several trips all over the world in the 1930s and 1950s, making full use of ships, trains, planes and automobiles. He also traveled extensively in India using all modes of travel. In what He called the New Life, Baba wandered over India by foot, reproducing similar adventures by previous Avatars. Muhammad had to leave Mecca to relocate in Medina and left Medina to fight in many battles with his followers. "Jesus had no roof over his head and had to wander all the time."⁵¹ Buddha spent almost half a century walking from town to town teaching, initiating, and nurturing the development of his followers. Rama had to wander in the wilderness for fourteen years.

The wandering seems to underscore the fact that the Avatar has no fixed "home" in the world other than the Hearts of those who love Him. The wandering also reveals the perfect inner detachment that the Avatar has. He exhibits the same charismatic love whether He is in His house meeting people or on the road without a roof over His head. When He was banished for fourteen years to the forest, Rama made the transition from a prince to an ascetic with cheerfulness and perfect equanimity. The Avatar is equally at home and not at home anywhere in the world. As Muhammad observed:

What have I to do with this world? I and this world are as a rider and a tree beneath which he taketh shelter. Then he goeth on his way, and leaveth it behind him.⁵²

THE AVATAR

The Avataric Signature

The Avatar comes into contact with a wide variety of people in a wide variety of situations. Many are drawn to His divine love; others could not care less; still others oppose Him and despise Him. In addition to His charismatic personality and his inimitable brand of humor, the Avatar has a signature, which He delights in revealing. That signature is His divine omniscience.

There are numerous examples of omniscience in Baba's life. For example, the following incident occurred when Baba was traveling through India:

The previous afternoon, while we were on our way to visit the aforementioned saint, our vehicle passed a big temple. At that time, Baba poked Kumar in the ribs, and pointing at a tamarind tree, He gestured, "You were born under that tree, weren't you?" Kumar, with an expression of utter surprise, replied, "Yes, Baba. But how do You know this?" Baba just smiled, and that was a perfect answer.⁵³

Abstract descriptions of this omniscience cannot compare to personal experience. Sufi Murshida Ivy O. Duce related the following incident from her first meeting with Meher Baba in India in 1948:

The first evening, after our momentous meeting with the Master, Charmian and I were standing in the garden and Norina pointed to a high hill close by, remarking that it was where Baba was doing his universal work with the *masts* and that the group would take me up there. I shuddered and protested that I could not possibly make such a climb. She started to urge me when Baba's omniscience went into action.

There was no electricity at Meherazad. Lamps were used and at night a lighted lantern was placed in front of the doors of our rooms to keep away snakes and marauders. Baba had a system

THE AVATAR

which went like this: he would ring a bell and Dr. Goher Irani, a woman doctor, would run to whatever room in the row of cell-like cubicles the men *mandali* inhabited that Baba happened to be in at the moment, and he would give her, or whoever was the appointed messenger at the time, some instructions or directions to deliver. He was nearly a full city block away from where we were standing but Dr. Goher ran up to us and said to Norina, "Mrs. Duce is not to climb the hill." We soon learned that he knew our every thought and reaction and played on them most skillfully, so as to push us beyond the limitations created by our own minds.⁵⁴

The Avatar does not use His omniscience for personal gain. Omniscience is simply one of the basic spiritual tools used by the Avatar. When He wishes to reveal His omniscience, it transforms those to whom He reveals it. Once we realize that God truly does know everything about us, we inevitably live our lives from a different perspective. The close disciples soon learn that the Avatar's omniscience is an integral part of their lives and their relationship with Him. Bhau Kalchuri narrates the following incident:

Meanwhile, Baba came back to Jal Villa and stood quietly next to Bhau. As his eyes were shut, Bhau did not know Baba was present, but after a while Baba tapped him on the head. Opening his eyes, Bhau was startled to find Baba standing before him. Baba asked, "Where was your mind roaming? God's name should be taken wholeheartedly!"

Bhau replied, "I cannot keep it in check, Baba. When I try to do the japa, it wanders more."⁵⁵

The Gospel of John tells the story of Jesus' visit to Jacob's well in Sychar, Samaria. His disciples had left Him alone, when a Samaritan woman came to the well to draw water. Jesus engaged her in conversation:

THE AVATAR

Jesus saith unto her, Go, call thy husband, and come hither. The woman answered and said, I have no husband. Jesus said unto her, Thou hast well said, I have no husband: For thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: in that saidst thou truly. The woman saith unto him, Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet.⁵⁶

The Avatar consistently reveals His omniscience from advent to advent. When members of the tribe of Nadir invited Muhammad and some companions for dinner, Gabriel came to the Prophet and told Him that His hosts were planning to kill Him. Muhammad then left the company immediately and returned home.⁵⁷ On another occasion, Muhammad visited a close disciple on his sickbed. After the Prophet returned home, "Gabriel" visited Him to inform Him that His disciple was dead.⁵⁸

Avataric Teaching Varies According to Time and Place

On the surface, the Avatars appear to have drastically different teachings. For example, Buddha taught reincarnation, practiced external renunciation, and appeared unconcerned about whether or not God exists. Muhammad taught only one life, lived a worldly life, and taught that faith and surrender to God was the meaning of life. Krishna taught reincarnation, exhorted His chief disciple to fight in a war with his own relatives, and asked people not to be attached to the results of their actions. Jesus taught only one life, asked his followers to turn the other cheek, and taught within the Jewish tradition.

Given the diversity of their teachings, one might wonder how the Avatars could all be the same individual. Baba outlined the common thread of Avataric teachings in an interview with the writer Paul Brunton in India in 1930, discussed above.⁵⁹ The Avatar's emphasis is always on living God's teachings in daily life. Character is everything. His goal is always to help the individual make progress toward God. However, from advent to advent, the teachings may shift in dramatic ways. Baba sums it up as follows:

THE AVATAR

The Avatar's exterior way of life is regulated by the habits and customs of the times, and he adopts that attitude which is most suited to serve as an example to his contemporaries. But in essence, all Avatars embody the same ideal of life.

At the time of Zarathustra, humanity was hesitant and lacked equilibrium. The Persians then were neither complete materialists nor really attracted toward the spiritual light. He taught them to be good householders, to marry and abstain from desiring the wife of another, and to worship God. His own life was based on this principle: good thoughts, good words and good deeds. Zarathustra was married.

At the time of Krishna, the Hindus were at war fighting among themselves. Envy and greed were predominant, and a real concept of spiritual life and love was unknown to them. Krishna based his spiritual teachings on laws of love and pure, innocent merriment. Human beings were joyfully directed toward a disinterested ideal of love.

At the time of Buddha, the people of India were deep into materialism. In order to demonstrate that their conception of value was wrong and that they were victims of the goddess of illusion, or maya, Buddha renounced his wife, his family and the riches of the world in order to establish his teachings on renunciation.

At the time of Muhammad, the Arab tribesmen were very sensuous, and it was not considered bad or illegal to live with several wives. If Muhammad had not married like Jesus and had advocated celibacy, or if he had imposed absolute continence, it would have produced inevitably dangerous reactions. Few people would have followed his teachings and fewer still would have been attracted to such an ideal.

THE AVATAR

Muhammad had six wives, but he had no physical contact with them.

At the time of Jesus, arrogance, imperiousness, pride and cruelty were the characteristics of people. Nevertheless, they possessed a conception of justice in regard to women and marriage; therefore, it was not necessary, as it was in Arabia, to make marriage an example. Jesus lived the life of humility, simplicity, and poverty, and he endured suffering in order to direct human beings toward the purest ideal - God as Beloved.

The Avatars incarnate in this world at different times and their teachings have therefore to be adapted to the mentality of their epoch. At times, the Avatar bases His teaching on the search for the personal God, and at other times, on the search for the impersonal God.⁶⁰

Answers to Some Historic Mysteries About the Avatars

Some historic puzzles still remain if we are to believe that the Avatars are in fact the same individual. Although several of these puzzles will be discussed in later chapters, a few of them merit some discussion here.

One puzzle has to do with Buddha's alleged atheism. Baba happily clarifies that Buddha was not an atheist. No Avatar would assert that God does not exist. Buddha emphasized the path to God; if one faithfully follows the path to God, one will inevitably reach the goal. The problem in Buddha's time was that there was too much intellectualizing about God, something like debating how many angels can dance on the head of a pin. Buddha's cure for this vacuous intellectualization was the Eightfold Path and the simple life He practiced. The "nirvana" that Buddha stressed is a precursor to God Realization - Buddha just didn't say so.

The second puzzle pertains to reincarnation. Meher Baba clarifies that the soul must go through millions of incarnations on the

THE AVATAR

path to God. However, the Middle Eastern Avatars (Zarathustra, Jesus and Muhammad) never taught reincarnation, and this omission seems irreconcilable with Baba's teaching. The Middle Eastern Avatars refrained from discussing reincarnation because a belief in reincarnation was not appropriate for those who would follow them in the future. Technically speaking, there is only one real death and hence only one life:

The real goal of life is not the death of the ego but of the mind. So when Muhammad or Zoroaster or Jesus talked of being born once or dying once they meant the death of the mind. Mind is born from the very beginning - even before the stone stage. This birth is once and the death of mind also takes place once. When the mind dies, the false ego is transformed into Reality. Real ego is never born and it never dies. Ego is always real but due to the mind the ego feels and acts as the limited and false "i."⁶¹

The teaching of reincarnation is given or withheld as the needs of humanity require. The Avatar has decided that humanity needs to know the truth of reincarnation at this time.

The last puzzle for discussion here is that of miracles. Miracles have been attributed to all Avatars, including Meher Baba, but no Avatar, including Jesus, placed any spiritual emphasis on miracles. The Avatar does not want people to follow Him because they fear Him or because they are fascinated by His occult powers; He wants people to follow Him for love and love alone. Divine love is the nature of the Avatar and the path back to God.

Miracles are primarily associated with Jesus. Contrary to popular belief, Jesus did not perform miracles to "prove" Himself, to overcome skepticism, or to attract as many followers as possible. The explanation is mind-boggling:

Baba went on to say that had Jesus not raised the dead, had He not performed the miracles, He

THE AVATAR

would not have been crucified, and He wanted to be crucified. He performed the miracles to make certain of being crucified.⁶²

No attitude could be more incorrect than to assume that the Avatar is in some way the passive victim of the forces around Him. Many have looked upon the crucifixion of Jesus with pity or derision, as if somehow Jesus could not help Himself. To the contrary the Avatar boldly invited upon Himself the worst the Romans had to offer to inspire His followers to live for God and, if need be, to die for God.

Attraction to God out of fear of or fascination with His powers will inhibit ones relationship with God. Baba comments:

Many miracles have been attributed to me, but I do not perform miracles. I do not attach importance to miracles. When people think miracles have been performed, their faith has done it. One miracle I will perform, and for that miracle the time is nigh. I have said that My miracle will be not to raise the dead, but to make one dead to himself to live to God. I have repeatedly said I will not give sight to the blind, but I will make them blind to the world in order to see God.⁶³

Those who seek out Meher Baba because they hope to find a practitioner of miracles will be sorely disappointed. As He says, miracles have no importance, and if one comes to Him looking for miracles or wanting to apply miracles as some kind of "test" of his Avatarhood, then one will come away disappointed. He wants that. He has come to awaken people to divine love and to the truth about God and the meaning of life.

Baba's view of miracles is consistent with that of the other Avatars. Although miracles occurred during Muhammad's advent, He would of course attribute them to Allah or Allah's messenger, the Archangel Gabriel. Buddha expressed profound loathing for the performance of miracles, with one exception, *i.e.*, when a person becomes totally detached from the world.⁶⁴

THE AVATAR

The Avatar's Suffering

Although the Avatar experiences infinite knowledge and power, He inevitably experiences a full measure of suffering. Meher Baba experienced two automobile accidents that fractured several bones and suffered many other physical ailments at various points in his life. Muhammad was stoned and forced to flee Mecca and was later wounded in the many battles in which his followers became engaged. Jesus was crucified; Buddha suffered the life of renunciation and poverty, including living in the outdoors; and so on. This suffering is not imposed on the Avatar by random events. To the contrary, He takes the suffering upon Himself as an integral part of His spiritual work. Baba remarked:

I carry the universal burden, and I suffer physically, mentally and spiritually. My physical suffering is seen by those around me. My mental suffering is intense, infinite. As for my spiritual suffering, it is ad infinitum.⁶⁵

The suffering is an ongoing part of the Avatar's experience, yet He plays his role with charm, enthusiasm, and cheerfulness. As Baba put it: "I am being crucified every second; but my merry, cheerful nature helps me bear the untold suffering."⁶⁶

The Avatar's Intentional Mistakes

Each Avatar intentionally makes one significant mistake in His advent. This "mistake" is of course not the result of inadvertence or incompetence since the Avatar is wholly perfect. The mistake is another signature, similar to Alfred Hitchcock's cameo appearances in his own films. It is also an example of Avataric humor. Murshida Ivy O. Duce summarized Baba's mini-discourse about Avataric weaknesses as follows:

When Zoroaster was attacked by a band of enemies while he was praying, he threw his beads at their leader, who was burned up instantaneously. That was a weakness. When Sita returned from

THE AVATAR

Lanka, she was reprimanded by Rama even though he knew she was pure and undefiled. That was a weakness. When Arjuna persisted in regarding Krishna as a companion and would not fight the battle which had to be fought, Krishna showed him his *virat swaroop* (Universal Form). That was a weakness. Buddha explained *nirvana* to his disciples but failed to explain all about *nirvikalpa* and the states beyond *nirvana* such as *majzoobiat*; *sulukiya* and *qutubiyat*, and that was a weakness, for people today think Buddha regarded the end of the Path as a zero condition (I have a note about this in *God Speaks*). Jesus should never have cried on the cross, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me!" That was a weakness. Muhammad never told the people he was God but said he was just another man and that the Koran came from Gabriel. That was a weakness. Baba ended with: "and Meher Baba has had a weakness in this life but I am not going to tell you about it until 700 years from now!"⁶⁷

The Avatar's Continuing Connection With His Creation

The Avatar's spiritual work and messages for humanity would be of limited value if the Avatar ceased to function as a spiritual guide after His death. Baba emphasizes that the Avatar is not identified with His body, that His body is merely like a coat He wears to visit us and then removes when He is no longer in physical form. "The Avatar never loses connection after He drops the body, but maintains His connection with all creation through the five Sadgurus living."⁶⁸ Meher Baba's personal secretary provided further clarification:

Whether in a body or with or without a body, He is *ever* connected with Illusion. When He is without the body, he needs some rest, and he takes rest. An ordinary man takes rest after his day's

THE AVATAR

work. He is a small man, small work - a few hours of work, a few hours of sleep. God-Man does the universal work, inner spiritual work - personification of God doing the work for the Creation. During his lifetime he suffers, works intensely. Then he just takes a little rest. Look into the vastness of his being and his work. His rest is 700 years - 700 or 1,400 years. He comes back again. Such is the case with the Avatar.

When the Perfect Masters leave the body after they do the work during their lifetime, they go into the Infinite. They are absolutely disconnected with Illusion. They do not know anything about this Illusion at all. Once Baba said, "Avatar's work goes on forever."⁶⁹

The reader who craves more details about the Avatar will find a feast of such details in the books by and about Meher Baba. This chapter concludes with a dazzling discourse entitled, "The Highest of the High," given by Baba on Zarathustra's birthday in 1953. That sublime discussion is included in full because any editorial deletion would be unacceptable:

Consciously or unconsciously, directly or indirectly, each and every creature, each and every human being - in one form or the other - strives to assert individuality. But when eventually, man consciously experiences that he is Infinite, Eternal and Indivisible, then he is fully conscious of his individuality as God, and as such experiences Infinite Knowledge, Infinite Power and Infinite Bliss. Thus Man becomes God and is recognized as a Perfect Master, Sadguru or Qutub. To worship this man is to worship God.

When God manifests on earth in the form of man and reveals His divinity to mankind, He is recognized as the Avatar - the Messiah - the Prophet. Thus God becomes Man.

THE AVATAR

And so Infinite God, age after age, throughout all cycles, wills through His Infinite Mercy, to effect His presence amidst mankind by stooping down to human level in the human form. But His physical presence amidst mankind not being apprehended, He is looked upon as an ordinary man of the world. When He asserts, however, His divinity on earth by proclaiming Himself as Avatar of the age, He is worshiped by some who accept Him as God, and glorified by a few who know Him as God on earth. But it invariably falls to the lot of the rest of humanity to condemn Him, while He is physically in their midst.

Thus it is that God as man, proclaiming Himself as the Avatar, suffers Himself to be persecuted and tortured, to be humiliated and condemned by humanity, for whose sake His Infinite Love has made Him stoop so low, in order that humanity, by its very act of condemning God's manifestation in the form of Avatar should, however indirectly, assert the existence of God in His Infinite Eternal state.

The Avatar is always one and the same, because God is always One and the Same, the Eternal, Indivisible, Infinite One who manifests Himself in the form of man as the Avatar, as the Messiah, as the Prophet, as the Ancient One - the Highest of the High. This Eternally One and the Same Avatar repeats His manifestation from time to time, in different cycles, adopting different human forms and different names, in different places, to reveal Truth in different garbs and different languages, in order to raise humanity from the pit of ignorance and help free it from the bondage of delusions.

Of the most recognized and much worshiped manifestations of God as Avatar, that of Zarathustra

THE AVATAR

is the earliest - having been before Ram, Krishna, Buddha, Jesus and Muhammad. Thousands of years ago, he gave to the world the essence of Truth in the form of three fundamental precepts - Good Thoughts, Good Words, and Good Deeds. These precepts were and are constantly unfolded to humanity in one form or another, directly or indirectly in every cycle, by the Avatar of the age as He leads humanity, imperceptibly, toward the Truth. To put these precepts of Good Thoughts, Good Words and Good Deeds into practice is not as easily done as it would appear, though it is not impossible. But to live up to these precepts honestly and literally is apparently as impossible as it is to practice a living death in the midst of life.

In the world, there are countless sadhus, mahatmas, mahapurushas, saints, yogis and walis, though the number of genuine ones is very, very limited. The few genuine ones are, according to their spiritual status, in a category of their own, which is neither on a level with the ordinary human being nor on a level with the state of the Highest of the High.

I am neither a mahatma nor a mahapurush, neither a sadhu nor a saint, neither a yogi nor a wali. Those who approach me with the desire to gain wealth or to retain their possessions, those who seek through me relief from distress and suffering, those who ask my help to fulfill and satisfy mundane desires, to them I once again declare that as I am not a sadhu, a saint or a mahatma, mahapurush or yogi, to seek these things through me is but to court utter disappointment, though only apparently, for eventually this disappointment is itself invariably instrumental in bringing about the complete transformation of mundane wants and desires.

THE AVATAR

The sadhus, saints, yogis, walis and such others who are on the *via media*, can and do perform miracles and satisfy the transient material needs of individuals who approach them for help and relief.

The question therefore arises that if I am not a sadhu, not a saint, not a yogi, not a mahapurush, nor a wali, then *what* am I? The natural assumption would be that I am either just an ordinary human being, or I am the Highest of the High. But one thing I say definitely, and that is that I can never be included among those having the intermediary status of the real sadhus, saints, yogis and such others.

Now, if I am just an ordinary man, my capabilities and powers are limited; I am no better or different from an ordinary human being. If people take me as such then they should not expect any supernatural help from me in the form of miracles or spiritual guidance, and to approach me to fulfill their desires would also be absolutely futile.

On the other hand, if I am beyond the level of an ordinary human being, and much beyond the level of saints and yogis, then I must be the Highest of the High. In which case, to judge me with your human intellect and limited mind and to approach me with mundane desires would not only be the height of folly but sheer ignorance as well, because no amount of intellectual gymnastics could ever understand my ways or judge my Infinite State.

If I am the Highest of the High, my Will is Law, my Wish governs the Law, and my Love sustains the universe. Whatever your apparent calamities and transient sufferings, they are but the outcome of my Love for the ultimate good. Therefore, to approach me for deliverance from

THE AVATAR

your predicaments, to expect me to satisfy your worldly desires, would be asking me to do the impossible - to undo what I have already ordained.

If you truly and in all faith accept your Baba as the Highest of the High, it behooves you to lay down your life at his feet, rather than to crave the fulfillment of your desires. Not your one life but your millions of lives would be but a small sacrifice to place at the feet of One such as Baba, who is the Highest of the High; for Baba's unbounded love is the only sure and unfailing guide to lead you safely through the innumerable blind alleys of your transient life.

They cannot obligate me who surrendering their all - body, mind, possessions - which perforce they must discard one day, surrender with a motive; surrender because they understand that to gain the everlasting treasure of Bliss they must relinquish ephemeral possessions. This desire for greater gain is still clinging behind their surrender, and as such the surrender cannot be complete.

Know you all that if I am the Highest of the High, my role demands that I strip you of all your possessions and wants, consume all your desires and make you desireless rather than satisfy your desires. Sadhus, saints, yogis and walis can give you what you want; but I take away your wants and free you from attachments and liberate you from the bondage of ignorance. I am the One to take, not the One to give what you want or as you want.

Mere intellectuals can never understand me through their intellect. If I am the Highest of the High, it becomes impossible for the intellect to gauge me, nor is it possible for my ways to be fathomed by the limited human mind.

THE AVATAR

I am not to be attained by those who, loving me, stand reverentially by, in rapt admiration. I am not for those who ridicule me and point at me with contempt. To have a crowd of tens of millions flocking around me is not what I am for. I am for the selected few who, scattered among the crowd, silently and unostentatiously surrender their all - body, mind and possessions - to me. I am still more for those who, after surrendering their all, never give another thought to their surrender. They are all mine who are prepared to renounce even the very thought of their renunciation and who, keeping constant vigil in the midst of intense activity, await their turn to lay down their lives for the cause of Truth at a glance or sign from me. Those who have indomitable courage to face willingly and cheerfully the worst calamities, who have unshakable faith in me, eager to fulfill my slightest wish at the cost of their happiness and comfort, they indeed, truly love me.

From my point of view, far more blessed is the atheist who confidently discharges his worldly responsibilities, accepting them as his honorable duty, than the man who presumes he is a devout believer in God, yet shirks the responsibilities apportioned to him through Divine Law and runs after sadhus, saints and yogis, seeking relief from the suffering which ultimately would have pronounced his Eternal Liberation. To have one eye glued on the enchanting pleasures of the flesh and with the other expect to see a spark of Eternal Bliss is not only impossible but the height of hypocrisy.

I cannot expect you to understand all at once what I want you to know. It is for me to awaken you from time to time throughout the ages, sowing the seed in your limited minds which must, in due

THE AVATAR

course and with proper heed and care on your part, germinate, flourish and bear the fruit of that true knowledge which is inherently yours to gain.

If, on the other hand, led by your ignorance you persist in going your own way, none can stop you in your choice of progress; for that too is progress which, however slow and painful, eventually and after innumerable incarnations, is bound to make you realize that which I want you to know now. To save yourself from further entanglement in the maze of delusion and self-created suffering which owes its magnitude to the extent of your ignorance of the true Goal, *awake now!* Pay heed and strive for freedom by experiencing ignorance in its true perspective. Be honest with yourself and God. One may fool the world and one's neighbors but one can never escape from the knowledge of the Omniscient - such is Divine Law.

I declare to all of you who approach me, and to those of you who desire to approach me, accepting me as the Highest of the High, that you must never come with the desire in your heart which craves for wealth and worldly gain, but only with the fervent longing to give your all - body, mind and possessions - with all their attachments. Seek me not to extricate you from your predicaments, but find me in order to surrender yourself wholeheartedly to my will. Cling to me not for worldly happiness and short-lived comforts, but adhere to me, through thick and thin, sacrificing your own happiness and comforts at my feet. Let my happiness be your cheer and my comforts your rest. Do not ask me to bless you with a good job, but desire to serve me more diligently and honestly and without expectation of reward. Never beg of me to save your life or the lives of your dear ones, but beg of me to accept you and permit you to lay down your life for me. Never

THE AVATAR

expect me to cure you of your bodily afflictions, but beseech me to cure you of your ignorance. Never stretch out your hands to receive anything from me, but hold them high in praise of me whom you have approached as the Highest of the High.

If I am the Highest of the High, nothing is then impossible for me; and though I do not perform miracles to satisfy individual needs - the satisfaction of which would result in entangling the individual more and more into the net of ephemeral existence - yet time and again at certain periods I manifest the infinite powers in the form of miracles, but only for the spiritual upliftment and benefit of humanity and all creatures.

However, miraculous experiences have often been experienced by individuals who love me and have unswerving faith in me, and these have been attributed to my *nazar* or grace on them. But I want all to know that it does not befit my lovers to attribute such individual miraculous experiences to my state of the Highest of the High. If I am the Highest of the High, I am above these illusory plays of maya in the course of the Divine Law. Therefore, whatever miraculous experiences are experienced by my lovers who recognize me as such, or by those who love me unknowingly through other channels, they are but the outcome of their own firm faith in me. Their unshakable faith often superseding the course of the play of maya gives them those experiences which they call *miracles*. Such experiences derived through firm faith eventually do good and do not entangle the individuals who experience them into further and greater bindings of illusion.

If I am the Highest of the High, then a wish of my Universal Will is sufficient to give, in an instant, God-Realization to one and all, and thus

THE AVATAR

free every creature in creation from the shackles of ignorance. But blessed is Knowledge that is gained through the experience of ignorance in accordance with the Divine Law. This Knowledge is made possible for you to attain in the midst of ignorance by the guidance of Perfect Masters and surrenderance to the Highest of the High.⁷⁰

ENDNOTES

1. From "Meher Baba's Call," a message given by Meher Baba in India in 1954, as quoted in Bhau Kalchuri's *Lord Meher*, ed. Lawrence Reiter, 20 vols. (Myrtle Beach, S.C. and Asheville, N.C.: MANifestation, Inc., 1986-2001), 4420. The pages of this incomparable biography of Meher Baba are numbered sequentially, and hereafter the short reference to this work will be to "*Lord Meher*, [page]"
2. Meher Baba, *Discourses*, ed. Eruch B. Jessawala, J. Flagg Kris, and Bal Natsu, 7th ed. (Myrtle Beach, S.C.: Sheriar Foundation, 1987), 82 (hereafter "*Discourses*") (emphasis in original).
3. Meher Baba, *God Speaks, The Theme of Creation and Its Purpose*, 2d ed. 3rd printing (Walnut Creek, CA: Sufism Reoriented, Inc., 1997) (hereafter "*God Speaks*").
4. Bhau Kalchuri, *The Nothing and The Everything*, ed. Lawrence Reiter (Myrtle Beach, S.C.: Manifestation, Inc., 1981) (hereafter "*The Nothing and The Everything*").
5. *The Nothing and The Everything*, 61.
6. *God Speaks*, 151.
7. *The Nothing and the Everything*, 107.
8. *Lord Meher*, 1885.
9. Ibid.
10. Adi K. Irani, "Thoughts on Avatar Meher Baba," *The Awakener*, ed. Filis Frederick, Vol. VI, No. 3 (1959), 10-12.
11. *God Speaks*, 249.
12. According to Meher Baba, there are always five Perfect Masters alive on the earth. Perfect Masters are fully God-Realized human beings who have achieved the goal of life, union with God. With the exception of the First Man's journey to union with God, no one can achieve God realization without the Help of a Perfect Master or the Avatar. Meher Baba has an extensive discussion of Perfect Masters and their role in Creation in *God Speaks* and *Discourses*.
13. *God Speaks*, 148-49, footnotes omitted, emphasis in original

THE AVATAR

14. The scope of this book does not permit a detailed description of Meher Baba's unveiling process, although there is a brief summary in the chapter devoted to Meher Baba's life. For vivid and compelling details, the interested reader should read the extensive discussion in *Lord Meher*.
15. *God Speaks*, 153, emphasis in original.
16. *God Speaks*, 63, footnote.
17. *Lord Meher*, 861; Francis Brabazon, *Stay With God*, 3d ed. (Melbourne: New Humanity Books, 1984), 32 (hereafter "*Stay With God*"); Adi K. Irani, "Adi's Talk at the Poona Club," *The Awakener*, ed. Filis Frederick, Vol. XIII, Nos. 1-2, 1970, 54.
18. *God Speaks*, 148-53, 254-57.
19. *Lord Meher*, 1881-82.
20. *Lord Meher*, 3935-36, endnote omitted.
21. *Stay With God*, 159, n. 29/6.
22. *Lord Meher*, 2519-20.
23. Meher Baba as quoted in *Lord Meher*, 4016.
24. *Lord Meher*, 4341.
25. *Lord Meher*, 1347. 1
26. Adi K. Irani, "Thoughts on Avatar Meher Baba," 11-12. See Note 10.
27. Meher Baba as quoted in *Lord Meher*, 431.
28. Meher Baba as quoted in *Lord Meher*, 902.
29. Meher Baba as quoted in *Lord Meher*, 915.
30. Meher Baba as quoted in *Lord Meher*, 2985.
31. *Lord Meher*, 5733.
32. Meher Baba as quoted in *Lord Meher*, 3159
33. *Lord Meher*, 1554
34. *Lord Meher*, 769.
35. *Lord Meher*, 2598.
36. Eruch B. Jessawala, *The Ancient One*, ed. Naosherwan Anzar (Englishtown, NJ: Beloved Books, 1985), 109.
37. *Lord Meher*, 4611-13, endnote omitted.
38. Meher Baba, *Life at Its Best*, ed. Ivy O. Duce (San Francisco: Sufism Reoriented, Inc., 1957), 66 (hereafter "*Life at Its Best*")
39. *Life at Its Best*, 67-68.
40. Meher Baba, as quoted in *Lord Meher*, 4308.
41. Don E. Stevens, *Listen! The New Humanity* (Monte Carlo, Monaco: Companion Books, 1985), 87.

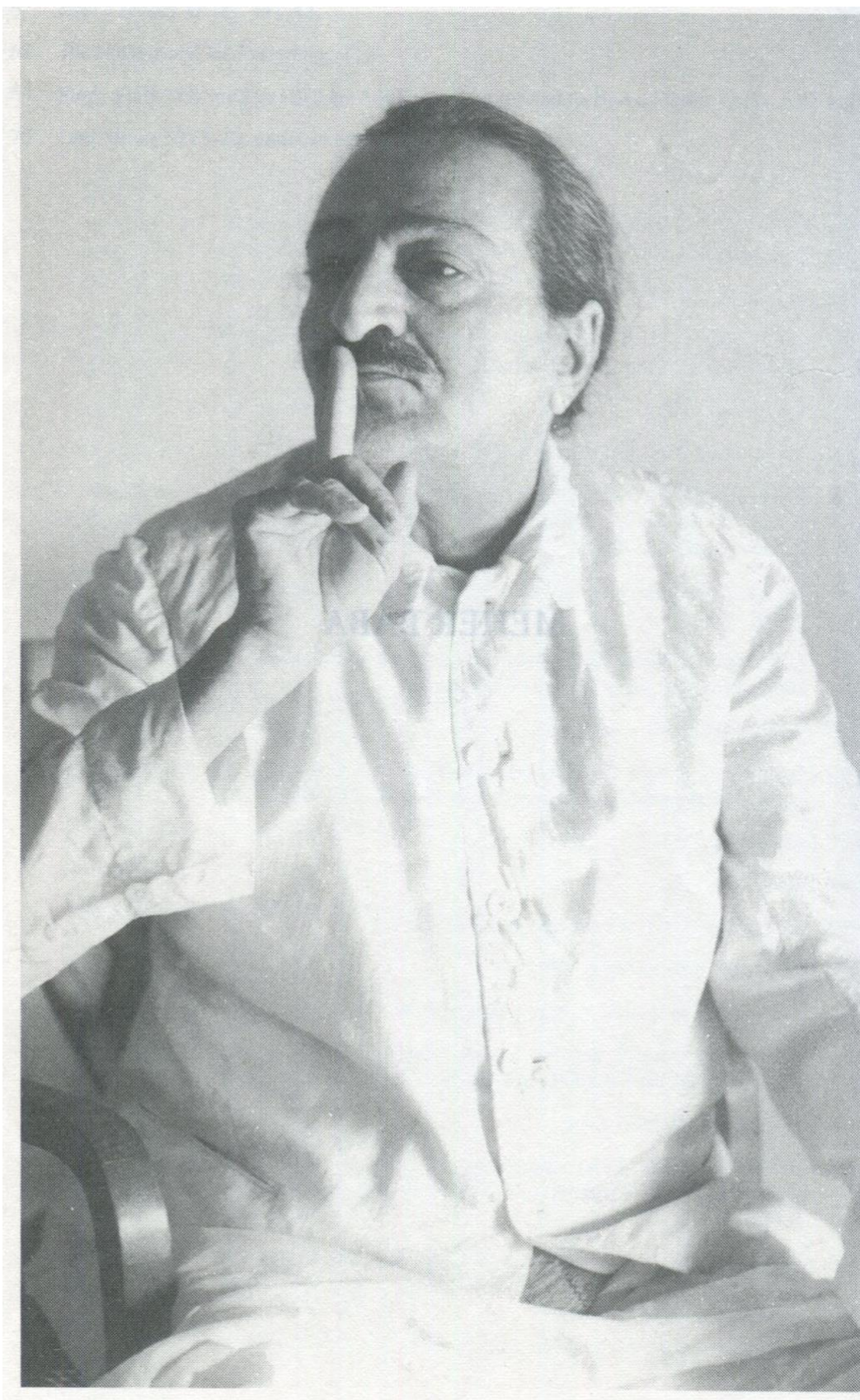
THE AVATAR

42. Meher Baba as quoted in *Lord Meher*, 4016.
43. As quoted in *Lord Meher*, 2180.
44. Excerpted from Meher Baba's "Universal Message," published by Meher Spiritual Center, Inc.
45. *Discourses*, 405.
46. Meher Baba as quoted in *Lord Meher*, 4562.
47. *Discourses*, 269.
48. *Discourses*, 269-70.
49. Ivy O. Duce, *How a Master Works* (Walnut Creek, CA: Sufism Reoriented, Inc., 1975), 100 (hereafter "*How a Master Works*").
50. *Lord Meher*, 1263.
51. Meher Baba as quoted in *Lord Meher*, 1104.
52. From the collection of Sayings of the Prophet of Muhammed Ibn Majah (Ninth Century A.D.), as quoted in Martin Lings, *Muhammad* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions International, Ltd., 1983), 345 (hereafter "*Muhammad*").
53. Bal Natu, *Glimpses of the God-Man, Meher Baba*, Vol. IV (Myrtle Beach, S.C.: Sheriar Press, 1984), 23.
54. *How a Master Works*, 25. Murshida Duce provides numerous examples of Meher Baba's omniscience on pages 508-13 of her book.
55. *Lord Meher*, 4637.
56. John 4:16-19, from The King James version of the Holy Bible. All subsequent references to the Judeo-Christian Bible are to The King James version.
57. *Muhammad*, 203.
58. *Ibid.*, 234.
59. *Lord Meher*, 1347; see the text above at note 25.
60. As quoted in *Lord Meher*, 1881-82.
61. Meher Baba as quoted in *How a Master Works*, 77.
62. Charles Purdom and Malcolm Schloss, "Three Incredible Weeks With Meher Baba," *The Awakener*, ed. Filis Frederick, Vol. II, No. 3 (1955), 50.
63. *Ibid.*, quoting Meher Baba.
64. Marie Beuzeville Byles, *Footprints of Gautama the Buddha* (Wheaton, IL: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1967), 99-100 (hereafter "*Footprints of Gautama the Buddha*").
65. Manija S. Irani, "Sixty-Third Family Letter from Meher Baba's Sister, Mani," *Eighty-Two Family Letters* (New York: Society for Avatar Meher Baba, 1969), page 2 of the letter (hereafter "*Family Letters*").
66. *Lord Meher*, 4696.

THE AVATAR

- 67. *How a Master Works*, 441-42.
- 68. *The Nothing and the Everything*, 113.
- 69. From a talk delivered in 1970 by Adi K. Irani, as quoted in *How a Master Works*, 430-3
- 70. *Lord Meher*, 4215-20, endnote omitted

MEHER BABA



MEHER BABA

It is impossible to do justice to Meher Baba's life and teachings in the short space of this chapter. Fortunately, there is no cause for concern because interested readers have a wealth of biographical material from which to choose, including Bhau Kalchuri's nearly 7000-page *Lord Meher*.¹ For purposes of the brief review in this chapter, approximately equal space has been devoted to Baba's life and to His teachings, so that the reader can have a feeling for each.

Baba's Childhood

Meher Baba was born Merwan Sheriar Irani on February 25, 1894 in Poona, Maharashtra State, India.² His father was Sheriar Mundegar Irani and his mother was Shireen. His parents were Parsis, the community of Zoroastrians who fled from religious persecution in Iran and relocated in India. Sheriar was a passionate seeker of God, who was persuaded to leave years of an ascetic search after receiving God's command to take up a family life because he would achieve his spiritual goals through his son.³ Just before Merwan was born, Shireen had a dream about a glorious personality in a procession upon whom tens of thousands were gazing in adoration. A few months after Merwan's birth, Shireen had another dream in which a Hindu goddess beckoned for Shireen to give the baby to her. Both parents knew their son would have a glorious spiritual destiny.

Merwan lived a normal family life with His parents, four brothers and a sister. He was bright, high-spirited, charming, and popular among His friends. He enjoyed school, literature, and games like marbles and cricket. He had a particular interest in the poetry of mystics like Hafiz. He matriculated and entered Deccan College in Poona, one of the pre-eminent colleges in India at that time. At the age of nineteen, He kept His appointment with destiny, and His life changed irrevocably.

The Five Perfect Masters

It is the task of the five living Perfect Masters to "unveil" the Avatar to prepare Him for His life's work. This unveiling process spans several years and requires structural changes of the physical body, subtle body and mental body of the man who must function both on the human and the divine levels. Baba revealed the identities of the five Perfect Masters who unveiled Him. Although this revelation may appear at first blush to be of little significance, it is, to the contrary, an extraordinary historical event. This Avataric advent marks the first time in recorded history that the Avatar has disseminated clear and detailed knowledge of the process of unveiling the Avatar and the role of the Perfect Masters.

In accordance with the Divine Plan, the five Perfect Masters located themselves in and around Poona in the early part of this century to meet their own appointment with destiny. The five Perfect Masters were Hazrat Babajan of Poona, Narayan Maharaj of Kedgaon, Tajuddin Baba of Nagpur, Sai Baba of Shirdi, and Upasni Maharaj of Sakori. These locations are all in the State of Maharashtra in India and are all within 350 miles of Poona. Their proximity to the Avatar-in-the-making was essential for the intense work they each had to undertake with Him.

The Unveiling of the Avatar

Hazrat Babajan was a faqir (renunciate) who was approximately 120 years of age in 1913. For years she had lived out of doors under a neem tree in Poona, indifferent to the elements and even to thieves who stole cloth or jewelry given to her by her devotees. Her gaze was luminous and her stride was swift and vigorous despite her advanced age. Merwan usually rode his bicycle by Hazrat Babajan's neem tree on his way to college. One day in May, 1913, Merwan rode his bicycle by Hazrat Babajan when she gave Him a simple nod of the head, beckoning Him to her. Merwan was drawn magnetically to the old woman, who embraced Him and kissed Him like a mother welcoming a long-lost son.

MEHER BABA

From that moment forward, Merwan lost all interest in the external world except for spending time with Babajan. She began the unveiling process and worked with Merwan every day for several months to reveal His identity with God. During this time, His mother became distraught at His abnormal behavior while the townspeople gossiped about a fine young man who had apparently lost His mind by coming under the spell of the old woman under the neem tree.

Merwan spent most of His time either with Hazrat Babajan, a few friends, or in solitude. He experienced identification with God, but His consciousness was not yet fully integrated. Merwan then traveled to Kedgaon and was lovingly received by Narayan Maharaj. Afterward, He similarly traveled to Nagpur and was lovingly received by Tajuddin Baba. Hazrat Babajan then urged young Merwan to see Sai Baba of Shirdi.

Sai Baba uttered one word to Merwan, "Parvardigar," meaning "God, the Almighty Sustainer." Before parting company with Merwan, Sai Baba repeated "Parvardigar" twice again. Merwan then went to see Upasni Maharaj.

Upasni Maharaj was living in the Khandoba temple in Shirdi. Maharaj picked up a stone and threw it with all his strength at Merwan, hitting Him in the forehead in the same spot where Hazrat Babajan had kissed Him. With this act, Maharaj initiated the agonizing process of integrating gross human consciousness with the consciousness of God which Hazrat Babajan had opened up. This painful process required another seven years, and Upasni Maharaj played the major role in completing the integration of Merwan's consciousness. After throwing the stone, Upasni Maharaj embraced Merwan and kissed the bleeding wound in His forehead.

Merwan began eating more regularly and began to take mundane jobs. Nevertheless, the process of "coming down" to gross human consciousness required Him to pound his head on the floor, on a wall, or on a tree on an almost daily basis for seven years. Meher Baba himself described this agony as follows:

This constant hammering of my head was the
only thing that gave me some relief during my real

MEHER BABA

suffering of coming down - which I have repeatedly said is indescribable. The relief I felt by banging my forehead on the stones can be compared to that which a strong cup of tea gives an ordinary man, over-stressed.⁴

He also spent enormous periods of time in solitude and also visited Upasni Maharaj from time to time. Even so, he began to attract friends around Him who sensed a spiritual quality about Him. In 1918 He first referred to himself as a spiritual master. In 1920 His new disciples referred to him as "Meher Baba," which means "Compassionate Father."

Upasni Maharaj had more work to do with Meher Baba, who lived continuously with Maharaj from July 1921 to January 1922. Maharaj completed the process of bringing Meher Baba down to gross consciousness and integrating all phases of His divine and human consciousness. Finally the work was done, and with folded hands Upasni Maharaj proclaimed, "Merwan, you are *Adi Shakti* - the Primal Force! You are the *Avatar* - the direct descent of God!"⁵

The process of unveiling the Avatar took almost nine years. At the beginning of His mission, Meher Baba was almost 28 years old, incredibly energetic and strong. Bhau Kalchuri summarizes:

It was through Babajan that Merwan attained infinite bliss, through Sai Baba that he attained infinite power, and through Upasni Maharaj that he attained infinite knowledge. Narayan Maharaj and Tajuddin Baba played direct roles in bringing him into creation also, but indirect roles in bringing him down after he was God-Realized. One may conclude that Narayan Maharaj and Tajuddin Baba brought Merwan down through the mental planes, and Sai Baba brought him across the fourth plane of infinite power and divine powers, and then through the three planes of the subtle world. When Upasni struck Merwan with the stone at their initial encounter, it was the first time in nearly two years that he experienced an iota of gross consciousness.

MEHER BABA

All five Perfect Masters play a direct or indirect role in bringing the Avatar into creation, forming a veil of vidnyani sanskaras through a blending of their individual personalities, then giving back his God-Consciousness and bringing him back down to function perfectly on all planes and all levels of consciousness. Upasni Maharaj played the most direct role in bringing Merwan back down to function on every level and plane of existence. It was during this seven-year contact with Upasni Maharaj that Merwan fully regained his individual human consciousness while simultaneously being God-conscious.⁶

The Avatar's Mission Begins

After Meher Baba parted as Avatar from Upasni Maharaj, He went to Bombay.⁷ He there established an ashram called "Manzil-e-Meem," the House of the Master. He attracted disciples from the Zoroastrian, Hindu and Muslim religions. Those who wanted to follow Meher Baba quickly learned that they would have to set aside any rigid aversions to associating with people of other faiths. In the Manzil-e-Meem Meher Baba transformed a group of friends and companions into disciples of a true spiritual master who understood the importance of obedience to the master as the path for the quickest spiritual advancement.

Baba disbanded Manzil-e-Meem in April of 1923. He thus began a pattern which was characteristic of the work of all avatars of the Avatar. Projects undertaken by Avatars cannot be measured by external yardsticks. When the internal work had been accomplished at Manzil-e-Meem, the ashram was abandoned. Character development is the Avatar's only concern; those who follow Him should be prepared to "wear the world like a loose garment" and be unattached to external events while at the same time developing a character of uncompromising spiritual strength.

The next eight years saw an uninterrupted period of intense activity, training of close disciples (called "mandali" by Meher

MEHER BABA

Baba),⁸ travel, contact with followers (called "lovers" by Meher Baba), and the establishment of a base of operations, which included schools, a dispensary, various living structures, and what would be His tomb. Near Ahmednagar in Maharashtra State in India, on the Deccan Plateau, there was a small village named Arangaon. Near that village was an abandoned military camp, previously used by the British in World War I. Meher Baba finally established a community in that location, and it came to be known as "Meherabad," the abode of Meher.

Through hard work, dedication and love, Meher Baba and his mandali transformed a desolate rural area into a flourishing spiritual community. At various times during the 1920s, there were schools, a dispensary, living quarters for men and women, and various other structures used by Meher Baba in His spiritual work. Meherabad is now a center of pilgrimage for those who want to acquire an understanding of Meher Baba: "In the future, Meherabad will be like *Jerusalem*. For my spiritual work, it is the best possible place. It will always be the center of my work."⁹ Baba's body is entombed in Meherabad.

Baba's love and charismatic personality drew people to Him by the hundreds. Those who came to serve Baba had to accept that He had no tolerance whatsoever for the caste system, for religious prejudice, for class distinctions, for the exclusion of women, and for the religious rituals that have cluttered India's culture for centuries. Brahmins had to mingle with untouchables; Hindus had to mingle with Muslims; Zoroastrians discovered that Baba had not come to exalt their religion over other religions. The wealthy learned that He loved the poor; the poor learned that He loved the rich; the educated saw Him mingle freely with the uneducated, and so forth. The key to His heart could be unlocked by love alone, which knows neither class, nor caste, nor creed.

The schools, the hospital, the work with the poor, and the training of disciples were never ends in themselves. The Avatar is always at rest because He has nothing to prove, but He is also never at rest because divine love motivates His intense activity in the service of the world. Baba's projects were archetypes. The Avatar's emphasis is

MEHER BABA

on the ever-present need for service and never on specific results. Those who obey the Master are steadfast in His service but unattached to results.

The emphasis in training the mandali was always on obedience to the Master. Those who were close to Him loved Him and reflected His incomparable divine love. Obedience was the art of living for the Master rather than for themselves. Anyone who thinks that life with a spiritual Master is a bed of roses should read *Lord Meher*. Baba's demands on his disciples were relentless. He drove them all to the breaking point but never further. He insisted on complete and uncompromising obedience, the ability to do what He asked without fail and without inattention. His energy was superhuman. The only goal of the Master is to wear down the ego of the disciple and to bring the disciple closer to God.

Baba's critique of established religion was uncompromising and harsh. One is reminded of Jesus arguing with the Pharisees; Muhammad smashing the idols in the Kaaba; Buddha making intellectual mincemeat of the know-it-all yogis of His time. In this advent, the Avatar did not come to establish another religion. His religion is the life of love, obedience and surrender to a Perfect Master or the Avatar, the religion of "good thoughts, good words, good deeds." Pleasing God in one's daily life is extremely challenging, but this is what God wants from us.

Throughout Baba's advent, He revealed pearls of spiritual wisdom on a daily basis. On one occasion, He remarked:

My explanations are quite, quite different from the scriptures of any religion and they have nothing to do with the *shariat* aspect of religions. If we find any illumination in scriptures, it is in the Hindu *shastras* and *Vedant*. But they too are only a shadow of my explanations.

None of the great Masters in the past has given such explanations as I have. They were great Masters, great Prophets, and they realized so many souls. However, what they gave or left to the world

MEHER BABA

was only shariat - sweet syrup. They only gave internal knowledge (gnosis) to their close disciples who were very, very few. What they said and what was written down to make books was only the knowledge and rules of rituals and ceremonies, appealing to the ordinary minds of the time.

While what I give is the explanation of the Knowledge that is beyond the scope of the ordinary intellect to grasp and understand. Even though these explanations are mere shadows of the Real Knowledge, they are beyond mind to follow. What I explain is a subject beyond the comprehension of the mind and that only to those who are prepared to digest it, not to everybody For all can neither grasp it nor tolerate it nor even bear to hear it.¹⁰

During the early period of Baba's advent, He traveled extensively throughout the Indian subcontinent and made three separate trips to Persia. At this time, Pakistan and Bangladesh did not exist, and the entire area was part of the British empire. Baba's travels were never idle tourist trips; He usually took several mandali members with Him, and He contacted hundreds of spiritually inclined souls, some of whom were destined to become close disciples themselves. His travels took him north to Kashmir, northwest to Quetta, northeast to Calcutta, and southeast to Madras. He traveled mostly by train, but also by automobile and by foot.

Baba Began Observing Silence in 1925

On July 10, 1925, Baba began observing silence. Although in the beginning, He hinted that His silence would only be a temporary phenomenon (perhaps for a year or so), He maintained silence until He dropped His body on January 31, 1969. On the day before His silence began, one of Baba's disciples pleaded that His silence would deprive the world of His teachings. He replied: "I have come not to teach, but to awaken!"¹¹

Baba's silence was His constant companion, but the silence enhanced the divine love which He lavished on those around Him

MEHER BABA

and on the world. The silence was never an impediment to His work. He communicated at first by written notes, then by means of a slate, and later by means of a board with numbers and the English alphabet written on it. In 1954, He abandoned the alphabet board and communicated by means of hand gestures that were uniquely His own creation (not the sign language used by deaf people). He explained His silence as follows:

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.¹²

Those who contacted Baba did not find His silence to be a hindrance of any kind. For example, one woman met Baba and realized only after the interview was over that He had not spoken.

Meher Baba's many projects at Meherabad provided essential social services to their beneficiaries, but they all had a unique spiritual perspective. Baba's goals were never purely material although spirituality is respectful of the material dimension of life. Every project was suffused with His radiant love, wisdom, and vision of the goal of life. His Meher Ashram school established a special division for spiritually sensitive boys which later became known as the Prem Ashram. Baba gave particular love and care to boys who had an aptitude for spiritual growth, many of whom Meher Baba described as spiritually advanced souls.¹³ Meher Baba also made contact with God-intoxicated souls called "masts" (pronounced like the English word "must"). These souls are spiritually advanced and require the direct help of the Avatar even though they appear to be mentally ill to the world.

Meher Baba Lays Spiritual Cables to the West

Several Westerners came into Meher Baba's contact during the next period of His Avataric mission. Meredith and Margaret Starr from England came to India to spend time with Baba, who sent them back to England after a while with instructions to inform oth-

MEHER BABA

ers about Him. The Starrs played a key role in Baba's work because they brought many close followers into His orbit. In this stage of His work, Baba began the life-long process of blending the Eastern and Western cultures. In this advent the Avatar will be for all cultures and geographic areas. Although Baba emphasized that India has been and will continue to be a spiritual land and will be a moral leader,¹⁴ He also declared that America has tremendous spiritual potential and will become spiritually-minded.¹⁵ After ten years of work in the East, the Avatar had laid the foundation for His first trip to the West and indeed the first trip to the West of any Avatar in recorded history.

Baba departed from Bombay on August 29, 1931 on the *S.S. Rajputana*, bound for France. By "coincidence," Mahatma Gandhi was on the same ship, and he and Meher Baba had two meetings during the voyage. After disembarking in France, Baba traveled immediately to London, where a group of His lovers was eagerly awaiting His company. He also spent time with His lovers in a retreat set up for Him in East Challacombe, where He declared that He is the Avatar of this age. He then returned to London and expressed a desire to visit America.

Baba made it clear that one does not require a medium (such as a priest or a religious organization) to approach God: "[N]o third party is required to take you to the Goal."¹⁶ Of religion He observed: "[E]ventually you have to go beyond the *shariat* - the traditional rituals of religion."¹⁷ He frequently stressed the overriding importance of honesty in daily life: "Compared to a religious hypocrite, an honest atheist is preferred."¹⁸ Nor did He mince words in His characterization of priests and self-styled holy men: "I have been saying that no damage to religion is as great as that done by the priest class."¹⁹

Baba traveled by train to Istanbul, Turkey and then went to Italy. On October 27, 1931, he sailed from Genoa for New York City aboard the *S.S. Roma*. After visiting New York City, He spent time with His American lovers in a house on the Hudson River. He visited Boston briefly and then returned to New York City, where He gave the following message:

MEHER BABA

Love is the only real religion. People are now tired of theories, doctrines and principles. They want the real thing, which explanations can never give. They must feel Truth, see Truth and experience Truth. Only then can one find harmony with everything and everyone. Only then can one, though remaining in the world, not be of it.²⁰

Baba was fond of the United States and of the American lovers who were drawn to Him. He promised that He would return to America. They were drawn by His love, and He was drawn by their openness to His love. He sailed for France on December 5, 1931 from New York City and then spent time in Paris with his European lovers. He observed: "In the East, I have people's worship; in the West I have love."²¹ He then sailed for India on December 18, 1931. On board the ship, He wrote to two American lovers: "I will come back to America to pour out my love to you and to spiritualize America."²²

Several Years of Intense World-Wide Traveling

Baba arrived in Bombay on New Year's day of 1932. His lovers were eager to reunite with Him. He met with Gandhi again. The meeting was His last physical meeting with Gandhi although He remained in frequent communication with Gandhi until Gandhi's assassination in 1948. There was much work to do in India, but He remarked to Gandhi that America was especially prepared for spiritual growth and development.²³

Baba was beginning to link the East and West. In this Avataric advent, the Avatar has come for people of both hemispheres. The energy and pragmatism of the material West will inspire the East; the idealism and spirituality of the East will inspire the West. The Avatar's many trips between the two hemispheres linked them with spiritual cables that would set a pattern for centuries: "I am the *Universal Avatar*, and not an Avatar for the East or West individually as in previous advents. I belong to the whole universe."²⁴

MEHER BABA

After only a few months in India, Baba sailed for England on March 24, 1932. After stopping in Venice, Italy, Baba arrived in England on April 7, 1932. Paramount Studios filmed Baba being interviewed by one of His English followers on April 8, 1932. Baba left behind numerous movies, photographs, and writings for future generations to know His image and words without depending on visual or verbal descriptions of intermediaries. Unlike the 1932 Paramount film, however, most of the films and still pictures were made by close lovers as opposed to professionals. In the Paramount film, Baba explained that He had not come to establish a new religion: "I intend bringing together all religions and cults like beads on one string and revitalize them for individual and collective needs."²⁵

Baba was determined not only to bring together the East and the West, but to change the role of women during and after His lifetime. As He explained to a Western reporter, woman is "man's equal."²⁶ Almost seventy years after His comments, we can see the results of His work in the increasing interrelationship between East and West and in the emancipation of women throughout much of the world. In fact, most of Baba's key disciples in the West were women.

From England, Baba traveled to Switzerland and then to France and back to England. During these travels, He contacted new lovers and worked with His close Western disciples to teach them His ways of working. Baba then sailed from England for New York City on May 13, 1932. When He arrived, He distributed a message to reporters which declared in part: "I intend bringing about a great spiritual revival in the near future, utilizing the tremendous amount of energy possessed by America for the purpose."²⁷ After spending time with His followers in New York, he traveled by train to Chicago, then to Kansas City, El Paso, Tucson and Los Angeles, where he arrived at the end of May, 1932. In the midst of the Great Depression, He declared that the "root of all our difficulties, individual and social, is *self-interest*," and that the elimination of self-interest could never be completely achieved without the help of a Perfect Master.²⁸

Baba met many film stars in Los Angeles, but seemed to conclude that Hollywood generally lacked the spiritual maturity to

MEHER BABA

become a suitable medium for serious spiritual messages. With characteristic Avataric humor, He said to Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford: "Only God is real, and everything else is a mere motion picture!"²⁹

Baba then sailed for Hawaii, Japan, China, Hong Kong, Singapore, Colombo, and Bombay, where He arrived in mid-July of 1932. In each of those destinations, He was busily engaged in his internal work while making various external contacts. After only three days in India, Meher Baba sailed for France and then went on to Italy, where He spent time with His Western lovers. In August of 1932 He went to Assisi, where He spent a night in a cave which had been used by St. Francis, one of His favorite saints.³⁰ During that evening, Meher Baba met with the five Perfect Masters to plan and oversee the destiny of the world for two thousand years.

Baba sailed from Italy to Alexandria, Egypt on August 23, 1932 and from Alexandria took the train to Cairo. There He visited the Coptic Church, which He said contains a cave where Mary and Joseph stayed after fleeing Herod and where Jesus and His disciples had also visited.³¹ He returned to India at the end of August.

After spending less than three months in India, Baba traveled again to Europe. He arrived in Venice at the beginning of December and then traveled to France and England. He explained to His Western lovers that He wanted them to go to India. He contacted new and old lovers and then traveled to Switzerland, Italy and Egypt, where He again visited the same Coptic Church which He says harbored Joseph and Mary. He left for Ceylon at the beginning of January, 1933, stayed for almost a month, and returned to India.

Meher Baba's travels always had a spiritual purpose. He contacted hundreds of people, delivered spiritual messages, tutored Westerners in the intricacies of spiritual development, and engaged in intense "internal" work as part of His Avataric mission. Although we can never understand His internal work, we can now see the fruits of His work in the form of publications, growth in interest in His life and message, pilgrims to His residence and tomb in India, and centers in His name in both East and West.

MEHER BABA

Baba welcomed a number of His Western disciples to India in April, 1933. After introducing His Eastern and Western lovers to one another, showing His Western lovers how and where He worked in India and traveling with them to various parts of India, He asked the Westerners to return to their homes, promising to invite them back at a later time. He traveled again to Europe, reaching Italy on June 23, 1933, and returned to India in a month.

Baba traveled again to Europe at the end of September, visiting both France and England. In Spain, He visited the house of a beloved saint, Theresa of Avila. He traveled to Madrid, Barcelona and Marseilles and returned to India at the end of November. His travels brought Him into contact with even more Western lovers.

Teaching as He Travels

Baba stressed obedience to the Spiritual Master. Those who wanted to stay with Him had to learn to please Him and follow His instructions. Although headquartered in Meherabad, Baba also worked in other parts of India.

On June 9, 1934, he again traveled to Europe, working with old and new lovers in France, England and Switzerland. In London, a man asked: "How can I be a true Christian?" Meher Baba responded: "By following the teachings of Christ, and by living the life that he lived and wanted you to live."³² His visit to Switzerland was particularly important because He said that He had drawn a circle of protection around Switzerland so that it would not be involved in the coming war.³³ Throughout His travels, He stressed the fundamental importance of loving Him and obeying Him as tools for spiritual advancement. He departed from Marseilles for India on July 20, 1934.

After working with His Eastern disciples, Baba returned to Europe in November 1934, arriving in France, traveling to England and then arriving in New York City on December 12, 1934. On one occasion, He met with 200 people. In all His travels, He meticulously laid spiritual cables linking the world together. Again He renewed

MEHER BABA

contacts with His old lovers and made connections with new lovers in Europe and in the United States. After a train trip through Chicago, Omaha, Denver, Santa Fe, and Albuquerque, Meher Baba arrived in Los Angeles on December 18, 1934. After working with His lovers in California, He left for Hawaii via Vancouver and returned to India in February 1935. Although Meher Baba's activities may give the appearance of "whirlwind travel" throughout the world, His purpose was always serious. He maintained an intense schedule of meeting with people, supervising projects, giving personal advice, contacting new lovers, and engaging in intense spiritual work that only He and the Perfect Masters can understand.

Seclusion Work and Various Ashrams

In India, Baba undertook tremendous spiritual work in seclusion. These periodic seclusions were a hallmark of His life and work in India. These seclusions differ completely from seclusions of ordinary people which are undertaken to retreat from the stress of ordinary life. Baba's seclusions were undertaken selflessly as part of His Avataric spiritual work for the upliftment of the world. Although we saw the external manifestation of this work, only the pattern of life as it unfolds years later will reveal the results of the work He did in these seclusions. Occasionally, as with work undertaken in seclusion in Switzerland, Meher Baba would reveal the purpose of His work, but usually He provided only sparse details.

Baba intended to bring various Western lovers to live and work with Him in India, and He looked for a suitable place to establish an ashram for Westerners. He was always mindful of the world situation and remarked in mid-1935: "It is definite that a war will break out in which the whole world will be involved."³⁴ He spoke critically of rigid adherence to religious rites and rituals and emphasized that the real religion is the life of universal brotherhood.

Baba established an ashram in Mysore for four months and then disbanded it. He selected Nasik as the site for the new Western ashram, and decided to establish another ashram in Rahuri. At the Rahuri ashram, he established facilities for working with both the

MEHER BABA

God-mad and the ordinary mad. Baba used the term "mast" (pronounced like the English word "must") to describe the God-mad and to distinguish their condition from the ordinary mad.³⁵ Ordinary madness is psychopathological and occurs when the mind suffers a tragic breakdown because of its inability to cope with the demands of everyday life. The God-mad are spiritually advanced souls who are almost always experiencing a state of consciousness on one of the internal planes of consciousness which lie between the "gross" plane of ordinary consciousness and the seventh or "real" plane of God-consciousness. All spiritual aspirants must traverse these planes on the way to union with God. Those aspirants who are fortunate enough to traverse the planes under the guidance of a spiritual master can make the journey under a so-called "veil," so that their consciousness is stationed on one of the internal planes but they enjoy gross consciousness so that they can function in the world. Other aspirants make the journey alone, seeking God with their own internal longing. These souls often become lost in the intoxication of the internal planes, which can provide thoughts, feelings and energy that is so pleasurable that it distracts the soul from making steady progress on the spiritual path. Meher Baba worked extensively with these masts and remarked that only the Avatar or a Perfect Master knows how to help them on their journey. The Rahuri ashram opened in August 1936.

Baba wrote to the Westerners discussing His plans to invite them to live in the Nasik ashram and His expectations for them. On October 20, 1936, He traveled to Karachi and then to Baghdad, Iraq. After traveling to Turkey, He took the train to Paris and then arrived in London on November 4, 1936. He seemed less interested in meeting new people than on other visits, and in response to a lover's concern about spreading His influence, He remarked: "I will draw the whole world to me when the time is ripe and when I want."³⁶ Baba's remark reminds us that only God can awaken divine love, which human beings cannot turn on and off by their own efforts. God's work has its own timing.

Baba worked with his followers in Switzerland and France, and then returned to India on November 12, 1936. There He remarked

MEHER BABA

that He wanted to train Westerners in spirituality made practical. He welcomed several groups of Western lovers to India in December. He explained to them that they would be headquartered in the Nasik ashram while He would be headquartered in the Rahuri ashram. As of January 2, 1937, there were fifteen Westerners residing in the Nasik ashram. He asked them to do everything in their daily lives for Him, telling them: "This is Vedanta and Christian philosophy in a nutshell: so very easy, yet so very difficult!"³⁷

The Westerners had strong personalities and strong egos, and they rapidly experienced conflicts about every detail of daily life in the ashram. Baba Himself deliberately brought about some of these conflicts in order to teach the Westerners to deal with them in a spiritual manner. Above all, He wanted harmony among the ashram residents. He told them that He could not continue his work with them unless they could live together harmoniously. He told them to think: "I am here for Baba, and Baba wants above all else - harmony"³⁸ He stressed that big hearts give and give in.

Baba decided to abandon the Rahuri ashram and relocate most of the people and activities back to Meherabad. However, He also felt that the Meherabad ashram was not appropriate for most of the Westerners, and He decided to bring the Nasik ashram to a close. He therefore began sending the Westerners home. The Nasik ashram had served its purpose, and the archetypical lessons of love, harmony and obedience had been taught by the Avatar.

Baba left India for France on July 31, 1937. There He worked intensely with a select group of Western disciples. Several of these Westerners played key roles in His work over the next thirty years and a few would live with Him as resident disciples in India. He also asked his Indian disciples to bring one of the masts named Mohammed from the ashram for the God-mad, and Meher Baba worked with this particular mast in France and then took the mast back to India with him when he left France on November 3, 1937. Shortly after returning to India, He asked several Western women to live as resident disciples in Meherabad.

MEHER BABA

Baba continued His work with the masts, many of whom were living at Meherabad. As part of that work, He wanted the masts to rehearse and perform in a play. On September 25, 1938, the masts performed in a play about the Hindu king Gopichand, and they were surprisingly competent in memorizing and reciting their lines under Baba's loving supervision.

The Blue Bus Tours In India

Baba wanted to travel throughout India, accompanied by men and women disciples, as part of His work. For that purpose, He ordered the construction of a blue bus, which was used extensively on several tours. One of the Western women did much of the driving on these tours. In Baba's initial tour with the blue bus, He took his disciples to Jabalpur, Sarnath, Delhi, Mathura, Ajmer, Jaipur, and other Indian cities. On May 15, 1939 Baba decided to return to Meherabad from Jabalpur. During this period of time, He continued to work with masts and also carried on a discussion with His disciples about the establishment of a spiritual center in India so that pilgrims could come to learn about Him. He also devoted particular attention to training the western women in control of moods and anger, harmony and obedience to his instructions.

In August 1939 Baba relocated his headquarters to Bangalore in the South of India. The Governor of Mysore State offered to give land in Byramangala, about twenty-two miles from Bangalore, and Baba accepted the offer for the location of His spiritual center. Baba then asked many of the people then living in Meherabad to relocate to Bangalore. There was intense opposition to the establishment of Meher Baba's center in Byramangala, and He intimated that this type of opposition was essential for his work. The opposition in the Bangalore area was echoed by intense opposition to Meher Baba by many people in Maharashtra. Opposition is characteristic of the Avatar's work throughout the ages.

On February 16, 1940 Baba terminated the contract with an engineering company which was to construct the center. He said that the center would be built by His disciples. He continued training His dis-

MEHER BABA

ciples and working intensely with masts. He spoke frequently about the world war that was raging in Europe and Asia and observed: "The war is necessary. All this destruction will purge the world of dirt, cleanse it of filth so that a new order can be established."³⁹

World War II, Work With Masts, and a Spiritual Center in America

On April 1, 1940, Meher Baba left Bangalore to travel throughout India. His caravan used the blue bus and three cars and covered more than 1,000 miles. He continued His intense training of His disciples and His work with masts, many of whom He made a concerted effort to contact during His travels. In May 1940 Meher Baba returned to Meherabad, where He was joined by many of the disciples and masts who had been living in Bangalore. He continued to make comments about the current war and also observed: "Religion has to go, and God has to come. Definitely!"⁴⁰ Apparently the war was necessary to destroy deeply-ingrained patterns of false behavior which diverts humanity from the path to God, and organized religion is part of such a false pattern.

Baba made numerous public statements on the spiritual aspects of war. It may surprise or shock some people that war has a spiritual aspect. As Baba commented: "But whatever happens, happens according to God's will. If you have this firmly embedded in your mind, then you will understand that this war business is nothing but God's game."⁴¹ However, in war even ordinary people display extraordinary sacrifice, courage and selflessness in the cause of patriotism, and these qualities are absolute prerequisites to spiritual advancement. Baba clarified that literal and uncompromising nonviolence in war time, as advocated by Mahatma Gandhi during World War II, was completely inappropriate for ordinary people. The abandonment of duty would merely be an excuse to run away from a fight out of cowardice and would allow evil to triumph.

Baba's spiritual work mirrored the intensity of the war. He made a concerted effort to contact most, if not all, of the masts in the world. In addition to helping the masts advance on their difficult spiritual journey in which they had become "stuck" on the internal

MEHER BABA

planes of consciousness, He used the energy of the masts for His own spiritual work. He also alternated periods of intense outward activity with periods of intense seclusion. In the latter part of 1940, He spent a month in Ceylon, where He worked with His disciples, with masts, and new and old lovers. He then returned to India, where He traveled extensively to contact masts.

In June 1941, Baba sent four of the Western disciples who had been residing with Him to the United States for the purpose of finding a suitable location for a center in that country. The spiritual center that had once been planned near Bangalore was never built. It may appear at first glance that Baba planned or established several spiritual centers, for example in Bombay, Toka, in Nasik, in Jabalpur, and in Bangalore, and then abandoned His plans. However, the mission of the Avatar is not to leave behind buildings; His real work is with the human heart and soul, where He always resides.

Baba returned to Meherabad briefly and then resumed His extensive travels to work with masts and to work with sadhus and sanyasis at the Kumbha Mela in Allahabad. He also met with groups of His close disciples to ask them to help in His spiritual work by following very exacting instructions for the conduct of their lives. He characterized His work as making the world more spiritually-minded. During this period of time, He foretold that India would be partitioned into two countries and that there would be extensive bloodshed caused by conflict between Hindus and Muslims.

During the war, Meher Baba on a number of occasions distributed food and clothing to destitute people. He emphasized that his doing so involved a much deeper spiritual purpose than merely feeding stomachs: He fed the souls of the recipients as well. The Avatar has always emphasized that life cannot be reduced to materialism, although Baba also observed that those who are confronted with abject poverty will find it almost impossible to focus on spiritual goals.

After three years, the search for a location for a spiritual center in the United States came to fruition. A close American disciple wrote to Baba that a property in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina that

MEHER BABA

her father had given her satisfied Baba's criteria for a spiritual center, and He advised her to accept her father's gift for that purpose. Today that property is the home of the Meher Spiritual Center, open to lovers of Meher Baba who wish to enjoy the spiritual atmosphere of the center and to interested people who simply wish to learn about Meher Baba.

Baba spent the entirety of World War II on the Indian subcontinent. (India and Pakistan were not partitioned until 1947.) He continued the intense pace of His work without diminution and remained acutely aware of the progress of the war. He conducted inner work in seclusion and then toured India at a furious pace contacting masts and sadhus (men who renounced the world for spiritual reasons). He contacted over 7,000 sadhus at the Kumbha Mela in Allahabad (a festival where sadhus gather every four or six years to celebrate the spiritual path).

When asked if He had taken birth only to help the Parsi community since he had been born to Parsi parents, Baba replied:

No. Now I am for all. This time I am the One for all,
with only one teaching. What is that teaching? *Love*
Me. No prayer, no meditation, only love me.⁴²

Baba's mother, Shireen, died on February 25, 1943. He commented: "She is now freed."⁴³ Baba worked in seclusion for a period of time thereafter, and then gave a public darshan in Sholapur in March, 1943. Afterwards He resumed his travels and work with masts.

Baba characterized His work in a nutshell as "spiritualizing the world."⁴⁴ His constant emphasis was on obedience to His instructions and wishes. That obedience is a spiritual tool that helps the disciple to move forward on his own spiritual journey, and it helps the Master in His work with the world. Baba again foretold that India would be divided into two parts and showed the exact boundary line to one of his disciples in July, 1943.⁴⁵

Throughout this war-time period, Baba traveled the length and breadth of India contacting masts and working with them. We have

MEHER BABA

few details as to what His internal work with the masts consisted of.⁴⁶ During this time period, Baba also provided food for destitute persons in various cities in India. As with everything He did, the emphasis was on the spiritual aspect of the work with poor people as opposed to setting up permanent social programs.

In April, 1944, Meher Baba shifted His personal residence to Pimpalgaon, a small village to the northeast of Ahmednagar. Meherabad remained a vigorous spiritual community and the location of the Avatar's tomb and a place of pilgrimage for centuries to come. Meherazad continues to this day to be a place of residence for Baba's disciples. On July 13, 1944, Meher Baba cabled His Western disciples that He approved their plans to make a spiritual center at Myrtle Beach, South Carolina and said: "All my lovers should cooperate to make Myrtle Beach the Spiritual Abode for one and all."⁴⁷

On November 11, 1944, Baba gave darshan to almost thirty thousand people and clarified again that He had not come to establish a new religion:

I am, therefore, not interested in founding a new religion. The world is already divided by numberless sects, based upon dogmas and beliefs. I have not come to give another cage for man, but to impart to the world the illimitable Truth. The world needs awakening and not mere verbal instruction; it needs the freedom and the amplitude of divine life, and not the superficiality of mechanized and pompous forms; it needs love, and not the display of power.⁴⁸

After the conclusion of World War II, Baba continued His intense work with masts. Bhau Kalchuri briefly summarizes the flavor of this work, which no doubt appears strange to readers unfamiliar with Meher Baba:

Baba's mast hunts were never holidays; he never took a vacation. He was always working, even while relaxing. His journeys in search of

MEHER BABA

masts were filled with inconveniences: discomforts in traveling, eating barely edible food in wayside places, and little, if any, sleep. India is not a pleasant country to travel through, with its tropical sun and rains; the roads to its back-country places and out-of-the-way towns are rough and often impassable in anything but a bullock cart, horse tonga or on foot. But Baba never spared himself or the mandali where this work was concerned. His mast-work was most important, and took precedence over his own and others' comfort. Although many accounts of the masts are brief, one should remember that each mast or mastani was a truly advanced soul traversing the subtle or mental planes of consciousness, and that it was very important to Baba to contact each one.⁴⁹

What Bhau Kalchuri says about the masts being spiritually advanced souls is critical to understanding Meher Baba's intense search for these souls. From a material perspective, the "successful" people of the world are those who possess status, money and power. These, as Baba constantly reminds us, are transitory and illusory possessions. The masts are actually further along on their spiritual journey, that is, closer to the goal of union with God, than most people who are viewed as "successful" in the eyes of worldly people. The masts are not therefore to be seen as pathetic souls who have nothing, but rather as advanced souls who have found the courage and the love to go beyond the illusory pleasures of the gross world and to make real steps toward the Divine Goal. God, in His mercy, personally sought out these spiritually advanced souls and gave each a loving push along the way to the eventual goal.

Baba established another mast ashram after relocating briefly to Mahabaleshwar and maintained that ashram for forty days. He then disbanded the ashram on January 28, 1947 and went into seclusion for twenty-one days. He was mindful that His Western lovers missed Him, and He asked them to be patient while promising to return again to the West.

MEHER BABA

In August, 1947 India achieved its independence from England, and India and Pakistan were created as separate countries. The partition and violence between Muslims and Hindus that Baba had predicted had come to pass, as the partition gave rise to bloody carnage throughout the subcontinent. During this tense period in India's history, Baba did not back off from His rigorous schedule. He continued his work with masts, gave public darshans, and conducted programs for the benefit of the poor.

The Middle East had been in turmoil after the end of the war. On May 14, 1948, the new country of Israel took birth, having won independence from the British. As Bhau Kalchuri observes: "On various occasions, Baba had stated that he had to find a home in the world for the Jewish people and finally it had come to pass."⁵⁰

On August 27, 1948, Baba and his close disciples held a house-warming for his new house in Pimpalgaon. Close lovers from Bombay, Poona and Ahmednagar and other cities in Maharashtra joined in the happy celebration. Baba named the place "Meherazad," meaning "Mercy is free." Baba came to live at Meherazad on September 16, 1948 and made it His home until His death in 1969.

The New Life

In June and July of 1949, Baba undertook a "Great Seclusion" of forty days. During that time, He also worked with masts and ordinary mad persons, as well as working with His disciples. The Great Seclusion was preparation for one of the most intense and mysterious phases of Meher Baba's life, which He called the "New Life." It is not possible to describe the New Life with full justice in this book. However, it appears that Baba undertook the New Life for the main purpose of revitalizing the spiritual path. The Avatar, of course, has no need to do anything for Himself because He is Perfection itself. In the New Life, in contrast to the "Old Life," Meher Baba played the role of the seeker of God, establishing an archetype for all seekers of God in the centuries to come. Because of this Avataric role-playing, the approaches to God appropriate for this age were opened and spiritually "charged," as it were.

MEHER BABA

Baba held a series of meetings in mid-August to outline the parameters of the New Life. The conditions would be demanding: wandering, begging, hard work, physical hardships, humiliation. Baba held out no promise of spiritual or material reward, and those who undertook the New Life should do so only for love of Him and for no other reason. The emphasis would be on cheerfulness, honesty, strict obedience to the master, and what Baba referred to as helplessness and hopelessness. The "helpless" seeker would live like a child who is helpless except for the love of his mother (God). The "hopeless" seeker would abandon selfish hopes to be replaced with only the hope of pleasing the Master.

There were many specific conditions of the New Life, and Meher Baba explained that most of His lovers could live the New Life internally while meeting their normal responsibilities in the world. In the end, the New Life began on October 16, 1949 with sixteen male disciples, four female disciples, and Baba. The first destination was Belgaum, in Southern India, where Baba spent a period of weeks training the disciples in the principles of the New Life. Baba consistently joined in the many menial chores that needed to be done throughout the New Life. The "companions," as they were called, were expected to remain cheerful, obey Baba implicitly, and to give up contact with all acquaintances in the Old Life.

In mid-November, Meher Baba shifted to Benares, where He gave instructions on begging. Baba then went to Sarnath, where Buddha began his work, and Baba prayed in certain ruins associated with Buddha. He returned to Benares and then moved to Hardwar with the companions. One of the companions had a heart attack, and four of the companions elected to live the New Life from their homes. Baba again emphasized the internal nature of the New Life:

"Physically staying with me has no importance and value, compared with implicit obedience."⁵¹ On February 20, 1950, Meher Baba dictated the following summary of the meaning of the New Life:

But this New Life is endless, and even after my physical death will be kept *alive* by those who live the life of complete renunciation of falsehood, lies, hatred, anger, greed and lust, and who, to

MEHER BABA

accomplish all this, do no lustful actions, do no harm to anyone, do no backbiting, do not seek material possessions or power, who accept no homage, neither covet honor, nor shun disgrace, and fear no one and nothing; by those who rely wholly and solely on God, and who love God purely for the sake of loving, who believe in the lovers of God and in the reality of Manifestation, and yet do not expect any spiritual or material reward, who do not let go the hand of Truth, and who, without being upset by calamities, bravely and wholeheartedly face all hardships with one hundred percent cheerfulness, and give no importance to caste, creed, and religious ceremonies. This New Life will live by itself eternally, even if there is no one to live it.⁵²

In that summation of the principles of the New Life, Baba simply lays out for all future seekers of God the attitudes and behavior that will allow them to move toward their spiritual goal and earn the pleasure of God. The New Life can be lived in either the East or the West.⁵³

On the first anniversary of the New Life, Baba readjusted the conditions of the New Life. He asked his close disciples to decide clearly between commitment to the New Life, following Meher Baba in the Old Life, or cutting their spiritual ties with Him altogether to become independent of Him. He contacted certain of his Old Life disciples who were not New Life companions, and He also contacted masts, sadhus, and poor persons. He simultaneously played the role of the seeker and the Master.

In early 1951, Baba undertook a seclusion of 100 days. Later in that year, He confirmed to his Western disciples that He would visit the United States and the new spiritual center at Myrtle Beach in 1952. He also outlined the need to engage in a "Manonash" phase of the New Life, or annihilation of the ego-controlled mind. This Manonash does not mean the destruction of the physical mind; it refers to the destruction of the ego. Baba explained that achieving the

MEHER BABA

goal of life requires the annihilation of the ego and that the death of this ego-controlled mind is the one real death that allows the seeker to enter the one real life of union with God. Baba enacted this Manonash phase of the New Life and completed it to His satisfaction:

For these last four months, according to ordinary human standards and by ways and means known to me, I have tried my utmost for the achievement of Manonash - and I can say with all truth that I feel satisfied with the work done. This satisfaction is due to the feeling I have of having regained my *Old Life Meher Baba state*, yet retaining my *New Life ordinary state*. I have regained the Knowledge, Strength and Greatness that I had in the Old Life; and retained the ignorance, weaknesses and humility of the New Life. This union of the Old and New Life states has given birth to LIFE - Life that is eternally old and new.⁵⁴

Baba had for some time promised to visit the West again, not only to see His old and new lovers but also to see the Meher Center in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina which had been established by close disciples and dedicated to him. On April 18, 1952 Meher Baba departed from Bombay for New York by airplane, the first time He had visited the West since 1937 and the first time He had journeyed there by airplane. After a one day stay in New York, Baba and his company traveled by train and car to Meher Center in Myrtle Beach. He remarked:

I have had many homes this time. I have laid my head on the ground in palaces and on concrete floors of humble homes. But of all the homes I have visited, this is the home that I love the best, because it was given to me and built for me with such love. I never leave. Remember, I do not leave, because this is my home.⁵⁵

Baba received a complete tour of Meher Center on April 23, 1952 and declared the Center officially open on May 9, 1952. From

MEHER BABA

that day on various lovers from different parts of the U.S.A. and the world came to visit Him there. Laying stress on honesty, Meher Baba said that it is better to be an atheist than to be a hypocrite in pretending to work for God.⁵⁶ He stressed that God wants purity, honesty and love.⁵⁷ He further remarked that "America is destined to lead the world spiritually."⁵⁸

After staying at Meher Center for a month, Baba and companions left Myrtle Beach by automobile to travel to California. On May 24, 1952, the car in which Meher Baba was riding was struck by another car driving in the wrong lane on a road near Prague, Oklahoma. Baba broke an arm and a leg, and three of His close disciples were also injured in the accident. The injured were taken to a medical clinic in Prague, where they were treated for several days by a local doctor. Baba explained: "You must understand that this was God's will, and it will result in benefit to the whole world."⁵⁹

Because of the accident, Baba and His company were unable to travel to California, as they had planned. The injured persons were driven back to Myrtle Beach, where they continued their recuperation. After more than a month in Myrtle Beach, Baba and His company left for New York on July 14, 1952. In recounting the accident to one of His lovers in New York, Baba remarked cheerfully: "America was after my blood for a long time."⁶⁰ What He meant by this cryptic remark will unfold in time. God is the universal body of the universe, among other things, and perhaps Baba meant that blood would have to spill on American soil in worldwide conflict. We have now seen blood spilled on American soil in several terrorist actions.

After meeting with His lovers in New York, Baba flew to London on July 30, 1952. On August 6, 1952, He flew to Switzerland, where He felt well enough to begin walking again. He flew to Karachi via Paris on August 21, and then returned to Bombay and was driven from Bombay to Meherazad on August 24.

Baba plunged himself into intense activity on His return to India. One remarkable event was a series of darshans (opportunity to be in the presence of the master) in the Hamirpur District in

MEHER BABA

Northern India. His love set the hearts of thousands in the Hamirpur District on fire with the love of God. He gave various other darshan programs in Delhi, Nagpur and Amraoti. During one such program He remarked: "Only the Perfect Masters know me.... Leave the thought of understanding me altogether. Love me, obey me; that is all."⁶¹

In January of 1953, Baba gave a series of memorable darshans in Andhra Pradesh State in Southern India. All told, some 150,000 people received His darshan and another 50,000 people received His prasad (love gift from the Master). Baba's presence there set hearts on fire just as He had done in Northern India.

In August 1953 Baba began dictating the book that eventually became *God Speaks*.⁶² That stupendous work is unprecedented in spiritual history, containing an explanation of the origin and purpose of creation itself, the nature and function of the planes of consciousness, the role of Perfect Masters, and the "path" to the self-actualization of the soul in its union with God. The book is breathtaking in scope and paints on a canvas more vast and authoritative than any in recorded history. Any reader interested in "the purpose of life" should study *God Speaks* assiduously.

On Zarathustra's birthday, September 7, 1953, in Dehra Dun, India, Baba dictated his message, "The Highest of the High." In that message, He unequivocally declared himself to be the Avatar and set forth with supreme clarity the purpose of the Avatar in relation to the individual spiritual seeker. The message, included in its full text in the first chapter of this book, is so direct in its substance and poetic in its form that it constitutes a complete outline of the role of the Avatar. Baba explains that the function of the Avatar is not to gratify material desires and that the Avatar cannot be understood by the human intellect:

Know you all that if I am the Highest of the High, my role demands that I strip you of all your possessions and wants, consume all your desires and make you desireless rather than satisfy your desires. Sadhus, saints, yogis and walis

MEHER BABA

can give you what you want; but I take away your wants and free you from attachments and liberate you from the bondage of ignorance. I am the One to take, not the One to give what you want or as you want.⁶³

The Avatar has never been for those who make a show of their love for Him, but for those who unostentatiously surrender their lives to Him, to live for Him and not for themselves.

In the first part of February, 1954, Baba traveled through the Hamirpur District in Northern India, a predominantly rural area. He contacted thousands of lovers and gave various darshans, and love for Him spread like a spiritual wildfire throughout the district. Baba at one point referred figuratively to Hamirpur as His heart. He explained that God does not listen to the language of the tongue or the language of the mind because God "listens only to the language of the heart which constitutes love."⁶⁴

After saturating Hamirpur District with His love, Meher Baba immediately made plans to visit His lovers in Andhra Pradesh in Southern India. Like Hamirpur District, Andhra was on fire with love for Him. Wherever He went, He was mobbed by throngs of lovers and those eager for His darshan. He also visited centers established in His cause and the homes of various lovers, as well as schools and places of business.

During the Andhra tour, Baba observed: "If, instead of erecting churches, fire-temples, mandirs (temples) and mosques, people were to establish the House of God in their hearts for their Beloved God, my work will have been done."⁶⁵ On another occasion He said: "I belong to no religion. Every religion belongs to me. My own personal religion is of my being the Ancient Infinite One, and the religion I teach to all is of love for God."⁶⁶

Baba departed by train for Poona on March 4, 1954. As He left Andhra, every station platform was packed with His lovers and devotees. He had drenched his Andhra lovers in his love and presence for two solid weeks and in the process touched thousands of hearts. The Andhra and Hamirpur "blow-out" darshan programs

MEHER BABA

were unprecedented and will be celebrated for centuries in history books.

After shifting his headquarters temporarily to Mahabaleshwar, Baba began dictating the second part of *God Speaks*. The disciple to whom He dictated the material would then rewrite the material into sentences at night and would read them back to Baba the next day. In this way, Baba integrated the writing of this major text into His everyday activity in a seamless manner. The dictation of *God Speaks* continued into July of 1954.

In June of 1954, Baba began planning a darshan program for Eastern and Western men in September to be held in Ahmednagar. In all, some twenty men from various Western countries attended Baba's darshan, which began on September 12, 1954. The Western men stayed in Meherbad and were permitted to spend three weeks with Baba. During the darshan period, "Meher Baba's Call" was read out publicly. That message eloquently describes the Avatar's role when the spirituality of the world has reached ebb tide. The Avatar's call is simple: "Come all unto me!" Baba emphasized: "The time is come. I repeat the call, and bid all to come unto me."⁶⁷ Another message read out publicly was "How to Love God," which concludes: "To love God as He ought to be loved, we must live for God and die for God, knowing that the goal of all life is to love God, and find Him as our own Self."⁶⁸

Baba spent a considerable amount of time during this "three incredible weeks" with the Western men. After the 1930s, the opportunity to spend as much as three weeks with Meher Baba was rare, and the Western men absorbed His love in full measure. He made frequent references to the material in *God Speaks*, which had not then been published. He also reiterated: "I have come to destroy in the world all rites and ceremonies that are superficial."⁶⁹ He also described himself as a mixture of all previous Avatars.

On October 7, 1954 Baba disclosed that He would give up use of the alphabet board, by means of which He had communicated with his close mandali and His lovers since He began his silence on July 10, 1925. After their intense experience of living with Baba for

MEHER BABA

three weeks, the Westerners left Ahmednagar on the evening of September 30, 1954 for Bombay. Before leaving, Baba gave the manuscript of *God Speaks* to one of the Western men, who took it to the two individuals who edited the book for publication.

As He had earlier predicted, Baba stopped using the alphabet board on October 7, 1954. He developed a unique system of sign language to replace the alphabet board as a means of communication in His silence. This system of sign language was not the same system used by deaf persons but was His own unique creation, including using His ear for the letter "E" and pointing to His eye for the letter "I." The close mandali learned to "read" these unique gestures; the meaning of the hand signals would not be apparent to someone who had not spent time with Baba.

Baba went into seclusion in Satara from May 1, 1955 to July 31, 1955. The alternation between intense activity in giving Himself to people and intense work in seclusion was typical of His entire life. His seclusions, however, were never retreats from work as they tend to be for ordinary people. The pace and intensity of His work never diminished, and the burden on His close disciples to keep up with His demands, to attend to the correspondence with Meher Baba's lovers, and to take care of the demands of daily life was almost unsustainable.

Baba went to Bombay from Satara where he gave darshan to many of His lovers. During the next few months, He moved around from Bombay to Satara to Poona to Meherazad - back and forth, contacting people in every town. He and the mandali then prepared for a remarkable series of sahavas (companionship with the Master) programs given in Meherabad in the month of November, 1955. He conducted four week-long sahavas programs broken down by language groups. He hosted 97 Gujarati-speaking men; 181 Telegu-speaking men from the state of Andhra Pradesh; 164 Hindi-speaking men; and 213 men in the Marathi group. (Since the Marathi group was the last and the largest, Meher Baba permitted some men who did not speak Marathi to attend.) These sahavas programs presented an unprecedented opportunity for the men to enjoy intimate contact with the Master for a week. The free flow of love between

MEHER BABA

the group and the Master was extraordinary and is described in detail in *Lord Meher* as well as in *Listen, Humanity*, narrated and edited by Don E. Stevens,⁷⁰ one of the Western lovers permitted to attend. Just as the intimate sahavas experience was profoundly joyful, the sorrow of parting with Baba was almost unbearable. After the last sahavas group departed, Baba remarked to the mandali: "I will not have such a sahavas gathering again. Their sorrow at parting is too difficult for me to witness."⁷¹

Baba gave darshan in several cities in Maharashtra, including Navsari and Bombay. He then went into seclusion again on February 1, 1956 in Satara. In seclusion He worked with selected masts, although His work with them was nothing comparable to the years in the 1930s and 1940s in which He contacted thousands of masts throughout the Indian subcontinent. During this period of time, Baba had been planning to visit the West again for one month, and He finally departed from Bombay on July 16, 1956 for London via Zurich and Paris. He arrived in London on July 17. After spending several days with His lovers there, Baba remarked that He would not visit London again. He departed by plane for New York and arrived there on July 20, 1956.

Baba spent most of His time with His lovers in close and intimate settings, but many new people were introduced to Him at this time. He also gave a rare interview with the media. After a full week in New York, He departed for Myrtle Beach together with 44 of His lovers, most of whom accompanied Him throughout the travels in the United States.

Baba gave interviews and spent His time at Meher Center in Myrtle Beach with old and new lovers. He remarked that He loved Meher Center beyond all other places in the world.⁷² While at the Center, He permitted a commercial television crew to film Him and to interview Him. Stating that He would return to Meher Center in two years, He departed for Washington, D.C. on July 30. In Washington, Baba had dinner at the home of one His close lovers, gave several interviews, and permitted Himself to be photographed by a professional photographer. He left by plane for Los Angeles on the evening of the 30th.

MEHER BABA

In Los Angeles, He gave interviews to reporters and permitted photographs to be taken. To one reporter He remarked: "I have only one message to give and I repeat it age after age. My message to one and all is: Love God."⁷³ On August 2, 1956 He visited a retreat dedicated to Him named Meher Mount, in Ojai, California. He remarked: "Next to Myrtle Beach, I love this place best."⁷⁴ He left for San Francisco on August 3.

In San Francisco, Baba informed his lovers that He was planning to call them to India in 1957. (As it turns out, the East-West Gathering eventually took place in 1962.) Although Baba spent His time mostly with His close lovers, many newcomers were able to meet Him there. He departed for Australia on August 7. After stops in Hawaii, China and Fiji, He arrived in Sydney on August 9.

This was the first time in recorded history that an Avatar had set foot in Australia. His lovers took him to Meher House, the home in a suburb of Sydney that had been built for Him by a few close ones. He told the Australians: "I have come to sow the seed of love in this country."⁷⁵ As He had in his visits to other Western cities, Baba spent time with His lovers, granted individual interviews, and discoursed on spiritual topics. On August 11, He flew to Melbourne. He informed his Australian lovers of His plans to invite the Westerners to India in November, 1957. Meher Baba flew back to Sydney on August 13 to stay again at Meher House. After spending more time with his Sydney lovers, He departed for Bombay on August 14.

Upon His return to India, Meher Baba resumed His intense work in seclusion. He continued to work with masts from time to time, and He made plans for the combined sahavas for Easterners and Westerners in November, 1957. On December 2, 1956, the car in which Baba was riding inexplicably went out of control, crashing into a stone culvert by the side of the road. Baba suffered a broken right hip bone, lacerated tongue, and severe abrasions of the forehead, nose, cheeks and legs. All occupants of the car were seriously hurt, and one of Baba's close disciples was killed. Although Baba's injuries healed partially in time, He was never again able to walk with His customary vigor and grace, and He endured constant discomfort and pain until His death in 1969. Nevertheless, He

MEHER BABA

explained that suffering is the inevitable lot of the Avatar, who sets a divine example for the cheerful endurance of suffering in life and who suffers to relieve humanity from its overwhelming burden of sanskaras. In the midst of His pain, Baba said: "I am happy. It is as I wanted it."⁷⁶ These two accidents were part of His universal work to free humanity from the suffering caused by attachment to machines.

Even though His pain was intense, Meher Baba gave darshan programs in March, 1957. By April He could walk with the aid of two canes, but the pain continued. He postponed the East-West sahavas until January, 1958. During the year or two after the accident, Baba continued to be treated by a variety of doctors, but the pain persisted. Because His disability continued, He decided not to give his combined East-West sahavas program. Instead He planned to give the sahavas separately, to Easterners in February and to the Westerners later in the year in Myrtle Beach and Australia.

The Eastern sahavas began on February 15, 1958; it included both men and women. At the program, Meher Baba confided that previous Avatars had only played the role of God the Father, but in this advent the Avatar played the role of both God the Father and God the Mother.⁷⁷ He also informed His lovers that Meherabad would become a place of great pilgrimage and that a big town would grow up there.⁷⁸ Baba held the sahavas program in two stages, with each group having about five days with him. The program took an extraordinary toll on His body, but He still remained cheerful and vigorous throughout the programs for the benefit of His lovers.

After the Eastern sahavas, Meher Baba spent time in Mahabaleshwar and Poona, meeting with His lovers and giving darshans. He was also busy planning another trip to the West. He left India by plane for New York and from there traveled by plane and car to Myrtle Beach, where He arrived on May 17, 1958. He wished to meet with His lovers at the Meher Center and, in contrast to earlier trips, He did not intend to visit a variety of Western cities. Two hundred twenty-five lovers were able to share His company at Meher Center. He gave group interviews and private interviews; He gave discourses; He asked for stories and entertainment; He enjoyed

MEHER BABA

a belated birthday party given by His lovers; and He shared with them the sweetness of His presence. On May 30, 1958, He left Meher Center for Wilmington, North Carolina, from which He traveled by plane to San Francisco. On May 31, 1958, He left San Francisco by plane for Australia. He would never set foot on American soil again, but He had drenched it with His love. In all he spent 200 days of this advent in the United States, more time than in any other country except India.

Baba arrived in Sydney, Australia on June 2, 1958 and flew from there to Brisbane. His lovers had built a retreat known as Avatar's Abode on a property about 75 miles north of Brisbane. He stayed there for five days. The sahavas with the Australians was much the same as was the sahavas at Meher Center. In the future, Avatar's Abode, having been blessed by five days of the Avatar's presence, will become a retreat center for spiritual aspirants in that part of the world. Baba returned to India by plane on June 7, 1958. He would never again leave India. From that time forward, those lovers outside India who wanted to see Baba would have to go to India.

Back in India, Baba began the first in a series of seclusions that would last on and off for the remainder of His life. The seclusions became more strict in the sense that He severely limited contact with the outside world and imposed prohibitions against groups of His close disciples from contacting one another. The pain from his 1956 accident never left Him, although some activities would give Him temporary relief. Referring to His two automobile accidents, He said: "I got my physical bones broken so as to break the backbone of the material aspect of the Machine Age, keeping intact its spiritual aspect."⁷⁹ During those times He was not in seclusion, He met with His lovers either individually or in groups, routinely shifted His headquarters from Meherazad to Poona during the three hottest months of the year (April through June), and gave darshan programs. Seclusions were never periods of inactivity. The seclusions involved Meher Baba's most intense work, His "universal work," that is, work for the benefit of the entire Creation which each Avatar must undertake as part of His mission.

MEHER BABA

Francis Brabazon wrote his masterpiece, *Stay With God*, at Meher Baba's direction. Meher Baba remarked: "I have listened to the reading of *Stay With God* and given my final word for its printing and publication."⁸⁰ After receiving the published book, Meher Baba observed: "*Stay With God* has come to stay and my love to all those who helped make it the perfect book that it is."⁸¹ *Stay With God* is a literary and spiritual gem that gives poetic flight to Baba's life and message.

Although Baba would not again engage in the whirlwind traveling that characterized more than three decades of His work, the pace and intensity of His spiritual work actually increased. During His seclusions, He would from time to time permit certain of His lovers to visit Him. His close mandali were witnesses to the intense toll the "universal" work took on His physical body. Although Meher Baba was never able to walk normally after His second accident, He surprised His physicians by being able to walk at all.

In 1960, Baba stayed at Guruprasad for three months. He gave darshan every Sunday, and thousands of His lovers were privileged to enjoy His company during this time. To one group of visitors, Baba commented: "To demand anything from the Beloved is an insult to love. Love only gives and goes on giving until the Will of the Beloved alone manifests through the lover."⁸² While He stayed in Poona, Baba visited the homes of some of His lovers there. This time at Guruprasad was a wonderful opportunity for Baba's lovers to receive His darshan and to enjoy many rich and insightful comments on God and the spiritual life. To one who was crying upon parting company with Him, Baba said: "Although you may not see me physically, be certain I am always with you. The only place that can hold me is the heart. Keep me close with you - I am always there."⁸³

On July 1, 1960, He began a six-month seclusion at Meherazad. Although He spent most of His time with His mandali, He did continue correspondence, give discourses, and see occasional visitors. His physical suffering during this period was particularly intense. On December 2, 1960, He cared for one hundred poor persons by washing their feet, bowing down to them and providing them money.

MEHER BABA

At the end of March 1961, Meher Baba again shifted His headquarters to Guruprasad in Poona, but He continued His seclusion. He relaxed His seclusion in the month of May, and His lovers streamed in from all parts to take advantage of the chance to see Him. Meher Baba remained in Poona until August 7, 1961, when He returned to Meherazad.

In March 1962, Baba announced that He would visit Guruprasad in Poona in November for one week to give darshan to His Western and Eastern lovers but not to the general public. This darshan ultimately came to be known as the East-West Gathering, an historic event in which He brought Westerners and Easterners together as a harbinger for the future in which there will be greater intermingling between Easterners and Westerners in the world generally. At the end of March, Meher Baba moved to Guruprasad for his usual stay during the hot months.

In June 1962, Meher Baba informed His lovers that the gathering scheduled for November would be shortened from seven days to four days. In July, Baba moved His headquarters back to Meherazad. Meher Baba's spiritual mother, Gulmai Irani, died in August, and He presided over her burial at Meherabad. In September, instructions were sent to those attending the November gathering, letting them know that it would be uniquely different from previous events. By October, plans for the November East-West Gathering were in full swing. Approximately 150 people attended from Western countries, and approximately 5,000 people attended from Eastern countries, most of them from India. The East-West Gathering took place at Guruprasad from November 1 to November 5, 1962. Some of the lovers were meeting Meher Baba for the first time and others had either met Him previously or had been with Him for many years.

In addition to sharing the companionship of His lovers, Baba gave discourses from time to time. He also asked His Western lovers to tour those places in Poona associated with His life. During the darshan itself, Meher Baba's hand gestures were translated into English by close disciples and then translated into Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati and Telegu by other lovers. After an intense four days, the East-West Gathering drew to a close in the late afternoon of

MEHER BABA

November 4, 1962, although Westerners were permitted to see Baba briefly the next morning. For most of His Western lovers, this turned out to be their last opportunity to see Him physically.

Baba resumed His seclusion when He returned to Meherazad. He asked Francis Brabazon to write a book about the East-West Gathering. Although He was in seclusion, He would meet with individual lovers or groups of lovers. He also communicated with His lovers from time to time, and in the spring of 1963 authorized His American lovers to sponsor a booth at the New York World's Fair for the purpose of providing information about His life and messages.

When He returned to Guruprasad in the Spring of 1963, He permitted His lovers to have darshan on Sundays. Baba called some of His close lovers to see Him during weekdays. For those wonderful times, the floodgates of His love were fully open. Baba alternately played with His close lovers and shared precious discourses with them. On one occasion He remarked that, if a person could repeat with love the 101 Names of God as given by Zarathustra, no other prayer would be needed.⁸⁴ His time with His lovers included private interviews, card games, music performances, joking and story-telling. Throughout this period, His universal work continued, which is almost impossible to fathom. Those who were able to spend this intimate time with Him were indeed fortunate.

Baba's suffering was almost always apparent, and those in His presence felt that they were dying internally by observing the suffering. The ten weeks of darshan programs at Guruprasad ended on June 16, 1963. Two weeks later, Baba left for Meherazad. His suffering seemed to grow even more intense there.

For the most part, Baba worked in seclusion, but still various people were permitted to see Him during His time at Meherazad. On the occasion of His closest disciple Mehera Irani's birthday in December 1963, approximately 250 women were called to Meherazad to celebrate the event with Meher Baba. His seclusion continued into 1964, but throughout that seclusion he tended to observe a daily routine, including sessions with His mandali, listening to correspondence read to Him, some recreation, and unfortu-

MEHER BABA

nately the continuation of intense physical suffering. On January 16, 1964 He said: "I have suffered much and will have to suffer much more until I break my silence. I give my love to my lovers."⁸⁵

Baba's birthday was celebrated widely throughout the world on February 25, 1964. He continued His seclusion in Meherazad until April 1, 1964, when He left to take up residence in Guruprasad in Poona. In contrast to 1963, Baba kept Himself secluded in Guruprasad, and few people were permitted to see Him there. The New York World's Fair opened in the spring of 1964 and continued to October of 1965, and Baba's lovers sponsored an information booth from which they distributed His *Universal Message* and related information about His life and work. Baba was quite pleased with this work on His behalf. The time had arrived to spread His message and information about His advent.

Baba made an exception to His seclusion by visiting the Meher Baba Center in Poona on May 1, 1964 and by permitting several hundred of his lovers to receive His darshan there. India's prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru died on May 27, 1964, and Meher Baba remarked that "India will have to wait another seven hundred years to find another jewel like him."⁸⁶ Baba left for Meherazad on July 1, 1964 and permitted His Poona lovers to assemble at Guruprasad to bid Him farewell.

His general seclusion continued at Meherazad. During this time, it came to His attention that certain spiritual seekers in the United States were using psychedelic drugs in an effort to promote their spiritual progress. Baba took a keen interest in this social problem, and devoted a huge portion of His time and attention to clarifying that the use of drugs was absolutely harmful to spiritual aspirants and would propel them backward, not forward, on the spiritual path.

In December 1964, Baba permitted three western women to see him and also to each have a private interview with Him. His physical suffering continued unabated, and He particularly experienced severe neck pains. Despite the suffering, He planned a darshan for Easterners in May 1965 to be held in Poona. Baba left Meherazad for Poona on March 30, 1965. The darshan for Easterners began on

MEHER BABA

May 1, 1965 at the Avatar Meher Baba Poona Center and continued at Guruprasad. Approximately 6,000 Easterners were fortunate enough to receive His darshan, together with a handful of Westerners. Even though His pain continued throughout the darshan period, Baba radiated happiness and good cheer, so that only His close ones knew how much He had suffered. He sacrificed His body for the sake of His lovers, knowing that this opportunity was precious to them.

Although the darshan was officially over on May 6, 1965, Baba permitted many lovers, particularly students that had been tied up in exams, to see Him for a few days after that. Even further, Baba had compassion for those who had not been able to attend the darshan in May and so scheduled another darshan in June, at which almost 500 of His lovers attended. Baba then returned to Meherazad on July 1, 1965.

Baba went into a deep seclusion in Meherazad but began planning a darshan for Westerners to be held in December 1965. Approximately 250 Westerners were expected. However, on September 4, 1965, He announced His decision to cancel the December darshan because of the pressure of His universal work. He added: "Sometime, somewhere, somehow, I will meet my old and new Western lovers before I break my silence."⁸⁷ Although extremely disappointed, they were resigned to His wish. He did, however, permit His Western lovers to write one letter to Him. Although He did not say so at the time, He had given His last darshan in this advent, and His lovers will have to wait 700 years to enjoy a darshan with the Avatar in the body.

Although in seclusion, Meher Baba saw a few individuals on a private basis. These interviews are lovingly recorded by Bhau Kalchuri in *Lord Meher*. He continued to take a strong interest in the drug problem in the West, and He actively encouraged various Western lovers to work against the use of drugs and to make crystal clear to the public that drugs had nothing to do with spirituality. He encouraged the public celebration of His birthday in 1966 by His lovers around the world.

MEHER BABA

Baba moved to Guruprasad on April 1, 1966. In contrast to the previous year, 1966 was very quiet, and only a few lovers were permitted to see Him there. Fortunately, the author of this book was one of those exceptions to the rule of seclusion, and his deeply moving and life-changing interview with Meher Baba occurred on April 15, 1966. That interview is recounted in detail in *Lord Meher*. Even so, words can never fully capture the breathtaking sweetness and magnetism of Meher Baba's love.

On July 1, 1966, Baba returned to Meherazad, where His deep seclusion continued. In this later part of His life, His time and physical strength were increasingly absorbed in His universal work for the spiritual improvement of mankind. His seclusion, His universal work, and His interest in the problems of Western young people corresponded with an explosion of interest in Meher Baba among young people at this time in Europe, Australia and particularly the United States. Hundreds upon hundreds of young people became acquainted with Meher Baba's life and message during this time period.

Since the Meher Baba Information Booth at the New York World's Fair had been a success, a Canadian Baba lover asked for and received permission to set up a similar booth at the Montreal Exposition of 1967. Baba also gave permission to His lovers to celebrate His birthday in 1967 in a manner befitting the Avatar. He also encouraged His Australian lovers to ensure that Avatar's Abode there would become one of the great places of pilgrimage in the world.

Baba shifted His residence to Guruprasad in Poona on April 2, 1967. After a quiet time in Poona, He left for Meherazad on July 2, 1967. In a circular issued on July 10, 1967, Baba emphasized that He needed to be undisturbed in seclusion to continue with His universal work and that He would announce plans for a future darshan after 1967. In fact, He wanted an even stricter seclusion from July 21 to November 21, 1967.

In September 1967, Baba permitted the Dutch film maker Louis Van Gasteren to film Him in Meherazad. (Some of Van Gasteren's

MEHER BABA

film was released publicly more than thirty years later.) On October 1, 1967, Baba issued a circular that announced that His seclusion would continue until His birthday in 1968 because of the intensity of His universal work. His work intensified.

At the end of January 1968, Baba issued a circular to the effect that His seclusion had to be extended until March 25, 1968, again because of the intensity of His universal work. On February 20, 1968, He dictated another circular to inform His lovers that His seclusion needed to be extended until May 21, 1968. He also communicated His wish that His birthday should be celebrated publicly on a grand scale by His lovers throughout the world.

Baba left for Guruprasad on April 1, 1968. His stay that summer would be His last. On May 21, 1968, His seclusion technically ended and His "Exclusion" began with essentially the same restrictions on correspondence and contact with Him. He returned to Meherazad on July 1, 1968.

Baba's "exclusion" ended on July 30, 1968, when He remarked: "My work is done. It is completed one hundred percent to my satisfaction."⁸⁸ He then turned His attention to the darshan He had previously alluded to, and He indicated that He would have a darshan in Poona in the Spring of 1969. He issued a circular on November 1, 1968, stating that the darshan would occur only on strict terms and conditions. He continued to take a strong interest in the enthusiasm for His cause among young people in Europe and the United States. He also continued to engage in His universal work notwithstanding His earlier hints that the work was done.

In December 1968, Meher Baba performed a wedding ceremony for His nephew and His nephew's bride. His health was extremely fragile, marked by a high blood urea level and intense muscle spasms. Meher Baba's mandali were concerned about His ability to give the planned darshan from April 10 to June 10, 1969, but Meher Baba replied that He would give the darshan "reclining" and that it would be no problem for Him. In mid-January, His health significantly worsened. In addition to His other ailments, He suffered nausea and vomiting, and His feet became swollen.

MEHER BABA

On January 26, 1969, He was transferred to a surgical bed. He experienced frequent spasms in His body, similar to electric shocks. On the morning of January 31, 1969, He remarked: "Remember this, that I am God!"⁸⁹ The spasms continued. At 12:15 p.m. on January 31, 1969, a terrible spasm shook His body and caused Him to choke and to stop breathing. Several of the mandali gave Him mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, but to no avail. He had crossed over.

His entombment took seven full days, when His lovers from around the world came for one last viewing. As He planned, His final darshan took place in Poona from April to June of 1969, and He did indeed give darshan "reclining." Moreover, He is continually giving darshan for all the pilgrims who come with love in their hearts to Meherabad, where His body was interred in 1969. Meherabad has already become a place of world-wide pilgrimage, as He predicted.

ENDNOTES

1. Please refer to the "Avatar" chapter, endnote 1, for a complete citation to Bhau Kalchuri's *Lord Meher*. In addition to *Lord Meher*, there are numerous other books about Meher Baba available through Sheriar Books in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina and Meher Baba Information in Berkeley, California and other booksellers.
2. The city of Poona is now transliterated as "Pune," consistent with various changes adopted in India after it achieved its independence from England. The previous spelling is used here because "Poona" matched the English spelling at the time of the events described.
3. See pages 116-131 of *Lord Meher* for a description of Sheriar's extraordinary search for God leading up to God's command to Sheriar to return to society and to take up a family life because his son would be destined for spiritual greatness.
4. *Lord Meher*, 232.
5. *Lord Meher*, 331.
6. *Lord Meher*, 312.
7. Just as Poona is now transliterated as "Pune," Bombay is now called "Mumbai," a transliteration of its Marathi name.
8. The word "mandali" means member of the circle. The precise characteristics of the many "circles" that surround the Avatar were discussed in the previous chapter.

MEHER BABA

9. Meher Baba as quoted in *Lord Meher*, 1266.
10. *Lord Meher*, 834-35.
11. *Lord Meher*, 736.
12. From Meher Baba's "Universal Message," published by Meher Spiritual Center, Inc.
13. For a complete account of the Prem Ashram, see Ramjoo Abdulla, *Ramjoo's Diaries 1922-1929*, ed. Ira G. Deitrick (Walnut Creek, California: Sufism Reoriented, Inc. 1979), 405- 585.
14. *Lord Meher*, 1349.
15. *Lord Meher*, 1350.
16. *Lord Meher*, 1423.
17. *Lord Meher*, 1429.
18. *Lord Meher*, 1434.
19. *Lord Meher*, 1447.
20. *Lord Meher*, 1487.
21. *Lord Meher*, 1510.
22. *Lord Meher*, 1511.
23. *Lord Meher*, 1515.
24. Meher Baba as quoted in *Lord Meher*, 1535.
25. *Lord Meher*, 1554.
26. *Lord Meher*, 1565.
27. *Lord Meher*, 1617.
28. *Lord Meher*, 1652.
29. *Lord Meher*, 1656.
30. The word "saint" is used very imprecisely in common vernacular and even by religious scholars. Not so with the Avatar. A "saint" is an individual on the fifth or sixth plane of consciousness, that is, a very advanced soul. Baba confirmed that Francis was indeed a true "saint," and Baba further revealed that Francis achieved God-realization at the end of his life.
31. *Lord Meher*, 1705.
32. *Lord Meher*, 1881.
33. *Lord Meher*, 1901.
34. *Lord Meher*, 1990.
35. A detailed and authoritative account of Meher Baba's work with masts is William Donkin's *The Wayfarers* (San Francisco: Sufism Reoriented, Inc., 1969), with a foreword by Meher Baba.

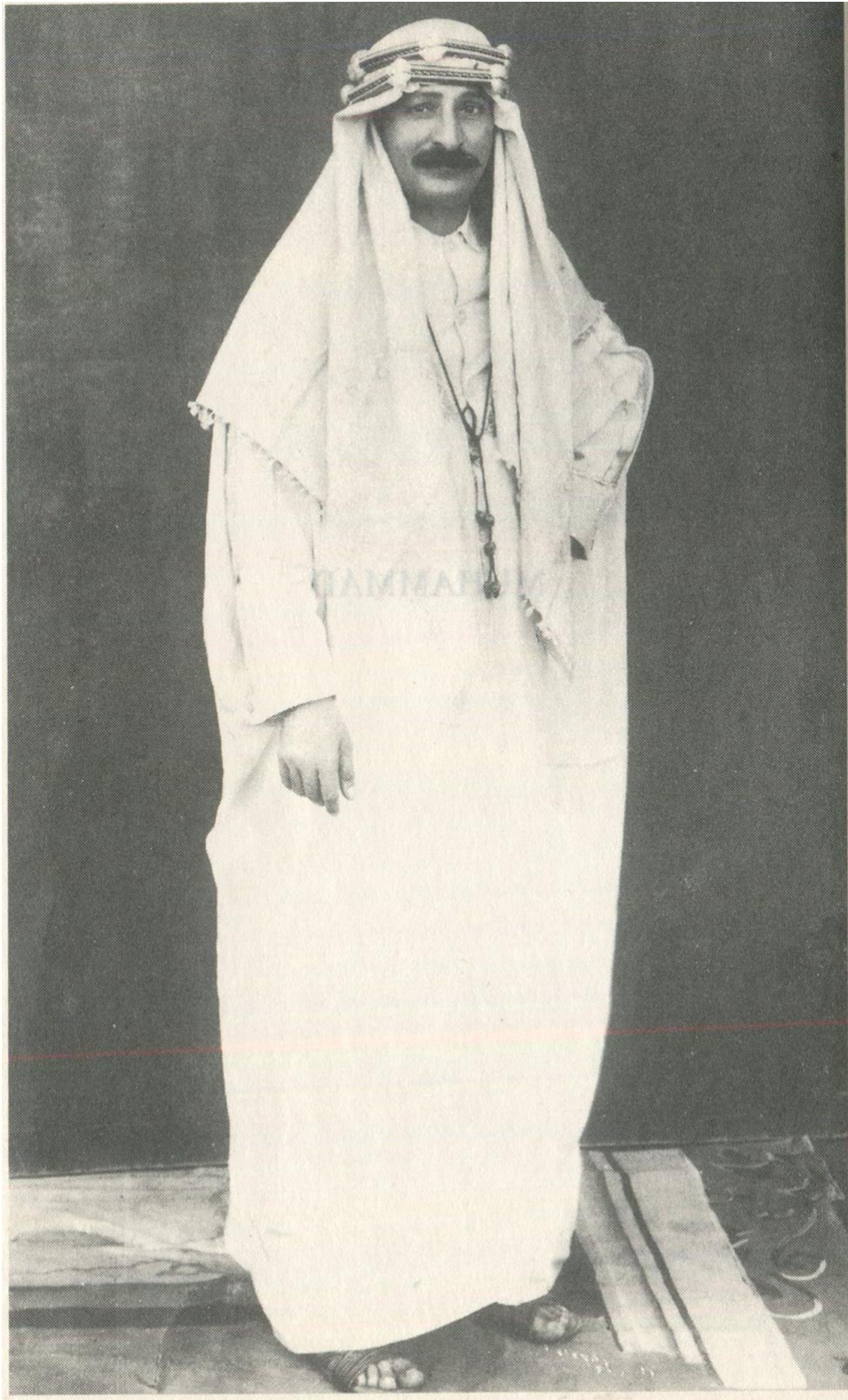
MEHER BABA

36. *Lord Meher*, 2043.
37. *Lord Meher*, 2070.
38. *Lord Meher*, 2088.
39. *Lord Meher*, 2533.
40. *Lord Meher*, 2580.
41. *Lord Meher*, 2616.
42. *Lord Meher*, 2818.
43. *Lord Meher*, 2853.
44. *Lord Meher*, 2873.
45. *Lord Meher*, 2905.
46. As to the external activities with the masts, see William Donkin's *The Wayfarers*.
47. *Lord Meher*, 2954.
48. *Lord Meher*, 2985.
49. *Lord Meher*, 3077.
50. *Lord Meher*, 3274.
51. *Lord Meher*, 3551.
52. *Lord Meher*, 3555.
53. *Lord Meher*, 3559.
54. Meher Baba as quoted in *Lord Meher*, 3761, emphasis and capitals in original.
55. *Lord Meher*, 3779.
56. *Lord Meher*, 3790.
57. *Lord Meher*, 3801.
58. *Lord Meher*, 3823.
59. *Lord Meher*, 3848.
60. *Lord Meher*, 3867.
61. *Lord Meher*, 4016.
62. *God Speaks* is a comprehensive explanation of the mechanics of the Creation itself from a spiritual perspective. The complete citation was provided in endnote 3 of the chapter on "The Avatar."
63. *Lord Meher*, 4218.
64. *Lord Meher*, 4276.
65. *Lord Meher*, 4335.
66. *Lord Meher*, 4341.

MEHER BABA

67. *Lord Meher*, 4420.
68. *Lord Meher*, 4424.
69. *Lord Meher*, 4483.
70. Meher Baba, *Listen, Humanity*, narrated and edited by Don E. Stevens (New York: Harper & Row, 1971) (hereafter "*Listen, Humanity*").
71. *Lord Meher*, 4848-49.
72. *Lord Meher*, 5013.
73. *Lord Meher*, 5049.
74. *Lord Meher*, 5061.
75. *Lord Meher*, 5089.
76. *Lord Meher*, 5135.
77. *Lord Meher*, 5310.
78. *Lord Meher*, 5363.
79. *Lord Meher*, 5526.
80. *Lord Meher*, 5607.
81. *Lord Meher*, 5652.
82. *Lord Meher*, 5722.
83. *Lord Meher*, 5767.
84. *Lord Meher*, 6121.
85. *Lord Meher*, 6231.
86. *Lord Meher*, 6261.
87. *Lord Meher*, 6380.
88. *Lord Meher*, 6641.
89. *Lord Meher*, 6712.

MUHAMMAD



MUHAMMAD

Muhammad's true status as an Avatar will undoubtedly come as a shock to orthodox Muslims. Meher Baba revealed that Muhammad was an Avatar even though Muhammad Himself took pains to disclaim such status. In this regard, one needs to remember that in every advent the Avatar intentionally makes a major mistake. According to Baba, Muhammad's mistake was that He did not reveal that He was God in human form.¹ In hindsight, it is not surprising that Muhammad is an Avatar because this man of humble origins inspired one of the world's major religions which now has over one billion adherents.

Muhammad's life has been frequently recounted, although the first formal biography of Muhammad did not appear until 120 years after His death.² By 1981, there were 2713 biographies of Muhammad.³ There is some evidence that Muhammad was descended from Abraham through Abraham's son, Ishmael.⁴ The connection with Abraham is no mere coincidence because Islam more closely resembles Judaism than Christianity even though Muhammad expressed deep respect and reverence for both religions.⁵ Islam and Judaism are both monotheistic; both emphasize worship of God in His impersonal form; and both emphasize dietary restrictions, fasting, and the observance of certain holidays and rituals. There is also some evidence that Muhammad originally structured Islam as re-oriented Judaism, but due to His conflicts with various Jewish tribes He restructured Islam in a different mold.

History of Mecca

When Abraham's wife Sarah gave birth to Isaac, Abraham was concerned about the fate of Ishmael, Abraham's son with Sarah's Egyptian handmaid, Hagar. God said to Abraham: "And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation."⁶ At

MUHAMMAD

Sarah's insistence, Abraham banished Hagar and Ishmael, who wandered some forty camel days south of Canaan to a barren valley named Becca.⁷ At some point in their journey, they ran out of water, and Hagar despaired as the boy began to cry. Genesis tells us: "And God heard the voice of the lad; and the angel of God called Hagar out of heaven, and said unto her, What aileth thee, Hagar? Fear not; for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand; for I will make him a great nation. And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went, and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad drink."⁸

The well was named Zamzam. The valley of Becca, later to be called Mecca, became a halt for caravans because of the excellence of the water.⁹ Abraham visited his son Ishmael near the well Zamzam, and God showed him the exact place upon which Abraham and Ishmael were to build a sanctuary and instructed them as to how it must be built.¹⁰ The name of the sanctuary, Kaaba, means cube, and its four corners are the four points of the compass.¹¹ The most holy object in the Kaaba is a black stone, brought by an angel to Abraham from the nearby hill, where it had been preserved ever since it had reached the earth. Abraham built the black stone into the eastern corner of the Kaaba, and when the sanctuary was completed, God spoke to Abraham and instructed him to institute the rite of the Pilgrimage to Mecca (or Becca as it was then called): "[P]urify My House for those who make the round (thereof) and those who stand and those who bow and make prostration. And proclaim unto mankind the Pilgrimage. They will come unto thee on foot and on every lean camel; they will come from every deep ravine."¹² Later Abraham prayed: "Our Lord! Lo! I have settled some of my prosperity in an uncultivable valley near unto Thy holy House, our Lord! that they may establish proper worship; so incline some hearts of men that they may yearn toward them, and provide Thou them with fruits in order that they may be thankful."¹³

Although Mecca and the Kaaba continued to be places of pilgrimage, over the centuries the Kaaba was filled with idols and the well Zamzam had dried up or been filled over.¹⁴ The spiritual light and blessing which God bestowed on the Kaaba had become extin-

MUHAMMAD

guished. Once again, the time had come for the lamp of spirituality to be lit by God Himself.

Muhammad's Early Life

Muhammad was born in 570 A.D. in Mecca.¹⁵ His parents were members of the Quraish tribe, who lived in Mecca and in part made their living from trading with pilgrims to the Kaaba. Muhammad's father died before He was born. As was customary in those times, Muhammad was cared for by a wet nurse in the countryside and then returned to His mother in Mecca. His mother died soon afterwards, and He was then raised by his grandfather. Muhammad's grandfather died approximately two years later, and He was then raised by His uncle.

Little is known of Muhammad's youth, but He did develop a reputation for being honest and trustworthy. He attracted the attention of a businesswoman named Khadija, who asked Him to take charge of a trading caravan and was very satisfied with His work. Even though Muhammad was 25 and Khadija was 40, she proposed marriage to Him. Despite their age difference, the marriage was a success in every way except for the fact that their children died young and none reached the age of forty.

Although Islam strictly forbids drawing a likeness of Muhammad or depicting Him in films, physical descriptions have been preserved.¹⁶ He was a man of medium stature with thick black hair and beard. Most of the early histories describe His eyes as black; His nose was aquiline, and His mouth was wide and finely shaped. There was a light in His face and eyes even before He assumed his role as Rasool (Prophet).

The Revelations Begin

When Muhammad was 40 years old, He felt strong urges to spend time in solitude in the countryside surrounding Mecca. At this time, He experienced the first of the revelations which He

MUHAMMAD

received from time to time for the rest of His life. A vision came to Him, informed Him that He was the Messenger of God, and ordered Him to "recite" or "read." Muhammad doubted His sanity and the authenticity of the vision, but His wife and others reassured Him that His experiences were valid. He also received a visitation from the Archangel Gabriel, who "delivered" most of the revelations during Muhammad's life. Gabriel showed Muhammad how to cleanse Himself before prayer and how to pray. The ritual cleansing and the prayer became two of the pillars of Islam.

According to Baba, Muhammad's "revelations" and his running dialogues with the Archangel Gabriel were play acted. As the Avatar, Muhammad had infinite knowledge. However, for purposes of His teaching, He pretended to receive revelations or messages from Gabriel. The Arab tribes with whom he had contact would never have accepted His statement that He was God in human form, and Islam would never have flourished after He dropped His body. Baba explained Muhammad's dialogues with Gabriel as follows:

The masters have sometimes followed external disciplines including prayers and have set an example of humility and readiness to learn from others. Thus Mohammed played the role of being taught by Gabriel. He thereby achieved two things. Firstly, he gave to the world an example of readiness to learn from others; and secondly, he awakened the teacher in Gabriel.¹⁷

The Early Days of Islam

Muhammad's early converts were His wife, Khadija, His uncle's son, Ali, a former slave named Zaid who had been freed and then adopted by Muhammad, and a man named Abu Bekr, who became Muhammad's "right hand man" in Islam. Abu Bekr was the chief disciple in Muhammad's first circle of disciples, the same role played by Peter in the advent of Jesus.¹⁸ Although the early group of followers provided a basis of support for Muhammad, the new religion did not exactly take Mecca by storm. At the beginning of His mission,

MUHAMMAD

the Quraish tolerated Muhammad because they perceived Him as non-threatening or as somewhat unbalanced. However, Muhammad's initial lack of offensiveness soon changed.

The Avatar always challenges the status quo and works to awaken humanity from its delusions about the meaning of life. He inevitably clashes with the religious orthodoxy of His day and particularly with the community into which He is born. Muhammad was no exception. He preached monotheism passionately and in the process insulted the idolatry of the Quraish. He added insult to injury by stating that the ancestors of the Quraish were in hell because of their idol-worship.¹⁹ He deliberately pushed the Quraish over the line to generate opposition.

The Quraish responded in several ways. They tried to get Muhammad's uncle to persuade Muhammad to change His ways, and then they tried to buy off Muhammad with promises of wealth and privilege. When these approaches failed, the Quraish resorted to persecution of the new converts and attacks on Muhammad Himself. The Quraish assaulted the new converts, boycotted them, quarantined them, tortured them, and imprisoned them. The new Muslims who had no family support in Mecca were particularly vulnerable and were treated as pariahs. The Quraish also made threats on Muhammad's life and put thorns in His doorway

Muhammad took compassion on the persecuted Muslims and urged them to flee to Abyssinia. Approximately 80 Muslims eventually found their way to Abyssinia in small groups. The Quraish were incensed at this emigration and also fearful that the new converts would build an even larger base in a foreign country. They sent a delegation to the Negus, the political head of Abyssinia and a Christian, to entreat him to turn over the Muslims to them. However, the Negus was persuaded that the Muslims were sincere in their faith and that the new religion was respectful of Christianity, and the Negus therefore refused to turn the Muslims over to the Quraish. ·

In the year 619 A.D., Khadija died. As Muhammad's devoted wife and then devoted disciple, she occupies a position of great

MUHAMMAD

respect in Islam. Muhammad's uncle also died shortly thereafter. Although He did not convert to Islam, he staunchly defended Muhammad within the Quraish community.

Muhammad remarried soon after Khadija's death. Indeed, He married several times more during his life. Of the last four Avatars, two did not marry and one (Buddha) renounced family life after marrying and fathering a child. The Avatars discussed in this book who lived before Buddha were married. Obviously there is no one pattern of life for Avatars, nor is there one rule about marriage. In a talk given in the 1930s, Meher Baba discussed marriage and the Avatars:

Every Avatar adopts a particular aspect of His time. He adapts and embodies His mode of working according to the attitudes of the people most prevalent.

The outstanding weakness that marked the attitude of the people in the time of Jesus was pomp, cruelty and pride; and to do away with that and set an example, He based His working or mode of life on simplicity, humility and suffering. And so there was no necessity for Him to marry

In the time of Mahomet lust dominated in the minds of men, so much so that nearly every man used to have intercourse with hundreds of women. Mahomet, marking this point, made it lawful for every follower of His to have only a certain number of wives and Himself married seven. Had He, like Jesus, not married then it would have been deemed essential to make it lawful for His followers to remain unmarried, but nobody in that case would have followed Him. It would have been worse than useless to come to nil from numerous wives so He fixed the number from scores to seven.

The people were too much steeped in materialism in the age of Buddha, therefore, stressing the nothingness of Maya, He set an example of true

MUHAMMAD

renunciation, and left His wife and children. He founded His system on renunciation and *sanyas*.²⁰

Muhammad's Unveiling

When Muhammad was asleep one night, He was awakened by Gabriel, who took Muhammad by the arm and led Him to a white beast known as a Buraq, which was a cross between a mule and an ass with wings at his sides. The Prophet mounted Buraq and flew to Jerusalem, accompanied by Gabriel. They were met there by a company of other Prophets, including Abraham, Moses, Jesus and others. They prayed together at the site of the Temple.

Muhammad mounted Buraq again and, accompanied by Gabriel, passed through the seven heavens. He saw a variety of Prophets in their celestial form. Muhammad was escorted to the "Lote Tree of the Uttermost End," which marks the end of the knowledge of every knower. Beyond the Lote Tree is a mystery, known only to God. Muhammad saw Gabriel in his heavenly splendor, and then Muhammad saw God, from whom His eye did not waver. Upon seeing God, Muhammad said: "I take refuge in the Light of Thy Countenance."²¹ Muhammad and Gabriel descended back through the seven heavens to Jerusalem, and then they returned to Mecca.

In the light of Meher Baba's teachings, we can speculate as to the significance of the story of Muhammad's journey on Buraq. The experience probably represented the completion of His unveiling as the Avatar. Meher Baba and his biographers have provided detailed explanations of this lengthy and painful process, which is effected by Perfect Masters. Meher Baba did not specifically identify any of the Perfect Masters who unveiled Muhammad. Murshida Duce writes that "Muhammad's Master was presumably a Jewish rabbi, since his unveiling took place at the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem."²²

Muhammad did not merely "see" God, but He became God. His consciousness was merged with God's consciousness. The seven

MUHAMMAD

heavens referred to by Muhammad undoubtedly referred to the seven planes of consciousness. As the Avatar, Muhammad had full consciousness of all seven planes, and could readily be characterized as traveling through the seven planes and back to the gross plane of consciousness. Moreover, each Avatar stations himself on a particular plane for purposes of his work or His Mission in the world. Muhammad stationed Himself on the seventh plane.²³ The seventh plane is the plane of Reality, the goal of life beyond the illusion of the gross world. Muhammad's being stationed on the seventh plane is entirely consistent with His lifelong emphasis on absolute faith in God.

One should emphasize that Muhammad's characterization of His relationship with Gabriel and the ride on the Buraq, as opposed to the description that Meher Baba has provided, was not done out of fear for His personal safety or even to preserve His own psychological comfort. The Avatar repeatedly demonstrates His fearlessness, whether it is Jesus' aggressive behavior causing his crucifixion, Krishna's leading Arjuna's chariot on the field of battle, Rama leading an army against Ravana, or Muhammad Himself putting on his armor to do battle against the Quraish. The Avatar never acts out of fear; His only concern is for His work. The Arabs of Muhammad's time would not have accepted a claim that Muhammad was the Avatar, and His mission would not have been accomplished.

The Flight to Medina

After His unveiling as the Avatar, Muhammad's circumstances in Mecca became increasingly bleak. His wife and uncle were dead, and His followers had either fled to Abyssinia or were being persecuted in Mecca. The Quraish were hostile to the new religion. Muhammad realized that He and his followers would need to emigrate from Mecca to a more hospitable location. He made a visit to the town of Taif, an oasis fifty miles east of Mecca. There He spoke with the leaders of the town, who ridiculed Him and His message. The Prophet was stoned and chased until He took refuge in a vineyard.²⁴

MUHAMMAD

Although the stoning of Muhammad appears to have escaped great emphasis by the biographers, Baba mentioned it more than once in His description of His life as Muhammad. Baba said: "Jesus was crucified and Muhammad was stoned and had to flee [Mecca]. Such actions on the part of Perfect Ones are not understood by the people."²⁵ On another occasion, Baba commented on the experience of bliss that accompanied the suffering of the Avatars and the Perfect Masters: "It was due to the constant experiencing of the infinite divine Bliss that the God-men could bear tremendous sufferings given by the ignorant masses for whose salvation they worked. While Jesus was being crucified, while the Prophet Kazaria was being cut in halves, while Mahomet was being stoned, and while Mansoor was being hanged, these God-men were enjoying the supreme Bliss spiritually without a moment's break, though they were physically undergoing unbearable sufferings and ordeals."²⁶ The Perfect Ones are not only misunderstood but also physically assaulted and tormented.

Muhammad frequently preached the new religion to the pilgrims who came to Mecca. He converted several pilgrims from the city of Yathrib, to the north of Mecca. These pilgrims returned to Yathrib and converted others to the new religion. By the next pilgrimage season, approximately 75 Muslims from Yathrib came to Mecca and met with Muhammad. By this time, Muhammad had received a revelation that God permitted the Muslims to fight in their own defense against those who persecuted them. The centuries-old command of "turning the other cheek" had been modified. Muhammad promised to live among the Yathrib Muslims and to transfer His loyalty to them if they in turn would promise to protect Him and any new immigrants from Mecca. They vowed to protect Muhammad with their weapons if necessary. The Yathrib pilgrims then returned home.

Muhammad promptly instructed the Meccan Muslims to emigrate to Yathrib. Mecca soon became a partial ghost-town. All the Muslims except Muhammad, Ali and Abu Bekr moved to Yathrib, where they were generally well-received and accommodated by their fellow Muslims. The Quraish were plunged into deep anxiety.

MUHAMMAD

Muhammad had been proselytizing for approximately twelve years, and the Quraish could foresee a complete revolution. Muhammad was uniting people through the bonds of religion, and the loyalty to Islam cut across traditional tribal loyalty that comprised the social fabric of Arabia. More particularly, the Quraish worried that Muhammad and the Muslims would unite other tribes against them and would wage war on the Quraish. Something had to be done, so the Quraish decided to murder Muhammad.

Muhammad learned of the plot to kill Him and prepared for it. He asked Ali to lie down in His (Muhammad's) cloak. When the assassins assembled outside Muhammad's house God took away their sight and Muhammad was able to escape. The assassins did not discover their mistake until the next morning. In the meantime, Muhammad and Abu Bekr took refuge in a cave about three miles south of Mecca. The Quraish wanted to get their hands on Muhammad and offered a reward of a hundred camels for anyone who could bring Muhammad back to Mecca. Quraish horsemen were already riding to Yathrib on the assumption that Muhammad was headed there.

On the third day, a pair of doves warned Muhammad and Abu Bekr that men were approaching the cave. The voices grew close and then agreed that there was no need to enter the cave because no one could possibly be there. When the sound of the voices retreated far away, Muhammad and Abu Bekr went to the mouth of the cave. They found there an acacia tree which had not been there in the morning, a spider web between the tree and the wall of the cave, and the nest of the doves. These "messengers" from God confirmed Muhammad's earlier statement to Abu Bekr that God was with them. Later Abu Bekr's son brought camels and a guide for the journey to Yathrib.

This journey to Yathrib was Muhammad's Hijrah, the cutting off of all ties to home for the sake of God. Each Avatar enacts some version of the Hijrah. For Meher Baba, it was the New Life. For Jesus, it was the crucifixion and the life after the crucifixion, discussed in the next chapter. For Buddha, it was His renunciation of the perfect life He enjoyed as Siddhartha Gautama. As Meher Baba reminds us repeatedly, the prize of God can only be won by those who are will-

MUHAMMAD

ing to live for God and to die for God. The Avatar always sets a perfect example of such a life.

Muhammad and Abu Bekr arrived on the outskirts of Yathrib on June 28, 622. The Muslims were overjoyed at His arrival. A few days later, Muhammad chose a place to live in Yathrib. The few remaining Muslims in Mecca, including Ali, soon joined their spiritual companions in Yathrib.

The Muslim Community Flourishes in Medina (Yathrib)

A new chapter began in Muhammad's life and mission. He was 52 years old, and it had been 12 years since His first revelation. He would make Yathrib His home for the 10 years remaining in His life. Yathrib soon became known as Medina, which translates from the Arabic as "the city." Muhammad had the traditional Avataric habit of using nicknames to refer to people. He called the Yathrib Muslims the "Helpers" and the Mecca Muslims the "Emigrants." True to their name, the Helpers rendered great assistance to the Emigrants, who had few possessions and had truly made a journey of faith and trust.

For twelve years, Muhammad had been in conflict with the Qnraish. The Avatar always receives serious opposition from the community into which He is born. Meher Baba observed: "It is true that a prophet is never recognized and revered in his own time and by his own people. This has been true since ages past. It happens in every Avataric period."²⁷ One of Meher Baba's close disciples elaborated on this principle:

The law creates opposition in the community of his birth. The Avatar gains ascendance over such opposition. It is because of His extreme compassion for the fallen community that he triumphs over the forces of opposition by trying to bring the spiritual good to the community. It is because of the law that the community turns a deaf ear to the silent voice of the Avatar. For such an act of denial, animosity and aggression against the personality of the Avatar, the community

MUHAMMAD

becomes a subject of retribution and suffering by being humiliated and oppressed by posterity.²⁸

The hostility of the Quraish toward Muhammad followed the established pattern. The opposition did not end with Muhammad's Hijrah.

Muhammad and the Muslims set about building the world's first mosque, a project that took a year. The mosque had attached rooms to accommodate Muhammad and His family. The agreement between the Helpers and the Emigrants provided some protection for Emigrants within the Arab tribes. However, there were also Jewish tribes within Medina with whom there needed to be some accommodation.

Muhammad originally hoped to attract Jewish followers. The Islam that He introduced to the world was essentially Judaism streamlined and retailored for the Arabian peninsula at that time. Islam is passionately monotheistic and has absolute respect for the Jewish prophets. As discussed above, Muhammad traces His own lineage to Abraham through Ishmael. When the Muslims first began their ritual prayers, they prayed to Jerusalem, and Muhammad's night flight by Buraq took Him to Jerusalem.

Muhammad assumed the role of statesman and negotiated a contract between the Muslims and the Jews. The covenant provided that the Jews would be permitted to pursue their own religion but that the entire Medina community, both Muslims and Jews, might be considered one tribe vis-a-vis the outside world. In other words, the covenant bound the Muslims and the Jews to mutual respect, peace and loyalty without making the other group the object of tribal warfare and retaliation. The Muslims experienced a fairly rapid rate of conversions by the pagan Arab tribes but relatively few conversions of Jews. In addition, tension developed between the Muslims and Jews which in time only got worse.

The Formation of Shariat and the Current Need to Reform It

Muhammad oversaw the implementation of various ritual observances as the new religion evolved. Because of the increasing tension

MUHAMMAD

with the Jews, Muhammad instructed the Muslims to pray to Mecca. He also made Friday a special day, although it did not have the complete prohibition against working as did the Jewish sabbath. Muhammad further adopted the use of the muezzin, the man who calls Muslims to prayer. He also incorporated Ramadan, a month of fasting, into Islam. When asked why Muhammad ordered Ramadan, Baba "replied that the Prophet Muhammad originally prescribed this fast as a social measure in Arabia so that the rich people would become more aware of the hunger of the very poor people. Baba said it was never intended to be carried on over the centuries and in other countries as a religious dictum."²⁹

The observance of external religious rituals is known in Islam as "shariat." In all religions, the rigid adherence to rituals throughout centuries usually causes the followers of that religion to lose the inner meaning and spirit of the religion and to give false importance to the rituals. According to Baba, this is now the case with all religions and particularly with the *shariat* of Islam:

There are two points among the Muslims which must be carefully noted. As a rule, before believing in a saintly personality, they insist on proof of his saintliness by way of miracles. For them shariat (outward religious ceremonies) is the be all and end all of everything, the foundation of their faith. Again, they regard it as impossible for a human being to be God.

Now before I draw my divine sword, if we are to prepare these Muslims to overcome these obstacles, we must do it with great care and tact. But while doing it, you must not confirm shariat. About man becoming God, you have to explain matters with great care, since this prejudice is again due to ignorance.

You must explain that Truth is beyond shariat. Shariat is good to begin with, but if you mark it carefully, those who insist on fulfilling the requirements of shariat usually themselves disregard its

MUHAMMAD

principles and take up vices of various sorts. The time has come to break the bindings of shariat and when I unsheathe my sword, these bindings will break. Before that, you have to work tactfully, so that you yourselves do not confirm shariat.³⁰

We have here a perfect example of one Avatar carrying forward the work of a previous Avatar. Baba said: "Avatar's work goes on forever."³¹ We know from Meher Baba's discussion of the Avatar's work and of previous Avatars, that each Avatar's work is complete only as far as it can go at the particular time and place in which the Avatar lives and works. Muhammad, for reasons discussed above, did not reveal that He was the Avatar. The shariat given by Muhammad was appropriate to that time and place but must now be destroyed by God's divine sword in this new age.

Baba further clarified that the shariat of Islam was not intended by God to be a rigid set of commandments forever: "It is not necessary to convert the instructions of the Prophet into inflexible and eternal rules of discipline. In the context in which they were given they served both material and spiritual purpose. They cannot be regarded as inescapable or necessary in all times and climes. The same thing applies to any other disciplines given by other seers or masters."³²

The religions introduced by the Avatars become misapplied and misinterpreted with the passage of time, and they become excuses for intolerance toward other religions. Baba commented:

For the Parsees believe in and worship Zoroaster, their beloved Prophet, and do not believe in any other of the Prophets of other religions, such as Jesus, Mohammed and other great Avatars. Not only this, they claim Zoroaster was the only Prophet, that he was the only one especially chosen and sent by the Almighty, and so on, calling non-believers *Durwands*, etc. As the Mohammedans call unbelievers *Kafirs*, and the Christians, speaking of their Lord Jesus, call unbelievers heathens.

MUHAMMAD

Alas! What idea do these Zoroastrians, Christians, Mohammedans have of their great Prophets - what they were and what they taught! They have a superficial belief that they were "Messengers of the highest order." How little do they know that these great Avatars were "God Incarnates" - nay, fully "awake and conscious" Gods!³³

The Battle Of Bedr

Muhammad led the Muslims in raiding parties, mostly directed against Quraish trading caravans. In so doing, He was organizing the Arabs in a fundamentally new way, according to Islam rather than according to tribal loyalties. Thus Quraish Muslims were actually pitted against their own tribe in carrying out these raiding parties. The raids caused Muhammad to intensify His own battles against the Quraish along with His own work to unite and develop the new Muslim community in Medina.

Muhammad was determined to raid the Quraish caravan as it returned from Syria, and He set out with 314 men from Medina to Bedr, an oasis at which the caravan would stop for water, to the southwest of Medina. The Quraish dispatched warriors from Mecca when they learned of the plan. Several clans of the Quraish army turned back to Mecca, however, when they found the thought of doing battle against their own tribesmen to be intolerable. The Muslims were triumphant in the battle of Bedr, and it signified the first great military victory in Islam. For the faithful, it was a test of loyalty to God and His Prophet, and they were rewarded with either Paradise (for those slain in the battle) or the joy of victory over the Quraish.

In Medina, the Jews and the so-called "hypocrites" (those who pretended to be Muslims but were not sincere) did not share the joy of victory. The Jews began to feel that the covenant with Muhammad was not binding on them, and a Jewish tribe told Muhammad that, if they made war against Muhammad, they would defeat the Prophet. An incident later occurred in which a Muslim killed a Jew

MUHAMMAD

and another Jew retaliated by killing the Muslim. This was the type of dispute which the covenant required should be mediated by Muhammad, but the Jews refused to submit the dispute to Muhammad. They withdrew into their fortified sector of Medina, but the Muslims laid siege to the Jewish sector and ultimately the Jews surrendered. As punishment for their breach of the covenant and their disloyalty, Muhammad banished them from Medina, and they were forced to abandon many of their valuable possessions.

Muhammad's conflict with Jews was political, not religious. Under the terms of the covenant, the Jews were free to convert to Islam but could also retain their own religion. The Jewish tribe was banished because of its unwillingness to respect Muhammad as the political head of Medina. Muhammad had plainly abandoned the non-violent approach used by Jesus. The willingness to fight was an integral part of Islam, and Muhammad and the Muslims were ready to use force where statesmanship failed.

The Battle of Uhud

The Quraish felt that the rise of the Muslims was a threat to their livelihood as well as their political stability, and they sent an army against the Muslims. Muhammad set out to Uhud, to the north of Medina, with approximately 1,000 men to confront the Quraish army. Unfortunately, 300 "hypocrites" abandoned the battle. The remaining 700 men failed to follow Muhammad's battle instructions, and the Quraish won the battle. Muhammad was struck by a stone in the face which knocked out some teeth and he was also cut by a sword. The loss only strengthened Muhammad's resolve, and He subsequently conducted other raiding parties against the Quraish.

In the meantime, tension developed between another Jewish tribe and the Muslims. After Muhammad successfully avoided a plot by some Jews to kill Him, He again laid siege against the offending Jewish tribe and banished them. The Muslims were able to claim land and valuable possessions from the Jews who were banished. Muhammad took no pleasure in the conflict between Jews and Muslims because He always hoped that the covenant would provide

MUHAMMAD

a basis for peaceful coexistence. Indeed, even after the banishment of the second Jewish tribe from Medina, Muhammad severely rebuked a Muslim who had assaulted a Jew because of a religious disagreement. Muhammad's message to the Muslim was that both the Jewish messengers and His own message were equal because they had come from the same God.³⁴

Muhammad's Humanity

Muhammad's biographers (or at least the biographers writing in English) have a tendency either to make Muhammad too human, by understandably ignoring His consciousness as the Avatar, or making Muhammad too pious, as if He were nothing more than a channel for the revelations. To the contrary, the Avatar is intensely human, full of fun and humor as well as seriousness.

Baba related the following humorous incident in the life of the Prophet: "Mohammed was very fond of eating dates. One day a mother brought her child to Him complaining that her child ate a lot of dates every day and so suffered from dysentery. The child refused to obey his parents and one day told them that he would not eat dates only if Mohammed told him not to do so. Mohammed could not tell the child not to eat dates when He Himself was very fond of dates and ate a lot of them. He told the mother and child to come back after a few days. Meanwhile, Prophet Mohammed left off eating dates and when the mother brought the child back after a few days, He told the child not to eat dates. The child obeyed at once."³⁵

Another story told by Meher Baba about Muhammad also illustrates His sense of humor. "It is said that once *Rasool-e-Khuda*, the Messenger of God, felt indisposed, and someone suggested that it was due to an evil eye and that he should sleep on a pillow with an open knife underneath it. He did so, and thereafter declared himself to be all right. Call it ordinary or call it divine; it was Prophet Muhammad's sense of humor."³⁶

After the battle of Uhud, Muhammad took another force to Bedr but the Quraish failed to show up and lost esteem among the Arabs. However, the Quraish mobilized a force of approximately 10,000

MUHAMMAD

and marched on Medina itself. During this time, certain of the hypocrites and another Jewish tribe allied themselves with the Quraish in the hope of defeating the Muslims. Muhammad led the Muslims in building a trench outside Medina that completely perplexed the Quraish. They drove their animals to the trench and stopped. The Quraish and the Muslims exchanged threats and insults across the trench for approximately one month, but the Quraish finally gave up and went back to Mecca. Muhammad's strategy had been victorious with minimal fighting.

Once again, a Jewish tribe had violated the covenant and essentially committed treason against the Muslim community in Medina. Muhammad in turn laid siege against that tribe, and they surrendered. The Arab allies of this particular Jewish tribe pleaded for mercy, but Muhammad deferred to the judgment of a man who had been wounded in the battle of the trench. That man was dying because the wound had turned septic, and he was not inclined to be merciful. He imposed a sentence of death upon the Jewish men and slavery for their women and children. Muhammad allowed the sentence to be carried out.

Muhammad praised God that he had not had sex with a woman prior to his marriage to Khadija.³⁷ Although he sanctioned polygamy, he did not approve of extramarital sex.³⁸ In this regard, Muhammad's views on sexuality are consistent with all the Avatars. The author's research has uncovered no instances of extramarital sexuality by the Avatars. Although Muhammad's acceptance of polygamy may seem extreme, it was part of a consistent Avataric pattern to raise the status of women, work the Avatar does in every advent. The message to Muslim men was clear that, although Islam does not restrict them to one woman, it forbids extra-marital sex and expects men to marry, and be responsible for, the women with whom they choose to be physically involved.

The Attempted Pilgrimage to Mecca and the Truce of Hudaibiya

In the early part of the year 628, Muhammad dreamed that He had performed the pilgrimage to Mecca unopposed. He announced

MUHAMMAD

His intention of making the pilgrimage and asked His followers to join Him. Many of the Medina Muslims, from 700-1400 in number, made the pilgrimage with Him. Muhammad dressed in the conventional garb of a pilgrim and brought with Him 70 camels to be sacrificed. Those who accompanied Muhammad were permitted no weapons other than swords. The followers were a true group of pilgrims and not an army. Not only could they not have vanquished the Quraish using only swords, but they made themselves vulnerable to an all-out Quraish attack if the Quraish decided to be rid of the Muslims and Muhammad once and for all. The pilgrimage was a test of faith in God and loyalty to his Messenger.

Before they reached Mecca, a messenger warned the pilgrims that they would not be able to enter Mecca and that the Quraish had sent horsemen to block their progress. Muhammad then took the pilgrims on a detour to Hudaibiya, some eight miles outside of Mecca. From there He conducted negotiations by messengers with the Quraish, who were concerned that Muhammad had come to fight and wanted to let him know that they would oppose Him with force. Muhammad assured one messenger from Mecca that He only wanted to pay His respect to the Kaaba as the House of God. That messenger reported Muhammad's message together with his observation that Muhammad commanded more veneration and loyalty than any person he had ever seen.

Muhammad sent a messenger of His own to Mecca, but when He did not return quickly, a great deal of anxiety set in among the pilgrims. In fact, they were extremely vulnerable to a Quraish attack and there was reason to fear for their lives. Muhammad then asked the pilgrims to pledge their allegiance to Him, and one-by-one they filed by Him to take His hand and make their pledge. Only one of the pilgrims failed to make the pledge.

At various points in Muhammad's mission, Muslims needed to commit themselves in faith and loyalty. Muhammad relied on the pledge of loyalty from the men of Yathrib in emigrating there. The Battle of Bedr required a commitment of faith, as did the pledge at Hudaibiya. That pledge was immediately rewarded when a messenger arrived from Mecca to make a truce with the Muslims.

MUHAMMAD

Muhammad agreed with this messenger as follows: (1) There would be a peace of 10 years in which both sides could move about in safety. (2) If anyone from Mecca went over to Muhammad, the Muslims would be obliged to send him back. If anyone from the Muslims went to Mecca, he would not be forced to return to Medina. (3) Any tribes could make an allegiance with either Muhammad or the Quraish. If they did so, such tribes would be covered by the 10-year truce. (4) The Muslims would return to Medina, but they could make a pilgrimage to Mecca the next year for three days.

The Muslims were plunged into a profound depression after the conclusion of the truce. The ten years of peace would allow the Quraish the chance to renew their caravan trade to its former level of prosperity. Moreover, the terms seemed one-sided and humiliating. Muhammad counseled patience. The Muslims sacrificed their camels and shaved their heads - pilgrimage rituals - without going to Mecca, and they returned to Medina.

The truce had the effect of allowing the pagans to mingle with the Muslims, and many of the pagans converted to Islam. Also, when women emigrated from Mecca, Muhammad declared that the Hudaibiya truce did not pertain to women. Moreover, some young Meccans who sympathized with Muhammad emigrated to a nearby town instead of Medina because they did not want to be returned to Mecca. They supported themselves by raiding Quraish caravans, and the Quraish then begged Muhammad to take them into the Muslim family so that they would be bound by the terms of the truce.

Muhammad and a Muslim army laid siege to Kheibar, a Jewish settlement north of Medina. The siege was successful, and it netted Muhammad weapons, clothing, food and other spoils of war. By the terms of the truce, the Jews of Kheibar could continue to cultivate their lands if they paid half the annual produce to the Muslims. When the fighting was over, a Jewish woman named Zainab invited Muhammad to dinner, at which she served Him roast lamb in which she had inserted a dose of poison. Muhammad spat it out before swallowing it, saying that He believed it was poisoned. Zainab admitted the accusation, saying that she had believed He would know about the poison if He were a true prophet. On his

MUHAMMAD

deathbed, Muhammad attributed the agonies of His last illness to the poison.

Muhammad sent a messenger to the Negus of Abyssinia to facilitate the return of the Muslims who had emigrated there. Many accepted the invitation, including Ali's brother. Muhammad married one of the women who had been widowed in Abyssinia.

The Next Pilgrimage to Mecca

In February 629, Muhammad set out to make the lesser pilgrimage with 1,200 to 2,000 Muslims. Under the terms of the Hudaibiya agreement, the Quraish vacated Mecca to permit entry by the Muslims. Muhammad went immediately to the Kaaba, touched the black stone and made the seven circumambulations of the temple.

Although the Quraish reminded Muhammad to leave when his three days in Mecca were over, they were profoundly impressed by the Muslim pilgrimage. Not only had Muhammad changed the Qibla (the direction of prayer) to Mecca from Jerusalem, but He continued to honor the tradition of pilgrimages to Mecca and continued to hold the Kaaba in veneration. Moreover, Muhammad, like all Avatars, possessed a personal magnetism that cannot be put into words. The Meccans witnessed this first hand when they saw Muhammad as not just a pilgrim but a dynamic leader who commanded whole-hearted faith and loyalty from His followers.

When Muhammad sent a messenger to one of the princes in Syria, one of the local tribes killed the messenger on his return trip. Muhammad sent an army of some 3,000 to avenge the killing, but the army was defeated at the Battle of Mota. Muhammad's adopted son, Zaid, was killed in the battle. Although the battle ended in defeat, Muhammad declared that those who had been killed were genuine martyrs.

The Quraish had made a treaty with one tribe, and Muhammad had made a treaty with another tribe. Under the terms of the Hudaibiya truce, those tribes were folded into the larger truce and

MUHAMMAD

came under its terms. A conflict broke out between the two tribes that had thus come under the terms of the truce, and a man was killed. One account has it that Quraish themselves participated in the fighting. In any event, Muhammad considered the truce to have been broken.

Abu Sofian, a Quraish leader and the father of one of Muhammad's wives, was immediately concerned and came to Medina to appeal to Muhammad to extend the truce. Muhammad refused. When Abu Sofian left Medina, Muhammad set out for Mecca on January 1, 630 with a force of 10,000 men. Muhammad's uncle Abbas and Abu Sofian encountered Muhammad's expedition before it reached Mecca to negotiate a peaceful surrender of Mecca. In this meeting, Abu Sofian converted to Islam by making the mandatory testimony that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is the Messenger of God. Muhammad then laid down terms by which the people of Mecca could surrender without fear of being killed.

Muhammad Conquers Mecca and Smashes the Idols in the Kaaba

Muhammad's force duly occupied Mecca, and Muhammad went to the Kaaba, where He ordered the idols in and around the Kaaba to be smashed and burned. He then entered the Kaaba and ordered that all the paintings be erased except those depicting Jesus and Mary. He then addressed the people of Mecca, who had gathered to swear allegiance to Him. Muhammad then forgave his former enemies. The Avatar who had left Mecca as a target of Quraish wrath and ridicule and an assassination attempt had returned to Mecca as a victorious hero. He had smashed and burned the pagan idols, and the Quraish had sworn their allegiance to God and His Messenger.

Many of the tribes around Mecca smashed their idols and converted to Islam when they learned of Muhammad's conquest of Mecca. One tribe in particular wanted to fight and mobilized an army against the Muslims. The Muslims opposed the warring tribe with their forces and, after some difficulty, conquered the opposition and divided the spoils of war under Muhammad's direction.

MUHAMMAD

Muhammad visited Mecca again and then returned in triumph to Medina. He left a governor in Mecca and a teacher to instruct them in the ways of Islam.

Muhammad's Last Years

At the time of the next pilgrimage season, Muhammad again went to Mecca and was joined by some pagans. However, when the pilgrims were gathered, Muhammad asked Ali to read out a declaration to the effect that pagans would be allowed a period of four months of grace, after which they could be attacked and killed. A second condition of the declaration is that, in the future, only Muslims would be eligible to make the pilgrimage to Mecca. The new orders did not apply to Jews and Christians, who were not considered pagans but instead were considered monotheists and "people of the Book."

The revelation that pagans would be killed struck fear into the heart of the tribes that had not embraced Islam. In the year 631, there were numerous delegations to Medina in which the Arab tribes made peace with Muhammad and converted to Islam. As discussed above, Muhammad required a new convert only to recite: "There is no god but God, and Muhammad is the Messenger of God." Upon making the testimonial, the new convert was welcomed into the Muslim family.

On one occasion, two men came to assassinate Muhammad, but they lost their nerve. Another man asked Muhammad to swear an oath that He really was the Messenger of God, and Muhammad did so. That man then returned home and converted his entire tribe to Islam.

Muhammad regarded Jews and Christians as fellow believers. He did not feel that Jews and Christians should be compelled to change their religion if they desired to hold fast to their own faith. Jews and Christians would be obliged to pay the poll tax and to submit to the political governance of the local community. Muhammad also introduced the new custom that disputes would be resolved not according to tribal custom but by Muslim law.

MUHAMMAD

Muhammad made His final pilgrimage to Mecca in 632. He instructed the people in many practices of Islam. In finishing, He said: "Have I not told you what to do and completed my mission?" The men replied: "Yes, by God, you have." Muhammad then said: "O God, bear witness."³⁹ This dialogue is reminiscent of Meher Baba's comments that His work was completed 100% to His satisfaction.

Muhammad spent the final months in His life in Medina, spending time with His wives and with His favorite grandsons, Hasan and Husein. In June 632, He became ill and word of His illness spread through the Muslim community. "When the Prophet was about to pass on, it is said that 144,000 companions (ashabs) gathered in Medina to be witnesses at his death."⁴⁰ Muhammad died at home in the arms of His favorite wife, Aisha. His death was probably caused by pneumonia. His last words were: "The most Exalted Companion is of Paradise."⁴¹

After Muhammad's death, the Muslims conquered a large portion of the Northern Hemisphere. However, during that time, a schism formed within the Muslim community which exists even to this day. After five years of civil war, Muhammad's cousin, Ali, was assassinated in 661. "It is a fact that, during the childhood of his grandsons, Hassan and Hussain, the Prophet predicted the Moharram [martyrdom] 'Karbala' to his daughter Fatima, the mother of martyrs."⁴² Muhammad's prediction came to pass. "Karbala was the famous battle-ground in Iraq (681 A.D.), where Prophet Muhammad's grandson, Husain (Ali's son), and Muhammad's great grandsons, Ali Akbar and Ali Asghar (Husain's sons), and other Shi'ahs were killed and where Husain was buried."⁴³ Nevertheless, Meher Baba said: "Muhammad's greatness is in Karbala, not in Kaaba."⁴⁴ Meher Baba even referred to Meherabad as "Karbala" at one point in time when winds and violent dust storms were raging in Meherabad, blowing off the tin sheet roofs on many of the structures there.⁴⁵ The greatness of God lies in his giving the inspiration and courage to his lovers (including his own relatives) to give their lives for God, who can think of this process as part of his sense of humor because for God, death does not exist.

MUHAMMAD

Meher Baba and Muhammad

Meher Baba and Muhammad may appear to have little in common. On closer inspection, their similarities come into focus. Both had Avataric charisma, and those who came into contact with them were drawn magnetically to them. Both revealed the Truth of God for those who will listen. Both had the impeccable Avataric character: honesty, sweetness, good cheer, buoyant optimism and certainty as to the meaning of life.

Perhaps it is more difficult to reconcile the differences in the teachings of the two Avatars than it is to reconcile differences in their personalities. Of course, for all advents of the Avatar - and Baba and Muhammad are no exception - God is the source of life and the goal of life. They each have different ways of packaging that message, but it all boils down to "God is, and there is only one God."

Perhaps the most striking difference in their teachings is that of reincarnation. Meher Baba, of course, clearly stated that the soul reincarnates millions of times while Muhammad never mentioned the existence of more than one life. Clearly Muhammad determined that the message of reincarnation was not appropriate for seventh century Arabs, and just as clearly Baba determined that the time is appropriate to be explicit on this subject. From a metaphysical perspective, there is an even more refined reconciliation of the two teachings. As Baba explained, from an Avataric perspective, there is no contradiction in the approaches of these various Avatars:

The real goal of life is not death of the ego, but of the mind! Therefore when Muhammad or Zarathustra or Jesus talked of being born once or dying once, they meant *the death of the mind*. Mind is born from the very beginning, even before the stone state. This birth is once, and also the death of the mind takes place only once.

When the mind dies, the false ego is transformed into Reality. Real Ego is never born and never dies. Ego is always real but due to the mind, it feels and acts as limited and false "I."

MUHAMMAD

Now mind goes on taking bodies according to its good and bad impressions. This taking and leaving the body is not the death either of the mind or the ego. After physical death the mind remains with its impressions. It is the impressions which make the mind take bodies, in order that the impressions might be wiped out. Consequently, the mind takes bodies according to the impressions, and the ego witnesses this. When one body is discarded, another comes up and forms, though there is a certain amount of time lag between the giving up of one body and taking up another.⁴⁶

Muhammad re-sanctified the Kaaba and the pilgrimage to Mecca. He smashed and burned the idols and declared that idolaters may not make the pilgrimage. He himself enacted the role of the pilgrim. Thus Mecca has been the most recent (certainly not the only) place of pilgrimage for seekers of God. Similarly, Meher Baba established Meherabad, Myrtle Beach, and Avatar's Abode in Australia as places of pilgrimage in this advent. One would expect a transitional period in the world's religions given that we are now in a new Avataric advent. An anecdote from Baba's life emphasizes the new focus of the Muslim pilgrimage:

One day a very old Muslim dressed in long coat and cap, came to Guruprasad in Poona for Meher Baba's darshan. He was so feeble that he had to be helped by two others who had accompanied him.

Baba looked at him and said, "You have become old. Now you must not worry, but think of Allah."

Addressing Baba as 'Hazarat,' the old man lamented, "Hazarat, I am worried. I have become old but have not visited Mecca to circumambulate the Kaaba. It has been a longing which I fear will remain unfulfilled."

MUHAMMAD

At this, Baba requested the assistants to support the old man whom he then asked to walk around His chair seven times. And the old man did that.

"Now, there is no need for you to go to Mecca," Baba told him. "Your haj (pilgrimage) is complete."

After saying this, Baba lovingly embraced the old man.⁴⁷

Muhammad's light can never be dimmed. It is the light of God. He was God. We can expect Islam, as well as every other religion, to evolve in this new Avataric advent. The Avatar's work is never done, and He picks up in one advent where He left off in a previous advent. He has only one concern, awakening love of God in the hearts of men and women. Muhammad was the perfect awakener, as are all advents of the Avatar.

ENDNOTES

1. Dr. H. P. Bharucha, "Guruprasad Glimpses, 1963," *The Awakener*, ed. Filis Frederick, Vol. IX, No. 3 (1963), 23. Dr. Bharucha was recounting a talk given by Meher Baba.
2. Sir John Glubb, *The Life and Times of Muhammad* (Chelsea, MI: Scarborough House, 1991), 17 (hereafter "*The Life and Times of Muhammad*").
3. C. L. Geddes, *Guide to Reference Books for Islamic Studies* (Denver: American Institute for Islamic Studies, 1985), 102.
4. *Muhammad*, 347. For a full citation of Martin Lings' fine biography of Muhammad, see "The Avatar" chapter, endnote 52.
5. According to Islamic tradition, Muhammad is Shiloh, to whom spiritual authority would be transferred according to the prophecy of Jacob in Genesis 49: 1, 10. *Muhammad*, 34 note 1.
6. Genesis 17:20.
7. *Muhammad*, 2.
8. Genesis 21:17-19.
9. *Muhammad*, 2-3
10. *Muhammad*, 3.

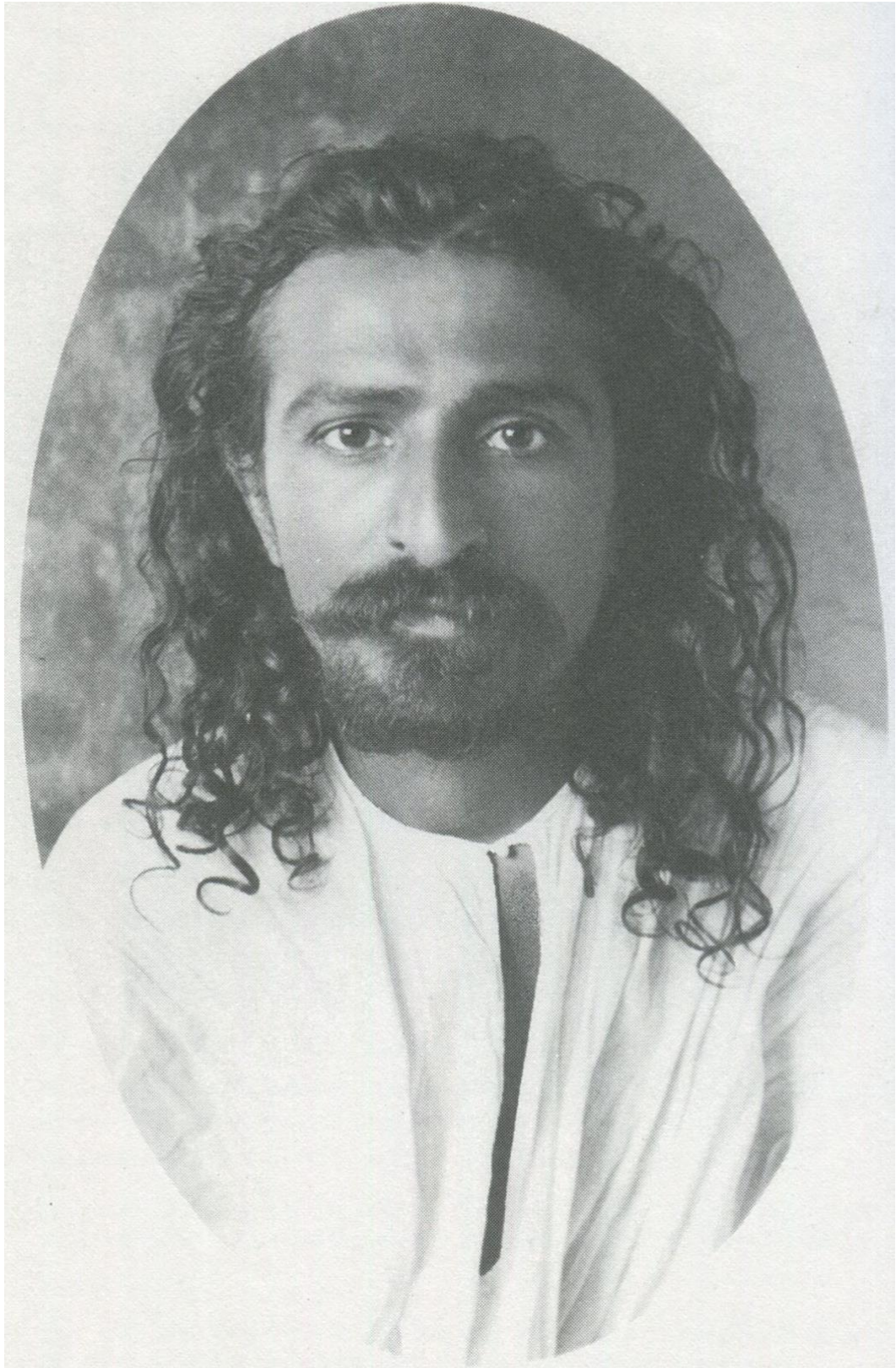
MUHAMMAD

11. Ibid.
12. Koran, trans. Marmaduke Pickthall (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), XXII, 26-27. All references to the Koran are to this translation.
13. Koran, XIV, 37.
14. *Muhammad*, 4-5.
15. This biographical summary is derived mostly from a composite of the Lings and Glubb books cited above. Individual endnotes are included where a point is unique or controversial.
16. This description appears in *Muhammad*, 35.
17. Meher Baba, *Beams from Meher Baba on the Spiritual Panorama* (Sufism Reoriented, San Francisco, 1958), 73-74 (hereafter "*Beams*").
18. *Lord Meher*, 4613 endnote.
19. *Life and Times of Muhammad*, 105.
20. Recorded by Ruano Bogislav and published in *The Awakener*, ed. Filis Frederick, Vol. XVI, No. 2 (1976), 55.
21. *Muhammad*, 102.
22. *How a Master Works*, 436.
23. *How a Master Works*, 35.
24. *Life and Times of Muhammad*, 138.
25. *Lord Meher*, 4620.
26. From a talk by Meher Baba compiled by Ramjoo Abdulla entitled "God Realization," published in *The Awakener*, ed. Filis Frederick, Vol. XV, Nos. 1-2 (1973), 11.
27. *Lord Meher*, 4697.
28. Adi K. Irani, "Thoughts on Avatar Meher Baba," *The Awakener*, ed. Filis Frederick, VI, No. 3 (1959), 11.
29. *How a Master Works*, 377-78.
30. *Lord Meher*, 3029.
31. Baba's statement was recalled in a talk given by Adi K. Irani in 1970, published in *How a Master Works*, 431.
32. *Beams*, 73.
33. Meher Baba, a talk entitled "On Religion, Ceremonies, Shariat," given on September 22, 1926, published in *The Awakener*, ed. Filis Frederick, Vol. XVI, No. 1 (1975), 20-21.
34. *Muhammad*, 212.
35. This story was recounted by Dr. Hoshang Bharucha in "Guruprasad Glimpses, 1963 - Part II," in *The Awakener*, ed. Filis Frederick, Vol. IX, No. 4 (1964), 32.
36. *Lord Meher*, 3935.

MUHAMMAD

37. *Life and Times of Muhammad*, 238.
38. *Ibid.*, 253.
39. *Ibid.*, 358.
40. *Lord Meher*, 4351 endnote.
41. *Life and Times of Muhammad*, 361.
42. Meher Baba, "God's Leela or Sense of Humor," *The Awakener*, ed. Filis Frederick, Vol. XIV, No. 2 (1972), 2.
43. *Lord Meher*, 2792.
44. *Ibid.*
45. *Ibid.*
46. *Lord Meher*, 3713.
47. Eruch Jessawala, *The Ancient One*, ed. Naosherwan Anzar (Englishtown, New Jersey: Beloved Books, 1985), 118.

JESUS



JESUS

"I am the Christ - no doubt of it. And when I break my silence, all the world will come to know about it." This direct assertion of Meher Baba's Christhood, one of many, was made in 1956 in San Francisco.¹ In the West, many people saw Him naturally as the Christ, the only known Avatar generally familiar to Western people. "They [Westerners] take me as the spiritual Master, one hundred percent like Christ."²

In India a Western man "saw Baba as *the Christ* with amazing clarity..."³ Another woman told a story of encountering Meher Baba in London in the 1930s: "At almost nine o'clock one morning while she was about to open the shop she had a vision in the 'waking state.' Christ appeared and she said to herself, 'Why this is Christ, and He has tears in His eyes!' As she raised the palms of her hands to her face the vision disappeared, but as she turned to look out towards the street, through the shop window, on the far side of the pavement she noticed Meher Baba."⁴

Baba Clarifies the Immaculate Conception and the Crucifixion

Even though Jesus is the advent of the Avatar most familiar to the Western world, very little of His life and teachings is actually known. We are fortunate that Jesus Himself, now called Meher Baba, has clarified many aspects of Jesus' life. Meher Baba paints an entirely different picture of Jesus from the serious and humorless figure who often emerges from the Christian tradition. The real Jesus was full of Avataric humor, light-hearted about everything but God, magnetic, and a Master in every sense of the word.

The Christian tradition is clear about the beginning and end of Jesus' life, but in a delicious bit of Avataric humor, the tradition has it wrong at both ends of the story. The tradition tells us that Jesus' mother Mary was impregnated by an angel (the so-called "immaculate conception") and that Jesus died on the cross and then two days later rose from the dead. Baba corrects the record on both points.

JESUS

Murshida Duce recounts the following vignette:

An interesting aside here has been related by Kitty [Davy]. She was reading some part of the New Testament to Baba, and he asked her, "Do people really believe Jesus was conceived in an immaculate way?" Kitty replied, "They do." Baba answered, "He was conceived without lust." In this *Kali Yuga* age it is probable that this would be considered an even greater miracle!⁵

Not surprisingly, believers simply embellished the story as it was handed down through the ages.

As it turns out, the crucifixion itself also became the subject of mythology. Most historians believe that Jesus died on the cross. The Muslim tradition, however, teaches that Jesus did not die on the cross and died in India years after the crucifixion. The Muslim tradition was correct. Baba clarifies that Jesus did not die on the cross and in fact did travel to India after the crucifixion and is now buried there:

There is one secret about Jesus which the Christians do not know. When Jesus was crucified, he did not die; he entered the state of *Nirvikalp Samadhi* (the "I Am God" state without bodily consciousness). On the third day, he again became conscious of his body and he traveled secretly in disguise eastward (with some apostles) to India. This was called Jesus' *resurrection*.

After reaching India, he traveled farther east to Rangoon in Burma where he remained for some time. He then went north to Kashmir where he settled. When his work was finished on earth, he dropped his body and entered *Nirvikalp Samadhi* permanently.

Saints in India have verified these facts about Jesus' travels. Mankind will soon become aware of the true life about Jesus.⁶

JESUS

In 1933, Baba showed some Western disciples a hill in Harvan, northeast of Srinagar in Kashmir State, India and told them: "There is the place where two of Christ's apostles, Bartholomew and Thaddeus, buried his body; they had accompanied him from Palestine."⁷ Baba had previously stayed in seclusion and fasted on that very hill.⁸

Bhau Kalchuri notes:

Whenever Meher Baba returned to Srinagar, for his own reasons, he went to the Harvan mountain village near the area where Jesus's body was buried in a cave nearly twenty centuries ago. Baba did not actually show the cave to his men and women mandali, because after viewing the area one observes that the cave was probably covered over by avalanches and the natural growth of the mountain terrain. This may be a controversial point of contention among Christian historians; nonetheless, it is legendary in India and Tibet.⁹

Baba's explanations of Jesus' birth, crucifixion, resurrection and travels to India in themselves present a totally new picture of Jesus' life and mission. Baba had more comments and explanations about Jesus than about any other advent. Perhaps the reason is that Jesus' life requires more clarification than that of the other advents.

Jesus' Youth

Jesus is directly descended from Abraham.¹⁰ When Mary was pregnant with Jesus, Joseph and Mary traveled to Bethlehem to comply with a Roman edict that all citizens should be enrolled and taxed.¹¹ Because there was no room in the inn, Mary was compelled to give birth to Jesus in a manger.¹² The infant was visited in Bethlehem by shepherds who had been told by an angel that He was destined to become the Messiah¹³ and by three wise men from the east who were led to the infant by a star and who also knew that He was destined to become the Messiah.¹⁴

JESUS

King Herod ordered the massacre of all boys in Bethlehem and vicinity because he wanted to be sure that he had destroyed the young Messiah.¹⁵ Joseph had been forewarned of the massacre by an angel who appeared in a dream, and he and Mary took the infant to Egypt.¹⁶ When Herod died, another angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him to return to Israel.¹⁷ Joseph and Mary raised the boy in Nazareth.

Little is known of Jesus' youth. According to one story, when He was twelve years old, He visited the temple in Jerusalem and amazed His elders with His knowledge and wisdom.¹⁸ In most other respects, His youth seems to be lost to history

The Beginning of Jesus' Mission

When Jesus was in His twenties, He was "baptized" by John the Baptist. John lived in the wilderness, dressed in camel's hair clothing and ate mostly locusts and honey. He was famous as a prophet and baptized people in the Jordan river. He preached that the Kingdom of God was near and urged his followers to repent of their sins.

After Jesus was baptized, the heavens opened up and He saw the Spirit of God descending upon Him.¹⁹ Then a voice came from the heavens, saying: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."²⁰ After His baptism, Jesus went into the wilderness. John, however, was ultimately arrested, imprisoned and beheaded, presumably because he was a threat to the stability of the social order.

After Jesus had fasted for forty days and nights, the devil came to Him and told Jesus that, if He truly were the Son of God, He should command the stones to become loaves of bread to satisfy His hunger. :

Jesus replied that man does not live by bread alone. Satan then took Jesus to the parapet of the holy temple and told Him to jump off because angels would rescue Him if he truly were the Son of God. Jesus responded that one should not put God to the test. Satan then took Jesus to the top of a mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and promised to give them to Jesus if Jesus would worship the devil. Jesus told Satan to "get thee behind me" and told

JESUS

him that God commands that men should worship and serve God alone. The devil then left Him and angels ministered to Him.²¹

Some time after His baptism by John the Baptist and His temptations in the wilderness, Jesus began His work in Israel, which lasted for approximately three years and ended with His crucifixion at the age of 33. Any accurate historical account of those years has been lost because the Gospels were written many years after the events and do not purport to be exact historical accounts of the events. The fact that the modern Christian world is segmented into the Roman Catholic Church, numerous Protestant denominations, the Eastern Orthodox Church, small sects, and individuals who consider themselves Christians but who do not participate actively in organized religion, shows that there is no clear consensus as to the "meaning" of Jesus' life and teaching.

The Itinerant Teacher

For His work in Israel, Jesus was an itinerant teacher with no headquarters or base of operations. He wandered from town to town, sometimes performing miracles and sometimes giving spiritual instruction. He commented on this wandering lifestyle: "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head."²² He drew a core of twelve disciples to Him who lived and traveled with Him. Although He undoubtedly gave the close disciples intense spiritual instruction as their Master, most of those master-disciple conversations have been lost to history.

When He returned to his home town of Nazareth, He was treated rudely. Even though He taught that He had come to fulfill the scriptures, He was amazed at the lack of faith shown by the people. One account has it that they led Him out of town intending to push Him off a nearby hill.²³ Jesus reminded the people of Nazareth: "A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house."²⁴

Jesus performed a variety of miracles in a variety of different circumstances. The miracles included curing paralysis and illnesses,

JESUS

giving sight to the blind, raising the dead, giving speech to the mute, turning water into wine, and walking on water. On one occasion, Jesus walked across the water to meet the disciples who were being tossed about in their boat by the wind. Peter attempted to walk on water toward Jesus but began to sink. He cried out: "Lord, save me!" Jesus immediately stretched out His hand and pulled Peter into the boat.²⁵

Conflicts With the Rabbis

Jesus relentlessly attacked the Jewish religious establishment throughout His ministry. Not only did He frequently break the religious rules, such as curing the sick on the Sabbath, but He repeatedly singled out religious officials for ridicule. On one occasion, He cured a man's withered hand on the Sabbath in a synagogue. "Then the Pharisees went out, and held a council against him, how they might destroy him."²⁶ On another occasion He addressed the Pharisees: "O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things?"²⁷ On yet another occasion Jesus denounced the scribes and Pharisees as "hypocrites."²⁸

In Jerusalem Jesus attacked the scribes by saying: "Which devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers: these shall receive greater damnation."²⁹ When a Pharisee asked Jesus to dinner and was surprised to see that Jesus did not wash His cup and dish before the meal, Jesus replied: "Now do ye Pharisees make clean the outside of the cup, and the platter; but your inward part is full of ravening and wickedness."³⁰ When Jesus drove the money changers from the temple, He accused those who were responsible for managing the temple of turning it into a "den of thieves."³¹

Not surprisingly the Jewish religious establishment resented Jesus' attacks upon them and wanted to retaliate against Him. When Jesus was teaching in the area of the temple in Jerusalem, the "chief priests and the scribes the same hour sought to lay hands on him; and they feared the people..."³² Jesus knew that His conduct would offend the priests and told His disciples that He would be "rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes."³³

JESUS

The Teachings of Jesus According to the Gospels

Jesus' essential teachings as embodied in the Gospels are somewhat puzzling. The focus of His teachings is often Jesus Himself, whom Christians must accept as the Son of God. "He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it."³⁴ He also said to a crowd: "I am the bread of life; he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst."³⁵ At the last supper with the disciples prior to his crucifixion, He said: "I am the way, the truth and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."³⁶

Jesus frequently did not observe the letter of Jewish law, as for example in healing on the sabbath and ignoring dietary restrictions. He taught that thoughts, words and actions are far more important than diet.³⁷ He did not exclude Gentiles from His message, and He welcomed women to His sermons. He did not limit His teaching to synagogues or to traditional religious texts; instead He was Himself the spiritual authority wherever He went.

To a rich man, Jesus said: "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me."³⁸ Asked which is the greatest commandment, Jesus replied: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."³⁹

Some had hoped that Jesus would lead an army against the Romans or in some way use His power to overthrow the cruel oppression of Roman occupation. Although Jesus had nothing good to say about the Romans, who were ruthless and pagan, He chose not to join with the zealots who wanted to oppose the Romans with force. Instead He counseled against retaliation: "Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, that ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also."⁴⁰

Jesus relentlessly attacked hypocrisy and spiritual posing. With regard to prayer, He taught: "And when thou prayest, thou shalt not

JESUS

be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly"⁴¹

Jesus counseled a complete surrender to God in the midst of life, including turning one's worries over to God. "Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these."⁴²

Although the Jewish culture emphasized a strong family life, Jesus neither married nor focused on His own family. To the contrary, He redefined family to include a broader "family" consisting of those who followed Him. He emphasized compassion, forgiveness, and service to the downtrodden as more important than rituals, ceremonies and legalistic formalities.

The Crucifixion According to the Gospels

Jesus predicted His own crucifixion: "Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify him; and the third day he shall rise again."⁴³ He also predicted dire hardships for His disciples: "But take heed to yourselves: for they shall deliver you up to councils; and in the synagogues ye shall be beaten; and ye shall be brought before rulers and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them."⁴⁴

Jesus also predicted the betrayal of Judas, who identified Jesus with a kiss for the benefit of the police, and Jesus predicted that Peter would betray Him three times before morning. Each prediction came to pass. Jesus was taken before the Jewish elders and scribes, who concluded that He had committed blasphemy. He was

JESUS

then taken before the Roman governor Pontius Pilate, who sentenced Him to death by crucifixion.

Jesus was humiliated, forced to wear a crown of thorns, spat upon, and forced to drag His cross to the execution grounds. The Romans nailed Him to the cross and crucified Him for approximately six hours. Toward the end, He said: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"⁴⁵ Christian tradition has it that Jesus **died** on the cross. His body was taken down from the cross and given to Joseph of Arimathea, who wrapped Him in a linen cloth and laid Him in a tomb in the hills.

On the Sunday morning after the Friday on which Jesus was crucified, women disciples who came to anoint the body in spices found the tomb open. An angel told them that Jesus had risen. He then gradually appeared to His disciples, kept their company, and instructed them in preaching His message. The Gospels of Mark and Luke report that, after spending time with His disciples, He ascended into heaven.⁴⁶

Nagging Questions About Christianity Linger On

Jesus left behind a religious movement radically different from traditional Judaism and from Roman paganism. The new religion did not promise prosperity or power but was based on the priority of loving God. Moreover, Jesus warned His followers that they would be at risk for their safety and their lives, and the fate of John the Baptist and Jesus Himself underscored the reality of this risk. The fact that the Roman empire was awash with the blood of Christian martyrs for several centuries bore out Jesus' prediction.

In retrospect, Jesus left a powerful incentive for his followers in order to take the risks that they did. That incentive was referred to in the Gospels as the "Kingdom of God." The Kingdom of God has meant different things to different Christians down through the years. Jesus taught the disciples about spirituality on a level that was different from His teachings for the world at large: "Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others

JESUS

in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand."⁴⁷ For others who had not been taught the "mysteries," the Kingdom of God has meant the path of loving God, selfless service to those in need, the companionship with fellow believers, or simply heaven. Jesus, however, gave few details about heaven.

Perhaps the reason that there are now so many approaches to Christianity is that Jesus left His followers with many questions and few clear answers. What are the mysteries He taught his disciples? How should a Christian live in the midst of worldly responsibilities, particularly those of this day and age? What is the significance of the miracles? Why did Judas betray him? What or who caused the crucifixion, and what is its significance? Why was Jesus tempted? Is there more to Jesus' life than we know? Until now, historians and theologians have only been able to speculate, and one could literally read thousands of books on these questions, all of them expounding different theories. Fortunately, Meher Baba has provided answers to many of these nagging questions.

Meher Baba's View of John the Baptist

History depicts John the Baptist as a somewhat strange and unconventional prophet who "prepared the way" for Jesus by preaching to the multitudes, baptizing them, and ultimately baptizing Jesus. Why the Christ **needed** to be baptized is unclear. Baba explained that "John the Baptist was a wonderful being. He gave his neck; he was the Master of Jesus."⁴⁸ In every advent, the five Perfect Masters must unveil the Avatar, and John the Baptist was the main Perfect Master responsible for unveiling Jesus.

One Baba lover, who wrote a diary on one of her visits to see Meher Baba in India, wrote: "The idea that man can become God has been forgotten in the West, though the early church seems to have had some knowledge of the distinction between Jesus and Christ, for they celebrated the birth of Christ at the Epiphany, which was also associated with the Baptism. For John the Baptist was a Perfect Master, and Jesus became Self-Realised during the Baptism."⁴⁹ John the Baptist played the same role in the advent of Jesus that Hazrat Babajan played in the advent of Meher Baba.⁵⁰

JESUS

John the Baptist was one of the five Perfect Masters who "brought the Avatar down" and unveiled His consciousness. Baba named very few of these Perfect Masters for prior advents, but He felt that John merited an exception to His usual practice.

The Temptations

According to the tradition, Jesus was capable of succumbing to temptation but apparently passed the test given by God by rejecting Satan's many offers. He therefore "proved Himself" fit to begin His ministry. The traditional view cannot be correct. The Avatar is perfect, God in human form. There is no possibility that He will give in to the forces of evil. As a totally Self-Realized person, His actions are not for Himself but for humanity.

When the editors of *God Speaks* specifically asked about the temptations of Jesus, Meher Baba provided this explanation:

The truth is that Jesus was not tempted by Satan, but that Jesus **got Himself tempted**, and He overcame the temptations. There was a great purpose behind this. He had to get Himself tempted; thereby He shouldered the burden of the forces of temptations that predominated in the world. Jesus then overcame all the temptations and in that way created a tremendous force which acted as a great set-back to the forces of universal temptations. The same was true in the case of Buddha, and it is the same every time in *Avataric* periods. Whenever God manifests on earth as *Avatar*, His Godhood gives a universal push and the result is universal, i.e., not only the humanity reaps the benefit but everything in the whole Creation reaps the benefit of the universal push.⁵¹

Baba gave an illustration of how this process is still at work in the modern world. In speaking with his mandali (disciples), he commented: "These days I try not to get angry or excited. Whenever I am about to do so, I remember the words of Jesus Christ and say: '*Get thee*

JESUS

behind me, Satan!' Therefore, whenever any thought of lust, greed, anger, jealousy, money matters or family affairs tries to possess your heart, say with me, 'Get thee behind me, Satan!' and be at peace."⁵²

The Original Message of Jesus Has Mostly Been Lost

Not surprisingly, Jesus' message has been mostly lost in the continuous retelling, revision and translation over 2,000 years. Baba made the following comments while speaking with a Christian minister in 1937:

If a lecturer speaks today before a gathering of five hundred, and the same subject is repeated by the five hundred listeners to others, there would be five hundred different interpretations - some never dreamed of by the speaker! Therefore, what about the teachings of Masters like Jesus interpreted after him perhaps a thousand times through different interpreters in the past. The original thought is sometimes lost sight of, or made irrelevant, but yet each clings to his own different interpretation as the original.

That is why many today hesitate to believe in the Bible and other such books, where interpretations do not appeal to them. There is more of the writers in the Bible than of Jesus Christ!

Thus it is that there are always quarrels between fanatic followers of different religions over words and explanations that the Prophets never uttered, but were written in the so-called holy scriptures by over-enthusiastic disciples and priests, which quite naturally creates a revolt in the minds of others.⁵³

In explaining the teachings of Jesus to schoolboys, Baba commented that the "teachings that are being followed by Christians are not the real teachings that Christ gave. The priests have altered his words, added to his teachings and spoiled them."⁵⁴ On another

JESUS

occasion, while listening to a speech by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Meher Baba observed: "Those in the church all speak of Christ our Lord, but do not follow him."⁵⁵ Like all other religions, Christianity has lost touch with the original message. As Meher Baba told a group in Australia: "Today the Christian world goes to churches. They are mixed up with sermons and ceremonies, and forget what Jesus wanted to be done universally."⁵⁶

The notion that modern Christianity bears little resemblance to the original message of Jesus is not shocking in light of the fact that we have no writings by Jesus and the fact that the Gospels were written many years after the crucifixion. Until now, those who sincerely struggled to understand Jesus faced almost insuperable obstacles. However, Baba has forever changed our perspective on Jesus.

Meher Baba Clarifies the Message of Jesus

What was the essence of Jesus' message? Meher Baba summarized the different levels of his teaching very simply:

What did Jesus really say? To the multitude he said, "God is in heaven; try to go there," and to reach that end he said to overcome certain temptations and sufferings.

To his followers he said, "God is everywhere; try to see Him," and gave explanations to that effect.

To the close circle of apostles he said, "God is in me and in you too," and actually revealed this to them.

Why did Jesus say different things? Owing to the time and the persons, according to their readiness to listen and understand. What Jesus meant was to leave all and follow him; that means to know him, see him, experience him.⁵⁷

The command to "leave all and follow him" is the requirement to which Meher Baba returns most frequently when summarizing

JESUS

Jesus' message. One important fact that He clarified is that the injunction to "leave all and follow him" does not mean to abandon one's worldly duties and possessions and live a monastic life. To a group of reporters, he said: "There is nothing irrational in spirituality. Explanation can be made so practical that it can be lived. Jesus Christ said, 'Leave all and follow me.' It means leave your limitations and live my life. He meant that it was the practical way."⁵⁸

On another occasion, Baba explained: "What is the meaning of 'Leave all and follow me?' It is to obey me!"⁵⁹ In response to a question about how to love Him, Baba said among other things: "Christ said: 'Leave all and follow me.' What did he mean by that? He did not mean leave the body, food, sleep and all that. No. He meant leave all thoughts of possessions, all worldly thoughts, and think only of him."⁶⁰ On yet another occasion, Baba further elucidated this essential Christian command: "But the meaning behind it was not to leave all these things; not to renounce the world, it was to *obey*. Leave all 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."⁶¹

Practicing What Jesus Wanted

If what Jesus really wanted was for his followers to obey Him by living the life He wanted in the midst of their daily responsibilities, it is not clear to many what they should do to obey Jesus. The Gospels teach that Jesus emphasized the two great commandments of loving God and loving one's fellow human beings. Of course, we must ask how these two spiritual commandments may be actually put into practice.

Loving God in a way that pleases God - as opposed to our own notions of loving God - is almost impossible. Meher Baba elaborated: "What you have to understand is that God and loving God are not child's play. It is like drowning in an ocean of fire! Jesus was never serious about anything, except about God - whose incarnation he was. He was serious about himself and God, with whom he was one. Otherwise, he was so lighthearted. Jesus even got crucified for oth-

JESUS

ers with the lightness of heart. Why? Because he had no want at all. He did not want; he gave."⁶²

Loving God as He deserves to be loved is something that only the spiritually advanced can accomplish. "Jesus Christ knew that it was not possible for men to love God, therefore He said, 'Come unto Me, follow Me,' and that is all that is needed for you all."⁶³ Loving God is the key that unlocks the spiritual life, but as a practical matter spiritual seekers can fulfill this command by obeying the Avatar. So what did Jesus want His followers to do in their everyday lives?

Meher Baba explained to a group in England in 1932: "You must try as far as possible to live a life that Christ lived. Not by theory and by intellectual understanding only should one try to follow Christianity, but by a feeling that must be lived: Love! ...To develop love, you have to do it practically - that is, you have to experience it in everyday life. You must lessen your desires and make others happy by thinking less of your own happiness. This can be done. By desire I mean selfish desires. If you are walking along the road and you find a man stricken with poverty and lying helpless, you will pityingly look at him and go on. If, further on you find your own brother in the same condition, you will at once give him all possible aid. This is generally the case. You will find your mentality lacks that development of love which true Christianity needs. It is all very practical and very simple - only people make it complicated."⁶⁴

God only expects spiritual aspirants to do the possible. In 1937 Baba gave a discourse on love, a portion of which is included here:

What is love? To give and never to ask. What leads to this love? Grace. What leads to this grace? Grace is not cheaply bought. It is gained by being always ready to serve and reluctant to be served.

There are many points which lead to this grace:
Wishing well for others at the cost of one's self;

Never backbiting;

Tolerance supreme;

Trying not to worry, which is almost impossible,
but try anyway;

JESUS

Thinking more of the good points in others and less of their bad points.

When Christ said, "Love your neighbor," he did not mean fall in love with your neighbor. If you do one of the above perfectly the rest must follow. Then grace descends. Have love; and when you have love, union with the Beloved is certain. When you love, you give. When you fall in love, you want....⁶⁵

Jesus taught that the goal of life was to unite with God here on earth. His message has been corrupted and glossed over by centuries of theologians and priests who feel more comfortable putting Jesus in heaven. The Kingdom of Heaven is no celestial rose garden; it is inside us. "Much of Christ's teaching in the New Testament is symbolic, if rightly understood. Christ talked of evolution, impressions, reincarnation, exactly as in Vedanta."⁶⁶

To a woman who had difficulties getting a clear idea of Jesus in her mind, Baba advised feeling Jesus by thinking "Christ is within me" once a day upon waking.⁶⁷

To a clergyman and doctor, Baba emphasized that to "understand Christ, to know him, one has to live his life."⁶⁸ To a student of philosophy, Baba said point blank that "Christ is only to be realized" and that "Christ is to be lived and not found in ceremonies."⁶⁹ To be perfect even as God in heaven is perfect, as Jesus taught, is to unite with God through love. Jesus is God, none other than our own true Self, and He lives within us all.

Jesus and the Search for Perfection

The symbolic clues of striving for God-realization are sprinkled throughout the New Testament, sometimes in unlikely places. When Jesus taught that one had to be like a child to enter the Kingdom of God, He was speaking of union with God. As Baba explained: "When one is a real child, a kingly child, it means he is God-Realized, as in Godhood there is pure childhood. That is why

JESUS

Jesus said, 'lest you become like a child, you shall not enter the Kingdom of God.' To such a child all the universe is as a toy The whole infinite life is the garden where this child plays."⁷⁰

Jesus taught that unless you lose yourself, you cannot find yourself. Meher Baba explained that this "means three things in one: first, love God so much that you forget yourself; second, sacrifice your carnal desires for the soul; and third, complete resignation to God's will."⁷¹ In order to find oneself, that is, to achieve God-realization, one has to lose oneself totally, that is, completely annihilate one's limited ego. This ego annihilation can only occur with the help of the Avatar or Perfect Master (Sadguru). The "Sadguru will not give it to just anyone. He cannot give it to one who has not annihilated himself completely. He gives it to one who has surrendered himself one hundred percent, or to one who has a very, very close or deep connection with him. Sadgurus can give this Knowledge in a second. But one who wants this Knowledge must have the necessary preparedness. Only then, the Sadguru gives help."⁷²

In explaining certain spiritual themes to his mandali on another occasion, Baba elaborated on the "pearls before swine" metaphor used by Jesus: "Swine live mostly on garbage. If you place heaps of pearls before them, they would still run after garbage. The world is like filth and garbage, and the path of God-Realization is like a path filled with countless pearls. You live in the same condition as swine. You are being shown invaluable pearls, but you remain drawn to the garbage. Only swans know the value of pearls."⁷³

The Avatar and Perfect Masters are essential to the spiritual life because they can remove the sanskaras (mental impressions) which cover the soul and prevent the soul from becoming its true Self. Baba explained that one cannot remove these sanskaras by one's own efforts. "When people come to a Perfect Master and touch his feet with their heads, they lay the burden of their sanskaras on him. A Perfect Master's feet collect the sanskaras from all over the universe, just as an ordinary person when walking collects dust on his feet. This is the burden to which Jesus referred when he said, 'Come Unto me all you who have labored and are heavy burdened, and I will give you rest.'"⁷⁴

JESUS

The Avatar or Perfect Master can forgive weaknesses (or sins) and help the aspirant to overcome them. After asking his mandali to reveal their weaknesses to Him, Baba related the following story from Jesus' life regarding this Avataric forgiveness: 'Just as I asked you today to confess openly your weaknesses, Jesus would meet daily with his disciples at a fixed time, and forgive their weaknesses and advise them. From this act of Jesus, the Catholics approach a priest for confession to this day. It is a good practice. But after a confession and pardon, the actions should not be repeated. If they are repeated, where is the benefit? It does no good if you commit seven hundred wrongs in seven days, and go to a priest to confess, only to repeat them later.'⁷⁵

The Christ lives within each soul. He is touched by obedience, which may move Him to release His grace and share His love with the aspirant. He can be reached by prayer, but as He reminded the hypocritical priests and scribes, God is not impressed by prayers done publicly for show or idle rituals and ceremonies. Baba asked one of His close disciples to give this explanation of prayer:

The prayer that God hears is the prayer of the heart, that raising of the heart, that suffering of the heart - that is what God pays attention to. And so it does not matter, and certainly it is foolish to rely upon the usual religious practices and ritual. What matters is your heart, the prayer that arises from your heart. That is the prayer that Baba hears, that God hears.

Baba says Jesus Christ said this exactly when he said: "When you pray, close the door; pray in secret." Therefore, pray from the heart even if you are with a thousand people. People know it all by heart but they do not grasp it, or God would hear.

Pray from the heart by giving *yourselves*. Just saying the words or being still, unless you are giving yourselves, is useless. It is the prayer of your heart, the giving of your heart, that counts. Those prayers are answered. Jesus meant, you do not

JESUS

pray, you do not ask, because you do not really ask with *all* your being.⁷⁶

Jesus' Disciples

Jesus' disciples are an integral part of the story told by the New Testament, but we know very little about their day-to-day relationship with their Master. The tradition has it that Judas was a cynical traitor who, having been for years the recipient of Jesus' love and close companionship, handed Jesus over to be killed for thirty silver coins. The tradition also tells us that Peter was the favorite of Jesus for his loyalty but denied Jesus and abandoned Him when Jesus was taken by the authorities to be crucified. We are told that the disciples were witnesses to numerous miracles and audiences for various discourses. We know that they actively spread Jesus' message after his crucifixion even at the cost of their own lives in many cases. The story, however, is one-dimensional. We know about the big events but next to nothing about the daily lives they shared with Jesus. We also have little understanding from the New Testament of why Jesus even needed disciples in the first place.

As discussed above, Baba has provided a context for understanding the Avatar's relationship with His disciples; that relationship repeats a constant pattern in each advent. In each advent, the Avatar brings a circle of 122 people, consisting of ten concentric circles of 12 each with the first circle containing 12 men and 2 women attached as appendages. "With every advent of the Avatar on earth, the 12 men of the Inner Circle and its appendage of two women, gather round the Personality of the Avatar, as the self-same 14 types of individualities. These fourteen different individualities, *in the shape of different personalities*, always occupy their respective offices, whenever the Avatar manifests on earth; and during and after the life-span of the Avatar, they - individually and collectively - function in the same way as their predecessors, who had held, and functioned in, the same offices of the Inner Circle during the past advents of the Avatar."⁷⁷

JESUS

Baba emphasizes that these individuals who comprise the ten circles of 12 (plus the two additional women) are not the same individual souls. (Only the Avatar is the same soul who must return time after time for the benefit of others and never loses His tie with the illusory world.) "It is not the same individualized personalities of the Inner Circle that reincarnate; it is the *individualities of their particular offices* that come with every advent of the Avatar."⁷⁸

It is no accident that the Avatar gives a different level of spiritual instruction to His Inner Circle than He does to others. We recall that Jesus told his disciples that He gave them the Kingdom of God while He gave others parables. The Kingdom of God in that context meant union with God. "All the fourteen members of the Avatar's Inner Circle realize God by the grace of the Avatar, during the same Avataric period, which is of one hundred years' duration after the Manifestation of the Avatar on earth."⁷⁹

The Avatar has a close and loving relationship with his disciples and most particularly with the Inner Circle. Their "job" is to serve , him, but in return He gives the Inner Circle the ultimate gift of the Kingdom of God. As Meher Baba reminds us, this "gift" has been earned by countless lifetimes of love and service to God. The personalities of the disciples need to be in harmony with that of the Avatar they serve. "Christ chose the right type of disciples, not too ardent, not too dull. All were fishermen. And later on, Christ did so much work through them. The work of the Master is affected by the conduct of his disciples, as the public always judges a Master from the behavior of his followers."⁸⁰

The Avatar requires strength of character in His disciples not only because His work is demanding but also because He will destroy their egos. Discipleship is the ultimate test of endurance and inner strength. However, the Avatar does not necessarily require intellectual sophistication, wealth, status or any of the "accomplishments" that provide ego-gratification in the material life. Meher Baba commented to a small group of workers in India in 1957: "I love all; but I do not necessarily need the rich, the respectable and the intelligent for My work. I need the simple, common people irrespective of their weaknesses. Simple-hearted fishermen gathered round

JESUS

Jesus: Krishna was happy in the company of light-hearted 'Gopis' - the cowherd companions. Was not Pendya, a lame Gopi very dear to Krishna? I am happy in your company for it is only love that matters and not the 'position.'"⁸¹ This obedience to the Avatar is almost impossible. As Baba said: "The apostles of Jesus also knew how difficult it was to obey Him."⁸²

Baba noted that He lived in close contact with His disciples as did Jesus: "But in this Avataric period, as in the time of Jesus, I choose to live in close contact with those few who have been with me from ages past, and who love me deeply, and whom I have loved since eternity. Those few are either here or elsewhere; it does not matter."⁸³

One of Jesus' habits was to serve the food to His disciples. Meher Baba commented in 1937 to his Western lovers: "I intend to start giving the food myself as I used to do. This is an old custom of mine which I have stopped for the last four years. The food is brought to me, then each of you bring your plate and I give it. Jesus did this."⁸⁴

Jesus' life with His disciples was apparently full of humor and playfulness as well as loving intimacy. Meher Baba remarked that the "apostle Peter loved Jesus very much, but every morning Jesus would kiss the apostle John, and Peter would become jealous of John."⁸⁵ Making one disciple jealous of another is a favorite Avataric technique for wearing down the ego and a technique which Meher Baba frequently used Himself.

Baba described another incident in the life of Jesus that illustrates Peter's loyalty and Jesus' compassion: "When I, as Jesus, ordered a pit to be dug to bury a member of my circle, Peter completed the work with his fingers, thereby injuring them badly, and to the point that one finger was fractured and the flesh lacerated. But the very next day, it was healed by my simply blowing on it!"⁸⁶

The True Story of Judas and Peter

Judas' betrayal and Peter's denial are both an integral part of the Christian tradition as it has evolved over 2,000 years. The very name

JESUS

"Judas" is synonymous with a traitor, in this case someone who betrayed the Messiah instead of his country and is therefore worthy of our profound contempt. Peter is lauded in the Gospels as a rock of faith and loyalty, but his denial of Jesus "three times before the rooster crowed" comes down to us as an example of disloyalty mixed with cowardice. The traditional view fails to take into account the fact that Jesus was God and that everything in His advent occurred exactly according to the pattern established by God long ago. Baba gives us a fresh and correct view of these two beloved disciples:

Judas helped Jesus Christ in his universal work. If Christ had not undergone the crucifixion, he could not have taken the burden of the universe upon himself. Jesus brought about his own crucifixion.

Peter loved Jesus the most. Jesus loved him most, although the love of Jesus for all was the same. Can you explain this? Loving all the same and yet some more than others? It is like the different parts of the body: they all belong to you, but you love some parts more than others. The eyes are more dear than your fingers. Is this clear?

Jesus loved Peter most in this respect. Peter was his eyes. When Jesus said to Peter, "You will betray me," Peter knew he would betray his Master, the one whom he loved most, and yet he bore it bravely. It was the most difficult thing to do: to know that he would betray and yet not to become weak. Jesus made Peter know that he would betray him for his work.

Judas was also made to betray. Peter betrayed willingly. It is most difficult when you love the one you betray. For example, suppose you [pointing to one] love me most. You are Peter. You [pointing to another] are Judas. I want you both to kill me. Now you, Peter, are made to kill me. You would not willingly do so. You are asked by me to kill me, and you love me more than your

JESUS

life. But you will lovingly kill me for my work.

Even Arjuna could not be like Peter. Krishna had to show him his universal body before he would kill his brothers and relatives in battle.

You, Judas [pointing to that one] love me very much. I turn the key and you go against me for my work. You do not go against me of your own accord. I make you go against me in order to tell people all about me. You do it willingly, knowing that people hearing you would beat me and crucify me.

All this means love, faith and sacrifice. If you do what I ask willingly, you really love me. If you are made to do it, you love me a little less. But if you do not do it, it all turns out like today's mango mess when you all hesitated to accept when I offered you the mangoes.⁸⁷

The Avatar shows time and again that He is omniscient. In order to play His role as God in human form, He lives life as if He did not know what would happen in the future even though He does know. This process was no different with Judas than with any other person or event. "Jesus knew that Judas would betray him, and still he did not ask him to leave his side. Knowing all, he acted as if he knew nothing. This divine *pretense* of the All-Knowing is the principle on which the divine play (*leela*) works."⁸⁸

God has a precise plan for the world, and no detail is overlooked. The events of His life support His universal work and reflect God's plan even though they may seem like tragedies from a human perspective. Judas played his role to perfection. "Judas turned against him [Jesus]. It is said Judas betrayed him, but it was a great help. It was not a betrayal by Judas, it was Judas helping Jesus to fulfill his mission. It was all in the divine plan."⁸⁹

Judas was one of the Inner Circle, and Meher Baba explained that all of the members of the Inner Circle receive God-Realization. Since the offices (not the individuals) of the Inner Circle are the same in

JESUS

every Avataric advent, every Avatar has a Judas and every Judas plays his role and receives God realization. One day in India, Baba gave the following elaboration on the Judas role after drawing a circle on the ground and keeping his finger on the circumference of the circle:

Lord Ram had his Ravana, Jesus his Judas. One of the twelve men in the circle is always like that. Suppose my finger was a compass. I, as the Master, am the point in the middle and the outside ring is my circle. Now observe what happens when the circle is complete and the compass is stationary. The pencil is still on one point of the circle. The one who is under the point shouts! That is *Judas*.

Eleven members of the circle are God-Realized during my lifetime – the twelfth after I die. He, my Judas, being the *dark side* of me, realizes me after I have physically departed.⁹⁰

So the tradition has it wrong. Judas was a perfectly loyal disciple who did precisely what his Master wanted him to do. One wonders, if that is true, how someone who was perfectly loyal to his Master could bring himself to cause the Masters crucifixion. Meher Baba explained: "The greatest service was Judas's betrayal. When he kissed Christ on the cheek, he did nothing. God did all. He behaved under a veil. He had the most difficult task to do for the Master of all the disciples."⁹¹

Similarly, Peter played his role to perfection. Jesus needed Peter to betray him to complete his work, and Peter obeyed his Master. When Jesus told Peter, "You will deny me," He carried out His own plan. Meher Baba explained: "Jesus said it and had it done. Why? Jesus, in that way, took the whole burden of the world and made Peter share it."⁹²

Miracles

Of all the Avatars, Jesus is particularly associated with miracles. Sadly, miracles have come to be a litmus test of spirituality. Not only

JESUS

do people regard the miracles as "proof" of Jesus' claim to be the Christ, but they also regard miracles as a test of sainthood. (Since God knows who His saints are, He certainly doesn't need the artificial tests imposed by human beings.) Some would refuse to accept Meher Baba's claim to be the Avatar without proof that He performed miracles. The whole topic of miracles, both in general and as it particularly applies to Jesus, is greatly misunderstood, but as usual Baba provides fresh insights on this important topic.

Miracles in and of themselves have no spiritual significance. Baba explained: "All miracles are child's play, whereas spirituality is far above them. Miracles in themselves have no spiritual value or significance. But they are necessary and, at times, performed by the Master as a means to convince people of Truth and spirituality. Jesus performed miracles not for his own gain, but to make people recognize the Truth and to create faith in them. Yet when he was crucified, he who could raise the dead, did not stop it!"⁹³

As Baba explains in *God Speaks*, there are numerous advanced spiritual aspirants who have the capacity to perform miracles. As discussed earlier, Baba explained that spiritual advancement begins to take place with the process of involution, when the aspirant "traverses" six inner planes of consciousness and then by the grace of an Avatar or Perfect Master unites with God on the seventh plane. He further explained that those on the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 7th planes can perform miracles directly (even though the type of miracle may vary with the plane) and that those on the 5th and 6th planes can perform miracles indirectly by influencing the thought process of those on lower planes.⁹⁴ Thus at any given time there are almost 7,000 individuals in the spiritual hierarchy who are capable, directly or indirectly, of performing or causing some kind of miracle.⁹⁵

From this explanation we can see that, except for miracles performed by those on the seventh plane (the Avatar and Perfect Masters), miracles are usually a distraction on the path to God. It is next to impossible to perform miracles for unselfish purposes because it is easy to become attached to the ego-gratification of being able to perform them. Thus for most spiritual aspirants, a miracle is more of an unfortunate byproduct of his or her spiritual

JESUS

progress, and the Perfect Masters who look out for the welfare of those on the path of involution will probably see to it that the capacity for miracles is snatched away or at least severely restrained.

True spirituality consists of loving God wholly and solely for the sake of love. Love of God is the path to God, and God's Infinite Divine Love is the goal. However, very few people are attracted to God solely for love. Jesus' miracles cast a wide net and pulled in more fish from the sea of life than just those who were only interested in love. Those who are interested in spirituality for its own sake would understand Baba's comments on Jesus: "Christ's greatness was not in his power or miracles, but in his humility being crucified. His humility was his true greatness."⁹⁶

In addition to performing miracles for the benefit of others, Jesus performed miracles for another truly stunning reason: "Had Jesus not raised the dead, had he not performed the miracles, he would not have been crucified, and he wanted to be crucified. He performed the miracles to make certain of being crucified."⁹⁷ We forget constantly that the Avatar is God. He is in perfect control of the situation. Jesus, who could perform miracles, did not lift a finger to prevent His crucifixion because the divine plan required Him to undergo crucifixion.

Meher Baba said that He performed no miracles: "Many miracles have been attributed to me, but I do not perform miracles. I do not attach importance to miracles. When people think miracles have been performed, their faith has done it. One miracle I will perform, and for that miracle the time is near. I have said that my miracle will be not to raise the dead, but to make one dead to himself to love God. I have repeatedly said I will not give sight to the blind, but I will make men blind to the world in order to see God."⁹⁸

The Spiritual Significance of the Crucifixion

The crucifixion is the very symbol of Christianity. Every Christian church, hospital, and school has a cross or some depiction of Jesus being crucified. Many Christians wear crosses as earrings or

JESUS

attached to necklaces, and crosses are commonly affixed to gravestones of Christians or used in place of a gravestone. Some Christians make the sign of the cross when they pray or when they are nervous. Even though the crucifixion is central to Christianity, many questions have remained unanswered until now: Is any one individual or group to be blamed for the crucifixion? What happened after the crucifixion? Why did Jesus have to be crucified? Why didn't Jesus take action to prevent the crucifixion, either by using His divine powers or by avoiding Jerusalem at that time? Did Jesus physically suffer on the cross or did he use His divine powers to mitigate the suffering? What is the meaning of His statement: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"?

We forget that the Avatar is God in human form. The crucifixion happened because God/Jesus willed it to happen. As Baba reminds us:

God is everywhere and **does** everything.
God is within us and **knows** everything.
God is without us and **sees** everything.
God is beyond us and **IS** everything.
God alone **IS**.⁹⁹

As discussed above, one of the reasons Jesus performed miracles was to assure that He would be crucified. God planned the crucifixion as part of Jesus' universal work, and the Jewish religious establishment, Judas and the Romans all played their roles to perfection in helping to bring about the crucifixion. God's script was simply played out.

But why did the crucifixion have to happen? Baba explained: "Jesus Christ had himself crucified. Although he had infinite power, he took on suffering and made himself helpless for the sake of humanity."¹⁰⁰ He elaborated: "[Jesus] was all-mighty, all-powerful, and yet he appeared so helpless. He got himself crucified in the end. Why? In order to teach humility to humanity."¹⁰¹

Cruelty, arrogance and inhumanity were common in the time of Jesus. By humbling Himself, He took on the suffering of the powerless and directed human compassion toward them as part of his Avataric work. Christians for 2,000 years have served the helpless and the forlorn as a way of serving God. Baba elaborated on this self-

JESUS

less service in speaking to a Christian priest who had dedicated his life to serving destitute and abandoned children: "By serving the abandoned you are serving Jesus the Christ because he too was abandoned by all, even by his own apostles. The emblem of abandonment is the Cross. Hence, to serve the abandoned is to serve the Christ - and I am He, undoubtedly."¹⁰²

The Avatar suffers like an ordinary man, and Jesus suffered horrendous pain on the cross: "Christ indeed suffered. If not, what would be the meaning of his taking form? Through his universal mind - which the knowledge of Godhood continually gives - Jesus experienced that all is nothing and was sustained by the Godhood's bliss. He suffered, but was not affected by his suffering."¹⁰³ As part of his ordeal, "Jesus fainted on the cross several times which he could have avoided, but it was a necessary demonstration for the good of humanity"¹⁰⁴

When one of Baba's close disciples complained that she could serve him better if she did not have "broken feet," Meher Baba replied: "Can't you take this much? Look what they did to me when I was Jesus - put all those thorns on my head, which drew blood, made me carry the cross. They beat me, nailed me on the cross and pierced my side. I had to withstand so much! Can't you withstand this much pain?"¹⁰⁵ Those who serve the Avatar must develop enormous spiritual stamina because physical and psychological suffering are inevitable experiences that must be cheerfully endured on the spiritual path.

It is a mistake to think of the crucifixion as a discrete event in the life of only one Avatar and to think that Jesus' remaining life and the lives of the other Avatars were filled with nothing but bliss. Unfortunately the crucifixion of the Avatar is continuous, and He must endure suffering every minute He remains in the body. Baba commented: "I am crucified every moment, as none of you can ever imagine."¹⁰⁶ Baba elaborated on the burden that the Avatar must assume in all His advents:

The Avatar has to incur upon himself the infinite burden of "worries" of the entire suffering

JESUS

world, while working in the world for the spiritual upliftment of humanity. This suffering of people, steeped in the darkness of ignorance, becomes the Avatar's suffering. This is his *crucifixion*. The Avatar is crucified every moment of his life on earth.

But, with this infinite suffering which he has to take upon himself, he also has the infinite bliss of the perfect state, which he eternally experiences. Otherwise, it would be utterly impossible, and He would be literally crushed under the burden of such suffering from all sides. If an ordinary man, however great, were to feel even a thousandth part of the Avatar's suffering, he would go mad! The Avatar has to bear this burden to lighten the load of the suffering of the world.¹⁰⁷

We recall that Baba explained that every Avatar makes one conscious mistake in each advent. This exhibition of weakness shows deference to human beings, who have no choice but to make mistakes. As previously discussed, Muhammad's weakness was in not revealing that He was an Avatar. Meher Baba explained that Jesus' weakness was in crying out on the cross, "My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me."¹⁰⁸ Even though Baba identified Jesus' statement as an Avataric mistake, He added a perspective that we continually forget: "He said it to Himself, of course, for He was One with God - the Father."¹⁰⁹ Of course. For 2,000 years most people have tended to read Jesus' statement as a cry to his "Father" in "heaven." He was Himself both the Father and the Son.

One can hear the Avatar chuckling: "I really pulled their leg on that one." At first blush, one finds it hard to believe that there would be any humor at all in the crucifixion. Baba enlightens us on this subject as well: "[B]ecause of the divine sense of humor, Jesus Christ could not help getting himself crucified, although the world rightly continues to look upon him as the Savior of humanity"¹¹⁰

Jesus' humor about the crucifixion carried over into Meher Baba's life. In one of His rare visits to the inside of a Christian

JESUS

church, He did not remove His hat. While pointing to the crucifix over the altar, He said: "It is *I* who is on the crucifix, and for this reason, I did not remove my hat when entering the church."¹¹¹ In the church, Baba also commented: "I remember a humorous incident in the life of Jesus. A very stout man tried to kick Jesus when he was carrying the cross. But he was so fat that while trying to kick him (me), he fell down! I remember it well."¹¹²

The fact that Jesus did not die on the cross and left much of the world (even those who do not believe He was the Avatar) to believe that He did die on the cross, is the greatest practical joke in history. For centuries people have wondered, "Why didn't Jesus save himself?" He did save Himself, and now it is time for the world to know. Jesus was smiling, and the next Avatar will probably continue the hearty laughter at Jesus' colossal joke.

Even with the new humorous perspective, we should not now underestimate the significance of the crucifixion. Jesus had to get crucified for the benefit of others to bring compassion and service of the abandoned to civilization. By His suffering, Jesus brought humanity to a world of cruelty and arrogance. As Meher Baba explained: "Christ's greatness was not in his power or miracles, but in his humility being crucified. His humility was his true greatness."¹¹³

The Trinity

One of the core principles of Christianity is the Trinity, the triune nature of God as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This doctrine, like almost everything in Christianity, suffers from having very little explanation from Jesus Himself. Consequently the doctrine has been the plaything of scholars, theologians and priests, who have proceeded to muddle the doctrine beyond comprehension. In truth, according to Baba, the doctrine of the Trinity encompasses God in His three basic roles as human beings, struggling to unite with God, the Beyond God, who is beyond or independent of the Creation, and the Avatar or Perfect Master, who embodies the entire illusory Creation as well as the reality of the Beyond God.

JESUS

Baba has provided specific material on the Trinity, some of which is included here to give a flavor of his remarks. Pages 139-143 of *The Nothing and The Everything*, written by Bhau Kalchuri from points given to him by Meher Baba, are specifically devoted to "The Father, Son and Holy Ghost." On page 140, Bhau Kalchuri summarizes: "In Vedant, in Sufism, and in Christianity there exist the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. This triune interplay is between Infinite Consciousness and Infinite Unconsciousness meeting in the One (the Son) [w]ho is conscious of both as Conscious Infinite Consciousness and Conscious Infinite Unconsciousness." Thus the Trinity is not unique to Christianity and embodies a fundamental truth of the mechanics of the universe.

In the 1950s Baba was in the mood to discourse about the Trinity to His disciples. Some of His comments are included here to illuminate the preeminent role of the Avatar:

When the soul becomes one with the Oversoul, it is in the state of Behud. And when the Realized Soul *descends* from his Highest state for universal work, meaning when he regains gross consciousness alongside his Superconsciousness, he is in the state of Anhud. Because, being God, he is in both states - the Limitless and the Beyond - and works for hud (limited ones).

Thus, in the state of the Father, the Realized One is not meant to do universal work; but in the state of the Son there is universal duty. The Father state is contained in the Son state; and from the standpoint of universal work, the Son state is higher than the Father state. From the viewpoint of Divine Consciousness, both states are one and the same, but in the Son state the duty of universal work is to be done; the Father state is without duty.¹¹⁴

This appears to be the first advent in which the Avatar has clarified that the Son (Avatar) is the measure of all things and greater than the Beyond God because the Son does universal work.

JESUS

Baba on one occasion asked that the following statement, "I am the Son of God the Father and God the Mother in One," be read out. The statement is included here in full because it provides tremendous insight into Meher Baba's advent:

God is One. He is both father and mother in One. He is in everyone and in everything; but God is beyond this too. I will tell you about God in the Beyond state. In the Beyond state God is both God the father and God the mother simultaneously.

Now we will discuss the worldly father and mother. Suppose a couple has seven sons. It is natural for the father to love those sons who are useful to him, who are healthy, intelligent, brilliant - obviously, the father will remain pleased with such sons. Now the six sons of this worldly father are healthy, strong, intelligent and good in all respects; the seventh son is a disabled weakling, innocent, simple and guileless (*Bhola*). The father has no love for this seventh son and loves only his six sons. But the mother loves her seventh son the most because he is weak, sick, disabled, simple and guileless.

God is both the father and the mother in One. The *Avatars* are Sons of the Father in the Beyond state. All past *Avataric* periods witnessed the presence of the *Avatar* as the healthy, bright, wise son of God. All this means that the *Avatar* always remained the Beloved Son of the Father. Note that the *Avatar* always takes a male form and mingles with mankind as man.

Hitherto, God in the Beyond state did not have occasion to play the part of God the mother. In this *Avataric* period, God the Father is very pleased with me at my being infinitely bright, wise, efficient and perfect in all respects (*Ustad* or 'shrewd') as my Father wants me to be, and I am the beloved Son of my Father. At the same time, in this form I

JESUS

am physically disabled. In America, in 1952, I was injured on the left side of my physical frame from leg to face. In India, in 1956, I injured my right side from the head down to the leg. Besides being physically disabled, I am also infinitely simple and guileless (*Bhola*). Thus, I am also the well-beloved Son of my God the Mother. So, in this incarnation of the *Avatar*, God has the occasion, as it were, to play the part of both Father and Mother.¹¹⁵

The role of God the Mother has in this advent become active, and the beloved Son of God the Mother reflects this active role in his own universal work. In this Avataric advent, God intends to equalize the roles of men and women, and we now see evidence of this universal work in every aspect of life.

Turning the Other Cheek

As with almost every Christian doctrine, Jesus' admonition to "turn the other cheek" has now become the source of intellectual speculation, and Jesus' meaning has been lost. Fortunately, Baba has also clarified this particular teaching for the benefit of posterity.

Baba clarified that Jesus did not intend to lay down an iron-clad principle of pacifism for all times and all situations. In His articles on "Violence and Non-Violence" in His *Discourses*, Meher Baba provides a comprehensive analysis of different attitudes toward violence and non-violence and different situations in which the use of one or the other would be appropriate from a spiritual perspective.

A moment's reflection on the lives of various advents of the Avatar would confirm that the Avatar does not have a "one rule for all situations" on this complicated subject. Rama, Krishna and Muhammad were warriors who led their followers into battle and conquered their enemies. In any case, decisions with regard to the appropriate use of violence require considerable discrimination. During World War II, when Mahatma Gandhi urged the use of his non-violence principles against the Germans, Baba commented:

JESUS

Gandhi feels that if you are slapped on one cheek, offer the other. He thinks that will put an end to wars. But that is nonviolence and nonsense!

Mahasabha (a Hindu reactionary political group) says you should follow the *Gita* and act as Krishna declared - to defend, but without hatred. Now that is not practical, because the German hate is so profound that the reaction on all the defenders must be of hate!

Krishna's teaching advocated by the Mahasabha, and Christ's teaching advocated by Gandhi, are both impractical for this war. What did the small nations do? They did not resist and were swallowed up! And now they hate more than those who resisted.

So now will come a new, third way for world peace. First world war, then world peace.¹¹⁶

If "turning the other cheek" was not an inflexible rule for all situations, what spiritual principles was Jesus trying to teach? One character trait that all spiritual aspirants must always have is that of control. Baba elaborated: "When Christ said give your other cheek to be slapped, it means control. But the world thinks that if you get slapped and don't get excited, you are either a coward or shameless."¹¹⁷

All the Avatars have stressed the need to control one's anger, and "turning the other cheek" certainly gives one practice in developing that kind of control. There is, however, a deeper spiritual lesson involving the removal of *sanskaras* (mental impressions). The spiritual path, as Baba explains in the *Discourses* and *God Speaks*, consists of the unwinding and ultimate removal of *sanskaras* that the aspirant has accumulated in his consciousness in the course of countless incarnations. Those who slap us, or harass, defame or criticize us, help to remove our *sanskaras*, often by taking them upon themselves. Baba explained: "If someone abuses us or insults us and becomes the cause of our suffering, or if we are harassed in any way, we should bow down to such a person instead of reacting angrily

JESUS

with him, because he is the means of wiping out our *sanskaras*. This is what Jesus meant when he said that if someone strikes you on the right cheek, offer him your left."¹¹⁸

The Travels of Jesus

Baba once commented: 'Jesus had no roof over his head and had to wander all the time.'¹¹⁹ Baba tells us that Jesus traveled to India and Burma and returned to Kashmir after His crucifixion in addition to his many travels within Israel. Although Baba did not provide anything close to a complete picture of Jesus' life after the crucifixion, He did elaborate on some surprising trips that Jesus made.

Baba visited Venice, Italy with some of His Western lovers in 1932. On this visit, He revealed some surprising information about Jesus:

They visited Saint Marks Square at 11:30 A.M., and at the suggestion of the gopis, it was decided to enter the church. Outside, Baba explained the church's architecture and its spiritual significance. He had them count and write down the number of pillars, domes and arches, which came to exactly one hundred and twenty. Baba indicated, "This church is one of the four great spiritual centers of Europe. The whole structure corresponds to the Avatar's twelve disciples of the inner circle and one hundred and eight disciples of the outer circles."

Baba then revealed, "I was here as Jesus with two of my apostles one month before my crucifixion and sat on the exact spot where Saint Mark's was later built."¹²⁰

Later in 1932, Meher Baba visited the Coptic Church in Cairo, Egypt. There He revealed more new information about the life of Jesus:

In Cairo, Baba revealed to Kaka and Chanji, "The Coptic Church contains a cave where Mary and

JESUS

Joseph stayed after fleeing Herod. The reason I came to Egypt is to visit this church."

Led by Baba, they visited the Coptic Church the next day. Baba's face was radiant with joy as he walked through the church, as if he was reliving his memories as Jesus. "This is my dear old place," he recalled and indicated that Jesus had also come and stayed here with his apostles. Baba climbed down to the small, dark room of the cave. The church warden did not want to open it, but Baba insisted and he finally agreed. They were told that the church had been erected over the cave nine hundred and thirty years after Christ.¹²¹

Baba also revealed that Jesus visited the Indian holy city of Benares, now called Varanasi, on the Ganges River.¹²² Such a revelation is less surprising in the context of the more significant revelation that Jesus lived and died in India.

Meher Baba's Favorite Christian Saints

For 2,000 years, Christians have struggled with the challenge of how Jesus wanted them to live. In any religion, the lives of saints provide examples of how that religion should be practiced. Baba once quipped that saints are God's assets, and His business was converting His liabilities to His assets. During a visit to the United States, Baba revealed that his four favorite Christian saints were Saint Theresa of Avila, Saint Catherine of Siena, Saint Francis of Assisi, and Saint Augustine.¹²³ Baba also revealed that Saint Francis "was the only one of the very few saints in Europe to become a Perfect Master."¹²⁴

These saints were particularly dear to Baba. (One should remember that a "saint" from Meher Baba's perspective is a very advanced aspirant on the fifth or sixth inner plane of consciousness. The attainment of the fifth or sixth plane is very difficult, and Baba was in no way influenced by whether a particular religion or organization regarded someone as a saint.) In his discourse on "Twelve

JESUS

Ways of Realizing Me," Meher Baba says: "If you have that love for Me that Saint Francis had for Jesus, then not only will you realize Me but you will please Me."¹²⁵ Of Saint Theresa, He said: "She loved me; she devoted her life completely to me."¹²⁶

In respect for His beloved Saint Francis, Baba visited Assisi and insisted on doing some of His universal work in a cave in which Saint Francis had meditated on Jesus. The details of Meher Baba's trip to Assisi are recorded on pages 1688-93 in *Lord Meher*. Similarly, he visited Avila, where he praised the spiritual atmosphere and explained that he had "special work" to do.¹²⁷

The path to God inevitably leads through sainthood, but sainthood is not the goal of life. The goal is union with God, and Baba tells us that Saint Francis was one who achieved that rare goal.

A Few Observations

If God did not have a sense of humor, we could never have one. For 2,000 years, Christianity has depicted Jesus as serious, otherworldly, and humorless. Fortunately, Baba has provided us with a refreshing portrait of Jesus, who we now know perpetrated the greatest practical joke in history: He faked His own death. The real man was undoubtedly light-hearted and full of humor, taking God seriously and everyday life lightly, as God intended life to be lived. He traveled the world, but even now we know little of His universal work. The Avatar undergoes continual crucifixion for our sake. Jesus suffered for the sake of His universal work on behalf of the world to teach us humility and to bring compassion and kindness to everyday life. We cannot fathom the Christ. We can love Him, and if we love Him like Saint Francis loved Him, we will please Him.

ENDNOTES

1. *Lord Meher*, 5073.
2. Meher Baba as quoted in *Lord Meher*, 4205.

JESUS

3. *Lord Meher*, 4498.
4. Fred Marks, "Love for the Sake of Love Awaits Neither Sign Nor Signal," *The Awakener*, ed. Filis Frederick, Vol. XIX, No. 1 (1980), 41.
5. *How a Master Works*, 457.
6. *Lord Meher*, 752. The editor of *Lord Meher* included the following endnote with the quoted passage: "In India and Tibet, Jesus' legendary name is *Isa Asaf*. It is also recorded in the *Koran* (passage 4:157) that Jesus did not die on the cross. The reader may refer to a scholarly work by Al-Haj Khwaja Nazir Ahmed entitled *JESUS IN HEAVEN ON EARTH* published in Pakistan." Another source documenting the life of Jesus after the crucifixion is Helger Kersten. *Jesus Lived in India* (Rockport, MA: Element Books, Inc., 1994).
7. *Lord Meher*, 1770.
8. *Lord Meher*, 1187-98.
9. *Lord Meher*, endnote for page 2974.
10. Matthew 1: 1, 17. As mentioned previously, all references to the Holy Bible of the Christians are to the King James version.
11. Luke 2: 1-5.
12. Luke 2: 6-7.
13. Luke 2: 8-20.
14. Matthew 2: 1-11.
15. Matthew 2: 16-18.
16. Matthew 2: 13-15.
17. Matthew 2: 19-23.
18. Luke 2: 41-52.
19. Matthew 3: 16.
20. Matthew 3: 17.
21. The summary of the temptations was taken from Matthew 4: 1-11.
22. Luke 9: 58.
23. Luke 4: 28-29.
24. Matthew 13: 57.
25. Matthew 14: 22-33. Meher Baba had a picture depicting this incident from Jesus' life in His bedroom in Meherazad.
26. Matthew 12: 14.
27. Matthew 12: 34.
28. Matthew 23: 13.
29. Mark 12: 40.

JESUS

30. Luke 11: 39.
31. Luke 19: 46.
32. Luke 20: 19.
33. Mark 8: 31.
34. Matthew 10: 39.
35. John 6: 35.
36. John 14: 6.
37. Mark 7: 15-23.
38. Matthew 19: 21.
39. Matthew 22: 37-39.
40. Matthew 5: 38-39.
41. Matthew 6: 5-6.
42. Matthew 6: 27-29.
43. Matthew 20: 18-19.
44. Mark 13: 9-10.
45. Mark 15: 34.
46. Mark 16: 19; Luke 24: 51.
47. Luke 8: 10.
48. *Lord Meher*, 4482.
49. Irene H. Conybeare, "Notes from a Diary: Hamirpur, 1952," *The Awakener*, ed. Filis Frederick, Vol. I, No. 2 (1953), 15.
50. *Stay With God*, 20.
51. *God Speaks*, 63, emphasis in original.
52. *Lord Meher*, 3924.
53. *Lord Meher*, 2235.
54. *Lord Meher*, 1035.
55. *Lord Meher*, 2180.
56. *Lord Meher*, 5101.
57. *Lord Meher*, 1034-35.
58. *Lord Meher*, 2516.
59. *Lord Meher*, 4731.
60. *Lord Meher*, 4976.
61. *Lord Meher*, 5019.

JESUS

62. *Lord Meher*, 3822.
63. Meher Baba as quoted by Filis Frederick, *The Awakener*, "Notes on The East-West Gathering," IX, Nos. 1-2 (1963), 27.
64. Meher Baba as quoted by Kitty Davy, "Baba's First World Tour, 1932, Part III," *The Awakener*, Vol. XIV, No. 1 (1971), 34.
65. *Lord Meher*, 2184.
66. Meher Baba as quoted in *Lord Meher*, 2250.
67. As quoted by Charles B. Purdom, *The Perfect Master* (North Myrtle Beach, SC: Sheriar Press, Inc., 1976), 239.
68. *Ibid*, 250.
69. *Ibid.*, 251.
70. *Lord Meher*, 2599.
71. *Lord Meher*, 2614.
72. *Lord Meher*, 3917.
73. *Lord Meher*, 803.
74. *Lord Meher*, 2114.
75. *Lord Meher*, 1231.
76. *Lord Meher*, 4949.
77. Meher Baba, "The Circles," *The Awakener*, ed. Filis Frederick, Vol. III, No. 1 (1955), 3.
78. *Ibid*, 4.
79. *Ibid*, 5.
80. *Lord Meher*, 2646.
81. Meher Baba, "On Working for Baba," *The Awakener*, ed. Filis Frederick, Vol. XIX, No. 2 (1981), 4.
82. Meher Baba as quoted by Filis Frederick, "Notes on the East-West Gathering," *The Awakener*, Vol. IX, Nos. 1-2 (1963), 15.
83. *Lord Meher*, 2333.
84. *Lord Meher*, 2072.
85. *Lord Meher*, 1597.
86. *Lord Meher*, 1599.
87. *Lord Meher*, 2183.
88. *Lord Meher*, 4614.
89. *Lord Meher*, 5106.
90. *Lord Meher*, 966.

JESUS

91. *Lord Meher*, 3817.
92. *Lord Meher*, 4472.
93. *Lord Meher*, 2130.
94. *God Speaks*, 41-54, 67-68, 208-218
95. *Ibid.*, 254-57
96. *Lord Meher*, 5093.
97. *Lord Meher*, 4480 .
98. *Ibid.*
99. *God Speaks*, 280, emphasis in original.
100. *Lord Meher*, 5052 .
101. *Lord Meher*, 5101.
102. As quoted by Charles B. Purdom, *The God-Man* (Crescent Beach, S.C.: Sheriar Press, Inc. 1971), 353.
103. *Lord Meher*, 2318.
104. *Lord Meher*, 2232.
105. *Lord Meher*, 4966.
106. *Lord Meher*, 1961.
107. *Lord Meher*, 2436.
108. *How a Master Works*, 441.
109. As quoted by Kari-Jo Harb, "A Visit to Meherazad - 9th December, 1962," *The Awakener*, ed. Filis Frederick, Vol. IX, No. 4 (1964), 15.
110. *Lord Meher*, 3935.
111. *Lord Meher*, 1599.
112. *Ibid.*
113. *Lord Meher*, 5093.
114. *Lord Meher*, 4163.
115. *The God-Man*, 314-15.
116. *Lord Meher*, 2615.
117. *Lord Meher*, 2593.
118. *Lord Meher*, 772.
119. *Lord Meher*, 1104.
120. *Lord Meher*, 1699.
121. *Lord Meher*, 1705.

JESUS

122. Reported by Elizabeth Patterson, "Spiritual Journey With a Modern Guru (Blue Bus Tour) Part II," *Treasures from the Meher Baba Journals*, ed. Jane Barry Haynes (North Myrtle Beach, S.C.: Sheriar Press, Inc., 1980), 97 .
123. *Lord Meher*, 3818.
124. *Lord Meher*, 5011.
125. *Discourses*, 405.
126. *Lord Meher*, 5433.
127. *Lord Meher*, 1834.

BUDDHA



BUDDHA

In 1931, Meher Baba remarked: "I am Life Eternal. I was Krishna, I was Buddha, I was Jesus and I am now Meher Baba."¹ Those who feel intuitively that Buddha was an Avatar will find confirmation of their intuition in Baba's explanation of Buddha's status. On the other hand, those who are convinced that Buddha was an atheist will be sorely disappointed by Baba's comments.

Baba shared this experience from His youth before He was unveiled as the Avatar:

When I was studying in Deccan College, I had a friend named Ramnath who was fond of reading books about the lives of saints. We were great friends, and one day Ramnath gave me a book to read on the *Life of Buddha*. While going through it, I came across the passage where Buddha had said that when he comes again in physical body, his name would be *Maitreya* (Lord of Mercy). I had not gone to Babajan yet. But after reading the passage I thought, or rather spontaneously felt, that I was the same "*Mercy*" to which Buddha referred.

Thereafter, Upasni Maharaj revealed to me that I was the Avatar. Babajan also told me one day, "O my son, you will make the whole world dance to your tune!" But today, I definitely know that I am *That*. My name, Meher, means mercy!²

Although Baba clarifies that Buddha was an Avatar, the belief that Buddha was an atheist is widespread. One Buddhist writer makes the following observation with total confidence:

Like some other religions - Taoism, Jainism, and certain forms of philosophical Hinduism - in Buddhism there is no place for God *at all*. There is no supreme being, no creator of the universe, and there never has been.³

BUDDHA

Buddha's Intentional Mistake Created the Humor

How could the mistaken belief that Buddha was an atheist acquire such widespread acceptance? The confusion arose from Buddha's emphasis on "Nirvana." Although those who reach "Nirvana" inevitably become liberated from the illusion-bound world, Nirvana is only a temporary state that precedes union with God. Baba elaborates on this theme:

Nirvana is that state where apparently "God Is Not." This is the only state where "God Is Not" and "Consciousness Is." This experience of the first stage of *fana* is what Buddha emphasized, but later on it was misinterpreted as Buddha having emphasized that there was no God. The reality, however, is that God Is; but in the absolute vacuum state of the first stage of *fana* only consciousness remains, experiencing absolute vacuum.

As it can never happen for God not to exist, in the state of *nirvana* God plays the part of consciousness itself, which consciousness is sometimes termed super-consciousness or *mahachaitanya*.

The second stage of *fana* follows this *nirvana* state and the "I am God" state is experienced consciously.⁴

The misconceptions about Buddha are a product of the Avatar's infinite sense of humor and His age-old habit of making a conscious mistake in every advent. Baba described Buddha's "weakness" as follows: "As Buddha, my weakness was that I explained about Nirvana - the Fana state. But I never disclosed about Nirvikalp samadhi - the Baqa state, which comes immediately after fana."⁵

The Avatar always has the last laugh! His practical joke undoubtedly gives Him pleasure and underscores His message that we can never understand Him. Buddha's mistake may have actually done a great service to millions of people down through the ages. For various reasons, there are always people who do not believe in God. By

BUDDHA

intentionally creating the misconception that Buddha was an atheist, Buddha brought these "atheists" unwittingly into His fold. The Avatar has always emphasized "Good thoughts, good words, good deeds" as the heart of the spiritual life. If atheists are introduced to this spiritual path by means of an intentional Avataric mistake, then so be it.

The Avatars generally receive names or titles, just as Jesus is known as the "Christ" or Messiah, and Muhammad is known as the "Rasool" or Prophet. The "Buddha" means the "Enlightened One," and it is accepted that Buddha "achieved" enlightenment by his own efforts. Of course, we know from Meher Baba that Buddha was unveiled to his status as the Avatar rather than earning enlightenment through His efforts as a human being.

Siddhartha Gautama's Early Life

The Buddha was born Siddhartha Sakyamuni Gautama in approximately 560 B.C.⁶ The name "Siddhartha" means "All Prospering."⁷ He belonged to the Sakya tribe of which his father, Suddhodana, was the leader or king. The Sakya tribe lived in the foothills of the Himalayas. At that time, there was a general well-being and prosperity among the peoples in that part of the world. There was widespread religious tolerance, and yogis, monks, wandering ascetics and renunciates were respected as genuine seekers of truth.

When Buddha's mother, Queen Maya, became pregnant, she began traveling to her father's home to give birth according to the established custom of the time. However, she experienced strong labor pains in Lumbini (a town now in Nepal), where she gave birth to the child under a tree. She then returned to the palace in Kapilavastu, where she died seven days after giving birth. Buddha was raised by the Queen's sister, Prajapati, who was also married to King Suddhodana.

By all accounts, Siddhartha's life was nearly "perfect." He was a handsome boy and young man, bright, energetic, thoughtful and

BUDDHA

well-loved by everyone. His father raised Him to be a prince and took every precaution to ensure that his beloved son was protected from seeing or experiencing suffering.

Siddhartha was well known for His compassion. According to the legend, Siddhartha and His cousin were exploring the woods when they saw a swan. Siddhartha's cousin shot the swan with an arrow, but the bird was only wounded. Siddhartha immediately removed the arrow from the bird's wing and squeezed juice from some leaves to stop the bleeding. After the boys quarreled over who should have the right to take the swan, a judge declared that Siddhartha had the right to the swan because He intended to save the swan's life rather than to take its life.

Siddhartha married a cousin, Yasodhara. For a time, she had difficulty conceiving, and this pain caused Siddhartha to think about the meaning of life. Ultimately, Yasodhara became pregnant with Siddhartha's son, Rahula.

The Four Sightings

Although Siddhartha's father tried heroically to insulate Siddhartha from the suffering of the world, his efforts could not defeat divine destiny. Siddhartha escaped from the protective atmosphere of the palace on four occasions to experience the "four sightings." On successive visits to the city, Siddhartha saw an old man, a sick man, a dead man, and a wandering ascetic. He had seen life's suffering directly, and He knew that what is born will age, become ill and die. He believed that the ascetic's search for truth would provide the answer to the problem of life.

Just as Siddhartha learned of the birth of Rahula, He was overwhelmed with the longing to live the ascetic life. The appointed time had come, and He rode out of the palace on horseback with a trusted servant. Upon reaching the forest, He cut His hair, removed His princely jewelry, and donned a simple robe. Siddhartha's servant went back to the palace with the prince's horse.

BUDDHA

The Quest

Siddhartha devoted Himself completely to the quest for truth. He tried conventional yoga meditations and remained dissatisfied. He then tried physical asceticism, to the point of reducing His body to a virtual skeleton. Siddhartha abandoned conventional yoga practices and self deprivation and redoubled His quest. Legend has it that he "achieved" enlightenment while meditating under a Bodhi tree. Prior to his experience of enlightenment, a woman took compassion on Him and gave him a bowl of rice pudding.

Baba tells a different story. In 1956 in South Carolina, He told His Western lovers who were seated on the grass: "This [scene] reminds me of the past when Buddha sat under the tree. After Buddha had been fasting for so many weeks, an old woman helped him by giving him a rice pudding. Following his eating of that pudding, Buddha sat under the tree, where he attained his Goal. As Babajan was to me, so that old woman was to Buddha; for just as that old woman helped Buddha to attain Super-consciousness, so did Babajan give Super-consciousness to me."⁸

When asked the old woman's name, Baba replied that her name had not been recorded.⁹ This interchange tells us as much about the Avatar as does His revealing that Buddha was unveiled to His divinity as opposed to "achieving" enlightenment. Baba clearly wants to reveal to the world the role of the Avatar and the related roles of the Perfect Masters. However, Baba was usually uninterested in "archeological" details of previous advents, such as specific dates and names of those who interacted with the Avatar. The name of the female Perfect Master who unveiled Siddhartha to his Buddhahood is immaterial to Baba's message.

The Beginning of Buddha's Mission

After His unveiling, Buddha began to attract disciples. He walked to a deer park in Benares (now Varanasi) India, one of the holy cities of Hinduism on the banks of the Ganges River. There He reunited with five close ones who had known Siddhartha prior to

BUDDHA

His unveiling as the Avatar, and He delivered his first discourse, "The Turning of the Wheel of Truth." Buddha's first objective in His long Avataric mission was to immerse these five close disciples in his teachings. A sixth, Yasa, was one of the first to come to Him after His unveiling.¹⁰

The Avatar's message is the same in every advent: "Love God." However, the Avatar's mission varies from advent to advent (compare Buddha with Muhammad), and as the mission varies, the perspective and the emphasis within the core message changes to suit the time and the place. Buddha took birth in an age characterized by an excess of intellectualism. There were numerous ascetics, renunciates, yogis and spiritual teachers wandering the countryside and competing with one another for students and audiences. Buddha's message pierced through this intellectualism and emphasized a pragmatic path to the True Self.

The Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Way

The Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Way comprise the essence of Buddhism. We should bear in mind that Buddha gave His discourses in a culture dominated by the oral tradition. Since Buddha's death, scholars have written volumes about the simple and straightforward teachings that He gave, and the intellectualism which Buddha wanted to undercut has now overwhelmed the simplicity of His message.

The Four Noble Truths are eternal. The First Truth is the acceptance of the fact that suffering is inherent in life. The Second Truth is that suffering arises from desire for material things. The Third Truth is that suffering ceases when we give up our desires for material things. The Fourth Truth is the Eightfold Way is the practical method to attain deathlessness and the permanent cessation of suffering.

Anyone who feels that the Four Noble Truths are historical relics should consider Baba's discourse entitled, "The Conditions of Happiness: Part I":

BUDDHA

Fulfillment of desires does not lead to their termination; they are submerged for awhile only to reappear with added intensity. When a person is hungry, he eats to satisfy the desire, but soon feels hungry again. If he eats too much, even in the fulfillment of his desire he experiences pain and discomfort. It is the same with all the desires of the world; they can only yield a happiness which is fleeting. Even in the very moment of fulfillment the happiness they yield has already begun to fade and vanish. Worldly desires can therefore never lead to abiding happiness. On the contrary, they invariably invite unending suffering of many kinds. When an individual is full of worldly desires, a plentiful crop of suffering is unavoidably in store for him. Desire is inevitably the mother of much suffering: this is the law.¹¹

The Eightfold Way consists of Right Views (those consistent with Buddha's teachings), Right Aspiration (the cessation of suffering), Right Speech (avoiding unkindness and backbiting), Right Action (avoiding injury to others), Right Livelihood (that which avoids injury to others), Right Effort (ceaseless striving despite countless failures), Right Mindfulness (internal awareness), and Right Meditation (single-pointed centering of the mind on a spiritually beneficial subject). This summary oversimplifies, but the interested reader will find no shortage of scholarly material on the Eightfold Way.

The Staying Power of Buddha's Core Message

The Eightfold Way is no less valid today than it was 2,500 years ago. Baba left volumes of His own writing and discourses to help spiritual aspirants develop "right views," or those views that are consistent with spiritual progress. Baba clarified: "To arrive at true Self-knowledge is to arrive at God-realization."¹² The Prayer of Repentance given by Meher Baba encourages the aspirant to ask

BUDDHA

God's forgiveness for "every word spoken that ought not to have been spoken," for every word inspired by selfishness and hatred, and "for all slander and backbiting." Meher Baba explained: "If we understand and feel that the greatest act of devotion and worship to God is not to hurt or harm any of His beings, we are loving God."¹³ Meher Baba neither prescribed nor proscribed specific occupations, but it is fair to see that He would prefer that those who aspire to love Him stick with an occupation that permits them to put their love for Him into practice and does not compel them to do things that displeased Him, such as lying, selling or using illegal drugs, engaging in wanton violence, and so forth.

Right effort has always been indispensable to spiritual aspirants: "Treading the spiritual path continues for several incarnations before the aspirant attains the goal. Centuries of continued sacrifices, service, self-purification, suffering and determined search have to roll on if the aspirant is to be spiritually prepared for the final realization of God. God-realization, which is the goal of the reincarnating individual, is never an attainment of a single life. It is always the culmination of his continued endeavor through many lives."¹⁴

Baba stressed that when a soul tires of the life of external conformity "and becomes more interested in the realities of the inner life," that soul "might be said to have become an aspirant."¹⁵ Finally, although Baba did not require meditation as a spiritual obligation, He did provide a variety of discussions of meditation and suggestions for themes upon which to meditate if an aspirant were inclined to meditate.¹⁶

Although Baba did not attempt to condense the spiritual life into a simple, coherent set of rules analogous to the Eightfold Way, the essential principles stressed by the Buddha will live forever as part of the spiritual path.

Buddha's Charisma and The Dryness of Modern Buddhism

After His unveiling, the Buddha lived a relatively simple life; indeed simplicity is one of the hallmarks of Buddhism. He spent most of His life in a geographic area 250 miles long and 150 miles

BUDDHA

wide.¹⁷ His peripatetic teaching style and life of renunciation permitted Him to come freely into contact with people from all strata of society. He despised the caste system prevalent in His time and stressed that His teaching and example were available to all.

Like all advents, He radiated a divine charisma that drew countless people to Him. Although He stressed meditation, His followers usually found more peace and joy in His presence than in their meditations.¹⁸ Children were extremely fond of Buddha, and He was fond of them.¹⁹ His magnetism was often irresistible.²⁰ Sadly, the personal charisma of the Avatars becomes lost in the midst of academic debates about their messages.

In 1940, while working in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) with His Western and Eastern disciples, Meher Baba commented: "Spiritually, Ceylon is dry. Inwardly, it is dry. Outwardly, it is wet. Ceylon is called the land of Ravanna. It is like a rock that cannot store water; the water flows away when poured on it. These dogmatic Buddhists are so dry, without feeling or emotion. India is the most spiritual, but not south India. It is very spiritual northward from Hyderabad."²¹

Baba's comment on the dryness of Buddhism is typical of His view of all religions, and Buddhists should not feel singled out for criticism. The natural order of things seems to dictate that religions degenerate into dry rituals and ceremonies and somehow lose their inner core of love and devotion to a spiritual ideal. The Avatar must then descend again as a man to revitalize the path to God:

If you take Baba to be perfect and one with God, Baba is then the Ocean and these different paths - Sufism, Vedanta, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Jainism and Christianity - are as rivers to the Ocean. But now the time has arrived and a period has arrived when these rivers have more or less become dry. Those who follow these different paths do it only in form. More importance is given to ceremonies and practices, but the real purpose is lost sight of.²²

BUDDHA

Buddha Had the Typical Avataric Humor

History sometimes depicts Buddha as a dry ascetic, but He was full of life and humor, often engaging in light-hearted bantering with His disciples.²³ The Avatar is more fully human than we are, and His sense of humor is unsurpassed. On one occasion, Baba commented on a type of humor that those with ordinary consciousness would not understand from their everyday experience:

Ajoba is very old. He has a family and children, and is spending his sanskaras in this life. Suppose in his next birth he reincarnates as a female. God forbid! I see this old man now and I also see him as he will be in his next birth - and that makes me laugh! Am I not justified in being humorous? Everything I see, I see as a dream!²⁴

In fact, life itself "proves the divine sense of humor or the leela [sport] of God. The manifestation of the divine sport or leela, however, depends upon the Great Ones of God who achieve Oneness with God. And thus, in spite of raising themselves above the law of duality, they still retain the divine sense of humor to uphold the universal law of ignorance through which Knowledge Divine is achieved for all eternity."²⁵ In addition to His cosmic sense of humor, the Avatar also finds humor in daily life with His followers. A few examples:

At the East-West Gathering in 1962, several of Baba's lovers entertained him with a variety show of skits. One lover, dressed as a doctor, examined Baba and asked Him to "open your mouth and say 'OM.'" In another skit, lovers dressed up as Krishna, a gopi, and a cow. The skit was entitled, "Forgive us Lord our little jokes on Thee and we'll forgive Thee Thy great big joke on we!"²⁶ Baba participated wholeheartedly in the skit and was warmly amused by it.

At the 1958 Sahavas in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, a group of men humorously calling themselves the "Supreme and Ancient Order of Alligator Watchers" entertained Baba with a series of skits. One lover gave Him a toy alligator that beat a drum; another gave him a big stuffed alligator. One man pushed a friend dressed as a

BUDDHA

baby in a wheelbarrow. Others sang songs, played an instrument or told funny stories. Baba gestured: "I never laughed so much in this incarnation as I laughed today!"²⁷

In 1963, Meher Baba hosted a special sahavas at Meherazad for women. During the morning session, things went very smoothly, and the women enjoyed Meher Baba's company immensely. Just after lunch, Baba gestured, "Something terrible is going to happen shortly!" Then a man entered the group, wearing white pants with a big yellow patch, a black coat, spectacles and a hat, crying out, "I want to meet Meher Baba!" Since no men were permitted at the sahavas, several women screamed out and some tried to restrain the intruder. Then the "man" revealed himself as a woman, who had been cleverly disguised as a man, and the women broke up in laughter.²⁸

Because He sees worldly life as illusory, the Avatar has a continuous sense of humor about everything. Baba even found humor in the circumstances of Buddha's death: "The funniest divine sense of humor was on the part of Buddha when he died of simple dysentery, though his 'medicine' for the spiritual *beemaries* (illnesses) of mankind holds the field to this day."²⁹

So the notion of the all-serious, super-pious Avatar is false. "There is no reason why God should not have a sense of humour. In fact, if He hadn't, we couldn't - something cannot come from nowhere: every limited quality must come from an unlimited one. Meher Baba has said: 'My sense of humour is Infinite.'"³⁰

Buddha's Prescription for the World's Maladies

Buddha's external life was the simplest life of all known Avatars. Not only did He spend most of his 45 years of teaching within a relatively small geographic area, His life of renunciation underscored His own messages.

Buddha was the perfect renunciate who showed that, when one truly renounces everything in this illusory world, one merges with God. However, Buddha did not require a life of external renunciation and specifically gave teachings for householders and people

BUDDHA

working in the world. However, from His perspective the life of external renunciation facilitated spiritual progress.

The Buddhist Themes of the New Life

Baba did not require or emphasize a life of external renunciation. He commented that many individuals leading a so-called "spiritual" life of external renunciation are in reality simply running away from responsibilities. In contrast to Buddha's life of simplicity, Baba traveled the world over many times, visited such centers of illusion as Hollywood and Wall Street, and freely used all the technology of the modern world. To characterize Meher Baba as in any way attached to the things of this world would be totally incorrect, however. His New Life, described in the chapter on His life, included phases of strenuous external renunciation. Meher Baba's New Life is the most reminiscent of Buddha of all phases of His extraordinary life.

Baba did not like the word "renunciation" to characterize the New Life. He preferred the word "Satyanashi," a word He made up. He commented: "There is a world of difference between renunciation and *Satyanashi*. Renunciation can be practiced and developed by anyone, and has a quality and degree in relation to different types of renunciators. But *Satyanashi* cannot be practiced. It is not of anybody's seeking. *Satyanashi* comes and cannot be resisted."³¹ He also commented: "Therefore, if any one asks you what this New Life is, say, 'Absolute and perfect renunciation.' If they ask, 'Renunciation of what?' say, 'Of everything - aims, hopes, help and life itself.'"³²

Baba's begging during the New Life in Benares was reminiscent of Buddha. He dressed in a white kafni, carried an ocher-colored satchel and a brass pot, and walked barefoot. When the companions went out begging, their appearance was similar to Baba's. He thus played the role of the perfect seeker of God, just as Buddha had played the role of the perfect seeker prior to his enlightenment and continued to live the life of external renunciation after His enlightenment. Baba made it a point to visit Sarnath at the beginning of the New Life. Bhau Kalchuri writes:

BUDDHA

Sarnath is the most sacred place to Buddhists all over the world. Sarnath is connected with the times of Gautama the Buddha, being the place where, after his full *Enlightenment* in Bodhigaya, he preached his first sermon and initiated his first five disciples. After this time Buddha's seat remained solely in Sarnath, where he set up his center of activity for all of India.³³

Baba took the women into some underground stone rooms used for meditation in one of the temples in Sarnath. He asked His sister Mani to write down on a slip of paper the name of the known Avatars in this cycle. Mani wrote the names of Zarathustra, Rama, Krishna, Buddha, Jesus and Muhammad. Baba put the list in His pocket as He went to the underground rooms.³⁴ Baba blends the personalities and work of all previous Avatars in this advent.

During Buddha's time, Sarnath was a deer forest known as Isipatana, which Buddha used to preach to His disciples. The modern-day Buddha took His disciples to the ruins of the old temples, still leading them on the same path to God. The external circumstances of life may change, but the internal realities of the spiritual path remain the same. "This New Life is endless," said Meher Baba. In fact, this "New Life will live by itself eternally, even if there is no one to live it."³⁵ Meher Baba's visit to Sarnath symbolizes the Avatar's breathing new life into the ruins of the old religions. The essence of Buddhism, the quest for God, will "live by itself eternally" and will always light the way for the spiritual aspirant. Meher Baba's sister Mani, one of the disciples to accompany Meher Baba on the New Life, underscored the Buddhist theme of the New Life: "As in the past by Buddha and His disciples, through this period of our life of renunciation and poverty we only partook of food that was offered us in 'Bhiksha' (i.e. alms.)"³⁶ Thus the Avatar updates His own work from previous advents.

Love Gifts to the Avatar

One of the delightful patterns of the Buddha, which was shared by Meher Baba, was in permitting His followers to lend or give their

BUDDHA

property to be freely used by the Avatar. Before Siddhartha was unveiled, He came to the town of Rajagaha just as King Bimbisara was about to sacrifice many animals. Siddhartha persuaded the king to free the animals instead. The king was so moved by Siddhartha that he asked Siddhartha to stay and share his kingdom with him, but Siddhartha declined the offer, telling the king that, when He had found the Kingdom of Truth, He would return and share it with the king.³⁷ After His unveiling, Buddha kept His promise to King Bimbisara and returned to Rajagaha. After attending a discourse of the Buddha, the king was moved to give a bamboo grove to Buddha, who accepted it as a love gift for His work. Buddha stayed in that Bamboo Grove many times, and people met with Him there to hear His discourses and seek His spiritual counsel.³⁸

Anathapindika, a lay-follower of the Buddha, wanted to establish a retreat for the Buddha and his renunciate disciples in Savatthi, the capital of Kosala, ruled over by King Pasenadi. After some searching of the surroundings, Anathapindika decided that Prince Jeta's park had the requirements for Buddha's retreat. Prince Jeta jokingly offered to sell the park if the purchase money were spread all over the park and to his surprise Anathapindika accepted the offer. As Prince Jeta watched Anathapindika's men spreading copper coins over the entire park, he was so moved by Anathapindika's devotion that he gave the park as a gift. A small monastery was built, and people came from near and far to hear Buddha's teaching there.³⁹

These incidents of loving generosity were apparently not unique. It became common practice for wealthy people to dedicate gardens or other grounds to the Buddha for His use.⁴⁰ This identical pattern of love gifts to the Avatar repeated itself in Meher Baba's advent.

In the early 1940s, Meher Baba asked two of His close western disciples to search for a suitable center in the United States, and He gave them certain conditions that such a center would need to satisfy, one of which was that the property had to be given from the heart. In 1944, the father of one of these close disciples gave her several hundred acres in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, and she offered the property to Baba as a gift from the heart. Baba lovingly accepted the gift and cabled the other disciple: "Am happy to find in all your

BUDDHA

letters about Myrtle Beach, everything that I personally and spiritually approve of and sanction. All my lovers should cooperate to make Myrtle Beach the Spiritual Abode for one and all."⁴¹

The Meher Spiritual Center in Myrtle Beach is a delightful and beautiful spiritual retreat, a wonderful place for newcomers to learn about Baba and for long-time lovers to refresh themselves. The center has residential cabins, facilities for cooking, a meeting room, a library, a house built for Meher Baba and His close disciples, and a number of nature trails and undeveloped woods. Baba stayed on the center in 1952, 1956 and 1958, and it is saturated with His love. The facilities at Myrtle Beach, and the love with which they were given, are very reminiscent of the love gifts of property to Buddha.

During the 1950s and 1960s, the Maharani (Queen) of Baroda made available her Poona "bungalow" for Meher Baba's use during the hot months of the year, April, May and June. The Maharani was totally devoted to Meher Baba and pleased to be of service to Him. Her "bungalow" was a palace, left over from the days of India's princely kingdoms. Baba used to tell his close disciples, "In March, you march to Poona," when it was time to shift from Meherazad to Poona, where they would stay at the Maharani's "bungalow," which became known as "Guruprasad." Baba invited many of His lovers to meet Him at Guruprasad and several times held darshans there. In 1962, Guruprasad was the site of the East-West Gathering, an unprecedented event that brought together Meher Baba's Eastern and Western lovers in a single event to enjoy his company.

The properties related to Baba's work in India were also love gifts. Meherabad was Baba's home for two decades, and the properties there contained a dispensary, schools, living quarters and meeting facilities. Meherabad now contains Baba's tomb and is a center for pilgrimage with residential facilities for visiting pilgrims. Meherazad was Baba's home from 1946 until He dropped His body in 1969. Meherazad is the home for the surviving residential disciples, but it will be a place of pilgrimage when those disciples die. The offices of the Avatar Meher Baba Trust are in Ahmednagar and were themselves love gifts. All of these properties are now owned by and administered by the Avatar Meher Baba Trust, so that Baba has

BUDDHA

turned a love gift **to** Him into a love gift **from** Him to His followers. After personally taking a group of His lovers to the tomb in Meherabad in 1955, Baba told them: "It is your great fortune that I myself brought you to my last resting place. After sixty years, this place will be a world center of pilgrimage."⁴²

Buddha's Conflicts With the Orthodoxy of His Time

The Avatar always comes into conflict with certain ingrained religious patterns in the culture in which He is born. Jesus aggressively attacked the arrogance and hypocrisy of the Jewish establishment. Muhammad waged war against the pagans who had corrupted the sacred Kaaba and the pilgrimage to Mecca. Baba broke down numerous stereotypes and false assumptions about the spiritual life. Buddha was no different.

Buddha had no tolerance for the caste system. By His time it had become an excuse for bigotry and cruelty. The soul has no caste, and Buddha would not allow any distinctions based on caste within the monastic order He established, and His teachings were open to everyone regardless of caste.

Buddha's acceptance of an untouchable woman caused quite a stir in the local community. Buddha used the event to tell an instructive story about the irrationality of the caste system, and His personal magnetism calmed the disturbed feelings of the members of the community.⁴³ On another occasion, Buddha met an untouchable scavenger, who was shy about presenting himself to the Buddha. Buddha's love melted away his reticence, and Buddha invited him to become a disciple. The man was so touched by Buddha's love that he immediately accepted, happy to abandon his miserable life. He later became a distinguished member of the order.⁴⁴

Buddha attacked the caste system on all fronts. Not surprisingly, the Brahmins were the main proponents of the caste system because they were the highest caste and considered themselves to be the elite of society. In a dialogue with a Brahmin, Buddha was able to compel the Brahmin to admit that one could not be a true Brahmin without

BUDDHA

wisdom and virtue. These qualities, as Buddha explained, may be acquired by anyone by hard work and character. Thus Buddha used the dialogue as a tool for explaining that a true Brahmin, from whatever origins of birth, is one who has wisdom and virtue.⁴⁵

Twenty-five hundred years later, the Avatar returned to India to continue the demolition of the caste system. Baba emphasizes that He gives "no importance to creed, dogma, caste, or the performance of religious ceremonies and rites but to the *understanding* of the following seven Realities...."⁴⁶ His life reflects His intolerance of the caste system and His compassion for those who suffered from the discrimination inflicted by it.

In one of the schools operated in Meherabad in the 1920s, Baba worked tirelessly at breaking down the prejudice toward the Harijan children (the untouchable caste called by Gandhi "Harijans" or "Children of God"). He gave these untouchable children a great deal of personal attention and twice a week gave them a bath. If someone came who wanted his darshan, Baba would say: "If you have come for the darshan of God, these Harijan children are *my* God! You are welcome at Meherabad if you are willing to serve them, else you should worship your own God in your house or temple. Here, the only God you will find are these children!"⁴⁷

In the 1930s, Meher Baba accepted an invitation to be served a meal by a humble villager who lived near Meherabad. Several Harijans from the village were also invited. A high-caste Hindu refused the invitation. Meher Baba sent for him and told him: "If you are still inclined toward perpetuating caste differences, it is better that you leave Meherabad. I would not care in the least if you did! I will not allow my work to be spoiled by such prejudices and I will not permit this village, which has a connection to me, to grumble and be affected because someone is addicted to such age-old intolerances."⁴⁸ The poor man was reduced to tears and explained that he was physically exhausted and was not prejudiced toward the Harijans. Baba then forgave him.

In 1943, Baba brought a sweeper's son with His group when He was working in what is now the border of India and Pakistan.

BUDDHA

(The partition of India and Pakistan did not occur until 1947.) In a role reversal, He ordered one of His mandali to serve this boy, to escort him to the movies, and to pamper him in other ways. One day the boy cursed the disciple because a truck had driven by and blown a cloud of dust onto the boy. Later Baba sternly rebuked the disciple and explained to him: "You *hate* him because you are a Brahmin and he is a sweeper. To banish this hate from your heart, I have purposely given you this work of serving him. You should be thankful to [the boy] for helping to eradicate this prejudice from inside you. You *hate* him, and you also *envy* him. He does not hate or envy you. This shows that Amir is a true *amir* (nobleman) while you are the pauper."⁴⁹

As a result of the Avatar's persistent work, India's constitution now prohibits discrimination on the basis of caste. Although India is certainly not free of caste prejudice in daily life, the lot of the lower castes has improved. The Avatar's work is continuous. Here Baba picked up where Buddha left off and advanced God's continuing crusade against the caste system.

Buddha's Work With Women

All Avatars have worked to improve the social status of women. The Indian Avatars, including Buddha, have all taught the truth of reincarnation. However, the mere fact that every soul must alternate between the genders during the reincarnation process is not justice enough. God is determined that men and women will be equal, and each Avatar has made a contribution toward that goal. The work has come to completion in this advent.

Buddha vowed that He wanted to see both women and men who could exemplify the life that He taught.⁵⁰ Moreover, Buddha did not distinguish between men and women in their ability to progress on the spiritual path.⁵¹ Since the soul has no gender and since every soul must incarnate as both male and female, there is little wonder that from Buddha's perspective wisdom and virtue distinguished a soul rather than gender. Indeed, some of Buddha's best disciples were women.⁵²

BUDDHA

The spiritual equality of the sexes may seem obvious in light of Baba's teachings. However, every religious tradition has discriminated against women in the past. In the East, the renunciates were considered the elite of the spiritual world, and those renunciates were mostly male. Women were often required to wait until a male lifetime to become renunciates. Buddha changed that pattern by establishing a monastic order for women.⁵³

Buddha was likewise strict about not imposing a disproportionate share of daily chores on women. He made it a rule that the men should not request the women to do their work for them, so that the women should have their required time for proper meditation.⁵⁴ Those old sexist attitudes had to be given up in the Master's order. The current Avatar picked up where Buddha left off and has made equality of the sexes far more universal.

Like Meher Baba, Buddha was unveiled by a female Perfect Master. This event had symbolic importance in both Buddha's advent and Meher Baba's advent and presaged the elevation of the status of women. Buddha initiated both His stepmother and His wife into his order among many other women.⁵⁵ Perhaps these women were the two women in the Avatar's first circle. Buddha's family thus set the example for seeking the truth by renunciation. In the later years of Buddha's life, women were treated with increased respect not previously seen in that part of the world.⁵⁶

Sita was Rama's partner in his years of wandering; Krishna had his gopis; Buddha made no distinction between the genders; Jesus freely invited women to follow Him and attend His sermons; Muhammad required His followers to marry women and care for them rather than to dispose of them as sexual objects, and Meher Baba continued this centuries-old task. His position regarding women is simple: "She is man's equal."⁵⁷

Women played a critical role in Meher Baba's work. In fact, He said that His work *in the West* would be done by women.⁵⁸ Meher Baba sent women to look for His spiritual center in the United States, and a woman accepted the land in Myrtle Beach from her father and then gave it to Meher Baba for His work. The same

BUDDHA

woman drove the Blue Bus during Meher Baba's tours of India in the 1930s. Four women accompanied Meher Baba on His New Life. A woman headed the group responsible for arranging Meher Baba's trip to the United States in 1956. A woman was asked by Meher Baba to be the head of Sufism Reoriented, which has done important work in His cause.

Gender is irrelevant to God. In Myrtle Beach, Baba related the story of Mira, a princess who lived in India 300 years ago and whose love for Krishna was legendary: "I am Krishna. I want all of you to love me as Mira loved me."⁵⁹ Similarly, He praised Saint Theresa of Avila: "That is the most important thing. She loved me; she devoted her life completely to me."⁶⁰

God is both male and female and also beyond gender. Until this advent, however, the Avatar manifested primarily the masculine side of God. Baba's advent is unique in that the Avatar has blended the masculine and feminine sides of God. Baba elaborated on this theme in a discourse to Easterners in 1958 in India:

Now, we again come to the Beyond-God, Who is both the Father and Mother in one. During cycles of cycles of time, after ages, when God descends as the Avatar on this material plane, he always takes a male form. He is never born as a woman. Avatars are the Sons of the Father in the Beyond state. All the past Avataric periods witnessed the presence of the Avatar as the healthy, bright, intellectual Son of the God-Beyond. This means in my previous advents I always remained the Beloved Son of my Father....

But in the past, the Beyond-God did not have the occasion of playing the part of God the Mother. In this Avataric period, God the Father is very pleased with me at my being infinitely bright, infinitely intelligent, infinitely brilliant, *ustad* (masterful), and so forth. I give promises and never fulfill them. (The group laughed.) I am bright and shrewd, as my Father wants me to be, and I am the Beloved Son of my Father.

BUDDHA

At the same time, in this form, I am physically disabled. In America in 1952, I broke the left side of my physical frame from head to foot. Now in India, the right side has been completely shattered in the recent auto accident. Besides being physically disabled, I am infinitely *bhola* (innocent), guileless and easily duped. Therefore, I always listen to all that you say and yield to your wishes. I have not the strength to say NO to any of you, nor refuse any of your requests, despite my plans, instructions and circulars. Thus, I am the well-beloved Son of God as the Mother also. In this incarnation of the Avatar, God has the chance, as it were, to play the part of both Father and Mother.⁶¹

What we think of in the modern era as "feminism" is a process that began thousands of years ago. In each advent, the Avatar has carefully nurtured the elevation of the status of women. In this advent, the Avatar intends to bring this process to its natural conclusion. Men and women are equals. The soul is beyond gender. God is now pleased to play both the part of Father and Mother and to blend the male and female sides of Himself.

Buddha's Emphasis on the Impersonal Aspect of God

Avatars emphasize different aspects of the central spiritual truth: Love God; strive for union with God. Buddha emphasized impersonal aspects of spiritual aspiration because people at that time and that place needed such an emphasis.

Just prior to His death, Buddha counseled His disciples to hold fast to the Dhamma, the spiritual path which Buddha had spent His life illuminating. He counseled that His followers must find the Dhamma for themselves in the light of His teachings.⁶² Here the concept of "the Dhamma" means a blending of the spiritual laws of the universe, the path to Deathlessness, and the Buddha's teachings.

The time and the culture in which Buddha lived required emphasis on the impersonal aspects of spirituality Perhaps spiritually inclined

BUDDHA

people were overly obsessed with personalized aspects of God. Perhaps there was a tendency to engage in hero worship directed to various gurus or to meditate only on personalities. Perhaps people were willing to settle for spiritual goals that fell short of the final goal, a kind of stifling self-satisfaction that inhibited true spiritual growth.

In contrast to Buddha, Baba emphasizes loving Him personally as the Avatar. For this reason, He ensured that a wealth of information about His life, His personality, His messages, and His image would be available to people to guide them for the next 700 years. He once commented to His Western lovers: "Learn to read me, for when you understand me, you will understand everything!"⁶³ In Myrtle Beach, Baba boiled the whole spiritual path down to the following: "I want love, nothing else. Love me, and let God love us. That is what I want. When you love Baba, God will love you, and God's loving means everything."⁶⁴

Baba made the same point in a slightly different vein to His lovers in India: "But if you really want God, if you are in search of God, the only solution is to hold fast to my daaman. There is no other way!"⁶⁵ By the term "daaman," Baba referred to the hem of a skirt. He explained that a child hangs on to the hem of his mother's skirt as she goes through the town on her errands, and it is important for the youngster to hang on to her skirt to avoid getting lost. Incidentally, Baba often wore a garment called a "sadra," which is like a long, body-length shirt which had a "hem" much like a skirt. Not to belabor the point: Love Him; hold on to Him; stay close to Him; obey Him. Baba's focus in this advent is on the personal God, the Avatar himself. "In short, it is of the highest benefit for all to hold to the Avatar's daaman. Even if you lose everything, hold fast to it. I am the Avatar of this Age!"⁶⁶

Avataric humor is again at play. Surely there is a twinkle in Meher Baba's eye when He says, "Hold on to my daaman." As Buddha, He told His followers: "Hold on to the dhamma." As Krishna and Rama, He advised people to fulfill their "dharma," their spiritual duty. The humor lies in the fact that these Avatars are the same person, modifying their message slightly from advent to advent. Standing near a statue of the Buddha in the Ellora caves in

BUDDHA

India, Baba emphasized this point: "I am Buddha."⁶⁷ He did not say, "I was Buddha."

The Avatars alternate between emphasizing the personal and the impersonal aspects of spiritual aspiration. Muhammad disclaimed even being the Avatar and pointed his followers to Allah, God in the Beyond State; Jesus admitted to being the Avatar and encouraged his followers to love Him personally. Meher Baba said: "If you have that love for Me that Saint Francis had for Jesus, then not only will you realize Me but you will please Me."⁶⁸

It is easier and more natural for most people to love a person than to love a concept or an abstraction, even though they may believe that the abstraction is divine. On the other hand, many people who believe in God cannot accept that God could become man. Thus we have varied approaches to God in the different religions because the spiritual needs of people are different.

Prior to this advent, the Avatar did not clarify the difference between worshiping impersonal God and personal God. Fortunately, Baba made numerous remarks on this subject, including the following:

Were someone to ask me who is greater, Personal or Impersonal God, Tukaram [a Perfect Master] or Bhagwan, Zarathustra or Ahuramazd, Jesus or God the Father, I would definitely answer that Tukaram, Zarathustra and Jesus are greater. In fact, they are the Greatest of the Great because by being a Sadguru or the Avatar they render infinite service to the universe and suffer infinitely by taking upon themselves the burden of the world's infinite amount of sanskaras. Undoubtedly, a conscious divine person such as Tukaram or Zarathustra, compared to the unconscious Bhagwan or Ahuramazd (formless God), is definitely greater!

Zarathustra was actually God in human form - an Avatar. In order to work in creation, he

BUDDHA

had to come down as man among illiterate, fanatical and hot-tempered humanity. Had Zarathustra told them to worship him, they would have denounced, harassed and murdered him. They would have thought him an enormous egotist and absolutely crazy. So he taught them to pray to formless God. But in reality, by worshiping formless God, they were worshiping him; and consequently they gained the impression that Ahuramazd was greater than Zarathustra, which was wrong.⁶⁹

The Avatar is both formless God and God in human form. How logical that the Avatar (or a Perfect Master) would therefore be greater than formless God! Before the Avatar clarified these truths, they were not known to mankind in general. Bhau Kalchuri emphasizes: "Only the Avatar or Sadguru Who thinks infinitely of the Self and Who has realized the Soul to be One can make others realize the Soul."⁷⁰

The followers of Buddha who strove for liberation after Buddha's death could not have attained liberation without the intervention of a Perfect Master. In fact, Buddha did not "achieve" liberation through the exercise of His own will power; instead, as the Avatar, He was unveiled by living Perfect Masters. In some cases, if there is no Perfect Master in the area when a soul is ready for God Realization, God arranges to care for that soul in the form of the Khizr. "Khwaja Khizr now and then takes on a physical body if there is some spiritual situation that absolutely demands it. The Realization of Francis was such a case, because he had no Perfect Master to give him Realization. So, on the night we read about on Mount La Verna, near Assisi, during which St. Francis also received the stigmata [wounds of the Crucified Christ], Khwaja Khizr, in his temporary human form, gave this beloved Western saint the touch of grace which made him a Perfect Soul - a Qutub or Perfect Master."⁷¹

BUDDHA

Buddha's Pragmatism

Buddha was a spiritual doctor, dedicated to alleviating the suffering of His "patients." Like any doctor, He was concerned with what works, not with theory. His teaching was eminently practical, always concerned with how to live the spiritual life and seldom concerned with explaining why the universe is the way it is to satisfy mere intellectual curiosity.

Once a group of mendicants continued to press Buddha to go beyond His discourses on the causes of human suffering and its cessation. He demurred by picking up a handful of leaves and asking the questioners whether there were more leaves in His hand or on the nearby trees. Of course, they replied that the nearby trees had far more leaves. Buddha then proceeded to explain that He emphasized only the leaves in His hand, rather than the leaves in the trees, because they were the ones useful to mankind.⁷² He then resumed his emphasis on the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path.

A man once came to Buddha who was concerned that Buddha taught only the doctrine of "inaction" as opposed to "action." Buddha replied that He taught both inaction and action. When the man asked how that could be, Buddha explained that He taught inaction as regards misconduct in deed, in word, and in thoughts and action as regards good deeds, good words, good thoughts.⁷³

A monk persisted in asking philosophical questions and demanded answers to them. Buddha replied, using the analogy of a doctor and patient. Buddha said that when a sick man visits a doctor, the doctor only asks him about his symptoms, the onset of the illness, and the prognosis. In short, the doctor wants to diagnose the illness and to prescribe a cure; the doctor does not engage the patient in a complicated discussion about the history of the illness, the other doctors who are also investigating the illness, current trends in medicine, the experiences of other patients, and so forth. These academic inquiries will not cure the illness or heal the injury, and the patient might die while all these tangential discussions are going forward. Buddha's focus was in healing the spiritual maladies of mankind and not in playing intellectual games.⁷⁴

BUDDHA

Some may conclude that Baba did not have Buddha's aptitude for pragmatism because Baba did provide numerous explanations of an intellectual nature on the mechanics of the universe and the spiritual path. On closer inspection, everything that Baba gave was for a practical purpose. The culture in which Buddha did His teaching was steeped in the oral tradition. In this age, there is more worldwide literacy and a higher overall level of education than at any other time in the world. The New Humanity needs a road map, an intellectual grasp of spiritual principles so that it can live the spiritual life and not just chatter idly about it. "None of the great Masters in the past has given such explanations as I have.... [W]hat I give is the explanation of the Knowledge that is beyond the scope of the ordinary intellect to grasp and understand. Even though these explanations are mere shadows of the Real Knowledge, they are beyond mind to follow."⁷⁵

The Avatar's teachings inevitably are taken by his followers on many levels. For most followers, adherents to the religion established after His death, the teachings become rules, rituals, ceremonies and orthodox practices. For a few, the Avatar's teachings are always mystical, that is, they guide the way to union with God. Mysticism, however, has gotten a bad name, particularly in the West, where it has become synonymous with escapism, irrationality and irresponsibility. As Baba has clarified, true mysticism is the meaning of life. "There is nothing irrational in true mysticism when it is, as it should be, a vision of Reality. It is a form of perception that is absolutely unclouded, and it is so practical that it can be lived every moment of life and expressed in everyday duties. Its connection with experience is so deep that, in one sense, it is the final understanding of all experience."⁷⁶

Life cannot be compartmentalized into one set of activities that are "spiritual" and another that are "material." God is in everything and everyone, and every detail of life has its own spiritual dignity. "The essence of spirituality does not consist in a specialized or narrow interest in some imagined part of life but in a certain enlightened attitude to all the various situations which obtain in life. It covers and includes the whole of life."⁷⁷

BUDDHA

The values placed upon life's activities from a material perspective are not those from God's perspective. "Although in spiritual life even little things matter as much as great things, the conventions of the world usually fail to recognize this simple truth."⁷⁸

Baba, like the Buddha, is eminently pragmatic. He tells us that, if the spiritual aspirant "runs away from the world, that does not help him. He will again have to come back to the world to develop that quality which would enable him to face and accept the world as it is. Very often his path lies through the world which he has to serve in spite of not liking its ways."⁷⁹ In the spiritual life, "[s]ound practice is far more important than sound theory."⁸⁰

As Baba said with regard to his training of his early Western followers: "I have called the Western men and women to India to see and share in my work. They are to be trained in a *spirituality made practical*, and, although it will not be a crown of thorns for them, it won't be a bed of roses either."⁸¹

Reformation of Criminals

One of the famous stories of Buddha's advent is the story of his conversion of the famous robber, Angulimala.⁸² As Buddha approached the city of Savatthi, He saw that armed guards were posted everywhere to protect the city against Angulimala, whose name signified a necklace of fingers. Angulimala murdered his victims, cut off their fingers, and added them to a necklace. People in the city and surrounding countryside were terrified of him.

Buddha inquired where he lived and announced that He would visit Angulimala. One of the monks attempted to dissuade Buddha from going but was unsuccessful. Another monk begged Buddha to take an armed guard with Him, but Buddha just laughed. He told the monks that he would be returning soon with Angulimala and asked that they treat Angulimala with loving kindness.

Angulimala was eagerly plotting his next robbery and murder when Buddha passed by his den. When Angulimala yelled "Stop," Buddha replied: "*I* have stopped. It is *you* who have not," and

BUDDHA

Buddha continued walking by. When Angulimala rushed at the Buddha with a drawn sword, Buddha looked him in the eyes and his sword dropped to the ground. Angulimala was transfixed by the Buddha's gaze, and he and the Buddha both sat down. Finally he asked Buddha why He had come to see him, and Buddha replied that Angulimala needed Him.

Buddha explained that Angulimala was a seeker, a seeker of adventure and challenge, and that he had come to show Angulimala a greater adventure than he had previously imagined and a conquest that he had not achieved. When Angulimala asked what this adventure was, Buddha told him it was the Eightfold Path that would permit him to conquer himself and to conquer fear. When Angulimala asked why he would want to do that, Buddha explained that he was the slave of his lusts for power, possessions and dominations. Even though others bowed in fear before Angulimala, he himself bowed without control to his desires and was effectively the slave of his desires. Buddha told him that he could show him how to become the master of himself.

Buddha explained that the spiritual path would require hard work and patience and that Angulimala would know pain and suffering along the way. Angulimala vowed that he was up to the task and explained that he would follow the Buddha as a disciple. Before they departed, Angulimala asked Buddha what He meant by His initial remark about having stopped. Buddha explained that He had stopped doing harm to all beings but that Angulimala had not.

Buddha returned to the monks and introduced His new disciple as "Brother Angulimala." In front of everyone, Angulimala repented of his evil deeds and asked Buddha whether he could ever overcome the karma of those deeds. Buddha replied that by seeking virtue and centering himself in the Imperishable, he could expiate his evil deeds. All who had witnessed this transformation were deeply touched.

Angulimala resolved to bear the suffering caused by his own karma as he moved among the village and towns-people who despised him for what he had done. Angulimala professed to have found an inner peace even in the midst of his suffering. He became

BUDDHA

respected for his hard work and earnest striving and eventually found enlightenment.⁸³

In this advent, Baba similarly reformed a notorious robber named "Satya Mang." Meher Baba narrated the story in 1954 in India:

Once, in Lower Meherabad, when there was the big colony and I had dissolved it all and moved to a new place named Toka a few miles away, a few persons were kept here. An Irani who was good in heart, but a bit cracked [crazy], had to keep guard at night. He had to shout out at intervals "All's well," to keep himself awake, as well as to show others that he was awake. At that time, there was a very notorious thief called Satya Mang, who had robbed and killed a number of people. One night, this Satya Mang had robbed a man on the road from here to Ahmednagar. The following night, something happened to this dear Irani; a lost donkey wandered here and he thought it was Satya Mang. So, he awakened everyone and all were nervous. One old mandali fainted. All the time, the man was shouting "Satya Mang is here!" After a time, a lantern was lit, and it was seen that there was nobody there; then the door was opened and the donkey was seen.

When I heard this story, I thought this illusion beats even the universal illusion I created ages ago! Then, I sent for Satya Mang, who was so proud of his strength that the police feared him and the villagers were afraid to report his threats. "I don't know Meher Baba, get out," he said to my messenger, and he abused my name.

But later on he came, saying he had seen Baba in a dream sitting on his chest. I was sitting as usual, and as soon as he saw me, Satya Mang prostrated himself and started weeping. I made him sit quietly by my side. "I want you from today

BUDDHA

to give up robbing and killing and to disperse your gang; and for your living, come to me and I will supply you with money," I said. He promised.

From that day, Satya Mang gave up his old ways. Once, there was a lapse; after some months, he thought of robbing someone. A moneylender had left his house vacant, and Satya Mang was tempted to rob it. He broke in, and saw the form of Baba standing at the doorway. So he came at once to me and said, "You have saved me." When I went away to Persia [in 1929] and left only one family here, I told him to look after Meherabad. At times, I have plenty of money. At other times, I have little or none. In the New Life, I begged for food and made the mandali beg. Satya Mang had stopped robbing. He was living close by, and he brought food to the family, begging from village to village for them."⁸⁴

More than a year later, when Baba held a program to work with poor people in India, Satya Mang was one of the participants: "Standing among the poor was Satya Mang, and Baba once again interrupted the ceremony when his turn came and narrated his history as a reformed criminal. Standing before Baba, Satya Mang began weeping, and his tears testified to his love for Baba and his superb faith in him."⁸⁵

In 1940 Meher Baba told the following story regarding Buddha and another notorious murderer:

There was a man who was a great murderer. In his life, he murdered ninety-nine people. One day, he felt very depressed and sick of it all. So he went to the Buddha, and frankly and openly confessed before him all his crimes, adding that he was feeling most dejected and wanted to end it all. The Buddha told him to go and sit by the side of a certain road and think of him. The murderer did so. Years passed.

BUDDHA

One day, while he was sitting there thinking of the Buddha, a rider came by, stopped before him and told him to move aside. The man refused, and the rider started lashing him with his whip. Instantly, reverting back to his old ways, the man pulled the rider from his horse and stabbed him! He killed him. However, at that very moment the man realized God!

The rider was carrying on his person a message from one king to another ordering the death of one hundred spies. By saving the exact number of lives that he had murdered, his good and bad sanskaras balanced. The man, of course, did not know all this, and was only thus saved by the Buddha, because the Master knew. Therefore, if you obey implicitly and unquestioningly, you win, because whereas your conception is limited, the Master knows all, and gives you just what is best for you.⁸⁶

These stories illustrate the Avatar's ongoing work to rehabilitate the criminal element. They also show that the only way out of our karmic predicament is to devote ourselves to an Avatar or Perfect Master.

Buddha Was No Wimp

History often distorts the personality of the Avatars. Each of the Avatars was dynamic, charismatic, energetic and forceful in His own way. In Buddha's case, history sometimes depicts Him as a detached, contemplative, other-worldly man who was sensitive and compassionate but never strong, stern and passionate. The fact that Buddha, like all Avatars, sometimes veiled His strength to make His followers comfortable around Him, does not for a minute imply that He did not have at all times reserves of infinite strength and power to which all Avatars have access if they choose to use it.

Buddha was anything but passive in deciding to leave the "perfect life" He enjoyed as a prince, and the mental and physical hard-

BUDDHA

ships He endured during his years of unveiling are beyond imagination. Also, Buddha was the only man who was not afraid of Angulimala and confronted Angulimala single-handedly. The force of His love was greater than Angulimala's power.

On a day-to-day level, Buddha displayed the Avataric mix of infinite tolerance of human flaws in some situations and no tolerance of misbehavior at other times. On hearing that one of His monks had effectively stolen some valuable timber from the king by deceiving Him, Buddha was outraged and established a rule within the order that any monk who committed a crime for which a layman would be punished would be thrown out of the order.⁸⁷ Similarly, when He learned that some monks had obtained full quantities of food by representing that they had supernatural powers during a time of great famine in the area, Buddha severely criticized those monks and established another rule that, in the future, such conduct would be punished by banishment from the order.⁸⁸ He also expected lay people to refrain from taking the life of living creatures, inflicting pain on living creatures, theft, adultery, lying, idle speech, slander, and harsh language.⁸⁹

When a disaffected monk tried to kill Buddha by unleashing a man-slaying elephant as Buddha and the monks were walking down a road, Buddha remained calm and loving. The townspeople were terrified of the elephant and climbed to the roofs of their houses. Buddha completely tamed the rogue elephant with love, and from that time forward it was tame and docile.⁹⁰ This episode shows that Buddha mastered every situation and manifested a strength that was appropriate to each situation. Those who attribute miracles to Him, just as those who depict Him only as a contemplative monk, diminish His Avataric charisma.

The Deathless Message

Buddha was at pains to distill His message into the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Way. Baba's message is no different; He tailored the message for the Twentieth Century and the next seven centuries, not the India of 2,500 years ago.

BUDDHA

While sailing to England in 1932, Baba commented to His mandali: "If you review my past activities, teachings and workings, you will find that they contain the elements of all religions in one way or another. They combine the teachings of all the great Prophets of the past - Jesus, Zarathustra, Buddha, Krishna, Moses and Muhammed."⁹¹ The fact that religions have splintered off into separate communities, each believing that it has a monopoly on truth, is one of the problems of this age that Meher Baba will solve: "I intend bringing together all religions and cults like beads on one string and revitalize them for individual and collective needs."⁹²

Baba tells us: "Worldly desires can therefore never lead to abiding happiness. On the contrary, they invariably invite unending suffering of many kinds. When an individual is full of worldly desires, a plentiful crop of suffering is unavoidably in store for him. Desire is inevitably the mother of much suffering: this is the law."⁹³ Baba further explained: "Not only individuals, but the whole world is in the throes of suffering. When suffering comes, it comes according to the divinely established law of karma."⁹⁴ The same words could have easily come from Buddha.

The path out of this vale of tears is still the same as it was in Buddha's time: "True happiness begins when one learns the art of right adjustment to other persons, and right adjustment involves self-forgetfulness and love. Hence arises the spiritual importance of transforming a life of the limited self into a life of love."⁹⁵ The path is difficult and will require the eradication of the ego, a long and difficult process: "Pure love is rare because in most cases love becomes adulterated with selfish motives which are surreptitiously introduced into consciousness by the operation of accumulated bad sanskaras. It is extremely difficult to purge consciousness of deep-rooted ignorance that expresses itself through the idea of 'I' and 'mine.'"⁹⁶

He came for us as Buddha, and He never left us. His work is never done, and He comes back again and again to point humanity in the same direction. As a prince, He "had it all." By renouncing the perfect material life to lead the perfect spiritual life, He showed us the way to happiness. He was no mere itinerant monk. He was and always will be God in human form.

BUDDHA

ENDNOTES

1. *Lord Meher*, 1507.
2. *Lord Meher*, 4321.
3. Sangharakshua (born Dennis Lingwood), *Who is the Buddha?* (Glasgow: Windhorse Publications, 1994), 157.
4. *God Speaks*, 127.
5. *Lord Meher*, 6098.
6. The summary of Buddha's life is a composite taken from a variety of sources that are identified in the bibliography. Scholars debate about the precise date of Buddha's birth, but 560 B.C. seems consistent with the figures given by many of them. Given Meher Baba's explanation that the Avatar usually comes every 700 to 1400 years, the date of Buddha's birth may be closer to 700 B.C. Edwin Arnold places the Buddha's birth as 620 B.C. Baba seldom concerned Himself with these "archeological" details of the lives of previous Avataric advents. The goal of life can be achieved only by living the truth taught by the Avatar in one's daily life. Mastery of the "archeological" details by itself simply cannot fuel spiritual progress as explained by Meher Baba. Moreover, those who crave details about the life of the Avatar can enjoy a feast of such details in the many books about Baba's life.
7. Sir Edwin Arnold, *The Light of Asia* (Twickenham, England: Tiger Books International, PLC, 1998), 5.
8. *Lord Meher*, 5031.
9. Ibid.
10. *Footprints of Gautama the Buddha*, 17-21. The book is narrated mostly from Yasa's perspective.
11. *Discourses*, 389-90.
12. Ibid., 141.
13. "The Prayer of Repentance" and "How to Love God," both given by Meher Baba, are available from Sheriar Foundation in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, from Meher Baba Information in Berkeley, California, or from other Meher Baba organizations.
14. *Discourses*, 337.
15. Ibid., 351.
16. For example, Meher Baba provided the "Divine Theme" in the supplement of *God Speaks* as an appropriate topic of meditation, and some fifty pages of the *Discourses* are devoted to discussing meditation.
17. Michael Carrithers, *The Buddha* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1983), 29.
18. *Footprints of Gautama the Buddha*, 104.
19. Ibid., 135-36.
20. Ibid., 131.

BUDDHA

21. *Lord Meher*, 2646.
22. Meher Baba, as quoted in *Lord Meher*, 3873.
23. *Footprints of Gautama the Buddha*, 33-34.
24. *Lord Meher*, 815.
25. Meher Baba as quoted in *Lord Meher*, 3936.
26. The skit is described in *Lord Meher*, 6034-35.
27. The skits are described in *Lord Meher*, 5439-40.
28. This episode is described in *Lord Meher*, 6228.
29. *Lord Meher*, 3936.
30. *Stay With God*, 159 n. 29/6.
31. *Lord Meher*, 3478.
32. *Lord Meher*, 3481.
33. *Lord Meher*, 3508.
34. *Lord Meher*, 3509.
35. *Lord Meher*, 3555.
36. Manija S. Irani, *Family Letters* (New York: Society for Avatar Meher Baba, 1969), letter dated October 16, 1958, page 2, footnote.
37. *Footprints of Gautama the Buddha*, 26.
38. *Ibid.*, 28.
39. *Ibid.*, 64-65.
40. Hammalawa Saddhatissa, *Before He Was Buddha* (Berkeley, California: Ulysses Press, 1998), 55.
41. *Lord Meher*, 2954.
42. *Lord Meher*, 4842.
43. Saddhatissa, *Before He Was Buddha*, 64-65.
44. *Ibid.*, 65-66.
45. Carrithers, *The Buddha*, 18-19.
46. *Discourses*, 1.
47. *Lord Meher*, 700.
48. *Lord Meher*, 1870.
49. *Lord Meher*, 2906.
50. *Footprints of Gautama the Buddha*, 82.
51. *Ibid.*

BUDDHA

52. Ibid., 84.
53. Ibid.
54. Ibid.
55. *Before He Was Buddha*, 81.
56. *Footprints of Gautama the Buddha*, 189.
57. Meher Baba as quoted in *Lord Meher*, 1565.
58. Reported to the author by Murshida Ivy O. Duce (1895-1981), the Sufi teacher who was directed by Meher Baba to be the head of Sufism Reoriented.
59. *Lord Meher*, 5432.
60. *Lord Meher*, 5433.
61. *Lord Meher*, 5309-10.
62. *Footprints of Gautama the Buddha*, 196.
63. *Lord Meher*, 1695.
64. *Lord Meher*, 3796.
65. *Lord Meher*, 4834.
66. Meher Baba as quoted in *Lord Meher*, 6018.
67. Bal Natu, *The Samadhi* (Myrtle Beach, South Carolina: Sheriar Press, 1997), 32.
68. *Discourses*, 405.
69. *Lord Meher*, 802.
70. *The Nothing and the Everything*, 204.
71. Meher Baba as quoted in *Lord Meher*, 5011.
72. *Footsteps of Gautama the Buddha*, 76.
73. Ibid., 112-13.
74. Saddhatissa, *Before He Was Buddha*, 106-07.
75. Meher Baba as quoted in *Lord Meher*, 834-835.
76. *Discourses*, 5-6.
77. Ibid., 85.
78. Ibid., 361.
79. Ibid., 356.
80. Ibid., 262.
81. *Lord Meher*, 2046.
82. The story of the Buddha's conversion of Angulimala is told in *Footsteps of Gautama the Buddha*, 144-52.

BUDDHA

- 83. Ibid., 151.
- 84. *Lord Meher*, 4494-95.
- 85. *Lord Meher*, 4834.
- 86. *Lord Meher*, 2623.
- 87. *Footprints of Gautama the Buddha*, 118-19.
- 88. Ibid., 119-21.
- 89. Ibid., 140.
- 90. Ibid, 160.
- 91. *Lord Meher*, 1546.
- 92. Meher Baba as quoted in *Lord Meher*, 1554.
- 93. *Discourses*, 390.
- 94. *Lord Meher*, 4237.
- 95. *Discourses*, 396.
- 96. Ibid.

KRISHNA



KRISHNA

Meher Baba often said that He had been Krishna. For example, in settling a quarrel among members of a family, Baba told them: "At the time of Lord Krishna, I settled your quarrels and again this time I do. You each have an old connection with me."¹

Although each Avatar radiates divine love, there is a special aura of joy and sweetness attached to Krishna: "Dry atmosphere marked the age of Krishna. The predominating elements then were internecine strife, jealousy, greed. So he had to preach, and founded His teachings on, the Gospel of love and gaiety, so that people began learning lessons in and developing love and merriment."² Krishna blessed the world with His love and merriment, and to this day paintings or statues of Krishna carry the fragrance of that love.

Krishna was the Jesus of his age, but we know more about Krishna than we do about Jesus even though Krishna lived approximately 5,300 years ago.³ Krishna proclaimed himself as the Avatar and taught, as did Jesus: "I am the way." Krishna's poetic discourse, the *Bhagavad Gita* ("Song of the Lord"), explains that people are perpetually tied to the wheel of birth and death, spending and accumulating karma, unable to pry themselves loose from attachment to the results of their actions, unless they link up with a Redeemer. The hero of the story is Krishna Himself, who guides sincere spiritual seekers and who can destroy accumulated sanskaras. Krishna's name in fact has several meanings, one of which is "destroyer of all the sins of the world." By dedicating oneself to Krishna, the individual soul can find freedom from his sins, i.e., his sanskaras. Krishna is the hero of the war and the hero of the battle of life, the battle waged by the individual against his lower self, to win his higher self.

Krishna's Birth

Krishna was born into the Yadava clan, which at the time of His birth had settled into the Yamuna valley in India.⁴ Krishna's parents

KRISHNA

were Prince Vasudeva and Devaki. On their wedding night, Devaki's brother, the evil king Kamsa, offered to drive the newly-married couple to Vasudeva's palace when he heard a voice declare that Devaki's eighth child would kill him [Kamsa]. Kamsa was so enraged that he attempted to kill his own sister, Devaki, but Vasudeva appeased Kamsa by offering to give each of their children to him.

Kamsa killed the first six children of Vasudeva and Devaki, and he also sent soldiers around the country to kill new-born children. When Devaki became pregnant with her seventh child, Kamsa was on full alert, but Devaki's pregnancy disappeared while at the same time Rohini, another of Vasudeva's wives, became mysteriously pregnant. The boy who was born to Rohini was Balarama, who was to be the brother of Krishna.

Kamsa wanted to prevent the birth of Devaki's eighth son, so he imprisoned Devaki and Vasudeva and shackled them to prevent all physical contact. Legend tells us that a divine light coursed through Vasudeva's body and then entered Devaki's womb, impregnating her with her eighth child, Krishna. At the same time Yeshoda, the wife of a cowherd named Nanda, became pregnant.

When Krishna was born in prison, a divine fragrance filled the air and light filled the cell occupied by Vasudeva and Devaki. Their chains opened up and they prostrated themselves at the feet of an adult Krishna standing in front of them. Krishna asked Vasudeva to carry him to Nanda's house in Gokul and bring back the girl born to Yeshoda, and Krishna then changed into a new-born baby which Vasudeva carried to Gokul in a basket. He exchanged babies and returned to the prison, where the chains closed again over the arms and legs of Vasudeva and Devaki.

When the prison guards awakened from their sleep, they summoned Kamsa, who immediately tried to kill the baby girl. When Kamsa was poised to dash the baby's head against a rock, the baby transformed into Durga, the Divine Mother, who informed Kamsa that he was a fool and that his enemy had been born elsewhere. She then vanished. Kamsa repented of his ways and released Devaki and Vasudeva from prison and restored them to their palace.

KRISHNA

Krishna's foster mother, Yeshoda, awoke to find a beautiful male baby at her side. All accounts are that Krishna's presence was adorable, and those who knew Him, particularly His foster parents, could not stand to leave His presence. Women of the village flocked to Yeshoda's house just for the privilege of holding the baby.

Krishna's life with His foster parents was idyllic, and His light-hearted merriment is the subject of legend. The Avatar's connection with Yeshoda continues to be close even after more than 5,000 years. Meher Baba explained that Yeshoda reincarnated as Godavri Mai, the chief female disciple of Upasni Maharaj, one of the Perfect Masters who unveiled Him to his Avataric consciousness.⁵

Krishna's Early Life

Yeshoda's maternal ways initiated customs that continue to survive. As Krishna's foster mother, she enjoyed all aspects of caring for Him, including rocking him in His cradle. Baba tells us:

Godavri welcomed me, placed her head on my feet, garlanded me, and placed me on the swing where Maharaj used to sit. Sitting on the swing (*jhula*) is derived from Krishna. His mother rocked him in a cradle. The gopis made him sit on a swing. It is now customary for Perfect Masters to sit on such a swing. This is not to put them to sleep, but is a sort of lullaby: "Krishna, now sleep and do not make trouble" - that is what is meant. Krishna was very mischievous, full of practical jokes, and used to make trouble. Christ and Buddha had other ways. I think I am a mixture of all of them.⁶

Making trouble was Krishna's specialty as a young boy. He went all over the village, pulling things down and upsetting carefully arranged properties, chasing birds and calves. Krishna and His friends had a seemingly insatiable appetite for milk, curds and butter, and they would beg, borrow or steal them from houses in the

KRISHNA

village. Krishna and Balarama recruited the other boys of the village to their mischief, and soon they headed up a village gang stealing butter and milk. The butter and milk gang was no ordinary gang. Krishna's personality was so magnetic that none of the villagers could muster any anger toward Him and His fellow thieves.

Yeshoda always knew her foster son was special, but Krishna added to her appreciation of Him one day when some of the other boys told her that Krishna had eaten mud. Concerned that He would be sick, Yeshoda immediately grabbed Him and asked Him to open His mouth. Krishna said that the boys were lying, that He had not eaten mud. Yeshoda insisted that He open his mouth and, when He did so, she saw a vision of the entire world. When Krishna withdrew her vision, Yeshoda abandoned all thoughts of punishing the boy and embraced Him warmly.

Krishna's foster father, Nanda, and the other elders of Gokul decided to move the cowherding community to Vrindavan, another location in the Yumuna valley which was lush and verdant. Krishna enjoyed His new home and explored it to the hilt. He made a flute out of bamboo and delighted in playing it while the cows grazed. Just as Krishna's fingers were light and agile on the flute, Meher Baba's fingers were equally graceful in pointing out the letters of His chosen words on the alphabet board He used after He began observing silence. "Some had compared Baba's use of the board to Lord Krishna's playing of His flute."⁷ In addition to His mischief and His games, Krishna enjoyed playing a game similar to checkers. When Meher Baba was playing such a game, He remarked: "When I was Krishna, I played this game and in this form, also, I enjoy it."⁸

Krishna and the Gopis

Krishna's companions at Vrindavan were the Gopis, whom He delighted, enchanted and teased. He played the flute for them, danced with them, and played tricks on them, including stealing their clothes when they were bathing in the river. In this advent, Baba visited the historical haunts of Krishna. In contrast, Baba for

KRISHNA

whatever reasons did not visit Saudi Arabia and Palestine/Israel, where He spent His last two advents. Bhau Kalchuri records the following notes about an excursion to Krishna's places in India:

The next day [January 28, 1939] they went to Mathura, where Krishna was born; to Gokul, where he spent his childhood; and to Vrindavan, where he lived with the gopis. Near a temple in Vrindavan, a young mast who was playing the flute saw Baba and exclaimed, "Here comes my *Murlivale* - the Flute Player! I have been waiting for you!" The mast was ecstatic when he saw Baba.

While visiting the places associated with Krishna, Baba observed, "When I see these places, I remember my old habitats; they are like my old, well-remembered haunts. Here, was where I used to play with the gopis and steal milk and curds; here, I played my flute; and here, my Radha [Krishna's chief female disciple] would come running to me! Now, I have brought my new gopis with me, and now, Mehera [Meher Baba's chief female disciple] is my Radha."⁹

Baba's reference to His "gopis" on that particular occasion referred to the group of mostly Eastern women who accompanied Him to Krishna's haunts. However, the Lord Krishna of this age enjoyed a period during the 1930s when he drew Western disciples to Him, and spent time with them in India and in the West. He often referred to some of the close Western female disciples as his "gopis."¹⁰ They took great delight in His company. Just as Krishna did with the gopis of Vrindavan, Meher Baba played with His Eastern and Western gopis, brought them into the orbit of His divine love, enjoyed light moments with them, and trained them for more serious and demanding work in later life. Baba's charisma and light mischief were identical to Krishna's. As He reminded a group of His lovers in Myrtle Beach in 1956: "I have the greatest sense of humor, the same as Krishna. That sense of humor should not mislead you or make you forget who I really

KRISHNA

am."¹¹ Like Lord Krishna, Baba stressed the path of love. "Baba always wanted us to feel that love was something cheerful and bright, not heavy and dull. There was a time to be gay and a time to be serious, both aspects of the Divine Spirit. And He would tell us about Krishna, how full of joy and fun He was, ever happy, and yet no one talked of love more than He; and how love is action at its highest."¹²

Krishna Survives an Attempt on His Life

In the meantime, the evil Kamsa was becoming increasingly anxious about the prophesy uttered by the ethereal voice on the wedding night of his sister and her husband. Kamsa had long suspected that his assassin would be Krishna and had even tried unsuccessfully to kill Krishna by sending various murderers in disguise. However, the young boy overcame all the plots. The sage Narada finally erased all doubt from Kamsa's mind by confirming that, indeed, Krishna was the one foretold by the prophesy.

Kamsa's determination to kill Krishna before Krishna killed him was redoubled by his conversation with Narada. He again imprisoned Vasudeva and Devaki, as well as Ugrasena, Devaki's uncle and the rightful king. Kamsa did not want to take the obvious approach by dispatching armies into Vrindavan to kill Krishna because neither Krishna nor His brother had harmed anyone and they were both loved by the community of cowherds with whom they had grown up. So Kamsa hatched a surreptitious plot to kill Krishna.

Kamsa invited Nanda, Krishna, Balarama and the gopas to Mathura for a celebration of the "Worship of the Bow." The public would be invited to an assembly where the sacred bow would be laid on a bed of flowers for viewing and worship. Unknown to the Vrindavan community, Kamsa planned to unleash a war elephant on the two brothers. If the boys survived the attack, they would then be invited to wrestle with proven champions, who would accidentally "crush" the boys under their powerful grips.

KRISHNA

As the boys entered the gate where the war elephant was stationed, the mahout (the elephant handler) goaded the elephant to charge the boys. Krishna fought bravely with the elephant and killed it, even removing both the elephant's tusks. The boys then proceeded to enter the arena, where the crowd greeted them with thunderous applause. The wrestlers invited the boys for a match, and the boys reluctantly agreed. Both boys killed their opponents and killed three more wrestlers who challenged them.

Kamsa was delirious and ordered the festivities to stop. He commanded the banishment of the two boys from Mathura, as well as the killing of Vasudeva, Krishna's natural father, and Ugrasena. Krishna was outraged at Kamsa's proclamations, and leapt to the dais where Kamsa was seated. Kamsa tried to kill Krishna with his sword, but Krishna quickly killed Kamsa with His bare hands.

Krishna made funeral arrangements for the dead and then rushed to the prison to release His parents. Krishna then went to Ugrasena's cell and released him, and Ugrasena was restored as king of the Yadavas. Krishna and Balarama were reunited with their parents and became members of the royal household.

The Counselor and Statesman

A new chapter of Krishna's life began. He and Balarama received instruction in spiritual matters as well as the art of war. His duties broadened into diplomacy and king-making. However, He did not forget his companions in Vrindavan, and He sent a messenger there to console them, remind them that He loved them, and remind them that He was always with them. Krishna's remembrance of the gopis parallels Meher Baba's remembrance of his own gopis in the 1930s, when He constantly sent them loving messages and encouragement when He was separated from them.

The gopis responded to Krishna's messages with such love and devotion that Krishna's messenger was overwhelmed. They dedicated every thought, word and deed to their dear Lord Krishna. Vrindavan was on fire with love for Krishna. When Krishna's mes-

KRISHNA

senger readied his chariot to return to Mathura, the Vrindavan community loaded it with gifts and food for their beloved Krishna. In this advent, Hamirpur is reminiscent of Vrindavan in Krishna's advent.

The next stage of Krishna's life placed Him squarely in the middle of a legendary war for India's soul and for its kingdoms. In order to understand Krishna's role in that war, one needs to have a little background of the *Mahabharata*, the epic story of this period in India's history comprising 100,000 verses of poetry. The following summary will be considerably shorter.

The Mahabharata in a Nutshell

The king of Hastinapura had two sons, Dhritarashtra and Pandu. Because Dhritarashtra was born blind, Pandu ascended the throne. However, because of a certain offense, Pandu had to retreat to the forest with his two wives, Kunti and Madri. Kunti was Vasudeva's sister and therefore Krishna's aunt. While doing penance in the forest, Pandu's two wives bore him five sons, known as the Pandavas. The eldest son was Yudisthira. Another of the Pandavas, Arjuna, was destined to become Krishna's closest disciple.

Dhritarashtra and his wife, Gandhari, had a hundred sons, who became known as the Kauravas. The leader of the Kauravas was Duryodhana, who was destined to become the chief adversary of the Pandavas and Krishna Himself. Pandu died in the forest, and Kunti brought her sons to Hastinapura to live with Dhritarashtra. The Pandavas endeared themselves to the people, and Dhritarashtra became jealous. Duryodhana hated the Pandavas so much that he tried to kill them by burning a palace to which they had been invited, but the Pandavas escaped.

Krishna was aware of the tensions between the Pandavas and Kauravas, but nevertheless advised the Pandavas to return to Hastinapura. Dhritarashtra offered the Pandavas half the kingdom, and they settled in Indraprastha. For committing a certain offense, Arjuna was exiled from his brothers for twelve years. During that time, Krishna arranged a marriage between his sister, Subadra, and Arjuna.

KRISHNA

In the meantime, Duryodhana's hatred of the Pandavas continued unabated. He decided to invite Yudisthira for a dice game and arranged for his uncle, an accomplished cheater, to play in his stead. As a result, Yudisthira lost everything, including his entire kingdom and all his brothers. However, Dhritarashtra took pity on them, perhaps out of guilt, and restored the Pandavas' kingdom to them. Undeterred, Duryodhana persuaded his father to re-invite Yudisthira for another dice game. The uncle cheated and Yudisthira lost again. The cost of losing the dice game was that the Pandavas had to go into exile for thirteen years. They spent twelve years in the forest and the final year incognito.

When they returned from exile, they demanded the return of their kingdom, but Duryodhana refused to give it back. The Pandavas and Kauravas began preparing for war. Both Duryodhana and Arjuna visited Krishna to ask for His help in the war. Krishna told them that one side could have all His armies whereas the other side could have the benefit of His counsel and companionship even though He personally would not bear arms. Duryodhana chose the armies, and Arjuna chose Krishna Himself, who was pleased with Arjuna's choice.

Prior to the commencement of the war, Krishna made a last-ditch effort to negotiate a peaceful solution and went to Hastinapura to try to talk the Kauravas out of their determination to fight. Krishna told Duryodhana that he was evil because of his hatred of the Pandavas and his refusal to return their rightful kingdom. Krishna publicly recounted Duryodhana's misdeeds, but Duryodhana walked out of the gathering. In the end, Duryodhana remained unrepentant, and Krishna told the Kauravas that war was inevitable.

The Battle at Kurukshetra

The battle was fought on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. Krishna kept His promise to Arjuna by becoming his charioteer. This service involved more than just guiding the horses:

Arjuna was the master archer, and he had to fight the battle as the commander-in-chief of the

KRISHNA

whole forces. To do this he could not divert his attention to guide the chariot. Instead he had to handle the situation in such a way that he could direct the horses without using his hands, leaving them free to signal his instructions to the whole army. To do this he would take his seat on a specially built chariot with Krishna's head placed between his two legs. Krishna's temples were then turned with the help of Arjuna's big toes. When Arjuna pressed his toe on Krishna's left temple, Krishna would direct the chariot to the left, and similarly with the right.¹³

However, before the war began, Arjuna suffered a crisis of conscience. He was confused, despondent, and contemptuous of the reasons for fighting the Kauravas. He did not want to kill his relatives, and he wondered about the meaning of life and the meaning of war. His dialogue with Krishna was immortalized as the *Bhagavad Gita* (the Song of the Lord). The *Gita* contains the essence of Vedantism and the wisdom of India.

There are natural parallels between the *Gita* and Meher Baba's teaching, particularly the focus on the key role of the Avatar in leading spiritual aspirants to God. Krishna emphasizes that God is the unseen actor behind all action in the creation, that one can never destroy God, and that the individuals on the battle field are really souls that cannot be destroyed. Krishna's emphasis on reincarnation is clear. These souls who will die on the battlefield will be born again and again, like everyone else in the world. The endless cycle of reincarnation is the problem of life, not the solution.

The Bhagavad Gita

Each person is seeking his or her own true self. God is the true Self within the self, and we seek union with that God within. The path to God is through sacrifice of one's entire body, heart, mind and soul. The processes of such sacrifice may be described in detail in

KRISHNA

various systems of yoga. However, the easiest and most effective path of sacrifice is the path offered by the Avatar. By giving everything to Krishna, by loving Him and dedicating all action to Him, one will come to Him and arrive at union with God. Thus Krishna destroys our sanskaras and our karma.

Krishna explained to Arjuna that he had a duty to fight and a duty to act in the world, but He stressed learning to act with detachment by leaving the results of action to God. Attachment to the senses can be overcome by love of God. Meditation on the Avatar will lead one to the spiritual poise one needs. Faith in God and oneself is essential; doubt will cripple spiritual progress. God is in everything and everyone; He is worthy of our love every moment. God is our only hope and worthy of every sacrifice we can make for Him. "To them, ever attached to Me, worshipping Me in love, I give that union to knowledge by which they come to Me."¹⁴

Arjuna Begs For a Vision

Even after Krishna's explanations of the spiritual mechanics of the universe, Arjuna remained unsatisfied and begged to see a vision of God. Krishna accommodated Arjuna, and He showed Arjuna His universal form. In order to do so, Krishna provided Arjuna with an opening of his "divine eye," the capacity in his consciousness to see God's universal form which remains latent in all of us. Arjuna was overcome with wonder and bowed down to Krishna, acknowledging not only wonder but fear. Krishna permitted him to see the result of the war in which the Kauravas perished. Arjuna begged Krishna to forgive him for any misdeeds and, still in fear, asked Krishna to withdraw the divine vision and permit Arjuna to see Krishna in His normal human form.

Krishna reminded Arjuna that the vision he was granted could be experienced only by Krishna's grace and could not be "achieved" by any combination of religious practices, sacrifices or austerities. Krishna did seize the opportunity to explain that devotion to him as the Avatar would lead the aspirant to him as God:

KRISHNA

"He that works but for me, for whom I am the supreme goal, who is devoted to me, devoid of zest in things, and devoid of hostility, comes to me, O Pandu's son."¹⁵

Having revealed his full divinity to Arjuna, Krishna explains that devotion to Him is the simplest and easiest path to God. Those who put their full faith in the Avatar, who devote themselves to Him, are able to lose their attachment to the fruit of action with His help. In this way, they gradually wear out their egoism and become worthy of union with God.

The Pandavas Defeat the Kauravas

Krishna's discourse answered all of Arjuna's questions, dispelled his doubt, and reinvigorated his soul. He was fully prepared to fight. The battle at Kurukshetra lasted eighteen days. Krishna constantly kept up the spirits of the Pandavas, sometimes entertaining them, sometimes rebuking them, always encouraging them. Krishna was himself shot by an arrow that drew blood but did not seriously wound Him. Ultimately, with Krishna's guidance, the Pandavas killed all the Kaurava brothers, including Duryodhana.

Although Yudisthira was tempted to renounce the world, Krishna urged him to fulfill his destiny and accept his role as king. Yudisthira then followed Krishna's counsel and was crowned king. Krishna lived for another thirty-six years after the legendary battle. His tribe (the Yadavas) became violent and self-indulgent and ultimately destroyed themselves. Krishna recognized that it was time for Him to die. He went out in the wilderness and lay down. A hunter mistook Him for a wild animal and shot Him in the foot, and the arrow went through His body and killed Him.

To Love the Avatar is to Love God

The *Gita* marks Krishna's first public declaration of his Avatarhood. Meher Baba's public declaration happened in 1953 on Zoroaster's birthday. The moment of public declaration was carefully timed:

KRISHNA

It seems that the Avatar's public declaration of His Avatarhood is an important event in His work and that there is a divinely ordained moment, each time the Avatar comes, for Him to make it. For years, Krishna allowed Himself to be accepted by the cowherds as a playmate, by the *gopis* as a companion, by His subjects as the king, and by some as the Lord, but it was not until the battle of Kurukshetra that He revealed His Universal Form to Arjuna and gave to the world His teachings, as compiled in the *Bhagavad Gita*, which declare that He is the Avatar.¹⁶

Krishna, like Jesus and Meher Baba, as distinguished from Buddha and Muhammad, established the path of loving God in His personal form as the most direct spiritual path.

The path carved out for spiritual aspirants by a particular Avatar loses its spiritual potency with time, but that is not always the case for everyone. Baba explained that St. Francis not only loved Jesus as He should be loved but achieved the ultimate goal of God realization, even though another Avatar (and another world religion) intervened between Jesus and St. Francis. Baba recounted the story of Mira with great admiration:

In India, everyone knows her. People sing the bhajans sung by her in praise of Krishna. Mira was a very beautiful girl. She was the wife of a royal prince of a wealthy family in north India, who later became king. She loved Krishna with all her heart, but did not live at the time of Krishna, who lived five thousand years before. Mira lived about three hundred years ago. Her husband did not like the way she was going about in the streets, for she was the queen, and queens did not mix with the crowd. She would enter the huts of the poor with the name of Krishna on her lips as she sang. She suffered many trials and threats to test her love for Krishna. She was locked up in a room,

KRISHNA

her food was poisoned, a cobra was concealed in a bouquet of flowers. She accepted all as the gift of her Lord Krishna, and nothing happened. Krishna protected her. She refused to have anything to do with anyone but her Lord Krishna.

Finally, the king drove her away into exile. She said: "If the king drives me out, I have a place. But if the Lord of the universe is displeased, I have no place." The people, too, turned against her.

As years passed, she looked radiant in her rags. Then the king came and fell at her feet. For a man in India to bow down to a woman is a sin, and to his wife, unforgivable. Yet, he fell at her feet because she was sincere. When she died, all revered her, and people repeat her bhajans.

I am Krishna. I want all of you to love me as Mira loved me.¹⁷

On another occasion, Baba remarked: "Mira was not born at the time when Krishna manifested himself as the Avatar in human form. Even then her love surpassed that of the Gopis. In this sense her love is unique, unparalleled. The same can be said about Francis of Assisi's love for Jesus Christ. He had not seen Jesus physically but his love for Christ excelled that of Peter, the Rock. Because Francis never met Jesus, his longing and love were that much greater."¹⁸

Often those who love a particular Avatar and try sincerely to follow His teachings believe that it is not possible to love the Avatar as intensely as it was when the Avatar was "in the body" and working in the world. Baba makes clear that nothing is further from the truth. The Avatar never dies; He lives forever in everyone's heart. He sleeps in the hearts of those who have no interest in Him. He awakens in the hearts of those who love Him. Baba says that He did not come in this advent to teach, but to awaken. It is no small matter to love the Avatar, but one can have no higher aspiration than to love Him.

Baba has commented in detail on the story and teachings of the *Bhagavad Gita*, clearly the central legacy of Krishna's advent.

KRISHNA

Since Baba is the one who delivered the Gita, His comments are always illuminating.

In 1939, as humanity was plunged into World War II, Meher Baba recalled Krishna's counsel to Arjuna, explaining that once again it was proper to fight and that the war had been brought about ultimately by God's will:

I, as Krishna, ordered Arjuna to kill. As Christ, I told Peter to give his other cheek to be slapped, but the truth underlying both is the same. Haven't people changed since then? No, people are not advanced, but they have changed.

The world now is going back to its barbarous attitude and so, over and over again, it is life's changes. But what Krishna teaches in the Gita is divine; it goes deep down. It says you can become God if you love me, follow me, surrender to me. There is no other way. Disciples must do as the Master orders - not imitate. Arjuna took up his bow willingly and obeyed, knowing with perfect knowledge that he was not killing. Detached, he had to do this for their spiritual good - no lust for killing, nor duty, but pure detachment to do Krishna's work.

If you are a perfect follower of non-violence, you give an oath that you would not hurt any creature. However, if you saw one dog killing three cats, what would you do - kill the dog? If you stood aside, you would allow the killing of the three cats. What, Elizabeth, would you do? If you keep silent, you are helping to kill three cats. If you kill the dog, you are violent.

There is a tiger and a herd of cattle and you have a gun in your house that you do not touch, however, because of your oath of non-violence. You know you can kill the tiger and save the herd. What would you do? Kill the tiger, but

KRISHNA

detached - this is what Krishna teaches. Do not follow violence or non-violence, just be detached. You must kill for the good of the herd. In the case of Arjuna, it was for the spiritual good of others, who were like tigers of lust and greed.

Is it right to go to war? Go to war if called and you cannot avoid it, but do not fight for the sake of killing. You just help and kill detached, or be killed without fear and anger toward the killer. Few, very few, can do so. Why do I want war? To make things right for spiritual progress and advancement.¹⁹

It would be a mistake to conclude that the spiritual "rules of war" are set forth for all time in the *Gita*. In 1940 Baba observed:

The Congress was first started in 1810 by Dadabhoy Navroji. Then Gandhi became the leader for the past twenty years. Those mad Chauri Chaura riots broke out nine years ago. Gandhi feels that if you are slapped on one cheek, offer the other. He thinks that will put an end to wars. But that is non-violence and nonsense!

Mahasabha (a Hindu reactionary political group) says you should follow the *Gita* and act as Krishna declared - to defend, but without hatred. Now that is not practical, because the German hate is so profound that the reaction on all the defenders must be of hate!

Krishna's teaching advocated by the Mahasabha, and Christ's teaching advocated by Gandhi, are both impractical for this war. What did the small nations do? They did not resist and were swallowed up! And now they hate more than those who resisted.

So now will come a new, third way for world peace. First world war, then world peace.²⁰

The key to the *Gita* is not the attitude of detachment, nor the various spiritual exercises discussed by Krishna, but obedience to Krishna:

KRISHNA

Although the whole universe is illusion, yet it is governed by a law, a definite law; and that law deals with every detail. We cannot escape from the law of karma. But when we transcend illusion, the law does not bind us any longer.

Krishna said the same thing to Arjuna, "Kill your relatives! Kill your friends!" in the battle of Kurukshetra. You must have heard about the famous battle. Arjuna refused, saying, "How can I kill my own kith and kin?" Krishna then declared, "I am above the Law. The whole creation is from me, and you will not be bound."²¹

Showing God's Universal Form to Arjuna Was Krishna's Mistake

One of the most dramatic events described in the *Gita* is Krishna's revealing His universal form to Arjuna at Arjuna's request. One might infer that God will give spiritual "experiences" or "powers" to those who devote themselves to an Avatar or that such extraordinary experiences are a necessary prerequisite to devoting oneself to the Avatar. Such a conclusion would be mistaken. One man, who lacked conviction, hinted to Meher Baba that he might be able to acquire conviction if he could have Arjuna's experience. Meher Baba replied: "It was nothing short of weakness on my part as Krishna to have convinced Arjuna that I was divine by exposing my identity as Paramatma through *Vishwaswarup* darshan [revealing the universal body]."²²

Meher Baba is the first Avatar to explain that the Avatar always has one act of weakness or makes one mistake during His advent. As Baba explains, showing the universal body to Arjuna was Krishna's mistake. Baba elaborated: "When I was Krishna, I revealed my *Universal Aspect* to Arjuna. This was a mistake. I should not have done it, because love and faith alone should make one obey the Master's behests. Arjuna did not do this, so to create trust in him, I, as Krishna, had to reveal something to him."²³ One problem created by Krishna's "mistake" is that spiritual aspirants may feel that they are entitled to special "experiences" or that they will not truly com-

KRISHNA

mit themselves to the Avatar in the absence of an experience. Baba observed: "By itself, any experience, small or great, ultimately amounts to zero compared with God-Realization. Some lovers in the West who regard me as God Incarnate write to me about their rare experiences, but those too have no real importance. Although it is heartening to have experiences, it is very dangerous to attach too much importance to them and to indulge in them."²⁴

Meher Baba linked Arjuna's weakness with His own weakness: "Very few have the true burning in love. When it starts, don't try to extinguish it. Even my Arjuna failed, due to his weakness, which compelled me to give him the *experience* [of Universal Body]. It can be called my weakness, because I gave him the experience to enable Arjuna to carry out my orders."²⁵ Arjuna's problem was that his understanding of the Avatar was imperfect and hence his faith in the Avatar was inadequate: "From this incident [Krishna's revelation of his universal body to Arjuna], you will come to know that even the closest disciples of a Master misunderstand his work. To convince and create faith in them, Masters have to resort to performing miracles. That is why Krishna did what he did."²⁶

We Cannot Understand the Avatar

With our limited intellects, we cannot expect and should not expect to understand the Infinite. "To **understand** the infinite, eternal Realty is **not** the GOAL of individualized beings in the Illusion of Creation, because the Reality can never be understood; it is to be **realized** by conscious experience."²⁷ Arjuna hoped to understand the whys and wherefores of the war but only succeeded in becoming confused and despondent. Krishna provided as much understanding in the *Gita* as Arjuna (and humanity embodied by Arjuna) required, but after becoming convinced of the Avatar's status, Arjuna needed to believe that God had brought about the events, even the war itself, for his own reasons:

My Avataric work concerns the whole universe.
It is not confined to the petty conceptions of
individual spiritual gains after following indi-

KRISHNA

vidual prescribed theories. It does not depend on any fixed rules, practices or resolutions. My work is on a greater and vaster scale than Krishna's. Krishna ordered Arjuna to slaughter his own relatives! Can such a thing be dependent on any principle? Krishna ordered it for the supreme good, and Arjuna carried out his order. But, like Krishna, I want some sacrifice.²⁸

God has his own reasons for events, including war. There is no way He could fully explain those reasons to us; we will only know them when we merge with God. For example, Baba explained: "Krishna proved to Arjuna, who was His devotee, that His apparent bringing about of the physical and mental annihilation of the vicious Kauravas was for their spiritual salvation. Perfection might manifest itself through killing or saving according to the spiritual demands of the situation."²⁹ The Avatar finds a way to make the events of the time and place of His advent a means for leading people to Him: "Had not Krishna brought about that war he would not have given the *Gita*, because everyone was in the mood to fight. Had he said, Don't fight, nobody would have listened to him. When he said, Fight! He brought the real meaning of Truth into the world."³⁰ Not only did the Avatar make use of the battle on Kurukshetra to provide a dramatic background for his spiritual message to humanity, but the conflict and resulting war was, from his perspective, a reflection of the Avatar's "divine sense of humor," as amazing as that may seem.³¹

The Delightful Legacy of Krishna

In a talk on the *Gita* given in 1939, Baba beautifully summarized Krishna's dialogue with Arjuna: "Krishna continues: he tries to make Arjuna fight by telling him Vedantic Truths; and then see if he is not affected by making him feel a coward. That too does not affect him. Krishna tells him all the secrets of divinity, that too has no effect. At the end Krishna shows how all are dying in his mouth [i.e., Krishna shows Arjuna his Universal Form] - that affects Arjuna. The One eternal God is everybody - God is in everybody. The body is affected,

KRISHNA

all changes, but the God which is within each body is never affected by anything. Krishna wants to say that God is really *you*." ³²

Krishna's life with the Gopis has become a legend. Baba observed that the Gopis were a good example of the type of disciple that captures the Master's heart:

I love all; but I do not necessarily need the rich, the respectable and the intelligent for My work. I need the simple, common people irrespective of their weaknesses. Simple-hearted fisherman gathered round Jesus: Krishna was happy in the company of light-hearted "Gopis" - the cowherd companions. Was not Pendya, a lame Gopi, very dear to Krishna? I am happy in your company for it is only love that matters and not the "position." ³³

On another occasion, the comical behavior of two close disciples caused Baba to reminisce: "These two reminded me of the time when I was Krishna. I had four companions then - one was a stutterer, the second was lame, the third squint-eyed, and the fourth was deaf." ³⁴ These touching reminiscences remind us that the Avatar simply does not care about "success" as the world recognizes it. He is concerned with one thing and one thing only, the ability of the individual to love God. That love can come in all walks of life, and in many ways the preoccupation with success in the eyes of the world inhibits the development of love of God.

Avatars counsel their devotees on every aspect of life. Those who receive advice from the "perfect" counselor are most fortunate. Baba's sister shared one such episode from their lives together in 1959, reminiscent of Krishna:

The second highlight was indeed unique – a wedding of two young Baba-lovers of the Bhajan group, who (with their excellent voices) lead the Arti and Baba-songs at all programs.. The couple are Hindu in religion, but from the still unrelenting orthodox view of caste they are poles apart,

KRISHNA

and ordinarily such a wedding would not even be considered! But it not only had the sanction and approval of Baba who teaches us that love is highest and that all are equal, but it was His helping hand alone that brought it about. The ceremony was held before Him, at Guruprasad [except for the signing at the registrar's later] amidst a fair gathering of Baba-lovers, in utter simplicity and beauty. Baba said it was the first and last wedding performed by Him as Baba. As Lord Krishna too He had personally helped in bringing about one union, that of His sister Subedra and his most-loved disciple Arjun.³⁵

Krishna was also the first Avatar to give prasad, a gift from the Master in the form of a sweet or candy. The prasad carries His divine energy and helps to create a link between the Master and the disciple. The tradition of prasad in the East is similar to the tradition of communion in the Christian tradition. Baba provided some fascinating background regarding this tradition:

Krishna was the first Avatar to institute the custom of prasad. Once he was in the company of four companions or lovers, and a rishi [sage] who lived in the mountain wildernesses came for Krishna's prasad. He had been so long in meditation that his eyelashes grew downwards, and ants had made their home on his body. Krishna replied that prasad was for his lovers and no one else. It consisted of ladoos or Indian sweetballs. At last the rishi, who was very intelligent, begged Krishna's favorite disciple Pendya, who was a cripple, to ask Krishna for him. This Krishna permitted because he was the slave of his lovers, and as a result the rishi gained illumination - not Realization.³⁶

Baba fortunately continued this delightful tradition and generously treated His lovers with gifts of prasad from time to time.

KRISHNA

Krishna was always busy working for the benefit of His lovers, whether it was on the battlefield helping the Pandavas, in Vrindavan helping the Gopas and Gopis, or in His life as a king-maker and negotiator: "Krishna, we read, used to offer prayers and homage to God, worship and serve saints and His own lovers and devotees in all sorts of lowly capacities."³⁷ Indeed, Krishna went to extraordinary lengths to promote and inspire love in His lovers. "Why did Krishna wash Sudama's feet and drink the water? Because of Sudama's love. He washed not the feet but the *love* of Sudama, and drank its waters."³⁸

The Avatar can bestow God-Realization on any soul. This greatest of gifts does not have to be restricted to the inner circle:

Any Sadguru [Perfect Master] can, even after His "Circle" duty has been performed, make a fit person God-Realized, but he cannot bring him back to the consciousness of the universe. In other words, he can make a person who is outside of His inner Circle only a *Majzoob* or *Paramahansa*, and never a *Salik* or *Jivanmukta*, a *Qutub* or *Sadguru*. But there is an exception to this rule. In the Avataric period, an Avatar can not only make persons who have no connection with His inner Circle God-Realized, but can also restore to them their gross and subtle consciousness. Beside the twelve members of His inner Circle, Shri Krishna, as He was the Avatar of the age in which He lived, made no less than seventeen persons (one a boy of scarcely eleven summers) God-Realized, *and* brought them back to the consciousness of the universe.³⁹

Although we can never know the identities of all the fortunate souls who have achieved God-Realization, Meher Baba did share with us in this advent an extraordinary wealth of information regarding those who achieved Perfection in previous times and some of those who were liberated by His hand in this advent.

KRISHNA

Krishna Prayed to His Lovers

One might ask, why would God pray and to whom does God pray? The notion itself seems unsettling. A story from the life of Krishna illuminates this point. A disciple of Krishna was dumbfounded to learn from a watchman that Krishna was in his room praying. Krishna answered the anxious question of this disciple: "I pray to My lovers. You see, the whole purpose of creation was so that My love might flow. I eternally love my creation, but periodically I take birth to receive the love of My lovers. My lovers worship me and I worship their love for Me."⁴⁰ The answer itself may seem perplexing to some, but the answer illustrates the whole purpose of the universe. God is the only reality. The whole purpose of life from the individual soul's perspective is to unite with God through love. That love is the essence of God Himself. God's love enables the aspirant to achieve this goal, and God thus bows down to and prays to Himself.

The Work of the Modern-Day Krishna

Baba is the most exceptional of the Avatars because His mission goes beyond all previous Avatars. Baba remarked: "My Avataric work concerns the whole universe. It is not confined to the petty conceptions of individual spiritual gains after following individual prescribed theories. It does not depend on any fixed rules, practices or resolutions. My work is on a greater and vaster scale than Krishna's."⁴¹

Meher Baba came to provide a fresh dispensation of the ancient truth, adapting His message to the unique circumstances of the twentieth century. "The times when Jesus and Krishna lived were different. The present time is altogether different. I have to tell the people according to the needs of the time. In the present atomic age material progress has nearly reached its zenith, and this is but the shadow of the internal progress in the realm of spirituality."⁴²

The Avatar is always with us. He may abandon a certain body, just as we take off our clothes before going to bed, but He never

KRISHNA

abandons His link with His own creation, illusory as it may be from his perspective. He tells us He will revisit us from time to time, and He has to return to bring a fresh inspiration to the world and move it along on its way to God. "Krishna said that from time to time he came to protect his lovers. I am the Lord Krishna. I am the Christ, the personification of love."⁴³

We tend to be creatures of habit. We get comfortable with a certain Avataric form or a certain religion associated with that form, and we like to stay within our comfort zone. Krishna did indeed tell His lovers that He would return, and in this age some of those lovers recognized Meher Baba as Krishna. When Baba visited Brindaban in 1939 with several close disciples, they encountered a young man playing a flute, who shouted loudly and happily: "Krishna is here! Krishna is here!" Baba recognized the man and told His disciples that He had come to Brindaban for the man.⁴⁴

Perhaps one of the most touching stories of the modern-day Krishna contacting Krishna's devotees was that of Baba contacting an absolutely destitute family in a poor hut whose only major possession was a statue of Krishna to which they prayed most sincerely. The family, consisting of a young woman and her parents both of whom were ill, had been wealthy but had lost all their wealth. Baba visited the family incognito, washed the man's feet, and gave them money in the name of God. As Baba and his disciple left the poor home, they could hear the daughter thanking Krishna with heartfelt sincerity, praising His mercy and His concern. This incident made Baba very happy.⁴⁵ On another occasion, Meher Baba was working with masts in India, he encountered one who greeted him with: "Look! Behold how devoted love attracts Lord Krishna to me!"⁴⁶

The wife of a lover of Meher Baba was a devotee of Krishna but could not accept Baba as the Avatar. Thus her husband did not invite Baba to their house when He visited their town, and the woman also did not attend any public events honoring Meher Baba. One morning as she was reading the *Bhagavad-Gita*, she felt Meher Baba's presence and felt that He explained to her that He was Krishna. Later that evening, when Meher Baba did visit her house,

KRISHNA

the woman served Him sweets and told Him: "You are Krishna; forgive my ignorance."⁴⁷

A new lover came to Meher Baba because he believed that Mehei Baba was the same as Krishna. Meher Baba confirmed his faith: "It is so. You have come because of the link with me since ages past. I will give you darshan as Krishna in the last moments of your life, but never think it is God-Realization."⁴⁸

Krishna in all His divine sweetness will always live in our hearts.

ENDNOTES

1. *Lord Meher*, 5219.
2. Meher Baba as reported by Ruano Bogislav, "From a Nasik Notebook," *The Awakener*, ed. Filis Frederick, Vol. XVI, No. 2 (1976), 56.
3. *Lord Meher*, 5432.
4. Biographical material on Krishna may be found in Swami Chinmayananda, *Glory of Krishna* (Bombay: Central Chinmaya Mission Trust, 2d ed., 1990); Chakravarti Rajagopalachari, trans., *Mahabharata*, 2d ed. (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1978); R.K. Narayan, trans., *The Mahabharata* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Mohini M. Chatterji, trans., *The Bhagavad Gita* (New York: Causeway Books, 1960).
5. *Lord Meher*, 4807.
6. *Lord Meher*, 4483.
7. Bal Natu, *Glimpses of the God-Man*, Vol. VI (Myrtle Beach, South Carolina: Sheriar Foundation, 1994), 185.
8. *Lord Meher*, 5165.
9. *Lord Meher*, 2374, endnote omitted.
10. For example, see Kitty Davy's *Love Alone Prevails* (Myrtle Beach, South Carolina: Sheriar Press, Inc., 1981), 77.
11. *Lord Meher*, 5027.
12. Kitty Davy, *Love Alone Prevails*, 154-55.
13. *Tales from the New Life with Meher Baba*, Interview With Eruch Jessawala (Berkeley, California: The Beguine Library, 1976), 124.
14. Chatterji, trans., *Bhagavad Gita*, Chapter X, Verse 10.
15. *Ibid.*, Chapter XI, Verse 55.

KRISHNA

16. Bal Natu, *Glimpses of the God-Man, Meher Baba*, Vol. V (Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. Sheriar Press, 1987), p. 77.
17. *Lord Meher*, 5432.
18. *Lord Meher*, 5851.
19. *Lord Meher*, 2434.
20. *Lord Meher*, 2615.
21. Meher Baba as quoted in *Lord Meher*, 5017.
22. *Lord Meher*, 5177.
23. *Lord Meher*, 3993.
24. *Lord Meher*, 5177.
25. *Lord Meher*, 4284.
26. Meher Baba as quoted in *Lord Meher*, 1798.
27. Meher Baba, *God Speaks*, 190 (emphasis in original).
28. Meher Baba as quoted in *Lord Meher*, 3317.
29. *Discourses*, 81.
30. Meher Baba as quoted in *The God-Man*, 134.
31. This was Meher Baba's characterization as quoted in *Lord Meher*, 3935.
32. Meher Baba, "Talks by Meher Baba," *The Awakener*, ed. Filis Frederick, Vol. XVII, No. 1 (1976), 1.
33. Meher Baba, "On Working for Baba," *The Awakener*, ed. Filis Frederick, Vol. XIX, No. 2 (1981), 4.
34. *Lord Meher*, 6198.
35. Manija Sheriar Irani, *Family Letters*, letter dated June 13, 1959, page 2 (New York: Society for Avatar Meher Baba, 1969).
36. *Lord Meher*, 5447
37. Kitty Davy, *Love Alone Prevails*, 350.
38. *Lord Meher*, 2769.
39. Meher Baba, "Baba on Suffering," *The Awakener*, ed. Filis Frederick, Vol. VIII, No. 1 (1961), 9.
40. Eruch Jessawala, *That's How It Was*, ed. Steve Klein (Myrtle Beach, SC: Sheriar Foundation, 1995), 382.
41. *Lord Meher*, 3317.
42. *Lord Mcher*, 5179.
43. Meher Baba as quoted in *The God-Man*, 369.

KRISHNA

44. Naosherwan Anzar, *The Beloved* (Myrtle Beach, SC: Sheriar Press, 1974), 47-48.
45. *Tales from the New Life*, 104-07.
46. *Lord Meher*, 3135.
47. Bal Natu, *Glimpses of the God-Man*, Vol. V (Myrtle Beach, S.C.: Sheriar Press, 1987), 221.
48. *Lord Meher*, 4743.

RAMA



RAMA

"I myself am Ram."

That was Baba's reply to an Indian man who described himself as a devotee of Ram.¹ The Avatar is always with us, but His human "coat" changes from age to age.

The search for the "historical" Rama appears to be futile. As noted with other Avatars, Baba could have provided complete biographical details of Rama, but He was not interested in doing so.

Rama lived in India approximately 7,000 years ago.² Rama's father, Dasaratha, was a king who ruled in Ayodhya, a community where righteousness prevailed because of Dasaratha's virtue.³ *The Ramayana* tells us that, at the time of Rama's birth, gods and demigods complained that "demons" were oppressing everyone. The leader of the demons was Ravana. As with many aspects of *The Ramayana*, there is a tremendous dimension of spiritual symbolism in the concept of a "demon." More importantly, Baba has a surprising perspective on Ravana's role in Rama's life:

Lord Ram had his Ravana, Jesus his Judas. One of the twelve men in the circle is always like that. Suppose my finger was a compass. I, as the Master, am the point in the middle and the outside ring is my circle. Now observe what happens when the circle is complete and the compass is stationary. The pencil is still on one point of the circle. The one who is under the point shouts! That is *Judas*.

Eleven members of the circle are God-Realized during my lifetime - the twelfth after I die. He, my Judas, being the *dark side* of me, realizes me after I have physically departed.⁴

The notion that the demonic Ravana was actually a member of the Avatar's circle may cause orthodox Hindus consternation, just as Christians may have a hard time accepting Judas's God-Realization.

RAMA

Rama's Early Life

Vishnu heard the prayers of the gods and demi-gods and agreed that He would incarnate as a human being. One-half of Vishnu's spiritual force was born as Rama, the son of Dasaratha's wife Kausalya; one-fourth of Vishnu's spiritual force was born as Bharata, the son of Dasaratha's second wife, Kaikeyi; and one-fourth of Vishnu's spiritual force was born as Laksmana and Satrughna, the twin sons of Dasaratha's third wife, Sumitra.

Rama and Laksmana were inseparable as young men. They were examples of the spiritual ideal: respectful of spiritual traditions, deferential to their parents, fully observant of the "dharma" of the culture of their time and place. The boys were adored by the people of the kingdom. At the age of sixteen, the boys accompanied a spiritual sage on a successful mission to kill demons. Their fame spread far, and they were invited to visit King Janaka, living in the city of Mithila. Janaka told Rama that if He could fire the gigantic weapon called "dhanus," Rama could marry Janaka's daughter Sita. After Rama successfully fired the dhanus at a public ceremony, Janaka pledged Sita in marriage to Him.

Rama's Father-In-Law, the Perfect Master

Baba tells us that Janaka was a Perfect Master. It is probable that Janaka was one of the Perfect Masters who unveiled Rama to his Avatarhood. Baba related the following story about Janaka:

King Janak was a *Videh Mukta*, a Sadguru who was physically without sensation or feeling, and beyond maya. But, because he was a king, he lived like a king in royal fashion, and his palace contained all the comforts and riches befitting a king.

An aspirant of the path came to him one day, sent to Janak by his Guru. The pilgrim had undergone all sorts of severe austerities, had wandered for years and years, and had fasted long without food and even without water.

RAMA

When he came to the court of Janak, seeing the pomp and grandeur of the place, he thought: "How could one living so regal a life give me knowledge? When the king himself is enmeshed in maya, how could he ever free others from it?"

King Janak asked the pilgrim to rest for the night and said he would talk with him after a few days. He was given a fine room in the palace with all luxuries. A servant was placed at his disposal, and he was fed the best of food. But at night when he went to sleep, as he lay on his bed, he saw a large boulder suspended over the bed, and it seemed to be slowly descending. He was frightened and lay awake the whole night looking up at the stone, afraid it would fall and crush him. For two days, he had no sleep and suffered in health.

On the third day, Janak sent for him and inquired about him. The man recounted his sleepless nights, and the king said, "Despite all the conveniences and comforts, you could not sleep and were restless. Compared to the hardships you have suffered in your past penance, this experience seems to have been much more tormenting, as your mind was all the time concentrated on the stone. Outwardly, though you found all splendor and glory, your life is just the same as that which you have led for years!"

Although you see me surrounded by the comforts of the palace, inwardly, I am all the time rooted in God. I am beyond all this and take others beyond it!

The pilgrim then understood King Janak's state and surrendered to him. ⁵

As a Perfect Master, King Janaka of course knew that Rama was destined to marry Sita and would be able to fire the dhanus.

RAMA

Baba shared another rich and entertaining story about Janaka:

Emperor Janak, Sita's father, was also known to be a Perfect Master. During his reign, there was a youth from outside his empire who longed desperately to see God. "I must see Him," he said, "as clearly as I see these external things." And he decided to see Janak and ask his help. For two months, he walked through sun and rains without food. This was about seven thousand years ago. There were no automobiles and airplanes then. Finally, he arrived at the courtyard of Janak's palace. The guards accosted and stopped him. He stood outside the wall, crying aloud for Janak, shouting his name, his glory and his fame. At last Janak heard him and asked his ministers to inquire who he was.

"I am a lover of God," he replied. "I want to see God. Janak must show me God."

Janak had him brought in and said to his ministers, "Throw him in prison!" So he was thrown in jail. The youth thought: "This Janak, who calls himself all-knowing, must know that I am seeking God, yet he sends me to prison." After a few days, during which the youth had no food nor drink, Janak ordered him to be brought to audience. Janak saluted him with folded hands and ordered his ministers to give him a bath, to feed him and to treat him like a prince. The youth was brought to the palace and seated on Janak's throne. "Let him enjoy this state for three days," said Janak.

The youth did not grasp what Janak had in mind and, of course, he did not know how to manage the affairs of state. Poor people came begging, ministers came for advice. But he did not know what to do and so kept quiet. Finally, he appealed to the ministers to ask Janak to free him

RAMA

from this uncomfortable position. Janak came, ordered him to come down from the throne and asked him which he preferred - the life in prison or life on the throne. The boy said, "They are both prisons, but of different kinds." Janak then directed him to go and to return after twelve years.

The youth left the palace, roamed about India, became a rich man and took the name of *Kalyan*, which means "happy in every respect." After twelve years he returned to Janak, this time rich and prosperous. The guards again checked him, asking who he was. "I am the rich Kalyan," he said. Janak, on hearing this, sent word for him to go away for a few more years. So Kalyan returned home and in the course of time lost everything that he possessed. After twelve years more he returned to Janak, who again asked who he was. "I am the miserable Kalyan," he replied. Janak then sent him away for twelve more months.

During this time, Kalyan started pondering: "What is this? When I first went to Janak, I had nothing but I wanted to see God. Then I was thrown into prison. Then I was placed on the throne. Then I became rich. Then I became poor. What does all this mean?"

When he returned to Janak's palace after twelve months, one of the guards took pity on him and said, "You fool, this time when Janak asks who you are, say 'I do not know!'" Kalyan followed this advice. Janak then turned his gaze upon him and he lost consciousness of all bodies, of the whole world, and became conscious of his own Self as the Infinite God.

The meaning of this tale is unless you lose the "I," you cannot see and become God, because where you are, God is not!⁶

RAMA

The *Ramayana* contains numerous symbolic references to flying machines and moving vehicles. Meher Baba's remark, that there were no airplanes or automobiles at the time of Rama, puts those legendary references into context. The fictional symbolism makes the *Ramayana* a more enjoyable tale. The *Ramayana* has been embellished in the thousands of years of being handed down from one generation to another, and the references to "demons" and "flying machines" makes the story all the more entertaining to the average listener.

Janaka also pledged his other daughter, Urmila, as the bride of Laksmana. In addition, Janaka's brother pledged his two daughters to Dasaratha's other two sons, Bharata and Satrughna. The four marriages occurred simultaneously. Upon returning to Ayodhya, Rama and Sita lived exemplary lives. Rama was the embodiment of the ideal young man, and Sita was the embodiment of the ideal wife. The people of Ayodhya adored them both.

Rama, Sita, and Laksmana Are Forced Into Exile

Dasaratha wanted to see Rama ascend to the throne before his death. The people of Ayodhya fully shared Dasaratha's wish. Kaikeyi, one of Dasaratha's wives and the mother of Bharata, plotted against Dasaratha. Kaikeyi reminded Dasaratha that she had saved his life long ago and that he had promised her two boons in return. She demanded that he grant her those boons: first, that Bharata should be enthroned as king rather than Rama; second, that Rama should be banished to the forest for fourteen years.

Although Dasaratha was enraged at Kaikeyi's treachery, Rama instantly agreed to Kaikeyi's two demands. Rama recognized that dharma required Dasaratha to keep his promises and also required Rama Himself to abide by legitimate demands. Rama looked directly at Kaikeyi and told her that He was in no way attached to wealth, fame, power and pleasure and that He was only devoted to truth.

Rama's own mother, Kausalya, was broken-hearted and forbade Rama from going into exile. She told Rama that she would die with-

RAMA

out the company of her beloved son. Rama explained that He must uphold the law of dharma by obeying His father's promises and that, in the final analysis, it was all part of God's plan. Rama forbade His mother from going with him in exile, explaining that her duty was to care for her husband. Ultimately, Kausalya blessed Rama's exile and promised to wait for Him to return to Ayodhya.

The story was different with Sita. She pleaded to go into exile with Rama as His loyal wife and told Him that, without Him, she would have to commit suicide. Rama was touched by her devotion and agreed to take her with Him. Rama also permitted his brother Laksmana to come with Him in exile.

The Ramayana describes Rama and Laksmana as inseparable. The ordinary person would be inclined to see this as brotherly devotion and loyalty, but Baba sees something more:

In fana-fi-Rasool, which is a very rare state and also occurs very rarely, a person becomes One with the Avatar (Rasool). When it does happen, it is during the Avatar's physical presence in the world and just before the unique worldwide manifestation of the Avatar. It is a rare occurrence. It has happened in the past.⁷

Bhau Kalchuri notes that Laksmana was one of the rare individuals in the fana-fi-Rasool state.⁸

Prior to leaving Ayodhya, Rama gave His property to the poor, to His servants, and to various holy men. When the three pilgrims left, Ayodhya became spiritually dead, a city in mourning. The hearts of everyone were heavy with sadness, and no one wanted to continue life without Rama, Sita and Laksmana. Shortly after the pilgrims left, Rama's father died from grief. Nevertheless, they had to fulfill their divine destiny, which required them to go into exile.

A sage recommended that the three pilgrims establish themselves on Chitrakoota hill, and Rama agreed to do so. Although much of the *Ramayana* is symbolic and may suggest that Rama was not a real person or that the places and events of the book are not

RAMA

themselves real, Meher Baba was at pains to point out that Rama was a real person and that the places described in the Ramayana were actual parts of India. Bhau Kalchuri tells us:

Baba wished to contact sadhus at Chitrakot, one hundred and ten miles southwest of Allahabad, and they drove there that day. But when they arrived, Baba felt uneasy and stated in no uncertain terms: "I don't like the atmosphere here," and so they returned to Allahabad without having made a single contact.

The road to Chitrakot was horrendous and what work Baba did by driving one hundred and ten miles there and back is unexplainable. The forested area of Chitrakot is associated with the advent of Lord Ram. It is believed that Ram, Laxman and Sita spent eleven years of their fourteen-year exile in Chitrakot.⁹

Bhau Kalchuri also notes that Meher Baba visited Ayodhya, where he worked with a much-revered spiritually advanced soul.¹⁰ It is most interesting to note Meher Baba's negative reaction to Chitrakot, an area that was sanctified by Rama's presence many thousands of years ago. Nothing except God remains sacred down through the ages. Just as Baba recoiled against the atmosphere of Chitrakot, He also did not visit the "holy" places associated with the last two Avatars, Muhammad and Jesus. The fact that an Avatar once lived in a certain area does not ensure that the area will preserve its spiritual atmosphere. The Middle East is now a battle ground, and Tibet, the home of Perfect Masters in the past, has been overrun by a political system to which religion itself is repugnant.

On the other hand, legend has it that Rama and Sita traveled through the Happy Valley area in Maharashtra and also visited the Hamirpur area in northern India. Baba personally took Western disciples to the Happy Valley area, and there is an entire community of Baba-lovers in the Hamirpur area famous for their deep devotion to Meher Baba. The Maharashtra area itself was home to Shivaji, one of the Avatar's minor advents. The Avatar is never tied to any patch of

RAMA

land, ethnic group or religious rituals, and it is His pleasure to reinvigorate certain areas and certain religious perspectives in His vast discretion.

Bharata traveled to the forest to meet with Rama and to implore Rama to reconsider His banishment and to take the throne. Although Rama was happy to see Bharata, he asked Bharata why he had abandoned his duty and gave Bharata a small discourse on why everyone needs to do his duty (dharma) in life. When Bharata continued to beg Rama to return to Ayodhya, Rama explained that one can only work out his own happiness by performing right action and that He needed to honor His father's promises. Rama told Bharata that He intended to honor His duty as prescribed by dharma and urged Bharata to do the same.

Rama's Spiritual Work During His Exile

Rama, Sita and Laxman left Chitrakoota hill because it was terrorized by a demon, the younger brother of Ravana. The three entered the Dandaka Forest, where they battled many other demons. One suspects that the characterization of "demons" throughout the *Ramayana* is symbolic, but the fact remains that the Avatar "cleans up" the universe on many levels, many of which we simply cannot understand. For example, "[o]n other occasions, Baba mentioned that Ram, while in exile, did much work with masts in the jungles. Such God-intoxicated persons as masts always exist on earth, especially in the East, and during Avataric advents they are contacted by God personified."¹¹

We cannot comprehend the scale of the spiritual cleaning undertaken by the Avatars, but such "laundry work" is an integral part of each Avatar's mission. In addition to the work with masts, Meher Baba was physically in the body during two world wars, the Russian and Chinese Revolutions, the Korean and Vietnam wars, and the expulsion of European colonists from Asia, including the independence movement in India. Muhammad united the factious Arab clans under the banner of God and required his followers to marry women rather than using them as chattels. Jesus invited

RAMA

temptation to cleanse the world of various temptations and cleansed lepers and the mentally ill of their diseases. Bhau Kalchuri writes:

Lord Ram worked with masts while he was [in] exile in the jungles for fourteen years; Jesus may also have done mast-work during his years of travel in India, Persia and elsewhere. During the advent of Ram, there was no such term as "mast," because that is an Arabic or Persian term. The God-intoxicated and God-absorbed men and women in the days of Ram were called "*rishis*" - sages, or "*sants*" - holy men or saints, or "*maunis*" - silent ones, recluses, hermits, also called anchorites.¹²

Rama's Numerous Contacts During His Exile

During His wanderings, Rama had contact with many types of people, including ordinary people, sages and ascetics, and so-called "demons." These contacts are now a permanent part of the legend of Rama. Bhau Kalchuri tells of one such contact: "Mention of Ram's feet is in reference to the story of how Ram one day stepped on a stone and it turned into the woman Ahilya, who had become a stone after having fallen from the fourth plane ages before. Ram had redeemed her."¹³

Baba related the following story regarding devotion to Rama:

In Rama's time a yogi once did penance for one hundred years. There was another man who loved the Master. He did no penance, no fasting. He only loved Rama. One day the Master went walking in the jungle. The first yogi opened his eyes and said to him, "Oh, Rama, when will I see your formless face?" Rama replied, "In fifty years." The yogi was frightfully disappointed and said, "I made penance for one hundred years and I suffered much, and still fifty years to wait!"

RAMA

The next day the Master accosted the happy devotee, and this loving one asked, "Oh, Rama, when will I see your formless state?" Rama replied, "After fifty more lives." The devotee said, "So soon!" And thereupon he got into such an ecstasy that he died; and as he was dying he saw Rama's formless state.¹⁴

There is a tradition in India that one should not refuse beggars knocking at one's door because it could be Lord Rama Himself, who spent fourteen years in exile and received food at the hands of householders and forest hermits. During the New Life, Meher Baba kept this tradition alive by personally begging for food from householders. One can only speculate as to the meaning of the New Life in this Avataric advent. Baba did not encourage an ascetic life for Westerners and in fact criticized most of the sadhus and sanyasis in India (ascetics) as people simply evading the responsibilities of life rather than genuine advanced souls. The Avatar constantly reminds us: "Do as I say, not as I do."

Opposition to Rama's Work

Baba repeatedly emphasized that each Avatar faces extreme opposition from the world. One would think that being banished to the forest for fourteen years would be opposition enough, but Rama's exile was just the beginning of the opposition to His work. The Avatar works through the opposition, and He invites this opposition upon Himself to advance His work. During various travels throughout India in the 1920s, Meher Baba said:

"I want to touch the feet of five thousand sadhus, and I pray that they will abuse and insult me. Sadhus will tear to shreds my *divine ego* and crush my *Babahood!*" He then told ancient tales about Lord Ram and recent ones about Upasni Maharaj, who were both much maligned during their respective wanderings in India.¹⁵

RAMA

The "crucifixion" of the Avatar is a continuous part of His work while He is in the body because He must do battle with the powerful worldly forces that oppose God.

Ravana

Great opposition requires a great opponent. Jesus was opposed by the Romans, by the Jewish religious establishment, and by Judas. Rama's chief opponent was Ravana, who delighted in evil deeds. The gods, demi-gods, and seekers of truth all complained that Ravana made their lives miserable. Of course, in the *Ramayana* Ravana is depicted in mythic terms, possessing a space ship, advanced weapons of war, twenty arms and ten heads, and superhuman strength. Everyone quaked in terror before him, and he described himself as death unto death.

Ravana lived in "Lanka," which is probably the island formerly called "Ceylon" and now called "Sri Lanka." Upon visiting Ceylon in 1940, Meher Baba observed:

Spiritually, Ceylon is dry. Inwardly, it is dry. Outwardly, it is wet. Ceylon is called the land of Ravanna. It is like a rock that cannot store water; the water flows away when poured on it. These dogmatic Buddhists are so dry, without feeling or emotion. India is the most spiritual, but not south India. It is very spiritual northward from Hyderabad.¹⁶

Brahma had given Ravana a boon that he could only be killed by a human being. Emboldened by this boon, Ravana enjoyed tormenting the gods and the sages. Ravana was so powerful that he assumed that no human was up to the task of killing him.

One of the many demons killed by Rama in the forest was Ravana's brother, Khara. Ravana wanted revenge and believed that abducting Sita would accomplish his goal. Ravana asked the demon Marica to disguise himself as a golden deer near Rama's hermitage. When Rama and Laksmana would leave the hermitage, Ravana

RAMA

would then be able to abduct Sita. Although another advisor counseled Ravana against abducting Sita, Ravana decided to proceed with his plan anyway. Ravana's abduction of Sita provides the central dramatic tension in the *Ramayana*.

Ravana was a swaggering, arrogant demon. The gods and demigods, not to mention the sadhus and sages, complained ceaselessly that Ravana delighted in terrorizing them. They prayed to Lord Vishnu to incarnate as a human being, and Lord Vishnu answered their prayers by taking birth as Rama.

Although villains in most stories are pure evil, Ravana in fact was close to the end of his spiritual journey. Ravana was "a king who was devout [sic] to his guru. One day he asked his guru if would [sic] in this lifetime achieve *mukti* - liberation. His guru said no unless he had a certain boon. Ravanna asked what boon. The guru explained that Ravanna would have to be killed by Ram. Therefore, Ravanna plotted to anger Ram so he would fight him. Ravanna abducted Sita and hid her, he then lied to Ram that he had seduced Sita which angered Ram so much that he fought him to the death and killed him."¹⁷

The *Ramayana* is full of symbolism and depicts Ravana as capable of changing his form at will, traveling in space ships, fighting with guided missiles, and capable of drying up the waters of the ocean. Ravana could fend off mountain tops hurled at him in battle, and he was not shaken if struck by lightening bolts. Ravana was a formidable opponent, so powerful that he required the Avatar Himself to slay him.

The Abduction of Sita

To return to the story, Ravana and Marica went to Rama's ashram in the countryside. Marica used his magical powers to turn himself into a beautiful deer of many colors, shining in the forest like polished gems. Although Laksmana rightly believed that the deer was a demon, Sita expressed great love for the deer. Rama announced that He intended to kill the deer, and He asked Laksmana to stay with Sita in the ashram and guard her.

RAMA

The deer (who was really the demon Marica) led Rama hither and yon until Rama was fatigued and far away from the ashram. When Rama did kill the deer with an arrow, it immediately turned into the demon Marica. As he expired, the demon mimicked the voice of Rama and said: "Hey Sita! Hey Laksmana!" Rama immediately realized that He had been duped, and He returned to the ashram as quickly as He could run.

When Sita heard what she believed was the voice of Rama, she panicked and asked Laksmana to run to help Rama. Laksmana again suspected that it was the voice of a demon imitating Rama's voice, and told Sita that Rama would prevail against any demon. Sita flew into a rage and manipulated Laksmana's emotions, accusing him of cowardice, of a lustful interest in Sita herself, and of a desire to collude with Bharata and to take over the kingdom. Of course, none of Sita's accusations were true, but Sita had pushed Laksmana's buttons. He told Sita that he had been so shamed that he could not remain in the ashram even though Rama had ordered him to do so. As he left the ashram to hunt for Rama, Laksmana correctly told Sita that she would not be there when he returned.

At this point, Ravana appeared to Sita disguised as an ascetic in ochre robes. Sita did not suspect that a wandering holy man would be Ravana himself in disguise and trusted him. Sita not only shared her fears and her grief at what may have befallen Rama, but also remembered her duty to care for holy men, offering Ravana food and water. In time Ravana revealed his true identity

At first, Ravana tried to talk Sita into coming with him to Lanka by telling her that she would be much happier living in splendor and luxury rather than living the life of a wandering ascetic. Sita responded by showing her unyielding devotion to Rama and by telling Ravana that his attempt to abduct Rama's wife would be Ravana's ruin. Seeing that he could not possibly persuade Sita to come with him, Ravana dragged Sita by her hair into his space ship and took her to Lanka.

RAMA

The Battle Is Joined

The abduction of Sita precipitated the battle between Rama's army and Ravana's army and ended with Rama slaying Ravana. The event was willed by God Himself. Even the nearest and dearest disciples find perfect obedience to be impossible, but these apparent acts of disobedience are parts of God's plan for the Avatar. God willed the abduction of Sita so that Rama could kill Ravana in battle.

Bal Natu relates the following discussion by Meher Baba in 1953: "Baba then mentioned some apparently ordinary incidents from the lives of the past Avatars to illustrate how those events have changed the course of spiritual history. Rama, for instance, at Sita's request, went out to hunt a 'golden' deer. While He was away, Sita quite casually crossed a line drawn before the hut, which enabled Ravana to take her to Lanka."¹⁸ Sita's casual disobedience, together with her unfounded distrust of Laksmana, were willed by God to bring about the epic drama of the *Ramayana*.

Upon reaching Lanka, Ravana again proposed marriage to Sita and she refused. Ravana then gave Sita an ultimatum to marry him within one year or be killed and eaten by Ravana. Sita professed absolute loyalty to Rama, and told Ravana that he would die for his great sins. In response, Ravana imprisoned Sita in a grove of trees, guarded by demonesses. Brahma the Creator took pity on Sita and ordered Indra, the king of the gods, to appear before Sita and give her celestial food, which would guard her against fatigue and hunger until Rama arrived.

When Rama discovered that Sita was missing, He was furious with Laksmana for disobeying His order and stricken with grief for the plight of his beloved Sita. In searching the forest, they discovered Jatayu, the king of the vultures, who had fought with Ravana and tried to prevent Ravana from abducting Sita. Before he died from his wounds, Jatayu explained to Rama that Ravana had taken Sita away in his space ship.

In their desperate search for Sita, Rama and Laksmana were led to Sugriva, the king of the vanaras, and his chief minister, Hanuman.

RAMA

The vanaras were probably forest-dwellers, but in the symbolic language of the *Ramayana* they are depicted as part monkey and part human and endowed with supernatural powers. One suspects that they are depicted as part monkey to distinguish them from Rama himself. Rama, as the Avatar, had divine consciousness, which Meher Baba explains is complete omniscience. In Hinduism, the mind is often depicted as a monkey, clever but willful, that must be tamed by serving God. Although the vanaras are heroes of the *Ramayana*, those who handed down the story from generation to generation probably wanted to ensure that "mere mortals" should be distinguished from Rama, Sita and Laksmana.

Hanuman's Great Service to Rama and Sita

Eventually, Sugriva placed himself and the various tribes of vanaras at Rama's service. Millions of vanaras searched India high and low for Sita but, of course, were unable to find her. In the meantime, the clock was ticking on Ravana's one-year deadline for Sita. The vulture Sampati disclosed that Ravana had taken Sita to Lanka. Rama then gave his signet ring to Hanuman, who would turn out to be exemplary in his heroism and service to Rama. Hanuman was a descendant of the wind-god and flew the entire distance to Lanka with the signet ring to identify himself to Sita.

After searching in Ravana's palace and all over Lanka, Hanuman finally discovered Sita's prison in the grove of trees. To identify himself to Sita, he briefly described Rama's life to Sita and showed her the signet ring. He then offered to take Sita back to Rama with him; she could sit on his back as he flew over the water. Sita demurred for a variety of reasons even though she was touched by Hanuman's compassion. She wanted Rama to have the glory of invading Lanka and vanquishing Ravana. As Hanuman took leave of Sita, she gave him a precious jewel by which Rama could identify her. Sita stressed to Hanuman that he must tell Rama that only one month remained until the date when Ravana promised to kill Sita.

Furious with Ravana, Hanuman destroyed the grove of trees in which Sita was imprisoned and then began destroying a great mon-

RAMA

ument in Lanka. After Hanuman had killed many demons and wreaked havoc on Lanka, Ravaua's troops finally captured Hanuman, and Ravana ordered that Hanuman's tail be set on fire and that he be led around Lanka. He then used the fire in his tail to torch Lanka itself, but fortunately Sita was spared from the fire. When Hanuman assured himself that Sita was safe, he flew back to Rama and the vanara army.

Rama was furious with Ravana when Hanuman delivered the news about Sita's imprisonment in the grove of trees and of Ravana's intention to kill her after one year in Lanka if she did not marry Ravana. Rama resolved to invade Lanka with His army and to destroy Ravana and his kingdom. Rama's noble army of millions of vanaras amassed itself on the shore, awaiting orders from their Lord and their General.

The Invasion of Lanka

Meanwhile in Lanka, Ravana's brother Vibhisana urged Ravana to give up his evil ways and return Sita to Rama. Ravana was undeterred (just as the Kauravas were undeterred in their resolve to fight) and stated his belief that he could kill Rama and thereby win Sita's love in marriage. Vibhisana was disgusted with Ravana and defected by flying to Rama's camp. Rama then crowned Vibhisana the true king of Lanka.

Rama dried the ocean between India and Lanka (as Moses later dried the Red Sea), and the vanaras built an 800-mile bridge across the ocean. Their work was fast because they had to complete it in less than the month Sita had remaining. Ravana proclaimed that he was eager to fight with Rama. However, he was not confident of defeating Rama and attempted to trick Sita into believing that Rama was already dead by showing Sita a manufactured copy of Rama's head. Sita believed Ravana and fell into despair, but a compassionate demoness told Sita that Rama had not been killed and in fact was already in Lanka with His army of vanaras.

Ravana was immune from being killed by gods, demi-gods and demons, but Lanka had been invaded by vanaras and by Rama and

RAMA

Laksmana. The battle between Rama's army and Ravana's army was joined, and there was death and destruction on both sides. Hanuman acquitted himself heroically. Because of that heroism in devotion to Rama's cause, Hanuman's exploits are legendary to this day. The monkey mind, that is the mind of the ordinary human being symbolized by Hanuman, can be disciplined and can achieve true greatness when it is subordinated to the cause of the Avatar.

One of Baba's close followers, Pukar, first saw Baba as Rama; this vision enabled Pukar to accept Meher Baba as the Avatar.¹⁹ Pukar's devotion to Baba was itself legendary. In 1954, Baba said to Pukar: "You are my Hanuman. Do you know it?" Pukar answered: "When you give me that experience, I will know it."²⁰ Given Hanuman's place of reverence in Hinduism, Baba's reference to Pukar as "my Hanuman" was an extraordinary compliment.

Rama Kills Ravana

When Ravana entered the battle, Rama seriously wounded him. Rama told Ravana to go home and rest for the next day's battle at which Rama intended to finish His business with Ravana. In the meantime, Rama's army killed many demons, including relatives of Ravana.

Ravana then re-entered the battle. Rama and Ravana squared off for the final confrontation, and their respective armies quietly watched the titanic battle unfold. After exchanges of missiles, Rama repeatedly cut off Ravana's head only to find another head immediately replaced it. Ultimately Rama killed Ravana with the Brahma-missile given to him by a sage. The demons fled, and the vanaras rejoiced on the battle field, joined by the gods and demigods in joyous celebration.

Sita's Test of Fire

When Rama finally reunited with Sita, He shocked her by suggesting that Ravana may have defiled her by touching her sexually

RAMA

Sita was immediately horrified at the false accusation and asked that a fire be prepared. She unhesitatingly entered the fire, at which time the Hindu trinity, Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Preserver, and Shiva the Destroyer, all appeared. They told Rama that He is the Avatar, the sustainer of the universe, the embodiment of dharma, and the salvation of mankind. The Lord of Fire then held up Sita and assured Rama that Sita was absolutely pure and free of fault. Rama said that He always believed that Sita was pure but He wanted to have a public proof of her purity to eliminate any doubt in the minds of others.

Rama and Sita then reunited with great joy, and Indra (Lord of the Gods) restored the lives of all vanaras that had died in battle. Rama and Sita then took an aircraft to Ayodhya and were greeted by Bharata and all the residents with celebration and happiness. Rama was coronated as the rightful king of Ayodhya, and His reign was characterized by total devotion to dharma.

Rama's Mistaken Banishment of Sita

Sita was happy to be with Rama, and she eventually became pregnant. However, a public scandal developed and some of the people in the kingdom speculated that Ravana had sexual relations with Sita. Although Rama knew that Sita was pure, He permitted Himself to be influenced by public opinion and arranged for Sita to be banished to the forest in the hermitage of the sage Valmiki. There Sita gave birth to twin boys, Kusa and Lava. Valmiki composed the *Ramayana* and taught the boys to sing it.

The twins eventually sang the *Ramayana* in front of Rama, and He was convinced that they were truly His own sons. He then sent word to Valmiki with the message that Sita should come to court and prove her purity. Valmiki escorted Sita to court; she was the embodiment of sorrow and grief. Rama acknowledged that He knew that Sita was pure and that the boys were His own sons, but He said he had to banish Sita because of the public scandal. Sita then asked Mother Earth to receive her if she were pure. Mother Earth rose from the bowels of the earth on a celestial throne, lov-

RAMA

ingly embraced Sita, and took Sita back with her to the center of the earth.

Scholars and devotees of Rama have for thousands of years puzzled over why Rama banished Sita to the forest when He had absolute proof that she was pure. As Baba repeatedly reminds us, we delude ourselves if we believe that we can fully understand the Avatar. Baba has clarified in this advent that each Avatar reveals one weakness, in deference to the fact that the Avatar descends into the human form, which by nature has its weaknesses. Baba said: "My weakness as Ram was that I had to renounce Sita for the sake of the peoples' satisfaction, by sending her into the jungle."²¹ In 1955 Krishna Nair, who did night watch for Meher Baba and had been a close disciple, was the victim of a prank played by school girls who wrote a romantic letter to one of their school-mates pretending the letter was from Krishna Nair. Meher Baba knew that Krishna Nair had not written the letter, but He banished him from the work of the close disciples and sent him back to South India. Krishna Nair was grief-stricken and pleaded with Baba, who explained that Rama had banished His own wife to the forest knowing that she was innocent. Baba assured Krishna Nair that He would help him internally.²² Our human sense of justice can never capture the Avatar's work in this world. His devotees have to love Him through their pain and feelings that life is not fair.

Rama was stricken with grief and vowed to take revenge against the earth itself, covering it with water. However, Brahma Himself appeared and asked Rama not to lose His temper. He said that Sita had preceded Rama into the next world, and that Rama and Sita would be reunited there when Rama had finished His duties on earth. Rama continued ruling for a while but eventually abdicated His throne and installed His two sons. His end was near, and Brahma counseled him that he could assume any form He desired and leave behind the illusory world. Rama then entered into the spirit of Vishnu the Preserver, and His story has been told for thousands of years.

RAMA

Rama Has Come Again

To this day, Hindus believe that the beggar at one's door may be Rama Himself. We know that the Avatar is always with us, whether it be in the form of Rama or Meher Baba or in the internal consciousness of the Avatar who never severs His link with the world. To think of him in any of His forms, to love Him in any of His forms, is always a benefit. "God's Life lived in illusion, as the Avatar and as Perfect Masters, is not illusory...."²³

One of the most famous devotees of Rama in the past century was Mahatma Gandhi, who as a devoted Hindu took Rama as the Avatar. His last words, uttered as he was assassinated in 1948, are inscribed on his memorial: "O Ram!"

ENDNOTES

1. *Lord Meher*, 4528.
2. *Lord Meher*, 4458.
3. Rama's life has been summarized from *The Concise Ramayana of Valmiki*, ed. Swami Venkatesananda (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1988).
4. *Lord Meher*, 966.
5. *Lord Meher*, 2440-2441.
6. *Lord Meher*, 4458-59.
7. *Lord Meher*, 6190.
8. *Lord Meher*, endnote to page 6190.
9. *Lord Meher*, 3329.
10. *Lord Meher*, 3329
11. Bhau Kalchuri, *Lord Meher*, endnote to page 2243.
12. *Lord Meher*, endnote to page 3142.
13. *Lord Meher*, 5739.
14. Quoted in an article entitled "Follow Love," by Elizabeth Patterson, included in *Treasures from the Meher Baba Journals*, ed. Jane Haynes (Myrtle Beach, SC: Sheriar Press, 1980), 7.
15. The material in quotation marks is from Meher Baba. The last sentence is from Bhau Kalchuri, *Lord Meher*, 664.

RAMA

16. *Lord Meher*, 2646.
17. Bhau Kalchuri, *Lord Meher*, end note to page 2332.
18. *Glimpses of the God Man Meher Baba*, Vol. IV (Myrtle Beach, SC: Sheriar Press, 1984), 78.
19. Bal Natu, *Glimpses of the God Man Meher Baba*, Vol. V (Myrtle Beach, SC: Sheriar Press, 1987), 65.
20. *Lord Meher*, 4530.
21. *Lord Meher*, 6098.
22. This incident is related in *Lord Meher*, 4643.
23. Meher Baba, as quoted in *Lord Meher*, 4606.

ZARATHUSTRA



ZARATHUSTRA

Only the Perfect Masters know me. I am that Ancient One - Zarathustra, Ram, Krishna, Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad.¹

Meher Baba unequivocally asserted that He was Zarathustra. Less than a year after making the above comment, Baba publicly declared Himself to be the Avatar on September 7, 1953, coinciding with the birthday of Zarathustra. Among other thmgs, Baba remarked:

Of the most recognized and much worshiped manifestations of God as Avatar, that of Zarathustra is the earliest - having been before Ram, Krishna, Buddha, Jesus and Muhammad. Thousands of years ago, he gave to the world the essence of Truth in the form of three fundamental precepts - Good Thoughts, Good Words, and Good Deeds. These precepts were and are constantly unfolded to humanity in one form or another, directly or indirectly in every cycle, by the Avatar of the age as he leads humanity, imperceptibly, toward the Truth. To put these precepts of Good Thoughts, Good Words and Good Deeds into practice is not as easily done as it would appear, though it is not impossible. But to live up to these precepts honestly and literally is apparently as impossible as it is to practice a living death in the midst of life.²

Baba also commented on Zarathustra's life:

Prophet Zarathustra lived some six thousand years ago. His Master was a Hebrew. But what the world knows about the religion that came from him is practically nothing. All these Zoroastrian rites, rituals and ceremonies have come down

ZARATHUSTRA

from the Dasturs (Parsi priests) and Zarathustra's followers who began them centuries after his death. For example, those ornaments of the Zoroastrian religion - the sadra and kusti - are the outcome of the preachings of the Dasturs centuries after Zarathustra's advent. The sadra and kusti have no connection with his teachings. They are nothing but *after-creations*. I am revealing to you the absolute truth.

Zarathustra was the greatest *Sufi*. He was the Father of Sufism, and its very foundation owes its creation to him. Sufism began with Zarathustra and ended with Mohammed.³

Baba shared another observation about Zoroastrianism in 1931:

The *Shahnameh* (Zoroastrian holy book) is almost total fiction. Zoroastrianism is very old - almost six thousand years. The reigns of the famous kings, Jal, Rustom and Jamshed, were before Zarathustra - almost one hundred thousand years ago! Who could authentically document such ancient history? Religion as the Parsis practice it today has nothing in it. All the original teachings of Zarathustra were buried and destroyed; hence, what they have is an afterthought and quite different from what Zarathustra actually said and taught. It is a pity, but true.⁴

Meher Baba and the Zoroastrian Community

The fact that the Avatar was born into a Zoroastrian family is significant. The Zoroastrian community has been decimated in Iran, the nation of its origin, and is now mainly centered in Western India. The faith itself has degenerated from the religion introduced by Zarathustra many thousands of years ago, as Baba frequently emphasized. However, despite having two Avatars, the Zoroastrians have enjoyed only one Perfect Master in recorded history:

ZARATHUSTRA

His name [in Persian] was *Azar Kaivan*. He came long after Prophet Zarathustra. He was so advanced that to get God-Realization, he laid down like a dead man for forty days, uttering: "Yezdan, Yezdan, Yezdan," until he lost his voice through weakness. So, he continued repeating Yezdan silently. After forty days, an apparition came to him and took him to a Master of that time. After untold difficulties and trials, he was given God-Realization.⁵

The long-suffering Zoroastrians wandered in the wilderness, and their cries were finally heard by Ahuramazda Himself. Once again God descended to bring a fresh dispensation of divine truth and love, and the Zoroastrian community was His host.

The community into which the Avatar takes birth inevitably provides opposition, and the Zoroastrian community was no exception for Meher Baba:

Without speaking on shariat, it is next to impossible to approach the Parsis who are, unfortunately, the most backward class spiritually and among whom ignorance and other vices have spread considerably. They have very little knowledge of saints and of things spiritual generally. I have taken this body as a Parsi and this time, in this very body, the *Avataric* climax will be reached.⁶

On another occasion, Baba elaborated further on the Parsis:

The Parsis are practically extinct. Fifty percent of them are on my side and fifty percent are in opposition. Those who do not believe in me still believe in their old rituals, putting sandalwood in the fire, and so forth. To them, those persons who are honest, serve mankind and have good qualities but who do not follow religious precepts are condemnable. They would often say

ZARATHUSTRA

that those not burning sandalwood have bought tickets to hell! According to their faith, Zarathustra was the last Prophet, and another one will come in the Kali Yuga - the present Iron Age. In this age, uneducated people especially have taken to worshipping stone as God, mostly in the villages. This is another sign of the spiritual decline of the East.⁷

Baba's taking form as a Zoroastrian serves to rejuvenate the Zoroastrian faith and to reacquaint the world with the faith, as well as formally acknowledge Zarathustra as an Avatar. The choice of a Zoroastrian form probably has a deeper significance although we can never know the full reasons for the Avatar's behavior. In 1932 Baba remarked: "If you review my past activities, teachings and workings, you will find that they contain the elements of all religions in one way or another. They combine the teachings of all the great Prophets of the past - Jesus, Zarathustra, Buddha, Krishna, Moses and Mohammed."⁸

As He often reminded us, Meher Babas mission was to harmonize the religions of the world and to blend the East and West. It turns out the Zoroastrian faith is in the middle of a spiritual spectrum only the Avatar can understand:

From the viewpoint of Divine gnosis, the Muslims progress [proceed] from Oneness (*Wahadat*) to manyness (*kasrat*) and the Hindus from manyness to Oneness. Thus the Muslims and the Hindus represent the extreme and opposite points of a diameter of a circle with God as the Center. Zoroastrianism is midway between the two extremes and hence the choice at this juncture of a Zoroastrian form in me as the vehicle of spirituality, derived from Muslim and Hindu sources.⁹

Our "Zoroastrian" Avatar was the beginning and the end of this cycle of Avatars, and He has the most ambitious agenda of any of the

ZARATHUSTRA

Avatars. His life incorporates the essence of Zarathustra and yet in its external form reflects the modern age completely.

Zarathustra's Early Life

Little is known of Zarathustra's actual life, and what was written down contemporaneously to record Zarathustra's life and teachings has been lost. People at that time and place wrote on cowhides, and those cowhides were presumably destroyed in the invasion of Iran by numerous hostile armies, including one led by Alexander the Great. The brief account given here is a composite derived from several sources.¹⁰ As was His custom with other advents, Baba did not seem concerned with the archeological details of the lives of previous Avatars. In this advent, He has given an abundance of material about His own life and teachings. The Avatar has come again, and there is no longer a burning need to try to figure out all the missing pieces of the puzzle of previous advents.

The culture into which Zarathustra was born was characterized by two classes of people, priests and laypersons. The priests were generally polytheistic, used intoxicants in their rituals, and frequently encouraged the worship of nature spirits.

Zarathustra's father was named Pourushasp. His mother, Dughdhowa, had a dream after she became pregnant. In the dream, the clouds darkened and from them came wild animals, who menacingly rushed toward her. One of the beasts ripped open her womb and pulled out the baby Zarathustra. Suddenly lightning flashed, and there magically appeared a young man holding a wand in one hand and a book in the other hand. The young man threw the book at the wild animals, who then retreated, and he picked up the baby and restored him to his mother's womb. The wound in her abdomen then instantly healed. As interpreted, Dughdhowa's dream signified that she would give birth to a prophet, who would prove a formidable opponent of evil-doers who would try to destroy him and his religion and who would ultimately succeed in demonstrating that good will triumph over evil.

ZARATHUSTRA

Legend has it that Zarathustra laughed when He entered the world. From what we know of Baba's sense of humor, the legend is not surprising. Legend also tells us that there were six attempts by the priests to kill Zarathustra. First, one of the priests tried to stab the baby Zarathustra in his cradle, but his hand became so paralyzed that he was unable to carry out his plan. As a second attempt, the priests took the baby and placed him in a cow pasture, hoping that the cows would trample Him to death. Instead, the leader of the cows straddled the baby with her four legs and prevented the other cows from harming the baby. On a third occasion, the priests put Zarathustra in a horse pasture, but the lead horse (like the lead cow before him) protected the child. Fourth, the priests put Zarathustra in a field with the bodies of dead wolves. When the remaining wolves returned to the field, their legs stuck to the ground and they were unable to harm the child. Two she-goats gave the child milk until His parents recovered Him. As a fifth attempt, the priests placed the child in a bed of flames but the flames suddenly cooled and the ground became soft as a bed of roses. Finally, the head priest tried to poison the child, but the child understood that His life was endangered and discarded the poisoned liquid.

Bhau Kalchuri narrates the following story about the Zarathustra of this age: Merwan was one day walking down a street in Poona when a herd of water buffaloes suddenly came stampeding toward Him. His mother shouted warnings, fearing that her son would be trampled to death. Here the accounts differ. Some spectators said that, just as the child was about to be crushed, the buffaloes avoided Him by running on either side of Him. Other spectators said that one buffalo just stopped in the street and hovered over the boy to protect Him from the stampeding herd. Still other spectators said that the boy actually was trampled by the buffaloes but that somehow He ended up safely on the side of the street as the herd ran by. In any case, the boy's escape from the stampeding herd of buffaloes was surely astounding.¹¹

Zarathustra received spiritual tutoring beginning at the age of seven. When He was fifteen, Zarathustra's father divided his assets among his children, and Zarathustra chose to receive the kusti, the

ZARATHUSTRA

thread or sash that has taken on great religious significance to modern-day Zoroastrians. At this same age of fifteen, Zarathustra left home to seek Truth and to fulfill His destiny as the Avatar. He apparently wandered extensively and spent a significant amount of time in solitude.

Zarathustra Begins His Avataric Mission

At the age of thirty, Ahuramazda (God) revealed Himself to Zarathustra. Ahuramazda revealed that men should be honest, charitable and just, that man should protect fire, water and animals, and that he should be righteous in the world of men. Several other visions followed until Zarathustra was ready to undertake His mission in the world.

For the next ten years or so of His life, Zarathustra wandered the countryside, preaching His message and practicing selfless service to those in need. Some commentators say that He wandered as far as China and India. His preaching fell on deaf ears, and He was scorned and abused by the people He contacted. Finally, at the end of the ten-year period, He attracted His first disciple, Mediyomah, the son of His father's brother and thus His first cousin.

At some time thereafter, Zarathustra entered the kingdom of Gustasp, the King of Balkh, known for his love, justice and mercy. Gustasp was interested in the new religion preached by Zarathustra but wanted to put the religion to the test. Gustasp arranged for Zarathustra to be cross-examined for three days by priests, scientists and scholars. Zarathustra told the king that, if He triumphed over these inquisitors, He should be permitted the liberty to preach His religion within the kingdom. The sages asked Zarathustra questions on every conceivable topic, and His answers were deemed superior to those of the so-called wise-men of the court. The king considered Zarathustra's effort a victory over the inquisitors. When the king asked Zarathustra to perform a miracle, He said that the Avesta (the bible of the new Zoroastrian religion) was the greatest miracle of the age, revealed by God to show man how to live in the path of truth. The king then asked Zarathustra to teach him the Avesta.

ZARATHUSTRA

Bitter at being publicly humiliated, the inquisitors plotted revenge. They planted hair, bones of dead persons, heads of animals, and other articles under Zarathustra's bed and then accused Him to the king of practicing black magic. The king was horrified and confronted Zarathustra with the evidence and the accusation of the court's wise men. Zarathustra assured the king that the articles of sorcery had been planted by others in His room, but the king did not believe Zarathustra and threw Him in jail.

The king enjoyed horse races, and his favorite horse fell ill at this time. The horse lay in its stall with its four legs folded into its belly. Zarathustra offered to cure the horse, and the king ordered Him freed from jail. Zarathustra told the king that the king must accept four conditions in return for curing the horse.

As the first condition, Zarathustra asked the king to accept Him as God's messenger. The king agreed to this condition in front of his army and his court. One of the horse's legs came forth from under his belly

As the second condition, Zarathustra asked Asphandiar, the king's son, to become the defender of the faith and to spread the new religion far and wide. Asphandiar publicly stepped forward and accepted the condition. Thereafter, a second leg of the horse came forth.

As the third condition, Zarathustra asked the queen to accept the new religion and to agree to spread the faith to the women of the kingdom. The queen immediately agreed to the condition, and a third leg of the horse was unfolded.

As the last condition, Zarathustra asked the king to send for the keeper of the royal apartments and to ask him for the truth as to whether anyone had secretly entered Zarathustra's apartment. The keeper of apartments identified the names of those who conspired against Zarathustra, and the king ordered them put to death. Zarathustra pleaded for their forgiveness, saying that God would visit a just punishment upon them. The king then banished the evil men from the country and begged Zarathustra to forgive him for the false accusation.

ZARATHUSTRA

Zarathitstra and His New Religion Flourish

With the full support of King Gustasp, Zarathustra established His religion throughout the kingdom. He laid down rules for living, including rules for sanitation, personal hygiene, and spiritual practices. The king studied the Avesta under Zarathustra's guidance. He also ordered fire temples to be established, tended by priests who were trained in the tenets of the new religion. Sages came from India and Greece to study from Zarathustra, and returned to their own countries to spread the new religion.

Zarathustra emphasized the importance of living a just life. As Baba reminded us many times, the essence of His teaching was "good thoughts, good words, good deeds." The Golden Rule, "Do Unto Others as You Would Have Them Do Unto You," is also attributed to Zarathustra. During this period, a neighboring king named Arjasp hated the spread of the new religion and invaded Gustasp's kingdom. King Gustasp's armies defeated Arjasp's armies but spared Arjasp's life.

Zarathustra's Murder

Twenty years later, Arjasp still carried a grudge against Gustasp and invaded Gustasp's kingdom once again. Although Gustasp's armies were ultimately successful against Arjasp, during this second war Arjasp's army invaded the main fire temple and killed all the priests, including Zarathustra, who was brutally stabbed in the back. As He died, Zarathustra threw His rosary at the assassin, and the energy in the prayer beads killed the assassin. The rosary contained 101 beads, corresponding with the 101 names of God given by Zarathustra as part of the new religion. Zarathustra was 77 years of age.

Zarathustra's Teaching

As mentioned, Zarathustra emphasized the importance of "good thoughts, good words, and good deeds." Although this ethical stan-

ZARATHUSTRA

dard may appear at first blush to be overly vague or simplistic, it emphasizes a central message of each Avatar which inevitably is forgotten by the followers of the religion established in the name of that Avatar. God cares most about how each individual lives his or her life. In this advent, the Avatar did not establish a religion; He has come to awaken hearts to live the truths He has painstakingly revealed for thousands of years: "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."¹²

Meher Baba made this point repeatedly:

Darshan has no connection whatsoever with rites, rituals, dogmas and daily religious routine. Zarathustra has shown that with good thoughts, good words and good deeds anyone can become like Zarathustra. And what is the state of affairs now? Zarathustra laid stress on good thoughts, good words and good deeds, but today his followers lay stress on wearing the kusti. They get annoyed if some fail to perform the ritual of kusti each morning. They do not bother much about the precious precepts Zarathustra gave. If once they forget to perform the kusti, they grieve over it, but they do not grieve while telling lies!

Thus, as long as such falsehoods like unclean thoughts, words and deeds are not given up, then no matter with what zeal you do kusti - however energetically you whisk it about early in the morning muttering prayers - there is not the least progress toward the path. Study as many religious books as you can, they will not gain you the sight of God! Even the worms destroy books! So create within you the sincere longing for the sight of God.

Cults and religions have no importance. Love holds the key. Do your duty but have the thought

ZARATHUSTRA

at the back of your mind that all this is *maya* [unreal],
and Baba is the only *Truth*.¹³

Zarathustra's core message was "God exists," the same message every Avatar brings. Zarathustra was the first Avatar in this cycle of Avatars to bring the message of monotheism to the world. As is also the case in every Avataric advent, the Avatar's message is not well received by many. The religious wars that resulted in Zarathustra's murder reflected the deep animosity that the priests and the followers of the other popular religions held for the new religion. Even today, the Avataric imperative of living well is rejected by many who say that there is no standard of "goodness." As Baba reminds us, goodness is born out of the sincere longing for the sight of God, the highest motive of all. The heart that sincerely longs to see God as He is will find a way to think good thoughts, say good words, and do good deeds. Baba put it this way:

In achieving good thoughts, good words and good deeds, one finds that good is not just something better than bad, nor merely the opposite of bad; and not-bad is not necessarily good. "Good" and "bad" are terms that reinforce illusory duality more than they remind one of divine unity. From the point of view of truth, thoughts, words and deeds are "good" only when they are born of the longing for, or the love of, God, the one and only truth.

Although born a Zoroastrian, all religions are the same to me insofar as they help men to come nearer and nearer to God, who is ever most near to man.¹⁴

What is "good" and "bad" cannot be reduced to laws written in stone. As the *Ramayana* teaches, what is one's *dharma* (the right action, the good action) cannot be reduced to rites, rituals, and repetitive behavior. The "good" involves infinite discrimination born of longing for God.

Why didn't Zarathustra declare Himself to be the Avatar? This question repeated itself in the advent of Muhammad, who (like

ZARATHUSTRA

Zarathustra) pointed His followers toward an impersonal God. Baba explained why Zarathustra emphasized the impersonal God and refrained from revealing that He was the Avatar:

Were someone to ask me who is greater, Personal or Impersonal God, Tukaram or Bhagwan, Zarathustra or Ahuramazd, Jesus or God the Father, I would definitely answer that Tukaram, Zarathustra and Jesus are greater. In fact, they are the Greatest of the Great because by being a Sadguru or the Avatar they render infinite service to the universe and suffer infinitely by taking upon themselves the burden of the world's infinite amount of sanskaras. Undoubtedly, a conscious divine person such as Tukaram or Zarathustra, compared to the unconscious Bhagwan or Ahuramazd (formless God), is definitely greater!

Zarathustra was actually God in human form - an Avatar. In order to work in creation, he had to come down as man among illiterate, fanatical and hot-tempered humanity. Had Zarathustra told them to worship him, they would have denounced, harassed and murdered him. They would have thought him an enormous egotist and absolutely crazy. So he taught them to pray to formless God. But in reality, by worshiping formless God, they were worshiping him; and consequently they gained the impression that Ahuramazd was greater than Zarathustra, which was wrong.¹⁵

Like Jesus and Muhammad, Zarathustra did not teach reincarnation. If the Avatar is the same individual, one has to wonder why the teachings of the different Avatars seem to be inconsistent. As Baba explains, the Avatar tailors His teachings to the specific culture and age in which He is born, just as a doctor prescribes different remedies for different people with different ailments. Baba remarked:

ZARATHUSTRA

The real goal of life is not death of the ego, but of the mind! Therefore when Muhammad or Zarathustra or Jesus talked of being born once or dying once, they meant the *death of the mind*. Mind is born from the very beginning, even before the stone state. This birth is once, and also the death of the mind takes place only once.

When the mind dies, the false ego is transformed into Reality. Real Ego is never born and never dies. Ego is always real but due to the mind, it feels and acts as limited and false "I."¹⁶

As discussed earlier, although the Avatar is perfect and conscious of all seven planes, He stations himself on a particular plane to accomplish His work. For example, Jesus stationed Himself on the fourth plane, and Buddha stationed Himself on the fifth plane of consciousness. Zarathustra stationed Himself on the sixth plane.¹⁷

As discussed with previous Avatars, each Avatar manifests a specific weakness or imperfection in his life. Rama's weakness was in banishing his own wife on the basis of false rumors about her impurity. Buddha's weakness was in failing to explain that union with God occurred automatically and immediately after the state of nirvana. Zarathustra's "weakness" was throwing His prayer beads at His assassin, causing the assassin to be burned to death.¹⁸

The 101 Names of God

Zarathustra has given us one of the oldest prayers to God: The 101 Names of God. "Meher Baba once remarked that if one repeats this prayer, no other prayer needs to be said."¹⁹ The 101 Names of God is such a sublime prayer that it is an appropriate theme on which to conclude our discussion of Zarathustra:²⁰

- | | |
|------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Yazad | Worthy of Worship |
| 2. Harvesp-tawan | All-Powerful |
| 3. Harvesp-Agah | All-Knowing |
| 4. Harvesp-Khoda | Lord of All |

ZARATHUSTRA

..5.	Abadeh	Without Beginning
6.	Abi-Anjam	Without End
7.	Bun-e-stiha	Root of Creation
8.	Frakhtan-taih	Endless Bliss
9.	Jamaga	Primal Cause
10.	Prajtarah	Exalted One
11.	Tum-afik	Purest of the Pure
12.	Abaravand	Detached from All
13.	Paravandeh	In Touch With All
14.	An-ayafeh	Unattainable
15.	Hama-Ayafeh	Attainer of All
16.	Adro	Most Righteous
17.	Gira	Upholder of All
18.	A-chem	Beyond Reason
19.	Chamana	Sovereign Reason
20.	Safana	Bountiful One
21.	Afza	Ever-Prolific
22.	Nasha	Reaching Equally to All
23.	Parwara	Nourisher
24.	Ianaha	Protector of the World
25.	Ain-aenah	Never-Changing
26.	An-aenah	Formless
27.	Knaroshid-tum	Most Steadfast among the Steadfast
28.	Mino-tum	Lord Invisible
29.	Vasna	All-Pervading
30.	Harvastum	All-in-All
31.	Hu-sepas	Worthy of Our Profound Thanks
32.	Har-Hamid	All-Embracing Goodness
33.	Har-naik-faraih	All-Embracing Holy Light
34.	Baish-tarana	Remover of Affliction

ZARATHUSTRA

35. Taronish	Beyond Affliction
36. Anah-aoshaka	Immortal
37. Farasaka	Fulfiller of Holy Desires
38. Pajohdehad	Creator of Holy Attributes
39. Khwafar	Compassionate Judge
40. Avakhshiaea	Merciful Giver
41. Abaraja	Bountiful Giver
42. A-satoha	Unconquerable
43. Rakhoha	Freest of the Free
44. Varun	Deliverer from Evil
45. A-farefah	Never Deceiving
46. Be-fareftah	Never Deceived
47. A-dui	One Without a Second
48. Kam-rad	Lord of Desire
49. Farman-kam	Decreeer of Sovereign Desire
50. Aekh Tan	Soul Supreme
51. A-faremosh	Never-forgetting
52. Hamarna	Just Accountant
53. Sanaea	Knowing All Things
54. A-tars	Fearless
55. A-bish	Devoid of Pain
56. A-frajdum	Most Exalted One
57. Ham-chun	Ever the Same
58. Mino-satihgar	Invisible Creator of the Universe
59. A-minogar	Creator of the Profoundly Spiritual
60. Mino-nahab	Hidden Within the Spirit
61. Adar-bad-gar	Transmuter of Fire Into Air
62. Adar-nam-gar	Transmuter of Fire Into Dew
63. Bad-adar-gar	Transmuter of Air Into Fire
64. Bad-nam-gar	Transmuter of Air Into Dew

ZARATHUSTRA

65.	Bad-gail-gar	Transmuter of Air Into Earth
66.	Bad-gerd-tum	Supreme Transmuter of Air Into Dust
67.	Adar-kibrita-tum	Supreme Transmuter of Fire Into Divine Sparks
68.	Bad-gar-jae	Spreading Air Everywhere
69.	Ab-tum	Creator of Life-giving Water
70.	Gail-adar-gar	Transmuter of Dust Into Fire
71.	Gail-vad-gar	Transmuter of Dust Into Air
72.	Gail-nam-gar	Transmuter of Dust Into Water
73.	Gar-gar	Master Craftsman
74.	Garog-gar	Rewarder of Sincere Desires
75.	Gar-a-gar	Creator of All Humanity and Its Actions
76.	Gar-a-gar-gar	Creator of All Human and Animal Life
77.	A-gar-agar	Creator of All the Four Elements
78.	A-gar-a-gar-gar	Creator of All the Planets and All Other Worlds
79.	A-guman	Never In Doubt
80.	A-jaman	Ageless
81.	A-khuan	Eternally Awake
82.	Amast	Ever-Alert
83.	Fashutana	Ever-Protecting
84.	Padmani	Recorder of Man's Actions
85.	Firozgar	Victorious
86.	Khudawand	Lord of the Universe
87.	Ahuramazd	Lord of Life and Wisdom
88.	Abarin-kuhan-tawan	Preserver of Creation
89.	Abarin-nao-tawan	Renewer of Creation
90.	Vaspan	Embracing All Creation
91.	Vaspar	Giver of All Things
92.	Khawar	Infinitely Patient

ZARATHUSTRA

93. Ahu	Lord of Existence
94. Avakhshidar	Forgiver of Sins
95. Dadar	Divine Creator
96. Raiyomand	Rayed in Glory
97. Khorehmand	Haloed in Light
98. Davar	Lord of Justice
99. Kerfaigar	Lord of Just Rewards
100. Bokhtar	Liberator
101. Farsho-gar	Awakener of Eternal Spring

ENDNOTES

1. *Lord Meher*, 4016.
2. *Lord Meher*, 4216.
3. *Lord Meher*, 1196.
4. *Lord Meher*, 1352.
5. Meher Baba as quoted in *Lord Meher*, 6104.
6. Meher Baba as quoted in *Lord Meher*, 3030.
7. *Lord Meher*, 4205-06, endnote omitted.
8. *Lord Meher*, 1546.
9. Meher Baba as quoted in Bal Natsu's *Glimpses of the God-Man*, Vol. V (Myrtle Beach, SC: Sheriar Press, 1987), 8, citing *Meher Baba Journal*, December 1940, 107.
10. The author consulted the following sources. Mary Boyce, *Zoroastrians, Their Religious Beliefs and Practices* (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979); Henry Thomas and Dana Lee Thomas, *Living Biographies of Religious Leaders* (Garden City, New York: Blue Ribbon Books, 1946); Ardeshire R. Wadia, *The Life and Teachings of Zoroaster*, 2d ed. (Madras, India: G. A. Natesan & Co., 1938); Framroz Rustomjee, *The Life of Holy Zarathustra (The Prophet of the Parsees)*, 3d ed. (Bombay: Self Published, 1961); Dr. Jal K. Wadia, "Spitama Zarathustra," *The Awakener*, ed. Filis Frederick, Vol. XVIII. No. 1 (1978), 48-65
11. This episode is recounted in *Lord Meher*, 154-56.
12. Meher Baba's Universal Message, published by the Meher Spiritual Center, Inc., Myrtle Beach, South Carolina.
13. *Lord Meher*, 5740-41.

ZARATHUSTRA

14. As quoted in *Listen, Humanity*, narrated and edued by Don E. Stevens (New York: Dodd Mead & Company, 1971), 42.
15. *Lord Meher*, 802.
16. *Lord Meher*, 3713.
17. *How a Master Works*, 35.
18. Meher Baba's remarks on Avataric weaknesses were recorded by Dr. H. P. Bharucha, "Guruprasad Glimpses, 1963," *The Awakener*, Vol. IX, No. 3 (1963), 22.
19. *Lord Meher*, endnote to page 3756.
20. The 101 Names of God were published in *The Awakener*, Vol. IX, No. 3, 37-39.

THE NEXT AVATAR

THE NEXT AVATAR

For the first time in recorded history, the Avatar has given us specific information about His return. In 1963, Baba remarked: "My next advent will be after seven hundred years when all five Perfect Masters will be men."¹ Baba reiterated His plan to return in seven hundred years on many occasions. A typical comment, made in 1954, was: "I will come back again after seven hundred years; this much I can say now."²

Baba tells us also that the Avatar will be male and will be born in the East. From the advents of Jesus and Muhammad, we can infer that "the East" includes the Middle East as well as the Far East. "The Avatar has always been and will always be born in Asia. This is because of the peculiar situation there in the evolution of the universe and the existence of the gross plane which necessitates the manifestation of the Avatar only on that particular continent."³

Baba also said that the next Avatar's mother will be the soul who was Gaimai Irani and that His father will be the soul who was Kharman Masi, both Indians during Baba's life.⁴ Of course, the humor is that those individuals are now dead, and we have no way of knowing who they will be in coming incarnations.

The next Avatar will be a scientist, and He will visit Japan.⁵ There is no evidence that the Avatar will be born in Japan, however. Interestingly, Baba visited Japan in this advent.

The Avatar usually comes during periods of great turmoil and spiritual ignorance. His next advent will be an exception to the general pattern, however. Baba explained: "When I come again after seven hundred years, the evolution of consciousness will have reached such an apex that materialistic tendencies will be automatically transmuted into spiritual longing, and the feeling of equality in spiritual brotherhood will prevail."⁶ Unfortunately, this spiritual state of affairs will not last, and materialistic tendencies will again predominate.⁷

THE NEXT AVATAR

With His characteristic charm and humor, Baba has given us the bare essentials of His next advent. There is enough detail to leave suffering humanity with hope, but part of the humor of the situation is that we cannot control when or where we reincarnate, so that our ability to "plan ahead" is seriously limited.

Although trying to speculate about the future is of little spiritual value, one has to believe that the Avatar will again surprise us all by defying orthodox expectations. Will He observe silence? Will He take birth in India? Will there be orthodox churches of a Baba religion along with priests and clergy of Meherism?

He is not likely to repeat a previous advent in His external behavior. The magnetic quality of the personality will be the same, as will the core message to love God. The style of life and the emphasis of the teachings will probably differ. Buddha, unlike Krishna, did not counsel armies and encourage His followers to fight. Jesus, unlike Buddha, did not start monastic orders and performed numerous public miracles. Muhammad, unlike Jesus, did not proclaim Himself to be an Avatar, left a book of revealed truth, and founded a religion with specific rituals. Meher Baba, unlike Muhammad, did not establish a religion, clearly proclaimed Himself as an Avatar, and encouraged His followers to enjoy His image in films, paintings, and photos.

So the Avatar will return to us with His love and His humor in seven hundred years. His love for humanity moved Him to tell us when He would return to sustain us during the interim. His humor will return with Him, as it always does. Those who expect to find an Avatar who duplicates the external life of Meher Baba will be disappointed, and those who are rigidly attached to an orthodox religion may miss Him. As always, He will recognize His lovers and will invite them to share in His loving company and spiritual light. To His close ones, He will give the gift of obedience to His orders, and to those who are spiritually ready, He will give the supreme gift of God Realization. To the world, He will give His love, His light, His guidance and His spiritual push.

THE NEXT AVATAR

ENDNOTES

1. *Lord Meher*, 6191.
2. *Lord Meher*, 4283.
3. *Lord Meher*, 1885.
4. *Lord Meher*, 2490-91.
5. *Lord Meher*, 4465 and endnote.
6. *Lord Meher*, 4547.
7. Ibid.

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

I list here the writings that have been of use in the making of this book. This bibliography is by no means a comprehensive record of the writings by and about Meher Baba or writings about the previous advents of the Avatar. The bibliography will provide a convenient index of the writings I found useful in researching this challenging subject matter.

Abdulla, Ramjoo. *Ramjoo's Diaries* 1922-1929. Edited by Ira G. Deitrick. Walnut Creek, California: Sufism Reoriented, Inc., 1979.

Anzar, Naosherwan. *The Beloved*. Myrtle Beach, South Carolina: Sheriar Press, Inc., 1974.

Arnold, Edwin. *The Light of Asia*. Twickenham, England: Tiger Books International, PLC, 1998.

Baba, Meher. "Baba on Suffering." *The Awakener*. Edited by Filis Frederick. Vol. VIII, No. 1 (1961), 8-10.

Baba, Meher. *Beams from Meher Baba on the Spiritual Panorama*. San Francisco, California: Sufism Reoriented, Inc., 1958.

Baba, Meher. "The Circles." *The Awakener*. Edited by Filis Frederick. Vol. III, No. 1 (1955), 1-5.

Baba, Meher. Comments made at the East-West Gathering in 1962. *The Awakener*. Edited by Filis Frederick. Vol. IX, Nos. 1-2 (1963).

Baba, Meher. Comments made in 1932 as reported by Kitty Davy. "Baba's First World Tour, 1932, Part III" *The Awakener*. Edited by Filis Frederick. Vol XIV, No. 1 (1971), 19-36.

Baba, Meher. *Discourses*. Edited by Eruch B. Jessawala, J. Flagg Kris, and Bal Natu. 7th ed. Myrtle Beach, South Carolina: Sheriar Foundation, 1987.

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

Baba, Meher. "God's Leela or Sense of Humor." *The Awakener*. Edited by Filis Frederick. Vol. XIV, No. 2 (1972), 1-2.

Baba, Meher. "God Realization." Dictated to Ramjoo Abdulla and published in *The Awakener*. Edited by Filis Frederick. Vol. XV, Nos. 1-2 (1974), 4-11.

Baba, Meher. *God Speaks, The Theme of Creation and Its Purpose*. 2d ed., 3rd printing. Walnut Creek, California: Sufism Reoriented, Inc., 1997.

Baba, Meher. *Life at Its Best*. Edited by Ivy O. Duce. San Francisco, California: Sufism Reoriented, Inc., 1957.

Baba, Meher. *Listen, Humanity*. Narrated and edited by Don E. Stevens. New York: Harper & Row, 1971.

Baba, Meher. "On Religion, Ceremonies, Shariat." Meher Baba's talk was given in 1926 and published in *The Awakener*. Edited by Filis Frederick. Vol. XVI, No. 1 (1975), 20-21.

Baba, Meher. "On Working for Baba." *The Awakener*. Edited by Filis Frederick. Vol. XIX, No. 2 (1981), 4, 32.

Baba, Meher. Remarks made on December 9, 1962 as recorded by Kari-Jo Harb in "A Visit to Meherazad - 9th December, 1962." *The Awakener*. Edited by Filis Frederick. Vol. IX, No. 4 (1964), 11-19.

Baba, Meher. "Talks by Meher Baba." *The Awakener*. Edited by Filis Frederick. Vol. XVII, No. 1 (1976), 1-4.

Baba, Meher. "Universal Message." Published by Meher Spiritual Center, Inc.

Bharucha, Dr. Hoshang P. "Guruprasad Glimpses, 1963." *The Awakener*. Edited by Filis Frederick. Vol. IX, No. 3 (1963), 22-36.

Bharucha, Dr. Hoshang P. "Guruprasad Glimpses, 1963 - Part II." *The Awakener*. Edited by Filis Frederick. Vol. IX, No. 4 (1964), 19-36.

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bogislav, Ruano. "From a Nasik Notebook." *The Awakener*. Edited by Filis Frederick. Vol. XVI, No. 2 (1976), 3-21, 38-40.

Boyce, Mary. *Zoroastrians, Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*. New York: Routledge&: Kegan Paul, 1979.

Brabazon, Francis. *Stay With God*. 3d ed. Melbourne, Australia: New Humanity Books, 1990.

Byles, Marie Beuzeville. *Footprints of Gautama the Buddha*. Wheaton, Illinois: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1967.

Carrithers, Michael. *The Buddha*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Chinmayananda. *Glory of Krishna*. 2d ed. Bombay. India: Central Chinmaya Mission Trust, 1990.

Conybeare, Irene H. "Notes from a Diary: Hamirpur, 1952." *The Awakener*. Edited by Filis Frederick. Vol. I, No. 2 (1953), 14-17.

Davy, Kitty L. *Love Alone Prevails*. Myrtle Beach, South Carolina: Sheriar Press, Inc., 1981.

Donkin, William. *The Wayfarers*. San Francisco, California: Sufism Reoriented, Inc., 1969.

Duce, Ivy O. *How a Master Works*. Walnut Creek, California: Sufism Reoriented, Inc., 1975.

Geddes, C. L. *Guide to Reference Books for Islamic Studies*. Denver, Colorado: American Institute for Islamic Studies, 1985.

Glubb, John B. *The Life and Times of Muhammad*. Chelsea, Michigan: Scarborough House, 1991.

Irani, Adi K. "Thoughts on Avatar Meher Baba." *The Awakener*. Edited by Filis Frederick. Vol. VI, No. 3 (1959): 10-12.

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

Irani, Adi K. "Adi's Talk at the Poona Club." *The Awakener*. Edited by Filis Frederick. Vol. XIII, Nos. 1-2 (1970): 49-55.

Irani, Manija S. *Eighty-two Family Letters*. New York: Society for Avatar Meher Baba, 1969.

Jessawala, Eruch B. *The Ancient One*. Edited by Naosherwan Anzar. Englishtown, New Jersey: Beloved Books, 1985.

Jessawala, Eruch B., and Mehera Irani, Manija Irani and Meheru Irani. *Tales From the New Life With Meher Baba*. Edited by Don E. Stevens, Rick M. Chapman, James M. Hastings, Gary Freeman and Patty Freeman. Berkeley, California: The Beguine Library, 1976.

Jessawala, Eruch B. *That's How It Was*. Edited by Steve Klein. Myrtle Beach, South Carolina: Sheriar Foundation, 1995.

Kalchuri, Bhau. *Lord Meher*. Edited by Lawrence Reiter. 20 volumes. Myrtle Beach, South Carolina and Asheville, North Carolina: MANifestation, Inc., 1986-2001.

Kalchuri, Bhau. *The Nothing and The Everything*. Edited by Lawrence Reiter. North Myrtle Beach, South Carolina: Manifestation, Inc., 1981.

Kersten, Holger. *Jesus Lived in India*. Rockport, Massachusetts: Element Books, Inc., 1994.

Lings, Martin. *Muhammad*. Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions International, Ltd., 1983.

Mahabharata. 21st Ed. Translated by Chakravarti Rajagopalachari. Bombay, India: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1978.

Marks, Fred. "Love for the Sake of Love Awaits Neither Sign Nor Signal." *The Awakener*. Edited by Filis Frederick. Vol. XIX, No. 1 (1980), 40-42.

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

Natu, Bal. *Glimpses of the God-Man, Meher Baba*. Vols. IV-VI. Myrtle Beach, South Carolina: Sheriar Press, Inc. and Sheriar Foundation, 1984-94.

Purdom, Charles B. *The God-Man*. Crescent Beach, South Carolina: Sheriar Press, Inc., 1971.

Purdom, Charles B. *The Perfect Master*. North Myrtle Beach, South Carolina: Sheriar Press, Inc., 1976.

Purdom, Charles, and Malcolm Schloss. "Three Incredible Weeks With Meher Baba." *The Awakener*. Edited by Filis Frederick. Vol. II, No. 3 (1955).

Rustomjee, Framroz. *The Life of Holy Zarathushtra (The Prophet of the Parsees)*. 3d Edition. Bombay, India: Self Published, 1961.

Sangharakshita. *Who Is the Buddha?* Glasgow, Scotland: Windhorse Publications, 1994.

Saddhatissa, Hammalawa. *Before He Was Buddha*. Berkeley, California: Ulysses Press, 1998.

Stevens, Don E. *Listen! The New Humanity*. Monte Carlo, Monaco: Companion Books, 1985.

The Bhagavad Gita. Translated by Mohini M. Chatterji. New York, New York: Causeway Books, 1960.

The Concise Ramayana of Valmihī. Edited and translated by Swami Venkatesananda. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1988.

The Holy Bible. King James Version, including books of the Old Testament and the New Testament. New York: Ballantine Books, 1991

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

The Koran. Translated by Marmaduke Pickthall. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992.

The Mahabharata. Translated and edited by R. K. Narayan. Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 2000.

"The 101 Names of God." Published in *The Awakener*. Edited by Filis Frederick. Vol. IX, No. 3 (1963), 37-39.

Thomas, Henry, and Dana Lee Thomas. *Living Biographies of Religious Leaders*. Garden City, New York: Blue Ribbon Books, 1946.

Treasures from the Meher Baba Journals. Compiled and edited by Jane Barry Hanes. North Myrtle Beach, South Carolina: Sheriar Press, Inc., 1980.

Wadia, Ardeshire R. *The Life and Teachings of Zoroaster*. 2d Edition. Madras, India: G. A. Natesan & Co., 1938.

Wadia, Jal K. "Spitama Zarathustra." *The Awakener*. Edited by Filis Frederick. Vol. XVIII, No. 1 (1978), 48-65.

For further information and a listing of materials by and about Avatar Meher Baba, please visit the website of Meher Baba Information (www.MeherBabainformation.org) or write to Meher Baba Information, P.O. Box 1101, Berkeley, California 94701 or (www.MeherBabainformation.org).

Books and other materials concerning Meher Baba may also be available through local bookstores or through groups and centers devoted to Avatar Meher Baba.

For information about visiting the principal places of pilgrimage associated with Avatar Meher Baba - including His TombShrine (Samadhi) and home in Meherazad and Meherabad in India - contact any of the following centers:

Avatar Meher Baba Trust (Ahmednagar, India):
www.ambppct.org

Meher Spiritual Center (Myrtle Beach, South Carolina):
www.mehercenter.org

Avatar's Abode (Woombye, Australia):
www.avatarsabode.com.au

Register of Editorial Alterations

Page 3, para 2, line 2, psuedo changed to pseudo
Page 11, para 3, line 4, wrily changed to wryly
Page 25, para 1, line 3, then changed to than
Page 38, para 3, line 4, wordly changed to worldly
Page 61, para 2, line 6, Hazraja changed to Hazrat
Page 115, para 3, line 7, waiver changed to waver
Page 129, para 4, line 8, the changed to they
Page 135, para 4, line 4, of changed to off
Page 146, para 3, line 2, pretence changed to pretense
Page 173, para 5, line 4, lead changed to led
Page 193, para 1, line 1, paripatetic changed to peripatetic
Page 231, para 1, line 4, They changed to The
Page 232, para 3, line 2, Dritarashtra changed to Dhritarashtra
Page 289, para 2, line 9, borne changed to born
Page 290, para 4, line 4, "a the" changed to "the"
Page 291, para 3, line 1, "the although" changed to "although"