

My Life with Meher Baba, the Avatar of the Age

By Meherwan B. Jessawala

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ISBN 978-0-940700-19-2

ISBN-10: 0-940700-19-0

Second Edition

Printed in the United States of America by
The Beguine Library
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ISBN : 978-0-940700-19-2

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Table of Contents

Introduction	9
Editorial Team	13
Foreword to Meherwan Jessawala's Memoir	15
Chapter One: The Story Begins—Earliest Memories through 1938	29
Chapter Two: Nagpur and Early Meherabad	39
Chapter Three: 1939	59
Chapter Four: 1940	83
Chapter Five: 1940-1942	99
Chapter Six: 1943	137
Chapter Seven: 1944-1945	155
Chapter Eight: 1945-1949	161
Chapter Nine: The New Life	191
Chapter Ten: 1950-1951	205
Chapter Eleven: 1952-1953	229
Chapter Twelve: Three Incredible Weeks and the Wadia Park <i>Darshan</i>	243
Chapter Thirteen: The Final Declaration	247
Chapter Fourteen: 1954-1955	257
Chapter Fifteen: Humorous Incidents with Gustadji	263
Chapter Sixteen: Questions about Spiritual Experiences from Kirpal Singh	273
Chapter Seventeen: 1955 Poona <i>Darshan</i>	277
Chapter Eighteen: Four-group <i>Sahavas</i> Sessions and A Visit to Meherazad	281
Chapter Nineteen: 1956—My Month-long Stay at Meherazad	285
Chapter Twenty: A Funny Letter from Pendu	297
Chapter Twenty-one: Baba's Second Automobile Accident	301

Chapter Twenty-two: Recovery at Silver Oaks	309
Chapter Twenty-three: 1957—Return to Meherazad, Cousin Meheru's Wedding, Baba's Treatment by Dr. Kenmore, and Visits to Poona	313
Chapter Twenty-four: 1958	329
Chapter Twenty-five: Return from the West	339
Chapter Twenty-six: 1959	399
Chapter Twenty-seven: Routine with Baba at Guruprasad	427
Chapter Twenty-eight: 1960	431
Chapter Twenty-nine: 1961	447
Chapter Thirty: 1962—The Routine at Meherazad and Celebrating Baba's Birthday	471
Chapter Thirty-one: Memories of Harry Kenmore	501
Chapter Thirty-two: 1963	507
Chapter Thirty-three: <i>Qawwali</i> Program in Ahmednagar and Guruprasad Anecdotes	543
Chapter Thirty-four: 1964	547
Chapter Thirty-five: 1965	561
Chapter Thirty-six: 1965 (Continued)	575
Chapter Thirty-seven: 1966	593
Chapter Thirty-eight: 1967	599
Chapter Thirty-nine: 1968	617
Chapter Forty: 1969	653
Chapter Forty-one: Baba Drops His Body	659
Chapter Forty-two: After Baba's Interment	675
Additional Stories About Baba	685



MY LIFE
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Introduction

Having lived in the orbit of Meher Baba's Love for his entire life, Meherwan Jessawala surely knew what was coming. Despite the much greater public prominence of his brother, Eruch, with regard to holding forth in the "court" of the Avatar of the Age, and despite Eruch's unique eloquence and especially his endurance in relating all that he knew about his Beloved to the eager lovers of the Lord who gathered to hear—despite all this, Meherwan's own perspective on life with the Incarnation of God for this era is both unique and invaluable, and eventually it had to be documented. After years of Meherwan's telling his story piecemeal in Meher Baba's Mandali Hall at Meherazad, Ward Parks, a longtime resident working at the Avatar Meher Baba Trust, asked him to consider telling the story of his life with Baba from beginning to end.

Ward had the idea to videotape Meherwan in his recollections of his life with Baba, and Ward undertook the project with his usual diligence, coaxing Meherwan into as detailed a recollection of events as possible. The project extended for weeks during the late 1990s and produced nearly fifty hours of videotape. This book consists of an edited version of the transcript of those tapes.

Meherwan's "memoirs" in the form of the raw transcript of the videotapes first came to my attention in the spring of 2011, when Keith Gunn, who had made the original transcription of the videotapes, bruited the notion of putting the transcript online. He had bounced the idea off Barbara Bamberger Scott, whose book *The Empty Chair* I had recently published through The White Horse Publishing Company, and she copied me on some of her e-mail correspondence with Keith with little further thought about it. I was immediately struck by the importance of Meherwan's account, and I was equally struck by the obvious appeal and the enduring value of an accessible version of it in book form. I did not know at the time that Bill Le Page in Australia had already purloined some of the stories for use in his book series entitled *The Divine Humanity of Meher Baba*, but when I did learn of that partial publication

in the context of his own collection of other material, I was all the more convinced that Meherwan's full account deserved its own book.

I approached Meherwan—whom I have known since 1966 when I first met him at his family home, Bindra House, in Poona, just after my meeting the Divine Beloved, Avatar Meher Baba, at Meherazad—with the idea that Meher Baba Information would like to publish the transcript of his videotaped memoirs as a complete story in book form, as well as to provide two other avenues of access to his storytelling: in this age of electronic media, it seemed time for Meher Baba Information to come out of the era of the Gutenberg press with both the videotapes and the raw transcript available on its website. Meherwan replied that he was delighted with the prospect, and he signaled that it was a done deal. As with much of the work that is fortunate enough to fall into the category of serving the Divine Beloved, however, a “done deal” usually means that there is a good deal to be done before the deal is, in fact, done. Meherwan requested that the copyright go to the Avatar Meher Baba Trust, and so it has; and in his review of the manuscript and the review of others who have been involved with the project, several instances of confusion with regard to details and dates were discovered in the original recordings and have subsequently been corrected.

What follows, then, is Meherwan's best effort to tell his story accurately, assisted by the meticulous critique of David Fenster and long hours of Mehera Arjani's reading the manuscript through with Meherwan. David has been involved with studying and writing about Baba's life and work for decades and brings a strong sense of historical timeline to the project; Mehera is Meherwan's cousin once removed—she refers to herself as his “niece,” in part no doubt because Meherwan was referred to as “Meherwan-kaka,” or “uncle,” as she grew up in and around the Jessawala family as if it were her own; she cares passionately about the “truth” of the story Meherwan tells here and has devoted many long hours to helping Meherwan bring the manuscript into final form. Steve Klein has also participated in assisting Meherwan with the editing and organization of the manuscript.

When first confronted with the enormous task of editing the raw transcript—which, while raw like uncooked meat, still had gone through various “curing” processes even prior to my receiving it—I was in the midst of considerable writing and editing work related to my own manuscripts. At the same time I had been looking for a project that might engage some of the younger Baba-lovers in my acquaintance, giving them some experience of the delights of working on projects related to Baba. The harmonic convergence of the arrival of this task and the recent “with great honors” graduation of Zachary Matthay and Ellie Colson from Tufts University (later to be married just prior to publication of this book) was too much to ignore. My wife, Sheryl, and I asked them if they would consider diving into the rough first edit of this manuscript as a project for Meher Baba Information, and they readily accepted. The result was a machete path through the jungle of transcribed memoirs that let in enough light to see the ultimate shape of this book, and both Ellie and Zachary will be remembered as the first true editors of this work, as well, later on, as proofreaders extraordinaire.

And then there is the additional input from Bob Ahrens, who on numerous occasions while taking a morning walk with Meherwan on visits to Meherazad, heard stories that enhanced or added to the narrative that Meherwan had provided in his videotaped memoirs. Those added stories have been included in the manuscript in a few places and are indicated by a border around the text, as with this paragraph, letting the reader know that while the information therein comes from Meherwan, the account has been written by Bob.

My own role has been to attempt to make the manuscript a readable account rather than the equivalent of recorded diary notes and jots and tittles of remembered events. Remember, Meherwan did not *write* this book, he “told” it, very informally, over many separate sessions, responding to various questions as well as talking from his own notes and memories. Accordingly, many recollections piled in as memory served

them up, often not in chronological order and sometimes at variance with other accounts. This book is a *memoir*, however—not a scholarly account of Baba’s life but rather the memories of someone who first encountered Meher Baba as a mere child and whose understanding and ability to digest all that he observed and experienced grew with age and maturity.

The result is a rare account of the Avatar’s life and work. Read this book and find yourself there, living in the ashram as a young boy with Meher Baba as a constant presence; with Baba on the Blue Bus tours; experiencing the pangs of separation from Baba in the New Life; and afterwards, describing Baba’s Avataric Force in the “Fiery Free Life”; and after that, with Baba in His last years, telling of Baba as He prepared to drop His body, and with Baba after He did so. Live the life Meherwan Jessawala lived, vicariously: enter the ashram of the Ancient One as a child and live through His Advent with Him, all from the perspective of one who enjoyed the unique Avataric Grace to be there.

Rick Chapman

16 October 2015

On July 15th, 2016, Meherwan died in Poona owing to complications from a hospitalization that followed a fall at Meherazad in which he broke his hip.

Editorial Team:

Ward Parks:	Interviewer and Videographer
Keith Gunn:	Transcription Editor, Proofreader Par Excellence
Zachary and Ellie Matthay:	Primary Editors, Proofreaders
Mehera Kerawalla-Arjani:	Meherwan's In-house Editorial Assistant
Steve Klein:	Editorial Consultant
David Fenster:	Historical Consultant
Bif Soper:	Copies of Meherwan's Videotaped Interviews
Jessica Mednick:	Photographic Scanning
Bob Ahrens:	Scribe for Additional Stories
Gary Freeman:	Penultimate Proofreader
Sheryl Chapman:	Photograph Editor, Proofreader
Rick Chapman:	Executive Editor
Avatar Meher Baba:	Who Has Made it All Possible!

NOTES REGARDING THE SECOND EDITION

The short print run of the First Edition of Meherwan's memoirs has served an invaluable purpose. Despite the best efforts of the proofreaders of the manuscript for that edition, readers of the published book have turned up several dozen "edits" that involved everything from typos to redundancies and factual inaccuracies. Proof positive that one cannot proofread too much or too carefully! This Second Edition contains all those noted corrections to date. Among those who have contributed to this effort, Daphne Klein and Bif Soper provided generous and special assistance with their intensive re-readings of the First Edition and their superlative proofreading—kudos to them and to all who have helped make this edition more accurate and more readable.

Foreword to Meherwan Jessawala's Memoir

[Mehera Kerawalla-Arjani wrote this forward to Meherwan's memoirs in November, 2015, just about eight months before Meherwan died. Meherwan saw this foreword at the time that it was written and was pleased with it.]

Dear reader, the memoir you are reading is not just the story of Meherwan Jessawala's life with Meher Baba, but also the story of his remarkable family. His father, Byramshaw (Papa) Jessawala, worked tirelessly and uncomplainingly for Baba, forsaking all ambitions for himself and his children once Baba told the family to leave all and come to be with Him. His mother, Gaimai, was not only devoted to Baba, but Baba said she would be His mother in the next Advent. Meanwhile his brother, Eruch, became Baba's personal attendant, interpreter, and boon companion. Both the sisters, Manu and Meheru, also spent their lives serving Him in whatever situation He chose to put them.

As you read, you will get some idea of the complete surrender to Baba's Will that the Jessawala family's life embodied. Their surrender was total—mind, body and soul were His, as was everything they owned. Whether Baba said “Come and be with Me” or “Go and live in Bangalore or Jabalpur” (or various other places where Baba put them), the family never asked why. Stories of how Baba treated Bindra House, their home in Pune, as His own abound. This was the last place Baba had them settle, ostensibly for a short period. Their longing to be with Baba in His home at Meherazad was intense, but their resignation to His Wish was absolute. Instead of a few weeks, they stayed there for over four decades. Their reward for accepting living apart from Him was His pleasure at their obedience and His confidence in their attention to His needs at any time of the day or night. These stories will make you laugh and make you cry.

Meherwan Jessawala, the author of these memoirs, is the youngest and sole surviving member of this unique family. His association with Baba began with his birth (he was given the name “Meherwan” by Baba), and he tells the stories of his life with his Lord with the simple sincerity that shines through in his interactions with anyone, be they old friends or total newcomers to Meher Baba's home in Meherazad. His life, like those of his

siblings and parents, is one of unquestioning obedience. He has always done his best to carry out Baba's wishes and continues to do so today. Listening to him softly narrating stories in Mandali Hall, I am always struck by how little of Meherwan is in these stories. It is all about Baba, always. This is also true of the contents of this book.

When the book's title was being discussed, the original choice was "*The Jessawala Chronicles*," but Meherwan took great exception to this title. "Where is Baba in the title?" he asked. So that is why the book is titled "*My Life with Meher Baba, the Avatar of the Age*."

My sister, Dolly Kerawalla, and I have been most fortunate to have been born as Meherwan's nieces. We stayed with the Jessawalas through our childhood, in Bindra House, where Baba would visit often. Because of their place in His world, we got to play with the Avatar as children and learned to love Him with all our hearts. And because of their unparalleled example of how to live for Baba, we have been inspired to try to be like them, though we could never really succeed at this!

Living in Meherazad as Meherwan's companion and helper (to the extent that he will allow me to care for him, since he's very independent and will try doing everything for himself), I was truly lucky to be able to work with him in getting this book to publication. Sitting day after day reading through the manuscript, taking down the stories that came because his memory was jogged by something that was just read to him, adding to the store of stories, was a true joy. In years to come people who have never met Meherwan will read this book and wonder, "Did people like that really exist?" To you all I say, "Yes, they did. Without any ostentation whatsoever, they lived for and served the Lord." I hope these future readers especially are inspired by this narrative to shape their lives in a way that will be a constant offering to Avatar Meher Baba, Who is the inspiration and the purpose of Meherwan's life, and will be so to the end. If this happens, then Meherwan will be happy because that is all he has ever wanted.

Avatar Meher Baba *ki Jai!*

Mehera Kerawalla-Arjani

Meherazad November, 2015

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Chapter One:

The Story Begins – Earliest Memories through 1938

Meherwan's father, Byramshaw D. ("Papa") Jessawala, was scrupulously honest and a man who would not trust others to do what he could do himself. Part of the reason he attained a very high government position—the Chief Inspector of Boilers for the CPB—was his honesty. Even back in the 1910s and 20s, corruption was woven into the fabric of Indian society, so the British official who hired Papa hoped that he would help control the corruption in the private sector and among the agency engineers doing the inspections.

Commercial boilers were required to pass a government inspection yearly or be shut down. Papa supervised a large group of engineers (even though he was self-educated) who inspected the boilers, but he also performed many inspections himself, so he was constantly traveling. If someone tried to bribe him, he would severely take that person to task in such a manner that he would never try a bribe again!

Meherwan remembers a few times when Papa took him along as a child for these inspections. The boilers would be shut off for

twenty-four hours ahead of their arrival and were cool and drained of water. Papa would walk into the firing chamber with a torch and hammer to inspect the boiler for defects. This was frightening for Meherwan, as the boiler chamber was pitch dark, like a deep cavern.

In His travels (particularly on *mast*-hunting tours), Meher Baba often had Eruch sign the men into rest houses as “Jessawala and party” (in case there was a question about their right to stay there), and occasionally He had Eruch use his father’s important position to intercede with local bureaucrats. Baba frequently stayed in Papa’s room in Bindra House when He passed through Poona in the 1940s and 50s. He commented that, because of the iron discipline that Eruch was raised with under Papa, Baba’s job of training Eruch for the *mandali* was considerably reduced!

Papa had purchased Mary Lodge in Nagpur some time in the early 1920s and developed the house and grounds into quite a palatial estate. Meherwan’s first childhood memory of Baba was at Mary Lodge when He came to give *darshan* there. From Papa’s standpoint, all of this was for the family, as Eruch later narrated. When Meher Baba called the family to “leave all and come to Him” in August, 1938, Mary Lodge and its contents were sold for a fraction of their worth, all in order to comply with Baba’s summons.

My first memories of meeting Baba are from my very early childhood. Baba had come to visit us many times before, and one of His visits—the first I remember—was in 1937. I was born in November, 1930, so I was perhaps a little less than seven years old when Baba visited us at our family home, “Mary Lodge.”

My father, Byramshaw Dorabji Jessawala, had worked very hard to create a nice home for us. It was a very comfortable mansion with a spacious compound and beautiful gardens that were the envy of the city of Nagpur at the time. Eruch once told me that the Royal Air Force had even made a sortie to take an aerial photograph of them! Papa would get special pots and exotic plants for the gardens, and he brought birds from various places for his aviary, a huge birdcage out on the grounds. The estate also had a long driveway and a big front gate.

Papa was doing well because he was the first Indian selected for the high and responsible post of Chief Inspector of Boilers for the Central Provinces and Berar, or CPB, for which he was well paid. At that time India was divided into several big provinces for administrative purposes, and CPB was a fairly large area. Papa wanted to provide a comfortable life for himself and his family, and he did so. He was a nice, jovial person,

but at the same time he was very strict with the upbringing of his children. He was often teased by his friends because he was such a strict disciplinarian, and he immediately noticed anything that was not as it should be. It was a trait that Eruch was endowed with as well, whether genetically or not I don't know.

My father always noticed immediately if something was amiss, so we had to be quite careful with him. It was good preparation for a more disciplined future life with Baba. As such, we are beholden to my father for this early training, although at the time we rebelled inwardly. He really loved us, although he never showed it outwardly. He was constantly on tours of inspection in the very difficult climate of Nagpur. Even in the summer, when Nagpur reaches 120 Fahrenheit in the shade, he worked all the time.

That was our family background when Baba visited us in Nagpur. We were all very expectant that Baba was coming to visit us. It was to be a long stay of several days, and a big *darshan* program had been arranged on our estate because it was large enough to allow crowds to come—the whole estate was flooded with people. I think it was the first public *darshan* Baba gave in Nagpur, and unexpectedly large crowds came to see Him.

I have no idea how so many people had come to know about Baba, but quite a large crowd was there, day after day. We had a big hall where Baba sat. The family stood behind Him, and of course His *mandali* were there. I remember Baba with His flowing hair looking very beautiful. He was of medium height and had a very slim build.

When I first met Baba, I had prepared a small garland for Him, but being very shy I didn't know how to go and place the garland on His neck. I brought the garland and put it aside, but Baba noticed and asked my mother to send me up to Him. He asked me to come with the garland and helped me to tie it up. He bent down so I could garland Him. It was a small little thing, but it shows how Baba evoked that response even in a child of that age who had not yet developed a strong feeling for Him. I wouldn't call what I had "love," but I had some sort of feeling.

My mother used to read all the well-known stories of the saints and Avatars of old to us, and I would be immensely interested in those stories. She continuously harped on the theme that Baba was the same Ancient One or Avatar come back again, and she indelibly etched that idea on my mind. So when I was confronted by Him, I thought, “Here is Lord Krishna.” It was a reverential feeling, rather than intimidating, and a sort of fullness of feeling was there every time I was in His presence.

I was so confident of this that during Baba’s visit I said something to the effect that “He is Krishnaji come again.” Baba must have heard me say that, because He would say to me, “Who am I?” and I would repeat, “*Krishnaji*, Baba.” He would like that, and He would make me say that fairly often. I said Krishnaji rather than Zoroaster, perhaps because Zoroaster’s doings were shrouded in antiquity, and we don’t have personal anecdotes about Him compared to subsequent Avatars. I had been read all the stories of the later Avatars, and Krishna appealed to me because of the way His childhood, His friends, and His life with the children were depicted—Baba liked that. He would say, “Who am I?” and I would respond, “Baba, Krishna!” He would say, “That’s fine.” In this way Baba would see that even a child had time like this with Him.

I remember one mischievous incident from my time with Baba. One day I had the urge to possess one little strand of His hair. I got a small pair of scissors, sneaked behind the couch where He was sitting, and I quietly snipped off one little piece of hair—I don’t know where I got the courage to do so. Baba didn’t seem to notice; He let a child play his pranks. Baba became very approachable to me once my initial shyness wore off.

Another time, Baba was fatigued after the *darshan*, and Mumma was pressing His feet, and I sneaked in to press Baba’s feet also. So you see, Baba didn’t neglect this small feeling that I had in His presence—quite the contrary, He nurtured it. No small incidents would be missed by Baba. He would see to it that even a child had time with Him.

Before Baba arrived in Nagpur, Mumma had a tailor come to our house. The tailor worked for the military, and he simply looked at Baba's photograph with His hands crossed in front of Him: from that alone he agreed to make some coats for Baba which Mumma commissioned. The only measurement we could give him was the collar size, but from just that he stitched the coats. When Baba came and those coats were given to Him, they fit Him just right. Baba looked very beautiful and resplendent sitting there in His silk coat.

People came in hordes for the *darshan* program at my father's estate. They would come down the aisle between the rows to receive Baba's *darshan*. One of the people sitting there was Tukdoji Maharaj, a very well-known saint in Nagpur and the surrounding areas. He was a tall, hefty giant of a man and a very nice person. He had a little drum called a *khanjiri* and played it while singing beautiful songs to the Lord, which Baba liked. It was a pleasant background to the people taking *darshan*.

Some of our Zoroastrian friends were there for *darshan*, but the Zoroastrian community mostly kept their distance from Baba. Most of the people attending were Hindus. One woman I especially remember had traveled from Navsari with a group to come to this *darshan* in Nagpur. She was following some master, and he had appeared to her in a dream. He told her that the Kalki Avatar, or "White Horse Avatar," was coming to Nagpur, and that she should go to the *darshan*. By chance she got into a train compartment with some Baba-lovers, came to know about the impending *darshan*, and joined them. On the way she was exhorting them not to eat anything, to fast, to be ready to be in front of the Avatar, and she kept repeating that the Kalki Avatar had come, because she was quite carried away by her dream. When she finally got to the *darshan*, she became quite a nuisance because she kept intruding and telling Mumma not to do her chores, but just to come into the presence of the Kalki Avatar. This was contrary to Baba's instructions to Mumma to be fresh and to eat and so forth. Even during the *darshan* itself she kept shouting "Kalki Avatar has come!"

Norina was there, as well as Baba's brother Jalbhai, Vishnu Master, Raosaheb Afseri, and Chanji. Norina happened to remark that Tukdoji Maharaj looked a bit drunk in the way he was walking, and Baba rejoined that Tukdoji Maharaj was indeed drunk, with Divine Love.

These *darshan* programs started in the morning and went on and on throughout the day. Dr. C.D. Deshmukh, one of the early Baba-lovers in Nagpur, was also there. Deshmukh had been one of Eruch's professors in Morris College, and he was madly in love with Baba, Whom he had met in England. He had had some experience with regard to Baba, possibly in a dream.

In those early years Upasni Maharaj would periodically come to Nagpur and stay with a man named Dr. Ponaskar, who would turn over his entire house for Maharaj's use. My mother would visit Maharaj whenever he would come and whenever she could. Papa was not very happy with her going to see him, but he was often away, traveling on one of his inspection tours, or if he was in town, Mumma would wait until he had gone to work before visiting.

One time she and Ponaskar were sitting with Maharaj, enjoying his company, when Deshmukh arrived with other professors from the college. Deshmukh introduced them one by one to Maharaj. "This is Professor so-and-so, B.A., M.A.," and on and on, as Deshmukh recited all the degrees that each professor had earned.

Maharaj started to flare up. "Why the hell did you bring these people here. I don't know anything about M.A. or B.A. All I know is *Itti Danda* [or "*gilli-danda*," a common and ancient game played throughout India]. This is not the place for them." And Maharaj became very fiery and started abusing Deshmukh and the professors like anything.

Seeing how upset he was, Ponaskar signaled to Mumma that they should leave, and they quietly slipped out of the room and went and sat in the adjoining room while Maharaj was still berating Deshmukh.

After a short time Deshmukh and his party beat a hasty retreat, and then, in a very loving voice, the complete opposite of what he had just

unleashed on Deshmukh, Maharaj called out, "Come, come." Somewhat timidly my mother and Ponaskar reentered the room. "Why did you leave?" Maharaj asked them.

"It seemed that you didn't want visitors," they explained. "No, no," Upasni explained, "that was for them, not for you. I am an empty vessel, and they come and fill the vessel with filth, so that outburst was a reaction to that, but with you it's quite different." So Mother and Ponaskar stayed and enjoyed Maharaj's company.

My mother told me another story involving Maharaj from those early days. It seems that it was Papa's birthday, so he had dressed up and gone to the fire temple that morning. While he was there Mumma went with us to see Maharaj, who happened to be in Nagpur at the time. When Papa returned home Mumma suggested that since it was his birthday, he should visit Upasni Maharaj, who happened to be in Nagpur just then.

Papa said, "Why should I go see him? I've just been to the fire temple. Since you have already gone to see him, it will be a needless waste of petrol for me to go also." But Mumma persisted that it would be good for Papa to go, especially on his birthday. With great reluctance Papa finally consented and went to change out of his good clothes. Again there was a disagreement, with my mother suggesting that as a mark of respect, Papa should continue to wear the nicer clothes. "But they will only get dirty there," Papa said. "He just sits on the ground, and if I go there, my clothes will get soiled." And he changed his hat as well, to an older one that had some grease stains on it.

My mother tried to talk Papa out of his insistence upon dressing down before leaving, but without success, and he went off to see Maharaj, taking with him a lot of dahlias that grew in our garden. Once he arrived, Maharaj greeted him very respectfully and said, "Come in, come in, Raosaheb. Why did you come here? There was no need. Haven't you already been to the fire temple? So what was the need to come here?"

As he bowed down to Maharaj, the greasy old cap was taken off by Upasni, who commented on my father's attire as follows: "Why have

you worn this old greasy cap on your birthday? And such old clothes too! Since your family had already come to see me, what need was there for you unnecessarily to waste all that petrol to come here?” And thus Upasni Maharaj not only took my father’s side, but in this way he also showed my father that he knew everything that he had been thinking and saying.

In such ways my father came to see that these spiritual giants were not ordinary people. Returning to Deshmukh, of course you know the story of Baba’s picture that we had in the house. There were not a lot of photos of Baba back then, and Deshmukh had asked my mother if he could borrow the photo we had so that he could make a copy of it. My mother agreed and didn’t think anything of it until she got a telegram from Baba saying, “Why have you put Me out of your house?” My mother couldn’t follow the meaning of it, but all of a sudden she saw that the photograph was not there in its usual place on the wall and somehow it occurred to her that that must be what Baba was referring to. Mumma had Eruch rush out and get the photo back, and she immediately reinstalled it where it belonged.

Over the years after leaving Nagpur, we moved quite a few times until we settled in Bindra House in Poona in 1943. Mumma didn’t care much about the rest of her belongings, but that photo was always very precious to her, and she would see that it always came with us. Once while at Bindra House Baba said “This photo depicts how I really am.” We don’t know what that means, of course, but it seems that the photograph had a special significance, because Baba took Mumma by the hand and led her and Manu to it and asked them to perform *arti* before the photo. Baba Himself folded His hands to the picture and touched His own feet in the photograph.



Chapter Two:

Nagpur and Early Meherabad

There are many stories about Baba from before I was born. There is a photograph of Mumma and Papa sitting with Baba on a swing in our garden, with Eruch seated at Baba's feet and other *mandali* nearby. At that time Mumma was expecting me, so in that way I am in the picture too. Baba sent word that when I was born I should be named Meherwan. The earliest boy child to be named Meherwan by Baba, by the way, was Rustom and Freiny's first child, who was Meheru's brother Meherwan, but he was nicknamed "Mehlloo." I was the first of the later army of "Meherwans" named by Baba after Mehlloo.

My father must have accepted Baba as the Avatar, but it was Papa's nature that he never showed his feelings. Inwardly he must have been immensely devoted to Baba—otherwise it would not have been possible for him to give up his family and his worldly life the way he did. Later on, when I read some of his letters to Baba written in the 1920s and 30s, I had some idea of his deep love and reverence for Baba.

In those days there was a division of responsibility in the family, so my mother had more time with us children. The man was the provider, and the woman looked after the household and raised the children. Papa was not very approachable. No hugging—he wasn't the type of father whose

children ran to embrace him. Once he complained about it to Baba, and Baba made us go and embrace him and kiss him! We couldn't give him a very affectionate hug because he always had a sort of shell around him, but he had a warm heart beating inside.

I remember that the year after the *darshan* program that took place on our estate, we went to Baba's Birthday celebration in Meherabad. It was 1938, and we had planned to go the previous year, but I had been sick and only my father went. At that time he took with him a silk robe that Mumma had made for Baba, and you can see Baba wearing that robe in the movie that was taken of Baba's Birthday in Nasik. After His Birthday Baba went on a tour, and while traveling he sent a telegram to Eruch that read: "COME IMMEDIATELY AND MEET ME AT PANCHGANI."

That story is well known—Eruch was busy gardening and dilly-dallied in responding to the telegram, and Mother told him to go immediately, because a communication from Baba was of supreme importance and everything else had to be secondary to that. A second telegram arrived ten minutes later with the same message, but from a different location, as Baba was still traveling, and Mother was furious that Eruch had not yet made a move to obey Baba's directive. At that point Eruch dropped his gardening, and Mumma told him to take Papa's Auburn, his brand new car recently imported from Germany. Eruch drove the car to the railway station and left it there unattended (though in charge of the police constable at the station) to catch the very next train. He went to Panchgani, and Baba asked if he (and later, in response to a second, similar question, the family) would leave everything and follow Him. Eruch said, replying to both questions, "By Your grace, anything is possible."

Baba must have done a great deal of preparation for the family to be willing to leave everything, to break off every tie, and go to Him. It was Baba's Grace, no doubt. My family's transition shows how Baba's internal working is, how He prepares us for being ready to come to Him, and that is how He does all His internal work to prepare the whole of Creation to receive Him. In such ways we get a small inkling of that internal work, which goes on continuously.

When Eruch returned from Panchgani, Papa immediately confronted him: “Where have you been?” and “It was stupid to leave my car unattended at the station. Was that the way to deal with an expensive car like that?” By then Eruch was very worried because he had even bigger news! When he asked the family if they were willing to give everything up and go to stay with Baba, amazingly Papa didn’t react with anger or surprise. He must have known it was the right thing to do because he said, “Well, if it pleases you all to join Baba, I have no objection, since I have done all this for the comfort of you, my dear family, and if you feel pleasure in leaving all this and going to live with Baba, I have no objection.” So it was Baba’s little wish, for the whole family to come to be with Him, expressed in just a couple of sentences, that led to all that followed.

Once the decision was made, we sold off all our assets as quickly as possible in accord with Baba’s wish that we “leave everything.” The whole estate—all the furnishings, all the mementos and acquired things of a lifetime—had to be disposed of between the first of May—Eruch had returned the evening of April 30th—and the first of August, 1938—everything except for a trunk of clothes for each of us. All connections had to be severed. Expensive crockery was sold in the market at throw-away prices. The entire house became a kind of store with each item marked with a price, so if people came to visit they might purchase items directly from us.

My cousin Dadi (Dadi Kerawalla, Sam Kerawalla’s brother, son of my aunt Banumasi) was with us, because my mother had kind of adopted him—his family was too poor to raise him the way that my mother could. My mother had taken on the responsibility and was schooling him. He was a very emotional child, and when he saw the ridiculously low prices on all these pieces of furniture and furnishings and keepsakes, he couldn’t bear to see such precious items going for a song, so we marked some of them up by a few rupees. But we had to get rid of them because Baba had specified that we could not bring those things with us.

Throughout this time there was a constant uproar in the house as people came parading through, and it was very difficult for Eruch, who had the

entire responsibility on his shoulders. Mother, of course, was floating on air at the thought of being permitted to join Baba, and Papa was out of the house on his work. He told Eruch, "You will need to manage all these transactions." In other words he was saying, "It's up to you. I have no time. I am still in service. You will have to manage it all." Papa told Eruch to ask Baba if he could continue his work for a period, because if he stopped before a certain age he would lose all rights to his pension. As a result Baba permitted him to continue working until the pension would start, which was just about six months later, and after that he too joined the ashram.

I was too young to be very involved in all this activity, but I sensed that something was afoot, and I knew I would be able to be with Baba. Dadi and I would play little pranks like raising the sale prices on our furnishings just to have fun, and Eruch would wonder why certain price tags on various items listed for sale at the estate were not as he had set them. I don't know if he ever found out what we did.

While we were still in Nagpur Eruch happened to meet a *mast*-like person on his way to college. He was known as Mukka Baba. "*Mukka*" means "mute," and he was so named because Mukka Baba would convey his needs to the people around him via signs. With Eruch, however, he actually spoke, and he would ask, "Son, could you feed me? I am hungry." Eruch invited him to the house, saying, "Baba, come to our place, and we will feed you there." Eruch gave Mukka Baba directions and he did come. He arrived almost naked—he had a little loincloth on his body—and his whole skin was so hard and wrinkled that it looked like a crocodile skin.

Mukka Baba came to our place with great authority, as if the place belonged to him. He strode in and came right into the house. Eruch had forgotten to mention that he'd invited Mukka Baba, and when he arrived, Eruch went to see Mumma and asked her to feed Mukka Baba something. Fortunately Papa wasn't there at the time. The man sat on the sofa in our drawing room, and although he was unkempt and filthy,

he sat with a regal posture. He said, “Look, before you feed me, I need a hot bath, so arrange for hot water.”

Eruch asked him, “Sir, they call you ‘Mukka Baba,’ and how is it you speak here?” Mukka Baba responded, “You expect me to speak to dumb animals? I don’t speak to animals, I speak only to humans.” Despite the inference, we didn’t feel very flattered.

So he got himself properly bathed, and then he ordered the dishes he wanted. “Where are your children? Am I an animal?” he barked out. “Call them.” Mother called Meheru and Manu, and he got them to fan Mukka Baba while he ate. On reflection I now feel that we were gaining experience on how to serve a spiritual master. He demanded attention, and he showed us the way to serve a person of such spiritual authority.

Later on, when Eruch explained what had happened with Mukka Baba, Baba said that these are the signs of a *Jivanmukta* and that Mukka Baba was a *mast*. He would come fairly often after that, and Papa was enraged whenever he found out about it. “Why do you allow this filthy person to come...?” he would ask Mumma and the rest of us. Mukka Baba didn’t care about Papa’s protests, however, and acted as if the place belonged to him. In truth, nobody could resist his authority. Persons who are mad might seem superficially similar, but it is the authority that clearly separates the *masts* from the mad. The brilliance in their demeanor distinguishes them from ordinary mad people.

Papa only realized that this *mast* was no ordinary “madman” when one day he asked Manu to prepare a cup of coffee, but Mukka Baba, who was present at the time, said, “Where is the milk for her to make you coffee? The milk has spoiled.” A short time later Manu came out from the kitchen and told Papa just that, and Papa was surprised as to how Mukka Baba knew this. After that incident Papa calmed down somewhat and treated him with greater respect.

Papa kept the car with him for the needs of his work, although Baba had explicitly requested that the car be presented to Him when the family

came to be with Him. When we joined Him at Meherabad on the 1st of August 1938, Eruch was very pleased with himself for achieving the stupendous task of winding everything up in such a short period of time. But Baba showed no happiness. “Where is the car?” He asked, to which Eruch responded that it had been left behind for Papa to use while he completed his service. Baba looked very displeased. “This has left a permanent scar on My heart,” Baba told Eruch. So from the very first minute of stepping into His life, we discovered that Baba’s order reigned supreme, and we had to execute His order in every detail to pass the test. Baba firmly reproached Eruch and told him that he should have brought the car so that Baba’s order was thereby obeyed; then, He said, He Himself would have sent back the car for Papa’s use.

Meherabad at that time was a very primitive place. What is now the *dharamshala* building was the old Mandali Hall. The *mandali* slept on the floor of that hall with all their possessions in little trunks at the head of their bedding rolls—a few sets of clothing, some few knick-knacks, perhaps a spare pair of shoes. It was a spartan life, simple but extremely beautiful.

I remember the first time, after leaving Nagpur to be with Baba, that I realized that Mumma was no longer by my side. It was the first time in my life that I was separated from my parents, and I was a bit frightened. Around me there were the older *mandali* members, appearing to me as hefty giants with rough, husky voices yelling at each other all the time, all within a very strict regimen. But in time I found Baba taking the place of my mother. When He came over to our side of Meherabad, He would cuddle me and comfort me. Baba filled in the place of my mother very naturally and very spontaneously. In front of the *mandali* Baba would ask me, “Who am I?” and I would respond, “Krishnaji!” and Baba would say, “See this child?” That would flatter me quite a bit. Baba had His way with little children as well as big men. Apart from having to get used to completely new circumstances, it was also fun.

Dadi came with us, but Dadi was very outspoken, cross and sullen, and Baba would draw those qualities out. Once Dadi said to Baba, “Baba, those

two oldies there, they are eating up all the cream from the milk, and we are given just plain milk, no cream, and I am used to eating cream!”

“Which of these oldies?” Baba asked him.

“Those two there,” Dadi responded, pointing to Masaji and Gustadji, who were cream-lovers. Baba asked them to present themselves before Him, and He told them to give all the cream to Dadi. I was looking down, completely embarrassed, but Dadi did get the cream from that time forth, and he would also make me eat some of it.

We lived in our own little niche in that main hall along with the men. My mother was in the women’s ashram atop Meherabad Hill. When we actually arrived at Meherabad, that upper ashram was not yet completed, and Pendu was working night and day to finish it. As hard as he tried, however, he couldn’t finish by the first of August when Baba came, so Baba and all the women *mandali* stayed at an irrigation bungalow on the route from what is now the Trust Office to Meherazad.

Baba would take Dadi and me to visit Mumma, and we would get to go on a drive with Baba and Adi K. Irani (Baba’s secretary) in Adi’s car, which at that time was an Opel. I would sit at Baba’s side, and He would cuddle me. Those visits were fun, but of course when the ashram on Meherabad Hill was ready, Baba shifted the women up there.

I was not free to go up to Upper Meherabad at that time—no male person was permitted up the Hill to enter the premises. This rule was adhered to absolutely strictly. Baba kept a watchman at the tank, and just in front of the gate there was a cabin. Either Soonamasi, Khorshed’s mother, or Kharmanmasi, another one of the women *mandali*, was on watch constantly. The person keeping watch would ring a bell if anyone approached the Hill.

Mumma was very close to Shireenmai, who had asked Baba to allow Mumma to be her companion. So Mumma would be with Shireenmai often, especially in the evenings when she would massage Shireenmai’s feet.

The first thing each morning, Baba cleaned all the latrines with His own hands, pouring the fecal matter into a receptacle, rather like a large

drum, and cleaning the pot with a broom. Masaji would go with Him to hold an umbrella over His head, but Baba did the work Himself.

There was a big wooden box with pigeonholes filled with doves and pigeons, and Baba would feed grain to them. They ate *jowar* [sorghum bicolor, a barley-shaped grain similar to millet] out of our hands. Dadi and I were usually together, because apart from us there were only the older, weather-worn people who towered over us. Masaji, Pendu's father, had a great liking for me, and he spent time with Eruch and me, somehow loving us more than he did his own son, Pendu. Gustadji was also a very lovable person, if you didn't count his sweet tooth and his taste for cream. He was silent, but later on he taught me how to read his signs, and we had a lovely time conversing with each other. His system of signs was different from Baba's—it consisted of words spelled out letter by letter. He taught me the vowels first, and then he would form letters, and I enjoyed conversing with him to the extent that my child's level of intelligence would permit.

On one of the Blue Bus tours I was often with Gustadji in the Opel, and we would have long conversations during the drives. Gustadji was full of humor, had very strange dreams, and told tall tales. In the later years Gustadji would tell his weird dreams to Baba to entertain Him. Baba would encourage all this, routinely asking him in the morning, "What new dream did you have today?"

The *mandali* numbered quite a few, and the whole long hall seemed to be filled with men at night—a big crowd. The ashram was designed with the *masts* and mad people all housed in Meherabad. At the time [late 1938] a major attraction was a little play that Baba wanted the mad people to enact. You can imagine the labor of love that the *mandali* had to undertake to inculcate some regimen into these people who were totally crazy and disoriented. To make them perform a deeply spiritual play, called *Raja Gopichand*, each *mandali* member took charge of one mad man and taught him the lines and stage actions. A big *pandal* or tent was constructed for the event in the open space across from where the new Mandali Hall (built in 1948) stands today.

When the play was performed, one actor suddenly ran off the stage in the middle of the play, and the *mandali* member supporting that person grabbed him and put him back on the stage. Though there was hilarity in the situation, it was a deadly serious project for the *mandali* and for Baba. What work was being done by Him, of course, we could not fathom.

The play depicted the life of a King of ancient times, Raja Gopichand, who, it was said, led a very luxurious and hedonistic life with sixteen hundred queens attending to him. There was a song about those sixteen hundred queens pouring water on him for his bath.

The king's mother, however, was deeply spiritual, and observing this ritual one day, she was filled with dismay to see her son wasting his life like that. At that moment a tear came to her eye, and it fell on the shoulder of Raja Gopichand. He looked up as he somehow felt the heat of her tear—that's how the story goes in any case. When he saw his mother weeping, he was deeply moved. He went up to her and asked her, "Mother, aren't you happy in my happiness?"

She responded, "No, son, this is not the way to lead a life."

The story goes on, and in time Gopichand was weaned away from his life of indulgence into a spiritual life, and eventually he became a great saint. Machinder Nath and Gorakh Nath were two of the Perfect Masters of the time, and they brought him out of this seemingly impregnable barrier of Maya. They penetrated the very citadel of Illusion, you might say. Later, in Bangalore, my father took me to see the film version of this story, and I remember weeping all the while over the suffering and happiness depicted in that very nice film. My father, however, didn't appear to be moved much. I tried to hide my emotions from him and enjoy the film, because when he would see that I was crying, he thought perhaps that I was unwell. He offered to leave immediately, and I had to assure him that I was fine and enjoying the film.

Back in those days we had really good films that impressed spiritual values upon the minds of people and children, but today we see the deterioration of films, leading people into great unhappiness. One of

Baba's instruments in speeding up the spiritual process is modern entertainment, no doubt.

So *Raja Gopichand* was successfully performed, with all the actors being inmates of the mad ashram. I wasn't sitting in the audience for the play, but I went around at the time to see what was going on behind the scenes. It was frightening to see the one madman who abruptly left the stage. He was all dressed up in saffron robes, and he had these big tongs in his hands, but the *mandali* intercepted him and put him back on the stage, and then he continued to carry out his part!

There was huge applause at the end of the play, and every *mandali* member must have heaved a great sigh of relief at its successful conclusion. Baba Himself seemed very pleased with the effort. The whole show had been stage-managed by Pleader, who left Meherabad soon after. Thereafter the mad ashram was wound up, and the mad persons were sent back to their respective places.

In those early days, just after we had joined the ashram at Meherabad, Baba's mother would visit from time to time. She would write to Baba first, and, when He permitted it, she would come. At that time Baba told my mother that she should serve Shireenmai and do whatever she said. Later my mother told me a funny incident about those times. Once she was massaging Shireenmai's feet at evening time when Baba just happened to come in. Baba's mother got up to welcome Him, and Baba said to her, "Mother, I would like to sit on your lap."

Baba's mother got quite annoyed. "Merog, behave Yourself. There are people all around here, and what will they think? Besides, You are so heavy now."

Baba said, "Nevertheless, I want to sit on your lap." And He did! What the meaning of such actions could be, only He knows.

During these visits my mother often asked Shireenmai about the older family history of Baba, and when she was in the mood, she would tell

Mumma many such stories, which are now lost to history as is always the way. But a nice lesson came out of this habit of Mumma's. Because of her love for Baba, my mother couldn't get enough of Shireenmai's stories and would always ask her to tell them to her. One time Shireenmai complained, "But I've told you all the stories already. They're all old and stale now—I don't have any fresh stories." Just then Baba happened to be walking by and overheard the conversation. Baba stopped and corrected His mother, "No, Mother," He said, "stories about Me are always fresh."

The Jessawala family, of which Meherwan was the youngest child, was called by Meher Baba to give up everything and join Him on the 1st of August, 1938. The oldest son, Eruch, was twenty-one and joined the men *mandali*. The two sisters, Manu and Meheru, were about nineteen and seventeen years old, respectively, and, with their mother, Gaimai, they joined the women. Shortly afterwards the Blue Bus tours began. Meherwan, seven at the time, also stayed in the women's ashram during the tours. Baba described these, initially, as "sightseeing" tours, which sounded like fun.

Meherwan was the only child accompanying the women (and a few men *mandali*) on the Blue Bus. Occasionally another child, such as his cousin, Dadi Kerawalla, might join the tour for a short time, but generally Meherwan was on his own and had to find ways to amuse himself. Baba later described the adult Meherwan as "in the world but not of it," so perhaps that solitary life was less difficult for him than for the average person. Still, it couldn't have been easy for a young child who, uprooted from his home, was without companions of a similar age and was surrounded by adults. Meherwan did make friends with several of the ladies, especially the "guards"—Kakubai (Vishnu's mother) and Soonamasi (mother of "little Khorshed").

Typically the bus would tour toward a destination, then stop at that destination for a while, so Meherwan would attend the local school

(examples were Dehra Dun, Bangalore, Jubbulpore—now Jabalpur). As anyone who has had to switch schools knows, it may not be easy to integrate into the new life there, especially for a shy and retiring child; so this was another challenge for the young Meherwan, who had to change repeatedly and often suddenly, as Baba's work dictated. During the summer months, when school was out, the bus traveled more or stayed in places like "Swarg Ashram" overlooking the Ganges as it raced out of the mountains near Rishikesh.

When I asked him, Meherwan replied that he was very happy being near Baba during that time and would never think of trading that experience for a "normal childhood." Baba, as the Source of joy and love and meaning, touched his life in a profound sense that continues to sustain him today.

The "Blue Bus" was a small vehicle into which many of the women traveling with Baba were packed. In addition to cramming extra people onto the regular bench seats, chairs (or bundles or suitcases) were set up in the aisle for the overflow. The roof rack was also stuffed and piled high with luggage, cooking gear and miscellaneous items. (The body of that vehicle was later mounted on cement blocks at Meherazad so that Baba could use it for His "Great Seclusion" in 1949, and that is where it still resides.)

Meherwan, as a boy of seven to eleven years old during the period of these trips, would sometimes sit in the ever-crowded Blue Bus and sometimes in one of the trailing cars, especially the Opel, in the back seat with Gustadji, one of the earliest of the *mandali*. Gustadji kept silence from 1927 by Baba's order and had his own unique set of hand gestures to convey his thoughts. By all reports he was a wonderful storyteller with a very animated style. Meherwan quickly learned to understand his gestures, so the two of them had very entertaining conversations in the back seat during the long trips. Meherwan's aunt, Gulamasi, was often in that car also, and she too thoroughly enjoyed Gustadji's stories. Meherwan would interpret Gustadji's gestures for the others to hear.

One of the stories Gustadji told Meherwan was about his time with three of Baba's Perfect Masters: he first went to Sai Baba's ashram at Shirdi seeking Truth. Sai Baba allowed him to stay but then generally ignored him. There was a "madman" living there who, whenever he saw Gustadji, would grab him and force him to lift a large iron girder and carry it some distance, put it down, then bring it back again! Gustadji became so much an apparent outcast that he was literally starving, and for a number of months he lived on grass that he harvested and seared.

When Sai Baba left his body, Gustadji followed Upasni Maharaj to Sakori and became *his* disciple. That was the time when Merwan—the future "Meher Baba"—was staying at Sakori as Upasni worked with Him to help Him regain full consciousness of the phenomenal world. Gustadji was one of that group of men and women directed by Upasni to leave him—Upasni—and to follow Merwan when He began His mission.

Gustadji's time with Perfect Masters, however, was not over yet! Soon after joining Baba, Gustadji was directed by Him to go to Babajan and serve her until Baba called him back. At one point Baba sent a message to Gustadji to take a mattress to Babajan as from Baba (Babajan normally sat directly on the ground). When Gustadji hauled the mattress before her, she was very pleased with it—that her "Rose," her "Son" (as she referred to Baba) had thought of her and sent it. She told Gustadji that he should care for the mattress and not attend to her! One time it began raining, and Babajan ordered Gustadji to lift the mattress up on its side and hold it like that to prevent its becoming soaked. The rain continued, however, and, as the mattress slowly took on water, the weight of it gradually bent Gustadji, and the mattress, down to the ground. Some time after that incident, Baba called Gustadji back to be with Him. Gustadji served his Beloved until his death in the 1950s.

While staying at various places during the Blue Bus tours, Baba would occasionally take the women on excursions to interesting places nearby. Sometimes Meherwan was included in those trips and sometimes not.

When we joined Meherabad on 1st August 1938, Baba was in the process of preparing for the Blue Bus journeys. If I remember rightly, the Blue Bus journeys started in the first week of December, 1938. It was about the 8th of December that Baba started on the Blue Bus tour with the women *mandali*. Dadi was sent back home; Baba made provision with his family so they wouldn't be financially burdened, and Dadi was well cared for. As always, Baba left nothing to chance, personally attending to every little detail.

As for me, Baba made an arrangement for me to stay with my relatives at Akbar Press, to attend a school in Ahmednagar at the start of the new school year. The beginning of the term was in June, so in the meantime some private tuition was given to me at Akbar Press as arranged by Baba. Language was a problem for me, since I had spoken only Gujarati at home and had gone to an English-medium school. Now I was living in a place where a Marathi-medium school was the only one available, so I had to learn Marathi.

I wasn't feeling very comfortable at Akbar Press, but at least I was with my relatives, the Satha family. Naoroji Satha, my maternal grandfather was there, and then my uncle Ploomama took over from him. My grandfather was the engineer at Akbar Press, which pressed ginned cotton into hard bales to be transported to Bombay and Ahmedabad where the main spinning mills were. In those years Ahmednagar was a center for cotton production. It had rich black soil that was very suitable for planting cotton. Unfortunately, later on sugar cane replaced cotton as a cash crop and cotton died out, but there used to be many ginning and pressing factories in the area. After Naoroji died my uncle Ploomama took over the running of the household and the work at the ginning press.

My uncles Naosherwan and Homi were the ones who first met Baba when he came to Arangaon, sitting on the roadside near where the *dhuni* is today. At that time they used to go for long walks, and they went all the way to Arangaon one day. They saw some new people there, with one very attractive person in their midst, and they were drawn there somehow. It turned out that it was Meher Baba and His *mandali* who were sitting there, and Baba beckoned to them to approach Him. Immediately they accepted Him, even though it wasn't Zoroastrian practice to accept a living spiritual master. Our family must have been spiritually prepared to have accepted Baba so readily.

Baba encouraged my uncles to pay frequent visits to Him at Meherabad, and they did. Naosherwan was all for Baba, and he wrote to my mother that they had encountered a great personality. He wrote, "He is like Zoroaster come again! Wouldn't you like to come and meet Him?" These words were enough for her. She, too, must have been inwardly prepared, and she was ready to come to Baba. I wasn't born yet, but Eruch has often described his first visit to Baba. I think my father also went on that occasion of the first visit to Ahmednagar and Baba, but I am not entirely certain about it.

Akbar Press, then, was where I had been deposited for my education. Papa was always worried about my education, and he pestered Baba about it. My life at Akbar Press, however, was not very happy, because during that time I was separated both from Baba as well as from the rest of the family.

Eruch didn't go out right away on the Blue Bus tours, but he did go on later trips. I remember having a very severe headache for two or three days, and Baba's younger brother, Adi [Adi S. Irani], prescribed some homeopathic drug for me. The headache did go away, but my whole body erupted with huge, pus-filled boils the size of small tomatoes, all from my waist down! This episode happened just before Baba embarked on the Blue Bus journeys.

I was moved to the Rahuri cabin at Meherabad so that Dr. Nilu and Eruch could, at Baba's instruction, attend to my condition, that is, to drain out

all the pus after cutting the boils open. At the time Papa was still working at his job, and Baba was traveling with the women *mandali*, so afterwards I was brought back to Akbar Press to recuperate. Because I wasn't feeling well they wouldn't let me out of the house, so for me the atmosphere there felt quite restrictive.

Baba and those with Him were still continuing the journeys in the Blue Bus, and, after a few weeks, they came to Mandla, near Jabalpur, on the banks of the Narmada River. This was where Baba's center was to be built later on. While at Mandla my mother received a very distasteful letter from Akbar Press, containing some complaints about me and my unruly behavior. Baba noted that my mother was becoming moody, and He asked her, "Do you feel upset with Me for leaving your son behind like this?" What had actually most distressed Mumma were the disparaging remarks about Baba made by my uncle Jehangirji, husband of my mother's sister Shireenmai. He wasn't a Baba-lover.

Mumma responded, "No, Baba, I would sacrifice a thousand sons like that for You." Baba was extremely pleased with the reply. He said, "No, I want your son to be brought here immediately." He was greatly pleased, because she had said it with all her heart and soul. Baba sent a telegram to Pendu to bring me to Mandla, along with quite a few packages that were in Meherabad at the time. Eventually Masaji was given the job of bringing me and the goods by train to Mandla.

To provide some background, Shireenmai's sister Piroja, who loved Baba dearly, was married to Masaji, and Masaji was the father of Pendu and Naja, who were brother and sister. Pendu and Naja were first cousins to Baba on His mother's side.

Masaji was a tyrant. Brian O'Neill (an American Baba-lover who often visited Meherabad and who is now deceased) reminded me of Masaji—very robust and very athletic, with a luxuriant moustache. Masaji was also very proud of his teeth, which he kept intact well into his old age. He once took a bet that they would remain clean even if he didn't brush them for a week!

What impressed me most as a young boy was how mild these rough and rugged people would be when they came before Baba. They were like a

flock of lambs before Him, whereas when Baba wasn't present, they were fierce and intimidating. These tough, burly individuals accepted Baba completely, and as a consequence they would carry out His orders without hesitation or question. Being with them left an indelible impression upon me of just how potent the aura of Baba's authority could be.

Kaka Baria was one of those old stalwarts—short, stocky, very strong physically as well as mentally. One day a big hornet strayed into Meherazad Mandali Hall while Baba was sitting there. The hornet landed on the wall to the right of the front door, and Kaka went over and crushed it with his bare hands, not making anything of it—he just slammed it against the wall to ensure that it didn't go anywhere near Baba. Baba said, "See how courageous he is!" A few days later Kaka had done something wrong or had displeased Baba, and Baba took him to task for it. At this upbraiding Kaka actually began to shed tears in front of Baba. This man who had no fear of anything in the world just melted before Baba. These are some of the things I remember from my childhood that impressed me greatly.

Going back to the story, Masaji had a consignment of quite a few big pieces of luggage: bundles, beddings, trunks—around forty pieces altogether—and he had to take me along with those items to Mandla. I was just asked to come, but I was not informed about the details of our journey. The next thing I knew, I was boarding a train. "Masa," Pendu had said, "take care to keep your eye on the baggage." Pendu would call him "Masa," though Masaji was his father.

There was too much luggage to load in the car in which we were traveling, so the baggage had to be loaded into the brake van [the baggage car]. Masaji interpreted Pendu's instruction to mean that he should, at every train stop, run back to the brake van, the last car on the train, to make sure that the baggage was not stolen and that it was still there. He took it to be like Baba's order (though it came from his own son). The idea of not carrying the luggage in the car came from the

British, who insisted that for over a certain amount of luggage, it should not be carried in the passenger car but instead placed in the luggage van.

Every time the train would halt, Masaji would rush out to see that the baggage was there, although there was no need because we had a receipt for the baggage, and the railway was responsible for delivering the same number of packages as shown on the receipt. But because it was *Baba's* luggage, Masaji felt that he had to go and see to it scrupulously.

Once we stopped at a small wayside station called Chalisgaon (the name means "forty villages"). Masaji didn't know that the train was scheduled for only a very brief halt, and when he reached the last car in his check on the luggage, at that instant the train gave a whistle and started. At that point Masaji started running to get back to our car. I was looking out of the window, and I could see that he was struggling—despite his efforts he couldn't get onto the train, and now I was all alone in the compartment, not knowing what to do.

Masaji later told me how desperate he was at that time. You know, the train kept going, and I was totally helpless. I had no tickets—I was just sort of baggage for Masaji, and I was completely dependent upon him.

When the train halted at the next station, I looked out of the window and saw a couple of railway police coming along the platform, peeking into each window looking for something. They asked me, "Child, where is your guardian?"

I said I didn't know and told them that he had missed the train. They made me get down from the train, and what I found on the platform was the baggage we were taking to Baba—a huge mound of luggage—and I was made to sit on one of the packages on top of the mound, under the only lamp on the platform. They told me not to move and that the next train would bring my guardian. They said I should have no fear, but it was almost approaching midnight.

I was quite forlorn and depressed by the time the next train steamed in. As soon as the train stopped, I saw Masaji come running toward the

mound of packages upon which I sat. He grabbed me and squeezed me very tightly, and he said, “Oh, my child, I was so frightened!” Then he started to weep. How would he ever have presented himself before Baba if I had been lost? The problem had been solved by the Station Master at the first station where the problem occurred—that fellow had sent a railway telegram to the next station to inform them to remove me and the bundles from the train, and so that coordinated action by the railway people had saved the day.

We got onto the next train and proceeded, with Masaji so incredibly relieved. When he came and embraced me so tightly, it seemed as though he had found the treasure of his life. I had not been as scared as he, apparently. He felt that he had failed before Baba, which is what had disturbed him so much. That was the point that all the while was being impressed upon me throughout my childhood—how seriously the close ones took their duty to Baba—their willingness to give their very lives for any little thing that Baba wanted done.

The new train on which we found ourselves was a slow passenger train, and it took a very long time to reach our destination. Masaji, as a matter of course, had sent a long telegram to Baba saying that we had missed a train and that we would be following in another train, and not to expect us for a few more days. We eventually reached Mandla—I remember Baba and the *mandali* were there—and Masaji immediately started crying in front of Baba, telling how it had all happened and how he had never felt such fear in his life, and how he would never have been able to face Baba if that child had been lost....

Then Baba said, “The old man (meaning my father) should not be told the story, so let’s gloss over the telling of these events.” At this point they began to strategize what they should tell Papa and what they shouldn’t tell him so that he would not flare up. I still remember this conversation! Baba Himself broke the news to my father. He was there in Mandla at the time—maybe Papa was there on leave. I’m not sure if he had joined the *mandali* permanently at that time. Papa was called and told, “Here’s your son.”

I think that occasion might have been the first time a male child was inducted into the women's ashram, as I now was. In this way Baba relaxed the extremely strict rule of total exclusion of men from the women upon which He had always insisted, and I was even allowed to see Mehera, who had up until then been completely cloistered from men.

While we were in Mandla Baba took us on various excursions, because Mandla is a scenic place and there are big falls there known as Dhuadhar (which translates literally to "smoky falls"). The falls are so high that there's always a mist from the falling water, a fine spray that reaches wherever people observing the falls are standing. Baba also took us on boat rides at night, and during that time there was a full moon.



Chapter Three:

1939

The Western women were staying at Mandla, but I didn't really understand much about them, as I was quite shy and withdrawn. One incident, however, impressed me and in fact really shocked me. The women, you know, would often disagree among themselves. It was difficult for them to see eye-to-eye. One day Baba called them all before Him. It was the case that as soon as the call came from Baba, His orders were to drop everything and come. The women were given some small wooden stools, and their duty was to come to Him and be seated before Him on the stools.

Everybody was there, and Baba was seated on a sofa, with Mehera sitting at his side. It was Mehera's birthday. Suddenly one of the Western women, Nadine, came and put her forehead on Baba's feet and began to sob loudly. Then, a little while later, another Western woman, Helen Dahm, came and started to beat Nadine with both of her fists, banging on her back! What was going on here, I wondered? I was witnessing all this and I was shaking all over just watching! Baba allowed the whole thing to go on for a long time. Helen began sobbing too, saying something unintelligible in Swiss German. A second woman was at Baba's feet—Irene Billo, I think, the only one in the group who could

translate for Helen. I was astonished that anyone would hit someone who was bowing at Baba's feet, and I was equally astonished at Nadine being able to absorb such blows because Helen was a tall, stocky, powerful woman, and she was hitting Nadine with all her might.

Finally Helen subsided. At that point Baba told Nadine to get up. He embraced each one—Nadine and Helen—and then He directed them to embrace each other, and they did so. Not only that, but they embraced quite warmly! I was so impressed—Baba had simply observed the whole scene, and yet He had somehow precipitated such a drastic change in attitudes between the two women. Afterwards there was pin-drop silence throughout the room.

That's my impression of the Western women from that period. It moved me very much to see how Baba allowed events to unfold—always with everything emptied out before Him. He was, as it were, the Ocean that absorbed all the passions and discontents of each one of them, and then, after expressing themselves before Baba, they calmed down, and the scene that followed was something out of this world. My view as a child was that it would have been sacrilegious for the person who was bowing down to Baba to be beaten, and that it should take place before Baba was equally unthinkable. But He allowed it to happen, and only He could have played it out in such a way.

This reminds me of one of Upasni Maharaj's discourses in which Maharaj says, "One of the ways to identify the *darbar* (court) of a Perfect Master or the Avatar is that you find all types of people around Him, from the worst of sinners to the highest of saints. They are all in His *darbar*, and only He, the mighty Ocean, can accommodate everything. The saints will not be able to do this." So the sign of true perfection is to find all diverse types of people surrounding such a person. People who we know are awful externally in their behavior, yet they are ready for Him. The "awfulness" is nothing but the remnants of the outer crust of the ego that Baba is clearing away. By virtue of my having the chance to live in His presence, I was initiated very unwittingly into this reality at a very young age.

I have described to you this very remarkable incident and the indelible impression it made on me at that tender age. There were, however, other incidents that were much lighter. At Bheraghat, near Jabalpur, the Narmada River is flanked by tall cliffs of pure marble, called the Marble Rocks. The river winds through these formations. When we went boating with Baba while He was staying there, He pointed out to us many nests of hornets in the marble, very fierce and formidable creatures. Their nests would be two-by-four feet in size. The boatmen would warn the people in the boats not to smoke a cigarette or *bidi* [an Indian peasant cigarette] because those hornets detested smoke, and anyone who generated smoke in their vicinity would be attacked. If those hornets attack you, your end would be certain, because once they attack, you have no escape from them!

My mother recalled that one night while she was in another boat, she caught a glimpse of Baba and Mehera with the moonlight behind them. She was deeply moved by the beauty of the scene, feeling that she was seeing the equivalent of Ram and Sita (recalling a famous boat ride from the *Ramayana*). Baba never failed to notice my mother's thoughts, and He later asked her what she was thinking. She told Him that she felt she had witnessed the scene that had taken place thousands of years ago, and He was very pleased with her answer. I recall that Baba took us out twice on the river to see the Marble Rocks, once in the daytime and then again in the night, when there happened to be a full moon.

From Mandla we later shifted to Jabalpur, a relatively big city. The Blue Bus was very cramped—the women would fill the seats on the bus, and then more women would be packed in to sit on their stools in the aisle. Then still more people would enter from the rear door of the bus, and Baba would literally push the women inside. I remember that sometimes Baba would bang the door on the fanny of the last woman to get in.

Baba and Mehera would sit behind a wooden partition up front, and Baba would give instructions to the driver where to go. He alone had the day's travel plans, and the driver would read Baba's board or someone would speak it out while reading the board. No sightseeing was permitted

for Mehera en route, and so there were heavy curtains over the windows on either side whenever she was traveling with Baba.

When we arrived at Jabalpur we stayed in the house of a Baba-lover named Jal Kerawala. He held the very high post of District Commissioner at that time. He had a large bungalow with a big compound, which of course he had to vacate while Baba and the women occupied the house. After staying there for some time, Baba moved to another, more spacious residence in Jabalpur. Baba allotted rooms to the various groups of family members, and if someone were alone, they were fitted into a group, and in this way Baba attended to every minor detail. I myself slept near Mumma along with my sisters, Manu and Meheru.

The highlight of our stay in Jabalpur was my thread ceremony, or *navjote*. Like the Jewish community, we Zoroastrians also have a celebration similar to a *bar mitzvah* when a child comes of age. When he begins to understand things, he is officially inducted into the religion. A sacred garment called a *sadra* is put on the child, and a sacred thread (*kusti*) is tied around the waist in a ritual that binds the young child to live a life of “good thoughts, good words and good deeds,” which is the essence of the Zoroastrian religion. Nowadays, however, the essence is forgotten, and the child just repeats the words in the ceremony like a parrot.

Baba actually wanted to perform my thread ceremony Himself, but Papa said that it would be better if it were done by a priest! Baba said, “All right, please yourself.” That was unfortunate for me and my cousin Sam, who was six months senior to me and who was called for the ceremony along with his mother, my aunt Banumasi. Our *navjotes* were to be performed together in Jabalpur, and owing to Papa’s insistence on tradition, we missed the chance to have Baba Himself as our “priest.”

I remember a very humorous incident that occurred just before our *navjotes*. When my mother had joined the ashram, Baba’s mother, Shireenmai, already had a great liking for her, and she told Baba, “I want

this girl to attend upon me all the while.” Baba ordered my mother to obey Shireenmai, and this pleased my mother very much. She said, “Yes, Baba, with all my heart I will serve Maiji,” which is how she referred to Shireenmai. The women formed a good friendship, probably in preparation for the future, inasmuch as Baba has said that my mother would be *His* mother in His next Avataric Incarnation.

Consequently, when Shireenmai heard that my aunt was coming to visit from Bombay, she told my mother to ask her sister to bring with her two nice *pomfrets*, a very tasty type of fish popular in Bombay. This was, by the way, during a phase of very strict vegetarianism for the ashram, and anything that entered the ashram had to be personally approved by Baba.

So, after Baba had approved the letter informing Banumasi to bring Sam to Jabalpur to have his *navjote* performed, Shireenmai asked my mother to add a “P.S.” to the effect that Banumasi should bring a pair of fresh *pomfrets* with her.

My aunt came on that appointed date, and Shireenmai told my mother, “Go immediately and see if she has brought the fish.” My mother went, and Banumasi said that of course she had brought the fish. Mumma then took the vessel containing the fish to Shireenmai. (Bear in mind that Baba had told Mumma to obey Shireenmai in all ways, and Mumma had taken an oath before Baba to do so.)

Mumma then told Shireenmai that the fish had arrived. My mother heated it up and brought it to serve to Baba’s mother. As it was laid out on the table and Shireenmai was taking the very first morsel, suddenly two cats jumped from out of nowhere onto her shoulders. She never liked cats, especially black-colored cats like these, and she screamed loudly and threw the fish off to distract the cats. The cats took the fish and disappeared, never to be seen again! Just then Baba arrived on the scene. “What’s this smell of fish? Fish in the ashram?” He gestured.

My mother got quite scared, and she said, “Baba, Shireenmai asked for it to be brought from Bombay.” Baba asked who had brought it, and my mother explained about Banumasi. Baba professed complete ignorance

as He listened to the story. Shireenmai flared up and said, “Yes, Merog, it is I who asked for it from Bombay.”

Baba rejoined, “But without My order? Mother, how could you do that?”

“Merog, you know that I like fish. I like it, and I asked for it.”

“Yes, but Mother, the ashram is strictly vegetarian.”

“I know You didn’t want me to eat it, because You sent those two cats.”

“Yes, Mother, you were very fortunate that those cats came and saved you from breaking My orders. You should consider yourself very lucky!”

That, of course, peeved Baba’s mother all the more, so it was in the end a very funny incident, but it brings home to us how Baba takes care so that His orders are not violated. Shireenmai had the prerogative of being the mother of the Avatar, and Baba inevitably made adjustments for her, but He also put restrictions on her; after all, a mother is still a mother.

Returning to the subject of my thread ceremony, owing to Papa’s wish it was performed using a Zoroastrian priest. Masaji was an expert cook, especially for big occasions involving large crowds, and during my *navjote* he was in charge of all the arrangements for the food.

Sev is the dish typically provided on auspicious occasions, a sweet dish similar to a sweetened vermicelli. Masaji had ordered several packets of vermicelli, and he had laid them out in the kitchen, along with the other ingredients. That night, when my mother and Banumasi were in the kitchen, Banumasi removed some of the packets because she thought she knew better than Masaji about the correct proportions for making *sev*. But when Masaji made the *sev* the next day, it came out all wrong. When he discovered what had happened, he flared up—he came with the big spoon that was used for the stirring to hammer Banumasi for spoiling both the *sev* and his reputation. He had a nasty temper, but immediately after flaring up he would forget everything. Despite such outbursts he was a very lovable person.

Baba was on the premises when my thread ceremony was performed. Quite a few people came because of Jal Kerawala’s position in the

region. When Baba called us inside, Mehera gave us each a photo of Baba in a marble frame, one to Sam and one to me. I don't know now where they are, but they were blessed by Baba.

Sometime shortly after my ceremony, Baba wanted to carry on with His bus journeys, and it was time for me to enter a school. Baba ordered all the family, even Dadi and Sam, to be enrolled in a school in Jabalpur. We stayed there for quite a few months—Sam, Dadi, my sisters, my mother, Banumasi and myself— all the family except Eruch stayed in Jabalpur.

Some time later we received Baba's call to leave everything and join Him in Bangalore. Eruch stayed with Baba, although he was sporadically sent back to the family when he had no work to do at the ashram, right up until the New Life. After the New Life started, he stopped coming altogether. When Baba would come to Poona, however, He would send Eruch to the house to tell us Baba stories.

The last year, 1968, Baba didn't send Eruch to Bindra House while He was in Guruprasad, and in that year the *mandali* also did not set foot out of the premises of Guruprasad. Even Baba's food, traditionally sent from Bindra House, was prepared in Guruprasad itself by Naja and Khorshed. There were two boys who used to go out to do the marketing while the *mandali* stayed inside.

Returning to the time of Baba's Blue Bus tours: I was enrolled in school as soon as we joined Baba in Bangalore, but early morning was always exercise time for me. Margaret Craske was my instructor. I had a somewhat weak constitution, and Baba told Margaret to toughen me up. Sam and Dadi weren't there, because Sam's father had wanted his children back immediately. Baba had planned to get them into the school with me, but the father wrote an unpleasant letter. Sam came to know about this letter, and he was a very unrestrained child at that time. He spoke about his father as "...a swine, depriving us of being with Baba." Baba came in while Sam was ranting about this, and those nearby tried to restrain him, but Baba said to let him finish, and when Sam's words ran out, Baba urged him to show some restraint, and that he should

respect his elders. Sam and Dadi did go back to Bombay as their father insisted and continued their education there.

Just at that time Baidul's family joined the ashram from Iran. Baidul had been with Baba much earlier, but he had gone back to Iran, and he returned to India with his wife, Soltun, and his two daughters, Daulat and Sarwar, and he rejoined Baba's ashram in Bangalore.

Daulat was older, and Sarwar was about three years older than me. Elizabeth was given the duty of each day taking Sarwar and me the distance of several miles to our school in Bangalore. Sarwar went to the convent and I went to St. Joseph's High—either St. Joseph's or St. Francis, I forget which.

Sarwar was a brilliant child. She knew no other language but *Dari*, a village dialect spoken in Iran by the Zoroastrians, a sort of a private language not known to the Muslims, but she picked up English very quickly. I was much more shy. When spoken to I would respond, but in general I did not initiate contact with any of the foreigners. It was difficult for me to be with new people, but I did eventually adjust. We spoke only English in those missionary schools, but despite our limited knowledge of English, we got by with what we knew. Gradually my English improved considerably.

When the school day was over Elizabeth would pick us up in her own car, a Pontiac, I think. It had a horn that had a musical tone to it, and we would press it when she was not around in order to entertain ourselves.

There was a big menagerie with Baba at the time—rabbits, a deer and monkeys, like Lucky, the little monkey who had been sent by Savak Damania from Bombay in a crate. When the case was opened, I'm told that that tiny little monkey jumped out of its cage and headed straight for Baba. How it got attracted to Baba is a mystery, but animals always felt that attraction for Him. It started chattering away immediately, and Baba was lending an ear to what the monkey was saying and nodding His head. Those who witnessed it said it was a beautiful moment.

The monkey, however, often caused messes wherever it stayed, and Norina, who was given the charge of taking care of it, would have to

sweep up everything. One time while at Bangalore, Baba sent for Norina to come, and as was customary in responding to Baba's call, she came immediately, just as she was, with the broom and a pan in hand, for she was in the midst of cleaning up after Lucky.

It turns out that when she came to Baba He was with the *Diwan* [a high-ranking government official] of Mysore, who had previously met Norina at a lecture she had given about Baba. He had been very impressed by her and had asked for an audience with Baba. A date and time were fixed, but he had to cancel that appointment owing to a state emergency. On this particular day he had turned up without any notice, and the *Diwan* was mightily impressed that Baba had princesses doing this sort of menial work in Baba's ashram. For Norina, though, it was a great embarrassment. In these little ways Baba would bring out all the various sides of a situation. The *Diwan* was in fact a deeply spiritual person—he would even bow down to Baba's mother because he had great respect for the one who had given birth to such a divine being as Baba.

These were the little incidents that would occur in the ashram. Mani tells us about parrots and mynahs that were likewise attracted to Baba. You must also have heard so many stories about Chum, who was sent by my uncle Piloomama. Chum was a dog of unique character. He wouldn't want anybody to approach Baba, but if Baba told him it was all right, he would permit it. Mani tells us of an incident of a calf that Baba kept with Him for a while, and Chum would chase the calf to force it not to approach Baba, who would be holding out some *jowar* for the calf. Throughout His Advent Baba did a lot of work for the animal kingdom, not just for the human species—He comes for everyone and everything in Creation.

At various times during the Blue Bus tours we had quite a large collection of animals, including a couple of huge, pink pigs named Nutty and Guppy. Those two pigs had a big litter, and Baba gave the piglets away to a good household that wouldn't slaughter them. Dr. Ghani, who was a Muslim, was told to find a household that would keep the pigs well.

There was a phase in Bangalore during which Baba wanted humorous plays to be performed, so all the ashramites had to take part in those dramatic productions in the big hall on the first floor. Mani was routinely the leading player, and she hooked me into one of those plays—this was in December of 1939, according to records of the time. I was shy and told her that I got stage fright.

“Look,” she said, “I have given you a very simple part. You have to be a small boy who has been employed as a servant to a very rich *nawab* [a princely ruler, who was to be played by Mani], and all that you have to do is when I say, ‘Boy, get the tea,’ you have to get the tray of tea and put it before me, pour it out into cups and respectfully do the Mohammedan salute. Then just leave the stage. That’s all you have to do.”

In order to practice I was given special permission to go up to the first floor of the bungalow, where Mani instructed me how to play my role. I got just one rehearsal using a wicker basket instead of a tea-tray, and I was not really prepared for my role—the whole thing went off very badly. I was so nervous that the whole tray was shaking and all the cups rattling.

When I came on stage during the performance, Baba was there and saw me all dressed up. I was still so nervous that instead of bringing the tray of tea to Mani, I walked off the stage, went across to where Baba sat with the women *mandali*, and brought the tray, the tea and the cups over and placed it before Him! Mani, trying to remain in character, said from the stage, “Boy, not there, you foolish fellow! You have to come this side. Over here!” But Baba was very amused. The cups fell over, the tea got spilled, and Baba had a very good laugh.

Whenever Baba was amused, it was a sight to see. He would get very red in the face and look very beautiful. No sound escaped when He laughed, but you could see that He was enjoying whatever it was to the hilt, because He would get all flushed, and sometimes He would move His legs back and forth in amusement, just like a little boy. Seeing Baba enjoying something to the fullest would invariably bring out the best in all of us.

During the plays everybody had to perform to the best of their ability. It was a sort of meditation. All had to remain keen and focused on their roles. Just to please Baba they would do it, regardless of their interest or aptitude for dramatic acting.

Once Najamai [Baba's cousin, Naja, who was among the earliest women *mandali* members] was dressed up for an appearance on stage as an old Parsi man, with white sideburns made of cotton, reading a newspaper the way old Parsi gentlemen used to do. One sideburn became detached, so she lifted the paper up so that Baba and the audience wouldn't see it. Baba signed to someone in the audience to tell her, "Naja, lower the paper because Baba wants to see your face."

She shouted back in Gujarati, "Baba, my sideburns are falling off." One sideburn had completely fallen off, and the mustache was dropping down. In spite of all her protests, Baba made her lower the paper so that He could see her face. Baba enjoyed all those humorous scenes, and these mishaps would please Him all the more, even more than the drama itself. The women were the only ones at these plays, but the performers were sometimes on the stage and sometimes off, just as with a typical play.

In Bangalore the men's ashram was nearby, but the Links—the name of the bungalow we stayed in while at Bangalore—was for the women and me, as I was staying there with my mother. Complete separation between the women and the men was the rule unless Baba called some man for His work, although He usually went to their side if He needed them.

Every morning Baba would go from His room on the ground floor through our room, which was between His room and the stairs on His way to Meheramai's room on the first floor. I would get up in the morning beforehand and would bow down to His feet as He was going to Mehera's room. He would then embrace me and go up. That was my privilege as a child living in the ashram with Baba.

One year when my birthday was approaching—I was in school in Bangalore at the time—Baba asked my mother what I might like to eat for the special occasion. This was probably a couple of days before November 22nd, which is my birthday.

“Baba,” she said, “he likes plain rice and *dal* and spinach best.”

“Silly,” Baba retorted, “you’re spinning yarns. No child would like plain *dal* and rice and spinach as his best dish.”

“All right, Baba, You ask him.”

So Baba told Mani, “When Meherwan comes from school, see that he doesn’t meet his mother. You catch him first and ask him what is his favorite dish.”

Mani caught hold of me as soon as I returned from school, so that my mother did not get a chance to see me and instruct me—Baba was sure that my mother was making up things just to please Him. Baba would feign ignorance in such instances. Not feign, really—He was all-ignorance and at the same time He was all-knowing also, all poured together in some way that we can never fathom. But He functioned in that way—it was most natural, and that’s why He was so approachable and so lovable. Because He was on our level, as totally ignorant as we were. He was actually that, and yet all-knowing. It was a heady combination that would spin anyone’s intellect around if they tried to understand what it is all about. It is just unfathomable.

So Mani caught hold of me, and upon her inquiry, I said that I liked plain *dal* and rice and spinach most. So she went to Baba with that information, and He said, “What an insipid kid he is!” So we had *dal* and rice and spinach for my birthday feast that year!

In the process of asking, by the way, Mani would say, “Wouldn’t you like *pulau* [a rice dish with vegetables] and maybe some spicy dishes?” I said what I said, namely, that I actually preferred plain rice and *dal*, and really, when you come to get the taste of it, there is nothing like *dal* and rice, and that’s what we eat now, today, here at Meherazad. Our daily evening meal is *dal* and rice with a few vegetables. The beauty of simple food is that you don’t ever get tired of it. In those old days, by the way, spices and cooking oils were extremely restricted and not only costly but scarce. Another detail I remember—sometimes Baba Himself would serve huge

portions to us, all of which you had to eat. It was all a part of His work with His *mandali*.

We usually sat all together at meal times, but sometimes our family would retreat to our own room, where we would bring the food and eat while sitting on our little bedding rolls. In the early days Baba used to serve all the food with His own hand, but in later years there would be someone assigned to that task, like my sister Manu or Katie. But whenever I received food from Baba directly, I took it as *prasad*. He typically gave so much that it would invariably be quite a job to finish—nobody would ever think of going back for a second helping. That was Baba's way—He was always liberal in all He would give out.

In Bangalore Baba was mostly busy with *mast* work. From time to time, however, Baba would call all the women to a gathering on the first floor of the residence. At such times they would play records or someone would read out from a book, but I mostly kept to myself unless Baba specifically asked for me. Each night one of the women would ring a bell and call out "Everybody, everybody!" This was the signal for everyone to come before Baba. After whatever program Baba had planned, "Begin the Beguine" would be played, and that ended the evening.

As I mentioned earlier, one of Elizabeth's tasks was to take Sarwar and me to school and back each day. She also took care of the dogs. Elizabeth was very fond of dogs, and there were two wild dogs that had been found and given to her, and another unclaimed dog that was named "Foundy." Later she even took Foundy to America, and brought it back to India when she was called back! I remember that dog, which died in India after many years.

The two wild dogs were called Jingo and Bingo, and they were tied up at the foot of the staircase. They tended to make a big ruckus all day long. Elizabeth would come and feed them, and they would remain quiet for some time before starting up again. Norina never liked those dogs,

and when Elizabeth was out of sight, she would come with a big folded-up newspaper and start beating the dogs to make them keep quiet!

Once Elizabeth appeared unexpectedly, and you should have seen the change in the tone and action of Norina: “My sweet darlings....” and so on. As if she was caressing them with the paper—she was a very good actress. Elizabeth never knew what Norina was doing with the dogs. These funny incidents and clashes were commonplace around Baba.

We were in Bangalore in 1939 when the Second World War started. As I’ve mentioned, we lived in the bungalow called “The Links,” the palatial residence of some royal family that overlooked the golf links. It had two stories, and the first floor [the second floor in the U.S.] had a wooden floor laid down for ballroom dancing. This had the disadvantage that when Baba was in seclusion He would be disturbed by the sound of the high heels of the Western women as they walked across that floor. Baba’s room was on the ground floor of the bungalow, and someone invariably had to rush upstairs to tell them to be quiet.

While we were in Bangalore, Baba took us to Mysore, where the palace of the Maharaja of Mysore was situated. It was the time of *Dussera*, a big celebration of the day when Ram achieved victory over Ravana. It’s a big holiday in India, and the *Dussera* celebrations become a tourist attraction. During the days of the celebration the Maharaja would come out in procession on richly-decorated elephants, and he would go in this procession through the streets of Mysore. Baba had booked an old palace there for us to stay in, and He took us to see the procession. Much of Baba’s work was with crowds, and this offered a good opportunity for it. The whole palace had been decorated with lights, and it was very beautiful. There are many followers of Lord Ram in the south of India, and *Dussera* is celebrated with great pomp and ceremony there.

A funny incident happened in that palace. The *mandali* on duty had to prepare hot water for Baba every morning—Baba would have His bath at 4:00 a.m., so they had to get up at 3:00 a.m. to get the water ready.

Eruch had brought a kerosene stove for the purpose, and my sisters were in charge of lighting the stove each morning. On one particular morning it wouldn't light, no matter how hard they tried. A little jet of oil appeared to be flowing through, but there was no flame.

Meanwhile, Baba was restless for His hot water. When my sisters explained that they couldn't get the stove to light, He gestured angrily, "You're all nitwits! You can't even light a kerosene stove?!" He sent Eruch over to see what the problem was, and Eruch found that the stove's fuel container was filled not with kerosene but with water! What had happened is that Khorshed had gotten up very early that morning to go to the toilet, and she mistook this kerosene container for the water pot, so as she washed up from the toilet, the kerosene was used up. Baba appeared quite agitated as a result of the delay in His bath, and Khorshed, poor Khorshed—not only did she get a reprimand from Baba, but she also stank of kerosene for the rest of the day!

The highlight of that stay was visiting the Brindavan Gardens, built by a German engineer who also designed the Krishnasagar Dam on the Kaveri river—the water was in plentiful supply at the time. The Brindavan Gardens were built on the far side of the dam, and they sloped down in terraces. At the very top was a huge peacock made out of colored lights, which would flash on and off. There were waterfalls with colored lights in the bottom, flowing down on one side of the gardens. All in all, it was an unforgettable sight. At night it looked like a paradise, with all sorts of colored lights in the fountains, a truly beautiful sight. When we went there, it was especially lit up because of the *Dussera* festival.

We were also sent to see the famous Mysore Zoo. All the animals, including the big cats—the lions and tigers—were kept free with a deep moat between them and the visitors. There were big mountain squirrels in the trees and various other wonderful sights to see. We were also taken to see the museum one day. That day the museum was closed to the general public so that Baba and the women *mandali* could go see the museum undisturbed. That was arranged by the *Diwan* of Mysore. The museum had many wonderful exhibits, but Baba raced us through the

place, so much so that we had hardly any time to look at them! It so happened that Shireenmai was also with the women that day, and she wryly commented, “Have we come here to run a horse race?” Baba replied that they had no time and had to go fast! What should have taken two or three days to see all the exhibits and valuable antiquities took only an hour or so with Baba!

While at Mysore Baba took us to Chamundi Hill, a steep climb up to a temple dedicated to Chamunda (a Hindu Goddess) with a huge bull—Shiva’s mount, Nanda—at the entrance. On the way some miscreants had placed some large rocks across the road. We were in our car, which was peculiarly shaped like a pistol, with Papa driving, me in the middle and Gustadji at the side. The car was a convertible, and there was a single seat where the hood opened, where Dr. Nilu was sitting by himself. When we came across the rocks, Papa had to brake, and he asked Gustadji to get out and remove the rocks. “That’s not my job,” Gustadji responded, and he continued to sit with his feet propped up on the dashboard because he had an order from Baba to do no work. Papa wasn’t aware of that order, and so because Gustadji paid no heed to his request, he had to get out and remove the rocks himself, which he did with much grumbling about “lazy, good-for-nothing people around this ashram who did no work but just sat there while others slogged.” But whatever Papa said never ruffled Gustadji, who simply put his legs up and enjoyed the scene. Papa finally moved the rocks out of the way, and we got to the top.

Gustadji was a truly genuine person, with a very genial, innocent face. He had led a straight and pure life with several masters: Sai Baba, Upasni Maharaj, then Babajan and finally Meher Baba. In his early days he had undergone tremendous hardships, and now he was totally unmindful of others and their criticism. Perhaps it was embarrassing for Gustadji not to respond to my father’s request and then to see Papa have to get out from behind the steering wheel to do it, but following Baba’s instructions took the utmost precedence. In the old days Gustadji had been in charge of the ashram and had been involved in intense activity, but now he was ordered to observe silence and to not work, which was in fact not so easy.

Apart from Chamundi Hill, there were also other old monuments of historical interest near Hassan. Hassan was the central place from which we made excursions.

Bangalore had a very British culture, and the Westerners all liked it. Baba appeared to go along with the Westerners in the sense that He seemed to be responsive to their interests. The *Diwan* of Mysore State, who had become very drawn to Baba, gifted Baba with a vast open space of a couple of square miles in Byramangala, away from the city, on which to build a universal spiritual center. A date was set for the groundbreaking ceremony, quite a big deal with all sorts of political big shots having been invited, including the *Diwan*—his position was essentially the Prime Minister of the state—who came as the guest of honor. Despite Baba being well known at the time, He would not allow the public much access to Him generally, apart from small *darshan* programs.

At that time there was a big anti-Baba movement afoot, led, in fact, by Colonel Irani, Mehera's own uncle, who was very active in attempting to debunk Baba! He would come to Bangalore and reserve big halls for the purpose of giving speeches impugning Baba. Baba strictly prevented the *mandali* from opposing this work despite their fervent desire to put up a rational defense, because, ironically, Colonel Irani's anti-Baba propaganda caused many people to find out about Baba. Over the years Baba always declared that He required opposition for His work to be most effective, and this was a prime example. Eventually, however, Baba sent Norina Matchabelli and Dr. Deshmukh to give pro-Baba speeches in the wake of this negative propaganda, so that people could learn more accurate details about Him.

At any rate the groundbreaking ceremony was scheduled, and a big group of these anti-Baba people had plotted to disrupt the ceremony. On the day the event was planned, they started heading towards the site, and it so happened that Padri, who had been given some work in Byramangala, saw a car ahead of him that was carrying several of these Baba-protesters. They had with them stacks of printed pamphlets that they intended to hand out to those gathered for the groundbreaking

ceremony, when all of a sudden Padri saw their car make a sharp turn and roll over just ahead of him. It was a serious accident, and he naturally stopped and rushed to help the people. It was at that time that he also found the anti-Baba literature, which was strewn all along the side of the road. Such were the ways of the Avatar: not only allowing the protest but also at the same time providing assistance to the protesters!

At the ceremony itself Baba was given a special silver spade that actually consisted of five metals, including gold and silver, with which to initiate the groundbreaking, along with a green granite stool on which to place the spade. As I've said, many dignitaries attended, and it was quite an affair.

My mother had previously given a very beautiful old-style *sari* to Baba's mother, and Shireenmai liked it very much. She had kept it for special occasions, and for this big event of the groundbreaking ceremony, she brought out that prized *sari* and put it on. Shireenmai really looked gorgeous in that *sari*.

The time came to go for the function—Byramangala was the place where the groundbreaking was to be done. A few of the residents of The Links who had been previously selected by Baba were to go to the ceremony. As the women were making their final preparations, Baba came along and said, "Mother, are you ready?" Suddenly Baba saw her all dressed up, wearing that rather ostentatiously elegant *sari*. Seeing this He said, "Mother, what is this?"

"Yes, Merog, don't you like this *sari* of mine?"

"No, Mother."

"What? How come?"

He said, "Look, Mother, see what I have on me? See this torn coat?" It was an extremely worn-out old coat that Baba was wearing, something like the *kamli* coat that He had worn for years together, tattered, essentially nothing but patches. "I am going in this coat, Mother, and will it look nice for you, being My mother, to be dressed up as a queen?"

"But then Merog, why don't You put on a good coat?"

“No, I am a *fakir*. So my mother should be dressed like the mother of a *fakir*. Please take off that *sari*.”

His mother was annoyed. “I know, Merog, that You never want me to look nice and well dressed.” She was really cross, very cross and very upset.

Baba replied, “No, Mother, that is not it at all. But you must get rid of this *sari* and put on the plainest one that you have.” She did it—she almost cried, but she did it—and my mother (Gaimai) was very impressed with this. Shireenmai would obey Baba, Who would bring her around by coaxing, showing pleasure, displeasure, whatever, but eventually getting her to follow His wishes. Shireenmai liked good things in life, was very talkative, very witty, and she was very good company. There was friction between Baba and her from time to time, so we had to be watchful and keep out of the way when we detected one of those episodes about to happen.

Once Shireenmai wanted to know about certain things that had happened in the ashram, but Baba replied evasively. “Merog,” she said, “call that little boy, call Meherwan. If he says that it is so, I will believe what You say.” So when I was called in, Baba made signs to me to look at His face when replying.

I should mention that earlier one time Papa had seen me in the ashram wearing a thin jacket even though the weather had turned cold. He wanted to know if I had been given warmer clothes, and I said no. He then turned to Baba and started complaining that he had left his children in Baba’s charge, and that Baba had promised to take care of them, and yet He wasn’t even providing adequate clothing.

After he had finished complaining to Baba and Baba had pacified him somehow and he had gone off, Baba turned to me and said, “Why did you say that? Didn’t you see Me giving you a sign?”

I said, “No, Baba,” and it was true because I had the habit, when I was in front of Baba, of looking down at the ground. Baba said, “When you’re with Me, don’t look at the ground, look at Me, and when I give you the sign, then say what I want you to say!”

So Baba was reminding me now to look at Him. And when His mother asked me the question, Baba winked at me, and I knew that Baba didn't want me to tell her what had really happened but to back up His story. But His mother got it all, and she said to Baba, "Merog, that is a small child, you know. Don't teach him to lie. It doesn't behoove You to make that little lad speak a lie."

Baba said, "I never said he should lie. I never said any such thing," but His mother was equally shrewd and could see what He was trying to do.

Another incident that occurred in Bangalore was quite humorous as well as instructive. It depicts how Baba is always taking care of all of us. Katie and my sister Manu were given the job to cook for the ashram in turns—one would cook one day, and the other the next, and so on. My mother and my aunt Gulamasi had to assist in the kitchen, because there were thirty or forty women to feed. Kitty was a help also, but the brunt of the cooking fell on the chief cooks.

My other sister, Meheru, was given Baba's personal work—washing Baba's clothes, attending to the cleaning of His room, and taking care of His personal items.

One day Baba came up from behind Manu and held her. She was a little nervous, and Baba said, "Do you feel anything"—meaning any jealousy—"that I have given all My personal work to Meheru and all this kitchen work to you?" Manu was taken aback, and she didn't know what to reply, because she had never had any such thought. Whatever Baba would give was always good enough for us. Such was Baba's influence, or whatever you may call it, that whatever He asked us to do was the thing to be done, the thing that we enjoyed doing. So Manu was taken aback by this question, but she gathered herself and said, "No, Baba. Whatever You give us is Your order, and I feel that what I do here is what would please You most, and I'm very happy about that. I didn't even have a thought about not being given any personal work."

Baba seemed extremely pleased with her answer, because there were some people in the ashram who would be a little cross if they didn't get

Baba's personal work. Baba wanted to know her mind. Of course, Baba knew, but He always wanted us to speak out what was in our minds. It was only a short while ago that Manu narrated to me her recollection of that incident in Bangalore.

It so happened that both my sisters had become very expert cooks by this time. One day Baba's mother came to Bangalore when we were at The Links. At that time the regimen of food was extremely strict: no spices, salt and pepper only, and maybe a little garlic or ginger—in short, very bland food. Baba's mother, as I've mentioned, had a liking for good, well-seasoned food. She was a lively personality with a zest for life—she liked the good things. She called Manu and said that she was sick of this bland food. "I'd like to have some nice spicy *patia*." *Patia* is a tomato dish, mainly eaten with *dal* and rice, which the Parsis prepare. It's sour and sweet, with vegetables and spices, with a good aroma to it. Manu said that she would do it with all her heart. Somewhere she found the additional spices that were required. At lunchtime she got the tray with the dish, and she walked into Shireenmai's room with it. Shireenmai said, "Yes, I smell something good after many days."

"I'm sure you will enjoy the dish, Maiji, I put all my heart and soul into it," said Manu. Impatiently Shireenmai opened the lid, and just as she was eating the first morsel, Baba arrived. Baba was silent, but in those days He used to utter a sound like "oom, oom." When they heard that sound, everybody turned around, and there was Baba in the doorway.

"I smell something unusual today. What's cooking?" He gestured.

Manu replied, "Baba, Mother asked me to prepare *patia* for her."

"What? *Patia*? By whose order?"

"Baba, Maiji asked."

"What? Don't you know My mother isn't well? That you shouldn't do such things? Let Me see what you have done." Baba took a little taste of it and continued, "You have prepared this spicy thing for My mother? Have you no sense in your head?" He got hold of her shirt collar and banged her head against the wall.

Shireenmai got scared a bit and started shouting, “Merog, leave that girl alone. It is I who ordered her to get that food for me. I was sick of this food here.”

Baba rejoined, “Mother, you are not well. Doctors advised you not to eat such things, and besides it is My order not to serve such spicy things here.” He went on and on, taking it out on Manu. “You are the one who will kill My mother? Let me see how it is.” Bite after bite Baba finished the whole thing.

Shireenmai said, “Merog, I know You like *patia*. If You had told me, I would have asked her to make more for You, but instead You finished all mine!”

“No, Mother, this is not good for you. Never do this again.”

So you see, although Baba allowed her liberties, He wouldn’t allow His mother to violate the orders of the ashram. So bland food was an order, and He came in the nick of time to save her from a transgression of His orders. All His acts were so spontaneous and natural, all in the flow of things, and yet they always had a deeper purpose.

Having been settled at Bangalore for some time, Baba decided to get all the baggage and belongings from Meherabad, and He instructed the *mandali* to bring everything, reserving a huge carriage on the railway for the purpose. Before the carriage reached Bangalore, however, Baba decided to move from there! “This place will not suit My work henceforth,” He declared. So it was that Baba would make His close ones subservient to His wishes, and when He wanted them to dissociate from something, He would do it this way. Lots of work done and undone, over and over again—that was the way of living with the Avatar.

All the work that had been started at Byramangala for the Universal Centre was stopped, and the land was returned to the farmers from whom it had been acquired by the *Diwan* as a gift to Baba. On the one hand the railway carriage full of the Meherabad items was coming, and on the other Baba was preparing to arrange transport to send it right back, along with the stuff already at Byramangala. Seeing this, someone

who had recently joined the ashram asked Baba what His plan was! To this question Baba replied very nonchalantly, “My plan is to have no plan, and that IS My plan!” Thus it was that Baba didn’t let His close ones become attached to anything or any place or anyone.



Chapter Four:

1940

Baba had also moved some of the *masts* with whom He was working to Bangalore, and in our compound a small place had been rigged up where they would feel at home. It resembled a sort of tea shop, which Donkin referred to as the “*mast* hotel.”

Chatti Baba was there, the most favored *mast* of the time. He was a *jamali mast*, a soft-spoken and gentle person, with a weakness for *rasam*, a tasty and refreshing South Indian preparation of tamarind juice with spices. He would be given liberal supplies of it. He also liked to have a lot of fine sand around, which Baba would make available for him to play around in just like a child, and he would also simply throw sand on himself.

Also in Bangalore a big straw hut was built for Baba to use for His seclusion work. The ashramites were told not even to look in the direction of the hut when Baba was in seclusion there, where He would sometimes stay for several days of intense work at a time. He also announced that He would break His silence during this period. One of the dates He announced was in 1940. He then announced that He was breaking His Silence to Himself, and that day we were asked to be very quiet and not make any noise. The day passed off very quietly and peacefully.

It was here, if I remember rightly, that Eruch had the experience of receiving a terrible shock from Chatti Baba. After Baba had been working with him one day, Chatti Baba came bolting out of the hut, and, while passing by Eruch, his *kafni* [long shirt] brushed against him, causing a severe electric-type shock from even that very slight contact.

I had no contact with the *masts* because Baba never encouraged us to have any such contact, unless He specifically called for it. I remember one *mast* called Chaddar Baba who, at the time Baba was doing this seclusion work with *masts*, was the chargeman of Bangalore. Kaka Baria was sent to fetch him, and day after day Kaka would try to coax him to come to Baba, finally one day succeeding in getting him into a taxi. "Why have you brought me into this place of Allah?" he demanded. He was a fiery (*jalali*) *mast*, and upon his arrival he proceeded to enter the women's ashram and go through all the rooms. Baba instructed everyone that he should not be obstructed in any way. My sister was cooking in the kitchen at the time, and he went in there and inspected all the cooking pots, and then made a hurried round of all the rooms in the bungalow. Baba then had a fleeting contact with him, after which the *mast* got back into the car and rode back to his seat in Bangalore. We learned that whatever the *masts* wanted had to be complied with, no matter the trouble to which one had to go. If they went off in a bad mood, Baba's work would be spoiled.

One time Baba took us in the Blue Bus to a place called Hassan, some hundred miles from Bangalore. My father was there at the time, and he had brought the pistol-shaped car that I have described earlier. It was because of the shape of this car (and perhaps because of his hair-trigger temper) that Baba's gesture for my father became a pistol. He was like a pistol, you know, very fiery.

I accompanied the party with Gustadji in my father's car, while the women rode in the Blue Bus, and Elizabeth's car was also there. In Hassan we stayed in a *dak* bungalow, which had a huge tamarind tree outside it. Many of the fruits had ripened and fallen on the ground, which led to the following incident.

Meheru and her sister, Naggu, who now lives in England, were staying in the ashram at that time, as well as Sarwar and myself. The four of us used to play little games among ourselves. We noticed the tamarind fruits, and we were tempted to taste what for us was “forbidden fruit”—Baba had told us not to eat sour things because they might cause us to develop a sore throat. When we thought nobody was watching us, however, we had a good feast on the fallen tamarinds.

We later realized that we were seen eating those forbidden fruits. We knew something would have to be said to Baba, and to remove the sour smell from our mouths, we gargled with water, so that if any ashramite might ask us if we had eaten them, we could lie convincingly. But to lie to Baba was impossible, so we considered some half-truths we might tell Him in case we were questioned by Him. We considered that we might say we ate just a little of the tamarinds, but that they had a sour taste and so we spit them out immediately (a half-truth because we did actually spit out the seeds). In short, we felt that we needed to be ready with some sort of ambiguous answer, given our forebodings about being discovered in our little disobedient adventure.

Of course we were called to Baba, and He proved to be in a stern mood. We were lined up before Him, and it was clear that our misdeeds had come to His ears. Baba asked Sarwar, “Did you eat (the tamarinds)?”

Somehow she said, “No, Baba.” I was asked and I said that I had spit part of it out, because, in truth, I had spat out the seed. Meheru was also asked the same question, and she also replied that she had eaten part of the tamarind and spat out the rest.

Baba asked, “Is there a stick around here somewhere?” Somebody handed Him an umbrella, and Baba gave Sarwar a whack on the head. He told Meheru to put out her hand and she got a whack. Then I had to put out my hand to receive a whack as well. At this point He again said to Sarwar, “Did you eat?”

“No, Baba.” Another whack, and another whack.

“*Tell the truth!* Did you eat (the tamarinds)?” Baba demanded. Eventually she had to tell Him that she had. I think that was the only time I got a whack from Baba in my whole life with Him. At the end we weren’t called back, but we were left to remember that Baba disapproved of our action and our not telling Him the entire truth. It was in truth not the whacks we got but the fact that we had displeased Baba that really hurt us the most.

I was not in the men’s ashram when my father joined it, so I don’t have any idea how he got along with the other ashramites. I do remember that some years later Baba sent my father to Rangoon to carry out some work for Him.

There was a hill station near Nasik called Ankai Hills, and at that place two or three of the *mandali* were given to Papa to manage. That was the first time the *mandali* had a taste of the military regimen that my father followed. Baba went out for a tour, and those people—Pleader, Savak Kotwal, Gustadji and one other *mandali* member named Bhabanand—were staying with Papa. One day Baba received a long letter from Gustadji, who wrote that they had been left in the charge of a dictator. Gustadji went on, “In all my life with several Perfect Masters, and even with the Avatar, I have never undergone such rigorous discipline, and if You don’t call me back, I give You notice that I will leave You and leave here. I cannot carry on like this anymore.”

Gustadji then went on to describe the daily routine: arise at 2:00 a.m., when all had to bathe and be ready for whatever Papa’s orders were; then breakfast at 4:00 a.m. Some absurd timings were there for other things, and then lunch at 9:00 or 10:00 a.m., and at 2:00 p.m. there was the evening meal! “Have you ever heard of any such thing in the world?” Gustadji wrote. “And if anybody protests, Papa goes into a tantrum, and he shouts at us. Immediately You send for me or I am going away!”

Baba had the letter read out and had a good laugh, and He called them back to Him. That’s how my father was received by the *mandali*. He

was not a very popular ashram manager. He was especially strict, however, because Baba had told him as He handed over the charge of these *mandali* that Papa should be extra strict with them. But that is how we had been brought up, with very strict discipline, and it served Eruch in really good stead. Because of that upbringing, Eruch was able to obey all of Baba's instructions in later years. Baba's order to Papa had been to manage the ashram, and he had done the best that he could.

Baba stayed in Bangalore until the school summer break in April, 1940, after which He went back to Meherabad. That was the first time I accompanied the party on a Blue Bus journey. As I've described, I didn't always ride in the Blue Bus. Our conveyances consisted of the Blue Bus, which carried most of the women *mandali*, plus an Opel that Sarosh had sent from Ahmednagar with a driver, plus Elizabeth's car, which may have been a Pontiac, plus our Auburn—previously Papa's car—which Baba had given to His brother Jal to drive and use when Baba didn't require it.

Gustadji and I rode in the front seat of the Opel sent by Sarosh. In the rear seat were Gulamasi and someone else—I don't recollect who. Baba was in Elizabeth's car with Mehera, Khorshed, Mani and perhaps Naja, while Jalbhai was driving the Auburn.

On the journey Gustadji was my companion in the car, and he taught me his sign language to break the monotony of the travel. He always had interesting yarns that he would tell me. He taught me very patiently. Each sign was a letter. He could go quite fast, and eventually I could read quite fast. In the heat, the glare and the dust, we still got along. It was May, the hottest part of our summer, though the hilly parts had quite a pleasant climate, with a wild jasmine scent.

I think after Bangalore my father went back, but of course my mother was part of the party. Shireenmai was not with the bus, however, because her health was not strong enough to withstand such a journey. Whenever she felt well enough, she would join the group.

We started from Bangalore early in the morning with all the contents of The Links that had been accumulated. Rano packed up everything, a huge mound of luggage, which had to be put on the top luggage rack of the bus. Every available space was jam-packed with so many women. The bus had a nice powerful Chevrolet engine, and it never gave us trouble on the road. It was a terribly hot time to travel, and Baba had given an order that nobody should drink water along the way. Consequently I was extremely thirsty. By mid-afternoon we reached a small town, Sakkara, and it was blazing hot when we reached the *dak* bungalow. Only one glass of water was allotted per person, so I was still quite parched after drinking it.

A general meeting was called at the *dak* bungalow, Baba in a very serious mood, and the subject of His discourse was “Limit”—I still remember that. How one had to stay within certain limits, and there was a limit to everything, even in the worldly sense. There were people who were crossing limits, so Baba was probably lecturing them. Baba kept coming back to that word. Mani was reading the board. It was *extempore*, no notes, so something must have upset Him. Not even the slightest disturbance would be brooked in those circumstances while Baba was talking in that mood.

We were later in Shimoga, where we were housed in a palatial building filled with rich antiques. It was said there was a prized antique vase there that had the power of reviving a dying person who drank water from it. We stayed there for probably a few days while Baba’s *mast* work was in full swing.

Another incident reminds me that Kaka Baria and Dr. Donkin were also there with us as well. After passing Shimoga we had to cross the *ghats* to get to the coastline, which was the intermediate destination on this trip to Meherabad. Kaka, sitting next to the driver, was instructed by Baba that he should keep the bus on the road and not take any detours. Our car was following the bus, whereas Baba’s car would go on ahead of us. We would be there behind it if anything happened to the bus.

A big archway had been created over that road, all gaily decorated. The arch had probably been put there for some wedding party. It was a bit low for the bus, which was loaded with luggage right to the top—the bus looked like a moving hillock, the load was so high.

Kaka stopped the bus and got down and took a closer look at the situation. He knew that if the bus tried to pass beneath it, the arch would be left in shambles. So, having forgotten Baba's instructions, Kaka said, "Let's take a little detour around the arch to avoid going under it." Accordingly the bus was driven off the road, and no sooner had it left than the side of the road proved to be nothing but mud. The bus sank down in the slush right to the axles. It had probably rained heavily the night before, and so the ground next to the road had become a pool of mud. Howsoever much the driver tried to extract the bus, the wheels just spun and spun. The bus was well and truly stuck, and we had also followed the bus in our car and likewise got struck. To add to our predicament, Baba's standing instructions were also not to fall too far behind His car.

Villagers came to see this circus-like sight of our vehicles stuck in the mud. Meheru's little brother, Jangu, had recently joined the ashram and he was also in the bus. He was very small, and he was crying nonstop, and it was all hot and stuffy in the bus.

Surveying the situation, Kaka told the women all to get down. From behind the curtains, they informed him that Baba's instructions were that they were not permitted to get down until the bus reached the destination. Kaka said, "But the bus is stuck. If you don't get down, we cannot move."

"That's your problem, not ours," they responded.

Kaka was starting to sweat at that point, because he now realized that he had overlooked Baba's little instruction not to leave the road. Kaka asked the villagers to get a couple of bullock carts to help pull the bus out of the slush. They agreed, and they got two bullock carts with big, thick ropes to try to get the bus out, but it was so stuck that both of those

thick ropes broke, without any real movement of the bus. Fortunately Baba must have sensed the situation, because He asked Elizabeth to turn the car around and returned to find the tragi-comic scene.

“What happened? How is it that the bus is there?” He asked Kaka.

“Baba, forgive me for forgetting Your instructions,” Kaka replied, and he prostrated himself before Baba on the road. Baba told Elizabeth to hitch the car to the front fender with a small steel cable she had, and He permitted the women to get down from the bus. Then, with just a little tug, the bus came loose.

Baba said, “Was the arch important or was My order more important? Now, remember, don’t go off the road, try to follow My car, and don’t delay!” Baba reiterated these orders because, as it turned out, the journey to come would be still more difficult.

We all heaved a sigh of relief, but little did we know what trouble still lay in store for us. As we proceeded it became dark as we reached the start of the *ghats* (mountain roads)—these are some of the most difficult *ghats* in India to negotiate, second only to the Bombay-Poona *ghats*: hairpin bends, thickly wooded, with precipices on one side and sheer cliffs on the other.

It was now dark, so the headlights had to be put on, but they failed to work! So Kaka asked the women to pass him their torches [i.e., flashlights]. While he sat above one of the mud guards—literally sitting on one of the front fenders—someone else sat on the other, and they tried to shine enough light forward for the driver to negotiate these hairpin turns. All the while Jangu, the little child, was inside the jammed-full bus wailing and screaming without a break!

There was no moon that evening so it was pitch black. We were in the middle of a forest with those breathtakingly steep drops and hairpin bends. The slightest mistake would have sent the bus hurtling several hundred feet down in no time. And the only light was what Kaka and someone else could provide sitting on the fenders with those little flashlights so the driver could just make out the road! You can imagine what a stressful situation it was!

Meanwhile Jangu, the little infant, was continuing to cry his lungs out. Kaka bellowed, "Can somebody keep that child quiet? I'm having enough difficulty with keeping this bus on the road." But what could anybody do? We were all repeating Baba's Name loudly and imploring His help. To make matters worse, each little flashlight rapidly lost its charge, so it would have to be swapped for another, often even dimmer light.

Eventually, by Baba's Grace, we negotiated those difficult bends and came to the top of the *ghats*. There we halted. As we were traveling slowly down the *ghats*, all the flashlights had gone out. Again, Baba must have sensed that something was wrong, because He sent Donkin back in another car to look for us. We were all stuck now, because with no lights Kaka couldn't proceed.

Donkin was a good engineer, and when he arrived he started fiddling around under the bus. He saw that the wire that connected the battery to the headlights had been broken off by the unfortunate off-road excursion when the bus had sunk in the mud earlier in the day. It was hanging loose, and he reconnected that wire, and the lights of the bus came on.

Kaka was frantic by now and greatly upset over the mistake he had made. We all shouted Baba's "*Jai!*" and eventually proceeded to Jog Falls. Baba was waiting for us there in the *dak* bungalow, and He inquired as to why we had arrived so late. Baba had arranged that we were to see the Jog Falls that very night. The party arrived, exhausted and frightened, with the last of their energy sapped by the day's ordeal, but Baba said, "You all are so late. Come along, get ready, I have arranged for you to see the Jog Falls tonight."

The *dak* bungalow was on the edge of a precipice. On the front of it was the river that was flowing fast, and it took a big fall, eighty to a hundred feet or more, a very big fall, and Baba wanted these falls to be seen at night. Elizabeth, as instructed by Baba, had hired people who were sent to the other side of the deep chasm with straw bales, which they were to set on fire and dump into the river. It would make a brilliant spectacle when those burning bales of straw went over the falls.

Back at the *dak* bungalow, there was a huge carpet in the main room, and Baba told us to unroll it. He said that we should all sit on the carpet and watch the display outside. “Observe this—I want you all to see this,” He said. But then someone came with the message that this was not the place with the best view, and that a place had been reserved for Baba’s party at the correct place for best viewing.

It turns out that we had arrived at the second-class *dak* bungalow, and the view was much better at a higher vantage point from the first-class *dak* bungalow, where we were supposed to stay. So Baba said, “Roll up the carpet. Get ready quickly, and we’ll move on to the higher bungalow.” On this pretext everyone was forced to pack up everything, put all the luggage back on the bus, and drive up to the first-class *dak* bungalow for better viewing. Nobody dared say anything although everyone’s eyes were drooping with fatigue.

There, at the higher bungalow, another big carpet had to be unrolled. We all sat there on the carpet, and then the signal was given and the lighted straw bales were thrown into the fast-moving river. It was really a breathtaking sight, the falls lit up by the burning bales of straw contrasting with the surrounding dark, dense forests. The place was a tourist attraction of sorts at the time, but none of the thousands of tourists who had seen the falls had ever seen them like this, with the Avatar in their midst. It was past midnight by the time the whole evening was over, at which point we had to unroll the bedding rolls and lie down without eating—nobody was in the mood because by now everyone was totally exhausted! And early the next morning we had to proceed to our next stop on the travels. It was like living in a mobile ashram with Baba, with many of the restrictions and disciplines that He imposed on His *mandali* in the early days.

From there we proceeded to Amboli, a very scenic place on the edge of the mountain, where we could see several mountain ranges, one after the other. Behind them was the coastline. At Amboli a Christian boy was picked up as part of the ongoing search for the “perfect boy.”

Baba had instituted a search for the “perfect boy” previously, and that search went on for years. Different boys would be brought, and each one would be with Baba for some time. I remember that one boy was even brought to Bindra House years later, and Baba would spend time with him, converse with him, and the boy began to recognize Baba’s gestures. So many different boys were brought over the years.

At Guruprasad many years later we were sitting around Baba, and I remember Baba telling Baidul to go to Bombay to search for a boy. Baba said that even if he had the face of the moon (meaning even if he were “beautiful”), if he had sweat on his hands, Baidul shouldn’t bring him.

The meaning of Baba’s internal working in this regard remains unknown to us. Maybe that work was sowing His seed of love for future generations; we can only guess. It had something to do with an aspect of His work that He never explained.

Anyway, this particular boy may have been named Antun—I can’t remember precisely. Baba liked him, and the boy was asked to accompany the party. Somehow his parents agreed to part with him. He was older than I was, but he was essentially illiterate, somewhat typical for a Goanese family in those days. He was so primitive that he had never seen a timepiece, and so I taught him how to read a clock. Baba passed by on one occasion, and He was pleased that I was teaching him. Antun was very intelligent and picked up things very quickly.

From Amboli we went to Sawantwadi, and I remember that the *Rani* of Sawantwadi held a big tea party out in the gardens of the palace in Baba’s honor. We were all disheveled from our travels, but we had to go straight to the palace for the party.

From Sawantwadi we proceeded to Karwar, which was a small sea port at that time. It is now a big naval dockyard! Elizabeth had arranged for us to stay in a nice hotel that was right on the sea front. During this time Baba was traveling incognito, so we made up a name for Him: “Babousi.” Baba wanted to be undisturbed for His work, and we were told not to disclose His Name to anyone there.

During one of our meals a waiter who was serving us got curious. That waiter cornered me when I was alone and asked me who the gentleman was who was traveling with the large group of Eastern and Western disciples, meaning Baba, of course. Being a kid I blurted out, “He’s God. His Name is Meher Baba!” I wasn’t supposed to say anything, but I had done so, innocently, of course, but there it was.

The next day that waiter came with his family for *darshan*. “How did that fellow come to know? Who revealed My identity?” Baba inquired. Eventually I was caught. Baba tweaked my ear and reminded me that nobody should know about Him. I was small and so innocent, but I remembered the lesson.

At Karwar we went with the women to the beaches. Baba would stand on the edge of the water with His *paichas* [pant legs] drawn up. The waters would rush up, and it seemed as if He were blessing the ocean, but what work He was doing, we don’t know. It was a very scenic place with beautiful shells washed up on the sand.

One particular beach to which Baba took us had huge waves, yet despite this He asked the women to go swimming. I remember that my sister Meheru went, but she had no idea how to dive under a wave! As she went out into the water, she kept being pushed back to the shore. She kept trying, and Baba had a nice laugh. Eventually Baba told her to come back because she didn’t know how to get through. The other women did manage to get out quite a distance.

From Karwar we continued on to Panjim, in Goa. The hotel we went to in Panjim, Hotel Republica, was supposed to be the best in town, but in fact it was very dirty—a typical Goanese hotel for those times.

In Panjim Baba took us to different tourist spots. One of them was the church of St. Francis Xavier, which had his embalmed body visible in a glass casket. Baba Himself took us there. It was on a day when the basilica wasn’t usually open to visitors, but Baba wanted to go there, so Elizabeth had taken special permission for Baba to visit and see St. Francis Xavier’s body.

While in Goa Baba suddenly asked for the car to be halted, and a tall, lean, well-dressed old man with a long white beard came and opened the door. Everybody was shocked and tried to push the man off, but Baba said not to do it. A few signs were exchanged, and the man went away. Later Baba said that it had been one of His agents and that they had had an appointment. So it was that we got slight glimpses of the internal workings of the Avatar from time to time, but it was all done in secrecy. The same man came the next day, met Baba again, and then left.

Goa was the highlight—going to St. Francis’ cathedral—but of course we had problems crossing the border because there was a strict customs barrier. Goa was still in Portuguese hands at that time. That was the period in which Baba asked Khorshed to carry the bag that contained “The Book” that He had written. Baba instructed Khorshed to see that the bag should never touch the ground. The customs people opened everything, but somehow they failed to notice that bag. Goanese officials were not on good terms with the British officials, so they were quite difficult. Goa had a different culture, with a language, Konkani, which is greatly influenced by Portuguese.

As far as I could perceive it, there was no question of whether Baba liked or did not like this place or that place. It was all related to His work. My impression was that the journeys were all incidental to His inner work and His contacts with *masts* and agents. Baba was decisive about the trip details—we’d leave when He had finished His work, no tarrying even for a moment, but the next place we would go to would not necessarily be in a straight line back to Meherabad. All of us with Him were just going along for the ride.

From Goa we headed back to Meherabad. There were a few other stops along the way. We visited Belgaum, and a funny incident occurred there. Elizabeth asked that we all be given ice cream because it was so hot, and Baba agreed, but He also stipulated, “After ice cream you must have garlic chutney, each one of you. Garlic chutney is a must, because otherwise you will get a sore throat from eating ice cream in this hot weather.” You should have seen Elizabeth’s face, because she absolutely detested garlic.

That chutney had to be brought, of course, because Baba had required it, and the ice cream had to be eaten. Nobody could back out at that point.

Belgaum was a very beautiful place. One of the *mandali*, Vishnu Master, had relatives there, and so we visited them. Belgaum also has another association, much later in Baba's Advent, with the New Life, because it was the place where Baba trained the New Life companions in 1949. It is in a region that receives a fair amount of rainfall, so it is typically cool there. Karnataka and Maharashtra have an ongoing dispute about which state owns the place, a city where both Kannada and Marathi are spoken—they are not related languages, and if you can speak one, you may still not understand much of the other.

From Belgaum we continued our journey via Mahabaleshwar and Panchgani, where Baba took us sightseeing. We stayed in a hotel where Norina and Elizabeth hosted a macaroni party! In Panchgani Baba took us to visit the "Table Land." This large, flat expanse of laterite rock is the second longest mountain plateau in Asia. From there we travelled via Poona, where Baba stopped at His mother's home and visited Maiji—His mother—and Jalbhai and Beheram and his family.

The Blue Bus and the cars then went straight to Ahmednagar, directly to Sarosh Cinema, and there we watched two movies in the middle of the afternoon after traveling all those miles. *The Wizard of Oz* was one of the two films. The Christian boy from Goa was sitting with me during the film, but that was the last I saw of him. Afterwards Baba put him in the care of Sarosh Irani, the one-time mayor of Ahmednagar and one of the early members of the *mandali*, to be trained as a cinema projectionist, and he served for many years in that capacity.

After the films we went straight to Happy Valley that very afternoon. Some British soldiers had discovered this ancient and historic place and named it such, but the local name is Dongargan, meaning "plateau on a hill." The site is at a lower elevation, a deep valley in the Deccan Plateau. At that time of year there was a lot of water, and there were some waterfalls at the time we visited.

There was a *dak* bungalow in Happy Valley, a building with several levels—the ground floor isn't actually the bottom floor because there are further floors leading down into the valley. Baba would take us on walks into the forest that surrounded the area at that time.

I had been to Happy Valley once before, with Masaji in 1938 after that train journey on which Masaji lost me, and now it was 1940, a couple of years later. A short while after arriving there with Baba on this trip, He sent my family and me, together with Eruch and Sarwar, back to Bangalore, because our school term was about to start there.



Chapter Five:

1940 - 1942

Eventually, then, we went back to Bangalore. Baba had arranged for my family to have a rented bungalow there. My mother, sisters, Eruch and I lived there, and Eruch stayed there for most of the time from 1940 to 1942. Sarwar and I continued with our respective schooling. Baba had His last meeting with Upasni Maharaj in Dahigaon on the 17th of October, 1941, and some time afterwards Baba drove all the way to our cottage, a day-and-a-half's journey.

Baba was expected to arrive at ten in the night, and we were all anxiously awaiting Him. He got delayed, however, and I was so sleepy that I dozed off, but Baba stayed up the whole night with the family. Baba told them not to wake me up from my slumber. He was in a very good mood, and Manu remembers the stories He told that night. "Today is a great day. The entire universe is on My shoulders now." Maharaj, it seems, had given Him something in the sense of spiritual responsibility or authority. "Maharaj wept on My behalf, and he asked Me to break My Silence, because otherwise he knew that I would have to suffer tremendously."

The meeting between Baba and Upasni Maharaj had been very powerful, occurring in a secluded place, all screened off. Nobody was allowed to look. Baba stayed for the night at our cottage on this visit, and then He went off on a *mast* tour the next morning.

Adi Sr. was also in Bangalore at the time, and the office (for Baba's work) was still there. Bangalore was Baba's official office site. Adi's sister, Dolly, stayed with us, but Adi resided by himself, managing Baba's office. The *Meher Baba Journals* were edited and printed in Ahmednagar, through the Mohan Press. They were then distributed via Bangalore by Adi K. Irani because the office was situated there.

One time while Baba was in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), we received a telegram ordering us to join Him in Kandy, a scenic hill station there. Ceylon being a separate country from India, we had to have smallpox and cholera shots in order to travel there, and after we had done all that but before we could set out, Baba finished His work in Ceylon and moved on to Calicut, in the southern Indian state of Kerala! From there He sent us a telegram saying that we should join Him there instead, so we went to be with Him in Calicut for some time.

I recall one funny little incident from that time. Baba called me into His room, and He said to me, "When I clap, you must start smiling and remain so. When I clap again, you must assume a serious face and keep that. Can you do that?"

"Yes, Baba, I can do it."

So He clapped and I smiled, and He clapped again and I became serious. "Oh, you do it nicely!" He said. Baba would come out with such funny little things like this one little incident—have you ever heard of such a thing? What and why were not for us to know.

While in Calicut Baba ordered some pure palm *tadi* ["toddy" is mildly fermented sap of the date palm tree] for everyone—both the women and the men *mandali*. The supplier, however, had unfortunately adulterated it with an intoxicant. Baba gave each of the women a mug full of the drink, but when my turn came I was given just a couple of sips, although I looked longingly at Him hoping for more. He asked me to move away, and it turned out to be just as well because in a short while, as we were having snacks and drinks, Mehera started to behave strangely. She kept embracing Baba. Then another of the women uttered a strange noise and

began to dance. One by one each of the women started acting strangely. Baba asked me to go to sit in Soonamasi's place and keep watch in her stead while all this drama was unfolding inside. My sister Meheru was affected in such a way that she went around slapping everyone quite hard, trying to get them to stop acting so strangely and to lie down. There was a lot of chaos and confusion, and some even started vomiting. Eventually the drug wore off, and everyone fell fast asleep for some time.

We were in Calicut some time in late 1940, and then we went on to Jaipur with Baba. It was a very long train journey, all the way from the south of India to the north. Baba had reserved a large third-class carriage for all the women and children. Meheru and Naggu were there because they were on vacation from their school in Deolali. Sarwar and I were also along on the trip because we, too, had holidays.

While approaching Jaipur we saw flocks of wild peacocks on either side of the tracks, beautiful in all their colorful splendor. It was an unforgettable sight.

In Jaipur Baba stayed in a big bungalow with high walls surrounding it. We were scared of lions and other wild animals that were prevalent in the vicinity, and we were required to be in our rooms when darkness fell. Jaipur was quite forested at that time, and Baba took us to the various palaces, one of which, Amber, had a room entirely covered with mirrors. It was said that in the old times it had been embedded with actual diamonds, but in any case the whole room was full of light. Jaipur was called the Pink City. *Rajputs* ruled here—they were *Kshatriyas*, the warrior caste of Hindus. There were also camels and peacocks aplenty in that area.

It was in early 1941, the warm months, and I was on summer vacation. It was the season of flies, and Margaret Craske, frustrated by their constant presence, thought of a novel method to keep them away when she was eating. She spread syrup on her legs so that the flies were attracted to that instead of her food, and in that way she was able to eat her meal in peace. Otherwise, the swarming flies were terrible—they covered our plates, making it almost impossible to eat.

In Jaipur I saw Baba fly a kite for the first time. Mani handled the *fitti*, that is, the spool. These were “fighting kites” with glass powder embedded in the string of the kite for a certain length up near the top, and people would direct their kites to try to cut the strings of the other kite-fliers. Mani had a big role to play because she had to let out the string quickly enough to avoid a bad attack from the other kite-fliers.

At one point Baba and another boy outside the compound became engaged in a kite battle. Mani failed to release the thread fast enough, and Baba’s kite got cut down, so, as is the custom, the boy won Baba’s kite. In the process Baba’s finger got cut and began to bleed. Mumma rushed out with a bandage and bound His finger, rather like Draupadi binding Krishna’s finger with a strip of her priceless *sari* during that earlier Advent.

It was about this time that “The Seven Realities” was published, and Baba had Norina read them aloud as we were sitting out in the compound. I was still in the women’s ashram, and I could see Mehera, though I was not allowed to touch her. I was very friendly with Mani, who was also young and full of mischief and innocent games. We played *gilli-danda*, which Baba would also sometimes play, and other children’s games. I revered Mehera from a distance and took care not to touch her. No other males were ever allowed to be there in the same compound as the women.

There is another funny incident I remember from Jaipur. Baba was giving us a sublime discourse, when suddenly Kitty barged in saying “Baba, here is the market list and my slippers to be repaired!” Kitty, as usual, was oblivious to what was going on.

Baba replied, “From the heights you brought Me down to manage the marketing! My mood is now spoiled.” Poor Kitty might have been the excuse for Baba not telling us things that He intended not to tell. She was a beautiful soul, Kitty, and though the ashram people would sometimes tease her about her absent-mindedness, she never took it to heart. She was always friendly, cheerful and laughing, and Baba was ever taking her side, protecting her. Baba’s hand was behind each and every thing—otherwise you couldn’t have lasted in the ashram, you’d be swept

away. It could be very rough. While we were there we continued to sing “*Hari Parmatma*,” led by Mani, and “*Tu Niraakaar Parvardigar, Ahurmazd, God Allah Hu*,” which Katie would lead.

When it was time for my school to reopen in early 1941, we were sent back from Jaipur to Bangalore, and we stayed there. Meheru and Naggu were also sent back to their school in Deolali, and so they accompanied us up to Bombay. Eruch often helped me in my studies—he would actually give me tuition—and I received good marks. I was weak in Urdu, my second language, but Urdu was easier than the other choices, Persian or French, because there were so many Hindi words in Urdu. I had to have a special tutor for the script however. During that time I occasionally got letters from Baba, written by Mani and signed by Him. We always wanted to have news from wherever Baba was, and He would keep us informed. That was our stay in Bangalore.

By the spring of 1942, the war was coming to a very critical state. The Japanese could have overrun India. At that time Indian troops were in Africa and Arabia supporting the British, so there were few left in the country to defend India. There was some strength here, but the Japanese were in full force, and they could have done serious damage.

The city of Calcutta was under attack—the Japanese had gone through Burma, and my father was very worried. Baba was in Dehra Dun at that time, while we had prepared everything to leave Bangalore. The whole house was packed up, but we continued to stay on, month after month, using only a few clothes, so that we could start out within hours of Baba’s call. Then there was a scare as a rumor spread that Bangalore was to be bombed. People left the city in droves, though we stayed put. The rumor turned out to be false, of course, and the people came back. One day shortly after that incident we received a telegram from Baba to come immediately to Dehra Dun. Eruch got our school-leaving certificates, and we started on the long journey northward.

It was a very long journey, and besides, it was a very difficult time to travel because of the war effort. Railways were mostly hauling military

cargo and troops in place of ordinary passengers, so the number of trains available to the general public was severely restricted. All the trains were therefore overcrowded with people, and there was often a sense of panic among the passengers.

Somehow we managed to get on with all our baggage—we had to put some of it in the brake van, but we set forth. Later in the journey we were stranded at the Secunderabad railway station for three days and three nights. There was a blackout owing to the threat of a bombing, and everyone was scared that Japanese bombers would mount an air attack on the city.

Eruch, however, did all that he could to make our stay comfortable. He ordered out good food and drinks from nearby hotels and made merry in spite of the difficulties. We were having a joyous time, in great anticipation of seeing Baba after such a long time. Somewhere on the way, with all of the chaos of the travel, all of our baggage got lost. The only possessions we had left were our hand luggage and a few rupees to cover the traveling expenses. In short, we were destitute.

When we managed to take the next leg of our trip to Delhi, the city was pitch black because of the continuing threat of bombing by the Japanese. Baba had told us not to sightsee, but we did go to the Red Fort, Qutub Minar and Jantar Mantar—whatever major attractions we could see during the one day when we had a long time until our next train arrived, the connecting train that left that night for Dehra Dun.

In Delhi, then, we waited for the connecting train to Dehra Dun, which was overnight, and I remember that we were trying to move the bedding rolls and handbags at the station in pitch darkness. The next day we finally reached Dehra Dun at 10:00 a.m. or so, and we went directly to the gates of the place where Baba was staying. Soonamasi was there keeping watch as usual, and she informed Baba that we had arrived. Baba called us in and greeted us with the words, “Why are you here? Who asked you to come over here?”

Eruch said that we had received a telegram to come, and so we came.

Baba said, "Show Me the telegram." Baba looked at it and then asked Eruch to look at the place of origin of the telegram. It had been sent from Ahmednagar. Baba said, "I never sent this telegram! Go back!" So we all turned back and started walking out of the gate. We were standing by the gate wondering where to go because, as I have mentioned, we had lost all of our belongings and were utterly destitute. At that moment Baba sent word calling us back.

When we were in front of Him, Baba asked us where our baggage was. We told Him that it had all been lost during our journey.

"What is this? You've come to sit on My chest like this? As if I have no other work?"

Baba could be very difficult sometimes, and He had already made it known that we were unwelcome. Eventually He said, "All right, since you have come, then stay." We were given a place to stay in the ashram, and after the initial hostile reception we forgot all about it. To be with Baba once again washed away all the difficulties of our journeys, and within no time we began enjoying being in the ashram. We did, however, feel hurt to have displeased Baba—it was not that we received a bad reception, but to have displeased Him was the thing that hurt us. That was a natural response for us—at least that was how I felt. We cursed ourselves to have been such useless people that we had caused Him displeasure.

At this point, of course, we didn't have even a change of clothing, so we had to borrow clothes. I got Mani's little shirt so that mine could get washed. We did not have even a comb to comb our hair.

My father was staying in Akbar Press in Ahmednagar at the time, and we later learned that he had been very worried about our welfare. It turned out that it was he who had sent the telegram! He was the one who wrote "You all should come to Dehra Dun." Somehow Papa did it, but maybe, and I should say, naturally, it was Baba's doing in the end. Adi was also allowed to leave Bangalore and move back to Khushru

Quarters in Ahmednagar. It seemed that Baba's work in Bangalore was over, though He never explicitly said so. Eventually Papa also joined us all in Dehra Dun.

So then we were in Dehra Dun, and I had to be entered once again in a new school. There were two choices: one was the famous Doon School, where all the big shots' sons went, but I was in the other one, the St. Joseph's School.

Those two schools competed against each other in every way. Whenever I changed schools, I would lag behind in my studies, simply owing to being a late-comer in that particular school. Baba would often enter me in the higher class, just beyond my actual level, and accordingly I had to come up to the standard of the class. That happened again in Dehra Dun, so all day every day I was working on my studies in order to catch up. Baba wanted me to study hard and do well, and so Eruch was again given the task of coaching me, and he had given me a strict timetable for my studies—morning to evening!

Ultimately I decided to revolt out of sheer boredom, or rather, the tedium of it all—I had no time to play! I decided to complain to Eruch, to tell him, "What is this timetable you have made for me? I have no time to play!"

But Eruch was staying with the men, which was some distance away, so I made up an imaginary school problem and wrote it down on a note that I put in my pocket. That way, in case anyone asked me where I was going, I could say I had to see Eruch to get help to solve this made-up problem.

I got the little cycle that had been given to me in Dehra Dun—it was kept a distance away from where we stayed in the ashram. As I was getting the bike out, suddenly I saw Baba on the veranda beckoning to me, "Hey, you! Come here! What are you doing?" I tried to explain that I was going to Eruch to solve this "problem," but Baba was, of course, cleverer than I was, and He turned to Vishnu Master who was nearby and told him, "You attend to his problem and get it solved for him." Baba then said to me, "Now go back and return to your studies." So my little revolt ended

before it even began. It seemed that whenever I tried to do something out of self-interest, in a very natural way Baba was always present to make sure that I didn't succeed. Baba would often get on my bicycle and ride around the veranda, where the cycle used to be parked.

In Dehra Dun we were given "segregated" rooms, that is to say, no one was allowed to step into the room of another person. I think this was the beginning of the dissolution of the ashram life of the earlier days where there was much more communal living and one could enter another's room freely. Even before that, so many women were sent away to their homes, and men also, and the size of the ashram was dwindling. The Dehra Dun ashram still had good numbers, but after that it began to come down. Baba was also in the beginning phase of hectic *mast* tours and seclusion work that would continue all through the war years.

Whenever Baba would begin His seclusion work, everybody needed to be in his or her own room and not cause the slightest disturbance, because Baba's work was very intense and He was very easily disturbed.

During one of these periods of Baba's work in seclusion, my aunt Gulamasi had a big alarm clock that was not working properly. We were all inside our rooms, barely whispering, mostly gesturing to communicate. Probably out of boredom, someone among the women got the idea to try to fix the clock, and ever so quietly, we started to open the thing to see what wasn't working. All of a sudden the alarm of that Big Ben clock went off, ringing loudly! We were all scared stiff, knowing how particular Baba was about our keeping quiet while He was working, and no amount of fiddling with the clock would stop the alarm! Even when we put it under several pillows, it kept making noise until finally the spring unwound.

After Baba's seclusion was over that day, there was a meeting with everyone present in which Baba asked all about it, and He expressed His displeasure with us. In the end He simply said, "Be more careful the next time."

While in Dehra Dun during the war, Baba instructed Margaret Craske, the English ballet instructor, to teach the women the appropriate air raid procedures that would apply in the case of attack. As part of the routine in the ashram, then, Margaret taught us how to drop everything and immediately get under the furniture, or if outside, to drop to the ground with chest raised up and our hands over our ears. We enjoyed these little “war games,” and whatever work Baba did through this activity we have no idea. One time He asked us what we had learned from Margaret, and in response I demonstrated the technique of retreating under the furniture, and Baba seemed well pleased with the alertness with which I had demonstrated the exercise.

Another part of the daily routine involved the precautions that we learned to take against *goondas* or “hooligans” if we ever encountered them. It was presumed that in the event of an air raid, there would consequently be looting by hooligans, because there were hooligan gangs around. To counter this threat, each member of the ashram was given a stick with a big knob on the top, and each person’s name was inscribed on that knob on the top of the stick. Baba told us to keep the sticks near the bedding rolls. To prepare us for a hooligan attack Margaret instructed us with regard to tactics, such as aiming for the knees and so on. Using a paper roll representing a stick, she would simulate an attack and demonstrate what to do in varying circumstances. We went through these exercises practically every day, and in this way we learned how to protect ourselves.

One day Baba took all the women and me to a cinema show entitled *Citizen Kane*. We dressed in our best clothes, and He took us on foot all the way from the ashram to the city. This was quite a distance, and Baba was walking at a very quick pace, so we had to work to keep up with Him. We saw the film all the way to the end, which was unusual for Baba, Who more usually would leave once He had completed the work He was doing with the crowds attending a cinema. It was an evening film show, and afterwards we walked back in the night. Very recently I read that there is great interest in a revival of this film.

I was friends with Dr. Nilu, who liked to exercise on his own. He was strong and muscular, and I asked him to teach me some exercises. His lodging was very close to the women's ashram, while the rest of the men *mandali* resided some distance away. During the day he would go be with the men *mandali*, and then he would return to his place near us later in the day. I would watch for his return so that I could go and learn some exercises from him.

One day I rushed out, thinking that I was late and might miss Nilu. Baba was on the veranda, and He asked me why I was rushing out. Baba held me by the hand and started walking rapidly to and fro on the veranda. I tried to keep my plan from Baba, but He made me tell Him. Baba said, "Why didn't you tell Me this before?" I explained that it had seemed so simple and trivial that I was a little embarrassed to mention it.

"No, no, you must tell Me everything when I ask," He said. See what patience He had to get me to tell Him this small thing, walking with me and then finally drawing it out of me. Baba called Mani and sang my praises to her, which changed the mood entirely and made me feel elated.

With these experiences I learned that no matter how simple an issue was, I should never hesitate to tell Baba about it. It was the biggest enigma that we all faced. There we were face-to-face with the One Who was All-knowing, and yet He seemed to know nothing at all about what was going on around Him. His humanity was so tangible, so real. He wasn't assuming ignorance—He actually *was* "not-knowing," although He was All-knowing! Once, much later, Baba said, "My state is such that knowing everything, I don't know anything." He then began asking the people around Him what His statement meant, but nobody could give a good answer. He said that we could never understand His state.

His humanity made Him so approachable, and to be human is to be ignorant. Yet He knew everything: He is that All-knowledge, All-power and All-bliss. I can't explain in words what it was like to be in His presence—it was so overpowering that we couldn't think of anything else but Baba when we were with Him. Yet what was so

striking and amazing was that we felt totally at home with Baba in His overwhelming presence.

There was another incident I remember from that period. At that time Baba had the whim of calling roadside artists to the compound and having them perform before Him. Those performers were somewhat like gypsies or roadside magicians, and they would come to the gate and Baba would call them to perform their tricks. Inevitably I was the person selected by Baba to be the “member of the audience on whom I will demonstrate....”

One such gypsy came professing to have “tremendous hypnotic power,” so Baba indicated that the hypnotic power should be tested on me. The artist took me by the hand as if to lead me to the front of the room, and while our backs were turned toward the audience he said, “Look, when I clap you become dumb, and when I clap again, you begin speaking once more. That’s all you need to do. Don’t be afraid.”

Standing before the audience he announced, “I am now going to demonstrate my tremendous hypnotic powers on this child. When I clap he will become dumb, and you can test him to see for yourself.”

Baba looked very intrigued. The man said, “All right, now I will clap.” I stood there, not speaking as I had been instructed. The others shouted at me in an attempt to make me react, but I was playing along, showing only a vacant, dumb stare. I just looked at Baba when He also tried to rouse me. Baba said, “Come on, now say something.”

At this point I didn’t know what to do, because now it was Baba who was doing the asking, but I just stayed silent. Another clap brought me back to normal, according to the showman’s plan. Those in the audience were all very impressed with the skill the “magician” had shown.

After the show Baba had Mani bring me to His room, and Baba said, “Now tell Me what really happened.” I explained that it had all been a show, with me playing along. “No,” said Baba, “I’m sure you were really

hypnotized.” I said, “No, Baba. I just wanted to keep the show going. The man told me what to do when he clapped.” Baba insisted, however. “No, you looked hypnotized and you were hypnotized. Otherwise you would have spoken when I told you to.”

This is how Baba was with us. He was All-knowing and Not-knowing at the same time. In these small little things we could see how He made that aspect of His Not-knowing visible to us.

At another time a different gypsy show came along, in which there was an old woman who was performing tricks, and I was called and made to go along with those performances as well. At a certain point in this show the woman took a long stick, and she said, “See this stick? I’m going to insert it right into my eye.” I was standing behind her, and she took the stick and in a jerky but very skillful movement she concealed the fact that, while pretending to push it into her eye, she had actually broken the stick. Because of where I was standing, I could see what she had done, but she fooled all of the audience, and it looked as if she really had stuck the stick into her eye, to the point that people cried out when she did it. Because I saw what she was doing, I tried to tell Baba and the others, but He just acted as if He hadn’t heard me, and the illusion was left intact. From His reaction I understood that Baba didn’t want me to reveal her secret.

In the first instance, with the fake hypnotist, I was possibly disobeying Baba’s previously stated wish when He tried to make me talk while “hypnotized.” I don’t know, but probably I was doing the right thing, as His reaction in this second incident showed—He truly went along with the performers, supporting their shows, and he wanted us to do the same.

While we were in Dehra Dun my mother was given the task of cooking for Baba. She put her heart and soul into it, and she prepared exquisite dishes for Him. Some of the other women in the ashram, however, started to feel a bit peeved about this privilege being given to someone as relatively “new” as my mother, and they would complain to Baba that Gaimai had a nasty habit of putting sugar in each and every dish she prepared, and they would insist, “It’s not good for You, Baba! Tell her to

stop this!” This bickering eventually reached such a pitch that Baba had to respond. It was the type of thing that would happen in the ashram all the time with Him.

“Yes, this is very serious,” said Baba in response to these allegations. He looked very concerned, and appearing to be quite upset over the matter. He called my mother, who was in the kitchen cooking at that time. She was a little nervous at the unexpected call, and she came and stood before Baba to listen to whatever He had to say. In a very grave and serious manner, He said, “Do you know what a privilege I have bestowed on you by allowing you to cook for Me?” My mother responded that she did. Baba went on, “Do you know how precious this body (meaning Baba’s body) is, filled with the Universe itself?” Mumma said that she did. “So don’t you think that you must take the greatest care when you prepare food for Me?” To this Mumma replied that she always put her heart and soul into preparing the food, and she was sure that Baba was enjoying it.

“Yes, I like it, but I hear a grave piece of news, that you have a bad habit of putting sugar in every dish. Is what I hear true?” Now my mother was more than a little scared by the tone of Baba’s question, and she admitted that she did indeed add sugar to the food. Baba continued, “Suppose I get diabetes. What would happen? This body will perish, and do you realize the consequences? If you are fooling with My person—My physical form—do you realize what you are doing?” He then became very serious and very harsh. “How dare you do these things? Haven’t you any sense, to be doing such a thing?”

She apologized, “Baba, I’m sorry I’ve displeased You, but I thought it would give a little taste to the food.”

“But what about My health?”

“Baba, I’m very sorry this happened, I’ll never do it again! I swear I will stop this practice immediately. It never dawned on me that it would be harmful to Your health.”

“No? But then why did you do it?”

My mother later reported that this back-and-forth grilling by Baba went on for about half an hour. Baba repeatedly asked why she did it, and she repeatedly swore that she would never do it again. She was really flabbergasted about why Baba was going on and on, not even realizing that Baba was in strict seclusion at that time and she was getting all this time to be with Him!

The biggest fun now follows. Baba said, "Call Eruch. I want to fire her in front of Eruch also." Eruch came, and Baba told him about my mother's practice of using sugar, asking if it were really true.

Eruch said, "Yes, Baba, she does have that habit. She even puts sugar in scrambled eggs, despite the fact that I always tell her not to do it." Poor Mother, Eruch took Baba's side, and the other women, who had been standing in the same room witnessing all this, also eagerly chimed in: "That's right, Baba, give it to her good. She doesn't listen when we tell her not to do this," and so on and so forth. They were all worked up, and poor Mumma was in tears at the end.

"Swear to Me again that you will never do this," Baba finally said.

"Baba, with Your Name I swear it!" Thrice He repeated this as He continued to scold her.

Eventually Baba said, "Now you go. I am quite displeased with you, although your food is tasty. I never knew you were adding poison to it!" Then Baba turned to the others and dismissed them also. Mumma was completely distraught. As she was going out of the door, Baba clapped and motioned, "Come here."

She thought to herself, "Now what?" and she returned to stand nervously once again before Baba.

Baba said, "Listen to Me. Keep preparing the food exactly as you have been doing. I like it very much!"

At this Mumma was completely nonplussed. She couldn't even take in what Baba was saying. She started apologizing and promising never to do it again—"Baba, I will not put sugar..."—but He responded, "Do you

hear what I am saying? *Do exactly what you have been doing right up until now.* Don't listen to anybody." She was totally floored by this!

Recounting the story later, Mumma said that she had never had such an experience in her life. She just broke down. Baba ended up saying, "I am most happy with what you are doing. I am so touched with your great feeling and concern for Me. Just keep doing what you have been doing. I enjoy your food the most." She just couldn't believe her ears, that Baba had been so seriously scolding her for half an hour, and then He said this. She got a big embrace from Him and was dispatched. It was a very remarkable experience in her life. It was just to please the others that she had been scolded, but she realized that Baba had at the same time given her such a great opportunity to be in His presence. It stirred up all her feelings. She used to describe this incident very vividly.

Just as an aside, in this way Baba would occasionally call my mother and my sister Manu on one pretext or the other, even when He was in very strict seclusion, apparently to give them a good telling off. Then He would embrace them and send them back. They didn't realize at the time that this was simply His way of seeing them during His seclusion. All the other women were pleased when Mumma and Manu were getting scolded, thinking they were getting their due, not realizing their good fortune. Baba was really skillful in these situations, and the other women were not upset, in fact they were quite pleased, because they believed Mumma and Manu deserved a little firing from time to time. Although there was some initial discomfort because they thought that Baba was displeased with them, both Mumma and Manu would later remember having this great feeling, saying that they didn't realize at the time what Baba was doing for them. "Eventually it dawned on us what He was doing, giving us a chance to be with Him and be embraced by Him even when He was in strict seclusion."

In Dehra Dun I had the duty of accompanying Baba from the women's side of the ashram to the men's side, which were about a mile apart. I

would try to hold the umbrella above His head, running with the umbrella to keep up. I tried my level best not to hit His head, though it was not always possible owing to my height, or I should say the lack thereof! This was one of the first personal duties given to me, and once I had left Baba with the men, I would return to the women's side. I was about eleven years old at that time, so once school started, I had to go to classes and consequently couldn't attend to this duty anymore. Baba wanted me to study hard, by the way, and He asked Eruch to coach me intensely in certain subjects.

With regard to the places that were rented for Baba's use in Dehra Dun or wherever it was that His work took Him and us, Baba always wanted us to live with care for the surroundings, to leave the places as we found them and not to take advantage of any situation. For instance, the place where we stayed at Dehra Dun had extensive lychee gardens, but we were expressly forbidden from plucking any of fruit.

Baba was often away on *mast* tours for weeks at a time, and as I recall no public *darshan* was allowed during our entire stay in Dehra Dun. At one point during my long summer vacation, Baba decided to go to Rishikesh, a famous city on the banks of the Ganges and at the foot of the Himalayas that is renowned as a spiritual center for Hindus. It was very beautiful and peaceful there at the time—the snows were melting, feeding fresh, sweet water into the Ganges, whose banks were lined with fine white sand. When we came up to the banks of the river there were two big boats, hired in advance by Baba, for the crossing to the Swarg Ashram ("*Swarg*" means "Heaven"). While going across the river to the ashram I put my hand into the water, and it was icy cold. The water was so pure that you could drink right out of the river, although the water looked milky, not clear. That was probably due to the silt that the Ganges brought down from the Himalayas. The river had carved out something of a gorge at that location, with high banks on either side. It took a climb of perhaps a hundred steps to get from the riverbank up to the ashram. A separate house for the men was arranged further down the river.

We arrived at a time that was perhaps not the “best” time for that region as far as the climate was concerned. For whatever reason Baba used to favor that sort of timing, when a place was less crowded. When we arrived it was full summer—the mountains would heat up, and it felt like a furnace all day long. Every evening Baba would allow us to go down to the river to splash the icy water over ourselves. When He wasn’t away on the *mast* trips, He would also accompany us down to the river bank, where all of us would gather and sit around Him.

Once Meheru (Mehera’s niece) and Najoo Kotwal had come on vacation to be with Baba. He had given Meheru permission to swim in the river, along with one or two others. On this occasion Baba was giving a discourse to the rest of us, resting His back against a rock, facing away from the water. Suddenly Baba got up and rushed to the river, where He found Meheru in danger of drowning! She was swimming, but she was trapped in a whirlpool, and she surely would have died if Baba hadn’t gone to her rescue! Sarwar was there, but when Meheru asked her for help, she thought that Meheru was trying to fool her. The strong currents in the river, plus a rock with a hollow under it, were responsible for her difficulty, despite the fact that she was swimming near the riverbank. Here the All-ignorant One was All-aware of what was happening behind His back. Meheru was completely exhausted when Baba extended His arm and pulled her out of the water. Had it not been for Him, she would have surely drowned.

In the evenings between 4:00 and 5:00 p.m. we were to sit out on the rocks near where we were staying and meditate, focusing on remembering Baba and on the repetition of His Name. Everybody who was there at that time remembers the extreme discomforts—the red-hot rocks to sit on, ants moving about trying to find a cooler place underneath us and getting into our underwear, a feeling of anything but calm and peacefulness! It was hot on top, hot underneath, and, you might say, hot inside us—meditation was, to say the least, difficult. Being a young lad, however, I didn’t mind the discomforts as much as some of the others, but we all eagerly awaited the bell signifying the end of the meditation time!

Speaking of meditation, there had been an earlier time in Meherabad when Baba had started us on this meditation business. There is a discourse on “The Divine Theme” as the subject for a meditation in *God Speaks*. We were instructed to read that discourse, understand the contents, and try to absorb it. Half an hour or an hour daily was devoted to reading “The Divine Theme” slowly as a meditation and to digesting it. This continued for about a year.

During this time Baba also directed us to fast, eating only one meal a day, so there were times when I would be really hungry. When the time finally came for meals, I could barely wait, and I would eat enough literally to bloat my stomach. We shifted from Meherabad to Bangalore, and then Baba made us continue the fast there. The fast was extremely taxing for me, as I had to go to school despite the fast, so when He learned about how hard it was for me, Baba sent a message, “Let Meherwan be exempted from the fast.” Boy, was I happy about that! Young children feel hunger pangs keenly, and so did I at that age, especially since I was running about expending lots of energy.

By the way, Baba never encouraged us to fast or meditate on our own. We were to fast only when He ordered it. Likewise, when He ordered a fast stopped, we had to stop. No attachment was permitted, neither to the fasting nor to meditation. He always insisted upon this.

Another time in Rishikesh Baba was sitting and chatting with us all, when two *sadhus* came by. Many *sadhus* and *rishis* would meditate in caves around there, hence the name of the place. Baba sent Mani to ask what they wanted, and they said that they had heard that Meher Baba was there and asked her if they could have His *darshan*. They didn’t know who Baba was, and Baba gave a sign not to encourage them, so Mani said, “We are just a group of women who have come here.”

The *sadhus* left quite dejected. Baba told the women they didn’t know how fortunate that they were to have His company, to be so close to Him, while these *sadhus* and *rishis* had meditated for years and years and yet He was not available to them. On hearing this Mani felt really

bad for the *sadhus*, and she pleaded with Baba on their behalf, that they should be given His *darshan*.

Baba was always infinitely compassionate, even in carrying out His strictest seclusion work, and so when these two *sadhus* eventually passed by once more at a later time, Baba relented and told Mani to inform them that He was, indeed, Meher Baba, and He then permitted them to take His *darshan*. Baba blessed them and sent them on their way in a matter of a few minutes.

The surrounding area at Rishikesh was heavily forested, and just outside where we were staying there lived big, black-faced, long-tailed monkeys that sat watching our every move. If we left anything whatsoever outside, they would come and take it away. They were a bit more reticent, however, than the red-faced monkeys we sometimes saw there, which caused even more trouble and destruction.

In Rishikesh we were given an order by Baba not to eat anything from outside whenever we were going to the riverside. While Kharmanmasi was in the ashram, Soonamasi, Gulmai's sister, saw a white root and thought that it might be arrowroot. She beckoned for Kharmanmasi to come down and said, "Here, try this root—it looks like arrowroot." Kharmanmasi forgot Baba's order and impulsively ate it. To her dismay it turned out to be an extremely poisonous root, and it was a touch-and-go affair, a matter of life-and-death for her. Dr. Nilu was sent for, and with great difficulty she came through that ordeal. After she had recovered Baba made the point for all to note: "See what she went through because she broke My order!"

Manu and Katie were cooking for Baba and the women as usual, but Manu was getting exhausted from the work, mentally and physically. Finally, when her exhaustion got to such a level that her body could not stand it, she had a nervous breakdown. Baba ordered her to take total bed rest.

Poor Katie then had to manage everything on her own. There were always complaints about Katie's cooking—it was too greasy or too salty or not salty enough—she just couldn't get it right. Each time Baba came

back from His *mast* tours, there would be a string of complaints. He was told that she was not cooking with her heart in her work, when the truth was that she was doing her wholehearted best. Baba would call her and chide her, time and again. One time it came to a climax, and Baba called her and severely berated her about how fed up He was with these constant complaints about her, and that He was thoroughly fed up with facing the same issues time and again whenever He returned, exhausted, from His *mast* trips. He ordered her to “blacken her face and go away.” He told her that He didn’t want to see her face again.

Katie went back to the kitchen and was wondering what was the purpose of staying, with Baba saying that He didn’t like her work and didn’t want to see her again. She decided that she might as well leave. In this frame of mind, while she was deciding to pack and leave, she saw Baba at the kitchen door. Baba came in and asked her what she was thinking. She started to weep and told Him about her feelings of hopelessness because He didn’t want to see her face. Baba acted totally surprised and asked, “Are you going to leave Me just because I scolded you in front of everybody? Do you know what you are doing?” Taking her by the hand He took her outside and showed her caves on the opposite bank of the Ganges. He said, “In those caves *rishis* have been meditating and doing austerities for a glimpse of the Lord, but I don’t give it to them. Here you have Me in the body by your side and you want to leave? Are you mad? Are you in your proper senses? Can you not take a little scolding from Me? I did it to please those people, but I know how you put all your heart and soul into your cooking, all just to please Me.” Then Baba embraced her, which caused Katie to break down weeping again. Baba consoled her and told her to do her work without thought of praise or criticism, totally and always only for His sake. So it was that Katie followed Baba’s order to work in this fashion to the end of her life, and she forever after turned a deaf ear to any criticism from anyone!

I remember that both the men’s and women’s ashrams were very full during our stay in Rishikesh. Manu recalls that there were almost thirty women on their side.

One time when Baba was leaving on a *mast* trip, He instructed us to continue to take our accustomed walks down to the riverbank. We would all walk in a group every evening. From what we had been told, we knew that Baba was returning on a certain day, but He finished His work early and returned to Rishikesh with Eruch in a *tonga* [a one-horse carriage] the day before He was expected. Seeing us walking on the far side of the river, He stopped the *tonga*, got out and started to wave to us with His handkerchief! Mehera was the first to see Him, and she started to wave back, and then we all joined in enthusiastically. Baba got back into the *tonga*, and we all hurried back to the ashram to get everything ready to receive Baba on His return.

After some time the weather changed. The clouds came on, and the monsoon was about to break. Remember, Baba had brought us there in the heart of the Indian summer. Suddenly the face of the river changed. It became very dirty and very turbulent because of the torrential rains in the higher reaches of the mountains, and all the dirt from up-river was washed down.

When this happened Baba called a meeting to have a talk with us. He said that He would like to stay where we were, but now that the monsoons were coming, we would have to stay for the duration if we determined to remain here. That, however, would bring out snakes and scorpions, and in addition, we would be essentially cut off from the rest of the world for three months. Our diet would also be restricted to rice and potatoes, as these would be the only foodstuffs available during the rainy season. The alternative plan, Baba said, would be to go back to Dehra Dun. Baba called for a vote on which course to follow, but He had made the “stay at Rishikesh” alternative sound so unpalatable that all voted to return to Dehra Dun.

By this time the river was flowing so fast and so full that returning by boat to the Dehra Dun side was no longer possible, so it was decided to walk upriver to a bridge called “*Laxman Jhula*.” It is an ancient suspension bridge, and legend has it that when Lord Ram needed to cross the river, His brother, Laxman, built the original one out of vines, hence the name.

No vehicles can use the bridge—only people can cross on foot. It was the only link between Rishikesh and the outside world. At that time Rishikesh consisted simply of isolated ashrams along the river, with perhaps a marketplace (but we never went there) and caves in which the *rishis* meditated. For our part we just saw forests and mountains, with the river down the middle. Now, of course, there are factories and all the signs of “modern progress,” a grievous transgression on the beauty of the land but, of course, all part of Baba’s plan.

So there we were, all walking along the river to the bridge, our baggage in a cart with some coolies to take the luggage across the bridge. The bridge was only four or five feet wide, and it swayed if we moved too much! Below we could see the torrential river, which was fast-flowing and very angry-looking and far from its earlier calm and crystalline state. It was now a deep brown color from the mud it carried, and it also stank quite a bit!

After we crossed the bridge, there was a bus on the other side that took us back to Dehra Dun. I don’t remember exactly, but I think we also went to Hardwar, ten or fifteen miles downstream, on the way. Baba took us to the *Kumbha Mela*, a large Hindu pilgrimage on the banks of the Ganges which takes place every twelve years and which was happening at the time. There were thousands upon thousands of people milling around, among which were untold numbers of *sadhus*.

We also saw an incredible sight: “professional” eaters called *chobas*, a type of priest who were fed *ladoos* [Indian sweetmeats] whenever someone died! They were a particular clan that would be hired by the family of the departed to eat kilos and kilos of *ladoos*, all in some peculiar ritual of trying to appease the souls of their dear departed. Each one had a certain capacity, and they would be called “a ten-kilo *choba*” or a “twelve-kilo *choba*,” depending upon how much they could consume at a given time. One person we saw was so obese that he occupied the whole space of a doorway! It was a terrible thing to see, and it was a terrible, twisted traditional practice with respect to the death of a person in that region.

On our return to Dehra Dun Papa had a desire to get a gold ring made for me. He asked me what type of ring I wanted, and I just said that a plain ring would do, because I wasn't at all interested in it. Of course, when the ring was made, it was shown to Baba, and He took it and told me to hold out my left hand and He put the ring on my middle finger. It fit perfectly. I wore it for quite some time, but then I must have taken it off for some reason I can't remember now, and I don't know what happened to it.

Baba decided to leave Dehra Dun by train, traveling south to Lonavala, a small hill station near Poona that sits about fifty miles east of Bombay. Baba's early disciples Ghani, Raosaheb and Ramjoo were all from Lonavala. All trains traveling from Bombay to Poona have to go through Lonavala, so it is a mandatory stop. From Lonavala the trains go down the *ghats* to sea level at Bombay in one direction and up into the hills to Poona in the other. It is quite a steep gradient from Lonavala to Bombay, so two engines have to be put on each train as a safety measure: one engine at the rear and one at the front, to provide an extra push while ascending from Bombay to Poona, and two engines at the front to stabilize the train while descending from Poona to Bombay.

So while we were all on our way from Dehra Dun on the train, as we neared Lonavala Baba suddenly became very pale and His pulse began to sink. Naturally there was a lot of panic and feverish attempts were made to revive Him. Rano was the keeper of the first aid box, and she hurriedly brought it over for Baba. Baba appeared to be totally drained of all blood. He appeared to have fainted—He couldn't even lift His hands or feet, and although His eyes were open in a vacant stare, He looked as if He were about to pass away!

Dr. Nilu had given Coramine drops to the women to carry around for cardiac emergencies. These were given to Baba, and in a few terrifying minutes He was Himself again, back to His normal state. What happened remains a mystery to us, but I have heard that during times of His very

intense Universal Work, that kind of severe reaction on His physical form would sometimes take place. This was indeed a very scary incident on the way, and it was the only time I ever saw Baba in such a helpless state with my own eyes. Everybody was greatly alarmed and in a great panic for a while until Baba revived.

In Lonavala we stayed at a house rented from a Parsi priest, while the men were located some distance further away. It was raining cats and dogs there, night and day. These were heavy downpours, the “elephant rains” that arrive at the tail end of the monsoon, and it felt fresh and nice when the skies cleared up.

I remember one incident that took place while we were in Lonavala. As usual, it was my assignment to accompany Baba at about breakfast time from the women’s side to the men’s side. Baba would visit Mehera and all the women, and then He would go to the men *mandali*.

Typically, just as I was having my own breakfast—which usually consisted of toast, butter and hot tea—Baba would be ready to leave for the men’s side. I would have to leave my half-finished plate and rush off with the umbrella in one hand and Baba’s alphabet board in the other—I literally ran behind Him as He walked with His usual lightning pace. Later, when I would return after leaving Baba at the men’s side, my half-eaten breakfast would have flies on it, and my tea would be cold. I didn’t have to wait there at the men’s side and bring Him back because Masaji usually did that. This happened every day! Just as soon as I would begin eating my breakfast, Baba would appear, ready to go to the men *mandali*’s side, and my breakfast would have to be abandoned, as I had to rush out to accompany Baba.

One day I got what I thought was a very bright idea. I decided not to eat my breakfast right away, but rather to wait until I would take Baba over to the men’s side first, and then afterwards I would relax and eat my breakfast in a leisurely way. With that plan in mind, on this particular day I waited for Him to appear, and I waited, and I waited, and I waited. I wondered why He didn’t come out at His usual timing. I didn’t know

what was keeping Baba. Every other day He had been up and out by that time. After almost half an hour of waiting, I thought, “I may as well start eating the breakfast and eat it very quickly.” Exactly halfway through breakfast, He came out. Now what could you say to that? See how this happens, all spontaneously. Baba wanted me not to be attached to the breakfast, and He was driving home the lesson, but at a cost to Himself by having to wait until I started my breakfast! On the surface it seemed just a coincidence, but see how calculated and well-timed it was, to teach me not to care about my breakfast.

Thereafter I didn’t have any more “brilliant ideas.” I just let it be, whatever it was, enduring whatever came my way. Even at that young age, I got the point. It would have been more trouble for me if I had tried to get things to turn out the way I thought I wanted them to.

I heard that Rano and the other women *mandali* inside had similar experiences. Rano, for example, liked her tea hot—it was one of her favorite things. But whenever she would be having tea, just as she would bring her cup of hot tea to her lips, Baba would clap for her. She would go to Baba, and He would give her some work that was, it seemed to her, completely trivial and not at all urgent. So naturally, as this happened time and again, she would think, “Why is Baba always calling me just when I am having tea?” And no sooner would she finish whatever work Baba had given her, He would send her on yet another errand, and her tea would get even colder!

Eventually Rano realized that Baba was going to such pains simply to bring home to her that she must not be attached to hot tea, but He never told her so directly. In these ways Baba went to infinite pains to train us to be totally subservient to His wish, and not to be attached to anything else. The funny thing was that after she would finish the errands, Rano would return to Baba, and He would say, “Oh, your tea has gotten cold. What a shame...,” and Rano would feel all the more frustrated.

The important thing was that Baba wanted all of our attention on Him alone, all importance placed on Him alone—a spontaneous, constant

meditation and remembrance of Baba. That is what it is all about—to remember Him and to forget oneself—that’s the whole game—and with Baba, it is brought about so spontaneously and naturally, without any unnatural coercion. And for that, Baba had to undergo so much trouble on our behalf, despite the preoccupation of His infinite work and having to attend to so many diverse things all around Him, even on the gross plane. How He had the time to spare for each one of us is incredible to contemplate! It was only because of the love He evoked in each one of us that it was possible to go through this process without hesitation.

It was a very difficult thing for Baba, being All-Compassion, to ignore someone, and He made it so very obvious that He was doing it on purpose. But to be ignored by Him was the most crushing experience those with Him could have. One felt totally worthless, that there was no reason for you to carry on with life. Most of the close *mandali* have undergone such an experience, and Baba went to such pains to bring that experience to them. Rano endured it for a very long period, and she used to describe the experience. She said that it was as if Baba saw right through her to whatever was directly behind her. He literally acted as if she were not there. He would point to someone through her. She thought she was being addressed, but no, for Baba it seemed as if she were not there at all. If Rano tried to respond, Baba would even show annoyance for the disturbance she was causing. So many others had these very difficult experiences.

I once had to go through something similar myself. It was 1966, in Guruprasad. Baba was about to leave for Meherazad at the end of His summer break, and He had called (amongst several other close ones) K. K. Ramakrishnan of the Poona Centre to see Him before He left. It had started raining that day, and Ramakrishnan hadn’t arrived. Baba turned to me, though I was sitting quite far away from the door, and asked me to go out and see if he had arrived. I went reluctantly, and seeing that he hadn’t, I came back and told Baba so, then returned to my seat. A few moments later He asked me to go look again, to see if he had come. Even more reluctantly I did as He ordered. Still no sign of Ramakrishnan. When this happened for the third time, I thought, “Why is He sending

me? Baba is going to go away for the rest of the year, I won't be seeing Him, and I should be having my chance to be in His Presence now." Not realizing that Baba was doing all this for me, to break my attachment to being with Him, I was annoyed. But see how merciful He is—He helps us to make His wish our pleasure and not to get upset or annoyed. It was only later that this understanding dawned on me.

Past connections are the only way to understand our great good fortune to be with Him this closely in His present Advent. "*Runanubandh*" is the Marathi term for this. It means "One Who is bound by debt." The Lord of Lords, Who is eternally free, permits this debt to be put upon Him, and so He brings those who have loved and served Him in past lives near Him when He appears on Earth. Unless you have such a connection, no amount of good deeds and no amount of penance and austerities will bring one to Him. It all amounts to ages and ages of past connections. It's not just coincidence or a quirk of fate; it's all very well planned and charted out. We don't know what we were in the past and how we have this great privilege to be associated with Him, but that is how it is.

There was another small incident at Lonavala that comes to mind. Masaji was very fond of me, and one day he offered me a few sweets. Baba saw Masaji giving them to me, but those very sweets had been given to Masaji as *prasad* by Baba! Baba was very upset with him: "What do you take this to be? I give you *prasad* to give to somebody else? Don't I feel for this child? You think you're a great big benefactor or something?"

Baba gave Masaji a big tongue-lashing in front of me, and I felt so embarrassed about the whole thing. Masaji was totally crestfallen. "You have not respected My *prasad*," repeated Baba, and He was giving him a very hard time. He could be very harsh with words. He did thrash people physically in the early days, but in the later days, even in silence, He could be equally devastating with His words. You would be totally shattered, and then Baba would give you the usual embrace and His forgiveness, and suddenly the slate would all be clean again.

Baba once asked Dr. Ghani to get a good female *ghazal* singer to perform before Him and the women, so Ghani arranged for one to come to perform before Baba. She came, and she sang very good *ghazals*, and at the end of the program Baba asked her if she could sing a song in English. She said yes, she could. So Baba asked her to sing her English song. She started up the harmonium and began, "Twinkle, twinkle little star, how I wonder what you are." She sang the nursery rhyme in a very Indian accent with accompaniment on the harmonium. It was a very funny performance, but no one laughed, out of respect for her attempt! Baba was happy with her efforts to please Him. He applauded her, rewarded her at the end of the performance, and sent her away.

While we were staying at Lonavala, the landlord (the Parsi priest) tried to come barging in one day. Baba's rule was that whenever we occupied a place, no one should enter—and that rule especially applied to the women's side. This fellow nevertheless insisted upon coming in. Masaji was at the gate, and I was there chatting and having some fun with him. The landlord persisted in wanting to come in, but Masaji blocked his entry, saying: "Please don't come in—it is not permitted!"

"What do you mean?" the landlord stormed. "This place belongs to me!"

"That's true," said Masaji, "but we have rented the place from you, and we have made a condition of no disturbances while we're here."

"Yeah, that might be for outsiders, but this place belongs to me, and I'll see how you stop me from coming in." He started making a big disturbance, frothing at the mouth in anger, shouting at the top of his voice, and I was really scared. He continued to try to get in, and Masaji had to physically restrain him. Eventually he went off in a huff, and he made himself scarce after that, but all this was reported to Baba, and He said, "Let's go from here. This is not the place for us." So after a few days of frantic search, we shifted bag and baggage to a place whose name I still remember: Prospect Lodge. It was a considerably better place, much more scenic, more spacious, and it belonged to a Mrs. Dean. She was a gracious old British lady who had lost her son in the Second World War, which was going on at the time. She was staying in

a guest house situated right at the entrance of the place we had rented from her. We stayed there for quite a few months. Baba enjoyed the place very much—the grounds were enormous, with a stream at the edge of the property. The property was terraced on several levels, and we would all go down to the stream in the evening, just as we had in Rishikesh. Baba would go down there with us in the evening when He wasn't on His *mast* tours, and sometimes He would play games with us, especially *gilli-danda*.

Gilli-danda is a game involving a small stick with a tapered, pointed end and a second big stick. The small stick, called the *gilli*, is placed on the ground and hit with the big stick, which causes the smaller stick to fly up. Then the smaller stick is hit again with the big stick while it is still in the air, and the distance it travels is measured in terms of the number of stick-lengths of the larger stick. So the number of stick-lengths, say a hundred or two hundred, would be the points you gained on your turn. If, however, you didn't manage to hit the *gilli* while it was in the air even after three tries, you were out.

Baba was an expert at hitting the *gilli*. Mehera would play on Baba's side, while Mani would usually captain the opposing team. The members of the opposing team would stand facing the direction in which the *gilli* was to be hit and try to catch it, and if they did, then the striker would also be out, just as in cricket, and then the next player on the team would have a try.

I remember well that Baba could hit the *gilli* with a big whack, and nobody could catch His hits! The *gilli* would soar over the heads of all the players and land far away. After one such hit, He said, "Now that distance, I'd say, would be about five hundred sticks."

Mani protested, however, saying, "No way, Baba, that's no more than a hundred sticks."

"All right," Baba said, "Let's count." So He swiftly went about counting, zig-zagging, moving only half a stick's distance toward the *gilli* and then going backwards, back and forth, back and forth, all with such speed that

it was impossible to see exactly what He was doing! All this would increase the count, and by the time they reached the *gilli*, the count was around six hundred sticks!

“No, Baba,” Mani said, “You are cheating!” But no matter how many times she tried, Mani was never able to catch Him at it. It was always great fun to watch them play.

There were other games as well. One time Baba organized three-legged races, lemon-and-spoon races, and sack races. Baba insisted that everyone had to make the maximum effort to try to win, and even the older people in the ashram had to participate.

One highlight of our stay in Lonavala was the much-anticipated visit of Baba’s mother. She had sent word that she was coming, and Baba said, “Oh, my, we are going to have a hard time with her. Eruch, you go to the station when she comes. When she asks you how things are, you give her a very dangerous picture. Tell her that there is lots of rain, and in addition there are all sorts of snakes and scorpions.”

Of course it was a fact. There really were lots of snakes and scorpions in the area, huge six-inch-long scorpions with hair on them, dark green and dark black—I’ve never seen anything like them since. Baba continued, “You should paint such a picture that she will hesitate to stay on here—otherwise I’ll have no time with My work, and she will become a headache to Me, complaining and grumbling about her health. Try your best to dissuade her from staying too long, but be careful, because My mother is very shrewd.”

“Yes, Baba, I’ll try,” replied Eruch.

So then she arrived at the station, and Eruch received her. When they got into the carriage, she asked, “How is everything here?”

“Everything is beautiful, but the weather here is awful. It rains constantly, and there are so many snakes. The other day the watchman killed three of them!”

Maiji asked, “Really?”

“Yes, and the scorpions here are huge—we have never seen the likes of them!”

“Is that so?” Baba’s mother replied. “What else did Merog tell you to tell me?”

Eruch looked slightly embarrassed. “Maiji, what do you mean?”

“No, no—I understand completely. What else did Merog ask you to tell me to scare me out of this place? I know everything—I am His mother, and you try to fool me by telling me these things? Do I not know this place?” I remember that she used to call Lonavala “Lenoli” and often visited the place because Jamshed, Baba’s older brother, had lived in Lonavala and died there quite young.

“No, Maiji, I was only....”

“Oh, you keep quiet,” she snapped. “You’re just a child, you don’t know anything!”

It was a very humorous incident, and of course, Eruch had to report the whole conversation to Baba, Who had a hearty laugh and said, “You see, I told you that she is very shrewd. You did not say all that I told you to convey in the right manner, that is, convincingly.”

“No, Baba, I made it very convincing,” Eruch protested, and so it would go with Baba, these little “games” that He would play with us, all for our benefit and perhaps His own amusement as well.

It was about September of 1942 when Baba began to disband the big ashram. In Lonavala there was the rule that each group had to have its own room. While in Lonavala the rains cleared up, and it was very fresh outside, and Baba took us for long walks. There was a big lake there. Whenever He would leave the women’s side, everyone had to come out, and He would wave to everybody, casting His glance on each one, and we all had to wave back to Him. He would look at each one in turn. Once I just stood there, not waving, because I was going to accompany

Him. He looked at me and said, “Why aren’t you waving? Start waving.” I started waving, and then He said, “Come on, let’s go.” His attention was on every little detail.

In Lonavala I remember that Baba went into a very strict seclusion. He gave instructions that nobody should come out to see Him when He went from the men’s side to the women’s. So when the call was given that Baba was coming, everyone had to go into their rooms and lock their doors until Baba went into Mehera’s room. He saw only Mehera, Mani and one or two others—or anyone else whom He had called. Otherwise, nobody was to try to see His face, even while we were all in the ashram, mind you!

I was allowed to see Him, however, because I had the duty of accompanying Baba to and from the men’s side. Later in the day I also had the responsibility of taking His food and drinking water to the place where He was staying in seclusion, a bungalow located midway between the quarters of the men and women *mandali*.

I had instructions that on the way I should not place Baba’s water can or food *tiffin* on the road surface. It was quite some distance, and my arms would be tired from the weight of carrying the food and water, so it was quite a challenge for me.

While in seclusion Baba sat all by Himself, and He did not want the least noise from the people living with Him. Outside noises, traffic noises—those didn’t bother Him, but the slightest noise from us ashramites was an immense disturbance for Him. “The least disturbance from you will be a great hindrance in My work,” He said, so we all had to be very careful about that. The seclusion and fasting was interspersed with what appeared to be frantic *mast* activity on Baba’s part—long *mast* tours in crowded trains—it was still war time, and Baba’s *mast* activity was at its height—interspersed with less hectic and more normal times at the ashram.

I was there with Jangu, Meheru’s little brother, and also with Adi Kotwal, and we used to play together as children. It was mid-year—no school

would allow me admission at that time—but I had to keep on studying, monitored by Eruch. My father was there too, but because I was on the women's side, Papa didn't see much of me and so he didn't have much to do with my upbringing.

Papa, by the way, was a good cook, and Baba would often ask him to cook. Mehera and the women would like his food very much, and I gather that Mehera had a soft spot for my father.

Later on I had personal experience of Baba's suffering, and it was nerve-shattering for us to see Him suffer. In those years He kept telling us that the pressure of His Universal Work was immense. "I am crushed by the work, especially in these wartime days, and especially after Upasni Maharaj handed over to Me the full charge of the universe." All the burden was upon Him once Upasni Maharaj dropped his body.

I remember one more incident nearing the end of our stay in Lonavala. Because it is quite close to Bombay, fresh seafood would be available in Lonavala, so Baba once called for fish, although He usually did not permit it. He called for a small parcel of fried fish, so after many years the ashramites tasted *pomfret* again, one of the best fish in India. We all had a tiny, slivery piece, but Baba said He would call for a big parcel the next time. He asked Kaka, who was in Bombay at the time, to come bringing two big parcels of fried *pomfrets*. Kaka brought the parcels, and there was great expectancy in the ashram—it was Baba's *prasad*, which of course was an additional benefit to say the least. I don't know if the men's side got any.

Baba came in during lunchtime. Everybody was called over, and we all lined up with our plates ready—a whole *pomfret* was served on each person's plate by Baba with His own hand. After we all started eating, Baba asked, "Has everybody had the *prasad*?" Somehow Baba noticed that Irene Billo hadn't come, or "E-rain" as we used to pronounce it. Baba said, "Where is Irene?" Baba asked me to go find her. As it turned out, she was in her room, sulking in a corner in one of her moods.

I said, "Irene, Baba wants you." She didn't reply. At this I was totally confused. A call from Baba, yet she wasn't responding! I repeated and added, "Come quickly!" I don't recall exactly what she replied, but I was becoming a nervous wreck by this point, because if Baba's call were not heeded quickly, it would invariably lead to a change in His mood. I rushed back and said, "Yes, Baba, she's coming." Baba waited and waited, but she didn't come.

Baba began to get annoyed, and everybody got tense. Baba then sent me to call her again, and yet she did not come. Finally He sent somebody else to call her, and after some delay, Irene arrived with a puffed face and without her plate.

I sensed that there was a big impending showdown. Baba was becoming more and more irritated. He beckoned to her, but she was reluctant to come close. As she approached Baba asked, "Where's your plate?" He then took a plate from somewhere, put the fish on it, and gave it to her. At the same time He turned her around and shoved her with His knee because He was so very annoyed. With Mani reading His words off the alphabet board, Baba exclaimed, "How is it you have not responded to My call? I am very displeased with you." He then pushed her away so hard that she almost fell over.

We were all in shock, and His good mood was now completely gone. The fish was still on everybody's plate, but it was difficult even to swallow a morsel. So Baba didn't let us enjoy the fish even though it had been so long since any fish had been allowed in the ashram. Irene went back to her room in a sullen mood and stayed there, crying.

In the meantime Naja had been in her room eating her fish, but she now came back into the room where Baba was and saw the big pile of fish still not distributed. She came to Baba in a very light-hearted mood and asked in a childish voice, not knowing what had just transpired, "Baba, may I have another piece?"

"Yes," said Baba, "come close." She did so, at which point Baba picked up a piece of fish and just rubbed her face with it.

“Baba? What is this?” Naja exclaimed, startled and confused. We were all taken aback and shaking. Naja’s face was covered with the oil and the *masala* of the fish, and she had no idea what was happening. Baba was furious.

Baba must have smoothed out the whole thing with Irene, but in the evening He had two of the maidservants pick up the remaining fish. They carried it to the border of the property and threw it across the stream, into the jungle at Baba’s order—so that was the end of our feast of fish. What we didn’t know, however, was that whoever had cooked the fish had used ginger as a spice, which causes the fish to rot very quickly. So the fish was spoiled when we ate it and most of us had diarrhea later on.

We knew, of course, that Irene was prone to those nasty moods, but there wouldn’t be any ill will towards her afterwards because everyone had those sorts of mood swings of elation and depression. When Baba’s mood got spoiled, however, *everything* got spoiled. The whole atmosphere would tense up, and each person would feel that he or she was in some way responsible for whatever had happened.

I recall another incident in Lonavala that took place on my birthday. My father sent me a telegram wishing me a happy birthday on the occasion—I don’t know whether he was in Lonavala at the men’s side, or away, out of the ashram. In any event, whenever any mail or message came, it was first opened by Baba. Consequently He was the one who brought the telegram and gave it to me.

Then He said, “Come, I’ll give you an embrace for your birthday,” so I got an embrace from Him. After embracing me Baba told me to take a stack of six or seven large frames from the women’s side to the cottage where He was observing seclusion. The frames were heavy, and for many days afterwards my arms ached from carrying them across! Baba was in seclusion at that time, mind you. In later times Baba’s seclusion would be much more intense, wherein nobody would see Baba, much less touch Him, unless called specifically.

There was a strange and unusual incident involving a ghost at Lonavala. Suddenly, in the middle of the night, our suitcases would rattle, or things would fall off the shelves, and one of the ashramites, Soltun, was even thrown off her bed!

This was reported to Baba, who said that there was indeed a ghost around. “Wherever I go, these ghosts try to be near Me, hovering around trying to touch Me. They seek liberation from their state. Nobody should worry, and if any such thing happens, you should repeat My Name and remember Me, and you will not have a problem.”

I had no such experiences, but others did. It seemed to be a rather boisterous ghost, whoever it was, and it even pulled some people’s hair, including Mehera’s! That was one of the other notable incidents in Lonavala. When Baba heard of it, He came and slept on the veranda of the house outside Mehera’s room. He worked with the ghost, and afterwards the ghost seemed to stop bothering us all.

While still in Lonavala Baba decided to go to visit the Tata Electric Power Station that was in the Panvel Valley. The women got into the back of the Blue Bus, and in the front, Eruch, Baba and I sat. We had to descend from Lonavala to Panvel valley, which was a very steep decline, so Eruch had to drive using only the first and second gears. I was feeling scared, which Baba noted. The slightest slip on those hairpin curves and we would go hurtling down several hundred feet! He patted me and gestured, “Don’t worry.” When we finally got to the power station, we were stopped at the gates by the security guards.

Because it was wartime, the strategic importance of the power station—which supplied all the power to metropolitan Bombay—was paramount, and accordingly it was a restricted area. It also supplied the power to the electrified rail tracks on which ran the trains from Bombay to Poona and beyond. The supply was uninterrupted, which is no longer the case. Now electricity supply is very erratic and can go off for hours or even days at a time! Eruch got out of the car, and the guard asked if we had a security pass to go inside. Eruch tried to talk the guard into letting us go in just

for a look around, but to no avail. In spite of his best efforts the guard would not budge. Baba called Eruch back and told him to take us all back. So we never did see the power station, and we had to drive back up all the way as painstakingly as we had come down.

Later Baba took us to the Pawna Dam near Lonavala, which supplied the hydroelectric power to the station in Panvel.

After a few weeks the stay came to an end, and we all shifted from Lonavala back to Meherabad sometime around December. Baba had called for a big meeting at Meherabad, but the outcome of that event was confidential. To this day I don't know anything about what transpired. I do, however, remember the day of the meeting. From the Hill up there I could see lots of people moving around at lower Meherabad. The meeting involved only those men disciples called by Baba, and from what I could see, there was hectic activity at Lower Meherabad. It was generally a time of great turmoil. Apart from the ongoing World War II, there was the "Quit India" movement, Gandhiji was arrested, there was unrest and violence wherever you looked, and we could only guess at the significance of Baba's work at the time.



Chapter Six:

1943

Baba's plans for us were always flexible, so of course after some days, in January of 1943, it was not a great surprise when Baba called all of us in the Jessawala family and told us to go to Poona. Yet another move had been declared by Baba! My sisters were very pained to be separated from Baba once more. "Not again, Baba!" they pleaded, and Baba said, "Look, I have some work for you people there. You go there and stay for some time. Just to please Papa (who was agitating for a more settled life), you just go there and stay for fifteen to twenty days at the most. Then I'll call you back, but you must be there for some days."

Baba's mother was also lobbying in the background that we should be resettled in Poona, but we didn't know that at the time. Papa and Maiji must have conspired together, so our family went with all our baggage to Poona. That visit was our first time staying in Poona. Baba had sent word to His brother Beheram, who located what came to be known as "Bindra House." It had been recently vacated, and a new tenant had almost signed a lease, but Beheram offered a higher rent and the landlord gave it to us.

There were no furnishings; it was an empty place, and we tumbled into it with all our bags and trunks. We occupied the place like a way-station, thinking that Baba would be calling us anytime. We used our filled trunks as beds, and we opened our bedding rolls to lie on top of the trunks. “Why unpack now? Baba will be calling us any day,” was our attitude.

In the meantime school vacation had ended, and the new school year was starting as of January. I had been out of school all the way from the time when we left Dehra Dun throughout our stay at Lonavala. During that time Eruch continued to teach me my lessons, keeping me abreast of my studies so as not to fall behind. He kept me up to the class level I would be promoted to. Of course, to be able to cope with the lessons I had missed during the three months or so I was out of school, I had to work very hard!

In short, I now had to enroll in a school in Poona. It was called Bishop’s High School, and it happened to be one of the best schools in Poona. It was a Protestant school, unlike most other English-medium schools at the time which were typically run by Catholic missionaries. I used to ride a small cycle to get to school in Dehra Dun, one that Baba Himself had ridden a bit, and now I used the same cycle to go to my school in Poona. My route took me past Babajan’s shrine, and my mother told me that whenever I passed by there, I should get off the bike and bow down to Babajan, and then proceed. That was what I would do, though Baba had given us orders not to visit any shrines or saints, including the big shrines in or near Poona devoted to various historical Perfect Masters. Baba had told us not to frequent such places and shrines unless He Himself told us to do so, which He did do only once, when He sent us to Alandi with Jal Kerawala to bow down at the *Jivant Samadhi* shrine of the Perfect Master Dnyaneshwar. “*Jivant Samadhi*” refers to a Master entering his or her final resting place while still alive in the physical form. This is usually in an underground space—a cave or cellar—or in a body of water, when it is then referred to as *Jal Samadhi*. That type of *Samadhi* is extremely rare for a Perfect Master.

Baba was very particular about it, saying that we had no connection with any such places or masters, but that our connection was “directly through Me.” My mother had the inclination and might have visited those sacred places had she not had firm instructions from Baba not to do so.

This topic reminds me of an incident about Babajan and the connection my mother had with her. On one of the earlier visits to Meherabad during vacation time, the family had gone to Ahmednagar and was staying at Akbar Press with our relatives there, and from there they would visit Baba at Meherabad. Baba told my mother and father that while returning to Nagpur, they should make it a point to pay respects to Babajan—this was perhaps in 1929, a year or so before I was born. Accordingly they went to Poona instead of returning directly to Nagpur, and there they approached Babajan, who resided, as usual, at a particular spot in the center of the Poona Cantonment. It was a time of great heat, even for Poona, and Babajan’s seat was beneath a particular *neem* tree, close to the Shivaji Market in the Camp area and quite close to Dastur Meher Road where Baba’s house is. This was where she made her “home.” There was no other shade beyond the tree itself, and there were almost always crowds milling all around the area. It was a chaotic scene, and one would be subjected to lots of pushing and jostling if ever one tried to approach her.

When my mother, Gaimai, along with Papa, Eruch and my aunt Gulamasi, arrived at the place, Babajan had a coconut in her hand. A coconut is considered to be a very auspicious gift by Indians, and everyone in the crowd of regular visitors was hoping to get that coconut for himself. There was even more pushing and jostling as our family approached. Mumma, Papa, Eruch and Gulamasi were attempting to get close enough to take *darshan* of Babajan’s feet in fulfillment of Baba’s instruction, and Mumma was feeling a little anxious owing to the continuous jostling and hustle-bustle. She realized that Babajan was being pestered by the boisterous crowd, and she thought that her family’s presence might simply add to Babajan’s annoyance. All the while Gulamasi was encouraging my mother to get closer and closer, to have

Babajan's *darshan* at her feet, although Gaimai's intention at that moment was to take *darshan* from afar and then to leave.

As they approached, some of the other women in the crowd were getting increasingly annoyed that my mother, this outsider, was trying to make her way directly to Babajan, and they were hitting and cursing Mother and Gulamasi! At this Babajan got very annoyed with these women, saying "Allow my children to approach!" So Mother and Gulamasi came up to Babajan, and as my mother was bowing down, Babajan gave her the coconut!

This was too much for the other women in the crowd, who now were cursing like anything: "Who is she, that she should get the coconut, this woman who comes here and snatches away our gift?" In fact, to appease them, my mother actually wanted to give the coconut to those ill-behaved women, but my aunt restrained her, explaining that it was *prasad* from Babajan, and because it was given by the Master, it was extremely precious and not to be given away.

Mumma felt that this coconut was a symbol that she would bear fruit, and in this case, that she would bear another child, which turned out to be me. That's the tradition among Indian people—that the gift of a coconut signifies fruition—which is generally taken to be the blessing of children, and indeed, she conceived soon after.

Just after the coconut incident with Babajan, by the way, Papa bought some food in the market, and the family decided to go to Bund Garden for a picnic and a rest, intending to get away from the crowds and the heat. They laid out their *tiffin* and carpets and were about to eat, when suddenly they heard a hubbub, and in the distance they saw Babajan coming in a *tonga*, followed by a big crowd of people. Seeing the crowd approaching what he had thought and hoped would be a momentary oasis of quietude, Papa said, "Oh no, not this old woman again!"

My aunt Gulamasi replied, "You shouldn't refer to her like that. Don't be disrespectful."

Babajan headed straight for where the family was sitting. Mother said that there were people around Bund Garden who wanted to serve

Babajan, and they asked for Babajan's permission to serve tea, *naan* and *rava* [a sweet dish made from semolina]. In reply Babajan said, pointing to the Jessawala family, "Give that to my children. Serve them. They are so hungry."

So indeed, hot tea, *naan* and *rava* were served to us, and what Papa had bought at the market for the family's meal had to be set aside. In his usual gruff way Papa complained, "What is this leathery stuff that we have to eat?"

My aunt said, "This is Babajan's *prasad*! You should eat it with great reverence—you shouldn't grumble about it!" But Babajan herself exclaimed to the people serving the *naans*, "What kind of *naan* is this? It is like shoe leather!"

Mumma remembers that Babajan then told my father, "*Main teri jannanee aur merey ko gaali deytaa hai?*" ("I am your mother, and you are cursing me?") My aunt also insisted that my father bow down and ask Babajan's forgiveness. Papa rejoined, "But I have never seen this old woman before. I have never cursed her. What is she saying about me cursing her?"

"Whatever it is, go and ask forgiveness," my aunt implored, and eventually he was persuaded to go bow down to her and to ask her forgiveness. Mother told this story frequently, with lots of details now not remembered. Thereafter Baba never permitted anyone from the family to visit Babajan. She dropped her body on the 21st of September, 1931, so I never got a chance to see her while she was still alive.

When it did come time for my birth, it was a very difficult one. My position in the womb was breech, so the doctors were very anxious during my delivery. They thought that either the mother or the child might not make it, and they wanted to do a caesarean. The gynecologist, Dr. Martin at the Mayo Hospital in Nagpur, was a very conservative old lady, and she elected to wait. With some manipulation with the aid of forceps, eventually I was

born. Because of the forceps, however, my face and eyes were all swollen. Manu says that I couldn't open my eyes until that swelling went down, which caused much distress to the family. Manu remembers my sister Meheru and she both wept because they were worried about whether my eyes would open or not. Mother was anesthetized for the last phase of the delivery, at which point she had a dream in which she saw both Baba and Babajan. They were coming with a big egg in their hands, which they gave to her. Inside the egg she saw a male child, and then they both disappeared after giving that gift to her. She came back to consciousness, and there I was. My aunt Banumasi was attending to her during the delivery, and she teased her saying, "A girl child is born to you." But Mumma said, "No, I know it is a male child." She had been convinced by the dream, which was very vivid. Baba was not in Nagpur at the time, but He came to visit later. I don't know directly about all this, of course—I heard about it only from Mumma when I was older.

Anyhow, to continue with my original story, I would have to cycle past Babajan's *dargah* [tomb] on my daily route to school. The family was still awaiting Baba's call to rejoin Him, and the trunks were still unopened—we lived a very day-to-day existence, full of the expectancy of rejoining Baba. Papa had a pension, and Baba used to send some amount for our daily living, but our life was very simple—no ostentation, no cinemas, no parties—plain and simple living as an extension of life in the ashram despite being physically separate from Baba.

In fact, we stayed in that simplicity for several decades. Baba's "planned twenty-day stay" for us extended to almost twenty thousand days, from 1943 to 1990! Eventually, after nearly half a century there, Bindra House was sold to a contractor and we were evicted, which we felt was tantamount to Baba's call, and so we finally came to Meherazad. Thus twenty days became forty-seven years!

Prior to our moving there, we had happened to pass through Poona only once. When we had journeyed with Baba from Bangalore to Meherabad,

Baba stopped in Poona to visit His mother, and that was my first and only visit until Baba asked us to relocate there.

As soon as we had moved in and settled down at Bindra House, we went to Baba's house to pay a visit to Shireenmai. She was quite happy that we were now living so close by, and she would also pay visits to us at Bindra House. We arrived in Poona in early January, and Baba's mother suddenly fell ill and passed away just two months later. I think now that Baba wanted my mother to attend to His mother in her last days, and that was one of the reasons He placed us in Poona at that time.

So it was that one day Beherambhai [Baba's brother] came to see us with the news that Maiji [Shireenmai] was ill. My mother and aunt went there, only to find that Baba's mother had suffered a brain hemorrhage and a stroke. Doctors wanted to take her to the hospital, and they did so in an ambulance. Although she was unconscious, Maiji held tightly to her bed, showing she did not want to be moved. She was nevertheless taken to Sassoon Hospital where she received medical attention from the doctors and staff. After a week or so there, however, the doctors told us that we might as well take her back home, because she could be given the same treatment equally well at home.

Maiji passed away on 25th February—Baba's Birthday. While my mother was there at Baba House attending to her, she suddenly saw blinding rays of golden light—she described them as being like fingers—passing out of Maiji's nostrils and then fluttering around her head like butterflies. Mumma couldn't bear the sight—it was in fact extremely frightening for her. Gulamasi was there, but she didn't see anything. Just then, Baba's mother passed away.

A telegram had previously been sent to Baba that Maiji's condition was very serious, and Baba was close by, in Mahabaleshwar. He set out by car when He heard that His mother was fading, but the car had a flat tire on the way and Baba got delayed. I think that Shireenmai passed away about half an hour before Baba arrived.

Baba came to Baba House, saw His mother and remarked that it was most fortunate that she had passed away before His eyes fell on her. Baba implied that if His eyes had fallen on her before she passed away, He would have been compelled to save her because He was her son, but that would have prolonged her suffering. “So it was good that she passed away before I arrived.”

Baba’s mother was unique, the universal mother. I don’t recollect exactly, but I think Baba said that she was liberated upon her death.

Shireenmai’s greatest fear was that nobody would attend her funeral, in large part because of the great antagonism toward Baba in the Parsi community of Poona. But the exact opposite happened. Throngs of people attended her funeral. Baba’s *mandali* were all called, and it was a big occasion.

For Zoroastrians there is a special place called “*ruvaan ni bungli*”—“*ruvaan*” means “corpse”—where the body is kept before it goes to the *Dakhma*, that is, the Tower of Silence. In Poona it is just across the road from Baba House. A religious ceremony is performed at the *bungli*, during which the body is bathed and wrapped in muslin from old *sadras*, and prayers are recited by the priests. After that the body is taken to the *Dakhma*.

I often came along when my mother was serving Shireenmai, who told us very interesting stories as I sat nearby and listened. She spoke to us in excellent Gujarati, although her mother tongue was Dari, not Farsi, that is, Persian. Sheriarji knew both Dari and Farsi, but he spoke Gujarati with a heavy accent, at least so Mani used to tell us. I never heard him, of course, but Mani could mimic it.

Maiji died in her sixties; she had diabetes, and maybe that brought on the stroke. Otherwise she was in apparent good health, and even a few days prior to her death she had visited us in Bindra House. On that visit Maiji told my mother that she had dreamed of a red horse, which was a very inauspicious omen. She felt that it boded ill for her—that it might even mean that she would not live to see another birthday. It was as if she had

a premonition of her death. Many decades later my mother also died of a cerebral hemorrhage, so it was a similar ending for both the mothers.

When Baba had originally sent us to Poona, He consoled us by saying that He would visit us often. Indeed, a few days after we arrived and had barely settled in, Baba came with thirty or so of the women *mandali*. We had no furniture, but we had a big hall that was quite empty, so we could accommodate all those women to sleep there on their bed rolls. Baba stayed in the garage, which we were beginning to use as a storeroom. We cleaned it out so that He could stay there, and Papa, Eruch and I stayed outside in a big military tent, something we had gotten from one of my cousins, Savak Damania, who was at the time enlisted in the auxiliary corps in charge of military supplies.

Baba stayed for three days that time. He wanted to have a good *qawwali* program while He was there so Jalbhai was asked to look for a good *qawwal*. As it happened, I was out at the market shopping, and there I happened to talk to my regular butcher, from whom I always bought our meat on the few occasions when we had it, and I asked him if he knew of a good *qawwali* singer. He said, "Oh yes, I know a very good *qawwal*."

So I asked, "Would he be willing to come and sing for us at our home?" That fellow inquired, and indeed the *qawwal* agreed to sing there for a nominal fee. He was brought to Bindra House, and I told him that we wanted a good program. Then I went to Baba and informed Him, "Baba, this *qawwal* is willing to come and sing."

Baba replied, "Nice. Ask him to come in the evening of the day of the program." Meanwhile Jalbhai also arranged for a *qawwal*, and they both converged together at Bindra House. The day of the program arrived, and Baba gave Jalbhai's *qawwal* the chance to sing first. As it turned out, Baba liked my *qawwal* better! The man Jalbhai had brought sang very stylistically, and Baba didn't like his performance at all, so He stopped him in mid-song. Then He asked my *qawwal* to sing. That fellow was singing his heart out for Baba, which Baba liked very much.

There were singing and dance programs in the main house during each day of Baba's stay.

In Poona there were many old-time devotees of Baba, including Sadashiv Patil, Vitthal Mauli, Sailormama, Ghani and Babu Cyclewala—quite a few people who had followed Baba in Poona from the earliest phase of His Advent. Babu Cyclewala's shop was close to Babajan's seat along the roadside in town, and I used to have my cycle fixed by him. I remember that he kept Baba's portrait on the wall.

Soon after we had moved to Bindra House, by the way, Baba held a public *darshan* program. He held it in the halls of the Ahilyabai Ashram School, which was located right across the street from our house. The program lasted all day long, and many people came to take Baba's *darshan*, including all the students at the school and the local Baba-lovers.

Anyhow, residing in Poona and living away from Baba was an entirely new phase for our family. At the time we had no idea that we would not go back into Baba's ashram. We were still awaiting His call, sure that it would be just around the corner. Baba paid visits off and on to Bindra House as He had promised us, and He called Eruch quite often to be with Him, because as I said, the *mast* trips were still in full swing.

World War II was still going on at that time, and in fact it was just entering its peak during this period. Poona, along with other major cities throughout India, was getting ready for possible air raids with the establishment of several air raid shelters. Sirens were set up all over the city, and we were all trained how to respond to the sirens if they were to announce an air raid. Blackouts were in force in the city, and wardens would patrol the streets to see if any light showed through windows or doors. Sometimes sirens were sounded just to keep the people alert, and we would all have to rush to the air raid shelter nearest to us.

Whenever Baba would embark on a *mast* trip, He would almost invariably pass through Poona, where inevitably He would make it a point to drop in at Bindra House, keeping His word that He would visit frequently. In fact, we had innumerable visits from Baba, and that kept

us going, as it were—we didn't feel left out. Sometimes we would get advance notice that Baba and the *mandali* would be arriving, but many other times He simply would arrive unannounced. Invariably Baba was hungry upon His arrival, and He would ask for food quickly, allowing hardly any time at all for preparation. We would scurry about while He would repeatedly inquire, "Is the food ready? Is the food ready? How long will it take?" His favorite was plain dal and rice. Manu recollects that He would sometimes arrive at 4:00 a.m. and ask for food to be prepared for Him.

Everybody would be on their toes, of course, whenever Baba visited. The *mandali* would be fed well too, as if to store up for all the troubles they would encounter on the imminent *mast* tour. Baba would always bathe during those stopovers as well.

When He traveled, Baba's appearance was often disguised with a cap and dark glasses, but in spite of all that external camouflage, people would feel attracted to Him, despite having no idea who He was.

Even in Poona there were a number of *masts*, and their state of being a *mast* was quite obvious to us. Our awareness of *masts* had been especially developed by Baba and His work with them. Once Baba dropped His body, the *masts* gradually disappeared, and today you rarely see one. In India there is a tradition to respect these men of God, though they often appear outwardly just like mad people. When attuned to the difference, as we were with Baba, one can sense their spiritual authority and dignity. Most *masts* were not harassed and were left alone to roam about at will.

Once Baba sent Papa out to get a particular *mast*, but he was so unaware of how to handle that type of situation that he spent a fortune trying to fulfill Baba's request. He got a public bus, took a crowd of people with him in addition to the *mast*, and he probably spent lavishly on refreshments to entice the *mast*. On top of that, the person Papa brought was more of a yoga adept and not a *mast* at all! The crowd consisted of his followers and students as he didn't want to go without them. Baba was very displeased with his approach to solving the problem.

Later on Kaka, Eruch and Baidul were the primary *mast* hunters. There was always a rivalry between Kaka and Baidul. Kaka would sometimes take me into his room at Meherazad to complain about Baidul. “He manhandles them (the *masts*),” he would say, “and Baba doesn’t like it, and some day he will come to grief due to his crude, uncouth approach. He has no manners....” Kaka would go on and on like this, time after time. Imagine—this competitive behavior went on right up to Baidul’s death! Baidul had become paralyzed on one side, and yet still sometimes they would physically push and shout at each other. Baba would say, “Look, those two old fellows are at it again.” Sometimes Baba reprimanded them, and sometimes He simply let them act out.

In later years, when Baba used to come around from the women’s side, He would take Francis Brabazon’s help to make a few rounds of the Hall, holding onto his arm. Kaka would sit on a pouf near Baba’s chair, and Baidul would be seated at the far end of the Hall, near the door leading to the women’s side, with his long, once-black but by this time almost totally gray beard. That was a unique privilege, by the way, in Baba’s “court”—to grow a beard—because Baba never liked beards. I grew one in college, but Mumma told me to shave it off, which I refused to do. When Baba came to Bindra House, He said, “What is all this?” He caught me by the hand, took me to Mother and said, “What is this? How did you allow him to do this?” He told me to shave immediately before I could come back into His presence.

Anyhow, on those rounds around Mandali Hall Baba would stop as He passed Baidul and would caress his long white beard, which pleased Baidul. One day Baba didn’t do that, and after Baba sat down He said, “Baidul, did you notice that I didn’t caress your beard today?”

“Yes,” replied Baidul sullenly.

“It is because I am upset with you,” said Baba. Something had happened—Baidul had had a quarrel with Kaka that morning over who would wash his face first. Although Baidul had been at the wash room before Kaka, Kaka had pushed him out and wanted to go first. Baidul

pushed him right back, and a scuffle had taken place. So this was how Baba would show His displeasure over their disharmony. Baidul felt sorry and began to weep. These were rough, tough *mandali*, mind you! It was a very unnerving sight to see them weep before Baba like small children. And in such cases Baba could in no time bring them to their knees—before Baba they were like lambs.

But those people were very tough. As I have said, rivalries were common in the ashram, on the women's side as well as the men's. There were all these little bickerings and all sorts of little "side-shows." Baba would be going on with the main show, but at the same time complaints would inevitably come to Baba and He would have to sort things out. There were enmities, but Baba would always make the warring sides embrace each other after everything was settled in His presence.

Such episodes were a daily occurrence. There was no end to it because Baba, in fact, brought out all these things in each one of us. That way no one would end up harboring any ill feelings inside himself. I suppose that it was not that there were really so many personal rifts, but all these pent-up feelings inside everyone were being brought out by Baba, and the others in the ashram were the most convenient targets. In short, the "scum" of one's mind would be removed, until the next session when more scum would come up.

In those early years I was small, and I looked up to all of them, all of the *mandali*. They were many years my seniors, so I had no ill feeling towards them, and they all liked me because I had the nature of making friends with everybody. When first I came to Meherazad for a long stay, Baba was walking past Mandali Hall when I was standing close by. He called me close to Him and said, "You have large ears. Make good use of them." I didn't understand, and He clarified, "When you hear something from one ear, let it go out the other. Don't store it in." What He meant was that whatever I should hear, I shouldn't repeat it elsewhere. I could listen and observe things, but I shouldn't involve myself. Anyhow, that's what I think He meant. In those days of my youth, my sisters used to tease me by pulling on my ear lobes, and I used

to get angry about it. Now here was Baba saying, “Make use of those long ears you have!” This was His way of giving a sort of discourse in just a few words. To hear but not to brood or harbor is a way of life—just be a witness to things. There is a couplet of Tukaram’s that says, “When a Master gives out a few spontaneous words, it is like a big sermon, and one must be very attentive at such times.” Baba would always bring out many facts about life and the spiritual path in these little things, all done so informally and apparently on the spur of the moment.

Some things we learned the hard way. The big orders we could always follow, but in the smaller matters, we weren’t always so careful, and so we sometimes missed some of the little orders He gave us. That’s when our inattention would be pointed out to us.

Anyway, after those *mast* trips, when Baba and the *mandali* accompanying Him would return, they were usually in a completely different state. They would be exhausted, haggard-looking, unshaven—totally drained of energy. The clothes of the *mandali* would often be stuck to their bodies with sweat and grime. We could see what troubles they must have undergone from the state in which they arrived. Baba and the *mandali* would then bathe, shave, eat meals and be ready to proceed to Meherazad. Baba did all this in order to be presentable to the women *mandali* and especially Mehera, who were all generally shielded from the real state of affairs during the *mast* tours. Baba kept Mehera ignorant of the trials through which He passed, because He wanted her to remain cheerful so His work would not be disturbed.

One of the main tasks of the women *mandali* was to see that Mehera would not be displeased. That was a big order for the women *mandali*, who had to be with her all the while and keep her in a good mood. Sometimes, though, Baba Himself would tell them about the travels and the difficulties that they had faced on one particular excursion or another.

At Bindra House Baba would tell Eruch to recount for us the *mast* tour experiences that they had had, and Baba would be there to supplement Eruch’s narrative when he forgot something. We wish now that we had

taken notes when Baba told Eruch to tell us about their travels, but our focus was so much on Baba that it never occurred to us to record that information for others who would not have access to the memories of those amazing experiences. *The Wayfarers* has only a small part of it, so we later felt that we had been really selfish not to have thought of writing down those accounts, but that was always the way it was with Baba. His presence was such that you simply forgot everything while being with Him.

After finishing the writing of *The Wayfarers*, by the way, Donkin actually became *mast*-like himself. Whenever he came to Poona, Donkin always stayed with us, and we noticed that he was often distracted and detached, a bit distant and preoccupied. I'll tell you some examples later on. Donkin had not spared himself in writing the book, and the enormous effort was remarkable and creditable. However cursory or superficial the accounts of Baba's *mast* trips and encounters in *The Wayfarers* may be compared to the detailed stories we would hear from Eruch and Baba Himself, the readers at least get some idea of what Baba and the *mandali* experienced on those trips. There would be no time for personal talks during those visits. As I've said, Baba's presence was so overwhelming and so endearing that our attention would simply be focused upon Him all the time that we were in His physical presence.

During this period the focus of Baba's activity was centered on the *masts*. Those years were the war years. After 1946, once the war ended, the *mast* work slowed down quite a bit, but it continued until Baba's second car accident in December, 1956. Eruch wasn't living with Baba full-time in those days, but he would frequently be called to travel with Baba on those *mast* journeys. When the *mast* trips ended Baba would send him to Bindra House for a few days from time to time. On those occasions Eruch had to face Papa, who inevitably had long lists of grievances. No sooner would Eruch arrive than Papa would vent his feelings. While Eruch stood in the doorway, Papa would recount all the things that vexed him. This would go on hour after hour, Eruch standing patiently in the doorway, hoping Papa would cut it short. The truth is that Papa greatly

missed Eruch's company, and this was how he expressed it. Papa was rather conservative, and although he enjoyed Baba's company, he wouldn't show it.

When Baba came to stay in Bindra House He would use Papa's bed, so Papa would be shunted out. Papa didn't mind—in fact he was quite proud and honored that Baba used his bed, and he often remarked to us, “Whose bed does Baba sleep in when He comes to Bindra House, huh?” He always readily moved out whenever needed.

One day when Eruch was with Baba at Meherazad, the topic of ghosts came up. Eruch had said that he didn't believe in ghosts, and that there was no such thing and that people made it all up. Gustadji, for example, was a great inventor of stories, and ghosts would feature prominently in many of them. The *mandali* always enjoyed his tales and the way he told them with many embellishments, expressions and gestures. Baba also enjoyed them immensely.

Anyway, on this particular occasion Baba said to Eruch, “Oh, you don't believe in ghosts? It's all right—some people don't believe—but it is nothing to be worried about,” and Baba dismissed the subject. Sometime later Eruch was sent to Poona from Meherazad to do some work, but no sooner had he arrived at Bindra House than he received a telegram from Baba. The telegram said, “COME IMMEDIATELY.” It was just those two words. So Eruch put on his travel clothes and took the next bus to Ahmednagar and went directly to Meherazad. Baba told him a few minor things, and then said that He would like Eruch “to stay and keep night watch with Baba, and then to go back to Poona tomorrow.”

That night Eruch arrived in Baba's room for his duty. At that time Baba was using the room later occupied by Pendu, opposite the *Manonash* Cabin, the place where I now live. Baba lay down on the bed and directed Eruch to lie on the floor by the bed. Eruch told us that as the night progressed he was sleeping soundly as usual, although even in his sleep he would always be very alert to even Baba's slightest stirring. He had

the training to be listening for Baba constantly, while taking as much rest as and when he could.

While sleeping very deeply Eruch suddenly felt a choking sensation as if someone were sitting on his chest and trying to strangle him. Eruch was a very strong young man at that time, so he tried to throw off his attacker, and eventually with great struggle he did throw him off. When his eyes opened, he found Baba sitting on the side of His bed, watching him.

Baba: “What happened?”

Eruch: “Baba, I felt somebody choking me!”

Baba: “Now do you believe in ghosts? I wanted you to have this experience— that’s why I called you to be here with Me tonight.”

Eruch said that in defending himself against the ghost, he had worked up quite a sweat. Dramatic as it was, I think that that was his first and last encounter with ghosts. Baba enjoyed the spectacle immensely while teaching Eruch a lesson.

A person who remains in Baba’s presence and stays awake prevents ghosts from approaching Baba—otherwise they would have unrestricted access to Him. They would want to touch Baba’s body so that they could be released from the disembodied state they are in and which could go on for ages. Baba explained that someone who commits suicide gets trapped in the disembodied “ghost” state until they finish their *sanskaras*, but because they don’t have a body, this spending of the *sanskaras* of the life they had cut short could take eons! They have to undergo this suffering for committing suicide. Touching the physical form of the Avatar would instantly release them. The disturbance from ghosts was one reason Baba always kept a night watchman with Him. The watchman had to remain seated, still and alert, and that was the most difficult part. Keeping alert without moving in the slightest—all the men *mandali* who kept watch reported that this was the most difficult thing for them to do.

While living at Bindra House with the rest of the family, Eruch didn’t usually have any work to do for Baba. He was sent to be with the family,

and he helped with the marketing and chores. He was quite active, taking the family out on outings and excursions, and later when Baba did allow us to go to the cinema, he took us to movies as well. The feeling of being close to Baba was there, even when we were not physically with Him. Later on Eruch was told by Baba to write letters to me to relay news from Meherazad, and this practice continued right up to Baba's last days. That was His grace and mercy.



Chapter Seven:

1944 - 1945

Even after a year or so of living in Bindra House, the trunks were still packed with our bedding rolls on them, and Papa's patience was on the verge of running out! Papa wanted to attend some Parsi social function around that time, and it was customary for such affairs that one should wear a *dagla*, a type of long white coat with matching white trousers and a special hat called a *pheta*, which is similar to a top hat but without a brim. In those days that was the typical "uniform" of orthodox Zoroastrians. Papa's own *daglas* were put away in the trunks, and so he had not bothered to unpack them. When he discovered that he was the only one attending the event who was not wearing the typical formal attire, however, he was greatly embarrassed. That provided Papa with a major cause for complaint when Baba next visited Bindra House.

"Baba," he said, "these people around here (meaning us, his family) are really crazy. So many months have gone by, and they still have not unpacked. I don't know what's in their minds." He told Baba to order us to unpack, and he gave the example of his frustration at having no proper clothing for the orthodox Parsi event he had attended.

In response Baba said, "Why don't you unpack? If you have to go somewhere or leave the place, you can always pack up again!" So we unpacked.

Some furniture slowly began to make its appearance, and gradually the whole place got filled up with tables, chairs, cupboards and beds, and all sorts of the items required for normal living. The reason that Papa wanted us to settle in Poona is that it is close to Bombay, and Bombay was (and remains) the center of the Zoroastrian population (although the Zoroastrian population in Poona is also fairly large). Papa enjoyed socializing with his friends in the Zoroastrian community, and so that was one reason he and Baba had arranged for us to settle in Poona.

Though we had moved to Bindra House, Baba used to call us to stay with Him. I had not been banned from the women's side, but from late 1944, I asked to be kept on the men's side. It was a natural sort of thing. I was not feeling very much at home as the only male on the women's side, so I opted out. The biggest problem of the New Life was to maintain that watertight partition between the men and the women, but somehow Baba sorted it out. In the years I was in the women's ashram, I never touched Mehera, although I spoke to her. In later years Baba gave me an order not to touch women at all. But even as a child in the ashram I kept a distance from Mehera.

Later, when I would come to Meherazad for my annual visit, I would stay on the men's side and wouldn't even see the women. Dr. Goher had to attend to the medical needs of the men *mandali*, and Mani was allowed to come to the men's side for Baba's work when required. Those were the only ones that I would occasionally see on my visits.

After Baba dropped His body, this strict separation was relaxed. Mehera and Meheru had been kept strictly segregated up until that time. Mehera would sometimes speak to us then, after years of having been kept cloistered from any contact with men, but we were always reticent to respond.

I still remember a time in 1944 or 1945 when we were called to Meherazad, and Baba met us in what later became Aloba's room. Mumma, Manu and Meheru went over to the women's side, but I stayed

behind. Mani wanted to see me from a distance so Baba Himself took me around to the main gates, and Mani came to the verandah of the small cottage and saw me from there. I was looking down, so Baba held me in front of Him, with His hands under my chin, lifting it to make me look at Mani.

I didn't have much contact with Chanji [Framroze Dadachanji], who was Baba's disciple and secretary from the 1920s until his death in 1944. I do recollect that he had various nervous tics when he was with Baba and was also very absent-minded. He would, for example, often be found searching for his glasses, only to discover that he had pushed them up onto his forehead! He was also renowned for his short temper and often had hot exchanges with Papa, whose temper was also on a very short fuse!

Once in 1942, however, when we were in Lonavala where there were the three residences—for the women, for Baba's seclusion, and for the men—Baba asked Mani to send me to get something from Chanji. He was in the men's bungalow, and by the time I went to him, I forgot exactly what Baba had said and only recalled vaguely that it was a letter. Chanji figured out for himself what Baba wanted, and he gave me the letter, which I was able to deliver to Baba. I was greatly relieved that Chanji was able to do so!

In any case, Chanji was always extremely busy with his work for Baba, and indeed, posterity will ever be indebted to him for his records of the events of Baba's early life. He went to tremendous lengths to record those accounts. The books *Meher Darshan* (in Hindi) and *Meher Prabhu* (known as *Lord Meher*) would never have been possible without him. (Ramjoo and Kitty also to a certain extent contributed with their own written recording of events and happenings around Baba).

Chanji was Baba's secretary, attending to correspondence while keeping the diaries. He also attended to Baba's physical needs and took care of Him before Eruch came. It was a tremendous responsibility. Some of those letters he wrote are gems. They show how he would encourage the

newly arrived Westerners about how they should be with Baba, and he was also instrumental in bringing so many Parsi families to Baba, including Meherjee Karkaria and all of his own extended Dadachanji family.

When Chanji died, he was attending to all of Baba's correspondence and everything secretarial. I'm sure that his absence must have been keenly felt, but somehow Adi was able to take over, and a transition occurred, so that someone was there to take over Chanji's duties. The *mandali* felt the loss of their colleague, and they often reminisced about Chanji, but Baba's pace was so hectic that there was not so much time for such niceties, and so it was a rough-and-tumble life all the while. There was no time for sentiments. Even when Baba Himself passed away, as you must have heard Eruch say, we had no time for ourselves. It was always an ongoing process.

Chanji passed away in Kashmir, in August, 1944. Once Baba had taken Chanji to Kashmir when He went there for some *mast* work, and Chanji was so enchanted with the Kashmir valley that he expressed a wish to Baba that He let him die in Kashmir. Baba fulfilled his wish, and Chanji did die there, and he was buried in what is now the frontier area near the Pakistani border (in the vicinity of Srinagar). His belongings were brought to Baba at Meherabad on his demise.

Masaji died in December, 1944. After that Baba wanted to have a memorial service for all His close lovers who had passed away, and for all those lovers close to Him who would eventually pass away.

I remember when Baba called us to Meherabad—it was just after Masaji's death. Two big pits had been dug near the railroad tracks at lower Meherabad, and Chanji's bedding roll was placed in one pit along with some other personal belongings of his, and Masaji's body was placed in the other pit. Then the names of all those who had been close to Baba were recited, and after each name, Baba would place a rose petal in the pit. It went on and on for about a hundred names. At least that is my memory of the event. Baba said that in the future a memorial was to be constructed at that spot, a "Memorial Tower" commemorating those who

loved and served Him or who were in some way connected to Him in this Advent. Baba had the names that were read out on that day put onto a list, and then He would periodically have the list read out to Him, with new names added as various other close ones would die.

The last time the list was read before Baba was in June, 1968. The names on that final list are now in the process of being inscribed on the Memorial Tower, which is under construction in Lower Meherabad at this time [March, 2013].



Chapter Eight:

1945 - 1949

Baba kept coming often to Bindra House, even after 1946 when the *mast* tours had decreased in frequency. He liked Poona, the city of His birth, very much. In later days He would tease Bhau [Kalchuri], who was from Nagpur, declaring that the climate was better in Poona than in Nagpur. Bhau would argue back just for the fun of it and to play along with Baba, taking the side of Nagpur, which is well known to have a much more extreme climate than Poona.

It seems that in every type of activity there would inevitably be people who would take the Beloved's side and people who would oppose Him. Even in card games there were people on Baba's side and people on the opposite side. While playing cards with Baba, everyone had instructions to put their heart and soul into the game, so that the people on the other team were supposed to oppose Baba's team. Those games were really unique. In the heat of the play there would suddenly be arguments and discussions among Baba's *mandali*, because they would actually get completely involved in the game, just as Baba wished. There was quite a big group of *mandali* staying in the ashram at that time.

Sometime in 1944 or 1945 we were called to Meherabad for a meeting. There were many *mandali* seated in Mandali Hall, that is, in the old

dharamshala with its four crooked pillars supporting the roof. Baba was at one end of the hall seated on a divan, and the men were gathered around Him. There was much merriment and laughter, because Baba was with us and He was in a good mood. Ghani was there at that meeting, and he had the habit of always poking fun at Baba, while Kaka Baria was very much Baba's staunch defender. Baba would goad Kaka by saying, "Kaka, look at all these things Ghani is saying about Me, and you are keeping quiet?"

Kaka would sullenly put his head down and just kept listening, but at some point Baba made a covert sign to Ghani to provoke Kaka. Ghani said some other nasty things about how cruel a God Baba was and so forth—he was a very learned man and very witty, almost always to Baba's great entertainment.

Eventually Kaka stood up and walked like a wrestler to where Baba sat, and everybody cheered. Baba said, "Kaka has come to My rescue. This fellow (meaning Ghani) is not shutting up." Kaka now started bellowing at the top of his voice, and his shouted arguments were interspersed with Ghani's witty rebuttals. Baba was laughing so hard that we could see His whole frame shake, and He was rubbing His feet on the *gadi* with glee, like a child. Eventually Kaka subdued Ghani, and he strutted back to his place triumphant, to the loud cheers of all present! Ghani was really being a good sport, and he had allowed Kaka to win the "debate."

A few years later, just before the New Life, Baba provoked a *ghazal* competition between Ghani and Khak Saheb, an old-time lover of Baba. That is how Baba would entertain Himself and His *mandali*.

Eruch and my sister Meheru both got married at the same time in 1945. It's a long story, which Eruch has recounted many times. In 1937 Baba had called Eruch, Meheru and the rest of our family to Akbar Press in Ahmednagar where, to Eruch's great surprise, he was engaged to our cousin Khorshed Damania, and Meheru got engaged to Khorshed's older brother, Savak Damania. They were both the children of our maternal aunt Shirinmasi. All this happened before we left Nagpur and moved

into the ashram. Baba had garlanded the couples with His own hand at the engagement ceremony, and they had exchanged rings. Then, in 1938, Baba had called us to the ashram, and all talk of engagements and weddings was forgotten.

The engagement hadn't been forgotten, however, by Jehangir Damania, who was my uncle and Khorshed and Savak's father. He began to get agitated about his daughter being engaged for so long with no marriage date being finalized, and as a consequence he started slandering Baba and Baba's people, and eventually his criticism reached Eruch's ears. This uncle of mine also wrote a very nasty letter to Baba complaining about these things.

As a result Eruch went to Baba while this mess was brewing and told Him that he had to get married. Baba looked askance at Eruch and asked, "What's gotten into you all of a sudden?"

Eruch replied, "Baba, it's simply that I don't like people saying all these bad things about You on my account, so please arrange my marriage."

"Why do you pay attention to such loose talk?" Baba retorted. But in the end Eruch was adamant, and so Baba agreed. He said, "Please yourself. Start the process." Calling for a calendar, Baba fixed the date for the weddings Himself.

Eruch then came to Bindra House, and he and I went to Bombay and started inviting all our relatives from Papa's side who were still living there to attend the weddings. That was the only time I met my father's two sisters, Soona and Banu. Papa's brother, Jehangir, lived in Kirkee, on the outskirts of Poona, and he, too, was invited. Baba had fixed the date to be May 28th, 1945, and He specified the place to be Akbar Press, which was Eruch's bride's home. Invitations were sent out, and the date was thereby announced.

On the appointed wedding date Baba came to Akbar Press and stayed the whole day, remaining in an annex to the main building. Even when the wedding ceremony was being performed, Baba simply watched it from the window of that room.

The wedding passed off very nicely. During the day Baba asked Manu and Mumma to cook food for Him, as He didn't want to eat the food prepared by the hired caterers, and so Manu and Mumma cooked for Him.

In the evening, after the ceremony and the festivities, Baba asked Eruch, "Who will be doing night watch for Me tonight?" Up to that day, of course, Eruch had been the night watchman, so he replied that he would be doing it as usual.

"Aren't you married now?" Baba asked. "Won't you be staying with your wife?"

Eruch acknowledged that he was married but insisted that he would be doing the night watch, and that made Baba very happy. "But," Baba inquired, "what about your wife?" Khorshed, the bride, was then called, and Baba said to her, "Look, this is what I asked Eruch about the night watch, and this is what Eruch said to me. What about you—what do you say?"

"I am happy with whatever You wish, Baba."

Baba said, "Is it all right if your Eruch stays with Me and does night watch?"

Khorshed said, "Baba, he is not my Eruch, he is Your Eruch. I am very happy with whatever You want."

Then Baba said, "I am well pleased," and He gave her a morsel of food with His own hands. As they were about to depart, Baba called them back and said to Khorshed, "Would you give Me something if I ask you?"

"Of course, Baba," she replied.

"Then give Me Eruch," Baba said. "Baba, I already said, Eruch is Yours, so how can I give You something that is not mine?"

Baba was most pleased with what she said and told them, "I would like you to live as brother and sister from today onwards. Will you be able to do that?"

They both agreed, so that was, in effect, the end of Eruch's marriage, on the very day of the ceremony! Khorshed came to live with us, and

Eruch went back to being with Baba. It was good for Khorshed that she accepted Baba's wish and obeyed Him. She was a kind soul, very affectionate and rather outgoing. She was not raised with the strict discipline that we had experienced in our family. Her family was much more social and outgoing, unlike ours which had at first been under the military-like discipline imposed by Papa and later under Baba's discipline at the ashram.

Years later Khorshed got into the clutches of a fake guru called Mirchandani. He got her so entangled in his web that she went off to his so-called ashram in Bombay and worked like a servant for him, gave him all her money and jewelry, and in the end totally alienated herself from Baba and our family. *Lord Meher* has the details of the meeting Baba held at Meherazad about that situation and its outcome.

My niece Mehera recalls Mumma and her grandmother Banumasi saying that when Baba was asked what the *sanskritic* burden would be for Khorshed after going so far astray and leaving Him, Baba said, "She gave Me Eruch, so for her all is forgiven."

Our cousin Savak was also a gem of a person, and he was fully devoted to Baba. My sister Meheru and Savak got settled in Khushru Quarters in Ahmednagar, and the room that was eventually decades later Mani's office in the present-day Avatar Meher Baba Trust premises was their living room, while the side rooms acted as the dining room and bedrooms. That is where Baba Himself settled them. Savak got a job in accounting and general administration at Sarosh Motor Works, owned by Sarosh Irani, one of Baba's close disciples from the Manzil-e-Meem days. One outstanding trait of Savak was that he was scrupulously honest.

Adi's father, Kaikhushru, had passed away by this time, but Adi's mother, Gulmai, together with Adi and his sister Piroja, were living in Khushru Quarters. Gulmai and Adi were staying in what later became Bhau Kalchuri's office, and Piroja had her own quarters in what is now the Trustees' Board Meeting Room, within the compound as well. These changes in living quarters through the years simply reflected the shifting patterns of Maya, the ever-changing fabric of Illusion. That is how it was.

After her marriage to Eruch, Khorshed moved to Bindra House to live with our family, and Baba sent Eruch back there from time to time after various *mast* tours. Overall, things were going on quite smoothly. I was about sixteen years old, and I had just finished my schooling after changing schools for the fifth time. In those days there was what was called “the Cambridge Course,” and the sealed sets of exam papers for these tests would be sent by sea from Cambridge. Once they arrived in India they would be distributed to all the schools around the country so that the exams could be held. This whole process became very difficult with many delays and obstacles because of the war. In the seventh standard, which was my class, we had to appear for what was called the “Junior Cambridge,” and then two years later we would take the “Senior Cambridge.” Our grades in those exams determined whether we passed out of high school and into college.

As I have mentioned, at that time—1945 to 1946—Khorshed was living at Bindra House, and during that period Baba called my mother and Manu to Hyderabad for a change while He was staying there. Mumma had developed a severe case of asthma, and her health had been poor during the wedding. Baba wanted her to have a change of environment after all that activity, so they went to stay with Baba for a rest.

Baba had a beautiful house there in the Jubilee Hills area, one that had been given for His use by some *nawab*. It had a swimming pool and all sorts of modern amenities. Throughout the years various people would inexplicably give over their best for Baba—homes to stay in, food for Him and His *mandali* or for feeding the poor, on and on.

Mumma and Manu stayed in Hyderabad with Baba for quite some time, and from then on Mumma’s health took a change for the better. She always felt that she had gotten asthma because she failed to obey one instruction of Baba’s, which was that she should not drink cold water for at least half an hour after working in the kitchen. On one particularly hot day, when she came out of the kitchen she had drunk a lot of cold water, and afterwards she suffered intensely. For nights together she gasped

and wheezed, and she lost weight until she became skin and bones. She might have passed away if it had not been for Baba's Grace, because there were very few good medicines available in India at that time. She had even been sent to Akbar Press to be treated by her brothers, Meherjee and Naosherwan, who were homeopaths, but to no avail.

Baba finally called for some medicines to be sent from America—I remember that one was a drug called Entex manufactured by Eli Lilly. Baba gave Mumma the pills with His own hands, and the attacks became gradually less and she recovered. Not a trace of asthma was left, a result that was considered impossible by the medical experts of the time. Later on, when she got old, if she caught cold she would have severe bronchitis, but not asthma.

There were many *masts* in and around Hyderabad, and Baba was ever attracted to places where *masts* resided. One could see them all over, roaming about the streets, but after Baba dropped His body, they all mostly disappeared. Even in Ahmednagar, there was a *mast* named Mama Mast. He was very old, from the time of my mother's childhood, and he was quite stout, hale and hearty.

We don't know, of course, but perhaps the *masts* congregated to help Baba with His work in conducting the terrible World War II, and His work thereafter, planning everything for many thousands of years, adjusting *sanskaras*.

We may be seeing the fruit of that work in you people who have come to Baba after He dropped His body and who without any rhyme or reason so easily accept Baba. It's a great source of wonder to us, but this is how we feel Baba's work is coming out into the open. Otherwise how could we explain why, in such a totally materialistic world, so many different souls worldwide are accepting Baba? Don Stevens used to tell me that in his youth, they didn't even speak the word "God." They would

hesitate, and people would look down upon any person mentioning God as very naïve, yet now so many in this same material world are able to accept Meher Baba as the Avatar of the Age! It must be the result of divine intervention, a necessary “assist” to allow the world to accept the divine dispensation.

Early in 1947 Baba came to Bindra House, along with Eruch, Gustadji, and Sarosh, who drove the car. The *mast* Ali Shah was brought to Bindra House a couple of days later. Baba then wanted to go to see a cricket match at the Poona Club. The game was played on the club grounds, which were fully visible to people sitting outside the fence on the periphery.

Adi had just had his new Chevrolet delivered and was very proud of it. Baba, Gustadji, Eruch and Ali Shah went with Adi in the car to the Club and parked outside, where they could view the match. Once they had settled in to watch the game, Ali Shah got out of the car and walked around to one side, where he calmly lifted his *kafni* and, squatting on the riding path, cleared his bowels. Gustadji was the one who looked after Ali Shah at that time, and when he saw this, he equally nonchalantly picked up some newspaper that someone had thrown on the road and used it to wipe Ali Shah’s bum.

The activity drew the attention of the fielder closest to the car, and he came over to see what was happening. Ali Shah hadn’t quite finished, and with this addition to his audience, he evacuated some more! Gustadji again started cleaning him, and by this time all the players were gathered around, watching in wonder. The game, in short, had come to a complete halt.

Baba walked a little distance away, dissociating Himself from this spectacle. After Ali Shah had finished, he got back into the car, and Baba then gestured to Adi to drive them all back to Bindra House. Later, recounting the episode, Baba said that even He was embarrassed by the whole thing!

While in Poona Baba wanted to do some particular *mast* and seclusion work, and there was an old-time fort of Shivaji near Poona called

Purandar where He decided to go for it. Eruch had found the place, and it was nice, suitable for Baba's work. I was allowed to go along because Eruch had said, "Let Meherwan come along also, just in the event that there is some emergency."

Baba made a wry face. "Why, what emergency? All right, let him come," He relented, knowing of course that Eruch was actually seeking to give me the opportunity to spend time with Baba. So when the time came, the car left Bindra House, and I was seated beside Baba.

After going just a couple of blocks down the road, Baba started to bend down to pick up a box that was on the floor. I said, "Baba, let me get it for you."

Baba motioned to me that I should have nothing to do with it and put the box on His lap.

I said, "Baba, I'll hold it for You."

Again Baba motioned, "No, no, no."

Baba opened the box and brought out some *gathia* (a soft and salty chickpea preparation) saying, "Since you want, you have this." As if to say, "If you want it so much, take it." He handed it to me in such a nice way.

Typically, as soon as Baba started on a journey He had to have something to munch on. Even during the night he would ask Naja for something to snack on. And he would eat very fast. Eruch says that nothing remained in His system for long. We obviously cannot know how His system worked, just that it was highly unusual.

The fort was on a steep hill. Baba was carried to the fort in a *palanquin*, and He asked me and one of the others to come up that way as well. I felt very awkward, especially as I was young, at being carried by four men. The fort was well maintained and had doors with glass panels. Once Baba entered the fort, He asked that I go back, so that was all I saw of that work of His.

In May, 1945, World War II came to a close in Europe, although it would be another three months before Japan surrendered. In the interim, in July, the British had an election, and Churchill's Conservative Party lost, bringing the Labour Party into power. Independence for India had been one of the manifestos of the Labour Party, and accordingly they immediately began the somewhat drawn-out affair of granting India independence.

So it was divinely ordained, despite the Conservative Party having won a most magnificent victory in World War II! A few months afterwards the Conservatives were kicked out of power. Winston Churchill was just voted out, as had happened a couple of centuries earlier to his illustrious ancestor, John Churchill, the 1st Duke of Marlborough, as we had been taught in school. John fell from power after the Battle of Blenheim. That was a very interesting coincidence, how history repeated itself. Churchill's ancestor had won a magnificent battle in Europe, and in spite of that success, he was thrown out. Why such an irony was again ordained may rest with the fact that India would never have gotten her independence so easily if Churchill had stayed in power.

At any rate, independence was granted, and Independence Day was declared on the 15th of August, 1947. The reason I'm relating these stories especially is because Baba was at Bindra House that very day. That is why I recount all these things, of course, because of their relevance to Baba. On that visit by Baba to Bindra House, He discovered that Papa was not very enthusiastic about the prospect of India's independence. "Oh Baba," he said, "these natives have no knowledge of administration, and I am most unhappy that the British are leaving." He would continue to express his opinion about it all in this fashion.

Baba, however, was not happy with Papa's view, and He said, "No, no, you must celebrate the occasion." The Government had decreed that everyone must have a national flag and must hoist it on their houses to commemorate the occasion. Papa wouldn't have it, but Baba told him, "Go to the market and buy a flag and bring it here," and when he did

so, Baba made him hoist the flag up on the veranda. It was a very rainy day, pouring, so you can imagine the scene with Papa grudgingly having to raise a flag in that weather! Perinmai, Beheram's wife and Baba's sister-in-law, was also not happy about independence, and Baba had personally gone to Baba House to make her put up the flag.

Years earlier, by the way, when they met on the *S. S. Rajputana* while they were both travelling to the West, Baba had promised Mahatma Gandhi that He would ensure that India got her independence.

Baba said, "I promise independence to India, but I need a promise from you."

"Yes, Baba," Gandhi replied, "what is it?"

"Soon after Independence you have to leave politics and come to Me, to translate My book" (referring to the book that Baba had written in the 1920s and had kept unpublished).

Gandhi had promised, but after Independence there was great turmoil and bloodshed owing to the partition of united India into India and Pakistan, and he got so embroiled in the political situation that he put off fulfilling his promise to Baba. Of course, shortly afterwards, on January 30th, 1948, he was assassinated.

As the 1930s progressed, it became increasingly difficult for Baba to work at Meherabad because the ashram was very close to the railway lines and the noise of the trains disturbed Baba. In addition, people would just walk in at all hours and expect Baba to give *darshan*, and Baba could get no work done.

Sometime around 1940 Baba told the *mandali* to look out for a suitable place for a new headquarters, and they began looking for somewhere to shift to. Vishnu Master found a place that was vacant, and after making enquiries he took Baba to see it. The place was called "*Gatney cha Malla*" or "Gatney's Farm." Baba didn't find that place suitable because it was even closer to the railway lines and to the train station itself, and therefore it would be at least as noisy as the Meherabad ashram.

There is considerable history regarding how Meherazad was acquired. After Baba dismissed *Gatney cha Malla*, Vishnu saw an advertisement in a newspaper about a property belonging to the Ahmednagar Municipality that was due to be auctioned. Originally the British had built a cottage on the property, located about nine miles north of Ahmednagar towards Rahuri and Aurangabad, for the engineer who built the dam that had created Pimpalgaon Lake. A ruler-straight road had been built for him to reach the cottage from the Wambori road, where the dam was situated, at a distance of about a mile-and-a-half from the cottage. After the dam was finished, the engineer was shifted to another place for work elsewhere, so the property where his cottage had been built was lying in disuse for many years.

Eventually it was handed over to the Ahmednagar Municipality, and they didn't know what to do with it besides put it up for auction. Baba was brought to see the property, and He liked it. Then He took Mehera and the women to see it, and they also found it delightful, verdant and beautiful, with the lake nearby.

Kaikhushru, Adi K. Irani's father, was the auctioneer for the property, and he contrived to get the place for about Rs. 200 by asking other people not to bid. The property was acquired, with a small cottage in the middle of it and a very rough kitchen at some distance. The place, along with the access road, was initially deeded in Baba's own Name.

According to *Lord Meher* the property was bought in an auction in 1940. After the purchase Baba would sometimes come with the *mandali* and stay there for a few days, but during those years Baba was mostly traveling with the Blue Bus. After 1943, when we had settled in Bindra House in Poona, Baba would go to Meherazad more frequently, but the place was still very wild, forested all around—there was no other habitation for miles. And there were only a few rooms here and there on the property.

Sarosh thought of building something better for Baba's residence, a new bungalow for Baba so that He would be more comfortable and one that

would also accommodate the women. Accordingly, a new bungalow was built that eventually became Baba's residence.

Baba permitted the women *mandali* to shop in Poona for things for the new residence, which He had deemed "Meherazad." Their car was completely filled with all of their purchases, so much so that Papa didn't want Manu to go back to 'Nagar with the women in the car. He felt it was too crowded and that Manu should take the bus, but Baba wanted Manu to accompany them so they all drove off with no room to spare anywhere in the car.

On the 27th of August, 1948, Baba performed the housewarming ceremony for His new home. He invited His close lovers from Bombay, Poona and Ahmednagar. The men and women *mandali* who were living at Meherabad were brought to Meherazad by buses, and it was a very joyous occasion. There is a very nice description in *Lord Meher* about that event. With great fanfare many close disciples were called, including our family from Poona. By that time Eruch was with Baba full-time. Baba served tea and food with His own hands to all the guests who came.

Then the men were called into the hall of Baba's house where His divan was placed. While Baba was sitting He directed His *arti* "*Bujave Naar*"—the "*Gujarati Arti*"—to be sung. Because we weren't in the habit of singing it, it all went haywire, and we missed and switched words and dropped lines and sang off-key.

Baba stopped us and laughed. He proceeded to dictate the *arti* to us, line by line. I remember that, after saying the last line—that Baba was "the captain of the ship"—He said "Good!" and we all sat down.

Around that time Baba went to the Himalayan region in search of *masts*. During His stay He wanted to find a good watchdog for Meherazad, and with difficulty a tiny female puppy was found, and Baba named her "Bhooty." She was a Tibetan Mastiff, the type of dog used by shepherds

on the higher slopes, and dogs of that breed are large, fierce watchdogs with lots of hair. Eruch carried the puppy, who was at that time just a ball of fur, snuggled in his armpit, following Baba on a very precipitous mountain path with a sheer drop on one side. Somehow Eruch stumbled at one place and almost fell. In the process the little puppy slipped from his grasp and rolled over the edge of the slope and out of sight! It was several thousand feet to the bottom. Everyone tried to see if they could locate the puppy, but they had no luck. Baba signed Eruch not to worry, however, and sure enough, a few minutes later the puppy came scrambling back up, right in front of their path. Eruch was utterly amazed at that puppy's natural ability to handle the dire situation. He picked her up and carried her once again, and they brought her all the way back to Meherazad.

Bhooty, or "Gulu" as she was also called, grew into a huge dog. Over the years there were plenty of occasions when there would be nobody at Meherazad except for Kaka Baria, who would be left there with Bhooty as his only companion. Baba had appointed Kaka as the manager of Meherazad, and he stayed on even when everyone would go away, to Guruprasad for the summer break, for example. There were no dwellings for miles around, so Kaka was all alone, but he said that he was never afraid of anything because at night Bhooty was let loose. Woe betide anyone who entered the premises, because she was ferocious and would attack. The local villagers were very frightened of her.

Once when I came to Meherazad for a long stay, Baba told me that I must befriend Bhooty. The best way, He suggested, would be to take her out for a walk. At that time she could be approached only by Kaka, Mehera and Baba—fierce barking and snarling greeted any others who came near. All animals, by the way—even ferocious ones—showed an instant recognition of Baba, giving those of us around Him evidence of His divinity in action.

So it was that I would take Bhooty and her son, Tipu, on walks every day while I stayed at Meherazad on that visit. One day I took them to the main road, and Bhooty tried to attack a woman who was walking past rather

close to us. Had I not held Bhooty very tightly, the woman could have been killed because Bhooty would have gone straight for the throat. She was a very fierce dog, an absolute terror in the neighborhood. At night Bhooty would go around the whole property barking—no human watchman could have done the duty so well! Soon after Baba's second automobile accident, she had a litter of puppies, of which one would become Baba's dog Mastan. She had given birth to three or four puppies, and Baba had selected Mastan, who resembled Bhooty, to keep as His pet.

It turned out that Mastan was the best of the lot—the best of all Bhooty's pups. The way he would obey all the commands that were given him was something to see. Baba loved that dog very much.

Around the time when Bhooty was brought to Meherazad, Baba undertook another *mast* trip to Calcutta with a few of his *mandali*, including Eruch, Gustadji, Baidul, and others. When they returned Eruch gave us a vivid account of how taxing it had been, and how Baba had been very restless when they reached Calcutta. They had stayed in the Great Eastern, a big hotel there. Baba had specified that He wanted a very quiet place, and He said that there should be vacant rooms on either side, with absolutely no noise. But Baba refused to pay for the vacant rooms on either side of His, which made it more difficult to convince the manager to grant them that request.

Somehow Eruch managed to get such a room. The *mandali* had to sleep out in the hall, far from Baba's room, because Baba found their snoring too loud. Still it was too noisy for Baba. He complained about trolleys being wheeled past the room. So Eruch went to the manager and told him to stop the trolleys. The manager said that it was a first class hotel, so of course they had room service, and he could not refuse to serve meals to people who wanted them. But Eruch insisted and the manager finally said he would see what he could do.

Eruch was doing night watch and thought that at last Baba would be content, but within a short while Baba called him and complained that there was a hammering noise and that He couldn't sleep. Eruch listened

and after a while determined that the noise was coming from outside. He went out into the street, looked all around, and he found a blacksmith nearby who was working late into the night. Eruch reported back to Baba accordingly, and Baba said, "Go and tell him to stop his work."

Eruch had to do it, of course, and so as not to seem too bossy or authoritarian about the whole thing, he told the blacksmith that he had a very sick elder brother who was trying to rest nearby and asked if he would please stop his work now. With great difficulty he convinced the blacksmith to stop. A few minutes later Baba complained that the bed was uncomfortable, so then the bed had to be dismantled and taken out of the room and another bed put in. To top it off, Baba required a change of rooms later in the middle of the night. Through it all the bewildered hotel manager was trying to figure out what sort of people these were, because Baba had complained that He could hear some person snoring—this is in India, mind you, where there is hardly ever a quiet moment to be had anywhere, least of all in a crowded and busy metropolitan city like Calcutta!

In the midst of all this the *mandali* were trying to sleep, and they kept scolding Eruch for waking them time and again, claiming that Eruch was encouraging Baba to bedevil them. Eruch was stuck with Baba on one side and the *mandali* on the other, and neither side was happy with him! Finally Baba decided that they had to go to another hotel, which, much to the exasperation of all the *mandali*, they did. Once there, however, Baba also found some fault or other and didn't like that hotel either, so they came back to the original one! The poor manager was actually scared to see these troublesome guests returning! To avoid any further demands, he handed over the entire bunch of keys to all the remaining vacant rooms in the hotel and asked that they go select any one they wanted!

We sat spellbound as we listened to Eruch tell this tale, dumbstruck at how Baba could tax the very limits of one's tolerance and capacity. As he told the story, I could see the veins standing out on Eruch's forehead as he recalled how difficult it had been. In the midst of all the shifting of

rooms, while Eruch was trying to locate a certain packet in the dark with virtually no light, Gustadji, who had kept silence on Baba's order for years, started to make some signs. Eruch was so irritated that within earshot of Baba he said to Gustadji, "I am fed up trying to deal with *two* dumb people here!"

On hearing this Baba said, "Wait a minute. What did you say?"

"No, Baba, I didn't mean that," Eruch replied, much chagrined.

"Do you think I'm *dumb*? You called me *dumb*?" Baba asked, clearly angry. Baba went on for literally half an hour about this "dumb" business, and Eruch had to apologize over and over again.

Fresh from the journeys, Eruch would recount such incidents vividly and in great detail, and we were able to get some idea of how tremendously taxing it was and how enormous an effort those with Him had to make to try to please Baba. Baba would work you to the limit of your tolerance, and He would want to see if you had reached the limit. When you finally reached the limit, He would relent.

Our family background in those times was one in which there was a good deal of family discipline. As I have mentioned, my father was a stickler for discipline, and although Mother's nature was far gentler, in her own way she, too, was very strict. If she found that we had been rebellious, for example, her most effective weapon was to stop talking to us. That was most unpleasant, and she did it with Eruch and once with me when she became irritated about something I did. I felt miserable about it because, where my mother was concerned, we were a close-knit family. Papa always kept a distance between him and us as a part of his parental authority, and so the closeness was not there with him the way it was with Mother, so when she shut us off to teach us a lesson, it hurt us quite a lot.

In the long run, of course, it helped us, because children require some sort of strictness in early life. Once that discipline is created, it becomes

an anchor in future life, helping one not to be easily led astray. So that gives a picture of our life in the beginning, and then from our childhood Baba's constant presence was there. Although we were not always with Baba physically, our connection with Him was the biggest thing I had in my life. Baba was there for everything: His personal orders and general orders were there, and the way we led our lives was to see that Baba should always be pleased with us. Inwardly we knew that if we behaved in such a way as not to please Baba, He would know. Things had to be done with real heartfelt intention to follow His wish and to please Him and not just for show. This was my experience growing up with Baba. After all, displeasing our parents would displease Baba, because parents have the ultimate good of their children in their hearts. Our parents were completely dedicated to Baba, of course, and we followed their example. Probably it was our preparation in past lives that helped us to fall in line.

Baba didn't let us stay anywhere for long in the early years. We were told to go stay in a place, and we would settle there. Then we would be called to Him or He would tell us to go somewhere else. Our lives were lived at His command, and we were always at His beck and call.

Occasionally, as in all families, there would be conflict. Baba wanted Eruch with Him, for example, and on the other hand Papa wanted Eruch to remain at home with him. Eruch wanting to get married, although Baba didn't specifically want him to, was different. Eruch's motive behind it was to safeguard Baba's interests because people were gossiping that Baba didn't want Eruch to live a normal life. Eruch later would say that having gotten married was a great help to him, because in later times there were certain incidents where women would proposition him, and it was useful for him simply to say that he was married and so be spared those advances. It must have been part of Baba's game that caused Eruch to get married.

Our family always felt a deep sense of security, because Baba was our very life. To be with Him, we had to strive to please and obey Him,

otherwise we couldn't be with Him. We always tried our best to live our lives according to what He wanted. We had the great pleasure and privilege to be in His fold, to experience His closeness, and it made life very secure for us. It is really a very tragic fact of life in these modern times that children are deprived of the guidance and security of family life. The disruption of family life is the cause of so many social ills and of children going wayward. I suppose it is all in Baba's plan to bring back real order into the New Humanity that He has planned for us.

Despite the closeness of our family, each person was individually devoted to and solely focused upon Baba. In truth, Baba was the center of our attention. When there were conflicts within the family, ultimately it was to Baba that we turned for resolution. Father and mother ceased to matter when one was before Baba, and Baba wanted it that way. One could say that Baba is a very jealous God, in the sense that our attention should never be diverted from Him. He must be the main interest in our lives at all times.

Eruch experienced that total focus on Baba when, as a child of nine, he first met Baba. He was traveling from Ahmednagar to Meherabad in a victoria [a very elegant and stately horse-drawn carriage]. The carriage was full with the other members of the family, so he was sitting on the back of it on a sort of a foot rest, and as they approached Baba, Mother asked him to jump off for fear that Baba would be unhappy with the overloaded carriage. Eruch did jump, falling onto the road and getting badly bruised as well as injuring his elbow.

When Mother approached Baba, she utterly forgot about what had happened to Eruch, so entranced was she with being back in His presence. All the while Eruch was lying on the road, and he eventually got up and came along crying because of his cuts and bruises.

It was Baba Who noticed Eruch and called him over and made him sit on His lap, and Baba then expressed His concern and soothed Eruch, to the extent that He applied some *dhuni* ash to Eruch's wounds with His own hands and then personally bandaged his wounds. Baba's loving

and gentle way so impressed Eruch that he had the thought, "Who could this person be, who is even more loving to me than my own mother?" Baba was contriving it all, I suppose, for the purpose of His eventual work with Eruch.

But all this requires past connections. Baba used to say, "Unless you have a past connection with Me, you can never cross My threshold and come to Me." It is not by chance that we as a family are so close to Him in His fold, and who knows what your own past connections to Baba are, otherwise you wouldn't be here to interview me! Nothing is "by chance" with Baba. These connections are how we get into the fold of the "jealous God," and this jealousy of His is not the jealousy of Maya. It is a jealous guarding of our own interests so that we do not go astray. In His taking responsibility for us, He has to exert infinite patience, and indeed sometimes He must act in ways that may actually seem cruel in order to be truly kind.

I remember an incident in my youth about how I would sometimes want to assert myself. I had just recently joined the Wadia College in Poona, and I was a bit puffed up after passing through school. There was a music society in the college, and one had to pay to become a member. I paid for the membership and received some tickets for musical concerts that were to be held in the college auditorium.

I was looking forward to the first program, and I told my mother that I would be going to it. In the meantime we had received a message from Meherazad that Baba was coming to Poona. He would be at Bindra House on such and such a day, which turned out to be the day after the program at my college. As a consequence my mother told me to not go the program, because, who knows, Baba might come early, as He often did. I said that I had done all the marketing for the household and everything was ready for Baba, and that I really wanted to go to the program. She said, "Listen to me. You should be here and help us out more if needed." I said, "Nothing doing. I am going to the concert," and I strutted off.

I returned, and to my dismay I learned that Baba had indeed come a day early to Bindra House, and He had inquired about me. He had said to Eruch, "It's nice. Let him attend the program." But when I heard about this, I reproached myself no end. I had missed Baba's company, and on top of that the program had not even been to my liking! Mother had been right—Baba had come and gone early.

Through that incident Baba conveyed to me the importance of listening to one's parents, as well as the importance of never taking Baba's plans for granted and always being alert to His movements. From that time on I stopped going to any of the programs because I felt sick about the whole thing. I didn't want to indulge in any activity that came between Baba and me. This is an example of one of the ways in which Baba kept us on the straight and narrow, utterly focused upon Him alone.

Another time, again while I was in college but possibly a bit later, I suddenly took a fancy to grow a beard. Mumma told me to shave it off, that it didn't look nice on me. I said, "No, Mumma, I want to grow a beard," so I wouldn't listen to her, with just that youthful urge to assert oneself.

Baba came to Bindra house and I had this little beard, and Baba said, "What is all this? You haven't shaved today? Come, I'll take you," and He got me by the hand took me to Mumma and said, "How did you allow him to grow this beard? I don't like this."

So Baba tells me all this in front of Mother, who had told me to shave it off. In these ways Baba would keep bringing home to me that I shouldn't do what I did, and that I should listen to my mother. Baba then said, "Go now and get a blade and shave yourself before you come into My presence." I always had a habit of not expressing my feelings and wishes, but Baba Himself would inevitably bring things out, examples of which I will share in due course.

I remember another time when we were in Meherazad. Baba had called for a meeting with Sarosh, Adi, and all the local *mandali*. Baba was in seclusion at the time.

Baba had given the time of the meeting as nine o'clock. As so often was the case, Baba was inside in the Hall at 8:30 a.m., and not one of the

attendees had yet arrived. Baba complained, “How is it they haven’t come by now? What’s wrong?”

Eruch said, “We have given them the time of nine o’clock, and they will surely be coming.”

“No, but if My time is 9:00, they should be here by 8:30. You see that I am here at 8:30? Why can’t they be early?”

Eruch said, “Baba, if they had come early You wouldn’t have liked it, because You are in seclusion and You gave them a definite time.”

“No, I want them to be here when I arrive. They should have come early and waited outside.”

So when the men came from Ahmednagar, Baba started firing at them straightaway. “What is this, you people?”

“Baba, we are here on the dot of the time you gave us.”

“No, if I said 9:00 a.m., then 8:30 a.m. was the right time to come.” They were all quiet, nothing to say. In fact, Baba had been there early and was quite restless. This was all to impress upon us that we should take His time very seriously—not only to be “on time” but to be early and to wait outside in case Baba should come early.

The name of the game, all throughout, was to make Him the central pivot of our life, to make Him supersede everything else, because that’s the only way to swim out of this sea of Illusion. Although He wanted us to be in the world and enjoy it, He always stressed this central fact: the attention had to be always on Him in order to draw one away from worldly things. That was His way of working, using external events to teach us how to follow Him.

Once, during 1948, Baba had sent word that He was coming to visit Bindra House. He had been to Gujarat on a *mast* trip, and He was returning to Ahmednagar, as usual, through Poona. I had done the food

shopping in preparation for His visit, and I bought some frozen *pomfrets* for Baba because it was difficult to get fresh fish owing to the rainy season.

Before Baba reached Poona a terrific storm hit, the likes of which hadn't been seen before and haven't been seen since. It wreaked havoc on much of the west coast and severely affected the Gujarat coast and Bombay. Because of the storm Baba's train got stuck at Verawal, which is on the Gujarat side of Bombay. He was intending to come through Poona to Meherazad by train and car. As it happened, for three days His train was stuck in that out-of-the-way place. What had happened was unprecedented; the floods had completely washed out the train tracks.

We were nervous because He didn't come on the expected day—we were completely unaware of what had happened to His train. The next day we again prepared fresh food for Baba, but still He didn't come. Late in the night of the third day, two days after they were expected, Baba and the *mandali* finally arrived, physically exhausted from their long ordeal. In addition to the usual strains of *mast*-hunting, it had been an especially trying journey with the delays and all the stress of being stuck on the train for all that time.

Once they were settled at Bindra House, with everyone having bathed and eaten, Eruch recounted what had happened. At Verawal, he explained, once it was clear that they were stuck owing to the flooded tracks, they began to play cards to pass the time. Baba sent Eruch for some tea water, so Eruch went to the driver of the engine, a Parsi, who gave him some hot water by tapping the bypass valve from the steam engine into Eruch's pot!

This driver consequently became interested in Eruch as a fellow Parsi, and so because he had no work owing to the impassable tracks, he followed Eruch back to the compartment where Baba and the *mandali* were passing the time. He peered in and asked if he could join the game, and Baba gestured to let him come in, and they all, the engine driver included, played cards and merrily passed the time.

The driver was a rough-and-ready guy, very lively and noisy and spouting obscenities, and Baba enjoyed him immensely because he was totally natural and very frank! That's how they passed the days while the train was stuck there. They played La Risque and *pees ni kot* [pronounced "coat"], and the games were boisterous and full of fun, but they did not keep scores and no gambling was allowed. That train driver was so very fortunate to come into direct contact with Baba and to entertain Him, but Baba must have kept His radiance veiled, because although the driver noticed that Gustadji was not talking, it appeared that he never noticed anything out of the ordinary about Baba.

Toward the end of one of the *mast* journeys Baba had arrived at Bindra House and had had His bath, and Eruch had laid out the already prepared food on the table for Baba. Baba said, "Eruch, now you go have your bath."

"No, Baba," Eruch said, "You first eat, finish everything, and then I will have my bath. I won't take much time for my bath."

"No, no, you go take your bath and relax," Baba insisted, wanting Eruch to take a break from his constant attendance upon Baba and bathe, and so finally he did. Before leaving the table, however, Eruch told Baba, "I'll be back as soon as I can, Baba. You eat, but don't take anything out of my bag—I'll come and give You Your medicines myself when I've finished bathing."

Eruch always had to be very meticulous about placing things in the travel bags, because many times at night there would be no light, and Eruch would have to feel his way around the bag to find the water bottle or a medicine bottle or whatever, so he never allowed anyone to touch those things. On this particular occasion Mumma said, "Go on, Eruch, don't argue with Baba. Go! Baba is telling you to go have a bath, so go have a bath!"

So, while Eruch was bathing, Baba was eating His food. As I've mentioned, He had a habit of eating very rapidly, although He often told

us to eat slowly. He finished His food, and Mumma helped Him to wash His hands, and then He said to her, “Go get me that Hewlett’s bottle from the bag.” Baba always had a little teaspoon full of Hewlett’s mixture after a meal to aid his digestion. Mumma started to do so when Baba said, “No, no, wait! I’ll get it out. If Eruch knows you’ve searched through his bag, he’ll be angry.”

Baba got up and went to Eruch’s bag, and somehow, as He was pulling it out, the bottle slipped from Baba’s hand and fell on the floor and broke with a crash! Eruch heard the crash from the bathroom and shouted, “Who touched my bag?”

Baba said to Mumma, “Oh, look what has happened! What shouldn’t have happened has happened, and your son will come out and start getting angry with Me!”

Mother replied, “Baba, how is that possible? How dare he!”

“No, no, you don’t understand—he’ll get very angry with Me,” and Baba took a little swab of material and tried to clean the floor, and as a result, Mumma was greatly annoyed with Eruch, simply because his meticulousness and his temper had actually seemed to give Baba a shock.

“Here, Baba, let me do that,” said Mumma, and she took the swab out of Baba’s hand and started cleaning up herself. Baba seemed to worry about Eruch’s reaction like a small child would worry about a disgruntled parent’s wrath. “He’ll get very angry, and he told us not to touch his things—now see what has happened!”

To which Mumma replied, “Who in the world does he think he is?! To heck with him! How dare he say anything to You!”

While Mumma was cleaning up the mess, Eruch rushed out of the bathroom. He saw what had happened and wasn’t pleased. “I told You not to touch my box—I would have come and given You Your medicine. This is why I was hesitating to go for a bath.” Then, when Mumma started telling Eruch off for rebuking Baba, Baba took Eruch’s side! He said, “No, Eruch is right. He is responsible for making sure that My things

are kept properly. I am sorry, Eruch—the bottle fell out of My hands and broke. I should have listened to you and not touched your bag.” In spite of Eruch’s upset that his things had been disturbed, of course he could not stay angry with Baba for any length of time.

This incident shows the human side of Meher Baba, the aspect that endeared Him so much to our hearts. Here He is, the Lord of the Universe, and yet He was concerned about the feelings of one of His lovers. He is the Master, and yet he is also the Slave of the love of His lovers. Eruch telling Baba what to do, and then scolding Him for not doing it, was all out of love. Although He was God, Baba’s humanity captivated us, and we often forgot that He was the Avatar! Inevitably the circumstances of the moment would overcome us, and we would lose that perspective.

Once, years later at Meherazad, Baba called for a carom board from Bindra House. A carom board is a big square game board with twelve white and twelve black pieces, a red queen and a large round disc to hit the pieces, which is called the striker. The board has four pockets, one at each of the corners, and the objective of the game is to send a piece into a pocket with the striker.

The board was brought, and four chairs were placed around the table, and Baba asked me if I was a good player. As I considered myself something of an expert at the game, I said “Yes, Baba.”

“Then you be My partner,” He said.

As the game was going on, I got very absorbed. Baba kept missing His shots, and finally He even missed a “home” shot—one in which the piece is so close to the pocket that it needs only a slight nudge to go in. Not only that, He dropped the striker itself into the pocket instead, which meant that we had to put a piece already won back on the board as a penalty and lose a turn as well.

When Baba’s next turn came and He was taking aim, I could see that He wasn’t going to be able to hit the piece home, so I went around to His side and tried to demonstrate how He should place His fingers on the striker correctly. Baba looked up at me, and raised His middle finger

to His temple, signing, “I know!” Suddenly I realized that I was trying to teach Him Who was All-knowing, so I sheepishly went back to my seat. After that Baba began to hit all the shots correctly, to bring home to me that He knew...everything!

On the whole, in all the various games we played, Baba was very good—in fact, He was always the best. After the second car accident He found it difficult to move about because of His hip injury. We had brought a table tennis table and had set it up in a room at Guruprasad, adjoining where the *mandali* stayed, which was quite a large room. Baba would sit on a high stool in the middle of His side of the table, and He would play with Francis. Even though He couldn’t move about, seated as He was on the stool, He would hit shots with such power and accuracy that Francis had to run from one corner of the table to the other just to keep the ball in play! Francis was a fairly good player, but he had his work cut out for him playing table tennis with Baba. In the early days Baba was so fleet-footed at badminton and cricket that none could match Him. Baba was also an excellent player of *gilli-danda* and marbles.

Sometime before Baba traveled to the West—I don’t remember which year, probably sometime before the New Life—Baba asked my cousin Sam what he wanted to do with his life. When Sam replied that he would leave it to Baba to decide, Baba told him to take up a course in wireless telegraphy and related radio technology science in Bombay. Sam passed that difficult course on his very first attempt, and he immediately got a job as a radio officer in the merchant marines. He joined the Halal Shipping Company in Aden, and while Baba was in the New Life, Sam was posted to several ships for the company.

After some years of service Sam returned to India with considerable extra money in his pocket. Back in Poona he bought a car, but not knowing anything about cars, we discovered that someone had passed off a third-rate lemon to him, and it was always in the repair shop. Sam’s intention was that after the car was put into good shape, he would offer it to Baba to use for some time, and then the family would have it.

It took months of repairs to make the car road-worthy. Sam then wrote to Baba, and Baba sent word to us that we should bring the car over to Satara—I think it was in 1954. So Dadi, Sam, a driver and I took the car to Satara from Poona and gave it to Baba. It was a war-time Vauxhall model. Baba made many *mast* trips in it, and it had only one major defect—it always gave trouble when trying to start it—but once it got going, it had a very powerful V8 engine and could beat any other car on the road. Baba traveled far and wide in that car, and it did break down frequently, but I heard Pendu remark, “Your car is really remarkable. It senses a garage nearby and only breaks down then!” So usually they were never far from a repair shop when the car broke down.

Lives of absolute sacrifice—that is what it is all about. To follow the Avatar and especially to live with Him, one has to offer oneself in real and total sacrifice. The thing is to keep offering oneself on the altar of His slaughterhouse, bit by bit by bit. It’s a game for strong-hearted people, but He gives the strength, the willingness and the readiness to offer oneself like that.

Through all these activities—from *mast* tours to the games they played with Baba, and through all His various orders—Baba was actually bringing those with Him to a state of utter *desirelessness*. That is what it is all about—to remove all desires, which are what keep Illusion in full swing. Ultimately we have to wear ourselves out, because when we remove the bundle of desires that makes us separate, then only He remains and we are not there. It is a tough proposition, which only His Grace makes possible.

Ghani was Baba’s boyhood friend, a *langotiya dost*, as Baba used to say. *Langot* means a diaper, so a *langotiya dost* is one who has known you since you both were in diapers! They were pals, and Ghani had the prerogative of getting away with things that others wouldn’t think of doing. Sometimes we read in *Ramjoo’s Diaries* how he would flagrantly disobey Baba and still somehow get away with it. His wit was such that he could make Baba forget His anger and make Him laugh instead.

I had a great friendship with Ghani, who tutored me in Urdu at his house. Ghani had a very unusually shaped skull—it was elongated back and front, and protruded far out in front. It was larger than the average skull, a true “Big Head.” Baba would refer to him by that nickname, and it was also Baba’s gesture for Ghani, depicting a large head. By the time I met Ghani it was not any exaggeration to say that he was lazy. As he grew older and slowed down, he wouldn’t even wash his plate after eating, and he would sleep with his shoes on because it was too much trouble to untie the laces! Sometimes he would not bathe for weeks on end, but he was a very likable person in spite of all those superficial quirks.

Everyone in Baba’s *mandali* had his own idiosyncrasies. Although he kept himself very clean, Gustadji was very frugal and always wore tattered clothes, despite having trunks full of good clothes! He simply never wore them except when he went to the West with Baba.

For those few weeks in the West Gustadji was a totally different person. For all other times, he wore nothing but the most tattered and patched clothes. You should have seen his photograph when Baba came here in the *Manonash* phase. That photo, which can be seen in the Blue Bus here at Meherazad, shows Baba seated on a chair with four *mandali* arrayed on either side and the Blue Bus behind. In that photograph Gustadji is dressed in clothes with patches all over them.

Very soon after that photograph was taken, Baba went to the West, so Gustadji had to pose for his passport photo all dressed up in a Western suit. He looked like some Hungarian professor, with ruddy, shining cheeks. One time I was visiting here in Meherazad, and Baba brought Mehera and some other women around specifically to see this sight—Gustadji had put up his trousers on the clothesline after washing them, and Baba wanted Mehera to see the number of patches on his trousers! There must have been a record number of patches on them—they were nothing but one great patch, because the original material was nowhere in sight!

[This following part of Meherwan’s memoirs was recorded on July 13, 1994, a very wet day in Meherazad. Meherwan was in Mandali Hall and

commented that Meherazad had been full of people the day before, and if this rain had come then, it would have dampened the event.]

It shows how Baba really helps us when we do our best to organize an event for Him. A great crowd had been there, and had this weather prevailed the day before, which happened to be a *Dhuni* day, it would all have been a sorry mess. Many people would have been in real confusion about how to carry on with the program, but it was perfect weather. I heard that just after the *Dhuni* on the 12th of July (i.e., 1994) the rains started, so Baba's timing was perfect!

This brings to mind the thought that the rains seem to have played a significant part during several of Baba's early times and especially during His important meetings. I remember in Satara in 1954, there was a meeting that He had called for the purpose of giving out His "Final Declaration." Just as He gave out the message there was the sound of raindrops on the roof, at which Baba declared, "The rains are our witness." It happened again in Meherabad in 1954, during the "Three Incredible Weeks" gathering—the rains played havoc the day before the gathering. And in 1962, on the first day of the East-West Gathering, it rained quite heavily, and in November too, a time when there is very little possibility of rain in the region. Everyone was baptized, as it were. Baba asked all who were attending the gathering to continue to sit where they were, and all got soaked, yet a short time later we were all dry!

I also remember one *Dhuni* in the 1940s that Baba Himself lit. When He lit the *Dhuni*, it began to pour, and we were all so concentrated on Baba that only when He moved off the *Dhuni* platform did we all move off with Him.



Chapter Nine:

The New Life

The New Life delivered one of the biggest shocks of Baba's Advent to the worldwide Baba community. In mid-1949 Baba stated that He wanted to enter into seclusion for forty days. That phase became known as "The Great Seclusion," and it was undertaken in the Blue Bus, the chassis of which is parked at Meherazad.

At that time there was no shelter over it at all, and no veranda—it was in the open, with just a big *neem* tree that grew at the rear end of the bus. That tree was the sole shade for the Blue Bus. Baba had directed sheets of bamboo *tatta* [matting strips] to screen off the place, and only Kaka Baria was allowed to see Baba throughout that period. He served Baba his meals and otherwise communicated with Baba as ordered. All others, even the other *mandali*, were excluded.

Kaka, by the way, could speak only while at Meherazad—otherwise, per Baba's orders, he had to observe silence whenever he went out of Meherazad. Since he had to do all the marketing, it was a very difficult order that Baba had given him.

A few non-resident *mandali* had been called—longtime disciples who lived outside Meherazad: Jal Kerawala, Nariman Dadachanji, Ramjoo

Abdulla and Meherjee Karkaria were there for part of the seclusion. I remember this because Jal Kerawala was given the task of maintaining a daily diary of the seclusion, and he was a close friend of our family. He left those diaries with us, and from them it was possible to glean much information that was a great help in writing about the Great Seclusion in later years.

Every night Baba would complain about not getting enough sleep, and the main cause of disturbance was that ripe *limborees* (*neem* berries) were falling on the tin roof of the Blue Bus. Because the roof was tin, the berries made a loud noise whenever they would fall onto it.

It was almost monsoon time, the season when the *limborees* ripen and fall. It was also very windy, so many berries would fall every night. Eventually Kaka tied a bed sheet under the tree so that the berries wouldn't make such a racket when they fell, and he also used to climb up the tree and break them before they fell, so that Baba would be disturbed as little as possible.

After a few days of this, when Baba emerged He said that to add to the agonies of His seclusion, He had banged into the corner of the luggage rack on one side of the bus. The rack hit Him with such force when He tried to stand up that He got stunned and dizzy. He was left with a nasty bump on the head from the injury, and Baba said that there was great spiritual significance that He had been hurt like this. As you can see today, the Blue Bus has a very cramped interior without enough room even to stand up. Since then that corner has been padded. It was done on Baba's order, because He said that in the future when His lovers visit, they should not hurt themselves as He had been hurt.

After emerging from this initial Blue Bus phase of His seclusion, Baba said He wanted a change of location, and He decided to go to Poona to continue the seclusion there. Naturally there was a mad scramble to get a good bungalow for Baba—it needed to be very secluded, and it had to be obtained as soon as possible. Eruch was at Bindra House at the time and assisted us in finding an appropriate place for Baba.

Eruch and I would go cycling around Poona looking for suitable bungalows, each of us going in different directions to widen the search.

Eventually Eruch located a bungalow in one of the hills surrounding Poona. It was a property called “Thube’s Bungalow,” located off the Poona-Satara road. It was lying vacant because it was so far away from town that the owner didn’t want to stay there. He was willing to rent it out, or maybe even simply to let Baba stay there without charge.

We quickly furnished it, and Baba relocated to it. The only disadvantage was that there were fierce westerly winds howling around the bungalow day and night, and Baba never liked a windy, breezy place like that. The bungalow had a veranda that was enclosed by glass windows, and those were always kept shut. At one point a *mast* was brought there for Baba’s work. Finally Baba returned to Meherazad and completed His seclusion in the Blue Bus. It was during that time when He was in Poona that Baba visited several places, including the Jangle Maharaj Temple, Shinde Chi Chattri and others.

Baba’s seclusion was so strict during that period that when He left Meherazad, the resident *mandali* had to stay indoors until He had left, and the same procedure was followed when He returned. I remember that a Jeep had accompanied Baba to Poona, which Eruch used for bringing *masts* to Baba and for other work in the city, such as marketing and other things that Baba told him to do. He stayed with Baba in Thube’s Bungalow during the time Baba was there. As I have mentioned, after returning to Meherazad Baba continued with the Great Seclusion once again in the Blue Bus.

After coming out of the Great Seclusion Baba went with the women to Satara and Panchgani, a spontaneous drive with Eruch driving one of the nine-seater Studebakers that Elizabeth had brought for Baba. Baba and the women stopped at Bindra House on the way to Satara, and they stopped there again on their way back. During that return visit Baba sent the women shopping to buy things for Meherazad. Manu was sent with them on that shopping spree. He even told Mehera to buy a sewing machine, and Mani bought a watering can for the garden. Baba encouraged them to go and shop, making it appear that He would be settling at Meherazad for the foreseeable future. What Baba did not reveal

to them at that time was that He was already planning to leave everything for the “New Life,” which was to be the next phase of His work.

Upon coming out of seclusion, Baba revealed to only a few close ones that he would be embarking on a new chapter in His work that He referred to as “the New Life.” For that unique upcoming phase Baba gave His close followers the choice of whether or not to accompany Him. We, however, had not the slightest notion of the major changes that were about to occur.

Papa and Manu were called to the meeting that Baba held for the purpose of outlining what was to come. Baba delivered the bombshell that He would embark upon a “New Life” of begging and wandering, helplessness and hopelessness, and that Baba would sever all His connections with His “old life” people, who should expect never to set eyes on Him again. In fact, His express order was that if anyone should encounter Him by accident during the New Life, he should turn his face away from Him, making a conscious and honest effort never, ever to try to see Baba again.

Of course that was the most devastating and mind-numbing news for all of us who had lived with or even simply met Baba. We couldn’t imagine a life with no physical contact with Baba, but such was Baba’s wish, and there was no recourse other than to accept it. The atmosphere at the meeting was awesome, surcharged with tension and seriousness, and Baba had never been more grave about anything at any prior time. The conditions for accompanying Him were so forbidding that many longtime *mandali* members had to think about whether they could survive and abide by the rules. Baba specified that as people were considering whether they could commit to His requirements, they were forbidden from discussing it amongst themselves. Nobody should influence any other person—no arguments, no discussions. Each was expected simply to come and hand over the circular given to the twenty selected by Baba with either “Yes” or “No” written on it, with their signature affixed below their response.

Ghani was the sole exception. He was the least suitable, physically and mentally, for the rigors of a life like the one Baba told the *mandali* to

expect, but for whatever reason, Baba wanted Ghani in the New Life. Baba told Eruch to give Ghani subtle hints, unbeknown to the others, that he should be a “Yes-walla.” Ghani used to tell us about the days he did spend with Baba during the New Life. The toughest part for him was to get up at 4:00 a.m. and not to yawn. One had to make a conscious effort not to yawn. After getting up and washing one’s face, the order was just to sit there, not to talk and not to read. Probably Baba wanted Ghani to lend some wit and humor in that setting.

In addition, Ghani’s days were coming to an end, and maybe Baba wanted His old friend’s company before he died. Or it could be that He wanted Ghani to have the gift of His presence in his last days. Eruch probably said, “Ghani, after all what is there to life? Why not just leave it to Him?” In any case, Eruch did somehow manage to persuade him to join the New Life, and thus encouraged, Ghani ultimately committed to “Yes.”

The biggest surprise of the meeting was that Padri said “No.” Baba Himself was surprised. He expected Padri to say “Yes.” But Padri just inexplicably wrote “No” on his chit, and that was it. It may have been a time when he had simply come to the limit of his endurance, and he realized that this was going to be a very taxing ordeal.

Padri had passed through many such new phases with Baba in his time, and he, better than most, had some idea of the rigors of what was coming. He may have felt that he wouldn’t be able to please Baba as he would want to, so better to say “No” than to be a burden to Him. In any case, Padri’s saying “No” was a great surprise to everybody, including Baba Himself. Of course, Baba being All-knowing, He knew what was to come, but on our level He was both surprised and a bit disappointed. It was just as well that Padri said “No,” however—had he gone into the New Life, there could never have been as capable a manager and caretaker at Meherabad in Baba’s absence.

My sister Manu has also told us what the situation was on the women’s side, namely, that the same meetings were held with the women disciples that Baba held with the men. Baba expressed the same messages about

the New Life there, and He had expressed the same seriousness. His remarks caused sadness and tears because of the situation that was going to befall all of them. Baba told each of them to approach Him, and that they should be prepared to obey His order because, unlike with the men, He would be making the decision for each of them. Each one of the women was to go to Baba, kiss His hand, and tell Him that she would obey Him 100%. He told them, “Don’t let this be the kiss of Judas.”

Each one came to Baba and gave her word that she would obey Him 100%. Then He gave individual instructions to each one. Only four were taken by Baba as His New Life companions—Mehera, Mani, Goher and Meheru—and the rest were told to go back to their homes or to stay with other well-to-do disciples. Meherjee was ordered to take Soonamasi, Khorshed, Kitty and Rano. Baidul’s wife Soltun, her daughter, Dowla, and Valubai were sent to Bindra House, and Papa willingly accepted this responsibility. Papa volunteered to take odd jobs to supplement his pension, and in fact he did take on some engineering work for the extra income. Nariman was asked to take Naja and Katie.

That was the situation, with some of the people who weren’t accompanying Baba being entrusted to different families. Each and every person and family that had been dependent on Baba was provided for in one way or another. Baba had devised His plan to the last detail, and a major part of it was what He termed the “arrangement-wallas,” the ones who would make the detailed arrangements to see that all were taken care of for a limited period in Baba’s absence. The money to provide for these people was to come from the sale of all the items and assets that Baba had, which He later ordered to be sold off.

This disposal of assets included the Studebakers that Elizabeth had brought for Baba, as well as all the new items that the women *mandali* had just bought in Poona at Baba’s urging. Eruch, who knew of Baba’s plans to leave everything for the New Life, asked Baba why He had encouraged the women to shop for things when they were going to have to sell them a few months later. Baba replied to the effect that He had had them buy things so that they would be able to give them up.

On their return from the Meherabad meeting announcing the details of the New Life, Eruch told us that he was really grateful that Papa had also been called to the meeting, because otherwise it would have been almost impossibly difficult for Eruch to explain the situation to Papa, but as it turned out, Papa understood the gravity of the situation because he heard it directly from Baba.

After returning home the full impact of what Baba had communicated began to sink in for each one of us, and it was a very difficult and somber situation. One day soon thereafter, we were all seated around the table for lunch—my parents, Manu and myself. An argument took place between Papa and Manu—she was slurping *dahi kadhi* (a yoghurt-based sauce that is eaten hot) in a way that Papa didn't like, and he reprimanded her.

Everybody was feeling very fragile, and so, quite out of character, Manu talked back to Papa. Irritated with her, Papa got up and gave her a hard slap. He had never done such a thing before, and he was so distressed that he left his plate unfinished at the table, went into the bathroom, sat on the floor and began to weep. We all were so stunned that we just got up from the table ourselves. I went to Papa, who said to me, "I don't know what has come over me. I have never in all my life lifted my hand to my children."

This incident gives some slight idea of how great the impact of Baba's New Life announcement was on all the Baba families around the world. He gave great suffering to His close ones. It was as if the whole world had fallen apart. What was there to look forward to? Yet somehow Baba gave us the strength to carry on, and as the initial shock wore off, we began to accept the inevitable.

A few days after this incident Baba paid a final visit to Poona and came both to Baba House and Bindra House. He met each one of us and even called the landlady, Mrs. Bindra, to meet Him. "This is My final visit," He said. "You all won't ever see Me again. Don't worry, keep obeying My orders, and you will be with Me." Then taking Manu by the hand,

He went with her to the storeroom. Opening each tin of grain, lentils, sugar, and so on, He ran His hands through the contents. Then He said to Manu, "Don't let these tins ever go empty. While they still have some contents in them, fill them up again." He also advised her and Khorshed, Eruch's wife, who was staying with us at the time, to find jobs.

While departing Baba said to me, "Look, I am taking Eruch with Me to look after Me. Your duty will be to look after the family." I was about nineteen at the time, still going to college, but Papa and I were to look after the family. So after that Baba left, and that was the last I saw of Him before He entered the New Life.

The only consolation was that it was Baba's wish, so we accepted it. Baba could be quite harsh about obedience. He accepted no compromises in that. Then, even though it breaks you apart, He gives you the strength to do whatever must be done, and eventually He makes it possible. He had made it clear that His decision and our resulting circumstances were absolutely final, with no compromises.

Obedience was ingrained in us, and so when we did see Baba afterwards, by accidental contact while He was in the New Life, we found the strength to turn away as He had insisted.

With the dawning of the New Life Baba was no longer physically present in my life. I now had to pursue my college education and follow Baba's order to look after the family. I was in my second year in Wadia College, located near the Poona railway station. The next few steps in my life, at least, were clear. I had to leave it to Him and let life unfold.

Baba had given me no indication at that time about marriage. In fact, finishing my studies and looking after the family was like a sort of marriage—to look after Mumma, Manu, Valubai, Soltun, Dowla, all of whom now resided at Bindra House. Valubai was not in very good health. She had suffered from malaria, and the medicine given to her had damaged her mental balance. She was not very stable at the time she was staying with us, and Papa had decided that she was not his responsibility. Fortunately she was quiet, not violent, and she kept to herself, working on the little patch of

garden directly in front of Bindra House. She was somewhat in shock, I think, to be sent out of the ashram in the way she had been.

Soltun and Dowla helped in the kitchen, because they were not educated and they could not obtain any work outside the house. Manu, on the other hand, started to learn typing and shorthand, along with Eruch's wife, Khorshed. Papa had brought in a tutor who taught them, and they were studying shorthand and typing quite earnestly. Khorshed, having an outgoing nature and wanting to socialize, eventually got a job as a steno typist with a company in Poona and earned some income that both helped the family and also provided her with some pocket money. Manu was more timid in nature, learning a little typing but then dropping the whole project and simply helping in the kitchen as she had always done. Besides, Papa did not like Manu going out in search of a job. He decided that he would somehow manage with the pension and other odd jobs that he could find.

The 16th of October was fast approaching, and everything had to be completed by that date. My sister Meheru was in Khushru Quarters, and Babu Tailor (father of Anil Tailor, who now stitches for pilgrims) had been called to sew new clothes—*kafnis*—for the companions who would be traveling with Baba. The preparation was quite hectic. Eruch had responsibilities at Meherabad. He would drive from Meherazad to Meherabad or Ahmednagar almost daily, returning late in the night. He was so dazed and overworked that he was driving on autopilot. Only after he arrived home one night did he realize that he had negotiated the Shendi Nulla in full flood and had driven through it in his big car without even noticing. Only when the water rushed in through the undercarriage and splashed on him did he realize that the car was flooding, but the momentum of the car kept it moving and he came out on the other side. Such was the amount of strain that people were experiencing.

As mentioned earlier, in order to raise money for the “arrangement-wallas” to be able to provide for all those who were dependent upon Baba, Baba sent many things from both Meherazad and Meherabad to Bombay to be sold off. Those items included Baba's unused *chappals*—can you

imagine it? Naja used to complain, but Baba had ordered that everything had to be sold off. Elizabeth had brought two huge green-colored cars from America—enormous long nine-seater Studebakers—for Baba's use, and they too were sold.

As the 16th of October dawned, the weather was very wet and desultory, stormy and windy. We were naturally thinking about Baba embarking on the New Life in those circumstances and what hardships He and His companions were going to encounter. It was a hard life, right from day one.

Eruch drove the women *mandali* and Baba to the railway crossing, where the car was to be abandoned. There was no bridge at that time. It was drizzling, and Baba met for the last time with some of His close ones who had been there at His direction, and after Baba and the companions crossed the railway line, everyone else had to turn their faces away and never look back at them.

Poor Ghani's travails started then and there, because the thing he hated most in life was exercise. There's a description somewhere about how this long march started, and yet Ghani had never walked more than a few feet in his whole life! Baba led him by His walking stick to get him to follow the group.

Eventually they reached the resting place for the first night, and Ghani was completely exhausted. In the New Life Baba asked Nilu to maintain a regular account or journal, so every fortnight he would send out a bulletin to those who had been close to Baba. That little contact at least was kept, circulars with mostly minor little details such as the weather that Baba and the companions would encounter. Look at how the mind works! We would curse Nilu for that, thinking "Couldn't he give us anything more?!" Baba was at least allowing us this small glimpse, because Nilu was ordered not to write anything more.

Speaking of glimpses, just after the start of the New Life, one day when Baba was on His way to Belgaum, I stepped outside Shivaji Market in Poona, and looking down a narrow lane behind the market, I saw Baba and a few of His companions about a hundred yards away. He had

stopped in Poona to contact a *mastani* who used to sit in that lane, and I saw Him near where she was. I was shocked, and I turned tail and fled from the scene. I saw Baba's back—He was in an ordinary coat and *sadra* at the time. Baba's order was so strict that it was a violation of it even to see Him, so to have seen Him even by accident was not a pleasant experience, because I felt that even this was disobeying Him.

Dr. Daulat Singh's New Life stories are well known. He was a well-known doctor in Kashmir and a devoted Baba-lover. He had replied "Yes" and was one of the original companions, but he was eventually sent back from the group because about a month after he started out on the New Life, his daughter was getting married. He felt bad about not being with her on her wedding day and was silently weeping outside in the night.

At that moment Baba and Eruch were walking by and saw him weeping. Baba asked him the reason, and when He heard why Daulat Singh was crying, He told him that he had disobeyed one of the basic tenets of the New Life, that of keeping no attachment whatsoever to his old life. He had not managed to forget his family.

He was called before all the companions in the morning, but although he had broken the rule, Baba decided that it was during the training period, so he was forgiven. He was told that he could continue to be in the New Life, but that he would need to go back home and, under Baba's order, he would live the New Life exactly as the other companions did, but at his home place. He could continue his practice, but he would have to beg for his food and live a life of hopelessness and helplessness.

So Daulat Singh left, a very painful parting for all his New Life companions who had a very hard time holding back their own tears. He went back home and continued his medical practice, but at the same time he would go out begging for food. That peculiar behavior appalled his family, and they told him to get out because he was bringing the family into disrepute.

As a result Daulat Singh left his place, and after leaving home he went around India begging. One day he came to Bindra House to beg for food.

Papa heard him calling from the gate, “*Prem sey bhiksha deejeeay*” (“Give alms in the name of Love”). He went out and saw Daulat Singh, and of course he was very happy to see him. He brought him inside and gave him the food as *bhiksha*, and he entreated Daulat Singh to eat in Papa’s room, which he finally did. He must have brought some sort of information about Baba, and I don’t know what transpired, but we were all happy to see him. He wore the New Life attire of a white *kafni* and green turban.

From Poona Daulat Singh went to Satara. He was sitting on a culvert one day when Baba was also there, staying in a house called “The Judge’s Bungalow.” Baba noticed someone sitting in the distance and sent Eruch to find out who it was. Seeing that it was Daulat Singh, he came back and reported it to Baba, Who called Daulat Singh in and asked him why he was there.

Daulat Singh told Baba everything that had transpired, and Baba was extremely pleased at his total obedience to His orders. Baba released him from the order to beg for food and told him to go back home to his family, which he did. Through it all Baba still considered Daulat Singh to be one of the New Life companions.

In the New Life Baba traveled from Belgaum to the north of India and stayed there for quite some time. We heard later about how He had gone to the *Kumbha Mela* in Hardwar with a few of the companions and the difficulties that He and those with Him had to face every day. They stayed at a place called Motichur, to which Baba and the men would return to rest every night. It was a twelve- or thirteen-mile walk from Motichur to the *Mela* at Hardwar, where Baba was doing His work. They walked that distance every morning and every night.

Once at the *Mela*, Baba would spend the whole day bowing down to the innumerable *sadhus* there, and that was when He injured His neck, owing to the tremendous physical exertion and strain of that activity. Baba and the companions would spend the whole day without food or

water, and Pendu had to keep a count of the number of *sadhus* Baba contacted in this way until He had bowed down to 10,000 *sadhus*.

In fact, after the New Life work was completed, Dr. Nilu and Dr. Donkin would talk between themselves about the experience, and I heard Nilu say that he felt that Baba would not last in the New Life because His physical condition was not good enough to endure the immense strain, even before the New Life began. But that is how it was—Baba was undergoing that hardship for some particular work that He alone understood, and He alone made everything possible.

After the New Life Eruch described to us various funny incidents that entertained them despite the hardships. One good story was about how the companions and Baba would come back to Motichur each night to a meal of *dal* and rice. That was their staple food, and they were getting quite emaciated, so a tin of oil was bought to improve the quality of the food.

The servant boy who was preparing the food there was an ignorant fellow, and when the oil was brought, he thought he would prepare a treat for the companions. So one day he boiled the *dal* in the oil instead of water! As a consequence the *dal* got really hard in the oil, but still he served it to them, and being famished as usual, they ate heartily in spite of the odd food. Within fifteen minutes everyone had terrible diarrhea! The oil, it turned out, was an excellent laxative!

As time went on Baba and the companions felt something must be done, so they bought a small tin of pure *ghee* (clarified butter) to supplement their diet. It was kept with great care and was given to the boy with very specific instructions. The first day the *ghee* was to be used in the cooking, Baba and the companions were all looking forward to a good meal at last, but when they came back from Baba's work at the *Mela*, they saw only the ordinary *dal* and rice that they had been subsisting on for weeks. It turns out that the boy had left the *ghee* tin open during the day, and a stray dog had come along and eaten it all up! So I suppose that from all these incidents one can only conclude that Baba simply didn't want them to have any luxuries at that time.

It was truly a life of helplessness, hopelessness, and of Baba's complete and sole authority. That authority extended not only to the companions but even to total strangers as well. Eventually Baba decided to stop travelling by foot and to continue the journey to Dehra Dun by train. He sent Adi Sr. and Babadas out to beg for four first-class and twenty second-class train tickets for that purpose, and the people they asked unquestioningly gave what they were asked, even though they were not allowed to see Baba or even to know His Name. Whenever money was offered in place of the tickets, it was declined, because the order was to not touch money, and the giver was told to go buy the tickets instead. The astonishing thing is that they did!

Circulars came out during the New Life, but as I have mentioned previously, they were very vague, certainly for those of us who hungered for every detail about Baba and those with Him. Sarosh, Meherjee, Ramjoo and Nariman were the "arrangement-wallahs," and they did not reside in Poona. At one point Padri did go to Benares to join the group, by Baba's orders, to accompany the New Life caravan that he had been ordered to deliver. He took it up to Benares where it was collected by two companions. Baba had allowed Padri to see Him and the group from a distance, but he was not permitted to take any photographs. Padri said that the procession of the animals and the caravan was a real sight to see.

Donkin was at the head of the procession, leading a white horse, followed by Baba, Mehera and the three women companions. Behind them came a camel cart with the men companions. Padri watched them go by from a first-floor hotel window [the second floor in the U.S.] and later told us, "It was a sight for the gods to see." The men wore white *kafnis* and green turbans, while the women were dressed in blue cotton saris. There were curious crowds on the streets, watching them all go by. If anyone inquired as to who they were and what they were doing, they were told that they were on a *padayatra* [pilgrimage on foot] to Hardwar to attend the *Kumbha Mela*.



Chapter Ten:

1950 - 1951

The New Life was hard on Baba and His companions, but it was also hard, perhaps even harder, on those left behind, because we did not have Baba's presence to boost our spirits, and worse, we had been ordered to have no hopes of ever seeing Baba again. One example was Vishnu's mother, Kakubai, who was a gem of a person. She was very outspoken but very innocent of heart, and she was a great friend of my mother and of our family. She died of a broken heart in 1950 while Baba was on the New Life. Her dying seemed like a very tragic thing, simply because of her enormous love for Baba and the pain of her feeling of separation from Him.

After about nine months in the New Life, Baba went to Satara, and it was around that time that while one day I was going to college on my bicycle, I happened to look into a passing rickshaw and there was Eruch! I was taken aback, and Eruch was also quite taken aback. Immediately I looked away. It transpired that Eruch had been sent to Poona for work, which is how I came to see him.

By this time Adi and Ghani had returned from the New Life, and I had seen both of them. Ghani was living close by. Adi visited us, and Ghani

had regular contacts with us all. So we got a little information about the early part of Baba's New Life from them.

But the first message we received from Baba in the New Life came that August. Baba was in Mahabaleshwar, and He wanted a change of atmosphere. He sent us a message telling us to find a bungalow for Him. A whole army of Baba-lovers swung into action, searching frantically for a bungalow. I located a very nice one on Prabhat Road, near the Film Institute of India.

After the devastating experience of Baba being absent from our lives for a year, this was a great unexpected boon. Baba wanted to stay for a month, and the owner agreed to rent the bungalow accordingly. We furnished it, and we went there early in the morning that Baba was to arrive to give the finishing touches to it. While we were tying the mosquito net onto Baba's bed, we heard a horn, and there was Baba's car turning the corner into the driveway!

We were really flabbergasted, and we dropped everything, ran down the stairs, and without looking over our shoulders once, we put our heads down and ran from that place as if to save our lives! There were two gates to the property, and we took the one farthest from where Baba's car was coming in. Baba had spotted us, and He sent word not to rush away, but we were leaving so quickly that we never heard anything. We just disappeared from the scene.

Baba stayed there for a week or so, and Mumma and Manu prepared His food as usual, sending it to Him from Bindra House. Eruch accompanied Baba to the Prabhat Road bungalow, and he was allowed by Baba to come to Bindra House and stay there each day overnight, but he had to pay one rupee to Papa for his food and lodging expenses—he was not to stay for free. We had orders not to speak to Eruch about the “old life” or any personal things pertaining to the New Life. At that point, however, we had already gotten a lot of information about the New Life from Adi and Ghani.

After Baba's short stay, He left for another short stay in Bombay before heading back to Satara.

All this was taking place at the time of my exams, and with all the excitement and activity, I couldn't manage any proper preparation, and so I didn't pass that exam. The college, however, allowed me to appear again for the exam, and the date for that reappearance was set for October 16th, 1950.

As it so happened, Baba decided to step out of the New Life for a day and had called some of His "old life" lovers to see Him in Mahabaleshwar. I was one of the ones given permission to go, but the order was that one could attend only if circumstances permitted it. And the day Baba had chosen was October 16th, the one-year anniversary of the beginning of the New Life, so I was not able to go. Many people such as Adi and Sarosh came to Bindra House in advance of that meeting, and I sadly sent them off, wishing with all my heart that there were no exam on that day.

Afterwards we heard from others about the meeting and about the wonderful sermon that Baba gave on that occasion. Later Eruch recalled an incident at Mahabaleshwar, when Vishnu, who was keeping the door open for Gustadji—who was a little late coming to the meeting—didn't close the door in time to prevent some other persons from entering and bowing down to Baba. That was another example of not obeying Him properly, and it brought home to us again just how literal and complete our obedience to Baba's orders should be.

Later on Baba was again in Mahabaleshwar, and I remember that He kept a very strict seclusion at that time in the Aga Khan's bungalow. The seclusion was to last for one hundred days. Eruch later took me to see the room where Baba did the seclusion work. It was a big room, but I think Baba had a small hut built inside the room itself and would seclude Himself there. There was also another temporary hut on the property.

Baba's seclusion was very strenuous, leaving Baba so exhausted that He had to come out of the seclusion after about twenty days. He was panting, and it seemed almost as if He wanted to get out of the bounds of Illusion itself. All this took its toll on the physical body, and apart from

the overall strain, Baba suffered from severe piles at that time. Baidul had had the same condition, and he had consulted some local quack and recovered, so Baidul then recommended that person to Baba. The medicine the fellow gave to Baba, however, made the problem flare up even more. Baba was in great pain, enduring enormous suffering. He was also very emaciated at that time and quite frail physically.

Instructions once again came to us that Baba wanted to come to Poona. We had to find another bungalow, a nice house for Him, and this had to be done quickly. We began searching frantically for a suitable bungalow for Baba, who would be accompanied by both His women and some of the men *mandali* this time. As was the case during the last search, it was exam period for me. I was studying for the Junior and Senior Graduate level, and if I didn't pass this time, I was done for. Again, however, I said to hell with the studies. I would just have to see to the exams after helping to secure a suitable place for Baba.

Adi was asked to come from 'Nagar to help search for the bungalow. He had a friend on Sachpir Street named Jamshed Irani who was not a Baba-lover, but he was Adi's very old close friend from his school days. That fellow had respect for Baba, and when Adi saw him, he told Jamshed that he was in search of a good house for Baba. They had a common friend, another Irani, and Jamshed told Adi to consult that other Irani, who was in the real estate business.

Adi went to see that man, who had a little stammer. He was nicknamed Bobra Irani, "Bobra" meaning "one who stutters." When Adi went to see him, they recognized each other, as they, too, happened to be old friends, reuniting after many years. It turned out that Bobra had a bungalow in the Bund Garden area called "Shangri-la," a nice little cottage with modern furnishings.

Bobra Irani had bought that bungalow recently and was renovating it, and he had fixed it up really nicely. He said, "I have just recently renovated a good place, and because you want it for Meher Baba, I will give it to you at no charge, but I have only one condition. I have already sold the place,

and the new owners will occupy it in exactly one month. If that is acceptable, I will give it to you for just that time, with no exceptions.”

We went in his car to see the bungalow. It was beautifully renovated, located in Salisbury Park, a very exclusive neighborhood on the edge of the park, just what Baba wanted. So the deal appeared to be done for us. He told us to take the keys from him the next day! It really seemed too good to be true. We went straight to the telegraph office to inform Baba.

The next day we bicycled over to Bobra Irani's place in Bund Garden to get the keys. We reached the end of the long lane leading to his house and dismounted. Adi said, “I'll go in. You stay here with the cycles, and I'll be back in ten minutes.” Adi didn't come back in ten minutes though, and after some time I heard a heated discussion and loud shouts inside. It was evening time, and it was beginning to get dark. Adi eventually came out in a huff, and we left immediately. Adi was too upset to speak, but after some time Adi explained that Bobra had refused to give us the keys.

As Adi calmed down he explained that Bobra's father was visiting him at the time, and he was totally against Baba. He had said, “What? You are giving the bungalow to that charlatan, Meher Baba? If you do that, I will never look upon your face again!”

Bobra was helpless, and as a result he reneged on his word. Nothing Adi said could move him from that position. Now we were totally non-plussed. We sent a telegram to Baba, giving Him the gist of what happened. The next day the reply said, “I am coming on the specified day as planned. See that the bungalow is ready. That is your lookout.”

Adi phoned Sarosh to come from Ahmednagar to help us out, because now we were in such a desperate state. I should mention at this point that prior to the encounter with Bobra Irani, I had been cycling along Bund Garden road when I noticed another unoccupied place. I had tried to get in, but the front gates were locked, so eventually I climbed the walls and entered the compound. I walked up the driveway and entered the porch. Marble steps led up to a huge palace-like building. Seeing no one around I started to call out, “Is there anybody inside?”

At that point a man popped out of a side door, shouting, "Who are you? How dare you come in here!"

I started to tell him, "Look I have just come to search for a bungalow suitable for...." but he interrupted me and kept on shouting.

"Is this the way to come in to a private property? By the way, how *did* you get in?"

"I climbed over the fence," I replied.

"You look like quite a respectable person, and I wouldn't expect such behavior from you. I doubt very much your stated motivation for coming here. You must be looking to pilfer something." He went on insulting me right and left and shouted that I should get out from there.

I repeated that I had not come for some malevolent purpose, that I just wanted to find a house for rent.

"You think this house is for rent?" he shouted. "This is the palace of the Maharani of Baroda! How dare you come in here talking such nonsense! You just get out from here immediately!" The man almost pushed me out, saying, "If you don't get out right now, I'll call the police and have you arrested. If you ever set foot in here again, I'll see that you are put behind bars!"

In the face of that tongue-lashing, I turned tail and fled. Utterly dejected, I got on my bike and roamed around searching for other places. I found one on Boat Club Road, all deserted except for one man there who was bent over a microscope. That man also abused me, yelling "It's a disgrace that such persons as you are allowed to wander about harassing law-abiding citizens. Get out of this place at once!" So my day of house-hunting ended on a decidedly sour note.

Sarosh had come from 'Nagar and had contacted various people he knew. One of his friends showed him a vacant bungalow on the outskirts of the city, but it was near an old tannery and was very old and decrepit. Though there was a nasty smell about the place from the tannery, at least it was an available bungalow. We had to have it if we found nothing

else, and as a back-up, another tiny cottage was reserved near the racecourse, the house of a friend of Sarosh's, and finally there was another option in the form of a house of another friend. We mainly tried to get that latter one ready, thinking Baba wouldn't like the tannery bungalow, which was really awful.

We sent a telegram to Baba saying, "Bungalow ready," and we gave the address of the one near the tannery. Baba was still in the New Life, so we were not supposed to see Him, simply to tell Him how to get there.

Now, while all this was going on, Gadekar, an old-time stalwart Baba-lover in Poona, was also searching for bungalows for Baba. To that end he went to meet one of his close friends by the name of Sardar Raste. The Sardars were of the nobility of earlier times, descended from Shivaji's line and that of his warriors. They were given *jagirs*, which are parcels of land, in token for services rendered to Maratha royalty. There were many of those Sardars in Poona, and they had huge ancestral properties in the old city itself.

Sardar Raste had his own property called "Rastewada." It was actually a palace from the time of the Peshwas, and it is still there, just opposite the Poona Baba Centre. It was a huge edifice, with old Burma teak pillars and a huge teak gate about twenty feet tall, with an archway to enter the Wada. The land for the Poona Centre was, in fact, given by Sardar Raste, but that's another story.

Anyhow, Gadekar had somehow made friends with Sardar Raste, and in the course of his friendship he had spoken about Baba. Through his contact with Gadekar, Sardar Raste had become interested in Baba, and when Gadekar mentioned to him that we were in search of a house for Baba and asked if he could help, Sardar Raste responded, "Wait a minute. I have a very good place. If you want, we'll go and have a look. The Rani of Baroda, when she was small, used to play on my lap (he was quite an old man), and she has a very nice bungalow here that is always vacant unless friends of hers come, and we can try to get that."

Gadekar came to Adi and me and said, "Would you want to try this option?" We responded that of course we would, so we went to have a

look. At that time, nothing was finalized with the other places. Sardar Raste fixed an appointment and took us in his car to the bungalow, and it turned out to be the very same place from which I had been unceremoniously thrown out a few days before! That same man who had chased me out, as soon as he heard the car coming, well, his body language changed dramatically! The first time we met, he had stood with his chest out, and now he was bent forward almost touching the ground. He offered a low salute to Sardar Raste, and then he saw me and I saw him. We recognized each other, but we both kept quiet.

The place was a big palace, with chandeliers, carpets, furniture, and a big guest house isolated from the main bungalow. It had a large main hall in the middle, a combination dining room and drawing room. It was so large that when the furniture would be rearranged, Baba could hold *darshan* programs here. There were three rooms on either side of that main room, rooms of huge dimensions. Each side room was wider than Meherazad Mandali Hall, though not as long. On the left-hand side was Baba's room, then Mehera and Mani's room, and then a room for the other women. On the right-hand side was Pendu's room, the room for the rest of the *mandali* (which Baba would use for smaller *darshan* programs or just gatherings of close ones), and then the Maharani's personal room, which in the early years was always kept locked.

The ceiling of the building was very tall. Despite the heat and dryness when Baba would come during the summers, in those rooms there would be a totally different atmosphere—very cool and nice, with an artificial ceiling above and then a roof higher up, so that there would be an air cushion on top. It was very well planned and well built.

The bungalow was also very close to the railway station, making it ideal for Baba's use. We had little hope, of course, because the Rani had never heard of Baba, so we didn't give much thought to this place working out. Like Bobra Irani's place in Salisbury Park, this palace really seemed to be too good to be true.

Back at Sardar Raste's house we composed a telegram to the Rani explaining that Shri Meher Baba was coming to Poona, and we asked if

He might stay at her bungalow, which was named “Guruprasad.” The cable was signed by Sardar Raste. On the day that Baba was to arrive, we received a return telegram from the Rani granting permission for Baba to stay there. On receiving it Sardar Raste and Gadekar rushed by car to Bindra House, Gadekar waving the telegram as he climbed the steps.

At that moment I had just returned from the market, having bought the necessary provisions for feeding Baba and His party. On entering Bindra House Gadekar proclaimed, “Meherwan, I got a telegram—we got the Guruprasad bungalow!”

I said, “Gadekar, it is too late. We have no way to communicate with Baba. But I will put the telegram with the food that we send over to them at the place by the tannery and see what Baba wants to do.”

“All right,” rejoined Gadekar, and off he went.

That afternoon I sent the telegram with the two boys who were to bring the food from Bindra House to Wanowrie, which was far away on the outskirts of the town. When Baba received the telegram, the women were resting, and Baba said to the men, “Let’s go and see the place.” When He saw it, He liked it immensely, and when He came back He said to the women, “Come on, pack up. We are going to stay at another place.” They were of course surprised at such a sudden turn of events, and later on, seeing Guruprasad, they were delighted! They were already fed up with the smell of the tannery and were wondering how Baba would tolerate it for the long stay. That marked the first time Baba stayed at Guruprasad in what would become a long history of His many visits there.

So, in spite of our inauspicious beginning, with Bobra Irani reneging on his offer and with my getting chased out of Guruprasad, our search had a happy ending. At first Baba had made it appear that it would be easy to find Him a good place, but our initial efforts left us in the lurch. This was one way in which Baba reminded us that any effort for Him had to be wholehearted, and also that strenuous effort was required to accomplish work to His satisfaction. It was also His way of bringing Maharani

Shantadevi of Baroda into His contact, and that seemingly unlikely episode initiated Baba's association with Guruprasad and Shantadevi herself.

It was May, 1951, when Baba began His stay at Guruprasad, just at the time of my final graduation exams. Studies had been, of course, out of the question for a while because of our frantic search for a suitable place in Poona for Baba.

Baba stayed in Guruprasad itself, while the men *mandali* were placed in the guest house, and the women *mandali* occupied the main building.

Word came that Baba would allow Papa, Sarosh, Meherjee, Gadekar, myself, and all those who had helped to secure accommodations for Him to come to see Him for a few minutes. This was to be our reward. As I have mentioned earlier, the last time I had seen Baba (apart from that one fleeting "forbidden" glimpse in the marketplace at Poona) was at Bindra House, when He said that I should look after the family while Eruch looked after Him.

So, after a gap of one-and-a-half years, we got a chance to see Him again. And of course, we were given instructions not to talk about anything, and not even to fold our hands in greeting when we saw Baba, because Baba was still in the New Life. So you can imagine how delighted we all were at the prospect of seeing Him, and on the appointed day we went to Guruprasad.

Upon actually seeing Baba, however, all joy vanished almost instantly because of the painful sight of seeing Baba so totally emaciated. I had never seen Him in such a terrible state physically. His neck stuck out like a chicken's, He was frail and worn out, He had to be supported to walk, and He couldn't even sit owing to a recent operation for piles. I had never seen Baba so pulled down—it was a terrible sight to see. Still, the smile He gave us was the usual Baba smile, and He embraced each one of us and told us that He was well pleased with our efforts to find the bungalow. Then He asked me, "I hear that it is the time of your exams.

Will you pass?"

"Yes, Baba, I will pass," I somehow said. Inwardly I knew that I had not prepared at all.

"You will pass?" He asked again, somewhat skeptically.

"Yes, Baba."

"All right, go home and now put your mind to your studies. You have not been studying, so try to study as much as you can."

To lighten our moods during that visit to Guruprasad, Baba would point to Nilu and say, "Day after day he is getting fatter, and here I am getting skinnier! Something must be wrong with him, because he is just putting on weight non-stop. He'll meet the fate of that man in the story!"

Baba was referring to a humorous anecdote in Hindu spiritual literature about a king known as Chaupat Raja. In his kingdom justice was so lopsided that the price of a bunch of vegetables and the costliest sweets had to be exactly the same, by royal decree. Everything had the same price no matter what it was, and everyone was equal. Baba asked Nilu to recount that story because it was apropos to His comments.

There is a rhyme associated with this story which goes: "*Andheri nagri, Chaupat Raja. Takeh ser bhaji, takeh ser khaja!*" Translated, it means: "A city of ignorance ruled by a mad king. Common vegetables (*bhaji*) cost a *taka* [an ancient Indian unit of currency] per *ser* [or "seer," a unit of weight in India amounting to about a pound], and so do the most expensive sweets (*khajas*)!"

Nilu related that story at Baba's direction. He said that there was a master and his disciples who went out on journeys of wandering and begging, much like the New Life. It was a very hard life for them, and everywhere they went they were despised, for they appeared to be able-bodied people and yet they were begging for food. Consequently, sometimes they could get food and at other times not. Somehow, however, the disciples clung to the master through all hardships.

Eventually the master and his disciples entered a very strange kingdom. Here the master gave the disciples the liberty to eat whatever they wanted. He provided them with some money, and they went out and bought the best of food, which was available at the lowest imaginable prices. For in that kingdom, by royal decree, everyone was to be served whatever they wanted at one and the same low price, and if anyone tried to violate this rule, they would be hanged straightaway.

The disciples had the biggest feast of their lifetimes, and the master let them eat for a couple of days. After they had gorged themselves and had become bloated, the master declared that it was now time to leave that place.

One of the disciples—and here Baba teasingly interjected that this disciple was like Nilu—was very fond of sweets. Nilu recounted that this man approached the master and said, “Master, I beg of you to excuse me from following you now. I think I have found my place here. I am really happy at this place, and everything is to my heart’s content.”

“Beware, my lad, this is no place for you,” the master said. “I warn you, don’t tarry here. Far better it would be that you should come along with me.”

“No, master, this place is perfect for me,” said the sweet-loving disciple.

“Look at the population of the place,” said the master. “Do you find anyone looking healthy?” And, in fact, as the disciples took note of the master’s words, it seemed that everyone in the kingdom was indeed emaciated. This was a surprise for the disciples, who couldn’t imagine why the whole population would be so emaciated when the finest of everything was available at virtually no cost. The master continued, “There is something seriously wrong with this place. It is better that we should go.” But that one disciple simply refused to go.

The master said, “All right, then. Be happy staying where you are, but when any difficulty comes, remember me, and I will be there to help you.”

The disciple said, “Yes, master,” but inwardly he felt that he would not have any occasion to remember the master. The smallest penny could get the best of food, or, in fact, anything one wanted.

The master then departed the kingdom with the rest of his disciples. The fellow who stayed behind ate and ate and ate, and eventually he became so fat that he had no care for the world whatsoever. He was quite happy simply gorging himself nonstop.

As it happened, the ruler of that kingdom was a very despotic king, and he was the sole, supreme judge of everything that happened there. He alone would pronounce “justice,” and, along the lines of the economy of the place, for the pettiest crime the punishment would be as bad as it was for the worst crime, and that uniform punishment was death by hanging. The whole population was afraid of the king’s erratic and willful judgments, and the reason they all appeared so emaciated was because they lived in constant fear the whole time; but that secret was not known to this happy-go-lucky disciple of the master

At this point Baba interrupted Nilu and chimed in. “You see, this Nilu is just like that. Despite My telling him not to eat, he keeps eating and fattening himself up like that fellow.” The story was so humorous, with Baba injecting His own humor as well, that we forgot all about the somber atmosphere of finding Baba Himself in such run-down health.

But that is not the end of the story! Nilu continued the tale, describing that there was construction activity somewhere in the kingdom and a wall had collapsed. When the wall fell, a donkey got crushed under it, and the owner of the donkey came to the king for justice.

The king called all the parties to appear before him, and he was intent that responsibility for the death of the donkey should be attributed to some person who would then be hanged. The builder of the wall was called, and he said, “Sire, it is not my fault. The man who was given the job of throwing the water on the wall did not do his job properly.” The man who had thrown the water onto the stone wall to set it was then called, and he said that the goat-skin that he had used had a leak in it, and he could throw only so much water onto the wall at a time, thus preventing him from doing his job properly. The fellow who made the goat-skin bag was then called, and he made his excuses, and on and on it went. Finally the king found someone to blame, but that man was so

emaciated and thin, owing to his continual worry that he would come under the unjust “justice” of the rash king, that no rope would ever have hanged him. Even the tiniest of knots would have slipped right over his neck and head!

At this point the king gave the order to search out a fat man in the country and bring him into his presence. The former disciple of the master in our story was the only fat man in the entire kingdom, and so he was dragged before the king, who said, “Well, you seem to be quite fat. You’re the right size to be hanged, so we are going to hang you.”

“Sire, what is my fault?” asked the bewildered disciple.

“You are the only fat man here,” said the king.

Immediately the now much-overfed disciple realized that his master had been right, and he began earnestly praying to the master to save him. In response to the disciple’s prayers the master appeared on the scene, and he took the disciple aside and told him to do one thing—that he should in fact ask to be hanged and leave the rest to the master.

The master then asked the king what was going on, and the king responded that this man was going to be hanged.

The master said, “Please don’t hang him. Hang me instead.”

The king replied, “But why?”

Now the disciple, under the direction of his master, approached the king and said, “No, sire, you pronounced *me* to be the one hanged, and I demand to be hanged!”

“But what’s wrong? Why do you want to be hanged?”

Now the master spoke out, saying that this particular day was most auspicious, and whosoever would be hanged on this day would go straight to heaven, “so that is why we are vying for this privilege.”

The king said, “Then that prerogative is mine!” He gave the order that *he* should be hanged, and all the people there suddenly pounced on the king and did hang him, because they all wanted to get rid of him anyway.

Baba jokingly said, “See, just like this man (indicating Nilu), he’s getting too fat, so he is ready to be hanged now!”

Towards the end of the time when Nilu was telling us this story, Baba asked me if I were familiar with the story, and I said yes, I was. Baba then said, “Then let us end it.” I felt very relieved because all the while Baba kept standing in the doorway and didn’t sit, and we could all see that He was in great agony. It made me most unhappy that Baba was suffering so much in an effort to humor us, and all along I had been wishing that this would end. It got to the point that I felt that instead of being in His presence, it would be better if we all left as soon as possible. Once the story was ended Baba asked us all to leave, and that was the end of our visit to Guruprasad.

My exams were scheduled for four or five days after Baba had arrived at Guruprasad. I was trying to study in the storeroom at the back of the sitting room in Bindra House. Every day I had to go for marketing, but after that there was such a hubbub in the kitchen that it made it difficult to concentrate. Naja, Manu and Mumma together prepared all the food that went to Baba and the *mandali* from the Bindra House kitchen.

The exam was my final B.Sc. in Physics and Chemistry. I had to know all the 92 elements and their characteristics and properties by heart. As it happened, I had opened just one page in the book, the page for Uranium, and that was the one they asked about in the exam! Somehow I just scraped through, and I became a full graduate with a degree attached to my name, despite hardly knowing any of the subjects!

While I was going for the exams, Naja had gathered all the persons in Bindra House to stand before Baba’s picture and pray that I would get through. It was such a daunting task for me to appear for those two subjects with so little preparation that for years thereafter I had nightmares about appearing for exams and not being prepared. Just the thought of it would make me shudder!

Inwardly everyone was allowed to feel anything, but one condition of the New Life was not to show anything outwardly in the way of formal recognition of Baba's divinity. There is one set of pictures that shows Baba in His weakened condition. The New Life had really taken a toll on His physical body, and He had not spared Himself one iota. It brought tears to our eyes to see Baba's condition. Never before and never since did He appear so emaciated and so weak. It was all part of His Universal Working, but to our eyes, it was inconceivable and unbearable that He put Himself through such intense suffering.

Despite his pulled-down health, Baba seemed to enjoy His stay at Guruprasad. He stayed there for quite a long time, and then after that relaxing stay He returned to Mahabaleshwar. He did return several times to Poona for treatment of piles, usually just for the day to receive an injection from Dr. Merchant, who was a colorectal specialist. The injections of Proctocaine deadened the pain of the piles and had to be given very carefully in the anus. It was a particularly difficult time for Baba.

Around that time Ghani passed away. We all attended his funeral. He left behind four daughters and a son.

At this point we had the feeling that there was some hope of contact with Baba again, although all contacts were indirect at that time. We got the opportunity to search for bungalows for Him, and when He came to Poona, the food would go to Him from Bindra House, so my mother had the chance to resume cooking for Him. The whole household would be all worked up to get the food ready for Baba whenever the chance came. These were great occasions for us because they connected us once again with Baba.

That year passed by, and thereafter I think Baba shifted to Hyderabad for the last part of the New Life. Around September Baba called a meeting for three days in Hyderabad. A select few of His disciples were told to come, and Papa was one of them.

Baba had rented a huge mansion, the home of Salar Jung, who had endowed a world-famous museum called "The Salar Jung Museum." I remember that we had sent a big basket of eatables with Papa for Baba

and the companions. I had gone with Papa to the railway station to make sure that he was in his reserved seat, as he was nervous about the journey.

At that meeting Baba gave the attendees the choice to come with Him on His New Life, even those who had previously not been included. He announced that it would be the most difficult time ever, that nothing His companions had seen so far of the New Life would be as strenuous as this phase. Some of the companions were really nervous about what Baba was up to at that point, because if the New Life up to then were nothing compared to this, what could this be?

He called this final phase *Manonash*, which means “Destruction of the Mind.” Many decided to join despite the harsh conditions, and a few were selected by Baba. The rest were told to return home, including Papa. Only four were ready to follow Baba into *Manonash*. The rest were sent back to Meherazad.

Baba left the Hyderabad palace, and with Gustadji, Baidul, Pendu and Eruch—the four that remained—started to trudge into the final phase of the New Life. They proceeded from Hyderabad via Aurangabad, where Baba wanted the blessing of a priest. From there they traveled via Imampur, where that well-known incident with the bird nesting in the mosque happened in the night, when Baba got annoyed at the noise the bird was making and asked Eruch to throw it out before changing His mind.

The following morning Baba asked those companions with Him to spit upon Him and slap Him for almost throwing the bird out of its nesting place in the old abandoned mosque, which act would have violated the orders of the New Life. Eruch said that they had to do it. All these things were there, very difficult things, just so many stories to us but when you had to pass through them in actual life, it was like passing through fire.

Eventually, after nearly three years of wandering from the beginning of the New Life, Baba arrived at Seclusion Hill outside Meherazad and casually said to Eruch, “Let’s go up the Hill.” Baba and the remaining companions climbed up the back side of Seclusion Hill. At that time there were two cabins there, at the top of the Hill.

Baba decided that He would do some seclusion work up on the Hill. Although it was December, it was raining, and it proved too wet and windy to stay on the top, so the cabins were brought down to the grounds of the Meherazad estate, which took a couple of days. One supposes that Baba was doing the *Manonash* phase to help the whole of Creation to annihilate the mind, which is what spirituality is all about in the end.

With the successful completion of the *Manonash* phase, Baba announced that it was the end of His New Life. He declared that He would now be entering into different phases of “Life,” as it were: the first stage He called the “Complicated Free Life,” a life where bindings (weaknesses) dominated strengths; that was followed by a phase in which “strength would dominate weakness,” and then the “Fiery Free Life,” and eventually just “The Life.” We just took these things as Baba said them, without any scope for comment or analysis or understanding.

Now, finally, we had the prospect of seeing Baba again, and after a while Baba indicated that He would call everybody for a meeting. But a circular came out instead, postponing the meeting because Baba was going to the West.

Before leaving for the West Mehera repeatedly asked Baba to get dentures, so just to please her He sent word to Papa to find Him a dentist for that purpose. The leading dental surgeon in Poona at the time was named Dr. Bharucha. Papa fixed an appointment for Baba, and Baba came to Bindra House in advance of it. Finally, after a gap of three years, Baba was back at Bindra House, and it was a day of great rejoicing for us.

By this time Baba looked much better. He was preparing for the trip to the West, and He was now eating well and building up His health. Earlier Baba would have long fasts, draining every ounce of energy from His body. In spite of all the hardships He had endured, however, He was almost His usual radiant self by the time He left for the West.

It is important to remember that we were still not allowed to bow down to Baba except on rare occasions. Later, when He declared His Avatarhood, we could say “Avatar Meher Baba ki Jai!” Of course, from the 1940s our

family had already known that He was the Avatar. As a young child I just accepted Him in all innocence. That's the advantage of having parents who love Him. One doesn't have to struggle to find and reach Him.

Baba went to the dentist, was fitted for dentures, and the dentist said he was going to make the dentures with the fanciest materials, including platinum, which would cost six hundred rupees at a time when ordinary dentures cost a fraction of that price! Eventually, however, he made different dentures, which cost much less, because he decided the fancy ones would be too heavy.

After several sittings to give a fit that Baba was satisfied with, Baba sent Papa to settle the bill. When he asked the dentist how much was owed, he was surprised to find that he was charging the full six hundred rupees. He hadn't reduced the price from that for the proposed dentures made of the most exotic materials!

So Papa, always practical, bargained with him and eventually brought the price down to four hundred fifty rupees, still a lot of money for what turned out to be quite ordinary dentures.

Papa paid him the reduced price, and on return to Bindra House he told Baba how much he had finally paid. Baba said that he should have paid the dentist the full price he asked, and over Papa's strong protests, sent Papa back to pay the balance! Baba gestured that whatever was being given should be finished with. Dr. Bharucha was surprised at Papa's return with the additional money, and he readily accepted it. It was a pity that he missed the chance of serving the Lord. So many doctors treated Baba as a loving service and never charged Him. They won, and this Dr. Bharucha, whose greed made him take advantage of the Avatar Himself, lost. Bad destiny—that is what it was.

Baba asked all of us, "How do I look now? Do I look good?" We all said that He did. Those dentures that His Beloved, Mehera, had so wanted Baba to have must have hurt Him or been uncomfortable, because much of the time He didn't wear them. Sometimes He just wore the upper ones. In fact, He was wearing the uppers at the time of the first auto

accident in Prague, Oklahoma, in 1952, resulting in some very bad cuts in His mouth. Owing to the impact of the accident, the dentures jammed into His gums and cut His tongue. That resulted in considerable bleeding, not to mention the pain caused by the splintering of the dentures inside His mouth. Baba didn't wear the dentures again, and we don't know what became of them.

Baba didn't have any teeth as a result of His banging His head during the period of coming back to gross consciousness, and that is why He always liked soft food. Baba used to eat quite fast, like a small child, and He would splash food all over Himself while He ate, but at the same time He would ask us not to eat fast! Eruch used to tell us that within a half an hour or an hour at the most, Baba's system would pass out everything that He had eaten. It was really unusual. Baba usually had several motions in a day, and if He didn't, He would say, "This is not normal." There was generally a potty chair nearby to help Baba relieve Himself—it was even carried with Him in the car because He had trouble squatting in His later years.

I think Eruch has often told the story about Baba's car trip to a Meherabad *sahavas* in 1954. On that occasion Baba couldn't pass a motion in the morning at Meherazad, but when His car got close to Meherabad, He suddenly urgently felt the urge to use the potty. He asked Eruch to drive as fast as possible, but about a mile from Meherabad a big crowd blocked the road, eagerly waiting for Baba's car to come. Baba's lovers had assembled to bring Him in a jubilant procession to Meherabad. All the while Baba was holding on, straining not to eliminate when the urge to do so was really strong, and He gestured to Eruch and the *mandali* who were with Him, "See, outside is so much joy and welcome for Me, and here I have to hold on because of such love!" His lovers, out of their outpouring of love, were unknowingly delaying His bowel movement, and Baba had to hold on and on and on until they finally reached Meherabad. Outside the Mandali Hall at Meherabad was a room that Baba had occupied years before, and a potty chair had been placed there, but Baba couldn't go in there until all the crowd had dispersed. Such, Baba

would often point out, were the “oppressions of love” borne lovingly by the Lord of Love.

Now, once I had graduated from college, Papa was anxious about my future. He naturally wanted me to get a job or find some sort of work. First he asked me if I had any desire to study further. At that point I was fed up with studying, and I said I did not. Then during one of His visits to Bindra House, sometime before He went to the West, Baba called me to His side. He said, “After lunch, come and see Me. I want to decide about you.” I was naturally very excited and gobbled my lunch. When I appeared in His room He asked, “How come you came so soon? I asked you to eat slowly.”

I said, “Baba, I have eaten my fill.”

“All right,” He said, “I want to decide about your future. What do you want to do now? Do you want to study further?”

“No,” I said.

“Then what do you want to do?”

“Baba, You decide,” I replied.

Baba gestured, “Fine”. He was happy with my response, but then He asked me again, “But what do you want to do?”

Again I replied, “Baba, whatever You want.”

He nodded, once again seeming happy with my reply. But then for the third time He repeated, “What do you want to do?”

So I started to say, “Baba...”

And before I could say anything more, He said, “All right, I will decide for you. You have to take a job and be a help to the family. I don’t want you to take up some business but simply to get a job. For the present take up a job somewhere, and I will see about later.”

I replied, “All right, Baba,” and that was it.

Before Baba left Bindra House after saying all this to me, He met with Papa and said, “Don’t worry about Meherwan. I have decided about his future, and it will all be fine.” Baba then shook Papa’s hand as if it were an accomplished fact, and my fate was thereby sealed.

I started applying for various jobs advertised in the papers, and I received a couple of calls. Meanwhile, my father had a friend who was a manager in the New India Assurance Company, and he asked him if there were any openings. The friend said that there were, and he asked Papa to send me for an interview.

When I went to see that man and he saw that I had degrees in Chemistry and Physics, he told me that I was totally over-qualified for the job, which was clerical. “Why would you want to come here to work?” he asked. “Go look for a job in your line of study.”

I replied that I would like to work in his company if he offered me the job. He was too embarrassed, however, to offer me the job, for which the pay was extremely low, so he said, “Very well, you go, and I will think about it.” That man interviewed many others for the position, but no one would work for the paltry salary that was being offered. Finally, when he could not get anyone else, he called me.

So that was that—despite my college degrees, my first job was as a clerk in an insurance company. The starting salary was sixty rupees per month, which was quite low even in those days. In addition they gave a “Dearness Allowance,” which was to compensate for the cost of living based on inflation, of another sixty rupees. The DA, as it was called, was a British practice, carried over after Independence. In England something expensive is referred to as being “dear,” hence the term “Dearness Allowance.” In fact, I wasn’t interested in either the pay or the job, but Baba had asked me to do it, so I did it.

The manager had asked me to begin the very next day, which was the twentieth of May, 1952, so I was in the office when someone brought in the *Times of India* newspaper four days later, which carried an account of the news of Baba’s accident. Until that time none of us had heard anything about it.

Because Eruch had declined to accompany Baba on His 1952 trip to the West—owing to his utter depletion from traveling with Baba and attending to Him throughout the New Life—both he and Pendu had been sent on speaking tours all around India. Mind you, at the conclusion of the New Life Eruch was totally exhausted and I would even say shattered by the exertion of all that he had been through, caring for Baba all the while. But the speaking tour Baba sent him on was even more exhausting, going to Hamirpur, Andhra and various other places in India and Pakistan. They had to give accounts of Baba's life and message at every stop, morning to night. Eruch was given the task of speaking, and Pendu was sent to assist him by making travel arrangements, ensuring they had accommodations, and so on.

Somehow Baba gave Eruch the energy to withstand that ordeal, and even though he had never previously spoken publicly, Baba extracted things out of Eruch that thrilled the audiences. You might say that it was almost as if Baba spoke through him. It was really wonderful, with the result that all of Hamirpur and Andhra were on fire with an intense longing to see Baba as a result of those speaking tours. Others had preceded Eruch and Pendu to those places, such as when Babadas and Vibhuti had talked about Baba, but Eruch and Pendu definitely conveyed something more about Baba, and particularly about His New Life, to the extent that they left these places virtually aflame with love for Baba.

When the telegram delivering the news of the accident came, Eruch was totally nonplussed. He and Pendu immediately wound up their tour and came back to Meherabad to await the outcome. A telegram was waiting for them there indicating that they should not discontinue their tour, but rather that they should carry out whatever Baba had told them to do. In the midst of His considerable injuries and pain, Baba had sent that telegram from America to instruct Eruch and Pendu, anticipating that they might have discontinued their travels. They had to resume their tours right away, and, of course, I carried on with my job, awaiting Baba's further instructions.

It was during the latter part of the tour that Eruch and Pendu went to Karachi in Pakistan, where there were several Baba-lovers, including Minoo Kharas and Adi Dubash. The Pakistani Baba-lovers entertained them lavishly, and so, after a long time, they were treated to great food and drink and were taken sight-seeing.

On one of those trips they went on a boat ride, during which something went wrong and the boat capsized. Pendu and Eruch both had great difficulty swimming to the shore. Eruch had both their passports in his pocket, and they were soaked after they got out of the sea water. They had to be dried out after their swim. In Karachi, too, Eruch spoke to the public, and many Zoroastrian Parsis were drawn to Baba through those talks, among them the Mavalwalas, the Arjanis, the Drivers and others.

Telegrams and letters and a few phone calls eventually filled us in on the details of the accident. In 1948, if I remember right, Baba had sent out a circular stating that a great personal disaster would occur shortly that would test the love and faith of His lovers, exhorting them to hold onto Him whatever should happen. With the accident in America we felt that this was the disaster Baba had foretold. The accident at Prague, along with all the events of His present Advent, was planned ages ago, when Baba was with us in His previous Advent as Mohammed—this is what He once told the *mandali*.



Chapter Eleven:

1952 - 1953

The years of 1952-1953 were the period of what Baba termed the “Complicated Free Life,” the “Full Free Life,” and the “Fiery Free Life.” We really didn’t know what Baba meant by all these different types of lives He planned to lead—we just accepted what Baba said, and for us, Baba was just Baba, from the beginning to the end, one Baba in whatever “life” He decided to live.

There was some external indication of what was happening during those various phases. In the “New Life,” all the “old life” connections were apparently severed, and Baba went out wandering, totally helpless and without any hope of seeing the “old life” people or allowing us to see Him. He then entered into the *Manonash* phase, in which Baba worked in the utmost seclusion, bringing great strain upon Himself to accomplish work we knew nothing about, really; but He said that He had succeeded in annihilating the mind. He declared that in doing this He was helping all of humanity to achieve this inevitable goal in the future and making it easier for them. I suppose He was referring to something to do with the whole of Creation in time to come. Annihilation of the mind is the only way to God-realization, the realization of one’s True Self.

After coming out of the New Life, Baba traveled to the West and had the accident. That was during what He called the “Complicated Free Life,” during which Baba said that “weakness would predominate over strength.”

Eventually there came the “Fiery Free Life,” in which Baba said that strength would dominate over weakness. He and the *mandali* went out on what turned out to be almost literally “fiery” *darshan* tours, particularly throughout Hamirpur and Andhra, setting people’s hearts on fire for Him. Such tours were absolutely unprecedented, and the response from the people was really tremendous. The crowds were so intense that the *mandali* had a difficult time simply safeguarding Baba’s body! Apart from these external signs, however, Baba alone knew what He meant by all those different phases. We never went into intellectual gymnastics about what He said and what it meant because it would result only in confusion. As Baba had often told His lovers, “Don’t try to understand Me, just try to love Me.” He is beyond all understanding, and our frail human minds are not able to fathom Him.

I had, of course, been conscious of Baba’s suffering through many phases of fasting and *mast* tours and the like, but when He first came to Guruprasad and invited us who had searched for the place to see Him, it brought tears to my eyes to see Baba’s terrible condition. In reference to the amount of suffering that He continually underwent, Baba has mentioned that His life was one of *continual* crucifixion. “Jesus was crucified once,” He said, “but I am being crucified continuously.”

People who lived close to Him always had this constant exposure to the result of the pressure of His Universal Work on Him. The pressure of His work was tremendous, and Baba never spared Himself or His body. There was so much activity that He poured into this Avataric Advent that I don’t think anything like it has ever occurred before. It was literally the answer to the machine age; He was working like a machine, nonstop, to give a proper answer to the machine age—at least that is what I feel. Baba said that this being the last Avataric Incarnation in the Cycle of Cycles, His Manifestation would be universal, whereas in the previous Advents the manifestations were more limited.

Despite being so close, even the *mandali* members would never have the full view of the tremendous work that Baba was accomplishing. It was just the external physical activity that people could observe, but Baba worked at the same time on all the other planes and other dimensions—nothing that was observable by us. We saw only the tip of the iceberg. Well, God does His work in silence, unseen, unheard and unknown by anyone. There is an Urdu saying, “*Khuda ki baatey Khuda hee jaaney.*” This means that God’s ways are known only to God. Baba’s life was a living example of this for us.

Going back to my own life story, as I was saying, I had just joined the New India Assurance Company, and within three or four days the newspaper report came that Baba had had the car accident. That’s how I came to know of it, and it was a huge shock to all of us. Baba’s circular had come out in January, 1948, in which He mentioned that a great personal disaster had to come to pass, and apparently God willed it to happen in America. He had to shed His blood there. The entire left side of His body had been shattered, and that’s a very striking thing to me. Recently it dawned on me that in America it was the left side of His body that was damaged. When facing North, the left side is the West side. At the time of that accident, Baba had been with only the women *mandali* in the car. Four years later when the accident occurred in Satara, it was His right side that was badly smashed up, and only the men *mandali* were with Baba then. In Hindu mythology or spiritual history, the left was Shiva’s female aspect and the right was the male aspect. We don’t know what the significance of all that may be—it is simply fodder for our speculation.

All those accidents were entirely predetermined by Him, such as the way Baba delayed getting into the car so that the accident with the other car would occur at a particular time and place. Prague, Oklahoma, is almost exactly at the center of the United States. In a way it was His particular sense of humor that He was just quite natural and allowed the whole thing to happen. Just imagine if you or I had been there and we knew that that accident was going to happen. We would have been all jitters and shivers.

Before Baba left for the West, Meherjee came to Bindra House and filled us in a bit as to what was going on. Prior to launching on the journey, Baba had called the men who would accompany Him. He was in a very serious mood. "What we are going on is not any picnic or joyride. I have very serious work to do, and I am entrusting to each one particular duties which you all have to carry out with great attention and care, so don't think that it is all nothing but fun for you to come with Me. I am warning you now."

Baba gave duties to various people. To Meherjee He said in a rather stern voice, "As for you, you will be My personal attendant in Eruch's absence." Meherjee had a sense of foreboding from those comments, and indeed, after the accident Meherjee was given the duty of attending to Baba's needs as His personal attendant. At that time Baba said to Him, "Remember, I told you that you would have to attend to Me? This is what I meant."

So the "personal disaster" was the accident, you see? Actually, as I have said, Baba had also foretold the accident in a circular. See how well planned it must have been! Meherjee said that he had never attended to a sick person, let alone Baba, and how grateful and beholden he was to Baba to allow him to serve Him in such a way. Baba would show him how to hold a basin under His face so that water wouldn't splash on Him, and so on. Meherjee didn't even know how to do that, but in His weakened condition Baba would show him how to serve Him, and Meherjee put his heart and soul into it. Nilu was there to do the night watch, and Sarosh was there as well.

So Baba showed Meherjee how to serve Him even in His severely injured state. Meherjee later described that at that time Baba would often be in bad moods, and it was a very difficult time to be serving Him. Ordinarily Eruch would have been doing that work, serving Baba personally, but his exhaustion after the New Life had led to his telling Baba that he could not to go to the West. Had he not traveled around India on the speaking tours as Baba had directed, however, the people in India would not have been inwardly prepared for the *darshan* programs to come.

Baba wanted that work to be done by Eruch, so Baba must have made him decide to stay back as he did. We are all puppets in His hands, though we feel as if we are acting of our own free will. We dance and dance, but it is always Baba Who pulls the strings. Everything appears to be going on very naturally, but behind the scenes we don't know what is really going on.

Meheru and Mani had the fewest injuries, whereas Baba, Mehera and Elizabeth were all seriously injured. Baba was thrown out of the car and lay bleeding on the side of the road. He later commented, "I had to spill My blood on American soil." Soon after the accident, the car with Sarosh, Dr. Goher, Rano, Kitty and Delia arrived on the scene. When they saw what had happened, Goher (who had earlier felt hurt at being excluded from being in Baba's car) realized why He had insisted that she go in the other car, because she was needed to tend to the injuries of Baba, Mehera and Elizabeth.

The nearest hospital in Prague was a private nursing home run by a Dr. Burleson. He was contacted and sent an ambulance to bring the injured to his nursing home. Goher accompanied them in the ambulance, and Dr. Burleson met them at the hospital and tended to them all. He started attending to Mehera first because Baba was not making any sound, which led him to believe that Baba's injuries were not serious. Dr. Goher, on the other hand, insisted that he attend to Baba first. Mehera's injuries were so obvious because her skull was fractured in several places.

Only after he had finished with Mehera did Dr. Burleson listen to Dr. Goher and look at Baba. Then he realized how very serious Baba's injuries were. He was shocked that Baba hadn't made a sound in spite of what must have been intense pain. Baba's whole left side had been broken, and Burleson put His clavicle and left leg in plaster. Baba's tongue was also cut because of the dentures He had been wearing at the time of the accident, and it had to be sutured.

Elizabeth was driving, so when the impact occurred, the steering wheel slammed into her chest and broke all her ribs. She had to be bandaged to keep her ribs in place so they could heal.

Dr. Burleson was amazed that people from different professions came forward to help Baba and His group. Later, when Baba started recovering, He and the others were discharged. Once He was out of the hospital, Baba had a letter sent to Dr. Burleson thanking him for his care. Burleson wrote back about how he had been so impressed by the love and care shown to Baba and the ladies by so many people.

Because of the accident, the tour in the United States was cut short. Baba returned from Prague, Oklahoma, to Myrtle Beach, after which He had to commute to the Hospital at Duke University for treatments for Himself and for Mehera.

The *mandali* and Baba returned to India via New York, Switzerland and then Pakistan. In spite of His injuries and with His left leg still in plaster, Baba gave *darshan* in New York. He and His party then went to Zurich for rest and relaxation before boarding a plane for Bombay. Because there was some difficulty in obtaining plane reservations for Baba and the *mandali*, they had to be flown out separately. Rano had great difficulty getting Baba's group back from Pakistan. That flight went via Karachi in Pakistan, and at Karachi airport Rano had enormous problems in trying to get them all on the same flight. Ultimately they had to take separate planes.

By the last week of August Baba and His party had returned to Meherazad. Eruch and Pendu also returned around the same time, and they went to Meherabad. Baba called them to Meherazad on His arrival there, and they gave Him an account of their travels. It was at that time that Baba planned the mass *darshan* tours to various places that they had visited, like Delhi, Andhra and Hamirpur.

Baba was in Meherazad for a few days, and there was some talk about a big meeting in Meherabad. Before that, however, Baba wanted to have some rest and recuperation. He also wanted some consultation about His foot, which had been injured in the accident and was heavily bandaged. So Baba wanted to come to Poona, and again there was a big rush to locate a good bungalow. Eruch happened to be with us then,

and he located a good one in a part of the city called the “Deccan Gymkhana” locality. It belonged to a person named Jakhar, and the bungalow had not yet been occupied. We went there, cleaned it up, and we got furniture and crockery on hire. Baba stayed there for a few days for medical consultations for His injuries.

When we organized these residences, Baba would reimburse us from the ashram account unless we were able to pay the expenses comfortably ourselves. We led a middle-class family life at that time, so we could afford some expenditures for Baba.

People who had a good amount of money gave money to Him. They lived the most frugal existence possible, the *mandali* and Baba, but no holds were ever barred in taking care of or contacting the *masts*. Even on *mast* journeys, however, Baba and the *mandali* were extremely frugal regarding themselves, eating little and always traveling third class. It’s just that the amount of traveling they would undertake to find a *mast* was almost unlimited. And Baba would often give money to various people to take care of the *masts* after contacting them. In the old days Baba was very particular about expenditures, and each day He would initial the bazaar list personally.

During that time there were big feeding programs for which thousands upon thousands of rupees were spent to feed thousands of poor people, but at the same time, the *mandali* were barely getting a meal. There would be occasional feasts as well, of course, but routinely, everyone ate very frugally. To be with Baba was a different kind of life—we were totally dependent upon Him, which was the joy of it.

Sometime before the Meherabad meeting took place, Baba came to Bindra House and stayed for a couple of weeks in Poona. Still using crutches, His foot heavily bandaged, Baba gave *darshan* at our home. I remember Baba sitting on Papa’s bed by the window. The two doors to the room were opened, and people came for *darshan*, filing in through one door and out through the other. There are photos of Baba with His foot all bandaged up giving that *darshan*. Just imagine what trouble and

pain He underwent because of the severe physical handicaps He had taken upon Himself! Baba's activity and outpouring were continuous. When He arrived on that occasion, no sooner had He sat down than we went to Him for His embrace. He was there for practically the whole day, and there was a stream of people wanting to have His *darshan*.

Baba went back to Meherazad after that, and He held the big meeting at Meherabad before He went out on several large *darshan* tours. I think I was there for three days of the meeting, but I have no recollection of what took place. After that Baba declared His plans to the effect that He would be embarking on that "Fiery Free Life" tour.

Baba was to go on the tour of the North first, and then to Andhra. On the 15th of November the "Fiery Free Life" tour began, starting from Meherazad. He told us that before going on the tour, He wanted to bow down to the three Perfect Masters who were directly associated with His present Advent: Sai Baba, Upasni Maharaj and Hazrat Babajan. First He went to Sakori, where He bowed down at Maharaj's tomb and then met with people there. Next Baba went to Shirdi and bowed down to Sai Baba's *samadhi* (Baba used to call him "the Old Man" or the "the Grand Old Man"). The same day He came to Poona and went to Babajan's place. It was closed at that time, but the people there had arranged to keep it open for Him, and while the city slept, at around midnight, Baba and the *mandali* with Him bowed down at Babajan's tomb.

Afterwards the rest of the *mandali* were asked to proceed on to Bombay, while Baba came to Bindra house and occupied Papa's bed. Eruch was keeping watch that night, I remember, in the corridor outside Papa's room. There was a chair at a little side table where people used to relax, so Eruch sat there, and when Baba would clap, Eruch would rush in. We all kept awake, but Baba sent word that we were all to go to sleep. We did, but every so often I heard claps followed by Eruch rushing to and fro. That was the first day and first night of the "Fiery Free Life" in Bindra House. The next day, the 16th, Baba was feeling cold, and He asked Mumma whether she had a warm coat He could wear.

I think I have told you that Jal Kerawala was a close friend of our family. He had recently died, and some of his things had been sent to us, including his personal clothing. In that collection there were two *sherwanis*, a black woolen one and a cream-colored silk one. The *sherwani* is the national dress of India, a long buttoned coat reaching down to the knees with a “standing” collar. This dress is also quite popular among *muslims*. A very tight-fitting, narrow pant called a *churidar* and the *sherwani* were the usual garb for government dignitaries when attending official functions. Jal Kerawala, who was very senior in the government service, had to wear these garments whenever he attended such functions.

Baba tried on Jal’s coat and it fit Him perfectly. Baba looked elegant in it. Baba said, “My very close one, Jal Kerawala, has passed away. I had great work for him to do, but never mind. He is now accompanying Me in this work.” There are photographs of Baba wearing that coat throughout the *darshan* programs that took place in Andhra, Hamirpur and other locations. It was cold in November and December, especially up North where Jal had been situated, so those coats came in very handy.

I think I have also mentioned that prior to the meeting at Meherabad, both Ghani and Jal had passed away. Jal Kerawala died early in 1952. Before he died he was staying in a distant place near Nagpur. Baba called him by sending a telegram, so he came immediately to Baba, whereupon Baba met him here at Meherazad and asked him to write Him a check for some amount, around five hundred rupees.

Of course Jal gave that amount, but he had a thought, “Why should Baba call me all this distance for such a small amount? Surely He could have written to me, and I would have sent it.” The strange way our minds work! It was his last physical contact with Baba. He had previously suffered from a little heart trouble, and soon after delivering the check to Baba, He went to Bombay for some work. On the train ride returning to his post, he suffered a massive heart attack and died.

Jal had seen my mother before going away and had mentioned to her about how he could have simply mailed the check. My mother

admonished him, saying, “How stupid of you to talk like this! You should be happy for even a few seconds in Baba’s presence!”

He responded, “Yes, yes, I know.” But somehow his mind started thinking weird thoughts, as if Baba was asking for money and Baba might have called him because perhaps Baba was a bit apologetic for it. But really, this was just an excuse to call him so he could be with Baba for one last time. This is how Baba does things, very naturally, and all the while our minds play tricks on us.

Baba now launched out on those *darshan* journeys, accompanied by quite a few people. Most of the *mandali* were given specific tasks while on the tours. One bus took the *mandali* while Baba went in a car. We have seen Baba’s car in a film of that Andhra *darshan*, a big, black car. From Poona Baba went to Bombay, where He gave a *darshan* at Nariman and Arnavaz’s home, and then He went by train to Kanpur and then to Hamirpur by car. I could have accompanied Him, but I had just joined service at the insurance company, so I was stuck in Poona.

Irene Conybeare had come at that time, and Baba sent her to Kanpur in advance. She joined Baba there for the tour of the North and South. She was writing *Civilization or Chaos?* at the time, and Baba gave her time to work on it in advance of His tour.

There was a tremendous wave of enthusiasm for Baba on those tours. The waves of Baba’s Love flowing out and returning were palpable. Eruch described one scene in the South to us. At that particular *darshan* program there was an offering of bananas. Everyone would carry a banana to be placed at Baba’s feet in the *darshan*, and at one point the crowd was so big, a lawyer Baba-lover there was given the task of raking the bananas, which fell through a hole in the platform so that they wouldn’t get in the way. The Baba-lovers at that place had built a high platform for the *darshan*, with space underneath for collecting the bananas.

As the *darshan* continued there appeared to be no end to the line. People just kept coming and coming. There were so many people that Baba finally had to stop the *darshan*, which put the remaining people

who had yet to come before Him into a panic and led to a sort of stampede. Everyone wanted to give their little gift, and eventually, seeing the possibility that they wouldn't actually reach Baba's feet for their individual *darshan*, they began to throw the bananas. Eruch reported that there was a literal shower of bananas as a result, and everyone was inundated! The lawyer who was under the stage raking up the bananas was so dazed by that experience that for days afterwards he roamed the streets and wouldn't attend to his work, having become rather *mast*-like, and soon thereafter he died.

Baba endured the physical exhaustion of those almost daily *darshans*, but in spite of it He just went on and on. That was one of the outward aspects of what He had termed the "Fiery Free Life."

Baba returned from those Fiery Free Life journeys to stay at Meherazad. At that time my sister Meheru was having a lot of health problems. She had been in hospital once or twice because she had some kind of obstructive jaundice. Doctors weren't able to diagnose it properly, and she became very yellow because of it. Eventually she was admitted to Booth Hospital in Ahmednagar, where they performed some surgery on her.

After recovering and coming to Poona, Meheru told us that Baba was at Meherazad at the time and was preparing to leave for North India. Baba had decided to shift His headquarters to Dehra Dun. Before leaving He came to see my sister in the hospital, and as a consequence, so many patients had Baba's *darshan* as He went through the wards to see my sister. Baba comforted Meheru, told her not to worry, and He reminded her to remember Him and to keep repeating His Name. Soon thereafter He proceeded to Dehra Dun. He had to pass via Poona en route, and He halted for the day at Bindra House, staying overnight. All the males present—Papa, Eruch, Gustadji and myself—stayed overnight in the garage, just spreading our bedding rolls on the floor. The women and Baba stayed inside the main house. It was a very happy visit.

The next day Baba proceeded by train to Bombay en route to Dehra Dun, and for the next six or seven months, Baba was there. My sister Meheru

came to Poona, as I said, and she seemed all right, but after some time she again had a recurrence of obstruction of the bile duct, and she was once again admitted to hospital, this time in Poona. There the doctor informed us that she was actually suffering from cancer of the pancreas. The doctors at Booth Hospital had in fact known about it, but they had not revealed that diagnosis to us. Nothing further could be done, they said, because it was spreading fast. After a few days' stay she was shifted back to Ahmednagar, where all types of different therapies were tried. "Grape therapy" was popular at the time—she was prescribed grapes as her sole diet—morning, evening and night, only grapes and nothing else.

Meheru became sick of the grapes, but the doctors found that the tumor had in fact gotten smaller after the diet. She had, however, become very frail for lack of any other food, and the doctors warned us that she wouldn't be able to survive that way. A few days later she had a sudden hemorrhage and passed away.

Mumma had gone to Ahmednagar to nurse her in those last days, and my aunt Banumasi was there, too, as was Papa. As her end approached, Meheru could feel her life leaving her. She would say to Mumma, "My feet are now dead. My legs, my thighs...they have died now." Then as her life slowly left her, she told them as each part died. Finally when it was coming to her throat and she knew she could not speak any more, she told them, "Tell Baba that Meheru's journey is over!" She was very courageous, and she had accepted her suffering as Baba's wish.

Toward the end Papa phoned me at Bindra House, telling me to come immediately as Meheru's condition was extremely serious. I took the night train and arrived in the morning. When I reached there she had already died. I couldn't believe it, and I suggested that we put hot water bottles on her to warm her up, as her body had gone cold. They let me do it, but I realized that she was gone.

It was of course a very big shock to my mother and also to my father. They felt the loss very keenly. Baba sent word that she had come to Him, and that nobody should worry. The message of her passing had been

sent to Baba by telegram. Then later on, when Baba returned from Dehra Dun, my father was very angry with Him, saying, “You allowed my daughter to die, and You should have saved her!” The rest of the family tried to pacify Papa, urging him not to express such views in front of Baba, but Baba told us to let him ventilate, and after that Papa calmed down. Baba consoled him, as He consoled the whole family, and then I believe that Baba began a stay at Satara, and that stint at Satara would continue until the second accident.

At Satara the women *mandali* stayed in Grafton bungalow, and the men *mandali* were in Rosewood cottage, about a mile away. Baba was in very strict seclusion during the period, so another cottage, called Jal Villa, was hired between the two. Baba, with Kaikobad Dastur and Dr. Nilu, worked and stayed in Jal Villa.



Chapter Twelve:

Three Incredible Weeks and the Wadia Park *Darshan*

Later on in September, 1954, there was a large *darshan* program in Wadia Park in Ahmednagar. Baba announced that He wanted to give a mass public *darshan* to lovers in the Ahmednagar area, the first one after many years. This was part of the program that came to be called “Three Incredible Weeks,” which was a truly amazing period of time when Baba’s Western men lovers were called to stay with Him at Meherabad. That event has been recorded in various books and films.

Baba asked us to be present for that *darshan* program at Wadia Park, and for that purpose I was able to get a few days off work. I remember that the *darshan* started in the early morning. Our family was staying at Akbar Press, located on Station Road just a few minutes from where the *darshan* was to be staged, so we walked over to the park in advance of the timing that had been set for it.

When we arrived we found that the grounds were nicely arranged, with the women seated on one side and men seated on the other as is traditionally the case for programs like that in India. There was a walkway separating the two sides with a little space in the front, and then a platform that served as the dais upon which Baba was to be seated.

Baba arrived early in the morning, and Sarosh and Papa went to receive Him. Baba walked briskly to the front, and He climbed onto the platform. Once He was seated, there were welcome speeches from Sarosh and other dignitaries. Then He started the program by announcing that He was going to bow down to Himself in all the assembled people. At that point He said, "I will be one amongst you, so I will come down and sit with you."

With that He went to the women's side, sat there for a few moments, and then to the men's side, where He also sat down. As Baba did this, there was a terrible stampede that broke loose as people rushed to touch Him. With considerable difficulty the *mandali* got Him back up onto the platform, truly fearing that He might be injured owing to the surge of humanity trying to reach out to come close to Him.

That was my first experience of being caught in a "stampede of love," and I myself nearly got trampled and in fact I lost one of my shoes in the process. I had been sitting towards the front with Gadge Maharaj (about whom Baba later declared "He is a real saint, who sees Me as I really am"), and when the stampede started, Baba just stood up and raised His hand, and the people gradually calmed down. Baidul was helping to manage those near Baba, along with good police arrangements that had been designed to ensure that the crowd would be orderly. Despite those precautions the stampede happened nevertheless. People could get hurt or killed that way, and of course many have died in such stampedes at various *melas*. It was a very worrisome part of the *darshan*, but it did get under control very quickly.

When the stampede started, the crowd was fortunately not yet as large as it might have been, but there was a massive crowd later that day. At the start of the program Baba bowed down to seven poor people, washed their feet, and then He began to pass out *prasad* to each one who passed before Him.

At one point I went over to the back side of the platform, climbed up onto it, and I stood behind Baba, and from there I got a very close view of Him giving out the *prasad*, which He did with both hands. The rate at which people were passing before Him was incredible. People had to

be literally pulled along by the *mandali* so that everybody could get a chance for a personal *darshan*. Baba was obviously exerting Himself tremendously to keep that phenomenal pace going.

The Western men were seated at a distance, watching the proceedings, this being their first day after arriving at Meherabad. Baba's women *mandali* also attended the *darshan*, and they stayed in a little cottage on one side from which they could see the proceedings. Some of them were brought onto the stage at one point. I missed seeing them, however, because I had gone out for refreshments for a little while.


Gadge Maharaj had arranged a feeding program for the poor at the site, and he invited Baba to start the meal. Baba honored the wish of the people by going over and having a few morsels with them, which was the only break He got in the whole day. Otherwise, from what I recall, He didn't stop at all for a rest or food or even a drink of water. Some observers estimated the size of the crowd as between sixty and seventy thousand, and I would estimate more; the crowd was tremendous, absolutely awesome. Baba was working furiously at giving out the *prasad*. Anyone else would have gotten cramps in his chest muscles and overwhelming pain from doing what Baba was doing. It required tremendous exertion on His part, and His coat was soaked with sweat for most of the *darshan*. Godavari Mai, from Upasni Maharaj's ashram in Sakori, attended the *darshan* for some time.

After the mass *darshan* at Wadia Park Baba then started the *sahas* with the Western men at Meherabad, going daily from Meherabad to be with them. That *sahas* lasted for three weeks, hence the term "Three Incredible Weeks." During that time Baba gave the Western men who had come very close contact with Him, which they would remember for the rest of their lives. Some very special discourses were also given to the gathering.



Chapter Thirteen:

The Final Declaration

t the end of the “Three Incredible Weeks,” on the three days of September 28th, 29th and 30th, 1954, Baba held a meeting for men only at Meherabad, with about two or three hundred people attending and staying in the area. From one point of view it was the worst time to have a meeting because it was the time of the “elephant rains,” a kind of secondary monsoon with sudden heavy downpours. No provisions had been made for rain because there had been nothing but bright sunshine and a cloudless blue sky in the days before. The tents for accommodating those attending weren’t waterproofed, and the night before the meeting was to start, the clouds burst. Everything was absolutely flooded! I’ve never seen rains like that, a nonstop cloudburst for hours and hours.

I heard later that Baba was at Meherazad and told Kaikobad to pray that the rains should stop. By about midnight the rain did stop, but everything was drenched. All our beds were in a tent between the railway line and the road, land that was not even rolled flat. It was soon after harvesting, and the ground was nice and receptive, quickly turning to mud. I remember that when the rains stopped, Sam Kerawalla wanted to go out to ease himself, and in doing so he sank into the mud up to his knees.

He shouted for help, and we had to go and pull him out. In short, nobody got any sleep that night.

The next day Baba sent orders that everybody must take some pill—quinine or aspirin or something, whatever it was that He “prescribed.” It was very cloudy that day but pleasant, with no rain, and it dried up quickly also.

The main *pandal* was on the same strip of land where we were staying, but further up the Hill, near the railway crossing opposite the *Dhuni* platform. It was here under that *pandal* that Baba gave out the “Final Declaration.”

It was a wonderful meeting. At the start of it the whole place was very muddy, and Baba took off His *chappals* and came into the *pandal* barefoot. Earlier Baba had wanted to wash his hands, and for that purpose He sent Padri to get some water. Padri went out, and there he found a pool of standing water. Padri scooped up the standing water and gave it to Baba to wash with, and Baba remarked, “Padri is Padri!” (Padri never wanted to waste water.)

After the various Names of God were invoked, Baba asked each one of us to come and embrace Him, and Baba stood throughout. Sam and I were filming the gathering, and that part of the film is not very clear because the sky was quite overcast.

Baba then took us up Meherabad Hill, walking in a group along the main path from Lower Meherabad. About three-quarters of the way up the Hill there is a small *neem* tree, and Baba sat down there. We all gathered around Him while He gave out some messages, and then we continued to the top.

Once at the structure that would eventually become Baba’s Tomb, we were all asked to go to the threshold and to bow down there while Baba stood outside at the side of the door. While we were taking *darshan*, Baba told us how fortunate we were that we were bowing down at His Tomb in His physical presence. He said that in the future, millions would come to bow down there. In those days there was just a door to the Tomb, which had a mud floor, and nobody ever went there.

After we had all bowed down, Baba came onto the platform in front of the five meditation cabins that were there on the side of the Tomb—the right side as you face the door to the Tomb—where Mani’s ashes are interred along with those of others. All the Westerners were called onto the platform, and all the Indian lovers were asked to stand on the ground in front of it. Baba was pacing up and down, and He narrated some humorous incidents that had happened while He was in seclusion on the Hill for six months, subsisting only on a flask of coffee every morning and evening. After that Baba took us down the Hill to lower Meherabad and asked us to assemble at the meeting place at three o’clock, after we had had our lunch.

At the designated time Baba came and sat on the *gadi*. After announcing that a very important declaration would be read out to us which we were all to listen to very attentively, Eruch began reading out Baba’s “Final Declaration.”

We all were dumbstruck by what we heard. C.D. Deshmukh began to weep loudly in front of Baba, “Baba, this is terrible. I can never imagine such a thing,” he cried, in reference to some of the things that Baba had stated in the Declaration. Remember, He had declared that His end would come by being stabbed in the back by enemies when none of the *mandali* would be around!

All of us were shaken up by the proclamation. Dr. Deshmukh was really an innocent person, like a child, and Baba consoled him, “You shouldn’t worry. It is all My work. Have no fear...,” and eventually he was consoled.

Meherjee was also very shocked, upset and also tearful after the meeting ended. Not wanting to let Baba or anyone else see him cry, he went some distance down the Arangaon road and sat there sobbing. Just then, of course, Baba’s car passed by, and Baba saw him, stopped the car and consoled him too. He said, “That which is determined by God will come to pass.” The Final Declaration was terrifying for those of us who were there, and it sent shock waves through the entire Baba-world as well. Innumerable letters, telegrams, and messages full of distress came pouring in to Baba when the news of the message spread.

After that gathering Baba went back to Satara. Because of all the many cries of concern that had come from His lovers, He later again called us for a meeting. There He gave out an explanation of His Declaration.

Before that happened Baba decided to give up the use of the alphabet board. On 7th October, 1954, Baba held a solemn ceremony where prayers were done by Kaikobad and others and then Baba sat down. He flung the board away. The board was made of thick cardboard, with the alphabet and numbers pasted on it. When it landed, one corner broke off, containing the zero of the board. Baba said that that was significant.

He asked Savak Kotwal to pick up the zero piece and keep it carefully, preserving it with great care for all his life. Savak took the piece and put it in his trunk. The next morning Baba asked him where the piece was. He told Baba it was in his trunk. Baba again emphasized, "This is a very important piece, and you should be prepared to take care of it and to preserve it as long as you live." Savak told Baba that he didn't think he could do that, so Baba asked for the piece back and sent the board and the piece to Padri in Meherabad to be preserved with His other things. That was the end of Baba's use of the board.

Without the board Baba still had to communicate with the *mandali* and His lovers. So He started the interim practice of getting those present to recite the alphabet, and He would stop them at the appropriate letter, then the next and the next, until the word had been spelled out. That took a very long time and was very hard to interpret.

It was at this time after giving up the alphabet board that Baba called the meeting I am describing. It was our first meeting with Baba in Satara, and it was the first meeting without the board. We could feel the strain that Baba was undergoing because His communicating without the board was quite new then, and every word had to be spelled out. The attendees tried to help with the words, and I could feel how much Baba was having to work at getting the message across. The meeting progressed, however, with Eruch as the official interpreter, but certain words had to be spelled out, and sometimes even full sentences had to be spelled out. I remember how very difficult it was.

At the time of that Satara meeting a funny thing happened. Beherambhai—Baba’s brother—was taking photographs of Baba. He had recently discovered some “new” photographs of Baba, images of His school days with the school cricket team. There were two photos, one of the group and one that was an enlargement of a shot of Baba in His school uniform. Baba was very happy to see the photos of Himself as a young boy, and then Baba remarked, “At long last the search for the ideal boy has been rewarded.”

We all looked puzzled, and then He said, “See, *here* is the ideal boy!”

Someone then said, “Well, Baba, then that’s the end of Your search for the ideal boy?”

“No,” Baba immediately responded, “This is just a photograph.”

At that time the search for the “ideal boy” used to go on and on. Some boy would be brought, Baba would work with him for a while, and then He would send him off. Throughout Baba’s lifetime we have seen such phases, virtually up to the second accident. In Baba’s work every aspect of humanity had to be involved, including children and youth. There was so much activity packed into His mission as Avatar that nobody can fathom it.

After He had previously provided the final “Clarification,” “Confirmation,” and “Decision” with regard to His “Final Declaration,” on the 21st of April, 1955, He gave out “The Die is Cast” [which was the last announcement in the cycle of communications concerning “The Final Declaration”]. It was dictated with great difficulty with the letter-by-letter spelling method now that the board was gone, and we heard the sound of raindrops on the tin roof no sooner than He had finished giving it out. Baba said it was a good sign, a sort of seal on the Declaration, and He was pleased.

As I have been telling you all the while, when Baba would be in our midst, our attention would be focused on Him, and little things that He would point out would be in our memory but other things would fade off. Baba was so much the center of our interest and attention—His presence was literally overpowering, especially on these various significant occasions.

Baba would be so radiant and bright that you couldn't look away from Him. All eyes would be on Him. When a message of His was being read out, Baba would nod His head and might gesture "Listen!" if someone were not paying proper attention, or perhaps He would gesture, "Be attentive!" or some such thing. Baba would notice any lapses.

The "Final Declaration" was definitely quite stunning, but as always, Baba helped us digest something that at the time seemed unimaginable.

The program nevertheless went smoothly, and everyone was very happy and satisfied by the end of the meeting. We all left Satara in a happy mood, and thereafter I remember several further visits that we had to Satara.

As I've related, my cousin Sam was working in the Halal Shipping Company at the time and was able to save some money. At times Baba would call us to Satara, and I remember one time involved some films that Sam had taken of an earlier meeting at Meherabad (I think during the September, 1954, meeting) and some other footage that he had. We had written to Baba about the film, and Baba and the women *mandali* expressed an interest in seeing the footage. There was also a film of Baba's Andhra tour that had been sent by Deshmukh that Baba wanted to see. He sent word that we should bring a projector if possible.

I tried to get a big 16mm projector, but I couldn't find anything like that in Poona. In pursuit of it I remember that I had also approached Gadekar to see if he could help us get a projector, and he was very enthusiastic about the project. He said that we would try to meet this person and that person, and we worked late into the night, and I was really impressed as to how keen Gadekar was that we should get a projector for Baba. In the end, though, the time ran short, and we failed to get any projector. Nevertheless, seeing how hard Gadekar had worked to try to find one was a revelation to me as to how dedicated he was to Baba. Whatever little thing Baba wanted, he would put all of his efforts into it. I must admit that I personally hadn't put that much effort into obtaining a projector.

We left for Satara without the 16mm projector, but we did take a small 8mm projector that Sam had. We traveled to Satara, and that same night Baba called us to Grafton, where the ladies were staying. We set up the projector and started to show the films. While I was arranging the screen and doing this and that, Baba was helping me. At one point Baba said, “That’s all right now.”

I said, “Baba, it’s a little crooked,” referring to the way the screen was standing.

Baba said, “It’s enough. Let it be.”

It was a very amateur effort. First Sam showed his films, and then there was the film from Deshmukh, who had also sent a very primitive projector, just like Deshmukh. When we tried to show the film, it ran through the projector so fast—there was no speed control—that it was like watching a Charlie Chaplin film in fast-forward! Somehow I was able to reduce the speed a bit, and everyone at least got to see it. During the showing the women sometimes exclaimed, “Oh, Baba, how beautiful that shot is,” and so on, so it was thoroughly enjoyed despite the technical difficulties. That footage was later edited by Meher Prasad, I believe, but this was Baba’s chance to see it in Grafton.

To backtrack, when we reached Satara with the film and went to Rosewood, where the men *mandali* were staying, Baba was busy attending to a *mast*, cropping his hair inside the hall there. He called me over to hold the torch while He was cropping the man’s hair. We all took turns holding the flashlight. Baba then took the *mast* to the bathroom and gave him a good scrubbing and a bath, and then Baba was free from His work.

With Baba the *masts* were typically very amenable. That was how we saw his Divine Authority, especially with people on the higher planes of consciousness. Ordinary mortals wouldn’t dare to handle them, but even with His authority, Baba would be very loving, very gentle, and He would coax them into what He would want to do with them. He would also warn the *mandali* to be very gentle with them, because to manhandle a

mast could result in very severe consequences. So Baba would warn the *mandali* to be very careful with them.

I remember one time when I was at Meherazad, and Kaka was telling stories about the *mast* work. Kaka always had a bit of a rivalry with Baidul. Both of those longtime disciples had the same task of searching for *masts*, so there was a little jealousy between them, you know. Kaka would denigrate Baidul's ways of handling a *mast*. He would tell me, "Baidul, you know, is a very crude fellow. He never knew how to handle a *mast*. He would be very rough with them, and he wouldn't have any idea what he might be in for. He could get a devastating curse from the *mast*. It is because of Baba he was saved, time after time—otherwise he would have been in real trouble."

It is true that Baidul used to be very rough and rather uncouth, but there was no question about his ability to ferret out a *mast* from "nowhere," as it were. He was really adept at this task, uniquely so. And the amount of trouble and suffering he underwent! I have mentioned that Baba had suffered from piles, but before that Baidul also had a lot of trouble with bleeding piles. In spite of that, if Baba asked him to go in search of *masts*, he unwaveringly went out searching, traveling miles and miles on foot, in the dark, in the heat, unmindful of any physical discomfort. He would come back with a rich haul of *mast* information—addresses and details about their whereabouts, and then Baba would accompany Baidul back out and contact those *masts*.

I remember Eruch telling us that one time when they were traveling, Baidul's piles were quite painful. When they got down at the train station they still had several miles to go before they reached the bungalow where they were staying. Baba asked Baidul if he had picked up the telegram from Vishnu that was supposed to be waiting for them at the station. In the hustle and bustle of the journey Baidul had forgotten. So Baba immediately told Baidul to walk back to the station to get the telegram. As Baidul started out, Eruch noticed that Baidul was leaving behind a trail of blood.

“Baba,” Eruch protested, “he’s in no condition to walk all that way.” Baba turned to Eruch and gestured emphatically, “Oh, so I have no compassion? You are the only one who cares about Baidul?” Eruch couldn’t say anything and had to remain silent.

As I have mentioned earlier, one time Baidul found something that seemed to relieve his piles, so he recommended the same medicine for Baba. When Baba took it, however, He had a terrible reaction and His anus swelled up, and the so-called cure ended up causing Baba a lot of trouble and suffering.

Baba Himself would say, “Baidul is really fortunate. Despite his outward appearance, being rough and uncouth, he is really fortunate. He has done great *seva* (service). In finding *masts* and bringing them to Me, he is incomparable.”

Eruch told us that the remarkable thing about Baidul was his phenomenal memory and sense of direction even in totally unfamiliar surroundings. He would go out in search of those *masts*, sometimes in obscure villages, sometimes without even any pathways to the towns, but once he had located the position of the place where a *mast* resided, he was able to guide Baba and the party back to it, even in the darkness of night. That ability was a special gift that Baidul had, and it helped immensely in Baba’s *mast* work.

One example will help to give you some idea of how good a *mast* hunter Baidul was. One time, when Baba was in Dehra Dun, Baidul had to search out *masts* in North India. Baba had set out on a *mast*-hunting tour with Baidul, Eruch, some of the other *mandali* and with Elcha Mistry—a close Baba-lover who lived in Dehra Dun—and in his preliminary searching, Baidul had located a *mast* in a sugarcane field.

When Baba and the others went to find that *mast*, it was night. The car had to be parked outside the field, and Baidul started out with Baba and all the others following, through the tall sugarcane, on foot. There was a very indistinct pathway between the cane stalks, yet Baidul unerringly took them through that twisting and turning path straight to the *mast*.


The rest of the *mandali* had been very concerned that they would get lost in that cane field, but Baidul eventually brought them into a clearing where there was a tiny little settlement, and there was the *mast*. Baba was very pleased with the contact. Then Baidul led them all back again to the car. At this amazing feat Elcha, who had always scoffed at Baidul and made fun of him, fell fully prostrated at Baidul's feet and acknowledged him to be the true champion of *mast* hunters!

"A great *mast* is like a treasure in a ruin," as Baba said, referring to the Rumi poem about such "men of God."



Chapter Fourteen:

1954 - 1955

fter Baba and those with Him returned from the Western trip, Baba was again in very strict seclusion back at Satara. Eruch came back to stay with us again at Bindra House. Meherjee was also there in Poona at that time, and we got firsthand accounts of what had transpired during the very eventful trip they had.

Eruch used to be Baba's driver at that time, and he would tell us of those days when Baba would take whirlwind trips in the car for *mast* tours. On one occasion Baba directed Eruch to take Him to various places, and while on that car trip He suddenly asked Eruch if, for His urgent work, he could drive to Indore, which is about seven or eight hundred miles to the north, as fast as possible in Nariman's car. Eruch, of course, said yes, and he drove for over twenty-four hours straight.

In order to keep him from nodding off at the wheel, Baba asked the other *mandali* to keep up a constant stream of talk to keep Eruch awake. After that whirlwind trip, Baba wished to return immediately to Satara in order to meet some internal deadline related to His work. Baba said, "I have to return to Satara within twenty-four hours," or something like that—maybe it was thirty hours—"Can you make it?" He asked. Eruch, who

had already not slept for three days owing to the trip to Indore, said “I will try, Baba.”

Eruch later recalled that in the later phases of that nonstop round-trip drive, which lasted almost three days, he became so exhausted that it began to feel as if he had lost all control over the car. He gave us a vivid account of how he felt as if there were a tunnel through which the car had to pass, and it was as if somebody else were controlling the car, as if Baba were in charge of the steering wheel. He kept passing out and dozing because he was so fatigued, and at one point he felt as if he would like to end the whole misery by giving a jerk to the steering wheel and finishing it off.

Eruch felt very nervous after that episode, and when they completed the trip, he told Baba, “Hereafter I will never drive again.”

Baba said, “Why? What’s wrong?”

“Baba, I think it would be a very serious problem if I continued to drive, because at one point in this return from Indore I had the urge to drive the car into some ditch and just end it all. Now I feel very insecure, as if something could in fact happen. I can’t concentrate like this.”

Baba replied, “What nonsense! Don’t be silly! Nothing is going to happen!” But, of course, something *was* about to happen, and Baba was preparing him for it. But in the meantime Baba kept Eruch going and made him continue as His driver for the trips, one after another.

I remember that in 1955 while at Satara, Baba expressed the wish to play a cricket match. He said that He had some very important work to do in playing this match, and that it was to be a very serious affair. Baba was in seclusion at that time, based mainly in Satara, and He was engaged in intense internal activity. He dictated the names of the people who were to participate in the game. They were in Bombay, Poona and Ahmednagar, so letters were sent out saying, “You have to be in Satara on such and such date.” If I remember correctly, it was the 18th of June—I’m not positive, but the date can be found in other accounts.

Pendu was given the responsibility of selecting a suitable place for the match someplace in the vicinity of Satara. He had selected a site, but

when Baba saw it He said it was not so good. Eventually Pendu located a place about thirteen miles away on the Satara-Poona highway at a spot called Udtara. It was a small village that had a government *dak* bungalow with a huge mango grove adjacent to it, with big open spaces between the trees. Pendu and those helping him had found a field next to the compound of the bungalow, and I remember that from there one could see the Poona-Satara highway. Baba immediately approved of the site, and people were sent to level the ground and so on. For days and days preparations were taking place in advance of that cricket match.

Baba went to inspect the work at the site two or three times. That indicates just how serious Baba was about the whole thing. To us it appeared as if it were just a game, but Baba was incredibly serious about it. How could we even imagine what the *real* game was? All of us who were to participate in the match were told to be there one day in advance, and various accommodations were hired to put up the twenty or so people who had been selected to form the two teams.

Each side in cricket consists of eleven players. Baba had selected only twenty players, and He divided them into two teams of ten. Baba said that He Himself would be the eleventh player for both sides. In short, we were quite a big crowd. Myself, Meherjee, Baba's brother Jal, Dadi—all of us went from Poona in Meherjee's car, which was a new Chevrolet that he had recently bought. We were also carrying many soda-water bottles for Baba, which He had asked for, so the whole car was packed with the crates. Baba's brother Jal had to sit with his feet folded up the entire journey, and he grumbled that he was expected to do yoga *asanas* throughout the trip. The rest of the players from Poona came by bus.

There were many participants, including Ramjoo, Nariman Dadachanji, Baba's brother Beheram, Meheru's brother Jangu, Pendu, Sarosh, Sidhu, Eruch and others. Baba was still suffering from piles, and He had told us that it was still very difficult and painful every time He had to pass a motion.

On the assigned day, the 18th of June, Eruch drove Baba to the site in the new Chevrolet that Meherjee had given to Him, while we who had

come in the Chevrolet followed in Sarosh's car. The rest came in different vehicles.

We gathered around Baba and He said, "You all have to play this game, and everybody must play it with great sincerity and with full effort to try to win the game." Baba explained that He would play on both sides.

Nariman was the captain of one side, and Sarosh was the captain of the other. Baba had personally divided up the players—"You go on this side, and you go on that side..." I was on Sarosh's team and Jangu was on my side. I don't remember many people, but Jalbhai—Baba's brother—was on the opposite team, and Meherjee was also on our side.

A coin was tossed to determine who would bat first, just like in a regular cricket match. My team won the toss, and we decided to bat first. We started to bat, and we started scoring runs. Jangu and I were the opening batsmen, and I hit the ball hard and scored some runs, and I started feeling confident. Most of the younger players were on our side. Jal was the bowler for the other team, and Jangu also hit some great strokes and we were piling on the runs, but after the fourth or fifth ball, I was declared out, LBW ["leg before wicket"]. I protested and Baba intervened, overruled the umpire, and said, "Play on." I may have inadvertently been the start of the practice of players protesting the umpire's decision!

In retrospect I feel I shouldn't have protested Jal's calling me out, because it is poor sportsmanship to argue with the umpires, and even though nowadays everyone does it, Baba always liked good sportsmanship. Anyway, a few balls later I was properly caught out without adding any further runs to the score. The weather on the day of the game, by the way, was nice—it was a cloudy day with pre-monsoon breezes, warm but not unbearably so.

Our side piled on a big score at the beginning, and then all of us got out. Baba called for a rest of fifteen minutes because He was very tired. Baba was reclining under a tree, His legs were paining, but since He could not put them up anywhere, He propped them up on Sidhuji's shoulders to avoid pressure on His piles. Sidhu started to massage Baba's feet, but Baba told him not to.

After the rest it was the turn of the other side to bat. The other side's players began getting out quite cheaply, and with the score favoring us, it looked like a real washout. At that time Baba intervened and began to bat on their side. He stroked the ball in all directions and all over the ground. We were sent on a "leather hunt," as that type of batting is called in cricket parlance. We would change our fielding positions to try to stop Him, and He would just find other gaps to hit the ball through! He devastated our bowling.

This game took place after Baba's first auto accident in America, mind you, and Baba was sixty years old at the time, but He was still very active. There was no way to get Him out despite our trying our best. While we had been batting, He had been keeping the wicket. After the other side batted, just when the scores balanced and each side had the same number of runs, He declared the innings closed, and so the match ended in a tie.

We had started playing at seven in the morning, and in all we played for about five hours or so, with a break in the middle for a little tea and refreshments. I remember Baba sitting there, enduring the pain from His piles. Because of His condition someone else ran for Baba whenever He was batting.

During the match we shouted and protested the umpire's calls and in general played a boisterous game, as one might expect among companions vying for the victory. There was lots of shouting, and the more shouting, the more Baba liked it.

After the game ended around 1:00 p.m., we all assembled in the *dak* bungalow on the property. Baba was seated in the big hall inside. He had asked Nariman to bring food from Bombay, such as jam puffs and sandwiches, and Baba gave each of us plenty to eat.

Everybody was tired because many of us had not played cricket for years, and many an old creaky joint had become inflamed. Some were so sore the next day, with such stiff joints and such sore muscles, that they could hardly get out of bed. Everyone was groaning loudly upon arising. Baba,


however, was extremely happy, and He said that His work had been done to His satisfaction.

The day after the cricket match, all of us who were not staying with Baba were sent off back to our places without seeing Baba again, as He had gone back into seclusion and had told us not to come to meet Him before leaving. That day the monsoon started—it was raining cats and dogs by the time we got to Poona. So Baba's timing was perfect. If the monsoon had started a day earlier we wouldn't have been able to play the cricket match.



Chapter Fifteen:

Humorous Incidents with Gustadji

 n another occasion we visited Baba in Satara at Rosewood Bungalow, where He was staying along with the usual complement of men *mandali*. We were gathered in the hall and listening while Baba had the correspondence read aloud. It so happened that a little joke was being played out that day, one that Baba Himself had perpetrated. Baba had asked Eruch to write a postcard in Gujarati purporting to be written by Kaka Baria, who was at Meherazad. Eruch did so and posted it from Satara, and it was now, as we were sitting before Him, being read out to Baba. “Baba,” Eruch announced, “this postcard has come.”

Gustadji was not there in the room at the time. He wasn’t well and was in his room resting, so Baba told someone there to call him. When Gustadji arrived, Baba, very seriously and with a long face, said, “Gustadji, hear this postcard. It is relevant to you, and then you can return to your quarters.”

Eruch read out the postcard, which as I have said had been written to portray Kaka writing to Eruch from Meherazad. It read something like this: “Dear Eruch, I am writing this postcard in accordance with Baba’s wishes of giving you news of Meherazad every week. There is nothing particular to report, except that I do want to mention the following

information—but please be sure that Gustadji should not be around when it is read out because he may get upset, but in any case I have to report what has happened....”

Immediately Gustadji pricked up his ears, and Baba reiterated, “Listen! Because this pertains to you, I have called you.”

Gustadji, who of course was keeping silence at Baba’s order, impatiently signed to Eruch, “Read out, read out—what is it?”

So Eruch continued to read out what Kaka purportedly had written: “I am very sad to inform you that Krishnaji very obstinately expressed a desire to enter Gustadji’s room.”

To give some background to this story, at that time a disciple named Krishnaji (about whom Bhau has many stories because Baba had assigned Bhau to take care of him and to be his personal attendant) was staying at Meherazad with Kaka.

Krishnaji was an unpopular person with the *mandali*. He was erratic and took advantage of his stay with Baba, and in spite of Baba’s attempts to rid him of all his undesirable qualities, he did not change his ways. He was not willing to follow Baba’s orders, which is the main thing one has to do when one wants to stay with Baba, but despite that, he must have had some good *sanskaras* because Baba allowed him to stay with the *mandali* for a year or so.

My first impression of him was at the 1955 *sahavas*, when he got up at the start of a meeting and started to lead a prayer, and he made the entire assembly follow him. It seemed very odd to me. It was clear that right from the beginning he was trying to assert himself quite a bit, and of course the *mandali* didn’t like all that, but since Baba tolerated it, they didn’t say anything.

You must have heard that Baba ordered Bhau to serve this fellow as a servant, and for many months he had to do all sorts of menial jobs for Krishnaji. When Baba finally asked him to leave, he started to do all sorts of silly things like saying that he was observing silence, using an alphabet

board, and imitating Baba in various ways. It was a very bad thing he was doing, and he even tried to lure other Baba people away from Baba. His behavior went to such an extent that Baba began to receive lots of complaints, and eventually a circular was sent out stating that Baba had severed all connections with Krishnaji and that none should follow such so-called deluded masters. It was quite a tragic outcome, but that's another story.

Shatrughan Kumar was also staying with the resident *mandali* at the time, and he had a great dislike for Krishnaji, but because Baba permitted Krishnaji to be at Meherazad, he could do nothing. When Krishnaji was finally ordered by Baba to leave, he went to Delhi and set himself up as a "master" there.

One time Kumar came to Meherazad for a visit, and during his stay he happened to notice a small signboard with a few lines from the Perfect Master Tukaram that had been put up on the wall of Mandali Hall. They read, "Letting the hair grow long and applying ashes on their bodies, there are many false saints who proliferate in the world. May their conscience be set afire, and to beat such people is not at all a sin."

That last line really caught Kumar's attention, and he saw it as a sanction from Baba. But mind you, Baba had given him an order never to lift his hand against another person after an incident in the early days when he slapped his wife because he thought she had not correctly prepared food for Baba. But here, Kumar thought, was a loophole, and after his stay at Meherazad, on his way home he went to the place where Krishnaji was staying in Delhi.

Krishnaji was performing this "master" masquerade more and more, and anger was building up in Kumar. He confronted Krishnaji and said, "Either you stop all this nonsense, or I'll beat you up." The fellow must have spoken rudely to Kumar, and they actually had a physical fight, and Kumar roundly thrashed him. Kumar was small of stature but very strong, and he had been a bold and wiry revolutionary.

"Now I'll kill you," Kumar said, "unless you marry this woman." It so happened that Krishnaji was having a sordid relationship with a woman

who happened to be standing at his side. They did get married as a consequence, because Krishnaji was truly frightened by Kumar's threat.

Baba came to know about all this, of course, and Kumar got a sound berating from Baba because He did not approve, and Kumar had broken Baba's order. I don't know what punishment came to Kumar because of it, but I know that Baba didn't approve of what he had done.

Perhaps Baba tolerated Krishnaji among the *mandali* to work out certain *sanskaras* for the benefit of the world. His unraveling of those *sanskaras* is still happening in the West and the East. We find such people impersonating Baba's ways and taking upon themselves the mantle of leading people, as it were, as if on instructions from Baba or some such folly that they present to the world. It is all terribly unfortunate, but of course Baba foresaw it all.

Anyway, returning to the story, Gustadji also disliked Krishnaji quite a bit and therefore was especially irate to hear that it was he who had entered Gustadji's room at Meherazad. You could tell from his facial expressions and the way that he was gesturing that he was outraged. Meanwhile Baba seemed to be enjoying all this to the hilt. All the rest of us had not yet caught on to the joke that was unfolding, but Baba winked at us in the midst of it so we thought there was something unusual going on. The reading from the "postcard" continued:

"Krishnaji is acting very boisterously. Despite my telling him not to enter Gustadji's room, he did so, and on top of that he had the temerity to open Gustadji's trunk...."

On hearing this Gustadji indignantly interjected to Eruch with his signs, "But how dare he touch my trunk?!"

Eruch replied, "Listen, I don't know anything about it. This is what has been written, and I am simply reading it out."

Gustadji, getting markedly flushed, very excitedly signed again, "Okay, okay—read on, read on!"

Eruch continued, "Krishnaji opened the trunk, he removed Gustadji's western clothes...."

Gustadji interjected yet again: “This man has touched my clothes?!” Gustadji literally started “shouting” in his silent manner, and Baba was thoroughly enjoying the whole scene, laughing silently and turning pink in the face.

“This man,” Eruch read, “in spite of my trying to restrain him, took out Gustadji’s clothes, put them on, strutted around in them, and then announced, ‘Look how good I look in this suit!’”

That was it for poor Gustadji. With such a pained expression he angrily said, “Don’t read any further! Send a letter today telling Kaka Baria to remove all the contents of the trunk and to burn up those clothes. I am not going to wear them again!”

Have you seen that photograph of Gustadji taken at the end of Baba’s *Manonash* phase? He’s in a patched coat, wearing patched trousers (*lenghas*), dressed as usual for him who was at heart a *fakir*. Afterwards, however, Baba wanted to take Gustadji with Him to the West, and at that time Baba told Gustadji, “Your current mode of dress will not be suitable in the West. They won’t allow you to land in the United States dressed like this! The most down-and-out beggar would look better than you do in your current clothes.”

Consequently Baba ordered a very nice suit for Gustadji, and indeed, when Gustadji wore it, he looked like some continental professor—very smart, very fashionable. It was quite a sight to see the transformation, and Gustadji wore those clothes while he was in the States, but when he returned they were all dry-cleaned and put in a trunk and locked up, with Gustadji reverting to dressing in his original rags. He was very particular about that trunk, however, and he wouldn’t allow anybody to touch it, least of all this Krishnaji, whom Gustadji detested because he was always trying to mimic Baba and His ways. As I’ve said, it was not just Gustadji—there was a lot of ill feeling among all the *mandali* about this person.

So when Gustadji heard that prank postcard being read out, he was really quite furious, really beside himself over the matter, until Baba said, “No, no—stop now. Let out the joke!” Baba gestured to Gustadji, “I wasn’t

going to tell you this was a joke, but because you're not well, I'm telling you so you don't burst!" And so then we all came to know, along with Gustadji, that Baba had put Eruch up to all this as a practical joke! "Now, go and rest," He told Gustadji.

And one of the great things about Gustadji is that when he saw how much amusement Baba had gotten at his expense, he became very happy. Instead of being angry at being the butt of the joke, he was happy that he could, unwittingly, lighten Baba's burden. So he went to his room in quite a good mood.

Many other amusing incidents involved Gustadji. While in the West Meherjee took some of the men to a shop and bought watches for them. He had some extra cash, so he could afford to buy some good watches, and being a businessman, he started bargaining on the prices. Everybody was astonished at how he bargained in a Swiss watch shop, just like an Indian bargaining at a vegetable stall, and the Swiss proprietor actually brought the prices down considerably! Meherjee definitely thought it was a feather in his cap to have bargained so successfully!

Anyhow, he got a very nice gold watch for Gustadji, which Gustadji actually took a fancy to. That watch showed not only the time but the date as well, and it had an alarm, which was a novelty at the time, so Gustadji wore the watch while he was in the West.

When he came back, of course, he took off the watch and the fancy clothes, and he hid the watch somewhere in his tiny room (which is now a store room in the back of Meherazad). The room was filled to the brim with trunks and boxes, and mostly it was all old papers, which he would collect and then send to my sister for selling. In turn she sold the scrap paper for a few *annas* to buy sweets for Gustadji—Baba had given him the latitude to do that.

Donkin was very naughty and took advantage of this habit of Gustadji's. He would, for example, purposely smoke a cigarette, and when the carton was empty, he would drop it near Gustadji. Sure enough, as soon as Don would leave, he would go pick up the discarded carton. Don

would throw out scraps of paper and old newspapers as well, and Gustadji would go around and collect those, too. All day long Gustadji would behave like that, which was definitely somewhat *mast*-like.

One time during one of my month-long stays at Meherazad, Baba turned to Gustadji and said, “Gustadji, Meherwan has been here for so long a time, have you shown him that watch?”

Gustadji made shushing noises to Baba, gesturing, “Don’t say this in front of everyone! I would like to show him, but I don’t want people to know about it.”

Baba looked around and said to me, “Yes, yes, now you go quietly, and Gustadji will call you,” and to Gustadji He said, “Show Meherwan that watch. What a beautiful watch it is! It even has an alarm, you know.”

Gustadji said, “Yes, Baba, I’ll show it to him.”

After some time Gustadji clapped and called me into his room. He closed the one window into his little closet of a room and turned on the light. He then shut the door, and, looking around to make sure nobody was watching, he then opened his trunk. In the trunk I could see a big box, but just at that moment when Gustadji had opened the trunk, there was a knock on the door. Gustadji quickly hid the box and shut the trunk, and he answered the door. And who do you suppose was standing there? It was Baba! Baba entered the room, and Gustadji quickly shut the door behind Him.

Baba asked, “Have you shown it to him?”

“No, Baba, I am showing it now.”

Then Gustadji brought out that gold watch that he had gotten from Meherjee in America, and Baba remarked, “See how beautiful it is?”

I replied, “Yes, Baba, what a lovely watch it is!” It was indeed a nice big gold watch, and it was quite an impressive sight.

“Then show him how the alarm goes off,” Baba added to Gustadji. With this prompting Gustadji moved the hands around, and the alarm began to ring. “See how nice the alarm is?” Baba said.

After this very private demonstration Gustadji said, “Now you all go. I have to put it back to make sure that nobody gets hold of it.” Gustadji was possessive, but in a very childlike way. So then he hid it somewhere, and that was probably the last time that anybody ever saw that watch.

When Gustadji died, Eruch sent for his brother Homi, or maybe it was one of the other brothers, to take possession of Gustadji’s belongings. When that brother of Gustadji’s arrived at Meherazad, he opened and went through all of Gustadji’s trunks, mostly throwing things out—ninety percent of everything there was scrap—and he was complaining, “All this junk! What did Eruch call me for?” Apart from the Western clothes that Gustadji had worn in the West, the rest of it was all a bunch of torn shreds and rags and nothing but trash.

Eventually the brother came around to Eruch and said, “I had heard that Gustadji had a gold watch, but I don’t seem to find it anywhere. Did any of you take it?” He asked in such a way that Eruch was rather perturbed.

Eruch said, “No, none of us ever touched his things. It must be there somewhere. You should search everything thoroughly.”

“I have searched all over, and I can’t find it anywhere,” said the brother.

Eruch was a bit diffident, because he thought perhaps the *mandali* might have taken it without telling him, so he went to Gustadji’s room and asked, “Have you searched through all those things that you have thrown out?”

“Why would he put it in any of those things?”

“You never can tell with that old man. He had those idiosyncrasies, and you had better check properly,” Eruch responded.

So Eruch himself started rummaging through the junk. There was an old shoe, torn from all sides, that the brother had discarded to be thrown out, so Eruch fiddled with it. It was all stuffed with paper to keep the shoe in shape, but after Eruch brought out all that stuffing, sure enough the watch was right up at the end of the toe, hidden inside the shoe.

Eruch said, “Here! Here is the watch. It’s good we found it, or you would have blamed us otherwise.”

That was how Gustadji was. I remember the time when we were having that meeting of the “Final Declaration” in Satara, and Gustadji asked Adi, “When you go back to ’Nagar, will you do one favor for me?”

Adi said, “Yes, yes, what is it?”

“I have some bundles of old newspapers—would you just take those over to Meheru?” In short, Gustadji asked Adi to take his accumulated bundles of junk to Ahmednagar and sell them. I think that my sister had died by then, so somebody else had to do the job of selling the newspapers. Adi must have thought that it was only a couple of bundles of newspapers when he acceded to Gustadji’s request, so he said that he would.

In any case, Adi agreed to do it, but he had no idea what he was in for. After the meeting with Baba Adi went with Gustadji to his room, where Gustadji started bringing out one bundle after another after another. He had collected those newspapers and other scrap for months, and in the interim nobody had taken them from him.

In the end there were so many bundles that even after filling the rack on top of Adi’s car to capacity, and then filling up the trunk in back, many were still left over! So Gustadji started loading them into the car—the whole back seat was loaded, including the footrests, and then Gustadji started loading them into the front seat and even on to the driver’s seat. When Adi came and saw this he became wild, shouting, “Gustadji, this is my car, a new car, and not a truck! I don’t like to load it like this. What’s all this rubbish you are giving me?” With that Adi began to throw out all the bundles, scattered all over the ground, and just at that moment Baba happened to be walking by.

Baba inquired, “What’s all this going on?”

Adi said, “Look, Baba, he asked me to carry a few bundles to ’Nagar and I agreed, but now he is overloading my car like this!”

“No, no, no,” Baba reprimanded, “you agreed to take what he was going to give you, no?”

“Yes, Baba,” Adi replied.

“Now you pick up all this,” Baba said, “and load it back in your car and take it with you. Now that you have agreed to it, you must do it!” So Adi grudgingly started loading everything all over again, and when the rest of us departed in other cars, he was still there, loading papers into his car! Once again it was all full of those newspapers and junk scraps, and Adi was cursing away, “This old man has ruined my car. I curse the day when I told him I would take his bundles....” All the while Gustadji was reveling in his “victory,” and we were all in gales of laughter as we watched this drama unfold.

All this for a few rupees! Gustadji was quite a character, no doubt, but a very sweet character. He didn’t meddle in other people’s affairs at all. He kept to himself, and wherever Baba went, he accompanied Him. He always had a very charming, smiling face with plump, rosy cheeks, just like that of a small child—very innocent.

Gustadji had a most difficult order from Baba, which was to do no work. Contrary to what you might imagine, it was a very difficult prospect not to do any physical work in the midst of all the constant activity going on around him, and he had constantly to obey Baba’s order not to indulge in any activity and to remain in whatever condition he was given. In the early days Gustadji was the manager of the ashram, and he was an extremely busy person managing ashram affairs—the women’s and men’s side both—and then suddenly to be directed to have no activity whatsoever! This is how Baba ultimately wears off one’s mind, as it were.



Chapter Sixteen:

Questions about Spiritual Experiences from Kirpal Singh

Kirpal Singh was a nice person and a genuine saint who respected Baba greatly. He was one about whom Baba often spoke highly. Once when Eruch had taken a message to him from Baba, he had asked Eruch whether he had had any spiritual experiences, and Eruch told him that Meher Baba's *mandali* don't get any spiritual experiences.

"Then how is it that you could carry on without such experiences? What could keep you going through all the hardships on the Path without those inner experiences?" Kirpal Singh asked.

Eruch answered, "Well, all I can tell you is that we are not favored with that kind of thing."

Kirpal Singh then said, "Then you must ask Baba to give you some experiences!"

To which Eruch slyly replied, "Why don't you ask on our behalf?"

Kirpal Singh responded, "Now that Baba has called me to see Him, I will certainly do that."

When Kirpal Singh eventually came with some of his disciples to have Baba's *darshan* at Satara, however, he was so overwhelmed by Baba's

presence that he forgot all about asking Baba why He didn't give spiritual experiences to His close ones. I still remember the beautiful way that Eruch described the meeting, Baba in His resplendent glory greeting Kirpal Singh so lovingly, and Kirpal Singh forgetting everything as a result of being in Baba's presence. So Eruch reminded him, "Kirpal Singh, why don't you ask Baba about that thing you were asking me?"

"Oh, yes," he remembered with some embarrassment. "I was so overcome with Baba's presence that I forgot all about it!" So Kirpal Singh then asked, "Baba, why don't You give spiritual experiences to Your *mandali*?"

Baba replied that He did not give such experiences but gestured that, "I have one person who has some experiences—would you like to meet him?"

After responding that he would, Kirpal Singh was taken to meet Kaikobad Dastur, a longtime disciple of Baba, and the two remained there in Kaikobad's room for some time. Baba, in the meantime, was conversing with the *mandali* and the rest of Kirpal Singh's retinue. After talking with Kaikobad, Kirpal Singh came back into Baba's presence and said, "Baba, what Kaikobad was just describing to me is way beyond what I experience myself! It's really remarkable and quite amazing!"

So much for Kirpal Singh lobbying Baba on behalf of His *mandali* to give them spiritual experiences! Kirpal Singh was truly overwhelmed by his own experience of being with Baba and of hearing about Kaikobad's experiences, to the extent that Kirpal Singh even forgot to offer Baba the sweets and flowers that he had brought for that purpose! Shortly after he and his entourage had left, Kirpal Singh came back with an embarrassed look to offer the sweets and garlands to Baba, Who lovingly accepted them.

On the subject of spiritual experiences Baba has said that they should not be sought, as they are but a distraction on the Spiritual Path and can lead the aspirant astray. Without the guidance of a Perfect Master, they will definitely delay his progress.

I personally have had no spiritual experiences that I can think of. Baba always discouraged all of us from trying to seek any such experiences,

except that Eruch has described one time when Baba Himself orchestrated something along these lines. In that instance Baba suddenly clapped and called the *mandali*—I think it was in Satara—and He said, “Now I want you each to do one thing. Go out and start meditating on the aspect of God as Infinite Effulgence and Glory. When I clap, you all start to meditate, and when I clap again, everyone should instantly stop meditating and come back to Me immediately. Select any spot you like for this meditation and then go and sit there.”

On the sound of the first clap Eruch closed his eyes, and he began to meditate on the particular aspect of God that Baba had instructed them to focus upon. After a few minutes or so, he began to have a very nice feeling of a great light everywhere, a wonderful feeling of joy and happiness. He began to enjoy the experience, and just as soon as he was becoming immersed in it, Baba clapped a second time. Hearing His clap, of course, everyone had to rush back to Him.

In describing this incident Eruch told us that once Baba had brought everyone back, He told them “Never do this again!” That, then, is as far as the matter of internal or “spiritual” experiences for the *mandali* seems to have gone—at least I can say that there has been nothing like that for me.

Baba’s emphasis was always on love, and love entails sacrifice that eventually leads to self-effacement, but very, very gradually. His Form was there, and He made that divinely human Form so lovable to us that everything else seemed inconsequential. That would be how the whole game would begin for each one who came to Him. He made people fall in love with Him, and then the fireworks started inside, quietly and gradually at first, but ultimately He would wean people away from their worldly ways by making them more and more one-pointed in their love for Him. This process inevitably led to each one passing through suffering.


This is His way, you know, and suffering means to sacrifice your own happiness, your own comforts, to please Baba and to lead a life that would please Him. It’s a painful process, because for eons of time we have been focusing upon our own self, upon our own comfort, often

simply to protect ourselves, and this ego-attitude has to be given up. Baba's ways are different from the conventionally accepted ways of spiritual experiences and ecstasy. None of that here—it's all down-to-earth, an unending grind in gradual doses. That's how it is with Baba.



Chapter Seventeen:

1955 Poona *Darshan*

n 1955, I think, Baba came to Poona to give a *darshan* program, a different one from the one that had been given on the railway station platform. Baba's lovers in Poona had said that they wanted to have a *darshan* program just as He had given in Andhra and Hamirpur, and in response Baba gave permission for it. The Poona group selected a nice site for the event on the Agriculture College Road.

K.K. Ramakrishnan was becoming quite active as a Baba-worker in the local group at that time, and that group consisted of people like Madhusudan, Thade and others. Gadekar was, of course, the main person. In short, they all invited Baba to give a *darshan* in Poona, and Baba agreed.

It was on the 14th of January, 1955, that the *darshan* took place. I remember that it was the occasion of *Makar Sankranti*, a very auspicious day for Hindus with lots of celebrations and ceremonies. It is the day signifying the entry of the sun into *Makara Rashi* (the astrological sign of Capricorn). In other words, it is the time when the sun is progressing to the northern latitudes at this juncture according to the Hindu calendar.

The program lasted throughout the day, and many thousands had Baba's *darshan* on that occasion, which took place in an open space that is

now the site of the Rahul Cinema Theatre in Poona. People filed by Baba seemingly endlessly, bowing at His feet when their turn came to greet Him face to face. While the *darshan* was going on, somebody said “Baba wants Meherwan to come and have His *darshan*,” so I went to where He was sitting and bowed down to Baba’s feet. I don’t know what got into me, but afterwards I went to Ramjoo and said, “Aren’t you going for Baba’s *darshan*?”

He responded quizzically, “Baba is allowing it?”

I said, “Yes, he called me to come for that purpose.” So Ramjoo and other *mandali* members went and took His *darshan* as well. Baba looked irritated by all this and gestured, “How come?” as He indicated that none of this was happening according to His Wish.

Like a fool I had told others that Baba was giving *darshan* despite Baba never saying that He wanted all the *mandali* to come. When they came before Baba, He permitted them to have His *darshan*, but then He bowed down at the feet of the *mandali* later, and I was very upset about having caused Baba additional strain because of my misunderstanding the situation and assuming that He was giving *darshan* to everyone.

In the old days the *mandali* were permitted to bow down to Baba, but even before the New Life—much before I should say—that practice was discontinued.

On the way back from the *darshan* program Baba came to Bindra House where a meal had been prepared for Him, but instead of eating there as planned, because it was so late Baba decided to take the food with Him and eat it on the way back to Satara that evening. Baba’s stay in Satara went on until December of 1956, which was the time of the second accident and marked the end of Baba’s stay in Satara.


As I mentioned earlier, Baba kept His promise of visiting us frequently, and we never felt that we were totally cut off from Him. Baba was in contact with us, so we always had that immediate and living contact with

Him throughout, right until He dropped His body. Our experience was one of both suffering and joy. We were away from His physical contact most of the time, but He kept coming often. Whenever He passed through Poona, Bindra House was invariably one of His stops.



Chapter Eighteen:

Four-group *Sahavas* Sessions and a Visit to Meherazad

ome time that year (1955) Baba let it be known that He wanted to hold a *sahavas* program with four different language groups, because in the earlier time when the different groups were all combined, there were lots of delays while Baba gave out talks, only then to have all four different translations to be read out. Baba was rather impatient about the whole thing in that instance, so He said, “Let there be four groups, with only one translation with each group.” The language groups were English, Hindi, Telugu, and maybe Marathi/Gujarati or something like that, and there were about two or three hundred people per group. All this took place before Baba’s second accident that occurred at Satara.

On the occasion of the Four-group *Sahavas*, which took place in 1955 as I’ve mentioned, there was one day on which the *sahavasees* came to visit to Meherazad. Ordinarily Baba would come to Meherabad from Meherazad each day to give us His *sahavas*, but one day Baba called us to Meherazad. First we were shown around Meherazad—the garden, the men *mandali*’s quarters, Baba’s room, the dining room and all that. Then Baba took us up Seclusion Hill.

Ours was a group of mixed ages, with some young and some older folks. The older ones were lagging behind on the way up the Hill, so Baba asked

them to catch up and told all to keep close and follow Him. Some of the young men thought that they could go more quickly by taking a short cut directly up, not walking along the path, but when Baba noticed this, He immediately called them all back. Chiding them, He gave a short discourse:

“There are no short-cuts on the Spiritual Path. Do you think that I can’t climb the Hill fast? I can, and I can climb it faster than you all. But there is a point on that path where you can’t go up and you can’t come back down. You would be stuck. Just as on the Spiritual Path, if you lose sight of the Master and go on your own, you will get stuck. Always follow the Master closely and don’t stray. My order was to follow Me, not lead Me. Now *follow Me!*”

As we walked up the Hill with Him, Baba told us that the path up Seclusion Hill resembles the Spiritual Path. He said, “The connection between the Beloved and the lover is like a fine thread, finer than a human hair. One end is tied to the waist of the lover, and the Beloved holds the other end in His hand. At the start the Beloved gives the lover plenty of rope. As the lover goes higher, more and more thread is let out to let him climb. At first the lover makes swift and joyful progress. There are the first flushes of excitement at being with the Beloved, Who encourages the lover by showering attention on him, keeping him close to Him and praising him. As he is climbing, the lover feels elated. He has left the world behind and is now following his Beloved, Who is taking him higher and higher.”

Baba carried on with the walk, and we came to the first U-turn in the path up Seclusion Hill. At that point He stopped and continued: “At this point the first jolt is given to the lover by the Beloved. Here He gives the first tug on the ‘thread’ linking them. As the lover becomes completely His, the Beloved begins to create a distance—there is no longer the praise and the joy of earlier times. In fact, it seems to the lover that the Beloved does not even want him by His side and is actually unhappy when the lover is present. The Beloved completely ignores the lover.” Baba compared this phase of the Spiritual Path to the increasing slope and difficulty in climbing Seclusion Hill, reiterating that the thread connecting

the lover to the Beloved is a very fine one, and that the Beloved now stretches it to its absolute limit, but He is always careful not to break it.

“The lover’s condition at this point becomes more and more pitiable. He suffers the pain of the Beloved’s rejection and displeasure and wonders what he has done wrong to make his Beloved act so callously. There is no answer in his heart—the Beloved simply shows complete displeasure with him. The lover is totally at sea, and he wonders what is the point of staying in the Beloved’s presence when doing so only causes the Beloved displeasure. Better, he thinks, that he leave and go back into the world. So he starts to go back,”—and at this point in His discourse, Baba stopped at the spot where the path turns back on itself and gestured, “just like the path here on the Hill, where it seems as if we are going backwards, not forwards. At this stage the Master stops tugging on the thread and begins to let it out again. Though the lover cannot feel it, the Beloved still has the connection with him intact.”

Baba continued to climb and then halted again at the point where the path makes the second U-turn. He continued: “The lover goes back into the world, but nothing seems to interest him. He is not able to enjoy anything—food, drink, companionship, wealth—they are all completely without any pleasure for him. He gets more and more despondent and finally thinks, ‘What is the use of living like this? I can’t go back to the Beloved nor can I stay in the world. I may as well end my life.’ So he decides to commit suicide. But just as he is about to do so, he has a thought, ‘As it is, I am going to die, so I might as well go back to my Master and die at His feet. At least that way I will be able to see Him once more.’ This is the point where the lover experiences the most extreme desperation. This is the point at which the second tug is given to the thread by the Beloved. So the lover returns to the Master, Who has been waiting for just this event! As soon as the Master sees him, He welcomes the lover with open arms, and then the Master starts to lead him on the final stretch of the Path.” The lover and the Beloved go to the final summit together, just as Baba climbed to the summit of the Hill

with us. Baba gestured that this is where the lover and Beloved become one, and that is the end of the game of Love.

This is a game the Beloved plays with the lover, allowing him to drift away, bringing him back, throwing him away again, and so forth. Through this process the Beloved makes the lover suffer constantly the pangs of separation and despair. All the while, as Baba pointed out with His graphic example on Seclusion Hill, the “climbing” is still going on, regardless of the apparent direction the lover is headed.


So we went up the Hill with Baba, and we sat all around Him once we had reached the lower level of the top of it. Photographs were taken of Baba with us sitting around Him on that occasion. It was the only time I climbed the Hill with Baba.

We stopped there for a while, and Baba led us up further until we reached the summit. Once there He told us how fortunate we were that He had led us up the Hill personally. In the future, He said, millions would want to come up and be there. He asked us to look around and see what they would find there—nothing but pebbles and stones and rocks. Baba gestured that there were many hills much more attractive than this one, so why would millions come in the future to *this* place? It was, He said, because He had done great universal spiritual work on this spot. That is what would attract them. He told each of us, in memory of this visit, to pick up a pebble or stone from there as a memento of our visit and to keep it safe. He then led us back down the Hill, and we all returned to Meherabad.



Chapter Nineteen:

1956—My Month-long Stay at Meherazad

n 1956 Baba let it be known that He would be traveling to the West once again. When this announcement was sent out, large-scale preparations were already afoot in the West to welcome Baba again, since this would be the first time that He would visit since the accident in Oklahoma in 1952.

While these preparations were going on I remember that Baba had come from Satara to spend a few days at Meherazad. At that time I was still working at the insurance company in Poona, and nationally, 1956 marked the year that for the first time there was a reorganization of the various states of India. That naturally generated a lot of political upheaval because there was a clamor for different states by different geographic and language groups.

Andhra was one of the states that was formed at that time. Because of the big riots and public disturbances going on owing to the unsettled political climate, it was a time that the insurance companies made a great deal of money from the sale of riot and fire insurance policies. I was in charge of that aspect of insurance in my company, and because of the high demand, I worked late into the nights to prepare and send out special policies customized to various situations. Working so continuously

ended up being detrimental to my health, and as a consequence of all that overwork, I suffered a sort of breakdown from the unrelenting late hours and mental strain.

One of the symptoms I experienced was a peculiar mental sensation in my head, all as a result of constant worry about preparing the policies in time. It was touch-and-go, sending those policies around to people all over the state of Maharashtra. There was a lot of tension, so much so that I couldn't sleep well for a couple of months, and it eventually affected my nerves. I also used to get odd episodes of noises in my head, and I even became a bit disoriented and would black out at times.

My condition eventually came to Baba's ears, and Baba sent word that I should take leave for a month and come to Meherazad. He sent Eruch to fetch me. That was the first time that I got the chance to go to Meherazad for an extended stay.

Accordingly, I took leave for a month, and my supervisors allowed it because the riots had tapered off and the work had eased up. Baba had brought three or four of the men *mandali* to stay with Him at Meherazad, while the rest remained at Satara. Among the *mandali* with Him were Eruch, Gustadji, and perhaps Vishnu and one or two others. The women had all come to Meherazad as well.

Upon arriving at Meherazad I was expected to relax. Because I had become so stressed, Baba gave me a few entertaining books to read. I remember reading *Kon-Tiki*, which was a true-to-life description of a man called Heyerdahl who had set out to discover how the Polynesians had traveled from Central America to the Pacific Islands without any modern ship technology. How did those people migrate thousands of miles? Working with the historic facts available, this man, Heyerdahl, tried to duplicate the raft the Polynesians had constructed and used for their journeys, which he named the "*Kon-Tiki*." Baba brought me the book and said, "This is a very interesting book. You read it." Every day He came by and asked, "How far have you read?"

I replied, "Baba, I am halfway through."

“Hurry up, hurry up,” He said, “there won’t be much time left.” I suppose that was part of my rest cure!

Baba took great interest in my reaction to the book. “How do you like it?”

I said, “Baba, I am reading it and really enjoying the book, and I want to read slowly and savor it.”

“Yes, I told you it was nice. You’ll like it.”

It was really a wonderful book. How that adventurer Heyerdahl built the raft, and how he eventually determined not to tie the logs together with metal cables, which was his original idea—because there was no such metal at that time in history—so he unwound the ties and replaced the metal ones with vines. And when he was out in the Pacific, he saw that after being immersed in water for days, the logs got softer. When they were being buffeted with high waves, he realized that had he tied the raft with metal wires, they would have cut through the waterlogged wood and he would have drowned. So it was fortunate that he stuck to the old methods, which turned out to save his life. Baba took quite a bit of interest in the book, which I imagine must have been read out to Him by Mani. Another book that Baba brought for me to read during that stay was *The Mouse That Roared*, which was a very funny book.

Hectic preparations for the trip to the West were going on at the time. Many messages needed to be prepared for Baba to give out once He got there. Eruch had a file of unpublished discourses that Deshmukh had typed out in the early days—I think in the 30s or 40s. At that time those messages were mostly in the form of relatively lengthy discourses, so one day Eruch told me, “Look, you have some time. Take out some extracts from these discourses so we could give them out as shorter, individual messages.”

I readily took on the work. With those various unpublished discourses at hand, I was directed to bring out various concise, pithy summations of what would otherwise be lengthy messages that might be inappropriate for the settings and events in the West.

Somehow Baba inspired me to create those extracts. I had told Eruch that I felt very nervous about the project, inasmuch as I felt that I might

leave something good out in the process of editing Baba's discourses. Eruch responded, "Do whatever you can...." because he was so busy with his own duties and with Baba's correspondence in particular that he simply had no time to do the work himself.

I remember that there was some controversy that required correspondence at that time about the point in *God Speaks* concerning the fifty-six Perfect Ones and the Spiritual Hierarchy. "How come Baba is saying five Perfect Masters, and then there are fifty-six Perfect Ones? What is this?" Everything was being done at a very hectic pace. Baba was supposed to come to Meherazad to have a little relaxation before going to the West, and this was His relaxation! And I was supposed to have relaxation from my overwork at the insurance company while working on all this!

In any case, we formed those extracts from earlier discourses, and they were read out to Baba. He liked them, but then He said that we should have titles for them. So Eruch said, "Since C.D. Deshmukh has typed out these discourses in the first place, we might as well call him to add titles to them."

Baba agreed and said, "Send for him." In response Deshmukh came to Meherazad, and he put the appropriate titles to each of the messages and then typed them up. The full discourses are in the records somewhere.

The messages we prepared from the earlier discourses were given out at different times during Baba's tour in the West, and later they were made into a book. One of the messages was in fact entitled "Life at Its Best," and Sufism Reoriented eventually published those discourses as a book with that same title.

I was busy with that work from morning to evening, and one day Baba came to me and said, "Why are you working like this? Stop typing."

I replied, "Baba, a lot of typing is required. Eruch wants these messages to be ready, and there is not much time before Your trip to the West."

Baba sympathized with me. "You came here for rest. What is this? You are over-exerting." In fact, I could sense that Baba actually liked that I

was working on a project involving His discourses. And I also enjoyed doing it, and I was putting all my effort into the work. It was a very intimate and profound time for me.

When I first arrived for my long Meherazad stay I was standing outside Mandali Hall early one morning when Baba happened to walk past. He looked at me in passing and beckoned me to come close. He then gestured, “You have long ears.” He continued, “Make full use of those big ears that God has given you—hear everything in one ear and let it go out the other,” meaning that I shouldn’t dwell upon anything that I would hear or see going on at Meherazad, and that I should not try to play one person against the other but just be an observer.

Actually, Baba wants all of us to do just that—to be a sort of observer in the world—and not to get involved with things. Just listen, observe, and be a witness. It’s a policy that can benefit everybody who does it, but unfortunately we have a tendency to get involved in little things, and then the controversies start. Even Tukaram has said in one of his poems, “Tukaram says be quiet and just observe what keeps happening in front of you.” In essence this means that, whatever happens to us or around us, we should be resigned to God’s Will.

Although Baba liked it that I was working, at one point He came in and asked, “Are you typing again?” Just then I had one of those disorienting episodes that I had experienced in Poona from overwork on insurance matters. I literally couldn’t respond to Baba at that moment, and He asked, “What’s wrong with you?”

After a short while I said, “Baba, I just had a little sound in my head and a peculiar sensation, and I just blanked out a bit.”

He said, “Yes, I could see that. Good it happened in front of Me!” Then He said, “Call Gustadji.” So I asked Gustadji to come in. Baba said to him, “Put your hand on Meherwan’s head and bless him so that he won’t have a recurrence of this type of attack again.”

So Gustadji, whose health was quite good at the time, put his hand on my head, and Baba said, “Now you won’t be bothered by this again.”

Sure enough, after that I never had any of those dizzy spells ever again. I think it was a reward for all the hard work I was putting in. Then Baba told me, “Give Gustadji something for what he has done. Seeing a piece of cheese that Naja had sent me for breakfast, Baba said, “Give that to Gustadji.” I was staying in Pendu’s room at Meherazad, and I had my meals with the other *mandali*, but Naja used to send me something for breakfast. So I gave the cheese to Gustadji, who was very happy as he adored cheese and ice cream and other dairy products—and he very happily made off with it.

I was friendly with all the *mandali*. Baidul wasn’t there, but Kaka told me old-time stories from the early days with Baba, and once he started, it was difficult to get away because Kaka’s stories, they could go on for hours. He was a very tough fellow, you know, yet filled with love for Baba.

One day we were with Baba when He told Eruch “Take down a message that I want to dictate.” That was the day that He gave out the message that a great personal disaster was awaiting Him, and that it would test the love and faith of His lovers to the limit.

After Eruch took down that message, it was read out to Him, duly edited, and then Baba told Eruch to send it to Adi and have it issued as a circular to be sent to all His lovers in the East and West. If you see in the records, you will find a circular issued in 1956, just before Baba left for the West. It was one of the “Life Circulars,” in which Baba gave an intimation of the disaster that was to befall Him later in the year in the form of the automobile accident at Udtara, near Satara. At the time we didn’t have any reaction, *per se*—we just took it as a statement from Baba. I don’t recollect any special feeling about it, but our attitude was that whatever Baba said, we should be prepared for it.

Another thing I remember was that during that time Baba called Chhagan to Meherazad for night watch. Chhagan Master was one of the old *mandali*, and he practiced Ayurvedic medicine from his house in Bhingar, on the outskirts of Ahmednagar city. Every day, when he

finished his work there, he cycled all the way to Meherazad. He had to be at Meherazad by 7:00 p.m. to start the night watch, which duty he had to carry through until the end of the night—all the while working in Ahmednagar during the day! Early in the morning, once he was free from his night duty with Baba, he slept perhaps for two or three hours, but with that he readied himself for the day and set off for his practice. He was truly one of the early rugged *mandali*.

So I remember that Baba, before retiring, once told me, “When Chhagan comes today, tell him that he should come for night watch tomorrow by 6:30 p.m.” So from the usual 7:00 p.m. timing, his duty now was to begin at 6:30 p.m.

Then after a few days Baba told me to tell Chhagan to come by 6:00 p.m. In this way Baba kept increasing the period of his duty by having it start earlier and earlier, and I was the one who had to tell Chhagan that Baba was now calling him at such-and-such time and to be ready. Through it all Chhagan did keep night watch, though he did look tired at the end of it all, but it was a short stay of a month so he was able to carry through with it, and, of course, Baba gave him the inner strength to do so.

This story reminds me that Eruch used to ask us in a very humorous way, “Can you tell me what is the most difficult weight to lift in the world?” We wouldn’t know what to guess, but he would respond, “Your eyelids.” How true it is! When you feel sleepy and you have to lift your eyelids, try lifting them and see how difficult it is. One of the most difficult things to do is to keep awake when one is exhausted, and to fall asleep is one of the most compelling things in such circumstances, especially when you are dog tired.

I was never given the job of night watch. In fact, Eruch suggested once to Baba that because there was a shortage of people staying with Him, I might fill in on night duty, but Baba responded, “No, I would have to explain everything to him, how to do it and so on. It’ll be a burden for Me. Don’t bother him—let him be.” So that was as close as I ever got to

doing night watch, but it was not to be. It was, to be sure, a tough duty, no question about it.

In the early years the night watchman had to stay outside the room. Later on he would be inside the room, sometimes pressing Baba's feet, but with strict instructions not to move, not to make even the slightest noise, and to sit very still. If you made even the slightest movement Baba would wake up and ask why you moved. That is what the watchmen would tell us, and it must have been a real *tapasya* (austerity). No austerity could compare to this! You had to do nothing except keep awake in spite of doing nothing, and not move a muscle, with no activity whatsoever, and keeping awake was the most important part.

Meherazad was very open then—there were no huts and no trees in the surrounding area—so there were vast open spaces and very little pollution in the atmosphere around it. We had very clear days and clear nights, so there were extremely beautiful sunsets. One day I was admiring one of those sunsets when Baba happened to pass by. He stopped and gestured, "What a beautiful sunset!" In effect, He was watching His own sunset, His own Creation.

Those were some of the good times that I had with Baba during that stay. Baba's health was good, He was eating well. One time I accompanied Him when He went for an evening walk down the private road, just Baba and me. It was usually His practice to have a walk after supper, which He typically had early, by about five in the evening. Baba walked so fast I almost had to run to keep pace with Him. We went to the end of the road, and then we returned. At the end of the distance Baba commented, "I feel quite sweaty after this walk."

I replied, "But Baba, You walk so fast!"

He said, "You have no idea how fast I would walk in the early days. This is nothing compared to that!" Baba was talking about His walking speed before the first accident, so what could that pace have been like, one wonders?

I was not adept at reading His gestures at that time, because I remember that on the way back, He stopped where Ghyara's little house is on the roadside, and He gestured something to me there.

I couldn't understand His gestures and asked, "Baba, do You mean *kusti* [the "sacred thread" that orthodox Zoroastrians wear tied around their waists]?"

Baba shook His head, "No."

I couldn't follow what He was saying, but He gestured not to worry about it. When we returned He told Eruch to tell me what He had been trying to convey, and Eruch said, "Baba was pointing to Ghyara's house, indicating that it is a Parsi gentleman who stays there." Baba's sign for a Parsi mimed the tying of a *kusti*, but though I recognized literally what Baba was indicating, I couldn't make the association and understand what He was telling me. Baba had quit using the alphabet board by then, and I was still quite new to Baba's gestures.

Baba's gestures were most eloquent and absolutely elegant, and Eruch was expert at reading them by then. I remember the first message that Baba gave through gestures, something to the effect that even if you are an atheist, if you believe in your own self, that is believing in God because your "self" is none other than God, and this message was rehearsed by Baba with Eruch because it was to be part of a televised interview during Baba's upcoming visit to the States. So how would Baba give the message out? Baba would make the signs repeatedly until Eruch got what He was conveying, and thus He made Eruch learn the message as he learned how to follow Baba's gestures.

Sometime after Baba had given up the alphabet board, the American Baba-lover Don Stevens wanted Baba to show the West how He had used it to communicate previously. At that time the Paramount film clip of Baba in London, with C.B. Purdom reading a message to the West that Baba was dictating on the board, had not yet come to light, and so there was no known film clearly depicting Baba using the board at the time. Perhaps Don Stevens had asked, "Baba, the world will never know

how You used the alphabet board, so could You make an exception and use it once again so that it could be filmed?”

Baba acceded to Don's request, saying, “Okay, I will do it just this once.” So first Baba gave out the whole message for that purpose through gestures. That message was then written out, and afterwards the same message was given out again on the board. You may see it in Don's film taken in Meherabad during the “Three Incredible Weeks.” In short, the board was used in the film solely to show how Baba had previously used it, but it was not used to convey any new information, probably in keeping with Baba's decision not to use the board for communication ever again.

Some messages that Baba gave out were prepared in advance, and some were spontaneous, given on the spur of the moment. When I was describing the groundbreaking for the “Universal Spiritual Centre” in Byramangala, I should have mentioned that the ceremony for that groundbreaking was also rehearsed—how Baba would dig, how the various people attending the event would go in a procession, and so on. The whole scene was rehearsed several times, and my mother told me that Baba would actually take part in the rehearsals—He would do all those things, just like ordinary people.

Sometimes Baba exhibited a certain kind of nervousness about events—“How will this happen, My health is not good, how will I be able to do it?” and so on, and we had to reassure Him, “Baba, don't worry, You will be fine. You look nice...whenever the programs are there, You always look perfect....”

“No, but My health is really bad!” He might say. “I may not be able to give My best. How will that be, suppose it happens...?” He expressed all these things. But He was actually not acting it out, but rather, as it were, living through that very experience, because He was perfectly human, and as any normal person would, He experienced the butterflies in the stomach and other signs of nervousness. But of course, when the time came, He was Divinity in action!

See how spontaneous all His actions were, and how graceful and how beautiful He looked! I have mentioned that in the later years Baba was

not in good health and looked very haggard and lean. When someone came for *darshan* Baba would say, “Why has this man come, breaking My order?” Relenting, He would then gesture, “Never mind, let him in.” As soon as He sent this word, we could see His face changing, the color coming back into His cheeks, and the transformation taking place right in front of our very eyes! As the person who was called stepped in, Baba was radiant and glorious, a totally different picture than the Baba who had been there prior to that *darshan*, with the entire change taking place right in front of our eyes in a matter of moments.

It was clearly a disturbance to Baba to have to do that, to give the appearance of being “in the pink of health” to the person who for whatever reason got the opportunity to have His *darshan* during His seclusion. That person would then perhaps carry that impression for the rest of his life. As soon as the person would leave the whole process would happen in reverse, and Baba would go back to looking haggard and lean. We never knew what He had to undergo to present Himself in such a fashion, but we do know that He never liked to be disturbed during His work in seclusion. For the rest of us, He would let us suffer the sight of His suffering, you know.

It may have been a relaxation for Him to be with those who were accustomed to this expression of suffering that He didn’t have to hide from any of us. As soon as the Avatar takes on the mission of Avatarhood, He starts to suffer. He has to take on the suffering that the world has to undergo as a result of its *karma*. If He didn’t take it upon Himself, the world would simply drown in suffering, so He takes it upon Himself, and we who were with Him used to see that—that suffering was the whole purpose of His Advent, as it has been in every one of His past Advents.



Chapter Twenty:

A Funny Letter from Pendu

The rest of the *mandali* were at Satara, as I have said, and Pendu was in charge there. He was the manager of the Satara residence, and he had the task of writing a weekly report about happenings in Satara for Baba's attention. One day we received a long letter from Pendu that Eruch read out to Baba along with the other correspondence.

This was, of course, in the midst of all the other activity of making preparations for the upcoming trip and sending messages and dealing with all the necessary correspondence to the West, and at the same time managing the correspondence from India and the East. Everything was going on simultaneously, creating a very hectic atmosphere. Eruch read Pendu's letter, and then he said, "Baba, I have received a very funny letter from Pendu."

Baba said, "Let's hear it."

Pendu wrote something along these lines: "Dear Baba, I hope You and the rest of the *mandali* are having a very peaceful time at Meherazad, while You have left me in charge here of a semi-lunatic asylum. I have not had a moment's peace here! It is really getting on my nerves, although it is so humorous that You will enjoy hearing what has happened."

Dr. Donkin had very recently finished his epic work, *The Wayfarers*, and he had undergone tremendous mental and physical hardships to compile that monumental and wonderful book. He had been handicapped in his efforts in a variety of ways—in coping with the language, in understanding the customs, and the greatest disadvantage was that a long time had elapsed since most of the incidents had taken place—so he had to rely solely on the memories of the *mandali* who had accompanied Baba on the *mast* tours. He was such a meticulous person that he would check and counter-check the details with all the different individuals who were on each tour in order to try to sort out discrepancies in their memories, and the *mandali* were not always in the mood for such tedious review. So in the face of tremendous odds—and I am sure it was only Baba's Grace itself that made it possible—he was able to complete that project about the *masts*.

The funny part about Donkin's long ordeal with *The Wayfarers* is that it was the result of his own sudden whim that he was given the task. Some *mast* tour incidents were being recounted in front of Baba, and Donkin had piped up, saying, "Baba, all this really should be recorded."

His remark prompted Baba to rejoin, "Fine. Why don't you do that."

He was trapped into the work, you know. It was all very spontaneous with Baba, every single detail.

Anyhow, after compiling that book, he had really become half crazy—he behaved rather oddly and had in some ways become like a *mast* himself. For example, when he talked with a person, he would keep on talking even when the conversation had reached a normal stopping point. Or sometimes he would suddenly become very annoyed with noise, and he would shut himself up for days. His behavior had, in short, become very erratic and problematic.

All this is by way of background to what Pendu wrote in his letter, telling Baba, "You know how Don is behaving these days. Now he has come almost to a climax. The other day he started to talk to me early in the morning, so I listened to him for an hour, then another hour, and by then

it was time for lunch! We sat for lunch, and he kept on talking to me nonstop, and then it was time for tea, and still he went on and on until it was time to go to sleep! Don was continually talking the entire time! I was almost getting crazy myself as a result of it.

“The next day I tried to avoid him, but again he caught onto me. This time, fortunately, Aloba happened to be close by, and it was Don’s ill luck that he happened to mention the Shah of Iran. As soon as Aloba heard the words ‘Shah of Iran,’ he took over. He immediately interjected, ‘Wait a minute, I have to tell you something, Don, something very interesting,’ and he started to tell Don the whole history of Iran. So I was greatly relieved because Aloba was now latched onto Donkin, and Aloba himself kept on talking and talking nonstop.

“Ultimately Don began to get a little nervous about whether Aloba was ever going to stop! So then Don retreated to the toilet, but Aloba followed him to the toilet and from outside he was continuing with the story of Iran! Eventually Don suddenly opened the toilet door and rushed to his room with Aloba in hot pursuit, continuing to talk about Iran and related issues. Don bolted his door with a loud bang and locked himself in. Aloba was banging on the door from outside, saying, ‘Listen to this last thing. It’s really interesting!’ but Don wouldn’t open the door, and he himself started to shout in frustration. After that Don didn’t venture to come out from his room for days.”

When Baba heard all this He was really very amused, and He became pink with His silent laughter. He held His hands to His mouth and shuffled His feet, a sure sign that He was most entertained. It was such a funny incident that Pendu described in great detail. Don had truly become eccentric like that. At times he would lock himself up, and he would hate to be disturbed because he didn’t like noise. Sometimes when he would begin to talk, it would be just irrelevant, unimportant things, and he would just keep jabbering and you had to keep listening to him—that’s all you could do.

Baba would bear all these idiosyncrasies, from Don and from the others. The New Life had also taken its toll on Donkin, who as a Westerner had faced great privations during that period. After that the book about the *masts* had also stressed him greatly. Something had snapped somewhere in Don's nervous system, it seems, and he was like that for the rest of his life, although later on he quieted down and would keep more to himself, shunning crowds and activity. All the while, however, Don was focused entirely upon Baba, as you will see in some later stories.

After my stay in Meherazad I returned to Bindra House, and Baba left for the West in 1956. It was a very hectic tour in America. Eruch was sent to us for a few days before going to the West—he had to do some shopping, buying a few clothes and suitcases and so on.



Chapter Twenty-one:

Baba's Second Automobile Accident

I have told you that after Baba and those with Him returned from the Western trip in 1956, Baba was again in very strict seclusion back at Satara, and I have recounted the cricket game that Baba had organized sometime in the middle of the preceding year, in June. Now I will describe what I remember of Baba's second accident, which took place at the end of 1956.

On a cloudy day towards the end of the year—the date was December 2nd—Baba suddenly told Eruch, “Today I would like to go to Poona to watch a nice cricket match to be held there. Let's go, and today we will not eat anything or drink anything. But when the women give the food, don't tell them that this is My order. Take whatever they give.”

Eruch said that he took the food given by the women, and that Baba and the men hadn't eaten anything since the morning. He must have avoided doing so in some way or the other.

When they arrived in Poona Baba said, “Let's go to the Defense Academy.” There is a large Defense Academy near Khadakwasla, about ten miles from Poona, where they train the military cadets. It is a big sprawling structure, very modern and up-to-date for military studies for

cadets. Baba went there, took a round, and then came back to attend the cricket match. (Khadakwasla is also the site of the dam in the vicinity of Poona that later broke in 1962—more on that later.)

Baba had the car driven to an obscure corner of the field, and He got out of the car and sat under a tree, from which point He watched the match. Meanwhile Gadekar and—to the best of my memory—Ramakrishnan happened to be in the area and saw Baba's car. They thought Baba must be around somewhere, so they rushed over. It was Baba's order, however, that nobody should approach Him. He was in seclusion at that time, you know. In any case, they came near to the place where Baba was seated, and they saw Baba and Baba saw them.

Baba was extremely upset by this incident, and He called Gadekar and said, "You have broken My order! Didn't I tell you that you should not try to see Me? When I give you My order and you break it, I am very displeased with you. Go! I don't want to see your face again!"

He really chewed out Gadekar, who was extremely upset about what had happened. Baba then announced, "Now My mood is spoiled. Let's return." Baba got into the car, and He and the *mandali* with Him started winding their way back out of town on the way to Satara.

As they approached the outskirts of Poona, one particular main thoroughfare was blocked by the police. Baba asked Eruch to find out what was going on, and the policeman on duty informed them, "Chou En-lai is expected to pass by this way, so all traffic has been closed." This was before the Chinese invasion took place; the Chinese were pretending to be great friends of India, all the while making preparations for a wholesale invasion across the Indian border. There was a slogan at the time—"Hindi Chini Bhai Bhai"—which translated means "Indians and Chinese are brothers." Baba later used that slogan to reproach a politician in a different context.

Some accounts of this day are different, by the way, suggesting that Baba's visit to Poona which was interrupted by Chou En-lai took place in the morning, while Baba's car went to Poona, and that Baba and

those with Him had attended the cricket match as they headed on their way back to Satara.

At any rate, Baba's car was blocked by Chou En-lai's motorcade, and with that delay Nilu asked permission to go out and see Chou En-lai as he passed by. Baba was upset, asking "What do you want to see that man for? What's there to see in all this?"

"Baba, I'd just like to see this man," Nilu replied.

"All right, you just go and see," Baba said, but He wasn't very happy about that. After the cavalcade passed by, the traffic opened, and they headed for Satara.

After leaving the outskirts of Poona on the highway, Baba had the car stopped. He was sitting in the front seat beside Eruch, and at that point He exchanged places with one of the *mandali* in the back seat. There were four people—Vishnu, Pendu, Eruch and Nilu—in the car with Baba, and Baba exchanged places with either Vishnu or Pendu.

Baba then told Eruch to proceed. After traveling for some time Baba again halted the car, and He said, "I want to sit again in the front." He was sitting beside Nilu for part of the journey. Nilu was seated just behind Eruch in the rear seat, which means that Baba sat with Nilu for a part of the journey, so this was perhaps a farewell to Nilu.

After some miles, then, Baba returned to his original front seat to the left of Eruch, who was driving. As the car proceeded and was approaching Udtara, Eruch later recalled that it felt to him as if the car were suddenly on a very slithery and slushy surface and that he couldn't control it. In an instant it lurched out to the left and went into a ditch. With great effort Eruch tried to wrestle the car back onto the road, and that is all he remembered about the accident.

What had happened, we surmised afterwards, was that the car did go into a trench on the left side of the road, a ditch that was not very deep. Eruch steered back out of it, but while doing so he encountered a culvert directly in front of him, which the car plowed into and through. Only the

right side of the car had come back onto the road at that point, so the car just sliced through the culvert. The wheels on the left side must have been suspended, and the momentum carried the car over the culvert and turned it around, so that when it came to rest, it was now facing back towards Poona. That is why the left side of the car was totally smashed. Somehow, however, it did not roll over.

I was working in the office one day after the accident, and I saw the car as it was being towed away. I noted that the left side of the car was a total wreck, but the right side of the car was unscratched. I remember that clearly.

Eruch said that he must have passed out as a result of the accident, because all his ribs were smashed by the steering wheel jamming into his chest. I believe that Baba's feet were up on the dashboard.

Of the four *mandali* members in the car, Vishnu was the least hurt—apart from a little bruising on his knee, which later caused him some pain, he had no serious injuries. After the car had come to rest he got out of it and rushed to where Baba was sitting and opened the door. When he opened the door, however, he didn't see Baba, but instead he saw a great flood of light. He felt as if he were seeing Lord Krishna in all His glory, having just vanquished His foes in battle. Vishnu was completely dazed by the experience, as if a great victory had been accomplished and Baba was in resplendent glory. After that vision passed he saw Baba sitting there, in pain and groaning slightly. Baba gestured, "There's a pain here," pointing to his hip. Baba was badly smashed up in the face as well, and He was bleeding, with His tongue badly cut, so Vishnu realized the severity of the situation.

In the meantime Eruch regained consciousness, and after getting up he found that Nilu was lying on the ground. He sensed that Nilu was dead, although he was not sure. The car door must have flown open, and Nilu was somehow ejected from the car. I'm not sure if Eruch himself had been thrown clear as well.

Eruch has recollected that he gathered all his strength and stopped a car that was just passing by. Vishnu and Eruch helped Baba out of the car,

and Eruch requested the people in it to give Baba a lift, with Vishnu to help, and both got in the car. The people were not hesitant in the least. They just accepted everything. In India it is a great hassle afterwards if one is involved in stopping to help for an accident, yet those people just gave a ride to Baba without any reluctance whatever. Eruch also said that there was a goods truck following shortly thereafter, and they too stopped. Eruch asked them to lift Pendu into the truck, as he was unconscious, and Nilu's body was put in the truck as well.

At this point Eruch passed out again, and the next time he woke up was in the hospital. His whole body was encased in Elastoplast owing to his broken ribs. Just breathing was very difficult with his rib injuries because each breath meant excruciating pain.

The women *mandali* later described the scene of how a car came into Grafton, and they felt as if some angel had walked in and said, "Please come out. Some of your people were involved in an accident." They rushed out to find Vishnu holding Baba, Who was in tremendous pain. Mehera and the others all brought Baba in and helped Him lie down, and then, of course, Dr. Donkin took over. The doctor from the hospital was called, a very nice person, and Baba was taken to the hospital where His leg was set and put in plaster, and then He later came back to Grafton.

None of us at Bindra House knew anything about the accident until the next day when telegrams were sent out. Meherjee came over and told us that he was rushing off to Satara to help with night watch. He told us that Dr. Nilu had died and that others, including Baba, were seriously injured.

Everyone took turns attending to Baba. Because Meherjee had already had the experience from the first accident in America, he was well-trained and a ready nurse for Baba.

As for Bhau, he had been given the order not to move out of bed, and he was embarrassed about the whole situation. I don't know the story about Bhau, but those other people among Baba's *mandali* were there to help Him.

About seven or eight days later Nariman came to Bindra House and said that we needed to arrange to get an ambulance to Satara because he had received word that Eruch and Pendu should be brought to Poona. He said, "So make some preparations—get me an ambulance, and we'll go there."

I went to Sassoon hospital and arranged an ambulance urgently. We got a good one, and Nariman and I, in a second vehicle, drove to Satara. On the way we stopped where the accident had occurred and saw where that culvert had been, and I noticed the cricket ground nearby and pointed it out to Nariman. It was just directly across the road, so we knew that Baba had planned all this very carefully.

The site is near the Udtara *dak* bungalow, but I wonder if that is still there. Much development has taken place, and under a World Bank aid project the whole road has been widened to almost double the size of the road that it was in 1956.

We drove to Satara and proceeded straight to Grafton. Meherjee took me aside to say, "Look, make arrangements for a good bungalow in Poona as soon as you go back because we are intending to shift Baba to Poona for better treatment. We'll persuade Baba to come to Poona, but in the meantime make all efforts to get a good bungalow as soon as you return."

When we went to see Baba, He was in terrible shape. The whole right side of his face was badly bruised, His nose was badly bashed, and His eyes were swollen to such an extent that He could barely see. It was a terrible sight. He was lying there in bed with his leg in plaster, and seeing us He said, "Who asked you to come here? What happened?"

Nariman said, "Baba, we were instructed to bring an ambulance to take Eruch and Pendu for treatment."

"All right," Baba said, "go to the hospital."

When we went to the hospital, it was chock-full of patients. The only open place they had found for Eruch and Pendu was an old stable in the

compound. They had quickly cleaned out the place somehow, two stables separated by a wall. In one of them on a bed was Eruch, and in another part of the stable was Pendu, also lying in bed.

Both were in very bad shape. Pendu had a fractured hip, a fractured leg, and he had incurred a terrible concussion of the brain, so much so that he had become extremely disturbed. Sidhuji was called from Meherabad to attend to him.

Sidhu had to look after Pendu, but Pendu in his delirious state kept thinking that Sidhu was the devil or something. As soon as Sidhu tried to enter, Pendu started shouting, "Get out from here! You've come to take my life—get out of here!" He went into tantrums, and Sidhuji did not know what to do at that point. Somehow they quieted Pendu down and gave him some injections. He was delirious, having hallucinations, and it seemed as if he could have lost his reason altogether. By Baba's Grace he got over that later.

We told Eruch that we had come to take him to Poona. He asked, "How come? Who asked you all to do this?" There had been a misunderstanding, it seems, and then the doctor came, and we informed him that we had come to take the patients to Poona.

"Why are you taking them?" he demanded. "I have given them the best treatment possible. The same thing they will do in Poona! But if you still wish to take them, it is your responsibility. In the case of Eruch, I don't guarantee that he will survive even a part of the journey. If you move him and if one of those fractured ribs enters his lungs and starts an internal hemorrhage, he won't live to reach Poona. If despite that you wish to move him, then please give your request to us in writing, and only then am I prepared to release him."

Eruch said, "No, no doctor, I am quite happy here, and there is no need to take us anyplace else."

The doctor continued with regard to Pendu, "If you take him now, it will cause him more trouble. He is in tremendous pain, and it is better that you let both these patients progress here for some time, and when the

time comes I myself will ask you people to shift them. Don't be in a hurry to move them—that is my advice to you.”


Hearing all this, Nariman agreed, and he said, “All right, doctor, we will do as you suggest.” So after all that, we returned to Poona with the empty ambulance.

When Kaka Baria went to see Baba at Satara, Baba Himself told us, “See what a soft heart Kaka has for Me. After seeing Me in that condition, he went outside to piddle, and while piddling he fainted! He simply couldn't bear the sight that confronted him.” So Baba said, “See his love for Me, how great it is!”



Chapter Twenty-two:

Recovery at Silver Oaks

fter returning home to Poona I rushed out to contact some house agents because Meherjee had asked me to get a bungalow ready. I contacted many, and then I also contacted other Baba-lovers to help find a house. One of the house agents fortunately had just had a house vacated in the Silver Oaks district, close to where Meherjee lived. Silver oak trees were growing in the garden of that house, hence the name. It had been built in a very modern way with carvings on the walls. The man showed it to me and told me, “If you want, we can give you this house on hire.” We seized the opportunity, ordered the furniture, and it was made ready quickly. I sent a telegram to Meherjee telling him that we had gotten a good place. Within eight days Baba was brought to Poona.

When Baba arrived we were asked to be at Sassoon Hospital while Baba was to be x-rayed. Unfortunately the x-ray room in Sassoon Hospital was on the first floor, that is, the first floor above the ground floor. It was a tall old structure without any lift, and it had a very narrow staircase. Baba had to be taken in a stretcher up those stairs, and I remember the tremendous pain He was suffering in His shattered hip, which made Him groan very loudly. He could barely bear the excruciating pain.

After the doctor looked at the x-rays, he said, “Baba doesn’t require any plaster. All he needs is traction because this thing is not going to heal with plaster. The bone is not in position, so traction should be done so that the bone comes back in place.”

Baba was bandaged, and we brought Him to the house that we had made ready. Baba was kept there for two or three months, and He remained in great pain throughout that time.

Once Eruch recovered sufficiently from his rib fractures, he came back to Poona and stayed with us at Bindra House. Every morning he would go to Silver Oaks in Salisbury Park where Baba was staying, which as I’ve mentioned was very close to where Meherjee Karkaria used to stay. I would accompany Eruch when he went there, and I remember seeing Baba lying on the couch with weights suspended at the end of His leg for traction.

When I arrived the first day, He asked me, “You came all the way in the sun without a hat? What was My order to you?”

I said, “Yes, Baba, I made a mistake.”

“Always wear a hat when you go out in the sun,” He said. So, despite the pain of His hip fracture, He was ever mindful that we stick to the slightest order that He had given to us.

Another example that struck me very deeply was that when Eruch recounted the accident, he recalled how Baba, even in His crippled and seriously injured state, had sent word to those who were in the accident with Him about an order He had given earlier that day regarding drinking and eating. Baba was lying in great pain, His tongue had been cut, His whole face swollen up, He could barely gesture, but He sent special messages to Vishnu, Eruch and Pendu informing each of them that they were now free from the order to refrain from eating and drinking.

This is what it is all about to be with Baba. His orders have supreme importance.

The doctor who originally was so adamant about the inadvisability of moving Pendu and Eruch eventually gave them permission to shift for

better treatment. Healing had to take place, and the doctor said, referring to Pendu, "You can take him to 'Nagar also." I remember that one day when I was at Silver Oaks an ambulance arrived with Pendu, and they brought him on a stretcher before Baba's bed there, at which point Pendu began to weep loudly. He said, "Baba, I am totally crippled!"

Pendu was upset, not because he was worried about being crippled but because he felt that this would prevent him from being able to work for Baba as he had been. His thoughts were all about serving Baba.

Baba gestured to Eruch, who interpreted, "Baba says, 'Pendu don't worry. You will start walking before I walk. Now go and take good rest and don't worry. Go to Meherabad and get well soon. I'll be coming to Pimpalgaon, so you go and get well soon, and you will walk before I do.'"

Pendu was groaning away throughout all this. He was partly conscious, partly delirious. He went on to Ahmednagar and was kept in Meherabad for some time, then at Akbar Press for a few months.

Baba sent Sidhu and Aloba to look after Pendu and to nurse him back to health. At Akbar Press Aloba was attending to Pendu, and he was recovering very satisfactorily.

As regards to Baba, of course, Donkin was making every effort to get the best treatment possible. Although Donkin showed no stress on the outside, inwardly he was greatly agitated. He could barely stand to see Baba lying there helpless. He went out into the junk market, and from there he got a special bed that he modified for Baba, improvising with whatever materials he could scavenge. Baba was comfortable on the bed, and everything could be done for Him on it without having to lift or disturb Him.

While Donkin was in the process of making that bed, he came to Bindra House and brought the bed there with him. He placed it in the open compound in the sunlight, where he kept staring at it for minutes on end, lost in reverie as to how best to make it. Eventually he arranged various planks beneath the bed and made me lie down on it. He said, "You lie down. I want to see the position." This continued as he went

into a reverie again, this time for half an hour, while I had to keep lying there. He had become almost crazed with the enormity of the situation, but he was making all-out efforts, and he came up with a very ingenious contraption that employed a variety of pulleys. In the end he devised the bed to have the mattress in several pieces, so that Baba could go to the toilet without having to be lifted up. In short, he performed a remarkable medical engineering feat, all with the most basic materials.

That bed was kept at Meherazad for quite a long time after that, and afterwards Bhau used to sleep on it. Dr. Donkin treated Baba with such great care and tenderness—it was a sight to watch. In any case, Donkin went in search of specialists who then saw Baba, and whatever was the best treatment was given to Baba. Baba seemed to make good progress, and soon He decided to shift to Meherazad.

Baba continued to have pain in his hip joint, however, and His x-rays were sent to England to some top authority in orthopedics. When that doctor examined the plates he said, “This man, whoever he is, will never walk again unless the whole joint is replaced.” Baba was approached about that possibility, but He said that He wouldn’t have any surgery, but He declared that He would indeed walk again. That was the further miracle that we saw from Baba—He did walk again, as He said He would.


While Baba was recovering at Silver Oaks, I remember that one day Kaka came from Meherazad. Bhooty had given birth to a litter of puppies, and inasmuch as she was getting old, Baba wanted a good puppy from her. Kaka brought the whole lot, three of them, from which Baba could select the one He wanted. Baba selected a tiny little pup from among the litter and right away named him “Mastan,” and Kaka brought the dog back to Meherazad and started looking after it, all black, a wooly ball, that’s all. The puppy grew up to become a huge dog, known throughout the Baba world as Baba’s pet dog, Mastan. Baba said the other two should be given to Padri to take care of, and accordingly they were sent to Meherabad.



Chapter Twenty-three:

1957

Return to Meherazad, Cousin Meheru's Wedding, Baba's Treatment by Dr. Kenmore, and Visits to Poona

fter his stay at Silver Oaks Baba returned to Meherazad. I think He was just starting to walk at that time. While recovering in Meherazad Baba occasionally came to Poona for treatment and check-ups. On one of those occasions Baba wanted a good place to stay there to recuperate.

We had Guruprasad in mind whenever Baba wanted to come, but we were in search of other bungalows just in case it fell through. On this occasion we approached Sardar Raste to see if the Maharani would lend the house again, and sure enough she sent a telegram confirmation that Baba could stay at Guruprasad. So, in 1957, Baba and the *mandali* arrived to stay for some time.

Baba was suffering a lot then, as severe pain from His injured hip joint was His constant companion after the accident. Dr. Harry Kenmore, the blind American chiropractor, had treated Baba and helped to relieve the pain quite a bit. Baba was doing exercises at Guruprasad as well.

At that time we acquired an old perambulator—a baby carriage—obtained second-hand from the market. We removed all the parts of it but left the frame, the four wheels and the long handle. Baba would use

that contraption as a sort of “walker”—He would hold the handle and use it for support when He tried to walk. It was better than a walker because the movement was easier, and Guruprasad had a wide veranda of marble flooring. It was easy for Baba to walk with the pram in front because He could put His weight on the handle, and we would put a big stone on the top of the front part as a sort of counterweight.

One day Deshmukh was there and he remarked, “Baba, how fortunate this stone is!”

Baba stopped in His tracks and said, “What did you say?”

“Baba, really this stone is so fortunate, that You are pushing it along in the cart.”

“Is that so? Are you jealous of its good luck? Come on, sit in the cart.”

“Oh, Baba, I can’t do that!”

“No, you sit now.” So Dr. Deshmukh was made to sit in the cart, and Baba pushed him along. It was quite a sight. Baba’s sense of humor was always present.

A touching incident occurred during that brief stay at Guruprasad. There was a blind girl who wanted the sight of the world. She was a Bengali girl staying in Poona, totally blind, and her parents had brought her to Guruprasad. It was a *darshan* day, and she could sing very well; she was in her late teens or early twenties, and she had a very sweet voice and a precious, innocent face. Baba liked her singing very much, and her parents beseeched Baba, “Let Your grace be on her so that she may get back her sight.”

Apparently on a whim Baba told the parents to do certain things for the girl. He said she should do those things for a certain length of time, and then she would get back her sight. We all wondered how and why Baba was doing such a thing, because ordinarily He never did anything like that.

The parents departed happily, but Baba was not very happy with the situation. What if the girl did all that and didn’t get back her sight? He was musing on this point with the *mandali* for some time. But later on it

came to our notice that the girl was not able to follow Baba’s instructions, so it was fated that she would not get her sight back. Later I found out that she was staying quite close to Bindra House, in fact just across and down the road in a small by-lane in a place called “Pudumjee Park.”

After the initial stay in 1951, Baba once again agreed to stay at Guruprasad in 1957. One of the conditions that Baba insisted upon for His acceptance of the offer to stay there was that neither the Maharani nor anyone else should come there while He would be at Guruprasad.

Sometime after Baba had arrived to stay at Guruprasad on that visit, however, it so happened that the Maharani’s brother, named Jaisingh Ghorpade, happened to pass through Poona. It was his habit that whenever he was in the vicinity of Poona, he would come to Guruprasad for a night’s stay and then proceed.

With no announcement, then, the Maharani’s brother happened to come to Guruprasad, and, naturally, he entered the premises. Before he could get very far, however, he was stopped by the watchman or one of Baba’s *mandali*. He was furious and blustered, “This is my place! How dare you all try to stop me?” He wouldn’t listen to the explanation about the Maharani having provided the bungalow to Baba, and so it came to Baba’s ears that all this was happening.

At that time one room at Guruprasad had been kept locked, which was the Maharani’s personal room. Later, of course, the Maharani gave the entire bungalow over for Baba’s use, but back then she had reserved one room, which was kept locked. Baba said, regarding her brother’s intrusion, “Let him occupy that room.”

Dadi, my cousin, was working in Ganeshkhind at the time. He had a nice little cottage, given to him by the government, in the Ganeshkhind Gardens in Poona where he was an agricultural officer. He had passed his agricultural degree, so he was in charge of the vast park-like garden there. Baba sent word to tell Dadi to “vacate his cottage—I want to shift

there because this man is coming here, and it will disturb me.” The next day Baba, with bag and baggage, vacated Guruprasad, leaving that fellow alone there.

In Ganeshkhind there were no fans, so we had to take turns fanning Baba. In Guruprasad, in the side hall, the first thing He would ask us to do would be to put on the fan, and it would be going full blast. In His bedroom, however, it was all sheeted up, and not a whiff of air ever came in, and poor Bhau had terrible times there. During night watch Bhau would sweat, while Baba would say, “I’m cold in here—somewhere there is a breeze coming in.”

Baba actually once mentioned, while the fan was running, “See how I have changed? I never liked the fan previously, but somehow now I am allowing the fan to be run all through the day.”

When the Maharani came to know what had happened, she was extremely distressed. She sent a very wonderful letter of apology, explaining that her brother didn’t know about the arrangement. She begged Baba to return and to continue His stay at Guruprasad, and she promised that in the future there would be no disturbance whatsoever during Baba’s stays at Guruprasad. Mind you, the Maharani hadn’t yet met Baba, but she was still totally dedicated to fulfilling His wishes! I think Baba sent a very positive reply to her that she shouldn’t worry about the misunderstanding and that it was all right, but that He would not be returning to Guruprasad at that time.

Baba continued His stay in Ganeshkhind for the rest of the summer. It was a quiet little cottage about five miles from Bindra House in a locality called Aundh, and He had a nice time there. At that time it was adjacent to the Government House. The British government had several such “Government Houses,” and the Governor of Maharashtra often came and resided at one or another of those houses whenever he felt like it.

Baba had paid several visits to Ganeshkhind previously because He liked the place very much. It was totally secluded and offered no disturbances. In the meantime Dadi had gotten a promotion that put him totally in

charge of the Botanical Gardens, and he was given an exclusive bungalow there. He was promoted several times in fact, and each promotion got him a different cottage, and Baba stayed in each of those cottages. Eventually, when Dadi became the superintendent, he was given the largest bungalow on the property with its own independent compound, at the very start of the row of residential bungalows. Baba would then use that, and whenever He would come to Poona, He would stay there, and all of us would visit Baba at that place.

Bhikhubhai Meelan—his actual name was Bhikhubhai Panarkar—of Meelan Photo Studios first met Baba at Ganeshkhind. He took those beautiful photos of Baba there, where He is in a slightly reclining chair in the open garden—there is a series of very beautiful shots of Baba taken there.

Ever since that incident with her brother, the Maharani had learned her lesson very well. She thereafter contacted all those to whom she had given the blanket permission to occupy Guruprasad whenever they felt like it, giving strict instructions that none should go to Guruprasad when Baba was there. Mind you, she had still not met Baba yet! In fact, she had not even heard about Baba prior to that time in 1951 when He first used Guruprasad. She just readily accepted all conditions that Baba communicated to her.

The Maharani of Baroda had been given in marriage to the Maharaja of Baroda, but she was originally from Kolhapur or Satara in South Maharashtra. She had an ancestral home there which she would visit fairly often. On her way from Baroda to the south of Maharashtra she would usually pass through Poona.

Once, on one of these trips to or from her ancestral home, she happened to be in Poona while Baba was occupying Guruprasad. She wanted to leave some message with the manager of Guruprasad, which, by the way, was her private property in Poona, not at all belonging to the state of Baroda.

For that purpose the Maharani came to the gate of Guruprasad—her own property—which was a couple of hundred feet from the main house.

A long driveway ran from the gate at the road to the portico of Guruprasad—it was a huge estate. She herself did not attempt to enter the place owing to the lesson that she had learned previously about strictly obeying Baba's orders.

When she arrived at the gate, Eruch was working on the veranda, doing some correspondence as usual, and when he happened to glance up, he saw someone standing outside the gate. He didn't pay much attention to it at first, but some time later he noted that the figure was still there. At that point he became curious and went out to address this very well-dressed, elegant lady, "Yes?" he asked. "Are you waiting for somebody here?"

She said, "No, I am the Maharani of Baroda."

Eruch graciously greeted her with Baba's "*Jai!*" and inquired, "Why are you standing there outside the gate?"

She said, "Oh, I wanted to convey some little message to my manager inside."

"But then, why didn't you come in?"

"No, I dare not enter. It is Baba's instruction that no one should enter while He is in residence, and I will not come in. But would you be willing to give my manager the message?"

Eruch said that he would send for the manager. She remained standing outside. This was her own property, mind you, and she had not yet met Baba.

Eruch sent the man out, but in the meantime Baba came to know about her presence, and I think Baba asked Eruch to call her inside. Baba was sitting in the hall, and He gave her *darshan*.

This episode shows how the Maharani used to follow Baba's instructions, all with the utmost humility. Later on, when she would be invited to come to Guruprasad and Baba would be on the veranda—in full view of her own servants, the staff and all the rest of us—she would unhesitatingly prostrate herself before Baba. Her love for and faith in Baba was immense.

The arrangement with the Maharani brought to a close the problem of getting a bungalow for Baba whenever He wished to visit Poona, and a good thing it was, because Poona was getting more and more heavily populated. In the old times it was difficult enough, but as the years progressed, no bungalows would be available at all. The last time we hired a bungalow for Baba was Silver Oaks, for His recovery from the accident. Thereafter, by Baba's Grace, Guruprasad came to be at Baba's disposal, and all our hunting for bungalows came to an end. It was fortunate for us, and for all Baba-lovers there, because such searches for bungalows were always a nightmarish situation.

The Maharaja of Baroda controlled the second richest state in India, after the Nizam of Hyderabad. So it was not surprising that Guruprasad seemed like such a luxurious place to us. But the Maharani said, "Baba, You should see my palace in Baroda. This is a small hut in comparison." The palace in Baroda was called "Laxmi Vilas Palace."

Bal Natu was once sent to Baroda to meet the Maharani. He was shaking like a leaf when he got there! The reception that he got, however, was wonderful, and he described the palace also, a huge, gorgeous place—there was another such palace in Bombay on Malabar Hill. It was a very rare combination that she possessed: in spite of all that wealth, she had come into contact with the Avatar of the Age. Baba used to tell us that she must be very fortunate indeed.

After staying at Ganeshkhind Baba then went back to Meherazad in June or July of that year.

Towards the latter part of the year Baba called Meherjee to Meherazad for some work, and He asked Meherjee to bring me along with him. My cousin Dadi Kerawalla was also there. I remember Meherjee, Dadi and I coming to Meherazad with some packed lunch my mother had sent off with us. Baba had told us to be there by about 2:00 p.m., and we were a little early, so we sat down under a tree on the private road and had our lunch, just to pass time so as not to be too early, and then we came.

After we arrived at Mandali Hall, Baba first had some work with Meherjee, and then He began asking about our household affairs. As a result of traveling in the heat of the day, however, I had gotten a slight case of heat stroke, and eating that food on the way gave me nausea, so the result was that I was beginning to feel very sick as I stood before Baba. I didn't know what to do so I was looking for any excuse I could find just to go out of the room, and Dadi, being the shy type, would leave the room too whenever I did.

Pretty soon Baba inquired, "What's wrong with you two guys? Why are you leaving the Hall so often?" We shrugged off the question as if it were nothing to bother about, but my nausea continued full force. I was afraid that I would throw up, so I wanted to go to the tap and wash my face. Now that Baba had noticed my coming and going, I didn't know what to do, and the nausea was increasing considerably as time went on.

Then came teatime, and Baba said, "Now line up." He started to distribute *prasad*, and that day somebody had brought sweets, some big *gulab jamuns*, those sugary lumps of condensed milk or powdered milk made into a cake-like ball, soaked with sugar syrup. Now a sight like that with a nauseated stomach would make you throw up right on the spot just by looking at it! But Baba was doling out big heaps of the sweets to each one of us, so I took it also.

I was wondering how I would eat all that Baba had so generously dished out, and I went to a quiet place and just gulped it down. I thought that I would now surely throw it up, but all of a sudden the nausea began to subside. Eating that sweet should have made me vomit it out instantly, but instead my stomach settled down and I began to feel good, and in an hour's time I felt normal.

That was just as well because Baba said, "I want you to stay overnight here. I have booked your seats for the circus also. We are all going to the circus today." A small circus had come to town at Ahmednagar, and all the *mandali*, men and women, were to go. Baba had arranged for tickets for all three of us, and that's why Baba said we had to spend the night at Meherazad.

We all went there—the circus had pitched tents on the Aurangabad-Nagar main road, just before the Trust Office. There is a junction at that point where five roads branch off, and in those days there was a large open ground just next to that junction, and the circus had set up there.

There was a tiny circus ring in the tent, and although it was a small affair, it was very well organized. The performers were quite skilled, they did very good acts, and everybody liked it. Baba was sitting with the women *mandali* in one place, and the men *mandali* were seated a little distance away. Everybody went, except maybe one or two who must have been kept back at Meherazad as watchmen. Baba was incognito, of course, and this trip to the circus was a sort of recreation for Him in the midst of His seclusion.

As the show was ending Baba told the women, “Let’s go before the final act.” But the women persuaded Baba to wait until the end. They wanted Baba to enjoy the show, and He gave in to their wishes without their having any idea, of course, what was in store.

Had they followed Baba’s instructions it would have been better, because it turned out the final act was a surprise. Into the empty ring strode the owner of the circus with his elephant, which was holding a huge garland in his trunk. He did a round of the whole ring, and then the owner with his elephant stopped directly in front of where Baba was seated at ring-side. The owner said to the elephant, “All right, do your duty,” and the elephant put his trunk up in salute, and then put the garland around Baba’s neck. Baba was surprised, the women were surprised, and everybody was surprised, and with that activity the whole crowd came to know that Baba was there. As a result there was a big shouting of Baba’s “*Jai!*” and Baba turned to the women and said, “See? I have been disturbed in My seclusion. This wouldn’t have happened if we had left earlier.” Somehow the owner had come to know that Baba was there, and he quietly created this grand finale, innocently of course, only thinking that it was appropriate to recognize and acknowledge Baba in this way. As it turned out, the *mandali* and everybody else were happy, but Baba Himself was not pleased.

The next day there was the usual Baba routine of prayers and other things, and after that Baba discussed the circus. He inquired of each of us how we liked it, and all said that it was excellent, and some cited a particular performance. Baba said He liked one act the most—an act by a Chinese performer, a short, stout person who was very athletic. He came in with a ladder, and then a table was brought into the ring. This fellow climbed up on the table, put the ladder on top of the table, and then he climbed the ladder, without any support. Once he had reached the very topmost rung, he stood balancing on it with his arms outstretched. Then he came down.

The next part was really breathtaking. This Chinese acrobat started up the ladder again, but this time he was actually slithering through the rungs, like a snake. It was amazing to watch his body weaving in and out of the rungs, all the way to the top rung, and there he did a full headstand! He then started coming down the ladder headfirst, still on his hands, wriggling through the rungs once more. Remember, all the time he was balancing a tall ladder on that precariously perched table without any support! Then he did a headstand on the ladder's top rung! The ladder swayed back and forth dangerously throughout the performance, scaring the audience and leaving them gasping and open-mouthed in wonder! Then he came back down headfirst, one step at a time.

The day after the show Baba said, "In this Incarnation I have learned something new: one step at a time!" That was a very profound statement. Baba said, "Something must be going too fast. I must take one step at a time."

Everybody laughed at that remark, and that was it. We all sat around Baba for a short while, and then Meherjee, Dadi and I returned to Poona.

Around October or November, 1957, my cousin Meheru—my eldest maternal aunt Shirinmasi's daughter (aunt on my mother's side)—was to be married to one of Baba's lovers named Burjor Mehta. After the marriage Meheru and Burjor had three children: Meherwan, Mehernosh

and Behram Mehta at Akbar Press. Burjor was staying in Bombay at that time, and Meheru was staying with her mother at Akbar Press.

Baba gave permission for Bindra House people to go to Akbar Press about four days before the marriage. We were called to Meherazad ahead of time, and Roshan was also there. She was not yet married to Sam, my other cousin, and she said to Baba, “We young people—if we go so late, who is to help our aunt with all the preparations for the marriage?” She was trying to be a little clever with Baba in that she was really thinking it would be fun to go early and wasn't just concerned about helping out.

Baba said, “Mmm, that's right. So what do you want to do now?”

She responded, “Baba, we should go at least ten days in advance.”

Baba said, “All right, come ten days before.” Whenever people tried to be smart with Baba, He always let them.

So Roshan and some of our family arrived ten days before, but the very next day my aunt Gulamasi came down with a serious case of influenza. She started getting rigors and serious facial paralysis. Next my sister Manu fell ill. Then my mother fell ill, and for about five or six days most of them were very sick, and of course they were of no help to the household. Roshan didn't get to have any fun, but instead she had to slog her life out to attend to all these people. Not only that, there were also others at Akbar Press who fell sick, and she had to care for them all. She was just exhausted!

Just four days before the wedding, however, everyone got well. It was as if Baba said, “You want to go early to help? So go and help all these people.” This was the help she could render.

The thing is, we should learn never to be smart before Baba. We all had to learn it the hard way, but everyone had that experience in their life with Him at one time or another. If they tried to act smart, Baba would let them do so, and in the process they would realize that what Baba had just casually mentioned was the best thing to do from the start. That's why Baba always made clear that whatever He said, we should just carry it out immediately and literally. We shouldn't try to be wise about or second-guess anything that He instructed us to do.

On the other hand, He was so human that we were encouraged to offer our objections and suggestions, and we often got carried away by our own thoughts, but when Baba asked us for suggestions, that was different. Of course He would save the situation in His Infinite Mercy, but the lesson would be brought home, and the next time we would think twice before we acted as if we knew better.

So the rest of us, including myself, came for this wedding four days beforehand as Baba had directed. It passed off nicely. Baba sent Chhagan Master to help with the cooking. After the wedding was over and before we left, Baba asked the Bindra House people to visit Him at Meherazad. We came for an hour or two, and we left again.

I believe it was not long after that time that Dr. Harry Kenmore expressed a wish to see Baba in order to treat Him. He was a very good chiropractor from New York City, and he had met Baba for the first time during Baba's 1956 visit to the West, at Myrtle Beach. He had become blind at the age of sixteen. He passed his medical studies, however, through sheer hard work and perseverance, getting his qualification from a well-known chiropractic college. He eventually did come to Meherazad and provided chiropractic treatments to Baba in Mandali Hall there.

That was the first time that the Hall saw any signs of renovation. It had been a stable before that, as I have mentioned earlier. At that time there were no *farsi* tiles on the floor or stones in the walls. It was all mud flooring, and Kenmore was a bit peeved because he would stumble, and he said, "You want Baba to walk on this uneven surface?" Baba hadn't started walking after the second accident yet, and so at about that time the flooring was installed and some semblance of habitation came into being.

Harry had brought his chiropractic worktable there, and he made Baba lie down as he did all the spinal adjustments that were a part of his treatment. There was also a stationary cycle, and he made Baba do exercises for His feet with that as well. He worked with Baba very wholeheartedly and sincerely.

Harry was the one who first detected that Baba's right leg was slightly shorter than his left, owing to the accident. As a consequence he got

special *chappals* made for Him with a higher heel and sole on the right side. In Poona there was a very devoted Baba-lover, Shankarrao Doiphode, who was a cobbler, and he made a special *chappal* for Baba. It was made with a very light cork sole to raise the height. Just half an inch made all the difference in reducing Baba’s pain.

Harry stayed for a month or two, and in order to do that he had abandoned his flourishing practice in New York, leaving it in the hands of one of his chiropractor friends, all just to treat Baba. His work helped Baba to start bearing weight on His fractured hip and to start walking once again.

Following Harry’s visit there was an article in the local papers about the “Modern Namdev,” in reference to Kenmore and his work helping to enable Baba to walk again. In Maharashtra Namdev is a very famous saint. As a child his parents were very devoted to Pandurang, also known as Vithoba at Pandharpur. Tukaram’s favorite image of God was Pandurang, which is one of the names of Krishna.

Namdev’s father was the priest attending to the temple in his village. The mother would send Namdev with the daily food offering for Pandurang, and then that food would be brought back for the family to eat as *prasad*. One day the father had some work requiring him to go out of town, so the mother sent the child to offer the food as usual to the Lord. Accordingly, in place of his absent father, Namdev himself put the food before the Lord and said, “Come on, Lord, start eating this food I have brought for You.” There was no response, of course, given that the image of the Lord in the temple was a stone statue. The child sat there for some time and again said, in all his youthful innocence, “Come on, now, it’s getting late, aren’t You going to eat? I have to take whatever remains back to my family!”

There was no response, which caused Namdev to begin pleading with the Lord: “I’ll be beaten at home if You don’t do this little thing for me!” The child had so much innocence and sincere faith that he literally believed that the idol would eat the food offered to it. Eventually the child got very annoyed and said, “Lord Pandurang, I’ll beat You if You don’t start eating!”

In his frustration and upset Namdev went in search of a stick, and in the meantime, it is said, the statue of the Lord came to life and started to eat the food. Namdev returned and said, “Oh, now You come around properly! Finish Your food quickly!” Whatever remained, Namdev packed it up and brought it back home. When the mother saw that Namdev had brought back less food than she had sent to the temple, she scolded him, saying “Namdev, is this the way you make an offering to the Lord? I didn’t ask you to eat the food. It was for Him! This is very bad on your part.”

Namdev was flabbergasted to hear this. “But Mother, I had great difficulty in persuading the Lord to eat the food you sent! Why are you blaming *me*?”

She said, “Come on, now, stop all this nonsense! Tell the truth! If you ate some of the food, it must be because you felt hungry.”

“No, Mother, this is what happened,” said Namdev, and he described exactly how he had tried to get the Deity to accept the offering and so on. His mother wouldn’t believe it, however, and in the meantime, the father came home. Hearing about all this, he started to beat the little child for telling a lie. Still Namdev insisted that he was telling the truth.

Finally Namdev said, “All right, if you won’t believe me, come with me tomorrow and you will see.” The father agreed.

So the child again offered the food to the Deity the following day, but the Lord wouldn’t come out because the father was observing it all. Namdev started to weep and wail and said, “If You don’t do this, my reputation is at stake. You must come and eat just like You did yesterday, whatever happens.” The little child’s love and faith was so great that ultimately the Lord revealed Himself, and his father received the Lord’s *darshan* because of the child. So the legend is that, because of the faith of Namdev, a stone statue of the Lord actually came to life.

The whole “modern Namdev” article, referring to Kenmore, was based on this same idea that with the intensity of his faith, he had made Baba walk again, something all the great doctors and specialists had said He

would not be able to do. Through Donkin’s connections Baba’s x-rays had been shown to the best orthopedic surgeons in London, and they had all asserted with great authority that this individual would not ever walk again unless he had surgery on the hip to immobilize the joint. [Meherwan recalls that the Marathi article had changed Harry’s name to “Hurricane Moray,” because that is how the Marathi journalist had heard his name: “HarryKen More!”]

Kenmore had tremendous faith in Baba. Some of the stories he told about himself were amazing. Later on Dadi wanted to go for higher studies to America, and he did go, with Baba’s permission. Kenmore was of great help to him at that time, and he was like a father figure to Dadi. He told Dadi about his experiences—how people took advantage of his blindness and so on. Despite his handicap he was a man of tremendous willpower, and even with his blindness he was a very forceful character. He never allowed self-pity to get the better of him. On the contrary, he wanted people to treat him like a normal person, and he went to great lengths to prove that he was as capable as anyone else.

In spite of his failing vision in his youth, Harry passed his studies and became a full-fledged chiropractor and started his own practice. He told Dadi that during those early days when he became totally blind—it was a progressive blindness—one day he was in a tall building and some person had carelessly left the lift [elevator] door open while the lift was not on that floor. In fact, the lift was ten or twelve stories down. Harry stepped through the door and started to fall, but somehow he grabbed hold of the cables and managed to slip down instead of free fall! He was totally lacerated from top to bottom and fell with a thump on the top of the lift. “Luckily I wasn’t killed,” he recalled.

Harry managed to get out of the shaft, but he was extremely angry with himself. Some other person might have broken down from the shock and the misery of that whole situation, but not Kenmore. “I was totally annoyed at myself for that utterly careless act of mine that day. I was so angry that, in my bloodied condition, I started to climb back up the stairs

of that building. I went up all those floors to the point from which I fell, picked up the lift there, and came back down, just to assert myself.” That was how he described that incident in which he fell down an elevator shaft! He was a strong personality—very forthright, very rude, very brusque in his speech, and very quick-tempered. It was the result of the long abuse he had suffered from his handicap, but with Baba he was very gentle.

Kenmore came to Bindra House often, as well as to Guruprasad. Whenever he visited Baba, Naja was the one to prepare meals for him, and he was a voracious eater. Naja would prepare kidneys and liver in a very special way, and Harry would gobble them all up! He was physically strong and had a booming voice, and he would say, “Naja, you are God’s cook, and I am going to kidnap you! This is the best liver and kidneys I have ever had in my life! I have been to the world’s best restaurants, but nothing could compare to this!”



Chapter Twenty-four:

1958

Early in 1958 Baba again arranged for *Sahavas* programs to be held at Meherabad. Once again they were divided by language with a Hindi-Marathi group and a Telegu-Gujarati group. This *Sahavas* was to be held in the month of February, 1958. This time it was hoped that for heaven's sake there should be no rains! The safe period was February. It was a very nice *Sahavas*, and Bal Natsu gives a very good description of it in his *Glimpses of the God Man*.

My group's dates fell during the period that included 25th February, which of course is Baba's actual birth date. By that time Baba had announced that His Birthday should always be on February 25th, abandoning the Parsi calendar, which is a lunar calendar that results in the dates varying year to year.

One thing I remember about that *Sahavas* was that Baba had to be carried around in the lift chair, often over long distances, because the pain in His fractured hip was always there. He wanted to go up the Hill, and we all followed the lift chair in which He was carried. When we were at the top of the Hill, He directed us to bow down at the crypt, which was not covered at that time.

Baba was brought in an open car, which was gaily decorated, to the place where the main activity would take place. The umbrella above Him was decorated, and there was a sort of canopy covered with flowers. Baba sat in the car with Kaka Baria next to him, and the car was driven around lower Meherabad and brought to the main *pandal* where the function was to be held. At that time Godavri Mai had been called from Sakori, and she sat in a chair that was kept beside Baba's chair under the *pandal* where the function was held. I remember that I was helping my cousin Sam, who had come back from his employment on the ship at that time. He had brought a new movie camera, and with that we got good footage of Baba.

As I've said, the *pandal* was at lower Meherabad where the present staff quarters are, that is, where Meheru Billimoria and Dadi and Jimmy Mistry used to stay, but those cottages were not there at the time, and there were also no trees there. Even now there is an open field behind that spot, and they do some plowing there. A big *pandal* was put up there, just for Baba's function. For sleeping and eating, large tents were rigged up.

I remember also that at that time Baba had called for a good *qawwal*. So we arranged for the same *qawwal* the butcher had recommended to me, the one who had sung for Baba at Bindra House back in 1943. Baba asked him to come to sing again at this program, and he did come and gave a *qawwali* performance.

One of the *ghazals* that this *qawwal* was singing was of Seemab, and Baba was very fond of Seemab and Jigar—those were His favorite poets as far as *qawwali* music was concerned. Baba asked him to sing some lines in which the poet—Seemab—says, “What should I tell you? What did I get from coming in contact with you?” The rest of the line goes something along the lines of, “In the form of a man I have found God Himself!”

That is just the opening couplet of that *ghazal*. It goes on to say, “I have found God by finding the footprint of my Beloved.” And there is a line just before the end to the effect that, “The whole life of Seemab has been one of sadness, separation and an absence of joy. What can I tell you that I have found by coming across such a heartless Beloved?” In other

words, he is complaining despite praising his Beloved, lamenting that his Beloved has no heart and that his whole life has been a tragedy. At that point Baba stopped the *qawwal* right in the midst of his singing, and He said, “I have liberated Seemab today.”

There was pin-drop silence in the whole crowd. The impact was not felt immediately, but then it sank in to the people, and there was a great shout of Baba’s “*Jai!*” It was a great occasion when Baba made that gesture, something I have an enduring memory of. To be liberated means what?! It was the end of his journey. Everyone was in great spirits, then Baba directed the singing to resume for some time, and that was the highlight of that program.

As I have said before, we Gujarati-speakers were grouped with the Telugu-speaking group. For Telugu Baba gestured in English, and the translation was in Telugu, but most Gujarati speakers were Parsis, and they tended to understand English. The Telugu speakers, from Andhra, were in the majority, and the food was prepared to their taste—they liked hot spicy food, morning, afternoon and evening.

Among the Parsis *rava* [semolina] is cooked in the morning, but the Parsi *rava* is sweet and very tasty. Those people from Andhra also cooked *rava*, but they did so with lots of spice, and all the Parsis would start to eat that *rava*, not knowing what they were in for. There were green pieces in it, which the Parsis thought were pistachios. When they started to eat, however, they came to realize those were fresh green chilies, and everyone was gasping from the searing heat they brought to the *rava*. But everyone finished their food, because Baba’s orders were that once you took it on your plate, you had to finish it. Everybody was groaning, and we couldn’t even drink the hot tea either, because it would activate the hot spices even more. The Andhraites call that *rava* dish “*upma*.” The food at the other meals was also hot with all different sorts of pickles and chilies, and by the end of the fourth or fifth day, most of us had dysentery—it was so bad that we were passing blood in

our stools, so that is the story of how we came to have a taste of Andhra food during that *Sahavas*.

Our common language, however, was English. Most of the Baba-lovers from Andhra knew quite a bit of English. Not the women so much—many of them knew only Telugu. This was a *Sahavas* for both men and women, with separate accommodations for each. Baba always insisted that the sleeping arrangements be separate, and that continues to this day. At Meherabad men never went nor looked beyond that wall separating the men's side from the women's side. That was part of Baba's discipline, right up to the end.

During the 1958 *Sahavas*, for the first time a very influential Baba-lover from Andhra arranged for special trains to bring the attendees to Meherabad and actually stop there, between the usual stations. All the lovers could alight there, and on returning they could join the train right there, with all their baggage, at the Meherabad crossing, which is not, of course, a station at all or a place at which any trains halt.

Sam took the film footage of the departure of those Baba-lovers by train, footage which we now have. In that film the train arrives, halts there, and there is Baba's multi-colored flag flying on the railway engine. Then one sees all those people climbing up into various carriages with all their luggage, and then Baba came down in the car with the women from Upper Meherabad. He got out at the point where we cross the railway line when walking from Lower Meherabad to the *Samadhi*. On the hillside there was a place where Baba stood and waved farewell to the crowd. As the train was leaving, all the people on it were waving their hands, hundreds of hands waving at the same time. Baba looked so resplendent, and He was gesturing to them, "Carry My Love with you." That episode marked the end of the 1958 *Sahavas*.

Near the end of 1957 Baba came to Bindra House. At that time I remember Baba displayed a plaque that contained these words: "No discussions with Baba about personal matters, and Baba will not interfere

in personal matters.” Despite this, while Baba was at Bindra House, I remember that He told Banumasi (Sam’s mother) that He wanted Sam to get married to Roshan. Now this was a personal thing, and Eruch said, “Baba, why are You doing this? We have given this (instruction by way of the plaque).”

Baba said, “No, no, this is an exception.”

“She’s a nice girl, I like her,” Baba told Sam’s mother. “I would like Sam to get married to her.”

“I have no objection, Baba—whatever You say,” Banumasi responded.

Sam was consulted, and he was agreeable to it, again with the usual “Whatever You say, Baba.”

So Baba told them to fix a date in 1958, and He said, “Now, get married.” We fixed the date for 21st March, because the 21st is a big day for Zoroastrians, the New Year in Iran, and the holiday that celebrates the advent of spring (*Jamshedi Navroz*). My father was also taking an active part in getting all the preparations done. We were first thinking of having the ceremony at Akbar Press, like the earlier marriage of Meheru and Burjor Mehta, but Baba told us to have it in Poona, and He said that He would be there.

Baba then sent word that Dadi had to make preparations for Baba to stay in the Ganeshkhind cottage, not at Guruprasad. The wedding date was earlier than Baba would usually come to Poona for His summer stay. By that time Dadi had been promoted to the Superintendent, so he had gotten the biggest cottage there, and Baba came for a few days to stay there. Baba also sent Eruch to attend the wedding.

The marriage was held at the Sir J.J. Agiary (fire-temple) near Dastur Meher Road, which is where Baba House is located. Many Baba-lovers from Poona were invited. The majority of the crowd were Baba-lovers, and they all gathered around Eruch, asking him questions. Eruch said, “Even this little outing that Baba gave me was all finished (owing to the press of Baba-lovers wanting to hear news about Baba from him). There is no such thing as an outing.” A big crowd had come for the grand

function. We all worked very hard, and by the end of the ceremony we were all quite exhausted.

Baba wanted a *qawwali* program, and again the same *qawwal* I've described earlier—the one that our butcher had originally recommended—was brought there. His name was Bashir Qawwal, a young Muslim at that time, and he had a good voice—Baba liked it. Unfortunately, however, the program took place during the month of Ramzan (Ramadan). In that month Muslims keep fast, and they also don't even swallow their spit. Baba noticed that and mentioned it to the *qawwal*, who responded that he was keeping fast. Learning that, Baba didn't want him to exert too much, and the program was cut short, and Baba was a bit disappointed about that program.

After it was over Baba told Sam to go for a honeymoon with Roshan, so they went to Kashmir. Baba told Dadi and me that we were both quite tired, so our honeymoon was to come with Him to Mahabaleshwar and to stay there with Him for three or four days. Baba then proceeded to Mahabaleshwar from Poona after the end of the wedding.

In addition to Dadi and me, He also called Meherjee, Nariman, Jimmy Mistry and, I think, Sadashiv Patil. We were all to stay there for a few days. Baba made arrangements for us at Ripon Hotel, which belonged to one of Baba's lovers named Kohiyar Satarawala. It was quite close to where Baba was staying at Florence Hall—Kohiyar had managed to secure Florence Hall for Baba's use.

I remember that during that time Baba was working in another room with Kaikobad on the day we arrived. They were closeted, and Baba was bowing down to Kaikobad several thousand times while Kaikobad repeated some name of God. We all were sitting quietly there until Baba came out and met us. When Baba came from the session with Kaikobad, He looked tired, but He washed His face and hands, and then He looked fresh. He had obviously worked very strenuously.

Baba then sent us back to the hotel to rest, telling us to come back the next day and that we would have a nice time together.

We settled down at Ripon Hotel. It was not a very good place, actually; although the hotel was very good, it was in a state of disrepair because it was too big for Kohiyar to handle. The food was passable vegetarian fare, but we were nicely settled. The next day we went to Florence Hall, and Baba asked us to sit in the big dining hall where He was seated on a sofa chair. We all sat around Him. He asked how we had slept, how our health was, “Did you eat well?”—the usual questions. When Jimmy’s turn came, he said, “Yes, Baba, everything is nice, but the food is all grass.”

Baba rejoined, “Hmmm, nice! Sometimes grass is good for the system. Eat the food. It will be good for your health.” We all laughed at that passing remark. Then Baba said, “Right, now you all are in Mahabaleshwar. You know, of course, that Mahabaleshwar is a hill station, and people come here for sightseeing. I give you a choice. Do you want to go sightseeing, or would you prefer staying with Me the whole day, and we’ll have card games and other good fun?”

Of course we voted unanimously for the latter. “We don’t care for sightseeing, Baba.”

So from morning to evening we played card games of La Risque and had quite a lot of fun. How the day would just slip by, it was really surprising. At the end of it everybody was fagged out and tired, and we were sent back to Ripon. That evening all of us conspired and said, “This food is rather insipid. We’d rather go out and eat somewhere.” But I said, remembering Baba’s remark earlier, “Baba would like us to eat at Ripon, you know.”

The others said, “Baba just said that in conversation. He didn’t give us any order to that effect.”

I insisted, “But I think He mentioned that we should eat here.”

“No, no, let’s go out, and we’ll have a good time at some restaurant.” So we all went out to a good restaurant called Silverene, which was famous for very good non-vegetarian food. We had a very nice party there—chicken, meat, meat curry—and we ate quite a lot and enjoyed ourselves.

Afterwards we went back to the Ripon, had a good night's rest, and the next morning we went back to Florence Hall to be with Baba.

Immediately He lined us all up, and He asked me, "First thing, what did you eat last night?"

"Chicken, Baba."

"What?" It was as if He didn't believe His ears. "They don't sell chicken at Ripon. How did you eat chicken?"

Then I had to tell the whole story, and Baba was upset. "I had ordered you all to eat at Ripon. How did you end up going out?" We all looked a little like naughty schoolchildren. Then Baba said, "You shouldn't have done that. However casually I said it, still I had expressed My wish that you should eat at the Ripon, and you went out, and that was not good for you all. Anyway, I forgive you, but now hereafter see that you all don't go out anywhere. Eat only at Ripon. But now let's get to playing cards."

Now all of us who had gone out to eat were on one side in the card game. Baba was on the other side, and, I remember, Kohiyar was on Baba's side. Our side started winning for a few games, but thereafter it was a series of losses for us, one game after another, and each time we had to rub our noses before Baba, and Baba would say, "That chicken you ate needs to be digested. This is good exercise for you! Serves you right—remember the chicken and rub your noses."

So the whole day we were made to remember that we had eaten chicken despite Baba's hinted instructions to the contrary. And usually, I must say, Baba never liked us to eat chicken, especially not to have the chicken slaughtered only for us. For a long time Baba-lovers in general in India did not eat chicken. To have an animal specially slaughtered for you gives you all of its sanskaras, and that is not good. If it's already slaughtered (like in a restaurant where you have ordered a chicken dish), then it's not so bad.

For certain people there were and are life-long orders not to eat chicken. Many people, especially the Pakistani group and Janghu Sukhadwalla

(the son-in-law of Baba's brother Beheram) have been ordered not to eat chicken. Beef or mutton? Generally Baba advised vegetarian food. It's simpler, more wholesome and more nourishing. Now we find a general trend in the world of returning to simpler foods.

In the early days our family was under strict orders. We were to eat mostly vegetarian food, and no eggs also, for many years. Later on Baba relaxed that order.

So back to the story about the Mahabaleshwar visit. That whole day passed off as a sort of mini-repentance for having broken Baba's order, or at least having ignored His stated preference. We never ventured out after that, keeping to the Ripon Hotel and whatever food they supplied us.

The Florence Hall, or whatever bungalow it was that Baba stayed at, was located on the edge of a cliff, and there was a big valley lying below that cliff. The bungalow had all glass panes facing that valley—the main room was beautiful, and we could get a clear view of the expanse that stretched outside. On the other side of the valley lies the Pratapgarh Fort, the headquarters of Shivaji during his time, his “capital” you could say. He conducted all his operations from Pratapgarh—it was impregnable. We could see it across the valley from where we were—it was a mile or so as the crow flies, but to go there one would have to climb down four thousand feet of mountain, go through the valley and then start climbing up again, making for quite a journey.

A few months earlier, in November of 1957, Nehru had come to inaugurate Shivaji's statue that had been erected there. Baba remembered Nehru, who Baba said was a real “karma yogi.” He was very selfless, although the people around him were very selfish and brought him into disrepute. But his own integrity was always there, and Baba said that India was fortunate to have such a leader at that time. Nehru always had a vision of a united India with harmony everywhere, and at that time there was a lot of dissension and squabbling about having separate states.

Baba happened to mention how when Nehru came for the inauguration, a local leader, by the name of Maharishi Karve, asked him for a separate

Maharashtra state. Something was mentioned about Nehru feeling very dejected about it. Baba said, “What could poor Nehru do?” He was sympathizing with Nehru and remembering him, so to speak, from a distance. From where we were we could see that quite a crowd had gathered, so there must have been some ceremony around the statue on that day which prompted all this discussion.

About five years earlier Baba had seen Nehru at a cricket match in Delhi, a match between the President Radhakrishnan’s eleven and Prime Minister Nehru’s eleven. Baba went to see that match, so what significance it must have had that He attended! Radhakrishnan had also heard about Baba. In fact, Wing Commander Sakhare and his wife had an audience with Radhakrishnan, and at that time Radhakrishnan made Mona Sakhare recite Baba’s *arti*. He was a great scholar, Radhakrishnan.


So that was our stay at Mahabaleshwar, three or four days of complete relaxation and fun with Baba. Then Baba sent us back, and we all went back to our respective places. I think Ramjoo was also there, and Kishan Singh might have been there too, I’m not so sure.

Baba continued to stay at Mahabaleshwar, but He told me to get Guruprasad ready because He wanted to come back to Poona and stay there. Baba was making preparations for His last tour to the West in this Incarnation. I was busy getting permission from the Maharani, and it was taken for granted that Guruprasad would be available. I remember that Baba came to Guruprasad from Mahabaleshwar via Meherazad, and then from there He came to Poona. He stayed at Guruprasad for a few days and then left directly from there for Bombay en route to the West.



Chapter Twenty-five:

Return from the West

fter returning in June, 1958, from His trip to the West, I think Baba again went to Ganeshkhind, staying there for a few days before proceeding to Meherazad. The 1958 tour of the West was originally meant to be a month or two in duration, but Baba suddenly trimmed it down to just fifteen days. He said He had great work that had to be done in India, so the tour around the world was shortened. It was a whirlwind tour, and this time there were replacements in those who accompanied Him. Instead of Meherjee, Baba took Nariman. And Nilu had died, so in place of him, Donkin was taken on the tour. Towards the end of summer Baba left Ganeshkhind and returned to Meherazad. He remained in India thereafter and did not travel anywhere else in the years to come.

As I have mentioned, Baba said that He had a lot of work to do. Again, I am not certain of the date, but I think maybe on July 9th of 1958, Baba held a meeting in the Mandali Hall at Lower Meherabad with a few of us from Poona and Bombay. He said that He had a very deep period of Universal Work to be performed, and He let on that He was entering a very crucial phase of seclusion that would be very strict and very important, and that it was, in short, a critical time.

To each one of us Baba gave certain orders, such as to repeat the Name of God, or to refrain from any sort of undesirable activities—Baba gave these orders to us while we were there. They were in Bhau’s handwriting, and Baba took each one’s orders and personally gave them into our hands with the words, “*Khara dil thi karjo*,” which meant “Follow what is written here wholeheartedly. It is a very critical time,” Baba said.

Baba gave a choice to Gadekar that if he wanted to do so, he could come to stay at Meherazad during that time, but that he should realize that Baba would be in very strict seclusion throughout the time. Baba told Gadekar, “You can come and stay for a month here, but My conditions for your doing so are very strict. You should not cause any disturbance to Me whatsoever. The slightest error on your part, and I will send you back.”

Baba was so stern and severe in that meeting that poor Gadekar was trembling. We were all sent back home afterwards, and Gadekar was to report back to Baba whether he would come to stay at Meherazad or not. The decision would depend on him only. Once he decided, he couldn’t leave Meherazad for any reason until the end of the stay, because Baba had prohibited people from both coming and going.

Gadekar was in a dilemma, and he came to Bindra House and started telling my mother, “Gaimai, I am so scared, I don’t know what to do. This is my problem—whether I’ll be able to please Baba there, and what will happen if I don’t? I so much love to stay near Him, but I’m worried sick over this decision!”

My mother said to him, “Gadekar, why do you worry? Just take Baba’s Name and write ‘Yes’! He will look after you. Don’t worry!” He absolutely brightened up after that, saying “Is that so? But I really felt very scared when Baba said all that!”

Mumma replied, “This is the way Baba always does it. He will look after you. You don’t worry. You just go through it and depend upon Him.”

Gadekar jumped with joy, saying “Those words are so consoling. I’m going to write right now, right here, to tell Baba that I am coming!”

I think that it was at about this time that Baba instructed Eruch to go away from Him and to stay in Meherabad for the first time ever. Before that Eruch had never left Baba's side from the time when he first came to serve Him. Eruch had to stay in Meherabad for forty days. Baba had given him certain orders, and he had to fast for forty days, from 14th July to 22nd August. He, and some others, were to have only a *seer-and-a-half*—a *seer* is equal to a little over a liter—of milk during the day, and as much water as they needed to drink. I don't remember whether it was the same year or not; I'm fuzzy about the dates. Baba took Eruch to Meherabad in the car, dropped him there, and then came back to Meherazad.

Baba said that although it would be very difficult for Him to be at Meherazad without Eruch as His companion, to help Him interpret and all that, He had certain work to do there, and so He had to keep Eruch at Meherabad for the duration of that work. At the end of the period Baba went back to Meherabad to pick Eruch up, and ceremoniously he was brought back to Meherazad. It was a very important time for Baba's work.

While Eruch was away Gadekar came to Meherazad. He had a really happy stay with Baba then. It turned out that his visit took place just a few months before he died. Later on Baba would mention very humorously how innocent Gadekar was. He had never stayed in Meherazad previously, so he didn't know the routine or how to do even simple things. So he would ask the *mandali*, "Should I go and have a bath?" For every little thing he would ask people around him, and as a result he became a bit of a nuisance. That amused Baba, and He recounted all of Gadekar's little questions and idiosyncrasies to us. Gadekar was an unparalleled person in this way, humble and simple.

As I previously mentioned, Gadekar was instrumental in procuring Guruprasad for Baba. He was a stalwart of the Poona group and brought many people to Baba, not only in Poona but elsewhere. At the end of 1958 Baba came to Guruprasad for a brief stay. I think it was at this time that Baba arranged for Digambar, Gadekar's son, to go abroad to

study. Digambar was hesitant about going because he was worried about his father, but Baba told him, “You go and look after your studies, and I will look after your father.”



Chapter Twenty-six:

1959

Gadekar's health continued to deteriorate, and he was diagnosed with Hodgkin's disease early in 1959. At that time there was no cure for the disease. Gadekar wrote Baba, asking to be cured so that he could continue to serve Baba. Baba wrote back to the effect that he had done enough, and it was now time for his wife and family to look after him. Not long after that Gadekar and his wife, Gunatai, took a taxi to Meherazad to see Baba. Gadekar wept before Baba because he felt that he could no longer be of service as his diagnosis was so dire. Baba again told him that he had done enough service for Him. "I am well pleased," Baba said. "From now on just think of Me and repeat My Name. Don't worry—you will soon be all right!"

Comforted, Gadekar embraced Baba. After he left the Hall Baba told Gunatai to look after him. When they got into the taxi to leave, Baba had all the *mandali* come out and shout three times, "*Bhakt Shiromani Gadekar Maharaj ki Jai!*" as the taxi pulled away. Loosely translated this means "The crown jewel among My devotees, Gadekar Maharaj *ki Jai!*"

It is interesting to remember that Gadekar's early connection with Baba was through his father, who was with Baba in the very early days. When Baba first opened the ashram in Meherabad, Gadekar's father was the

cobbler of Arangaon village. I think he was local, either from Arangaon or, more probably, from one of the poorer sections of the city of Ahmednagar. After meeting and falling in love with Baba, he stitched all the shoes and *chappals* for the boys and the ashramites. His crowning achievement was his stitching the *chappals* for Baba that He wore for many years. They are the relics that are displayed along with Baba's *kamli* coat in the museum on Meherabad Hill.

The *chappals* were made all with leather—even the stitches were made from cow hide. With each stitch he made, Gadekar's father repeated the Lord's Name, and he had great love for Baba. Possibly because of that devotion, or perhaps for some connection he had, Baba wore the sandals almost constantly, and whenever they got worn out, He had them patched up. Now there are so many patches that hardly any of the original sandals is still visible.

Baba sent this cobbler's son, Gadekar, for higher studies, and He even saw to it that he went to England to get his post graduate degrees, and he did very well. When he returned to India he got a very high government post, and gradually Gadekar rose to the position of Director of Education and Welfare of the Backward Classes for the whole of Maharashtra State.

In this governmental position Gadekar used to tour all around Maharashtra to see how the schools were being maintained. Those were municipally run schools aided by the government. As someone from the cobbler (*Mochi*) caste, Gadekar was considered lower caste by high-caste Hindus. He rose from those humble beginnings to great heights, but the beauty of his character was that he never forgot his humble origins.

There was no show in his humility—it was so completely natural to him. I remember that he had a *peon* [clerk] in his office whose name was Vitthal. That name reminded Gadekar of one of the names of God—in other words, one of the names of Baba. So Gadekar treated his Vitthal with great respect and used to put his arm around his shoulders. That is the sort of thing that a high-ranking officer in government service would normally never do with a *peon*.

Gadekar was a very good person, and his love for Baba was unbounded. I was told about the following incident that took place when he was the Director of Education and had to go on tour. He had gone to a small village in the district of Sholapur, and when he got there he found that the schoolmaster had locked up the school and gone off without telling the authorities about it. Gadekar saw all this during his visit and then returned to his office.

In the meantime the schoolmaster returned to his post. He was told that Gadekar had visited and that he was now in serious trouble and might even be dismissed for failing in his duty. He became very fearful, and he went to one of his friends and said, “Now what should I do?”

His friend happened to know about Gadekar’s connection with Baba and how much he loved Baba, so he told the schoolmaster, “There is only one way you can wangle yourself out of this situation. What you should do is that when Gadekar goes to his office from his residence, you be there on the roadside. When Gadekar’s *tonga* passes by, say ‘*Jai Baba!*’ to him. If you do that, I am sure he will try to overlook what you have done.”

“Certainly, I will try to do that because if he dismisses me, I will surely starve!” The schoolmaster was a poor person. At that time the pay scales were very low for primary school teachers in villages, and it was very hard to get some other job if you had lost your previous one.

So when Gadekar passed by, the teacher shouted out Baba’s “*Jai!*” and Gadekar stopped the *tonga* and got down. “Come here, come here,” Gadekar called. “You know of Avatar Meher Baba?”

Before the man could say anything, Gadekar embraced him on the roadside, so happy that this man knew about Baba in this forlorn place. Gadekar took him to his office, where everybody was standing at attention to welcome Gadekar. Gadekar took the man by hand, and he led him inside. He spent the whole time talking to him about Baba and nothing about what had happened. Rather than get into trouble, the schoolmaster heard so much from Gadekar that he began to feel some sort of attraction for Baba!

After that Gadekar pardoned the schoolmaster's lapse in his duty at the school, explaining to him that if he ever did that again, it would get Gadekar himself into trouble. Thereafter that man became a very ardent Baba-lover! In the attempt to devise a ploy to escape his predicament, he got himself hooked! That is how some people come to Baba. If you try to fool others in Baba's Name, you yourself get trapped! That is the efficacy of the Lord's Name.

Gadekar seemed to have been played for a fool, but in the end he brought a soul to Baba, which is a very great thing. There are numerous instances in which Gadekar would just forgive someone for Baba's sake. His wife, Gunatai, wasn't as devoted to Baba. She was, however, in charge of the finances. On every payday she would go to his office and take away his pay packet. Out of that she would give him a small daily allowance for his travel and other expenditures. If he needed more money to go visit Baba, she would make him beg her on his hands and knees for it. Baba knew this and didn't like it, even commenting on it to Gadekar, but Gadekar was so humble and so totally devoted to Baba that he didn't mind doing all that as long as she allowed him to go be with his Beloved Lord.

As I've already described earlier, Gadekar did commit a serious mistake the afternoon of the second automobile accident—rushing to Baba's car when he had spotted Him at the cricket match displeased Baba very much. That's why Baba always told us that greater than love is obedience. So one has to very be careful about Baba's orders in everything one does.

Gadekar's son, Digambar, and his daughter, Nalini grew up and became well established. The daughter became a well-known gynecologist and ran her own maternity hospital in Bombay. The son held a high position in Baroda University—I think he was a Professor of Geology. Being in Baroda, Digambar would also visit Shantadevi, the Maharani there, often, and she always received him very warmly. He was later deputed to Lucknow to establish a university there, and he was one of the founding faculty members of Lucknow University, serving as the Vice-Chancellor

of that institution from its inception. Both brother and sister, Gadekar's children, love Baba and are devoted to Him.

In early 1959 Gadekar was in a very bad state of health. He was in his final days, and, because of the Hodgkin's disease, which entails a cancerous growth of the glands, his neck had swollen to such an extent that his condition was very bad and he was in a lot of pain.

When Baba passed through Poona on his way from Meherazad to Bombay in early March of that year, He stopped for lunch at Bindra House, but when I mentioned Gadekar's condition to Him, Baba decided to skip lunch and said, "I must go to see Gadekar."

So Baba took Eruch and one or two other *mandali* and went to his place. Gadekar, from what I gathered later, was overjoyed to see Baba at that time. By chance it happened to be Mahashivratri, which is an especially auspicious day for followers of Shiva. Baba said to Gadekar, "Today is Mahashivratri, and Shiva has come in person to you, and so you are very fortunate indeed!" Baba embraced him, and He said, "Now, stop worrying about anything. Everything will be all right—just think of Me. Take My Name now day and night, and soon all will be well." It seems that after Baba met him, all his pain disappeared, and during his last few days he was in relative comfort. He was very happy and passed away peacefully while Baba was still in Bombay.

Although there were some failings with each of Baba's dear ones, they all had certain beautiful and superb characteristics. Each of Baba's *mandali* was like that, and when Gadekar died, Baba sent a telegram that *Bhakt Shiromani* ("The crown jewel among the lovers") Gadekar has come to Him.

Before coming to Poona in early 1959, Baba had sent word for me to get Guruprasad ready. The Maharani had agreed to all of Baba's conditions about its use, which is why Bal Natu had been sent a few months earlier to see her. Still the usual telegram was sent to the Maharani. Those

formalities continued for two or three more years, and thereafter there was not any need even to ask permission. Any time that Baba so desired, Guruprasad was at His disposal. Preparations were made, as before, for the summer stay that year. Baba had created a sort of motto for the shift from Meherazad to Guruprasad: when the month of March would arrive He would say, "In March we march to Guruprasad!"

While all this was going on, Sam and Roshan had a baby girl, Mehera, following their marriage the year before. Roshan recalls that after the marriage Baba had been very keen that she get pregnant soon. He would always gesture His query, asking her this by passing His hand over His stomach as if it were protruding, the sign for a pregnant woman. Finally, before He went to the West in 1958, He told her that by the time He returned she should be expecting. "Baba, that is in Your hands," she told Him. Roshan says that He then told her to keep trying and He would do the rest.

So it was that when Baba returned, Roshan was expecting. The child was later named Mehera by Baba. She was born on the 21st of February, 1959, just before Baba was to arrive. We sent a telegram to Baba, "Girl child born to Sam and Roshan. What name should the child be given?" Baba sent a reply to name the child "Mehera."

After Roshan's delivery she and Mehera were brought to Bindra House and kept there because it was a bigger place and because Ganeshkhind was too far out of the way, situated as it was on the outskirts of the city. When Baba came to Guruprasad He was eager to see the baby. He visited Bindra House almost daily, saw the child and played with her in His lap. In the months of March, April and May, when Baba would come, it was hot so that there would be sherbet [sweet lime, sugar and a little salt] served to Him and all His attending *mandali*.

Baba usually arrived at Bindra House around 1:30 p.m., at the peak of the daily heat when it would be blazing hot outdoors. Temperatures could be as high as 120F out in the open. The *mandali* accompanied Baba, and after the ten-minute car ride from Guruprasad to Bindra House, they

were all drenched in perspiration. During those visits Baba said, "I'm not coming to see you all, I am coming to see Baby Mehera." That was the name for her, to distinguish her from His Mehera.

I remember how we would keep cold sherbet ready, and Baba would distribute it to the *mandali*, then dip His little finger in it and make Baby Mehera suck on His finger, and she enjoyed it. Francis happened to be there and once remarked in his Australian accent, "What a lucky bye-bee!" and then he said to Rano, "Rano, why don't you die soon, and then you will be re-born and will get this same treatment from Baba?" To which Rano replied, "Why don't you die first?"

My father took a great fancy to the little child. He thought it was his own daughter, Meheru, who had been born again. Baba then said, "No, no, it's not her." He told us that Baby Mehera was someone else, "who was very close to Me and has come again, and I have her in My bosom again, near Me. She is one of My old disciples."

On one occasion Baba sent Goher to check on the child's health. Goher said, "Baba, it's time that we should pierce the ears of the child."

Baba said, "But it will hurt the child so much!" He always appeared to be so anxious about every little thing like that in daily life.

Goher said, "No, Baba, it's just a matter of putting one tiny little pin through some flesh."

Baba said, "No, wait, let Me come, and as you do it I'll hold the child." Baba had Baby Mehera in his lap for the procedure, and He told Goher not to do it too quickly, and He fussed about it just as if He were a grandparent.

Goher said that she had never felt so nervous in her life. Although she had pierced so many children's ears, Baba with His concern made her shake, as it were. It turned out that Mehera started yelling loudly at the pain of the first pin prick, and as Goher was going to do the other ear Baba said, "No, no, that's enough. You have caused too much suffering to the little one already, and I can't bear to see it."

Mind you, before Him is the suffering of the whole world! This is how it is with Baba—we could see the concern He felt for that little child. It was as if He Himself were undergoing the pains of the little baby.

Sometime later, on Baba's instructions, Goher came back and quietly pierced the other ear of the child. It was much easier for her to do it that way, and it took only a few minutes. Baba could be so very protective and so tender whenever a situation warranted it.

That was the beginning of Baby Mehera's life—it was a wonderful beginning, and she is very fortunate to have enjoyed such special contact with Baba. She was a very sharp, intelligent child, so much so that at hardly two-and-a-half years of age she memorized and could recite the entire Parvardigar Prayer. At the opening of the Poona Centre in 1964, when she was five years old, the prayers had to be done, and for that occasion she stood up, a microphone in front of her, and she said the prayers loudly into it. Baba was so happy. "See how clever and intelligent she is, without missing a word!"

When Mehera was of an age to be entered into school, Roshan took her to the convent at which Mehera and Mani had studied in their childhood in Poona, the Convent of Jesus and Mary. It's a very famous school there, much sought after by parents for their children and very centrally located. Roshan went there and asked, "Will you admit my child?"

The nun replied, "No, I'm sorry, the school is totally full, I cannot accommodate her."

Roshan pleaded with her to accept Baby Mehera. "My child is so bright—come on, Mehera, recite Baba's prayer to Mother." Mehera then recited the Master's Prayer, and the nun was flabbergasted at the way this child was repeating such big-sounding words so fluently. She said, "Whatever happens, I am going to get this child admitted to my school!" An extra bench and seat was put in the class, and she got admitted because of Baba's Parvardigar Prayer, into a Christian mission school, mind you!

Roshan and Baby Mehera, along with Banumasi, stayed in Bindra House for a while, and then they eventually shifted to Sam's bungalow in

Ganeshkhind for some time. Sam was off on the high seas owing to his work on the ships. Then Dolly, Mehera's sister, was born, and eventually, in 1964, I was able to get a place known as "Viloo House" for them very nearby Bindra House. Ever since that time they have lived in Viloo House, close by Baba House. Baba had told them that if they moved out of Bindra House, they could only move into a house that was contained within the triangle formed by Baba House, Bindra House and the nearby synagogue (*Lal Deval*). That's the story of Baby Mehera.

Baba's stay continued at Guruprasad. Rano and Najamai would come to Bindra House when Baba came to Guruprasad. After Baba settled in, they would assist my mother, Manu and my aunts Gulamasi and Banumasi with the preparation of the food for Baba and the *mandali*. It was four or five kilometers from Bindra House to Guruprasad, and when it was time to deliver the food, the boys would come with tiffin boxes on cycle, or sometimes a car would come to carry large pots of food if Baba had invited more people. Food was never cooked at Guruprasad until the last year, 1968. In later years, as the numbers increased, only Baba's food was sent from Bindra House. The *mandali*'s food would be sent by a lover named Jal Dorabjee. Jal had a catering business, but the food was cooked in his own house and sent from there to Guruprasad. Mother, Manu, and Naja were the principal chefs for Baba's food, but Banumasi and Roshan would come over and all would help. Still, a little sugar would be put in the *dal*!

Deshmukh always had the privilege to come to Guruprasad whenever he could, even when Baba was not giving *darshan*. When he had vacations he would come and stay with the *mandali* at Guruprasad, or wherever Baba happened to be at the time.

Baba once said, "Let's try to fool Deshmukh." It was April Fool's Day, and they dressed up a big rock in fancy paper with coverings on top of other coverings, and Baba said to Deshmukh, "I give you this as a present." Deshmukh took it, set it aside and looked at Baba.

Then Baba gave a sign to Eruch, who said, "Doctorji, wouldn't you like to see what Baba has given you?"

“No, I can see later.”

“No, no, you should open it now. Baba would like you to see it.” Deshmukh was persuaded to open it, and he opened one layer of the wrappings after another, and finally out came this big black rock!

Deshmukh kept a straight face throughout and said with genuine gratitude, “Oh, how blessed I am that Baba has given me such a present that will never deteriorate.” So he had his laugh in front of all of them as the joke backfired, and so it was true, because the stone is the ultimate thing, a most gross object, and Baba gave him a present that would never deteriorate. We were all stunned. Such was his caliber.

That same summer there was a selection of the players who would be sent to England to play cricket there. A pre-selection match was held, and the secretary, Mr. Bhawe, President of the Poona District Cricket Association, invited Baba to observe. We went to a place called Nehru Stadium in Poona, near Satara Road. The secretary gave us a place on top of the players’ pavilion, a room on the first floor that opened out onto the roof of the pavilion down below. Baba watched the match for quite a long time. It was a good match, and Baba liked to watch cricket.

When time came for the players to break, their tea was served in the adjacent room. Baba told us all to sit quietly, and we all eavesdropped on the conversations going on between the players as they had their tea. It was not that Baba wanted to hear, but that He didn’t want them to know that He was next door.

After the selection was made, the players were brought over to Guruprasad and presented to Baba. The whole team that was to go to England came for Baba’s *darshan*. That was the moment when Polly Umrigar and Nari Contractor were first introduced to Baba. They were great players in their time—Polly Umrigar was an all-rounder, good at both bowling and batting, and he really took India’s team on his shoulders. Nari Contractor was the newly appointed captain while Polly was the vice-captain. Ever since that meeting Polly and Nari were staunch Baba-lovers. Of the people from the team who came to see Baba, they were the two who held on to Him.

Polly was successfully leading the U.K. team, but there was some disagreement between him and the board that controls cricket in India. Polly was a bit outspoken about his views, which didn't sit very well with the controlling body, and to avoid further conflict Polly stepped down from his captaincy.

Nari had gained sufficient experience by then, and that's why the board thought fit to appoint him captain. Polly said that his services were still available despite his not being captain, and that he was prepared to play under Nari. In fact, Nari had established himself by then as one of the world's finest opening batsmen. He was a very stylish left-handed batsman, and left-handers were few and far between. Whenever a left-hander was discovered it would be a great asset to the team, because when they batted, it was a great nuisance for the fielding team.

A couple of years later, in 1962 when Nari was captain, the team again visited Baba. This time there was going to be another tour of the West Indies, where people are known for their very lively cricket. Nari and Polly were there with Baba, and I think the rest of the team had also come. It seems Nari had some sort of premonition that something would go badly, and he asked, "Baba, let Your *Nazar* be on me and my side."

Baba said, "Have no worry. My *Nazar* is on you." It proved to be so, though it was a disastrous tour for the Indians. The Indian team had never faced such a hostile environment. Huge, strapping bowlers with nearly 100 mph bowling speeds routed the Indians.

Amongst the West Indians was a bowler who did not keep his elbow straight when he threw the ball, which is illegal in cricket. He was not a bowler but a thrower of the ball. Some bowlers have that slight throwing action, which only a skilled umpire can detect. Many times Polly would tell Nari to complain to the umpire that the ball is being thrown at him, but Nari would say, "No, let it be."

In those times the batsmen were not protected with helmets, and it was very dangerous to face a hard-throwing bowler. The West Indian team had a fast bowler, Griffith, who was throwing the ball, and the

umpires were not objecting, because to get a “throwing” ruling you had to ask for it.

One delivery came crashing onto Nari’s skull and he was knocked out. He had to be carried off the field, and later doctors diagnosed a fracture of the skull and subsequent concussion, and a blood clot had formed. Polly was all the while by his side, but the medical care there was not very good and there was no decent hospital nearby. Polly and the manager of the team somehow contrived to get him to a big city in the West Indies—maybe Barbados—and the doctor there said, “It is a miracle that he is still alive. But you have come just in time.” So it seems Baba’s *Nazar* was indeed on him.

The doctors performed a very difficult operation on Nari, but the real miracle was that he came through the entire process and emerged absolutely normal. Though he had sustained a serious injury and part of his skull had to be removed and a metal plate put in place, he had no disability. He returned to cricket and played again, but he lost his original confidence, and thereafter it was a steady decline until he eventually gave it up. As time went on the game became more technical and more scientific, so it passed him by. And it was also time for Polly to move on.

Polly also had a problem. From a very young age Polly’s son Fali had a heart defect, which Polly mentioned to Baba. The little boy would want to play, but with every slight exertion he would become breathless and turn blue. Eventually he was diagnosed with a hole in his heart. There was no surgery to correct that defect in India at the time, and so he had to be taken to the U.K. for surgery. Again Polly brought him to Baba, and He told Polly that his son would be absolutely all right and that His *Nazar* would be on the boy. The boy had a successful operation, and he grew up to be a fine, healthy young man. Later he emigrated to Australia where he settled down. He even tried to be a cricketer, but I don’t think he was very successful.

Polly stayed in cricket to the end of his life, but he was on the Cricket Board and became more of an administrator in his later years. He and his wife, Dinoo, would attend cricket matches, and both often came to

Meherabad and stayed at the Pilgrim Center. They and their daughter, Shireen, would often be there for *Amartithi*. Both Polly and Dinoo have now gone to Baba. Professional sports can sometimes be corrupted by money and power, but the failures in professional sports are all Baba's ways of bringing things to a head in every department of life.

One feature of Baba's stay at Guruprasad that summer was our going to see movies with Him. Baba would often accompany us to see good films, mainly comic ones like Laurel and Hardy or Charlie Chaplin, which He liked. I remember seeing a film called *Saps at Sea* with Laurel and Hardy. It was a very comic movie playing at the West End Theater. We also saw one of the nature films by Walt Disney called *The African Lion*. We would always go to the afternoon matinee shows in the hot season. For Baba, 2:00 p.m. was the time for outings. There would be a heat haze over the roads and car bonnets, but Baba enjoyed the heat!

The theater showing *The African Lion* was an old ramshackle place with a tin roof, no ventilation, and no fans running once the picture started, to save on electricity! It was called Limaye Cinema and is now long gone. It was like an oven inside, and we thought Baba would get up halfway through and that would get us out of the agony of the stifling heat, but Baba sat through the whole length of the movie. It was, at least, a good picture.

Of course Baba saw many Indian films, like those about Tukaram and others. I think He must have seen *Tansen*, which is about the life of a great musician in the court of Akbar. In the 1960s Baba went to movies only occasionally, and they were usually English movies.

That year Baba sent us to lots of films, even crazy ones—I don't know why. It must have had to do with some work Baba was doing. Baba Himself wouldn't go, but sometimes He would want a report. He especially wanted us to see the Charlie Chaplin film *Limelight*, which had not been released for Indian exhibition for many years.

Limelight was Charlie Chaplin's last movie, a classic. It was his only talking movie, beautiful, really. It seemed as though Charlie Chaplin

might have read Baba's books, because there was so much talk about reincarnation and related things, and Baba wanted us to see it.

The next day we had to give our comments, and He asked me what scene I liked most. I remember telling him, "Baba, there was a scene about a ballerina who was crippled in an accident in which she fell, and her career was suddenly stopped short. She recovered, but every time she tried to perform, she had a psychological barrier and would just collapse. She was in dire straits, hungry on the streets, and as usual Charlie was the one who had sympathy for such downtrodden people. He brought her in, he looked after her, made her whole again, and in this way she got back on her feet.

"There was a big performance coming up, and she was all prepared for it, but as she was about to go on the stage, she had another psychological breakdown and collapsed. Charlie struts up to her and gives her a tight slap across the face. The sheer shock was so great that she got up, got on the stage, and gave a terrific performance. Charlie is so pleased to see her do it that he goes backstage and gives thanks to the Divine—in case somebody is there—because he was an atheist." I said to Baba that that scene was beautiful, and Baba liked the scene being described to Him.

Chaplin was a perfectionist, and he required many re-takes before he was convinced that every frame was perfect. In most of his movies he was the producer, director, actor, writer and musician. I don't know how he did it, but he was a genius and Baba's favorite. Very comic, too, no question about it.

One day Rano fell very ill at Bindra House. She had diarrhea and vomiting—she couldn't retain anything—and we called the local doctors to treat her. At that time my father was also not in good health. Normally my father's regimen was very clock-like. At 4:00 a.m. his day would begin, with loud prayers early in the morning. Then, after an early breakfast he would be off for his morning exercise, followed by visits to his friends, the old-time pensioners. He would be back home by 11:00 a.m. or so, have a quick lunch, and afterwards he would always nap for

an hour or so. At 2:00 p.m. he was out on the road again, in spite of whatever the weather might be—heat, rain, shine, anything. By 6:00 or 7:00 in the evening he would be back, and he would retire early.

For several days, however, we noticed that he was not in great health, and he asked me to get some medicines for him. The doctor came and examined him, but he couldn't find anything particular that was wrong with him. Papa complained of heaviness in his chest, so I said let's get a cardiogram done, but he thought it would be a waste of money. "Don't do that. I'll be depriving you people of that much money."

I said, "Papa, what is this you are saying?"

Papa rejoined, "No, no, son, my time is now very near."

I said, "Papa, you have been talking like this for many years now. You might as well stop saying such things."

"No, no, you people don't take me seriously, but I tell you I am not feeling well now." He had been saying this sort of thing for some days at this point. He had stopped going out and mainly just lay in bed, which was most unusual for him. The day when Rano took ill, he was very concerned about her. He kept telling me, "What will happen if something happens to her? It will be very difficult, a foreigner dying in India...."

That evening Baba came over, and Papa was quietly seated on his chair in his room. When Baba came, Papa didn't come out to see Baba in the hall or do anything at all to greet Him. He anticipated that Baba would come to see him. Indeed, Baba did go to his room and saw Papa there. I remember that Baba took a glass of sherbet into the room with Him and told Papa, "Now, take this."

Papa said, "Baba, I am feeling nervous about Rano. Being a foreigner, suppose something happens to her—there will be a lot of queries and problems."

Baba told him, "Light a match to all that!" meaning, "Quit worrying—now set fire to those thoughts!" Baba continued, "Don't think about anything. What you should do is just repeat My Name—this is the time

for you to stop worrying about anything else, just repeat My Name and everything will be fine.”

Papa was pacified, and he drank the sherbet that Baba had given him, and then Baba left. Baba saw Rano and consoled her, told her not to worry, but in the night her condition became very serious and she was vomiting constantly. I got up and tried to get hold of a doctor in the middle of the night. It was very difficult, but somehow I got a doctor to come. The doctor, whose name was Dr. Rose Fonseca, lived three doors down from Bindra House, in a small cottage which was also her hospital and clinic, and she came and examined Rano and gave her something, but the vomiting continued all night long, and we were all very distressed that night.

The next day Baba again came early in the morning, and Manu told Baba, “Baba, she’s on the point of passing away now, so it’s up to You.”

Baba said, “Come. Bring Me a glass of sherbet.” Baba called for a big glass, and He went to Rano’s room, which was on the opposite side of the veranda from Papa’s room. She had become so frail and weak that she could barely open her eyes. She couldn’t speak and she was on the point of collapse. Baba took a sip from the glass and then poured a teaspoon of the sherbet into her mouth. He said, “Look, I am giving you this sherbet. Try to retain it.” She had not been able to retain anything, and that was causing severe dehydration.

Manu held her mouth, and Baba poured it in, and it almost came out but she was able to retain it. Baba poured a few more teaspoons-full and said, “That’s nice. Now that she has retained this, she’ll take a turn for the better. Have no fear.” Baba told Manu to feed her a teaspoon of the sherbet every five to ten minutes, and Baba also dipped his hand in the sherbet. Subsequently Rano began to retain the fluid, and she did indeed get over her illness.

Baba then went to Papa, who was still very nervous. Baba came in the evening again, and at that time He gave sherbet to Papa. He told Papa to forget everything and said, “You don’t worry about Rano. Leave that

to Me. You just worry about thinking about Me now. This is the time for you to do that.” Papa remained quiet and had the sherbet.

On that morning before He left Bindra House, Baba told me, “Tonight you have to go to bed at 10:00 p.m. because you had a very restless night last night and you will spoil your health if you don’t get sufficient rest. This is My order to you.”

I said, “Yes, Baba.”

Then, that afternoon while I was at work, Baba again paid a visit to Bindra House, and afterwards He came over to my office. His car was outside, and Baba sent someone in to call me. I went to Baba, and all the office people gathered there and had a sight of Baba. Baba told me, “Do you remember that tonight at 10:00 p.m. you must go to bed? I have come to remind you about this.”

I said, “Yes, Baba, I will do that,” and Baba drove off, again making the sign for ten as the car was going away.

In the evening Baba came again and gave sherbet to Papa, and again He reminded me that I must be in bed at 10:00. Papa was resting in bed, and he kept calling me from time to time because he was feeling very restless. At about nine Baba sent Eruch and Dr. Goher to check on Papa. Dr. Goher examined Papa’s heart and blood pressure, and she found it all right, but Papa still seemed restless. Eruch gave him a little soup, and they both went back to Guruprasad.

At about five minutes before 10:00 p.m. I took my pillow and went outside and lay down. It was hot during those days so I was sleeping on the veranda. Just then Papa shouted, “Meherwan, come quick.” I thought, “Oh God, this old man, what to do now? Baba has given me this order.” So I put my head on the pillow to fulfill the order, and then I went to him. That was the last cry he made—he had had a massive pulmonary embolism, a sort of stroke in the chest due to a blood clot in his lungs. His breathing was heavy and labored, and he was wet with perspiration.

I went to summon his usual doctor, who refused to come, and then to Dr. Fonseca, whom I had brought for Rano the night before, but before

I got back, my father was breathing his last. They were all shouting, "Papa, say Baba's Name, say Baba's Name!" in his ear. Papa said, "Baba, Baba," and on the third time he collapsed. He had just died when the doctor tried to give him some injection, but he didn't respond.

The next day Baba told us that it had been a toss-up between Rano and Papa. I don't know if He said whether it was Rano or Papa who won! Baba never brought up anything about the order for me to go to bed at 10:00, though I should have told Him what happened.

When Papa passed away I phoned Eruch at Guruprasad with the news, and he informed Baba. Baba had retired for the night, so Eruch went to Baba's room where Bhau was keeping watch. Baba asked who it was, and Bhau told Him it was Eruch. Baba turned over to face Eruch and asked what was the matter. Eruch informed Him that a phone call had come from Bindra House to say that Papa had died. Baba just turned over and went back to sleep. A short time later, however, He sent Bhau with a message to tell Eruch to phone Meherjee to come and assist me in preparing for the last rites.

I asked when we should arrange for the funeral, and the doctor said, "The sooner the better." We decided on having the ceremonies the morning of the next day, because for Zoroastrians a funeral ceremony is never done after sundown. So if a death takes place in the night, the ceremonies are performed the following morning.

I had to arrange for Papa's death certificate and permission for the funeral, because we needed municipal sanction for the funeral ceremonies, and so I had to arrange those details and make all the preparations. The office where I had to do the paperwork was open all night, so I was able to manage it despite the late hour. We moved the body to a place where the rites would be conducted by the *dasturs*, that is, the priests of the Parsi community.

There was and still is a place on Dastur Meher Road called "The *Bungli*." It is just three or four blocks from Baba's house, on the opposite side of the street. There the bodies of the deceased are bathed and wrapped in

cloth, and then the priests come in the morning and do the special prayers for the dead. After that the body is taken out to the Tower of Silence and offered to the vultures. It is placed in an open structure, rather like a well, and the birds come and eat the flesh. It is the last act of charity performed by a Zoroastrian.

I had informed Eruch that the funeral would be that very morning. Eruch conveyed that to Baba, and Baba asked Eruch if he wanted to go. Eruch replied, "Baba, whatever You say." Baba said, "Let Meherjee help Meherwan. You just stay here." Then Baba came to *mandali* hall (in Guruprasad) as usual, and Eruch began reading out the correspondence to Him. Suddenly Baba said to Eruch, "Come on, let's go to Bindra House." So, early in the morning Baba came in the car, along with Eruch and Jimmy Mistry. I was of course not there—I was in the *bungli* on Dastur Meher Road, along with Mumma and the other family members. Only Manu, Naja and Rano were at Bindra House.

It so happened that one day prior to this, on the day that Papa eventually died in the night, Baba had called a meeting of His *mandali* from Ahmednagar and other places to be held at Guruprasad, and so a large number of Baba's *mandali* had come to Guruprasad. Baba asked all of them to attend the funeral. A big crowd of Baba's *mandali* and the Baba-lovers in Poona attended, and the result was that, just like with Baba's own mother's funeral, Papa's was a big affair. He was quite a famous individual in the Baba-world. Baba's sign for him, as I said earlier, was the sign of a pistol.

So Baba came from Guruprasad to Bindra House early in the morning, and He told Manu, "I am hungry. Fix some *dal* and rice for Me quickly." Consequently there was a scramble in the kitchen. Naja was there, and Manu recalls that the two of them were hurriedly doing things. In the meantime Baba also said, "Let's go get some bread from the baker because I would like to have bread with My *dal*."

Baba liked *brun* bread, a very crusty and very tasty bread, baked in rounds that are slightly flattened on the top and bottom. Irani bakeries

were famous for this sort of bread, and *brun* bread is traditionally eaten with great “lashings” of butter and hot, sweet tea. The scent of freshly baked *bruns* is irresistible.

The baker’s shop also happened to be on Dastur Meher Road, and after buying the bread at Kayani’s, they drove just down the road a little ways and parked across from where the funeral ceremonies had started. Baba said to Eruch, “Do you want to attend the funeral ceremony?”

“Baba,” Eruch replied, “whatever You say.”

“Go and pay your respects to him and come back quickly,” Baba said.

Eruch went hurriedly inside the *bungli*. He bowed down to Papa’s body, and then he returned to Baba, Who was waiting in the car. In the meantime the prayers had been completed, and the body was being brought out. So Baba’s gaze fell on Papa’s body as it was being taken on its way to the Tower of Silence. It is considered very good for any of us, of course, that Baba should see us in these last moments, so Papa was very fortunate. Then Baba gave a little discourse to Eruch. He asked him, “What is this you are seeing?”

“Papa’s dead body, Baba.”

“What is a dead body?”

“It’s his corpse, Baba.”

Baba said, “The dead body is the excreta of the soul. Just as you eat food and you absorb the nutrients and then you excrete it, the body is like food to the soul, and after its work is done, the soul excretes it, so the dead body is the excreta of the soul. Just as you feel relieved and refreshed when you pass a good motion, so the soul also feels relieved and refreshed when it excretes the body.”

Then Baba drove away. “My work is finished,” He said, “let’s go back.” So they returned to Bindra House, and Baba had His food there, which was also very auspicious for Papa, that Baba should come to the house at that time, and Baba said, “I have done My work for Papa. You all need

not do any other ceremony except the fourth day ceremony, and then no more ceremonies.”

Traditionally the Parsis do ceremonies for years together for the departed. The fourth day ceremony is important, Baba said, because on that day the soul’s link with its previous physical body and with the gross world in general snaps. In what way that is, we don’t know, but until then the soul lingers in memory of the body that has been dropped, so that’s why that prayer ceremony on the fourth day is important.

Papa wanted very much to be social with the Poona Parsis. He dreaded being ostracized by the community, so he would go to the fire temple and force me to go with him, until one day I just rebelled and stopped going. Every time it was my birthday or some big Parsi festival, he would make me go to the fire temple.

Papa never held it against Baba that he had given up his eldest son to Him; still he wanted the family to be around him, but he was all for Baba. It was a revelation to read Papa’s letters to Baba in the old-time correspondence—he wrote to Baba with such love and respect. Baba sent him on many errands, even to Rangoon, in the old times when we were in Bangalore, around the time of the war. Papa’s letter from Rangoon talks about the blackout there, before the Japanese occupation. Papa was the one who had to wind up the whole Byramangala Universal Spiritual Centre—so many things he did in Baba’s service. Papa was very practical, and he never showed any emotion, and he never liked people to be emotional about anything. Baba liked such people—honest, straightforward, never having any rancor in the heart. He had a very short temper, but he also was very soft-hearted. That was the end of Papa, the 29th of May, 1959.

Soon thereafter, following Papa’s passing, Rano picked up in health, and she returned to her old self. Later, as I’ve said, they told Rano, “It was a choice between you and Papa, a toss-up, and Baba decided to release Papa and hold on to you.”

That was a very big incident in our life because we lost a member of our family for the first time in many years. The last time that had happened was when my sister Meheru passed away back in 1953. Now it was another member who had gone, and we did miss Papa. Baba once remarked to me after Papa passed away, "Are you feeling relieved?"

I was very moved, and I couldn't give any reply to Baba, and He didn't say anything further. He knew how I was feeling about it. The others tried to cheer me up, saying Papa was with Baba. Of course we knew that Papa was really fortunate and blessed that Baba had been with him during his last days, as well as at the final ceremony.

Another sad event also occurred at that time. That one had to do with Shatrughan Kumar, who lived near Dehra Dun and who, with his wife Subudra, had served Baba during the New Life. Kumar was the father of Amrit Irani, and he also had a son named Prashant, who was quite young, only nineteen at that time, and who worked in some mines near Belgaum. He was not keeping good health there. Kumar was with Baba at Guruprasad during that period, and Prashant was to take leave and go back home for some rest. Baba told Kumar, "Call the boy here."

So the boy was called to Guruprasad, and he came that same day, but he wasn't well. He seemed to have a slight fever. First Goher was called to treat him, but the fever did not respond to her treatments. The next day the fever rose, and Baba asked Kumar to take him to the hospital. Prashant was shifted to a clinic, the Jehangir Nursing Home, where they found out that he had leukemia. So you see that Baba had him called in the absolute nick of time. Baba went to see him in the hospital, and He was constantly thinking of him, because the doctor said that the disease was advanced and that Prashant did not have long to live. In those days there was no treatment for young people with leukemia, and the result was invariably fatal.

Within a couple of weeks Prashant did indeed die, and they had to inform his mother, who was in Dehra Dun. Baba said, "Just send a telegram to her to call her to Guruprasad, not to inform her about anything else."

So she came very happily to be in Baba's presence, and my mother was also called to break the news gently, as women can do. Eruch was there, and so she was told as sympathetically as possible what had happened. In the beginning she was confused and angry, not understanding how Baba could have allowed this to happen, and she cried a lot. Eventually, however, with Baba impressing upon her how fortunate her son was to have gone quickly under Baba's *Nazar*, she remained resigned to His Will and somehow Subudra was consoled. Baba, of course, was there, and in Baba's presence all these tragedies lose their sting.

Baba kept her at Guruprasad for a few days, and then He sent Subudra back. On the very next day after Prashant's death, as we were sitting in the hall as usual, Baba said to Kumar, "Come on, get up and show us how to do the hula hoop dance before Me." The hula hoop craze had recently come to India, but that was the first time I saw someone doing the hula. We used to call it the hoopla ring. Kumar wiggled and wiggled and did a very energetic dance to keep the ring in movement—all this just to make him celebrate that his son had died with Baba nearby. Kumar never showed any emotion. He was quite stoic.

Baba's stay at Guruprasad was coming to a close by this time. On the last day of His stay, when Baba and His entourage left to return to Meherazad, we were given the task of winding up the whole show, as it were—the extra furniture and crockery had to be stored and so forth. It took us practically the whole day to bring everything to order and to hand over the charge of Guruprasad to the manager once again.

We arrived there early in the morning, and hectic preparations were being made for Baba to leave. I remember that Mumma was there with my aunt Banumasi, and Baba was in the *mandali* hall, a side room off the main hall. That was where Baba would hold small, intimate meetings and gatherings. Baba was seated on the sofa in that side room, and He called us in, embraced Mumma, said, "Don't worry!"

Suddenly Mumma burst out crying. She began to weep loudly. Baba was caressing her and asked, "What's on your mind?"

“I don’t know,” she cried, and she just continued to weep very loudly in Baba’s lap, kneeling down before Him. Baba was consoling her, and in between the sobs she was saying, “Eruch is behaving strangely these days. He’s so brusque with You, and I can’t bear the sight of it. I feel he’ll become Your Judas, Baba!”

Baba looked at her askance. “What is this you’re saying?” Baba called Eruch, “Come on, come here.” Eruch came, and Mumma was still upset. Eruch felt very exasperated because he had to attend to all the final packing and chores.

Eruch flared up and he exclaimed, “Baba, this is not the time for all this. I don’t know what has come over Mumma. I have to do so many things.”

Baba said, “Come here. Light a match to all the other things. This is more important than anything else. Just let everything else be and come here.”

Grumpily, Eruch came in obedience to Baba’s orders. Baba said to Mumma, with Eruch interpreting, “What is this you are telling Me?”

“No, Baba, he behaves very rudely with You these days, and I can’t bear the sight of this....” She was all flustered and more than likely depressed after the passing of Papa. And, in fact, Eruch had so much work those days with Baba that he would flare up, and Mumma felt concerned about all that. Ultimately, though, she was feeling Baba’s separation above all, because Baba was leaving Poona.

Baba said, “No, no, he’s not My Judas, he’s My Peter. He’s My right hand. Have no worry about him. You have no idea how fortunate you are to have such a son....” Baba was consoling her all the while. It was a high-powered drama being carried out while others were scurrying about, doing their packing and all, and here this was going on in their midst. Baba consoled her and said, “You mustn’t feel like that. Be brave—I am always with you, and now I have in mind to call you to Meherazad very soon.”

That reassurance quieted Mumma quite a bit. Eruch was waiting to go back to work, because if anything should be left out of the packing and

preparations, then there would be lots of additional trouble for Eruch. He had to attend to so many minor things, such as shifting the office and the correspondence all back to Meherazad.

Then, as usual on departing Poona, Baba went to Bund Garden, which is quite close by. There was a big road from Guruprasad toward the river, and at the end of that road before you cross the river is the turn to Bund Garden. Before leaving for Meherazad Baba, as a sort of last farewell to His Poona lovers, would go and perch Himself below the big mango tree there, where, I've been told, in the old days Babajan had gone to sit from time to time.

There was a small platform around the tree, but we brought a chair for Baba and arranged it beforehand. The Poona Baba-lovers gathered and sang Baba's *arti*, and then Baba waved at everybody, got into the car and drove off. Everyone kept watching Baba's car as it crossed over the bridge, which could be seen from Bund Garden.

Baba was first driven from Guruprasad in Adi's car, a Fleetmaster, and after they crossed the bridge Baba switched into the women's car, which had been sent ahead.

That was the end of that eventful year, and then Baba returned to Meherazad and went back into seclusion again. He did His usual seclusion work. We have records of that work in Mani's letters as well as other diaries. But Baba kept His promise, and He called Mumma to stay at Meherazad for the first time. She thoroughly enjoyed her stay there, sometime in September or October. Later on Baba also called Manu. Then I was asked to come. I was able to get a month's "privileged leave," and I think that that was the time when my annual visits to Meherazad began.

As this was still in the first few years that Baba used Guruprasad, after He would leave it was the Maharani's custom to let various of her relatives and friends use the place. One of those friends was a woman named Dhun—now known as "Nan"—Umrigar. The Maharaja of Baroda—his name was Gaekwad—was fond of the races, and Dhun's son, Karl Umrigar, was the ace jockey in India at the time. He was very

brilliant, had natural talent, and he rose to a position of eminence very early in life. So, because of that common interest, Dhun met the Maharaja and they became friends.

In Poona the racing season starts sometime in June. Just when Baba would leave Guruprasad, the real racing season for Poona would begin, because the monsoon season in Poona is very pleasant. It is unlike Bombay, where it just keeps pouring and it's very dull and not a good place to be during the monsoon. When the rains stop in Poona, it dries out very quickly, and then you have beautiful weather, so then the races would start while the Bombay racecourse would still be too wet for the horses to run.

So with this background, you can understand that Dhun Umrigar and all of her friends—many Bombay socialites—would have use of Guruprasad right after Baba left. In later years, when the Maharani passed the order that none should come to Guruprasad and that it was exclusively for Baba's use, Dhun Umrigar's coming there came to an end. She was, in fact, peeved about that and more than a little angry with "this Meher Baba." She presumed that the Maharani had gotten involved in some sort of cult.

Eventually Dhun Umrigar came to Baba. The Name of Baba was sounded in her ears, but it took quite a few years for it to travel to her heart. Many, many years later, we heard how it all happened, and it turns out that it was through her son, Karl. As I have mentioned, he was the top jockey in India, and others were jealous of him. In one of those very prestigious races, his horse was making good progress, was about to win, when somebody from the crowd, or maybe another jockey, caused his horse to stumble. We don't know exactly how it happened, but he was thrown off the horse. Because he was in front, the other horses trampled him as they came past, and he died on the race track itself. Thus it was that a very young and promising life was snuffed out.

When his mother heard this, she went into deep shock, and she was depressed and grieving for many years. It so happened that there were

some friends of hers who had had similar experiences of some grief over the departure of loved ones, and they had apparently made contact with the departed spirits by the means of a “planchette” (similar to a Ouija board). They do something to begin the session, and the spirit comes and starts writing through their hand—that’s their experience, so they tell us.

These friends suggested that Dhun should try to get in contact with her deceased son this way. She went along with the idea, and it seems that her hand began to write something: the first thing to come out was the letter “M.” Then further séances produced the words “Meher Baba,” and because of her connection with Guruprasad, she remembered that Name. The sessions continued, and eventually the whole sentence came through as “Go to Meher Baba.”

With this Dhun thought it was time to investigate further. She called up her friends in Bombay to inquire, and some knew of Baba and told her to visit Meherabad. She did go there, and afterwards she came here to Meherazad. The first time she came, she arrived here on the last day of the Pilgrim Season. We didn’t know anything about her story at that time—she just came with other pilgrims, and she was instantly hooked, as it were. When she saw and felt the loving atmosphere here, she immediately knew that her son had guided her rightly. So that is how she came to Baba, indirectly through Guruprasad.

But Baba had always discouraged us from pursuing that kind of contact with spirits. Baba always said that to have contact with spirits is an extremely dangerous thing. The contact can be genuine, but sometimes evil spirits can take advantage of the situation, and in the process ordinary mortals can come to great grief and disaster. Baba always asked us to stay very clear of all such activity. In fact, Eruch and Mani directly brought this home to Dhun, telling her, “Now that you have come to Baba through this automatic writing, you should stop using these means of contacting Karl.” Baba made the same sort of point to those who suggested that their psychedelic drug use was the reason that they came to know of and be interested in Baba. I think, however, that she has

continued contacting her son that way—it seems from her various writings that it has gone on for quite some time.

Through Karl and his messages Dhun Umrigar brought many other people in similar distress, so a great big group has come to Baba through this automatic writing. In earlier days it was psychedelic drugs that had brought people to Baba, Who then asked everyone not to dabble in drugs, but as Eruch would say, Baba used different hooks to catch different types of fish. Once the fish was caught, the hook had to be taken out and discarded because it was no longer important.



Chapter Twenty-seven:

Routine with Baba at Guruprasad

Whenever Baba would call, or whenever I had leave from my work, I had the permission to be at Guruprasad. When we would arrive to see Baba we would fold our hands from a distance, enter the room and sit there. There was no big fuss made about us. Mostly I'd be there on weekends, except when He was in seclusion. Meherjee also had this permission to visit whenever he wanted. I had to get to the market first, early in the morning, because the food for Baba and the *mandali* was made at Bindra House. After that I would wash up and go be with Baba.

Usually by the time I got there, Baba was over on the men's side, generally by about 8:00 a.m., sometimes even earlier. In those days the first thing that Baba would deal with was the correspondence. Eruch was in charge of reading out the English correspondence, while Bhau handled the Hindi correspondence. Sometimes Bal Nattu was there, and I think he handled the Marathi part of it. The day's newspaper would also be read out, and after that, if there was time, Baba just chit-chatted with us. At other times we played the usual card game of La Risque if there was some time left over after the reading of the news and Baba's exchanges with us all. Eruch would then leave to send off replies to the letters in

accordance with the points given by Baba, while we who were there for the day remained in His Presence.

Later, of course, when He was in Poona mainly the Poona Centre people came, including Madhusudan, Gadekar, K.K. Ramakrishnan and many others. Sometimes during the card games there were as many as twenty to thirty people, and two packs of cards would be used—one with the full pack and the second with the lower denominations. We were each dealt two cards and played the game of La Risque. There would inevitably be lots of shouting and chaos and confusion, but it was very enjoyable because Baba was there. Baba would make the side that lost rub their noses on the carpet. Baba would say that both sides won, however, because although one side won the card game, the other side won by getting the privilege of rubbing their noses at Baba's feet. So the losers were actually the more fortunate ones. By the end of the day most of us had shiny noses from rubbing them on the carpet!

Each game took about four or five minutes to play out, but games with fewer of us lasted longer. One time there was just Dadi, Vishnumaster, Kaikobad and myself, but still we were quite noisy. Then Baba announced, "From now on everybody should observe silence while playing the game." That was something unique. The cards were dealt out, and we were fooling Dadi and he got so confused. We were on the opposite side, but we told him through signs, "You bid on this," and so on. We had a sign for each suit, all the while communicating only with signs. Vishnu would try to get Dadi to pay no attention to us. "Don't listen to them," he would say, "they are the opposite camp! Don't bid like they are telling you!" Dadi was completely confused, and Vishnu got so annoyed that he started to beat his chest, signaling "Oh, this fellow is so confused. What should I do?" He got thoroughly worked up, and of course Baba was enjoying the situation. Finally Baba said, "If I carry on any more with this silent game, their stomachs will burst! So now you all can start speaking." Then there would be a big clamor again. That is how we would have fun with Baba.

We had to bid for the number of tricks we would make, and if we could make that number of tricks, we would get points. “La Risque,” as a bid, means that you are bidding to take all the tricks. If even one trick is taken by the opposite side, you fail, and you lose the hand.

In the smaller games you would have to state your bid blindly. You declared the trump if you won the bid. If our people had the ace of the trump suit *and* the joker (which superseded the ace), we would win. Many times Baba would say, “Who has the joker? Bring it here!” and Baba would fling His card to the man who had the joker. That would be the end of the game because, with the joker in hand, Baba would win it all.

There was only one joker in the deck. The joker could also be the top card of another color. La Risque is a popular card game, and the rules are available if someone wants to play, but no one will ever be able to play it as we did, in the company of the Avatar of the Age.

Kumar and Rustom and Sohrab would come too, sitting on either side of Baba. The twins were not allowed to play because they were too young. Sometimes Kumar wouldn’t rub his nose when he lost, and Baba would tell the twins, “Make him rub his nose,” and so they would wrestle with Kumar to try to get his nose down. All these little things would be very funny. Kumar was very strong despite his short stature, and it made for an entertaining scene to see him being wrestled to the floor by the twins.

Sometimes Baba would announce, “We’ll have correspondence later,” or “No newspaper today, let’s have games.”

I should mention that this was the first summer that Francis Brabazon stayed at Guruprasad. He had come to India to stay with Baba in January of 1959, and he remained with Baba until the end, for the last ten years of Baba’s life. Besides Donkin—and Rano on the women’s side—Francis was the only Westerner with Baba. Donkin mainly kept aloof in the later years, though after the accident he helped a lot. Only when Baba called him did he come to Meherazad.

At first Donkin stayed for some time at Meherabad. He and Padri were there, and there would be sparks flying every now and then because Don would behave peculiarly and Padri would have no end of troubles with him. Every now and then it would come to Baba's ears, and they would both be called to Meherazad. Baba would soundly berate one or the other in front of all of us, like small children being brought back on track. Baba had to keep on doing this right to the end—even the old-time *mandali* needed Baba's guidance.


Then Don shifted to Khushru Quarters, but that was very noisy because of the nearby movie theater—Sarosh Talkies—and in the later years he stayed in an outbuilding of Viloo Villa, which I believe is where he died shortly after Baba dropped His body in 1969.

In the early days Baba used to train Eruch very strictly also, but most of the blasting and lambasting was left to Papa. He got his share. Every time Eruch would come back to Bindra House, Papa was ready to carry out the operation, so that part of the job was handled by Baba's instrument, my father. He berated Eruch on the subject of deserting the family, repeatedly saying that he was an idler—no good! Papa said all sorts of unkind things to him, but Eruch just kept quiet, saying nothing. Eruch well understood the big sacrifice that Papa had made in his lifetime. Eruch would never have been able to be with Baba had Papa not allowed it. We will always be beholden to both our parents for our life with Baba.



Chapter Twenty-eight:

1960

n the next year, 1960, Baba sent word that He would be coming for His usual stay at Guruprasad, so again we approached Sardar Raste for obtaining permission, and the usual telegram was sent as a sort of formality to await the Maharani's sanction, which was quickly given. As soon as it arrived I went to Guruprasad and started making preparations for Baba's arrival. There was not that much to do because the Maharani's staff naturally saw to it that the place was kept in good repair and cleaned daily, but I had to arrange for extra furniture and crockery and other things, which took some time to get ready. For Baba's visits we would get an on-demand gas connection and gas stoves for heating food or making tea and breakfast.

All hearts were a-flutter in Poona in anticipation of the chance to have Baba's *darshan* again. In Meherazad Baba was in very strict seclusion, which was not only physical but even correspondence was not permitted, because Baba had gone into the phase of gradually ceasing all correspondence with His lovers.

When Baba came to Guruprasad there would often be a let-up in this sort of strict seclusion. Even the close *mandali* looked forward to this

period, although it would be very strenuous for them because of the *darshan* programs every day. People would flock there, and there was hardly any privacy. But still, to see Baba in a different sort of mood was a great relief to them, because when He was in seclusion Baba would be so withdrawn that a very heavy atmosphere prevailed because He didn't like any disturbances.

Baba's mood always had to be noted and taken into account, whereas when He came to Guruprasad, it was a different thing altogether. I was only able to attend during the weekends, and *darshan* was held then too. During the week there was a constant flow of outside lovers, and the weekends were very crowded with Poona and Bombay people as well as lovers from further away.

One person who was allowed to visit Baba while He was at Guruprasad was the Maharani Shantadevi. Baba would question her about her family affairs. She was a very unhappy woman because her husband had deserted her, her sons were a bit wayward, and no one in her family showed any inclination towards Baba. That disturbed her the most. So Baba would console her quite often, saying, "Just by your coming here you have done the work for your entire family. Have no worry about them. I'll take care of everything."

This is the tremendous advantage that one gets by coming into the orbit of a Perfect Master or the Avatar. Once you come, not only do you have the benefit of His association, but He sees to many generations to come after you also.

Baba also talked about other things with Shantadevi. I remember one time the lights in the hall were on and the fans were working, and Baba said to Shantadevi, "Do you ever get the idea that we are using all these utilities lavishly? See the lights are burning and the fans are working here—have you given a thought to all the expense you have to undergo for My comfort?"

She laughed and said, "Baba, it's a great pleasure and delight for me that You are making full use of all the things that I can offer You."

Baba was very pleased with this reply, and He said, “You are really blessed. You have all the wealth in the world, and you have Me, the biggest jewel in your crown, so you have best of both the worlds!”

In our language this phenomenon is known as “*Sona ma sugandh*.” “*Sona*” means “gold,” and “*sugandh*” means “fragrance,” so the saying translates as “gold with fragrance”—meaning, “you have the preciousness and luminosity of gold with the fragrance of the rose.” Baba said this to her, and she was very happy.

Another person who came to be with Baba was Zal Aidun. He was a very funny person, a close friend of Baba’s brother Jal. Somehow Jal would get him into Guruprasad. He was very shy and quiet and had a very effeminate voice, so if Baba asked him anything he would put his head down and reply in a very squeaky voice. He was small, thin and lean, and Baba would make fun of him quite often.

One day Baba asked us all to go to the West End Theater. Baba also asked Zal to go, so we all went. It was a tense wartime movie about how Paris was saved in the nick of time. Hitler had given instructions to his people to put dynamite all around the city, at all the big installations, so that when he gave the order the whole city would be blown up, or some such thing. We enjoyed the picture.

The next day we were all before Baba again, and Baba asked, “Did you watch the picture?” and would ask us for comments.

Each one would say, “Yes, Baba, it was excellent and quite thrilling—there was so much suspense!”

Baba then said, “Zal, stand up.” He stood up, reluctantly. Baba asked, “Did you like the picture?”

In his very small, squeaky voice, Zal said, “No, Baba.”

Baba gestured, “What? What do you mean? Didn’t you accompany the *mandali* to the theater?”

“Yes, I did, but I didn’t see the picture.”

“What do you mean, you didn’t see the picture?”

“No, I just kept looking down.”

“Didn’t I order you to see the picture? How dare you do that?!”

“But Baba, I have never seen any picture in my life!”

Baba said, “Now I order you. Go again. See the picture. I want you to see it from beginning to end.” So this fellow was sent posthaste that evening to go back to see the whole picture again, and the next day he had to report to Baba about what he had seen.

Always Zal would look down, whatever his circumstances. He was a very peculiar type of character. He was very straightforward—he would never talk to anybody, and he would only reply if he were spoken to. He was a very withdrawn person, and Baba called him “My hermit.”

We were sitting in front of Baba one morning, and Baba asked, “How do I look?”

Each one described Baba’s beauty, handsomeness and radiance, and in fact that day He did look quite beautiful.

Baba then said, “Zal, stand up. How do I look?”

“Baba, You look very old to me.”

Baba looked surprised. “I look old?” He asked the rest of us if He looked old to us, and we all said that He looked beautiful and radiant. “Zal, how do I look?”

“Baba, You look very old.”

So Baba said, “Get out of the room. I don’t want to see your face again!” So poor Zal went outside, and after a short while Baba called him in again, and He once again gestured, “How do I look?”

“Baba, You look nice.”

Baba smiled and gestured, “Come on. Sit down. Now you’re acceptable.”

Such funny little things would happen with Zal, but eventually people took advantage of his good nature. He was from a very well-to-do family, and he owned a big mansion, but he wouldn't have anything to do with it, so his brother and his wife appropriated the property. He allowed that to happen, and he would stay in one of the servants' quarters in the same compound, sharing it with the gardener, and he was quite happy. He didn't want all the hassle and bother of owning a property.

Such was Zal. He was quite a recluse, but after Baba passed away, he never missed any *Amartithi*. He was, in fact, the first one who would appear at Meherabad to join the *Amartithi* celebrations. The whole time, however, he would stand behind the Tin Cabin in one spot, looking down, never taking part in anything that was going on, just being near Baba's *Samadhi*.

One day Zal disappeared, and before long people began to wonder what had happened to him. His room was locked, and no one could get in. A couple of days later the gardener, who shared the servant quarters with him, broke down the door, and Zal was found dead inside his room. He lived unobtrusively and had passed away equally unnoticed. Just like a hermit.

In the afternoon Baba would retire to His room, and we would just be sitting around, and sometimes Baba would call us in. One time He was holding a soda water bottle in His hand, and He asked each of us to approach Him and made us drink from the bottle. Then He asked each one in turn, "Do you realize the significance of what I am doing now?"

Vishnu Master was there, and he said, "Baba, I think that by doing this You must be quenching the thirst of someone who is lying in the desert."

Baba said, "Very petty. It belittles My status that you even think such a small thing of Me." Then Baba asked Eruch.

Eruch said, "Baba, I think You are bringing us closer to You."

Baba said, "Bringing you close like this, making you drink from My hand, signifies that I am working for My lovers everywhere."

In that year, 1960, Baba once again called us to Meherazad in turns from Bindra House. As before, Mumma went first, followed by Manu, and later myself. Manu told me that in 1960 during her stay at Meherazad, she had the occasion to witness some of Baba's intense physical suffering. It was at that time that Baba was struck with herpes facialis, an excruciatingly painful form of herpes zoster, which attacked Him on the face and affected the trigeminal nerve. It hurt His eye, His ear and His throat—all three nerves on one side. Manu said that it had started with a small pimple near the top of the chin, which Baba said was rather painful. Dr. Goher applied some cream to it, but in a couple of days it spread very fast, and that side of His face and part of the eye was affected. The inside of His mouth to the throat and into the ear was extremely painful for Baba. Baba said it was part of His work that He had to suffer this. Manu was helping Mehera and the other women to serve Baba at that time, but she said it was a very painful stay for her to see Baba suffer like that.

After that visit she was sent home, and I was called. Baba had by then almost recovered from the eruptions, but the aftereffect was still there, and Baba was not in a good mood. It was the first time that I saw Baba so completely withdrawn within Himself.

I remember that we would sit outside Mandali Hall—at that time there was no such veranda or anything, it was all open air. Baba's chair was put out and we all sat around Him, and not a word was exchanged. Eruch would try to strike up some conversation, but Baba wouldn't respond. He would sit with His chin down, and He would force a smile sometimes. It was so painful for us. We had never seen Him like this—it was as if for the first time Baba had lost His sense of humor, which had never happened before, so it was an extremely distressing atmosphere. He said He was having to endure the tremendous pressure of His work: "You have no idea what I am suffering," He said. It was a nerve-shattering experience. At that time Baba was, in fact, suffering from what would be, in anyone other than the Avatar, called a deep clinical depression.

Once it became so unbearable that for the first time ever I heard Eruch burst out, “Baba, really this is now unbearable for all of us. We request You to stop taking this suffering upon Yourself! We don’t care for any benefit for us, we don’t care for Realization—burn us all up if You like—but we request You to please ease a little the burden on Yourself. We can’t bear to see You suffer like this!”

There was hushed silence, and in spite of everything Baba looked up. There was a slight shadow of a smile on His lips, but Baba brushed Eruch aside and said, “Restrain yourself and don’t get carried away.” That was the only response Baba gave. We could just imagine what stress He must have been under at that time.

To relieve the tension, one morning Eruch told Baba, “Baba, we have arranged for a drive out to the pumping station. Let’s go out there. Meherwan hasn’t seen the pumping station. Wouldn’t You like to show him around?” Baba agreed, and said we should go, although He was clearly in no mood. Baba, a couple of other *mandali* and I got in the car and drove down to the pumping station, which was functioning at that time. In spite of His depression Baba started to show me how the water flowed in at one point and was filtered at another. I was feeling so bad that Baba was showing me these things, because He was suffering so much. He had done this only to please Eruch, who had used this excuse to get Baba out of Meherazad because he thought it would divert His mind for a while.

We could all see that Baba was deeply depressed, but as He said, the pressure of His work was unbearable. In addition, the pain in His hip was there constantly, and added to that was the pain from the trigeminal neuralgia caused by the herpes virus, though the rash had gone. So He had constant, unbearable pain in a very delicate part of the human anatomy, the face, and He had great difficulty swallowing as well.

Because Baba’s condition continued to worsen and His pain became unbearable, a famous neurosurgeon in Bombay, Dr. Ram Ginde, was contacted and told about Baba’s condition. Dr. Ginde came to Meherazad with Nariman and Meherjee on 30th October 1960, and he examined

Baba, and, in the process for the first time he had Baba's *darshan*. He did not come as a lover at first—he was just told that Avatar Meher Baba would be his patient—and he was given some information about Baba. He had immediately agreed to see Him.

At the time Ram was the top neurosurgeon in India. Later we came to know how he had performed very complicated brain surgery for some very rich businessman in Bombay. That man had first sought treatment in Vienna, I think, where one of the world's leading brain surgeons worked at the time. Upon hearing that the businessman had come from India the surgeon exclaimed, "You've come all the way from India to me? And in India you have this man who is as good as I am. Where was the need for you to come here? Haven't you heard of Dr. Ginde?" Such was Ram's international reputation.

Despite his fame and his unfamiliarity with Baba, he had immediately agreed to treat Him after hearing about Him. After seeing Him Ram told Baba, "This pain will continue to be there, and I can't say how long it will last. It may even last for many months. There is only one remedy for it, but it is not an easy treatment to administer."

Baba asked, "What is it?"

Ram explained, "If I give You an injection of alcohol in the correct place, exactly where the pain originates—where the three nerves meet—it will stop the pain."

Baba asked him, "So why don't you do it?"

"But Baba," Ram said, "the potential side effect of that treatment could be that it will paralyze part of Your face, and that paralysis could be permanent."

Baba said, "I don't mind that. The pain is utterly unbearable. Go ahead. It is interfering with My work. I would rather that you do this than continue this way."

"But Baba, such treatment requires a very elaborate procedure. The position of the needle has to be monitored on x-ray, because it has to go into precisely the correct position."

Baba said, "All right. Do it here."

Under normal circumstances Ram Ginde would never have agreed to such a thing, because it was a very delicate and a very dangerous procedure. If some mistake occurred it could blind a person, or cause paralysis, and even then the pain might continue. He was so overpowered by Baba's presence, however, that he finally agreed. He asked where he could do the procedure, and Baba said, "Here, in My bedroom."

Ram said that the room would have to be disinfected, and he gave instructions to Dr. Goher accordingly, and then he asked Eruch to help him wash his hands, after which he would not touch anything prior to the procedure. He showed Eruch how to wash hands the surgeon's way, how to make the lather come up, which is the main thing that removes bacteria. He was a very talkative person, mind you. In later years I got to know him quite well myself.

Ram entered the room, where Baba was asked to sit in a chair. Before beginning he said, "Baba, there's one thing that remains a question. Without the usual x-ray monitoring, I have no means of knowing whether I've reached the correct spot to give the nerve block. How will I know when I have reached it?"

Baba said, "I'll give you the sign. When you reach the correct spot, I'll signal it with My index finger, and then you will know that it is the correct spot. Will that be all right?" (This, by the way, is exactly how Eruch described the whole procedure to me when I came to visit Meherazad on 16th November, 1960. The account in *Lord Meher* describes it differently, however.)

This top neurosurgeon agreed to all this, if you can imagine! The procedure involved passing a large supporting needle through the temple to reach the spot where the junction of the trigeminal nerves is located, and when that needle touched that exact spot, a second, much smaller needle and syringe would be passed through the support syringe to administer a drop of alcohol to deaden the nerves.

Now see what happened. Kaka Baria told me this next part. Kaka said that when Dr. Ginde initiated the first part of the procedure, he could hear the needle pass through—it was a big, long needle—and he could barely watch. He could hear the needle make a crunching sound as it passed through the side of Baba's face. Kaka said that he almost fainted to see Baba suffer such agony. Normally, of course, that procedure is done under anesthesia, but Baba wouldn't agree to that.

In any case, after the needle had been inserted Baba soon made the sign, indicating "You have reached the right spot." How skilled Ram Ginde must have been—he must have done that so often. He found the correct spot, and he administered the final injection of the alcohol, and Baba said, "The pain is gone!" Everybody was so deeply impressed, because the constant nagging and unbearable facial pain immediately disappeared and Baba was suddenly all right. Ram asked Baba how he felt. "Excellent," said Baba, "I have no pain now. It's totally gone."

Ginde responded, "Baba, it's Your Grace that made it possible. I've never done anything like this before in such surroundings."

Baba felt very hungry—He had not eaten for two or three weeks because of the neural pain and the sores in His mouth that had made eating impossible. So in short order Baba had a hearty meal of rice and *dal* and fed the last bit to Ram with His own hands.

With the procedure finished, Dr. Ginde wound up everything, and then he packed up and left. He couldn't have gone halfway to Nagar when Baba suddenly said, "Oh, the pain has returned!" So someone was sent running to the pumping station, where for many years the closest telephone was located. The person rushed over and phoned Adi's office, telling Adi to stop Ram's car and tell him what had happened. They were all standing outside Adi's compound on the roadside as a result—Adi and those with him in the office—just when the car with Ram in it approached, and they hailed it and made it halt. Ram came on the phone, or they phoned back—I can't exactly remember how it happened.

When told of the report that Baba was once again experiencing the pain in His face, Ram said, “I am extremely happy this has happened, because otherwise Baba would have had facial paralysis. This is very good news, and nothing further can be done about it now. The pain should subside within a few days.”

I personally think that all this was an excuse to get Dr. Ginde into Baba’s net. After that experience Ram was all for Baba—he was so devoted to Baba that as soon as he got any opportunity he would come running for Baba’s *darshan*.

Thereafter the pain did return, but it gradually began to lessen, and finally it disappeared, so that was the saga of Ram Ginde. *Lord Meher* offers a beautiful description, in Ram’s own words, of his very first meeting with Beloved Baba, which anyone who reads this book should also read. I can imagine that, if they could, anyone who meets the God-Man for the very first time would describe the experience exactly as he has done.

Because Baba was so withdrawn during this period of such a tense atmosphere, the *mandali* faced a great big problem. A few months prior to these occurrences both Ben Hayman and Joseph Harb were scheduled to visit Meherazad, but Baba had had to postpone their trip multiple times. They were to come all the way from the United States to be with Baba. But owing to the herpes and then the subsequent depression, and with Baba still in seclusion, He sent a cable to Ben and Joseph—He called them “BenJo”—which read “My health is not too good, but despite this and because of the frequent postponements, I give you two options. Either you can come now as planned for five days, or later on in February for ten days. Wire back what you prefer.”

Very soon the reply came that, “We want the five days right now.” The *mandali* were happy that they were coming at this time, but at the same time everybody was concerned, because these people were coming and Baba’s health was such that He was not responding to anything—how would their visit be? The poor fellows would come all the way and see Baba in a very depressed mood. So when that reply came and the visit

had not yet materialized, a few days were left and Eruch said, “Baba, why not cancel their visit?”

Baba said, “No, if I cancel it now their hearts will be broken, so let them come.”

“But Baba, in Your present condition how could You attend to them?”

“We’ll see,” He said. “Let them come.”

On the day of their coming Baba was, as it were, at the nadir point—He was extremely depressed, very tired and completely disinterested in everything. On that day, however, Baba became very restless. He kept asking Eruch every now and then, “When are they coming?”

Eruch would reply that they were coming at such-and-such a time. “They must have left Bombay by now, and so now they are on the way.”

Baba kept inquiring over and over, and eventually He asked that they phone Bombay to see if “BenJo” had left yet. All the while someone was running to and from the pumping station with these messages. It was determined that they had left Poona, because we phoned there and were told that Meherjee, who was to come with them, had already left, and the time of their departure from Meherjee’s house was given.

So then Baba said, “That’s good, but why has the car not come yet?”

“But Baba, it will take time,” Eruch would say.

“I hope they don’t meet with any accident. I feel there will be an accident.”

Baba was so restless that He made us all feel very restless, too. Then Baba told me, “You go, take the car and the driver, and if you intercept them on the way, make them come quickly here because I want to go inside, and before that they must be here.”

I quickly took Baba’s car towards Ahmednagar. As I reached the crest of the hill near Khandoba’s temple, I saw Meherjee’s green car coming along toward us. I got down and started waving frantically from the side of the road, and I stopped their car. “Quick, quick!” I shouted, noting

that Adi Jr. was driving the car. He also had been called from England, and I think that he had joined them on the way, as BenJo were passing through England. So I shouted, “Quick, quick! Hurry up! Baba wants you in Meherazad as quickly as possible!” They were in Meherjee’s brand new Chevrolet, and they just zoomed on. We turned our car around and followed posthaste to see what would happen.

Baba was seated in Mandali Hall, and when they came in we saw the change that had taken place in Baba—it was just indescribable. From a mood of absolute dejection and pain, Baba suddenly brightened up, and we could see the color had come into His cheeks and face. He had become so pink and so radiant when those three people trooped in. Baba greeted them and asked them, “How do I look?”

They all said, “Baba, You look radiant and beautiful!” All the *mandali* were nonplussed, just looking at each other. Every time this happened, we could not cease to wonder how it was possible. Baba looked completely different from how He had appeared just minutes earlier, and the visitors were very happy to see Him. Baba cheered up, and a wave of happiness spread through the *mandali* after months of feeling low. A different atmosphere started to prevail, and for the five or six days that they were there, Baba was totally different, giving them discourses and listening to music. The liveliness was there, and all the humor was there that had been gone for so long. We saw that Baba was totally in control and could just stop that phase of His work and give so much of Himself to His lovers who had come. Of course, at what cost we never knew. At the end of the day it was a different picture. He would be totally exhausted and very weary. But not a trace of that was visible when they were present. They had no inkling of Baba’s true condition, and when Baba would tell them that they had no idea how He was suffering—“You see me so radiant and glorious, but you have no idea what I am passing through inwardly”—it was just so many words for them. But for us who had seen the previous phase, we knew what He was talking about. At least we had some slight idea from the external things we had seen, while internally what suffering He was undergoing He alone knew.

It showed that the physical suffering and mental depression was a part of His Universal Work—that He was making His body suffer to take on the suffering of the entire humanity and the universe at large. We can only presume that in a similar way, it was also how He took on a mental illness for the sake of all those who suffer from mental problems, which are not visible but are all the same devastating in their effect. Baba's Divinity was evident, however, in the ease with which He could switch the depression on and off. It is impossible for someone who is not a Perfect One suddenly to drop his or her depression and to become cheerful and interested in what is happening around them, and then, on cue, switch back to being depressed again. Only the Avatar can do that.

Some of the *mandali* occasionally could amuse Baba, helping to lighten the burden of His work, but His two main entertainers, Ghani and Gustadji, had died. They had been specialists in cheering Him up, but we did have a new humorous character who had come onto the scene, Elcha Mistry from Dehra Dun. He had a great sense of humor and an equally great long hooked nose, evoking a comic appearance without even trying, and he could create a humorous and cheerful atmosphere within minutes of entering a room. Whenever Baba would become withdrawn as a result of His work, Eruch would suggest, "Should I call Elcha, Baba? He will lighten Your mood!"

At the time I've been describing, however, Baba didn't want Elcha to be there, but at other times, if it became too much, Elcha would be called. He was a man who could really make you forget all your sorrows because he was such a cheerful person. In addition to his humorous appearance, he had a loud, funny voice and a very infectious and hearty laughter, and he would regale Baba with many absurd stories that lightened the atmosphere.

Elcha Mistry had come to be with Baba after the New Life. He was from Dehra Dun and was the first cousin of Naosherwan Nalavala's mother, Freiny. He was working as the manager of an apple orchard in Simla, and each year he would send Baba crates of apples, which we would also get to share.

Elcha's uncle was Major Bamjee, who happened to have been a friend of Colonel Irani when they were both in the army, and those two were the main antagonists of Baba in the early years, responsible for spreading the anti-Baba feeling throughout the Zoroastrian community. Elcha was Major Bamjee's nephew, and he would go and stay with him even though he had drawn so close to Baba. He would talk to Major Bamjee about Baba, saying, "Uncle, you are wasting your lifetime (by not taking Baba's *darshan*). You don't know what you are missing."

His aunt would say, "Elcha, don't do that. His heart might stop. He'll get so upset if you tell him all these things."

But Elcha responded, "It's very good if his heart stops while I am telling him Baba things!" Elcha recounted this whole conversation to Baba in such a funny manner. He quoted his aunt as saying, "His clock would stop ticking!" Baba was amused by the expressions he used. So that is how we got this character Elcha. Later on, even after Baba dropped His body, he would come and stay at Bindra House, and he always joined us for *Amartithi*. He died some years later in a car accident when his car fell over a cliff-edge for the third time. We all missed him very much after he was gone.

So we had a different sort of atmosphere during the days when BenJo were there. Baba took them on sightseeing trips to the neighboring places. I remember while we were driving past Khandoba's temple, I pointed it out to them. Ben was rather hard of hearing so he didn't follow what I was saying. Baba said, "Speak louder. Let him hear what you are saying."

In the later days Baba also was a little hard of hearing, and He always used to ask us to speak up. Whenever I interpreted Baba's signs, I typically spoke them out relatively softly, and He would gesture, "Speak up." Eruch would tell me, "Speak louder. Baba wants you to speak louder. He can't hear you properly."

In contrast, by the way, Baba had very lively eyes until the end.

Another thing that I remember was that Ben Hayman was an osteopath. During his visit he expressed a wish to adjust Baba's body, and this was

after the accident when Baba was having problems with His body, so Baba agreed to it. Ben was delighted that he would get the chance to handle Baba's precious body. I remember a table was put outside here, in front of Mandali Hall, in the open. Baba got onto the table, and Ben told Him to lie flat on His back, and then he stretched Baba's legs fully. Next he had Baba relax completely and went around to Baba's head, put his hands below the neck, and he did some sort of adjustments, as though he was balancing Baba's entire head on his fingers in a very delicate manner. Baba's head was swinging to and fro. Ben said, "Baba, relax. You mustn't move Your head at all. Just let it go." He was sort of giving a tug from the base of the skull or something, and then it was over.

Baba declared that He felt very good after that. Some sort of alignment was reached in the spine. Ben said, "Baba, I want to show this to one of the *mandali* so they can do it in my absence." So I was made to lie on the table, and Ben showed Eruch how to do it to me, with Baba and all watching. I picked up a bit also. It's a sort of easy adjustment to the neck, and it relaxes your spine quite a lot.

As I said, Ben was relatively deaf. I remember Baba remarking, "It's a pity that Ben has become deaf. It's difficult to get him to take part." He was referring to some conversation or other, because Ben wouldn't pick up quickly what Baba was saying. That was Ben.

After a very happy stay of five days or so, they left. Then Baba sent a very nice cable later, something to do with BenJo and banjo, playing a Baba song. I don't recall it exactly, but I remember that it was very nicely worded. Baba was famous for the different types of names He would give to people.



Chapter Twenty-nine:

1961

The time rolled around for Baba to come to Poona in 1961, and Baba sent word that Guruprasad should be made ready as usual. While we were all busy preparing the palace, Baba was still in seclusion. This time He sent word that He would not be seeing any of His lovers during His stay.

When Baba came to Guruprasad, none of us was allowed to be present. Baba came with only His resident *mandali*, and all Poona Baba-lovers had specific warnings from Him that if they disturbed Him, He would abruptly wind up His visit and return to Meherazad. He directed that they should help Baba in His seclusion work by not disturbing Him. Later on, if He liked, He might allow whomsoever He wanted to come. But none was ever to venture into Guruprasad that summer without invitation.

So Baba's stay in Poona in 1961 started in a very somber fashion. Guruprasad was really quiet, unlike previous stays during which it was buzzing with activity and *darshan* programs. Baba-lovers took great pains not even to go near that locality. Baba kept in seclusion and carried on His work there. But He did call me once.

At that time I was also having a kind of depressed spell, so Baba called me to Guruprasad, and when I was seated there I saw Him playing table

tennis with Francis. I still have that picture in my mind. Baba was still having severe pain in His hip joint, so He was seated on a high stool and Francis was at the other side, and they were playing away quite fast. Baba was returning the ball really well, despite His physical handicap and having to sit while playing. Francis was a player, a fairly good player, but Baba made him run from one side to the other. After some time the game was stopped.

They were trying to give Baba some exercise because He needed exercise for the body. Baba was still using the makeshift walker we had fashioned from a baby carriage a few years earlier. There was a big, broad veranda all around Guruprasad, with marble floors, so it was ideal for Baba's exercise, and Baba did exercise every day, gradually increasing the time and the pace of His walking. Baba would hold the handles and trundle the carriage around. We added weights, putting a big stone on the top as a sort of ballast so the carriage wouldn't lift up while Baba was putting His weight on the handles. I think I mentioned before how once Deshmukh happened to be there and he noted, "What a lucky stone it is!" and how Baba said, "All right, now you sit there."

Baba pushed Deshmukh and everybody laughed, but Deshmukh was unruffled. He had that peculiar characteristic. Although everybody made fun of him, there was never a change in his facial expressions, mind you. He just wasn't concerned! It was he and Baba—nothing else mattered.

It was a very wonderful trait Deshmukh had, because I remember once there was a group of children in Guruprasad to whom Baba wanted a message given, and Deshmukh was sitting nearby. So Baba said, "Deshmukh, get up and give them a talk." What a nice talk he gave to those little children! After it was all over the children were all absorbed in what this great learned doctor was telling them—they were little tiny tots—and then after they had left Baba said, "See? All you people think that he is such a goofy person, but could any of you have done this extemporaneous speech on the spur of the moment?" He was really very learned. No amount of poking and prodding, taunting or teasing, would disturb him at all.

There are many humorous incidents about Deshmukh. One time, for instance, Baba was in Dehra Dun in the early years, and Deshmukh had gone there for vacation to be with Baba. There were quite a lot of mango trees where Baba was staying, and Baba had given orders to the *mandali* that no one should ever pluck mangoes from the trees, but if and when the mangoes fell on the ground, then they were free to grab them. The main grabbers were Gustadji and Baidul. They were great lovers of mangoes, so night and day their attention would be on falling mangoes. As soon as they heard a little thud, both would rush out to get the mango first.

It was quite hot at that time, so Deshmukh climbed up the terrace with his bedding roll and thought he would have a nice sleep up there because it would be cooler than in the house. Meanwhile, every night Baidul and Gustadji would keep vigil, because mangoes often fell in the night. Neither of them slept very well because the mango season would soon be over, and they wanted to make the most of it. They would sit up outside quite late in the night in the hope of getting a jump on the fallen mangoes.

Gustadji described that one night as he was keeping vigil, it suddenly started to rain. Deshmukh was up on the roof unprotected, and it was such a sudden shower that to cut the time for coming down out of the pouring rain, he just rolled up his huge bedding and threw it from the terrace, and it landed just a few inches away from where Gustadji was sitting.

Gustadji recounted that when the bedding roll landed right next to him, he jumped up nearly to the height of the terrace from the great shock of it! In the dead of the night he suddenly finds some big object crashing down with a big loud thump, and both he and Baidul were startled and shocked by it. After that they both gave up their nightly vigils.

Deshmukh had the habit of constantly standing up and starting to speak even if others were talking or singing, and Baba would make fun of that. One day Jimmy Mistry was present, and Baba said to Jimmy, "Deshmukh is disturbing Me in these programs. Now it's your job to restrain Dr. Deshmukh. It is your duty to make sure that he does not do this anymore. If you fail to do so, and if he stands up and utters a single word, I'll ask you to sing before the audience."

Jimmy dreaded that possibility because he had no voice to sing and didn't know any songs—he had never sung in his lifetime. Baba continued, "I'm serious. If any such lapse occurs on your part, and if Deshmukh interrupts the activities again, then you will have to sing."

The program began and Jimmy sat by the side of Deshmukh, and he told us later, "This man"—meaning Deshmukh—"has spoiled my entire stay here. I have to concentrate only on him!" And indeed, every now and then Deshmukh would want to stand up and start talking, and Jimmy would grab him and make him sit down, and Baba would have no end of amusement watching the fun. It was a certain type of concentration for Jimmy to obey Baba's order. While all the wonderful programs were going on, Jimmy had to be concentrating on Deshmukh. After that he said, "Curses be on that man! I couldn't enjoy any of the programs!"

Jimmy literally would insult him and make him sit down, but Deshmukh was irrepressible and would try to get up again and again. Even seated he tried to speak, and Jimmy had to cover his mouth! They were both a sight for the crowds. Deshmukh would, left to his own devices, interject talk about Baba and His divinity into those musical occasions, causing the music to stop awhile for his impromptu speeches.

Another time Dr. Alu was there along with Deshmukh, and there was a big crowd in the small "*mandali* hall" side room at Guruprasad. Baba said to Deshmukh, "Would you like to marry Dr. Alu? If I tell you to do so, would you do that?"

Deshmukh stood up and said, "Baba, right now I would do it!"

"Then what would Indutai"—Deshmukh's wife's nickname—"say? Won't she start shouting? Maybe she would even beat you. Are you ready for all that?"

"Baba, that's not the point. If you want me to do it, I'm ready right now."

Baba looked at Dr. Alu, who had big beads of sweat forming on her forehead. She was thinking, "What will I do if Baba tells me to marry that man?!"

Baba asked, “Are you afraid that I’ll ask you to marry him?” Alu was completely nonplussed and couldn’t answer.

Then Baba said, “No, no, relax, I’m not asking you to do it.”

But our Deshmukh was ever-ready for anything Baba asked. Baba had but to give the word, and he would be ready to do it, unmindful of anything or anyone.

As I said, the stay in Guruprasad in 1961 started very quietly, but I was allowed to visit Baba off and on because of my health condition at that time. Baba was still having that withdrawn attitude, and His seclusion continued. But one day, all of a sudden, he opened a little window in His seclusion. He said, “I would like to have a change in this routine. To begin with I’d like to give *darshan* to the small children of My lovers—only their children. Can you all arrange to see that only children could be brought and that I could give them *darshan*?”

The pros and cons were discussed, and everybody was happy that this terrible, withdrawn phase was coming to an end. They all said, “Baba, if the children come, how will they be brought here? Someone will at least have to come with them to look after the children.”

Baba agreed. “All right,” He said, “one parent or aunt or whoever can come along with them.” A circular was sent out and a date fixed. All the children of Baba-lovers were allowed to come on the appointed day, and the lucky parent or whoever was allowed to come with their wards, and there was quite a lovely program. Roshan Kerawalla was among those who went to Guruprasad on that day, taking Baby Mehera.

There was also some small skit performed on the day the children came, with Rustom becoming the mother and Sohrab becoming a little baby in Rustom’s arms. Sohrab said that Baba recognized him immediately, and He winked at Eruch so that He was in on the joke from the beginning.

They had a knack for acting, you see—the whole of Baba’s family—those two twins as well as Mani, who could put up a show in no time at all, and she often did, entertaining Baba to no end. Baba also had that talent. In the early days, in fact, He had been employed by a theater company,

some time after His Realization, I think. His mother wanted Him to get some employment, and I think His uncle ran the company, so He was hired. Baba's brother Jalbhai also was a good comedian—he could imitate Charlie Chaplin absolutely perfectly.

Before the children's *darshan* Baba had sent a circular out to all His lovers that He would give *darshan* for one hour each afternoon between the 15th and the 31st of May, 1961. He sent out this plan for a fortnight of *darshan* to all His lovers, so there was a big rush to see Him. The rule was that each person could see Baba only once during the entire fortnight. Of course there were some little "sneakers-in," but most people abided by Baba's wish. His lovers came from all over India and had His *darshan*, again with the condition that they should see Him only once in those two weeks and under no circumstances were they to repeat the visit. They should just come, bow down to Baba, and go back. They were not to ask any questions, and no one should disturb Him at all.

All accepted these conditions. So once again Guruprasad gradually started to hum with activity. As the news spread there was a great rush of Baba-lovers, and many came even from distant outstations. Even for that little glimpse of Baba His lovers were prepared to come from far away.

The news of the *darshan* program had leaked to the West, and I remember one day looking at the queue and all of a sudden seeing Harry Kenmore in line! He had come all the way from New York City for this one fleeting glimpse of Baba.

Baba was so surprised! Kenmore just came along in line, had Baba's *darshan* and was ready to go back home. Baba kept him sitting in the hall till the end of the *darshan*, however, and then he went back. The airport people were curious. They had seen him come that very day in the morning, and then he was leaving again in the night. That was his love for Baba.

Baba gave Himself fully to every lover each afternoon. Despite the tremendous strain that we could see building up, He really gave of Himself to the maximum. Although He laid aside His seclusion for a brief time, He said that His Universal Work continued uninterrupted. Baba always looked

very tired and full of sweat at the end of His *darshans*. He was unable even to walk without support, but He would have a very happy expression on His face. He would ask, “How was the program?” and there would invariably be the same reply: “Baba, it was wonderful. You looked radiant, beautiful.” Those would be the words, you know, invariably. And of course He had His usual worn-out appearance afterwards. We had to see both His phases—His beauty and His fatigue. The programs were mostly on weekends when I didn’t have to work and could come. At times I got a few days leave—I had lots of days to my credit. I would utilize my free days to the best advantage, taking a month or even a month-and-a-half at Meherazad or to attend the Guruprasad functions.

As I said earlier, it was by Baba’s Grace that I got that job in the insurance company. It was a very convenient job, and I was quite disposable, you see. My presence wasn’t essential all the time, so my employers could readily grant me leave to be with Baba.

A year prior to this, in 1960, a new dam was being constructed near Poona. Poona’s water came from the Khadakwasla Dam, which also supplied water to the military, about ten or twelve miles to the south of Poona. They foresaw water shortages because Poona was expanding very rapidly and was becoming more industrialized, and so upstream to Khadakwasla another dam was built.

Khadakwasla was a masonry dam, built in the British times, but the new Panshet Dam, upstream, was an earthen dam, because the engineers thought that that approach would be all right and save on the cost. The engineers warned the government, however, that because it was an earthen dam it would require at least a couple of years to settle down and be strong enough to support a body of water.

Very soon, though, elections were to be held, and as is so often the case, a sort of political expediency reared its ugly head. Despite protests from engineers, the chief minister of Maharashtra, and soon to be Minister of Defense for India—Mr. Yeshwantrao Chavan—gave the order that the

dam should be allowed to be filled up. The sluice gates of the dam, which had been kept open so that no water should build up behind it until it had settled, were lowered. People had already been suffering water shortages, and the minister wanted to be able to proclaim how much he had helped the people by giving them this new source of water. He thought that by doing this he would have a feather in his cap, imagining that “Well, it is already one year since the dam was built, and now it has surely settled enough. We’ll not store much water, but let some water collect,” and then he could take credit for providing more water to the populace. The engineers were reluctantly forced to agree.

What happened was that sometime in mid-July there was a big cloudburst during the monsoon season—I don’t think we ever had rains before or after of such intensity. For three days and nights there was a continuous downpour. A huge quantity of water began to accumulate behind the earthen dam, and the engineers tried frantically to raise the sluice gates to relieve the pressure, but they jammed!

The engineers foresaw a terrible catastrophe in the making, and they sent warnings to all downstream that they were unable to do anything, and that people all along the banks of the river must evacuate for their own safety. Poona had never had any such crisis in the past, so those warnings were taken lightly—in fact, people just ignored them. There were numerous slum dwellings on the river banks, and the river flowed through the heart of the city, and so, really, people had nowhere to go. It was raining cats and dogs with no sign of a let-up, and what unfolded was simply a preordained tragedy.

A day prior to this downpour there was some clear weather, and Baba had gone for an outing in the car. Jalbhai was there, and Baba went to Bund Garden, resting His hand on one of the stone lions on a parapet that had steps leading to the lower level by the bandstand. After pacing up and down around Bund Gardens, He went to other places in Poona. It seemed as if He were, so to say, surveying the scene to come.

Meanwhile the warning message relayed from the Panshet Dam authorities resulted in a telephone call to Guruprasad from a person high

up in the public works department, someone who was a Baba-lover. He was very concerned about Baba's safety, and he gave the message over the phone that it was likely that floods would take place very soon, "So please be in readiness. If such a flood should happen, please see that Baba's safety is not endangered."

The *mandali* were curious. The river was quite close to the back of Guruprasad, less than half a mile away, but how could floods reach all the way to Guruprasad? Guruprasad is on the same level as the bridge that crosses the river at Bund Garden. It is fairly high, in other words, but one could never say that the river couldn't overflow its embankments.

As expected by the engineers, there was no let-up in the rains. It just went on pouring and pouring until at last the poor dam could hold it no longer. It just suddenly gave way. A huge expanse of water gushed out from the breach, and downstream was the Khadakwasla Dam, a solid masonry dam.

The force of the water and its mass was so great, however, that eventually Khadakwasla failed and there was a huge breach there as well, and then the full impact came to Poona. Within minutes the low-lying parts of Poona were under twenty feet of water.

Two days before the flood, by the way, Naja had been suffering from tonsillitis. Baba gave her permission to get her tonsils removed, and she was taken to the top ENT surgeon in the city of Poona, a Dr. Pate, and he performed the surgery. After the surgery Baba went there in the evening and saw Naja in the hospital. Her room was on the first floor—the "first" being the first floor above ground level—and Baba said, "Tomorrow you must return to Bindra House."

Naja said, "But Baba, the surgeon has asked me to stay on here."

Baba said, "Tell the surgeon that you want to leave. Don't stay here. It is My order to you!"

The next day, in spite of the surgeon's protests, Naja said that she had to leave. The surgeon said, "But surely you can wait for a couple of days. Is there anything lacking here?"

“No,” said Naja, “I cannot explain, but I have to leave this place!”

She emerged from the hospital with all her belongings, and of course there were people to help her. She was supported and all that, because she was in no condition to go on her own. A tonsillectomy is a difficult surgery when one is older.

Naja was brought home while this downpour was happening. Then came the flood, and the clinic where she underwent her surgery was completely submerged. The water rose to the second or third floor, and there was no escape because all the bridges on that side of the river got washed away. Poona city was disconnected from the rest of the country, except for one railway bridge, a steel bridge built in the old days. That bridge and the Bund Garden bridge were the only two connections to the outside world. It would have required a trip of several miles from the city to find a way out.

Many people died. The government, of course, suppressed all the news because it was a big blow to the party in power that they had allowed such a thing to happen. Great damage was done in Poona city. As with every bad thing, however, there is always a good side. All the old areas of the city, which were so terribly congested, were swept away. No construction could be done for some time, but then all those flooded areas which were jammed up were reconstructed, but this time with good planning, so a lot of beautification took place. Unfortunately, many lives were lost along with much property.

Another miraculous thing happened during that time. Ali Ramjoo, the son of Ramjoo Abdullah, one of Baba's early *mandali*, was staying very close to the river, and his house got flooded. How he managed to escape from that flood I still don't know, but he said that everything he owned got destroyed. All their possessions floated away in the water. But there was a little touch of Baba there because the water in their house came up to the bottom of the frame of Baba's photo and then receded.

Afterwards, for such people like him who were living in congested little shanty towns, the Poona Municipality built good houses for them in

higher, safer areas to the south of the city. They were happy later on, because all the flood-affected victims were resettled there in a colony that was well laid out.

Bund Gardens was totally flooded—the water had come to the level of the road. Café Bund was between Bund Garden and Guruprasad, and the waters were ankle-deep there. That day Baba sent word to Bindra House that all should go to the riverside to see the floods. As we approached the river there was a terrible roaring sound. It was really awesome and frightening—I have never seen a sight like that. The water had reached above the arches on the Bund Garden bridge, just a couple of feet below the road surface. Somehow that bridge survived, despite the huge volume of rapidly flowing water. It took a few days for the water to completely empty out.

Ironically, after the deluge there was total lack of water due to the collapse of both dams. The riverbed was dry. The only water left was the small amount the Bund Garden wall kept in Bund Gardens.

Immediately following the floods all our taps went dry, and at every old well in the city there were huge crowds jostling for water. People were quarreling with each other. Baba House had a well, and for years the waters of that well had not been used. When people came to know there was a well there all the neighboring people rushed in there, day and night. The house was literally under the level of the well water, so to speak! The well water had risen so high that people could almost draw the water with their hands because of the flooding that had taken place. It was a godsend because people could survive on those old wells that had fallen into disuse over the years.

I remember Eruch was given strict orders that nobody should waste water. We would bring water from Perinmai's house, and the water was strictly rationed, even for toilet use, and only a little washing of our faces was allowed.

The Tata Hydroelectric Power Company had a dam called the Mulshi Dam about 40 miles to the west of Poona, which supplied

hydroelectricity to Bombay, Poona and the areas in between. It was a dam mainly meant for generating power, hydroelectric power, but they volunteered to bail out the city. Their engineers, with the help of the public works department, worked night and day, and within a couple of weeks or so they laid a temporary pipeline all the way to Poona. Water began to trickle into our pipes for half an hour or an hour daily. It was muddy, brown water, but it was very precious.

Somehow the city survived, but it was really crippled, and there were many bad days afterwards, and really for many years there was water shortage. Eventually the Panshet Dam was rebuilt, allowed to settle down, and the Khadakwasla Dam was repaired. Several monsoon seasons had to pass by, however, before the dams could be used to supply Poona with water again.

A funny thing happened during this crisis period. After the initial floods were over the Chief Minister came posthaste to survey the flood-affected regions of the city to try to give solace to the crowds. He was walking near the riverside, and of course the river was almost empty at that time. There was a huge crowd following him, and he was strutting about as if he were a modern-day Shivaji, come to save his people, when he was actually the cause of the disaster. He made it known that he had come to offer relief, and none should fear anything, nobody would be deprived of basic amenities, and all that. He was strutting down the riverside when suddenly there was a rumor that Khadakwasla Dam had burst and there was a bigger flood coming. Actually, that dam had already burst, so the rumor was totally false. Upon hearing this there was a big stampede, and this modern Shivaji of ours turned tail and took to his heels.

The next day the news came to Baba, and He was quite amused with this. He said, "It must have been quite a sight to see this modern Shivaji bringing out his sword from the scabbard, as it were, and quickly tucking it back again and scampering off!" Baba could make funny gestures, and I still remember the gestures He made, as if He were pulling out the sword and quickly putting it back and running off.

The rumor that a bigger flood was coming was taken quite seriously. There was a big road in front of Bindra House, and we saw a river of people running along it in total panic. The rumor had actually been spread by underworld elements so that people would leave their homes and rush out. There was a lot of looting after that, and many people lost their belongings in that mad rush.

We could see the panic on their faces. We remember one boy, for example, looking here and there, going along with the crowd, wandering about crying, "Save us, save us!" The boy was carrying a parrot in a cage. There was a school opposite our house, along which ran a wall that had a small break in it, and people were rushing through that break, trampling each other in their hurry to escape, such was the panic.

Sam was out in the city near the area referred to as Quarter Gate, which isn't far from Bindra House. A crowd was running by shouting, "The flood is coming, the flood is coming!" Sam rushed to Bindra House with that news, which is what prompted us to start hastily making preparations to go up to the first floor. We got Baba's photo which we had, and there was Dhun who was very crippled, so we made her ready. In the meantime Baba came to our place, and He said, "What's all this going on here?"

We said, "Baba, there's this rumor...."

He replied, "Nothing is going to happen. Don't panic. My *Nazar* is on you all." That reassured us.

Those were the days of the flood, and it reminds me that in the old days, when we first joined the ashram, my mother told me stories of what Baba's mother had told her. One of the things Shireenmai had told her concerned when she was talking to Baba about His saying that three-quarters of the world would be destroyed. She said, "Merog, You say that everything will be destroyed. When You destroy Poona, don't destroy it with fire. Destroy it with water." Perhaps she had a fear of fire, or perhaps she had some premonition of what was to follow many years later when Poona was flooded.

In response, Baba had said to His mother something to the effect of, “Yes, yes, don’t worry.” A lot of destruction took place in the city of Poona, though the Cantonment area was relatively undamaged. We could see bodies floating by on the stagnant water after the floods had subsided, and there was a terrible stink because the huge grain go-downs owned by the government emitted a very foul stench when they got flooded and the grain started to rot. Poona was a stinking city for months afterwards, and there was grain rationing also because of the loss of so much of it. Later the government found emergency supplies and all that, but it was still a terrible loss.

Adi had gotten some information that Guruprasad might have been affected, and he came rushing in his car from Ahmednagar with water cans, thinking there might be no water left. Arriving the next day, he saw that everything was okay at Guruprasad. Baba actually extended His stay and did not leave Poona for Meherazad until the end of July, though His seclusion continued as usual, stricter than ever before.

Meanwhile, before He left, there were constant downpours, and Eruch used to cycle home to Bindra House every night from Guruprasad and then return the following morning. Baba told him to cover himself up well, but Eruch must have neglected that because it seems that he must have caught a bit of a chill in his lungs or something. A few days after Baba returned to Meherazad Eruch developed severe pneumonia—it was a very bad case with high fever, and Goher treated him with the usual allopathic drugs.

Eruch’s fever was brought under control, but all of a sudden his body had a severe reaction to the drugs, to some sulfa drug, I believe. He suddenly developed what is called hemolysis, in which the kidney ruptures and one can’t keep blood out of the urine. Eruch had deep chocolate-colored urine as a result, and he was becoming very pale. Baba wouldn’t let him go for treatment, and his condition worsened. Goher was frantic. She said, “Baba, he won’t survive long unless we do something.”

Reluctantly Baba allowed Eruch to be shifted to the Booth Hospital in Ahmednagar, where Doctor Pedersen was the chief medical officer. He

was a very good, accomplished doctor from the Salvation Army. He was given charge of Eruch, and he said, “The first thing is that he must be given a blood transfusion.” His blood count had gone dangerously low, and the doctor said that he could collapse at any moment.

There was, however, no blood bank in Ahmednagar, and fresh blood was needed. Eventually my cousin Kawas found a farm laborer, a strapping young fellow, who had a blood type exactly matching Eruch’s. He was happy to give blood for Eruch, and the transfusion was done, but the kidney wouldn’t recover. Whatever Pedersen tried did not work. My mother had been informed of the situation and she was there all the while, having rushed from Poona. Pedersen told my mother, “Pray to Meher Baba, and I will also pray to Jesus, because there is nothing like the power of prayer.” The first thing these Salvation Army people do, every morning, is to start their work with prayers. The whole staff assembles in the compound, and when the doctor comes, they all start praying under the leadership of the doctor. Psalms are read, and then they commence work. It was a very nice atmosphere.

When nothing else seemed to work, Pedersen said “I have just one more remedy left—it’s derived from snake venom. I’ll inject that, and if that doesn’t work, I have no other remedy left for him. You pray to the Lord, and I will pray also.” He was somehow quite attracted to Eruch, you know. Even while Eruch was in this condition, he would start talking about Baba, and he was very impressed with Eruch.

The injection was administered as a last resort, and somehow it worked. The draining of the blood from the kidneys stopped, and in a few days the crisis had passed. Baba paid daily visits to the hospital, of course, sometimes two or three times a day despite His seclusion. It was a very critical time. Eruch would have passed away had that last treatment not worked, but of course Baba had other work in store for him.

I think all this happened in October, 1961, and it was mentioned briefly in the “Family Letters,” to the effect that Eruch had been sick, but details were not permitted to be given out because of Baba’s work and strict

seclusion at the time. Had more information been given out, there would have been no end to the queries and the expressions of concern and anxiety all around the world, but by this time the seclusion phase had started, and many things simply could not be mentioned at the time. Later on everybody became aware of what had occurred.

Eruch then seemed to have a spate of health problems that required him to be hospitalized. First he had some weakness caused by the strain on his kidneys. He was also suffering a lot of pain from piles, the result of the hard life they had had to lead on the *mast* journeys and in the New Life. It was excruciatingly painful whenever he had a bowel movement, and eventually he developed a fistula. As a result an operation had to be performed the following year, and again it was Dr. Pedersen who performed the surgery and closed up that fistula, essentially a hole that develops owing to constant friction—an exceedingly painful condition.

Later Eruch's tonsils flared up, and once again he had to be admitted to the hospital, and they had to remove them. I remember that during those times of hospitalization my mother would go to stay with him. During the tonsil surgery it was very difficult to anesthetize him, she told me later, and huge quantities of chloroform were required to get him knocked out, a dose sufficient for two or three persons. The doctors faced this problem with each surgery on him.

So, Eruch's tonsils were successfully removed, but his tongue slipped back during the operation, and he choked while they were removing some parts from the mouth. The operating doctor was summoned, inasmuch as Eruch was turning blue because his tongue was blocking his windpipe, and Pedersen had to rush in and pull out his tongue with forceps, injuring it in the process.

Eruch had a final bout with a fissure, and three operations had to be performed, one after the other, each just a few months apart. One time I went to be with Eruch because Mumma wasn't feeling too well, so I was taking care of him while he was in the hospital. The operation went well, but on the day Eruch was to be discharged, he developed herpes in

the groin, the result of some infection in the hospital, and that caused yet more pain. Baba was extracting the maximum suffering from Eruch, it seems, but he took on whatever he had to endure without complaint.

Eruch was released without any further hospitalization for the herpes. We treated him in his room at Meherazad, and Dr. Donkin was treating him as well. After he began to feel well, I went back to Poona.

As I have mentioned, Dr. Pedersen became very fond of Eruch. When whatever surgery had been completed, the doctor would go to the recovery room to monitor Eruch. He would thereafter come to Eruch's room, and Eruch would explain all the niceties of the spiritual path, and the doctor was very, very interested in all that. The doctors and matrons and nurses would be waiting for Pedersen to come out—the whole hospital's rounds had to be made, but Pedersen would forget everything while talking to Eruch. The staff would peep into the room from time to time, hoping Pedersen would come out, and Eruch would remind him, "Doctor, I think you should go for your rounds." "Oh, that can wait, that can wait," the doctor would say. Afterwards I think he once even came to pay a courtesy call to see Eruch at Meherazad. I don't know if he met Baba or not—I think he did, so he was quite fortunate. Eventually he was transferred back to Australia, and another doctor, Dr. Brieseman, arrived. He was there at Booth Hospital until Baba dropped His body, and it was he who sent the ambulance for Baba.

Eruch had one more illness after all this—he came down with a high fever which turned out to be typhoid. After all those major operations, his system had become weak, so he was prone to such infections. I remember that Baba had sent him to Bindra House for a few days to recuperate while Baba was at Meherazad. And then after some days' rest he returned to Meherazad. It seemed that that was his time to have one health problem after the other in quick succession.

When Baba had been traveling extensively, Eruch had been in rugged health, and Baba gave him and the other *mandali* all the energy they needed. They were tough guys, I tell you, each one better than the other.

It was hard to tell who was strongest—they were all tough physically, spiritually and mentally. With “The Divine Toughener” as their Master, there was no place for softness.

Once there was an episode that involved our neighbor at Guruprasad. It was during a relatively quiet period when there were just a few of us sitting on the veranda with Baba. There was another bungalow at the side of Guruprasad, similar but much smaller and not nearly in as good a condition. Only one person was staying in that building, and he seemed to us to be very mysterious because the windows, doors, ventilators and everything would always be shut, even in the summer! It was as if the place were totally deserted, but there was in fact a man living there. Everybody was quite mystified and intrigued by the strange appearance of the property—all closed up and yet inhabited—and we all wondered what on earth he was doing.

Well, on this particular day, when we were all sitting on the front veranda, Baba happened to cast His glance towards the roadside, and there was a Westerner coming out from the gate. He would always come out from his bungalow at a particular time, go down his approach road, then go along the main road and past Guruprasad, but we had no idea where he went after that. He typically had a satchel in his hand, and I think he wore a hat and looked down—never left or right—his gaze was fixed on the ground before him.

Baba gestured, “Look, look, there is that man going out again.” He told Aloba, “Go, go and find out about the man, who he is and what he is doing.” As soon as Baba merely mentioned these words, Aloba was immediately electrified, and he swung into action. There was quite a tall banister all around the veranda, but instead of going out via the porch and the steps, he just leapt over the banister, doing a sort of summersault or a cartwheel over it, jumped down ten feet below onto the ground, and started to run. He ran down the driveway very fast, up to the point where he encountered the closed gates of Guruprasad. There was another row

of tall railings, a lower wall with metal railings with spears on top, and again Aloba did a cartwheel over it all, and before the man walked past that point, Aloba materialized before him.

That man must have gotten quite a shock. Who was this person appearing before him? Meanwhile, observing this, Baba gestured to the rest of us, “Look at this fellow. He gives Me a heart attack! To give him any order is a dangerous thing!” And really, we were all amazed at how Aloba had made a sprinting bee-line for that guy.

That was the last we saw of Aloba for several minutes, and we don’t know what happened next. But shortly thereafter he came back, and he brought all the information that one would want to have about a person! The man’s name was Kirkpatrick, he was an Irishman, he was living all alone in the house next door, and he had some business at the bank, which is where he always went. Aloba reported all the information he could extract from the man. We came to know that he was like a *mast* at that time, and I think he was the first Western *mast* that we might have ever encountered. He was a total recluse, never spoke with anyone, never allowed anyone into his house, and at night people used to hear strange sounds coming from the place. No one knew what it was all about, but it was quite mysterious.

Anyway, Kirkpatrick had retired, but he continued to work as the secretary to the Bishop of St. Mary’s, the largest Protestant [Anglican] church in Poona, for a very small wage. He lived very frugally because he didn’t have much to live on, and of late he had come upon very hard days. It was a time when he was going to require a lot of help, and that was, you know, very likely why Baba seemingly casually got acquainted with him. Probably it was time for him to have contact with Baba.

He was in dire financial difficulty, unable to pay the rent, and the landlord was giving him lots of trouble—he had cut off both the electricity and the water supply to the building because of non-payment of the rent, but the landlord was unable to evict him because the laws concerning eviction were very strict at the time. There was rent control, and it was highly

weighted in favor of the tenants. To this day the poor landlords are still having a very rough time with those old rent contracts!

So the landlord just cut off all his utilities, hoping that his non-paying tenant would be forced to leave the place. One day Kirkpatrick came over while Baba was in the *mandali* hall, and Baba allowed him to come in. He very respectfully asked Baba's permission to wash himself, and Baba very graciously allowed that.

Gradually he began to come closer to Baba, and Baba would allow him to come and sit in the *mandali* hall. He would sit in one place, very unobtrusively, while things were going on. In the later years we would sometimes find him sitting there, rather unkempt but still clean. Later on it became much worse because he was in more and more financial difficulty, and eventually he requested some help to meet his daily food requirements.

At that point Baba ordered Meherjee to see to his needs, which were very simple. All he ate was a little *bhakri* [millet bread] and a spicy dish made with chickpea flour called *besan*. That was his favorite dish, and he said that "If I could get just this little amount of food, and You could arrange for that, I would be very happy." Baba told Meherjee to give him a small sum of money to provide for his food, in those days only thirty rupees a month.

Meherjee looked after him as instructed by Baba, and that continued for years. Each time Baba would come to Guruprasad He would inquire after Kirkpatrick's welfare and reiterate that Meherjee should take care of him. It was a sort of duty that Baba gave to Meherjee.

This continued even after Baba dropped His body, and later on, when I joined Meherjee working in his factory, Meherjee delegated the job to me. So every month I would go and give Kirkpatrick the small amount of Rs. 30, and he would be very satisfied with that. I would tell him that if he required anything else he should let me know, and he would say, "No, son, this is quite enough for me. I am happy."

Eventually the landlord succeeded in evicting him. There was a court case and the landlord won, so Kirkpatrick was physically thrown out of the

house, and all of his belongings were thrown out into the compound. The Christian Mission, which ran a poor home, came to his rescue. They took him in and got him settled in a small room. There were rows of those rooms for poor people who were totally without support.

I would then go there to the home for the poor to give Kirkpatrick his monthly food allowance, as it were, and whenever I went he would say, “You won’t fail to come the next month, will you?” I would say not to worry about that, and that “Baba will always look after you. If you need anything more, let me know.” His demands were very few.

A year or so later he asked for Rs. 20 or so more, because prices had gone up. It was just sufficient for him to pay for the day’s food. His whole room was filled with trunks, which were filled with books—he didn’t even have space to lie down. So whenever I would go there I would find him sitting on the edge of one of the trunks in the doorway, with a book in his hand, reading all day long. That was his occupation. I imagine he was past his sixties. He had a constitution like Bal Natu—very frail and thin. His complexion was pale and anemic because he was not looking after himself despite my asking him to take care.

Eventually Kirkpatrick was getting more and more frail, and one day a man came to me and said that he should be taken to hospital. It was the same man who had provided his daily *bhakri* and *besan* for years. I went to visit him and tell him so, but he said, “No, son, I am all right.” His trousers were all wet, and he saw that I saw that, and he said, “This is not incontinence. It’s just a little discharge I am having from a sore I have.”

I said, “But it needs looking after. I’ll take you to a hospital, whichever one you want, or a good clinic.”

“No, no, I am all right here. I’ll let you know when the time comes. I’ll send word to you. You don’t worry about me.” That was the type of man he was.

Eventually the time did come when he sent for me. That day he said, “Now, my son, the time has really come—I need to be hospitalized, so get me into some good place.” I got an ambulance, and I took him to a

nice mission hospital where Meherjee's daughter had worked at one time and where the hospital staff knew Meherjee.

I got him into the ambulance, and he was just covered with muck, discharge, pus and all that. I don't know what had happened. It had all gone into his shoes, which were stuck to the floor, so I took the shoes off, and they were full of pus. When I took him to the hospital—the missionaries there were providing service for the poor—and when I went later to meet the person in charge of him, that person said, "What a man you have brought here! It took me twelve pails of water to wash him clean! He was full of maggots! How is it that you brought him here so late?"

I explained that I had been looking after him for a long time, and that it was with difficulty that I could convince him to come to the hospital. The person responded that Kirkpatrick was in a very weakened state and they feared for his life.

At the hospital I saw Kirkpatrick completely clean for the first time, all nicely washed and lying in the bed, and he said, "Son, you have done very well. I am really happy now, but will I get my food here? I would like to have an egg every day." I told the staff not to spare any expense, and whatever he needed should be given to him, and naturally we were paying the bills.

Then all of a sudden Kirkpatrick started to develop a temperature because the infection had spread into his blood stream, and he got septicemia and gangrene and suddenly became very seriously ill, and a couple of days later he died.

Meherjee and I arranged to take his body to the Christian cemetery. It is a very lovely site in Poona, on the Poona-Satara highway, a huge place with gardens. A pit had been dug for him. Meherjee said to the Christian priest who was going to perform the final rites for Kirkpatrick that we would like to read out our "Master's Prayer," and he said that we were free to do what we wanted, so the Parvardigar Prayer was read by Meherjee, and we shouted Baba's "*Jai!*" and the body was lowered. Thus Baba saw to his welfare right to the very end.

As it turns out, at one time Kirkpatrick had been very well-to-do! He had been secretary to the Bishop of Poona, and that was a high post. He had an office in St. Mary's church. He told me about his life, and I remember that his father was a big shot, but his family lost all contact with him and eventually he became totally without resources, and Baba took over, as it were.

He was a real *mast*. How else could you explain that sort of behavior? He was so quiet, though—he never spoke about God. He would come to the Poona Baba Centre every Monday while he was in good health. He would sit quietly in a corner, never talk to anyone, and then just go away. He must have loved Baba silently—we just don't know what was happening inside him. We only saw the external link—internally we don't know what was going on.


I'm not sure which year this contact with Kirkpatrick started, but it happened in a summer when things were pretty quiet. It must have been before Baba's 1962 stay, because by then the Maharani had had a trellis constructed around the veranda, which would have made Aloba's vaulting over the banister impossible. Aloba would call him "Karakpatrick," because "*karak*" means "stiff," and one of his characteristics was that he would walk quite stiffly, always looking at the ground.



Chapter Thirty:

1962

The Routine at Meherazad and Celebrating Baba's Birthday

 did go to Meherazad in 1962, and I think it was then that I started to go annually around the time of Baba's Birthday. Each year, a few days before Baba's Birthday, I would take my earned leave and come to Meherazad. One of the things that kept me occupied in Meherazad was helping Eruch respond to the flood of telegrams that would arrive every year at that time asking for messages from Baba. Newly opened centres inevitably wanted special messages, and there was always a mad rush of correspondence.

On one of those occasions a couple from Hyderabad had come to Meherazad, uninvited and unannounced. The Andhra Baba-lovers were having a glorious celebration in Hyderabad for Baba's Birthday, and these people had wondered what the Birthday celebration would be like at Meherazad—it must be even so much grander, they thought, because Baba Himself was there.

They arrived in the early morning at 4:30 a.m. and stood at the Meherazad gate just as Baba came into Mandali Hall and sat down. I was there with all the men *mandali*, and Baba had sat down in front of us. As those visitors approached they noticed that it was all quiet—Baba was in seclusion, no one was allowed to see Him, but somehow they had

appealed to the outside watchmen to allow them to come in, and then Baba allowed them to come inside for His *darshan*.

Baba asked, “Why did you two come here? You know that I am in seclusion?”

They said, “Yes, Baba, but we were so eager to see what would happen here. The activity is on such a grand scale in our place, and this being where You are, we thought it would be so much grander than the Hyderabad celebrations so we wanted to come and see for ourselves.”

Baba said, “I am not here. I am where you came from. There is where I am. What you see is what is happening here, because I am not here! Go back quickly!” And really there was nothing happening at Meherazad—no celebration, no programs, nothing. The servants had put up some bunting on the ceiling along with little paper decorations and some chalk decorations—*rangoli*—on the floor. The hall was lit with kerosene lanterns as usual. That was it. What I remember is that for Baba’s Birthday celebration at Meherazad we all got up very early in the morning, and after washing we would all be ready. Baba, I think, was with the women. At exactly the stroke of 5:00 a.m. Baba wanted us to shout, at the top of our voices, “Avatar Meher Baba *ki Jai!*” seven times. That was it. And then we recited the Parvardigar and Repentance prayers. The women could hear us and also shouted out Baba’s “*Jai!*” and then they sang the *arti*. Baba appeared to be most disinterested in all this, however, because He was working in seclusion, and this was a bit of a distraction for Him. My feeling was that He wanted to get it over with as soon as possible.

As I said earlier, I believe that I came for Baba’s Birthday for the last six or seven years, until 1968, to help Eruch with the correspondence. There would be stacks of telegrams, and I would file them in alphabetical order and help him to draft the replies and send them out to the various Baba-lovers. By the time all the telegrams and letters had been dealt with, it would almost be time for me to return, but those were very enjoyable stays I had with Baba.

This was our daily routine at Meherazad while I was there: each morning Baba would come over from the women's side at about eight o'clock. Some of the *mandali* would go over to the women's side—and I would join them when I visited—and we would take the lift chair to bring Baba over to Mandali Hall in it because he was not able to walk that distance without great pain and discomfort. There's a very good film clip in *Beyond Words*, the movie made by Louis Van Gasteren, showing Baba going from the men's side to the women's side of the Meherazad estate in the lift chair.

Once Baba was inside the Hall, we would all stand in a line, and He would have a little walk up and down the Hall, from one end to the other, assisted by Francis on whose arm he leaned for support. Baba would go past us all as we stood in line, taking seven or eight quick rounds up and back. His usual humor and unique style was always present. If Francis was caught daydreaming or otherwise not paying attention, he would get a quick jerk as Baba made a sudden turn, so he had to be very alert at those times.

Then we would say the prayers. Everybody in the hall would stand up, and the door would be locked. Francis and Bhau would be on either side of Baba supporting Him while Eruch read out the prayers from the prayer book in which he had written down the prayers Baba had given, and the rest of us would stand with folded hands before Baba. In later years I recall that the pouf would be brought before Baba, and we each in turn had to put our right foot on it after the prayers were completed. Baba would bow down, placing His head on each one's right foot seven times. The *mandali* member to whom Baba was bowing down had to repeat the Name of God according to his own religion, out loud, seven times, once each time Baba's forehead touched his foot. Eruch and I would say "Ahuramazda," Pendu would say "'Ya Yezdan," Aloba would say "Allah hu Akbar," and so on. That would be the end of the prayer session.

After that Baba would start having the correspondence read out and afterwards the reading of the day's newspapers or whatever else had been arranged, and that is how the day would be spent at Meherazad.

Around noon or a bit later in the afternoon He would go in to the women's side for lunch. After having His lunch and a brief rest, He would return around 2:00 p.m. and would spend another couple of hours with the men *mandali*, sometimes in conversation or we would have a card game or something. When there were only four persons there we would play a game called "*pees ni kot*," which is played rather like La Risque but with only four players.

Not long after I returned to Poona Baba sent word to get Guruprasad ready for His usual annual summer stay. Earlier that year the Maharani had completely renovated Guruprasad. The bungalow had never before had any renovations. Renovating that huge property was extremely expensive, but for Baba's comfort and convenience she had an inner urge to fix up the whole place.

Now see what happens. In the interval between the end of the summer of 1961 and the beginning of the summer of 1962, the whole electrical system was stripped down, old wiring was removed, new electrification done, and the whole veranda all around the bungalow was covered with a trellis work of decorative steel. That made the whole veranda secure—only three entrances to the veranda were now open—with steps on either side and the front. You could lock all the doors and the whole bungalow would be completely secure, including the veranda.

When Baba came in the summer of 1962 He continued His seclusion, and many of the renovations helped create a more secure, secluded environment for Him. It also looked very nice after the extensive painting, coloring and white-washing. The old princess looked young again! Really, it was very beautiful. And then, after all this was done, Baba announced that we would hold the East-West Gathering at Guruprasad. It was a fit place for the occasion, ready for that unique event in Avataric history.

As usual, I was busy making Guruprasad ready for Baba's arrival. When Baba first reached Poona He was still in seclusion, so nobody was allowed to see Him. After just a few days at Guruprasad Pendu was stricken with

urinary trouble—he had prostate enlargement, and the doctor advised immediate surgery. After Baba was settled in at Guruprasad Pendu was then taken to a nearby clinic, the Jehangir Nursing Home.

The surgery was performed by a very competent surgeon named Dr. Eddie Bharucha. He had recently returned from England with his FRCS degree and had been appointed the General Surgeon at Jehangir Nursing Home. He performed the operation and it appeared to be successful, but after a few days there appeared to be a little leak from the site of the incision, and it seemed that there had been a rupture. The doctor said that another surgery would have to be done, so poor Pendu had to undergo another major surgery to repair the burst that had occurred. That was done, and afterwards he was recovering at the clinic.

A few days before he was to be taken back to Guruprasad, the site of Pendu's surgery ruptured again, so now Pendu was really distraught! The poor doctor said, "I have never had this experience in all my life!" He promised Pendu that this time it would be successful, and he asked him to give him one more chance. The third major surgery was performed, and that time it was properly done, but as a result of those repeated surgeries the urinary tract got inflamed and had to be dilated frequently. It was extremely painful for Pendu, and it looked as if Baba were making Pendu share in the suffering that was always the lot of the *mandali* who were with Baba. It was so obvious! How could such a competent surgeon fail twice in a row and then have this aftereffect? In addition to all this, among the *mandali* Pendu had the most suffering from the second accident. In fact he was really tough, and I suppose Baba gives as much suffering as one can take, so each one gets his due share. Baba brings one to the very limit of one's endurance, pain or exhaustion.

I remember that when Baba first arrived, circulars were being sent out about the East-West Gathering. This great *darshan*, to be held for both Eastern and Western Baba-lovers, had been on His mind, but Baba had kept postponing it. Eventually He set the dates: it was to be held during the first week of November, 1962, for a week's program from the first of November to the end of the week. There was to be *darshan* on the

first four days of the week-long stay, and then the groups would go on a tour around Poona visiting Baba sites. On the sixth day they would go to Ahmednagar and visit Meherabad and Meherazad, and then on the seventh and final day a short visit with Baba to say farewell and then back home.

There were several changes of dates and instructions, and many preparations were being made because Baba's going to the West again was out of the question owing to His physical condition, but He had agreed to give *darshan* to His lovers in Poona. So Baba started allowing some of the Poona group to come to Guruprasad, and during those visits musical programs would be held.

During the time that Pendu was in the hospital, Vishnu was also not feeling well. He had a dilation of the heart, although at the time we didn't know it. He had uneasy spells of dizziness and nausea, and one day I heard Eruch tell Baba, "Baba, he should be hospitalized. His condition does not appear very good to me. Why don't we send him to the hospital?"

Baba gestured, "No, no, no, he's all right. Let him be here." Baba indicated that there was no need for all that. He knew that Vishnu's life was nearly over—in fact, it was only a few days to the end—and Baba probably wanted to keep him close by.

During this period Eruch was spending the nights at Bindra House, while during the day he was at Guruprasad, arriving at about 8:00 a.m. and staying until 5:00 or 5:30 p.m. He worked on his correspondence duties at Guruprasad, and when he returned to Bindra House he posted the letters he had written for Baba. Eruch ate dinner at Bindra House, talked with us about the day's activity, spent the evening with us, and then rested for the night. Baba sent him to us every night.

Baba continued to make Vishnu do the night watch for part of the night, and I remember that there was a very big program at Guruprasad one day, and after the program was over we all returned home. That night at about 10:00 p.m. somebody opened our front gate. I think it was Meherjee or somebody who had been sent there, and he informed Eruch

that Vishnu had suddenly died, and that Baba was calling Eruch to return immediately to Guruprasad.

Vishnu had been on watch after the music program, and sometimes if Baba would summon the women to come to His bedroom at night, the watchman would wait outside until Baba clapped. The protocol was that the watchman would leave the room, the women would come, and after seeing Baba the women would leave, Baba would then clap, and the night watchman would return to his post in the room.

On this night Vishnu was just outside Baba's room, where Eruch used to have his office. There was a peculiar elaborate sort of sofa, with seating all around a main back-and-headrest which was quite tall. It was supposed to be placed at a niche in the wall, and people could sit all around.

Vishnu was sitting on the edge of one of the seats, and Dr. Goher came along to call him for going back in to Baba. Vishnu was enjoying a joke with someone at the time, and he was laughing loudly. As Goher came out of the Maharani's room onto the veranda where this couch was, she found that Vishnu was laughing very loudly, and then suddenly he lurched forward. Goher was shocked and very scared, and she began to shout, "Baba, Baba—Vishnu, what happened?" But he had passed away, just like that. Goher tried to resuscitate him, but there was no response. He had just passed away in a single jolt—a swift and good death was given to him by Baba. He had been with Baba since 1919, the Kasba Peth days, even before *Manzil-e-Meem*.

Vishnu was a very retiring man, very unassuming—he never pushed himself forward, but he was always ready to do whatever Baba asked him to do. He was a gem of a person, invariably nice, soft-spoken and extremely large-hearted. He was the kind of person who never interfered much with other people. He accompanied Baba on many occasions, and he was the one who saw Baba's glory when Baba had the car accident near Satara. He and Nilu were great chums, childhood friends, and I think in fact that Vishnu brought Nilu to Baba when Nilu was still studying medicine.

Vishnu's mother, Kakubai, loved Baba deeply from the very early days. Maiji—Baba's mother—would also go and visit her in her Kasba Peth home. Vishnu was very young when Baba first started going there, and he actually just wanted to go to the cinema and watch movies. Kakubai complained to Baba about that, and Baba, Who was still called Merwan at that time, slapped him soundly. Because of Merwan's instructions he started going to school, and a while later he was called by Merwan to be with Him at *Manzil-e-Meem*. When Baba moved to Meherabad he went there and became a teacher at the Hazrat Babajan School. That is why he—along with Chaggan, Dhake and Arjun—had “Master” attached to his name, and he was called Vishnu Master by all. Vishnu came to Baba as His disciple for all time, and one of the very fortunate few who were to become His close *mandali*.

His main task in later years was to do the marketing for Baba—in short, he was the bazaar master. At Meherabad he would share this task with Jangle Master.

So, back to the story of his passing: Goher rushed back and told Baba, “Baba, Vishnu has died.” Baba came out of His room, sat on the chair there, and said, “All these years Vishnu kept watch for Me. Today I am keeping watch on his body.” That was a very rare thing. Baba never did that. Baba said, “He deserved this. It was in his fate.”

Baba waited with Vishnu's body for Eruch to come, and when Eruch arrived from Bindra House, Baba told him to take Vishnu's body to the crematorium. Baba also sent word that I shouldn't go along. Accordingly, I went to sleep.

Eruch went off with Meherjee, and they arranged for the funeral. Other Poona and Ahmednagar Baba-lovers who had been there for the *qawwali* program earlier were informed, and Patil and others went to the Vaikunth Crematorium in the city where the cremation was performed late that very same night. Eruch returned late in the night to Bindra house, as instructed by Baba. Vishnu's ashes were taken to Meherabad to be buried there according to Baba's orders. Thus, the

first of the four pillars of Meherabad merged into his Beloved Baba and returned home.

I remember an outstanding musical program that summer. It was the performance by an Indian classical music singer called Vinayakrao Patwardhan. Baba never liked classical Indian music, but this man's singing was so good that Baba enjoyed that program very much. He was a great singer of the pure Hindustani classical music, a learned pundit of music, with the highest qualification. He had developed a specialty called "*tarana*." Towards the end of a musical piece he started rendering the sound of a musical instrument from his throat—no words, but only notes with that sound. He was so good at it that we really felt as if some musical instrument were being played, without a false note in it, mind you, and he was quite aged then, so to put forth that sort of performance at his age was a fantastic feat.

No one else could do that sort of thing, and the crowd was enraptured. Baba also liked it very much, so much so that He gave him His handkerchief and told him, "You must give one more performance here when My lovers come from the West." He agreed to that.

This "*tarana*," by the way, was so remarkable that when this singer performed in Moscow, Khrushchev, who had attended the concert, went backstage and asked if he could look in Patwardhan's mouth to see if he had inserted an instrument in his throat.

Baba especially liked one particular *raag* called "*Bhairavi*." Usually it is sung late in the night or as the last piece in an evening concert. It's a *raag* full of pathos, crying out to the beloved with all the feeling in the heart, and that was the one Baba most liked in the classical repertoire. The way Vinayakrao sang it really brought tears to the eyes of many of those present, a performance truly given from the heart.

Francis, not being aware of the nuances of Indian music, wouldn't know how the performance was, and he asked me, "How was the artist's performance?"

On this occasion I said, “Superb.”

Francis remarked, “It seems that Baba is able to draw out the best from the artist.” We also noticed it, that Baba’s appreciation was so much that any artist that performed before Him would be inspired to bring out their very best. And most of the artists felt that the best performance of their career was the one before Baba. The artists were fortunate because it was the opportunity of a lifetime to sing before Baba and to entertain the Lord of the Universe. On that occasion even Francis felt moved.

Indian culture is such that there is respect for persons regarded to be spiritual, so even though a singer might not have a full appreciation of Baba’s Avataric status, he would come and give a free performance.

Indian classical music can be very long and drawn out—the lines are repeated ad nauseam, as it were, and it requires a lot of grounding in the music to appreciate it. Outwardly Baba didn’t have the patience for that, although He was Infinite Patience Itself! What He liked more was *qawwali* and *ghazals*, where the aspect of love was predominant, and all His life Baba always stressed love. That aspect was predominant in that form of music, so that’s why He liked *qawwali*.

Even in *qawwali* there are two types, the *ghazal* and the *Naat*. The *Naat* is praise of the Prophet Mohammed, and interestingly, Baba didn’t like that as much. *Naat* is typically not that inspiring, and it is more conventional. What Baba wanted was the lover’s cry, the lover’s complaint, and the Beloved’s response, all of which is found in the *ghazal*.

Even *ghazals* can have two different types. Begum Akhtar sang *ghazals* but not in the *qawwali* style. She was known as the “Queen of *Thumri*”—which is another style of singing *ghazals*.

We were now almost at the end of Baba’s stay at Guruprasad in 1962. The main thing on everybody’s mind was the approaching East-West Gathering. It was a going to be a huge undertaking, and everyone was gradually getting geared up for it. Baba held several meetings with the Poona Centre workers because thousands of Easterners were expected to come and get the chance to be with Baba after many years. There

hadn't been a major *darshan* for quite some time, and Baba hadn't encouraged people to come, but now this gathering was to be on a bigger scale so lots of preparation was necessary.

For the Westerners, letters, telegrams, cables and circulars of Baba's wishes also needed to be sent out. The Gathering was originally scheduled to be a seven-day event starting on the first of November, but later on Baba sent out another circular and everybody held their breath lest it should be another cancellation, but He just shortened the program to four days.

During that time there was a happy occasion for the Jessawala and Kerawalla families. On 31st of May, 1962, Roshan Kerawalla gave birth to a second daughter. Baba was informed immediately, and He was very happy with the news. He named her Daulat, after Mehera's mother, and ever after she was always called Dolly. Dolly was a lovely, healthy baby. Baba called Sam and Roshan to bring the newborn baby to Him to see, and He told them that they should not have any more children. Banumasi, of course, was very upset, because she had hoped for a boy child, but Baba was insistent. He told the family that these two girls would do more work for Him than any man could.

Baba was very particular that Dolly be vaccinated against smallpox, but Banumasi kept saying she was too young. Because of her disobedience to Baba's wishes, Dolly got a very severe case of smallpox, which she contracted from the Khilnani boys who had been brought to see Baba while they still had the scabs of the pox on the skin, which is the most infectious stage. Dolly was unconscious in the hospital for forty days, and the doctors were convinced that she would die. If she didn't die, they said, she would surely lose her sight. Mehera would pray to Baba to save the baby, and Baba told Kaikobad that he should pray constantly for the child. Daily reports would come to Baba, none of them encouraging. He would continue to say that Dolly was going to be all right, however—that He would take care of her. And sure enough, she did recover, and not only that, she recovered without losing her sight!

One time, maybe one or two years later when Dolly had just started crawling, we were at Guruprasad for a small gathering of Poona Baba-lovers. Baba was in the main hall, seated on His chair. Roshan and Dolly were close to His seat, sitting with the women *mandali* and the other ladies from Bindra House and Baba House. Dolly could speak somewhat, but she wasn't walking properly yet because she had been weakened from the smallpox. She was crawling around, much to everyone's joy, because we'd nearly lost her. But for Mehera's entreaties and Baba's Grace, Dolly would not have been with us on that occasion. Suddenly Dolly crawled very determinedly to Baba's chair, held on to His *sadra* and pulled herself up. Looking up at Him she said quite clearly, "Baba, I love You. Do You love me?" Baba was so amused! He gestured to her "Yes, I love you!" Eruch interpreted and everyone there laughed at the precocity of this little child. I can still see her in my mind's eye, looking up at the Lord of the Universe and telling Him that she loved Him.

So, after November 4th, which would be the last day of the Gathering, everyone would be free to leave because Baba wouldn't see them again, but arrangements were made for transporting those who wished to visit Meherazad and Meherabad. Those attending could be in Poona for the whole week and a few days after, so all of this was at the back of everyone's mind.

Everyone at Bindra House was putting in their bit, and it did seem like something new. Never before had the East and the West of the Baba-world met on this scale. It was a unique gathering—the first and the last of its kind in this Advent.

While Baba was winding up his stay at Guruprasad and preparing to depart for Meherazad, the Maharani paid a visit, and she suggested to Baba, "Now in a few months time You will have to come again for the East-West Gathering, so why don't You stay on? Guruprasad is entirely at Your disposal."

Baba was very pleased with what she said, but He said that He had to attend to very important work in seclusion that required His presence at Meherazad, so He returned and was in Meherazad until the end of October.

Back in Meherazad Baba spent much of His time in seclusion. He held a few small *darshan* programs during that time, nevertheless. His phase of seclusion seemed to go on and on and on, but His dark mood and the complete disinterest that had manifested in the earlier phase of His working proved to be temporary. We don't have the faintest idea about it, but He was taking onto Himself the suffering of the universe, and people around Him could sense that. The *mandali* especially struggled to see Baba suffering like that. His whole life was a sort of continuous crucifixion.

Now that Baba was back in Meherazad, the preparations for the East-West Gathering slowly started to gain momentum. As the event approached, there were more and more tasks to be done. It would be difficult to accommodate the vast numbers of Easterners who would attend. November was fortunately the time of *Diwali* vacations, so we could reserve campuses in some schools and other such institutions for the purpose of accommodating some of the lovers in the different groups. For the Westerners we had booked almost all the hotels available in Poona at the time—well in advance, mind you.

During Baba's time there was the Wellesley Hotel, the Poona Hotel, the Ritz Hotel—they are mostly all gone now. There was also the Poona Club, the Napier Hotel, Mobos Hotel and the Turf Club. Between these few hotels and private clubs we could accommodate the 150-odd Westerners that eventually would participate in the East-West Gathering.

Meherjee was given the charge of arranging the flights and the placement of the groups of people in the various hotels, and I was to assist Meherjee in that work, so I had to be with him all the time. Dr. Donkin was given the responsibility of the medical care for all, especially for the Westerners. He had to make special preparations for the Westerners, and he did a really wonderful job with that. General Dr. Bhandari and his wife also

assisted with the medical side for the Easterners. We didn't know them at the time, but they were extremely devoted to Baba. She was a medical officer, and he was a doctor in the Armed Forces Medical Corps, stationed in Poona. Then there was Dr. Jehangir Bastani, Faroukh Bastani's elder brother, who had newly qualified as a doctor. He later studied psychiatry, emigrated to the United States, and served as the psychiatrist in charge of several penitentiaries in the U.S. He eventually received a citation from the President of the United States—he's a very talented person who served Baba very well at the time of the East-West Gathering.

Those lovers were managing the medical side of the gathering, but there were also many other things to prepare, including the stalls for people who wanted to buy Baba books and lockets and other trinkets. All the duties were distributed. If there were any difficulties we were allowed to correspond with Eruch and Mani and the *mandali*. There was no direct correspondence with Baba as such because He was still in strict seclusion.

All these preparations were going on. The man in charge of construction of the *pandals* and the stage was Bapusaheb Shinde. He was a very stalwart Baba-lover, a huge man with a robust constitution. Jalbhai was given the duty of taking the Westerners to see the Baba sites in Poona and afterwards taking them to Meherazad and Meherabad.

There were lovers coming from Pakistan—the Arjanis and Dubashes—and they were posted at various hotels. Specific persons were responsible for the group at each hotel. It was all planned out very meticulously, and in spite of the very big shock that was to take place at the time of the Gathering, the whole thing worked very smoothly and efficiently by Baba's Grace.

All was building up into a crescendo, and everybody was quite fired up. There was a lot of activity everywhere, including in Meherazad where correspondence zipped to and fro all over the world. The worst part of it was that Baba's health began to fail. The pressure of His Universal Work was so immense that His health was declining, and day by day it

was causing great anxiety and worry to the *mandali*. So Eruch would tell Baba, "Baba, we can cancel the program, because Your health really doesn't seem to be good enough for such an event."

Baba responded, "No! Come what may, this meeting must take place!" There had been many postponements in the past, and Baba was determined not to postpone again. Yet Baba became weaker and weaker and more and more unwell, until even He would ask the *mandali*, "Should I cancel the program?"

They would all respond, "Yes, Baba," because all were so worried about Him.

Francis would say, "Baba, just straightaway give the signal and we'll call it off."

"No, no, no," He would then say, "let it go on."

This sort of thing was going on all the while, in Mandali Hall and in Baba's bedroom with the women *mandali*. The men and women *mandali* had to share in this suffering and tension. It just went on and on, and in the middle of all this Baba sent out the circular reducing the time for the Gathering to four days, which, of course, was accepted universally.

Just before the East-West Gathering, on October 21st, Baba went to open the Ahmednagar Centre despite His weak health. It was a red-letter day for the Baba-lovers in Ahmednagar. After a long period they got to see their Beloved, and their hearts were full as they had His *darshan*.

Now it was time for Baba to come to Guruprasad, which He did in the last week of October or thereabouts. We from Bindra House, Janghu Sukhadwalla, and the Baba House people had all been preparing Guruprasad for several weeks—cleaning out the place, bringing in the extra furniture, utensils, linens, and many other things that were required for Baba's stay.

Baba's health was not good when He arrived, and then it started to deteriorate even further on a daily basis. Those of us who were helping

to prepare for the East-West Gathering used to go every morning to Guruprasad to report on the previous day's work, but Baba seemed more and more disinterested in all of that. He would sit with His head stooped, looking pale and sallow, immersed in His Universal Work. Once again He seemed to be in that withdrawn state that we had witnessed the previous year. After an hour or so Baba would want to leave the hall, and He had to have two of the *mandali* assist Him, one on either side, as He could barely walk. We wondered how He would ever be able to conduct such a monumental *darshan* in such a state.

Baba had told those of us who were working for Him to come to Guruprasad for lunch, and Baba fixed the menu for us—it was a very simple menu, sweet buns and tea. We had to come from wherever we were and have our lunch and then return to our various duties. Adi tried to suggest that we have *brun* bread (with more of a crunchy crust and not as sweet) and butter instead, but Baba was displeased at that suggestion and said that it had to be bun bread and tea only. Each day Baba seemed weaker and weaker, so much so that just before the gathering took place, Eruch was moved to say, “Baba, even now we can cancel it if You want us to.”

Baba said, “No, no, now it has to take place, whatever happens.”

The program was to begin on November 1st, but Baba called some of the Westerners who had arrived earlier to see Him on the 30th and 31st of October. When we reported to Guruprasad on the morning of the 30th as usual, Baba was sitting with His head bowed down, as He had been, but then we saw a miraculous change come over Him right before our eyes. Suddenly His whole face began to assume a glow, the color flowed back into His cheeks, and He opened His eyes and looked all around seeming to take an interest in things for the first time. It was as if a dark cloud had passed away and had been replaced by bright sunshine! Baba looked radiant. He straightened up and suddenly began to react normally, with His usual lively interest. We couldn't believe our eyes, even though we had seen this same phenomenon before when BenJo visited Meherazad the previous year. Each time this happened we were astounded anew!

Baba listened to our accounts of our latest activities and began to give instructions. Baba ordered us to come for lunch at Guruprasad and ordered Pendu to prepare tea and bun bread. After the meal Baba retired unassisted and briskly walked over to the women's side!

The "great shock" that I mentioned earlier concerned the almost simultaneous emergencies of the Cuban missile crisis and China's treacherous surprise aggression on India's northern borders (after seemingly fostering India-China brotherhood). China attacked India on the very eve of the East-West Gathering. The government declared an emergency and all the planes were requisitioned, which left the Australian group in the lurch. Because they didn't have much money, they couldn't afford to travel all the way from Australia to India by plane, so they had made an arrangement to come up to Colombo in Ceylon—nowadays Sri Lanka—by ship, and from Colombo they were planning to catch an internal Indian Airlines flight to Bombay and then come over to Poona.

The emergency was announced on the very day they landed in Colombo, and no planes were available. The group was desperate, and they tried to get other flights but most could not. Some managed to get on a flight, but the rest had to carry on via the boat, and they lost a full day of the East-West Sahavas as a consequence. Baba made up for that, however, by calling them to see Him privately once or twice. Poor Bill Le Page had a very trying time, as he was the one in charge of the Australian group and all the arrangements were being looked after by him.

Baba explained, "See how Maya always tries to intervene in any important phase of My work?" This was a part of the general scheme of things. Something or other must cause obstacles in Baba's work—that was Baba's game plan, as Baba said such opposition lends great force to His work. Of course those obstacles had to be overcome, and then Baba's work would have more force.

Simultaneously, the Cuban missile crisis was happening! Russia was trying to send atomic missiles into Cuba, and President Kennedy laid down an ultimatum saying that if the Russian boats proceeded to Cuba,

the American Navy would intervene, and if that happened, there would be the danger of nuclear warfare. It was a touch-and-go affair, as Baba was telling us. This was a part of the Universal Work that Baba was doing that had so affected His health. Baba said that He had had to work very hard to avert a nuclear holocaust.

At the last hour Khrushchev “chickened out,” as it were. Russia was frightened by America’s threat, and Khrushchev retreated, so the ships with the missiles went back to Russia and the world heaved a great sigh of relief. All this was very near the time of Baba’s East-West Gathering. Then a couple of days prior to the function came the Chinese invasion—so you see, there was crisis in the West and crisis in the East while Baba’s Western and Eastern lovers were gathered for His *darshan*.

I, of course, was working with Meherjee during my hours out of the office, and I had planned to take leave when Baba came to Guruprasad. I had already taken about two or three weeks leave to help Meherjee. I carried out what work I could to the fullest extent. We visited the various hotels, making sure that everything was right and ready. Sarosh and others were in charge of the reception committee to welcome the Westerners, first in Bombay and then in Poona. Baba planned everything very well, everything down to the last detail, and everybody had taken up all their responsibilities despite all these emergencies, tensions and the simultaneous threats of Indo-Chinese War and World War.

The Poona Centre *bhajan mandali* and Mr. Golwalkar, the Station Director of All-India Radio and a very talented musician, were in charge of the music. Another stage had been built for musicians. You see, the main stage for the *darshan* was built on the back side of Guruprasad—it was a gigantic stage—and then there was a massive *pandal*, seating maybe five thousand or so, stretching out from the stage. There was a huge open space in back of Guruprasad, and also servants’ quarters and outbuildings on either side of that expanse. That open space had been unattended for ages, and it was full of weeds, bushes, and undergrowth, and it was also

very uneven because it had been not been used for years and years. The entire grounds in back of Guruprasad had to be totally dug up, leveled and then steamrolled to make it completely level. After that preparation the poles were erected for the *pandal*, and finally the cloth decoration and the roofing was set up. All this was supervised by Bapusaheb Shinde, and of course the City Engineer, Mr. Burjor Bode, was of great help in providing water and other facilities. In short, many people were drawn into the preparations for the event, and everybody helped.

While leveling and digging up the place, huge nests of biting fire ants were uncovered. The very night when the final rolling was being done and the chairs were beginning to be put into place, the ants started to come out.

The contractors came to Eruch in the dead of the night, explained what had happened, and asked if they should kill the ants with some pest-killing powder. Eruch was mindful of Baba's orders regarding ants, namely, that one should not willfully destroy them. But now millions of those ants were all over the place, and there loomed the prospect of a mass extermination. Eruch was in a quandary. Baba had retired—as I say, it was the middle of the night—but Eruch felt that he had to ask Baba's permission to proceed with such a step.

So he went and knocked, and Baba asked Eruch to come in, and Eruch explained the situation to Baba. Baba sat up on His bed and appeared to consider the issue for some time. Then He said, "Give the order to exterminate the ants, because the comfort of My lovers is greater than the lives of the ants." Baba had mentioned somewhere that if human beings kill ants, the ants have to return as the same species to continue their evolutionary journey. Their spiritual progress is retarded by such killing, so to speak, so it's not a good thing to do. Unlike snakes—in their case the only way a snake can progress out of its snake form *is* to be killed by a human.

The extermination of the fire ants took place in the middle of the night, after which the chairs were placed in position. By morning time it was a

grand spectacle, with rows upon rows of empty chairs in place, and the *shamiana* [tent or awning shelter] was looking resplendent with different brightly colored cloths and a brilliant blue sky overhead. The weather was very pleasant, and a cool winter breeze blew gently.

The greatest piece of good news, of course, was Baba's sudden, miraculous return to good health. So on the 1st of November the sun rose, and Baba was the real Sun, radiant, glowing, so beautiful that we were all really delighted. When Beloved Baba was in good health and good spirits, His cheeks would become rosy and His eyes would twinkle, just as they were doing on that day. He looked rosy and pink—"in the pink" of health, you could say. The morning session began with the Westerners coming for *darshan* in the main hall of Guruprasad. The hall had been arranged with chairs for the older people along the sides.

Ruth White attended at age ninety-two, and I remember the workers brought a lift chair to bring her into the hall. Kitty attended to Ruth the whole time. The youngest visitor was from Australia—it was Radha Rouse, a six- or seven-year-old tot. Jenny, Ruthie [now Maree], and Michael—Bill Le Page's children—had all come as well.

No Easterners were allowed to be in the hall at that time. Even we were not allowed to be inside. Only Baba, Eruch, and, I think, Francis. The rest of the *mandali* had to stay with us in the *mandali*'s room. We could see through the slats of the latticework, though, and Baba didn't mind that.

We hear that the Westerners' *darshan* was a gorgeous, radiant love-feast. Baba was on the sofa-chair on the stage, and everyone was just enchanted by His beautiful form. There were many tearful faces and lots of weeping, as usual, and He embraced each one in turn. Many were seeing Him for the first time. It was an indescribable scene.

This was entirely different from what we experienced in our day-to-day interaction with Baba. None of that for us! That goody-goody stuff was not for the *mandali* people. Eruch would complain many times, "Baba, is this in our fate to see You so tortured all our lives, and they enjoy seeing You so radiant for a time and go away with all that satisfaction?"

Baba responded, "That is in their fate, this is in your fate. What can I do? They see the divine aspect of Me, whereas you see the human side of God. In the future, when My lovers who haven't seen Me in the physical body come from all over the world, they will long to know all about My human traits, and in their eyes you will see the reflection of My Divinity." Still, even though this was the fate of the *mandali*, they cherished their experience because of their proximity to the Lord. Come thick or thin, happiness or sadness, they were with Baba.

The East-West Gathering was Baba in His really divinely expansive mood, giving away everything most lavishly. What a love-feast it was, really!

The morning programs were very intense, very personal, almost private, because the group of the Westerners was relatively small. The afternoon session was the real East-West Gathering. The Easterners would be at the gates just before noon, before the gates opened, hoping to occupy seats close to Baba. Of course, the first six or seven rows on either side were reserved for the Westerners by Baba's instructions. After that anyone could sit where they chose. But Baba ordered the Poona lovers to start occupying the rear-most seats and then to fill in toward the front from there.

I wasn't part of the audience and was not supposed to enjoy all of this. I was one of the volunteers. My duty was on the telephone. There was just one solitary telephone at Guruprasad, in the Maharani's room. The bath and toilet rooms were at the rear on either wing of the main hall, and there was an opening in between the two wings where the stage was constructed and the *pandal* beyond that. From the Maharani's room I could be on the phone, and then I could open the side windows of one of the toilet rooms and Baba would be visible very close by. The women *mandali* could also see Baba from the women's wing bathroom, from behind the curtains. We could see Baba from the sides and back, with the whole view of the audience facing Baba in front of us. It was truly a grand vantage spot from which to view the whole event.

There were many people coming in all the time, asking me to place phone calls for them. There would be inquiries coming in—somebody

was ill, asking to send their people who were attending the program to come and help—and the phone was buzzing all the time, especially up until the morning session started, when the calls would begin to taper off. That was the arrangement.

The afternoon session started on the first day, and the whole *pandal* was full. There was a small dais halfway down the *pandal*, on the right side, where the Poona *bhajan mandali* were seated with microphones and speakers all around, and the sound was good. That was all managed by Bapusaheb at his own expense, mind you. The *bhajan* group would be singing there, providing the background for the whole occasion, and Baba's sofa chair was in the middle of the main stage with steps leading up to it. It was not a public *darshan*, you know—only Baba's lovers were allowed to be there.

The *darshan* started. It was supposed to be a cool month, but the afternoon heat was stifling. Some persons were fanning themselves vigorously, as you can see in the films, because it was so hot, and being inside the *pandal* made it all the more humid, with the breath of so many thousands of people. We were all very uneasy about it.

Suddenly, from literally nowhere clouds began to gather. There was thunder and lightning, and Baba's Maya was starting to play her own game. And before one could realize what was happening, it began to pour. Never before in November had we seen such showers in Poona, and so nobody had foreseen rains in that month. No provision had been made for the roofing to be waterproof, and it began to pour inside the *pandal* as well. Everybody became totally drenched.

The beauty of it was that nobody moved from their seats. They just kept sitting there gazing at Baba, although some of them put their chairs on their heads because the cloth of the *pandal* held off some of the downpour only temporarily. After the cloth had held the water for some time, then that collected water would pour down over people's heads as if a bucket had been overturned above them! You could call it a real baptism by rain. So you see, in all Baba's big functions and phases of

work rain has played a part—in Satara and at Meherabad, and also notably on the first day of the New Life.

Everything got flooded. We thought, “Baba, what’s going to happen now? Is this going to turn into a farce?” But no—Baba gestured that everyone should stay seated where they were, and that no one should leave. He wanted the *darshan* to go on as if nothing had happened, and accordingly the *darshan* queue proceeded just as before, as it normally would. Fortunately there was a corrugated tin shade over the stage itself, so that area remained dry throughout that flash downpour.

A little stampede did occur in the beginning. The queue system seemed to go haywire because the people from the sides couldn’t see what was happening in the front. It became difficult for the volunteers, and at one point I left the phone and rushed out to help restore order. Before long the situation seemed to be in hand, and I went back to the room where I was manning the phone. I even had a little feeling of pride that I had been able to accomplish something where so many volunteers had failed. But as soon as that thought arose in my mind, Baba sent word to me that I shouldn’t have left my post. Baba reprimanded me, “You had no business to come out!” But that reproach was followed by Baba forgiving me.

My uncle, Meherjeemama Satha, was there, the oldest member of our family, in his eighties at that time, suffering from asthma, and he also got totally drenched. And then there was Maisaheb Patwardhan, the Queen Mother of the Maharaja of Kurundwad, a very frail old lady, also with asthma. Both sat through the whole unexpected downpour and never had any problems.

Things dried up very fast. It was a very strong shower, probably limited to that locality and lasting for only fifteen to twenty minutes, or a bit more. Within no more than an hour or so everything dried up and all the drenched lovers were practically dry. Baba asked some of the Western women to go to the women’s side to dry off and change into some spare clothes of the women *mandali*, so it was, in fact, a complete blending of East and West!

The close of the day's program was His *arti*, which was performed at the front of the stage. Some women, led by Kusum Mohkam Singh from Delhi, waved big platters with lighted camphor in the traditional manner of performing *arti*. After the *arti* Baba gestured that all should leave quickly, because many people were lingering and not ready to go yet. All then dispersed, and Baba returned to His room.

There were four days of the morning sessions. Baba had said, "No private interviews," but sometimes He would call various of His lovers in little groups and talk to them. We were not allowed to follow the proceedings much, but we could gather little tidbits from here or there.

Part of the Australian group had missed the first day's program, and those persons arrived on the afternoon of the second day. On that day they were called to Guruprasad in the evening as a special case, and Baba met with them individually to compensate. It was a very personal thing, as we gathered from Bill, Judith and the others. Bill and a few others came by air directly from Australia, well in time, to arrange for their group's stay here, but Bill stayed over in Bombay to await the group from Colombo. The others came ahead on the train to Poona.

After Bill had remained behind at Bombay, he heard that there would be no more planes. Baba sent a message to him that he should return to Poona, so he attended the program on the first, and then he rushed back to Bombay. For three or four nights he stayed awake. The long journey from Australia should have tired him out, but by the end of it all he realized that Baba must have given him the energy he needed to manage, and it made him think how Baba might have given the *mandali* the strength to get through the unbelievably demanding *mast* tours.

On the second day, again in the afternoon, there was another little shower, perhaps for the group that missed the first day's heavy downpour! I remember a little drenching on the second afternoon, but

far less than the first day. You can see in one of the films that Baba made signs to the effect that clouds are gathering and the people should go home now. It was just after the *arti* on the second day. Fortunately the third and fourth days were clear.

A little heartwarming incident occurred on the third day. There was a village some distance away towards Bombay, and the whole village had come to take Baba's *darshan* for this East-West Gathering. They had left their whole village without attendants—children, women, men, all had come, leaving the animals unattended but with fodder and water for two days, entrusting them, as it were, to Baba's care. For two days they tried to join the queue, but by the end of the second day they still had not received His *darshan*, as the day's program came to an end before they reached Baba.

On the third day they had to leave or else there would be chaos back home owing to the untended animals and so on. Somehow Baba came to know about this, and He sent somebody to call them back. I remember Baba gave them a special *darshan* on the morning of the third day, starting before the Westerners arrived and continuing while the Westerners looked on. The villagers were extremely happy, because they would have left without His *darshan* otherwise, in spite of all their sacrifice.

Somehow Baba knows about all these things, and He deals with them in very natural ways. The village was very satisfied and left after Baba's embrace. He left their *darshan* to the last minute so that they had to be resigned to His Will, and then He gave them something unexpected. That's how He often tests His lovers—He draws out love and sacrifice from us with all these natural happenings, brings things to a head, as it were, and then rewards us.

There were two special occasions for music. One day Baba had arranged for a *qawwal* to be brought for an afternoon session, as well as on the morning of the last day. Vinayakrao Patwardhan fulfilled his promise to Baba to come again and perform for the Westerners. Initially he had told Baba that he wouldn't be able to come because he had to go to Russia

to perform. Baba then asked him when his flight was, and he told Baba that it was on the night of November fourth. Hearing that, Baba told him to come, assuring him that He would see to it that he was driven to Bombay in time to make the flight.

Baba would tell us that music is just the seventh shadow of the Original Sound, the *Aadi Naad*. If one were to hear just a tiny vibration of that Original Sound, one would be shattered into atoms by the sheer force of it. "I hear that continuously, all the while, but despite that I also enjoy this music on your level!" What a state that must be!

Baba's favorite *raag*, "*Bhairavi*," is the *raag* that is always played at the end of a program. So, as expected, Baba asked Patwardhan to sing it. The song translates as "O Master, don't go away, don't leave me!" The Westerners were just enthralled by that music—most had never heard anything like it before. It was a superlative performance, and everybody was spellbound, and Baba was there to add the ultimate dimension to the beauty of the occasion.

Towards the end of the performance Patwardhan again displayed his specialty, the *tarana*—no words, no instruments, just the singer bringing forth all the musical sounds from his throat.

I remember that there was also a little skit in a lighter vein that the Westerners performed on that last morning session they had with Baba. They had asked Baba's permission to stage the skit, and He agreed. Baba also allowed us to be in the hall at that time, although we were relegated to the back. Khaled Al-Faqih played the part of a doctor whom Baba-lovers were calling to examine Baba to see why He was not speaking. He came and put a stethoscope on Baba, Who was also taking part in the play, and said, "Say 'Ah' please!" I remember Baba's gesture declining to make the sound. It's all very hazy now, thirty-three years later, yet some of those scenes I can still visualize as if they were happening now.

On the afternoon of the fourth day the *darshan* was opened to the public. Poona Baba-lovers and others could all come and see Baba.

Baba's chair was brought to the edge of the stage so that people could touch their foreheads to His feet or bow down to Him as they walked by. There was no way to embrace each one as it would have been impossible. Since it was a public *darshan*, there were miles of queues, almost up to the railway station. It was frightening. It began in the afternoon, and each visitor would bow down at Baba's feet and pass on. The whole time Baba was making a gesture, as you can see in the films, as if He were blessing them while accepting their love.

The *mandali* were also asked to come and bow down to Baba, a privilege accorded to them for the first time in many years.

Baba went through the whole afternoon and into the evening without taking a break. Finally, though, at about 7:30 p.m., He called for an end to the *darshan*. There was the *arti*, and then Baba said, "That's it!" Every one of us breathed a sigh of relief. It was also a big relief for the resident *mandali* to see Him looking so radiant and so beautiful with all that color. While on the stage Baba blessed the baskets of *prasad*. That *prasad* was then taken out by Sadashiv Patil, and it was distributed to each person after they had taken Baba's *darshan*. Even after Baba left the stage the queue continued to file by and receive the *prasad*!

Of course at the end of each day it was a nightmare for the *mandali*. Baba's entire body was drenched with sweat and tortured with pain. No one had any idea of the suffering He went through during the East-West Gathering. Bhau and Pendu were doing night watch, and they reported that Baba would pass the night with moans and groans. Mornings were a different story—that divine beauty was for the public viewing, but this torture was for the eyes of the *mandali* alone.

Towards the close of the East-West Gathering, in one of the morning sessions, Baba allowed a group photo to be taken. In it He is holding Lud Dimpfl's hand. One photo was with all the women in front of Guruprasad. Baba's chair was placed outside, the women all stood around Him, and Baba was very concerned about the heat because it

was so sunny and hot, and in the film you can see Baba gesturing to the photographer to take the photo quickly because He didn't want the women to get sunstroke. Baba's gestures mean, "The sun is shining, and they will get hot." It must have been a very nice photo. A second photo was taken with the men afterwards.

On the last day of the public function the press had come, and a reporter from the *Times of India*—one of the largest English newspapers in the country, read all over India—asked a question. That day I was among the Westerners, and I was taking down the details of their departures. Meherjee wanted their schedules, so I was getting all their names and ticket numbers. So that man stood up and said, "Baba, I want to ask You a question. This Chinese invasion has taken place. What will be the outcome of this?"

Baba had Eruch speak His reply. "Since India is My birthplace, and I am the Avatar of the Age, I say that eventually India will be victorious." There was a great cry from the crowd of "Avatar Meher Baba ki Jai!" because Baba had announced a favorable outcome for India. Baba also declared that despite the successful Chinese invading armies sweeping over the Indian frontiers and capturing vast stretches of Indian territory, they would go back!

Manohar Sakhare was a Wing Commander in the Indian Air force, and he had recently been posted in Delhi. Since this emergency had arisen all of a sudden, there was no question of his getting leave to go see Baba because he was inducted into the War Office. Along with the chiefs of the Army and Navy, he was operating under the personal command of the Prime Minister of the time, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. But somehow he got leave and came to Poona with instructions that, if summoned, he had to return immediately.

When he was attending the East-West Gathering on the first day, the marshals came to call Sakhare back. Somehow he was able to evade even those marshals. Baba had said that the Chinese would turn back, and at the conclusion of the East-West Gathering, when Sakhare returned to

Delhi—I think that he rushed back soon after the last session—he delivered that message to his superiors. Somehow the top authorities condoned his absence. When he returned the Air Marshall confronted him and asked, “What happened? What did your Master say?” The war cabinet was there when he told them that Meher Baba had said that the Chinese would turn back. The members of the war cabinet laughed and said, “Militarily it is impossible that a victorious army would ever turn back. They will never do that,” they declared. But just as Baba had said, on the very next day the Chinese unilaterally declared a cease-fire and turned back. They didn't enter the lower valleys of the mountains. It was an inexplicable military action, unheard of in world history. The chief Air Marshall summoned Sakhare and said, “There is something great in your Master.” That was one of the episodes of the East-West Gathering.

On the fifth day of the Gathering, although most of the Easterners left, most of the Westerners stayed on and were sent off to visit the Baba places in Poona, accompanied by Baba's brother Jal. On the sixth day they went to Meherabad, Meherazad and Meher Nazar to get the flavor of those places. Many of them had never visited before, and they were given a guided tour. One attraction of the tour was, “Drink the pure waters of the Meherazad well.” As they returned late in the evening they saw that Baba had sat out on the porch at Guruprasad, waiting to wave to them as their buses went past. As He waved to them, they all loudly shouted His “*Jai!*”

That detail has remained in my head from the tour program. They all enjoyed the visit to Meherabad and Meherazad and greatly appreciated coming and seeing what is here. They visited Baba's Tomb—at that time the crypt was open—and they were instructed to bow down on the threshold of the *Samadhi*.

On the tenth day Baba left for Meherazad, and in the early morning He went to Bund Garden as usual and sat under that mango tree that we called “Babajan's tree.” There are two trees that we call “Babajan's

tree”—the one in Bund Garden and the other one that is the *neem* tree at her shrine.

The tree at Bund Gardens was to the right of a hedge where there was open space, and beyond that, the wall and the river. The tree was there for many years before it fell down. Later, in 2010 or so, the Poona Municipal Corporation allowed the Bund Gardens to be destroyed, and now a bridge runs across where the tree used to stand.

The women had already gone on ahead in the DeSoto, but Baba was in Adi Sr.'s car during the drive to the Bund Gardens. He was to meet the women later, on the other side of the bridge, and then He would travel to Meherazad in the DeSoto with them.

When Baba arrived at the Bund Gardens He was greeted by many Eastern Baba-lovers and some of the Westerners who had not yet left and were congregated there. He sat there for a while before leaving for Meherazad. For so many Westerners it was the last time that they would ever see Baba in the body. Quite a lot of tears flowed that day, and the Baba-lovers there felt that when Baba left, their hearts were going along with Him. Baba was waving right until the car turned the corner onto the Bund Garden bridge and He could be seen no more.

And so the great East-West Gathering ended. For many days Baba would remember and continue to mention with much love all the incidents that had occurred.



Chapter Thirty-one:

Memories of Harry Kenmore

Baba's brother Beheram and Janghu Sukhadwalla—Beheram's son-in-law—had been responsible for filming some of the East-West Gathering, along with Harry Kenmore. Harry had hired a professional photographer and had brought many stacks of raw film, and a lot of footage of the occasion was taken. He asked Beheram and Janghu how much film they had shot, and they said that they had a thousand feet. "A measly thousand feet?" he said. "Couldn't you do better than that?" He felt that such an occasion would never arise again, but celluloid film was very expensive then, and more filming wouldn't fit into the budget.

Harry inaugurated the afternoon sessions of the East-West Gathering with the Parvardigar Prayer. He hardly needed the microphone, such a booming voice he had. Harry's love for Baba was really unique, because not only was he blind but he was also very hard of hearing. It was a real job for Eruch to satisfy him. Whenever Baba would sit, Baba would make Harry sit very close to Him on His right side. Baba would keep patting him on his legs just to give him a feeling of His closeness and to reassure Harry that Baba was with him.

Sometimes Baba would joke with Harry. Once He said to Harry, "Oh, you have a very rough chin. See how smooth My shave is?" And Baba

would hold Harry's hand in His own, take it up to His face and have him feel His forehead with the back of Harry's palm.

Harry would laugh, "Ho, ho, ho, my Pop is cheating!" You couldn't fool him. He liked that joke. He would always call Baba "my Pop."

Harry paid several visits to India. The first was after the Satara accident when he came to treat Baba, and he succeeded in lessening Baba's pain to a considerable extent. As I've mentioned, he was the one who detected the uneven length of Baba's legs after the accident. Baba's right leg was shorter because it was the right hip that was shattered in the accident, you know, and some shrinking had occurred. Baba would walk with a limp, so a *chappal* with a raised heel was made for Him thereafter.

Harry didn't know what he could do for Baba. He would do something, and then he would feel that he could do so much more, and despite his terrible disability he was not hindered. At the first opportunity he would come to Baba, spending thousands of dollars. He was really madly in love with his Pop. Baba could evoke that love from him—it was a gift from Baba to him.

Eruch told us that the first time Harry had Baba's *darshan*, because of his blindness he requested permission to palpate Baba's body. He had such a delicate touch despite being a very assertive, rough-talking person. His fingers were extremely sensitive, and he would handle his patients very delicately. Feeling Baba lightly with his fingers from head to toe was for him like seeing Baba. Later on he mentioned to Eruch that he could visualize the great beauty of Baba's form and the delicate nature of His whole body, so sensitive were his fingers. He was an ardent and outspoken lover of the Lord.

So Harry Kenmore would come quite often to India, unaided by anyone, a fiercely independent person. The slightest show of sympathy or attempt to help used to annoy him. He really wanted to be on his own. He would tell Eruch how he managed to do all these things. He said that he had to commit everything to memory, because if he didn't concentrate on where he kept things or what he did with them, they were lost to him

forever. Each and every thing he had to commit to memory, he said, so he never allowed anyone else to touch his belongings and suitcases. Woe betide the person who dared to do that! Even his socks would be properly paired and didn't get mixed up, because if that happened he wouldn't be able to tell which was which!

Inwardly he was totally all for Baba, and Baba tried to give him as much of His love as possible. Later on, when Baba sent out a circular about the 1969 *darshan*, Baba sent word to Harry that he should not come because, Baba said, "I wouldn't be able to pay attention to you at that time, so I will call you later sometime, somewhere."

Baba did call him later, telling him to come in October, 1969, and that he was to come whether he heard from Baba or not. As it turned out, of course, Baba passed away before the 1969 *darshan*. It did take place, in Baba's physical absence, but His presence was very much felt by everybody at that *darshan*.

As per Baba's instructions, Harry Kenmore did not come for that gathering, but he did come a bit later, in October or November of that year. He was with Eruch for an extended stay, and Eruch gave him all his time and energy. He was probably with Harry from morning till night. It must have been very exhausting, no doubt—taking him for walks, always telling him Baba stories, attending to him from morning till night. Harry got miles and miles of recordings on his wire recorder, which he called his "baby," of Eruch telling all the Baba stories he could think of. Harry would go to his room at night and play those stories back onto tape, and then the wire would be ready for the next day. At that time Eruch's memory was very fresh, and he was full of all those early stories. I hear that, by Baba's Grace, all those recordings are still intact.

One time, when Harry was at Meherazad on that visit, he was walking with Eruch down the Meherazad private road and beyond there on the Wambori Road, and they were talking about how Baba had given Harry that promise that He would meet him somehow, somewhere, sometime, and Harry remarked, "I am sure He will do that." In his usual blustery voice he said, "My Pop will never let me down!"

Just then from a distance Eruch saw a tall farmer approaching, stately looking, an unusual person for a farmer of the locality. The farmer came straight to where Harry and Eruch were walking. Eruch was wary about this because if anybody touched Harry, Harry's natural impulse would be to throw the person out of his way. Thinking that it might happen and that the man could get hurt, Eruch tried to stop him. The man nevertheless came straight toward Harry.

Sensing something unusual, Harry asked, "What's the matter?"

Eruch said, "Nothing, Harry, there's just somebody here who wants to greet you, and this man is extending his hand. He's a farmer, I think, who wants to greet you, Harry—he wants to shake your hand."

Hearing this, Harry extended his hand and shook hands with the person who had approached him. Then Eruch said that he was surprised because instead of walking away, the man had paused and actually reached up to caress Harry's face, and quite uncharacteristically Harry didn't say anything. Eruch was surprised, to say the least, that Harry permitted a stranger to touch him like that.

Eruch said to the farmer, "Who are you and where do you come from?"

The farmer said, "I have come from" and he named a village, "and I am going to" and he named another village. That was all. Harry and Eruch went on their way. Eruch began to continue his talk from the point where they had been interrupted. As he started, Eruch suddenly realized how unusual the whole incident had been. He turned back to take another look at the man who had stopped them, but there was nobody there. The road was clear, the fields were clear—there were no turns in the road, no trees to block the view of a person. Eruch mentioned this to Harry.

Harry suddenly became very grim and silent. The rest of the way he was very sullen—he wouldn't talk at all, which was totally unlike Harry, and they both came back to Meherazad from their walk. That whole day Harry locked himself in his room, and in the evening he came out and

told Eruch, “Eruch, I think it was my Pop who visited me, and I couldn’t make it out at the time, and I am feeling so low about it.”

Then Harry began to describe that the hand he shook was unlike a farmer’s—it was soft and velvety to the touch, without a callous, not at all the hand of a field laborer. Harry remarked, “The way He caressed my face reminded me so much of my Pop, and I am sure that it was He who visited me. He has kept His word to me.”

Eruch said, “Now cheer up, Harry!” and he did perk up, but for a while he was rather disconsolate that it had gone the way it had. On top of that, he had shut off his “baby” when the man approached him and Eruch, so there was no recording of the voice of the farmer. Another little trick of Baba—not to leave His voice on the wire recording!

That was our Harry. A year or two after Baba dropped His body, Harry died of liver cancer. He couldn’t bear the separation from his Pop. Harry was the founder of the Society for Avatar Meher Baba in New York City. The Society, as it was popularly known, was responsible for bringing many young people to Baba.



Chapter Thirty-two:

1963

Just before the 13th of January, 1963, it was time for me to come to Meherazad. I would stay until the end of February.

On the 13th I saw a car coming to Meherazad, and it carried Begum Akhtar and her party, and maybe Golwalkar, who was the Music Director of All-India Radio for Poona and was in touch with the leading artists of the country. He had written to Begum Akhtar because they were fast friends. In the summer of 1962 Baba had allowed a few musical programs to be held, but Begum Akhtar had been ill when they took place. She was an extremely busy, very famous *ghazal* singer in the *thumri* style, and the pathos in her voice was such that Baba liked her singing very much.

This was her first visit to Baba. She knelt down before Him and offered her excuses for not having been able to come earlier when He had called her, and that it had always been her wish to sing before Him. If He allowed her to sing, she would like to present a few pieces today. Baba paused for a moment and said, "All right, provided you come during the summer to Guruprasad and sing for Me there."

She was delighted. She said, "Baba, with great pleasure."

Baba added, “Two days in Guruprasad.”

She replied, “Any number of days You want.”

A small group had come with Begum Akhtar to Meherazad. She had her troupe, and they set up and she began to sing. While she sang, tears were flowing down her face. She had a lovely voice, and she was singing her heart out, as it were, to Baba, and you can imagine the feeling that was produced there. It was spellbinding, I tell you! Baba was in such a good mood that He was encouraging her, and she was giving her all to her singing. She sang with the pain of the remorse she felt because she had refused Baba many years ago, when He had asked her to come and sing for Him. That time she had demanded five thousand rupees for her performance. Now she had come to His feet out of her own longing, and that showed in her performance, and it was a true love feast. She sang three or four *ghazals* before Baba.

At the time there was an Urdu professor named Dastard who loved Baba very much. He had written a poem praising the Lord in Urdu, and Baba asked Eruch to bring the poem, and He gave it to Begum Akhtar to read. She read it and was so impressed by it that she requested Baba to let her put it to music and perform it before Him right then and there! Baba graciously permitted her to do that, and in a very short time she had composed a tune and was able to sing the poem to Him. Such was her talent and her skill—she could put a piece of verse to music in no time. That was her first performance before Baba. She knelt down and she wept, and Baba gave her His handkerchief and consoled her, and it was a very happy meeting. She departed soon afterwards with her troupe.

In the afternoon the 'Nagar Centre people came, and they sang *bhajans* and various Baba songs. Gajanan Watve was there, and he was a very beautiful singer. He sang “*bhavageet*,” a type of devotional songs. Those were songs devoted to the souls of the lovers of the Lord, singing His praise in Marathi. Very sweet it was—Watve had a very soft voice, and Baba liked it very much. He was from Poona and had come to sing at Guruprasad for one of the previous functions. Baba liked his

performance and presented a handkerchief to him. It was the singer's reward from the Lord.

There was quite a crowd at Meherazad Mandali Hall for that program. The Mandali Hall was filled up as Baba gave this little program there that day, and it turned out to be quite a musical feast.

All seemed to enjoy the occasion, but as all good things must have an end, that day ended, and Meherazad returned to its quiet routine. Baba sent out a circular saying that there should be no public celebration of His Birthday that year, and He didn't want to be disturbed during His seclusion. People were free to send cable greetings, but correspondence was strictly prohibited.

Even in the earlier years Baba would ban correspondence fairly often, and at times when all correspondence was stopped for a particular period, no one was allowed to write to Baba or the *mandali*. Since I had to send things ordered by Goher or Eruch, I was allowed to correspond even in those restricted periods, but I was not allowed to give any news of my end or expect any news from Baba's end. Still, the link was there. A little line at the end from one of their letters might be, "Baba sends love" or something of the like, or "your letter was read to Baba...." That was a great consolation. I wrote quite often because many things would be required at irregular intervals—maybe once a week. I wrote to Goher for the needs on the women's side, and I wrote to Eruch for the needs of the men *mandali*.

For Baba's Birthday in 1963 correspondence was totally stopped except for Birthday telegrams. Everything was very quiet, and it was likewise a very small occasion at Meherazad. The usual Birthday routine was followed: rising at 3:30 or 4:00 a.m. This was Baba's wont all through life, to be early and before time for everything. At 5:00 a.m., before sunrise, Baba was born, you know. So we had to get up much before sunrise to be in Mandali Hall, and we would line up. The staff would also be nearby. At the stroke of 5:00 a.m. we shouted out "Avatar Meher Baba *ki Jai!*" seven times, just as we did each year, loudly enough for

Baba to be able to hear in His bedroom, and the women would do the same thing there. Then Eruch would recite the Parvardigar and Repentance Prayers, and that was it.

A sumptuous breakfast of *sev* or *rava* would be our reward, as is the custom amongst Indian Zoroastrians, both Parsis and Iranis. There would be good hot Aloba tea to wash it down with, as well as some fresh yogurt. That was the usual thing. That is a special breakfast, considered auspicious to eat on a “good day” like a birthday or anniversary, special food to begin an auspicious day.

Afterwards Baba came to be with us, and we would embrace Him. There would be the usual correspondence—piles of telegrams and cables pouring in—and Baba would send a special message to someone, for example, if a new Baba center were being inaugurated or the like. Often new centers would be opened on that day, and Baba’s attention would be there for the occasion. That was how that Birthday passed, in a very quiet manner.

As I have described earlier, days at Meherazad followed the same routine if all was well. Baba would come to the men’s side in the morning and again in the afternoon, and the newspapers would be read out in the later part of the day. Baba referred to the news as “bogus news,” and the sign for this was simply the letter “B.”

During my stay Baba would come every morning from the women’s side. The lift chair would first be taken from the Hall to Baba’s porch, Baba would come out, sit on the chair, and Kaka Baria would accompany Baba back to the men’s side as the servant boys carried the chair. Francis would also go and accompany Baba. When they reached Mandali Hall the chair would be put near the tin door on the rear side of it, and then Baba would start to walk up and down the Hall.

Then the door would be locked and the prayers would be done. Afterwards we would sit down, the door would be unlocked, and the usual correspondence—when correspondence was permitted—would be attended to. Of course there was the “bogus news”—the newspapers—to be read out in the afternoon.

I think it was in this year, as this probably occurred when there wasn't a lot of correspondence to attend to—Aloba was reading the *Shahnameh* to Baba, which is the account of the kings of Iran. The copy that Aloba had was in Persian, but he didn't read the Persian—instead he translated it extemporaneously into broken English, line by line. Baba understood Persian, but we did not.

Aloba's English was not quite up to the mark, but he could well express what he wanted to. Francis used to enjoy it immensely. In one particular chapter the famous Rustom was responsible for the build-up of the military might of Iranian Empire, and the enemies of Iran were always plotting to kill Rustom. There was the big saga about how they eventually succeeded in destroying Rustom by turning his own son, Sohrab, against him. It's a very tragic tale and very well described in the *Shahnameh*. Aloba would go on and on, and Baba asked us, "Would you like to listen to all this?"

We said, "Yes, Baba." Francis was the most enthusiastic.

"You would like to? All right, carry on."

It was just to pass the time. Francis called the King of Iran "Mousie" because he was like a mouse compared to Rustom. This mouse of an emperor used to sit on the throne and do nothing, according to Francis' understanding, so he called him "Mousie." Baba would say, "Say it again," because Francis had that Australian accent and it was amusing to hear him say it.

We were there for some time, but I don't know how much was read. Baba was in the mood to hear it at that time, maybe because there was no correspondence and nothing else to do, at least according to us. Baba was in fact busy all the time. While the story was being read, He would be absorbed in His work, and yet very attentive, mind you. On all spheres His attention was always there.

Morning sessions would start at 8:00 or 8:30 a.m., and they would last until about 11:30 or 12:00 noon. Then Baba would go to the women's

side, take His lunch, take rest, and then come back at about 2:00 p.m. for another hour or two.

In the very early days Baba would be in Mandali Hall even up to evening time, but gradually our time with Him became less and less, and Baba would return to the women's side early in the afternoon. Sometimes Baba would have afternoon sessions in His bedroom itself—He wouldn't come into the Hall, so we would go there, and Eruch would read the bogus news or any other correspondence that required Baba's attention. Baba might sit in the sofa chair that Kenmore had brought all the way from America. (He had bought a plane ticket and had brought it as a "passenger" on the plane! He really was an unusual guy, I tell you—"Baba needs to be comfortable!" was his motto.) Otherwise, Baba might sit on the edge of the bed while attending to the details of the afternoon.

Baba would have His supper very early after leaving the Hall, possibly by 4:00 p.m. Everything was early with Baba. Bhauji would be ready for the night watch after dinner, and Kaka Baria would also help. Later on Bhau would be on watch for the night.

Baba would sometimes feel hungry in the late evening or the night, and the night watchman would knock on the door to the women's side. Naja would always keep food ready for Baba, despite His telling her, "Now don't keep this. I have had My dinner, so you all eat it up." She would invariably keep something ready, however, so that if He should call to ask, "Is there anything left?" she was always able to say, "Yes, Baba."

"What? You didn't listen to what I said?"

"Yes, Baba, I did, but I kept just a little for You, just in case You might ask."

Naja was very particular about Baba's requirements in that respect. Over the years she had come to know what Baba liked and what He would want, and it would always be ready for Him. To obey Baba properly you had to have that feeling for Him, to be able to anticipate His requirements, to get in tune with Him, to know His pleasure and displeasure. In order to do that, all your attention had to be on Him one hundred percent. That

is what He always wanted. That is the way to forget yourself—it is the highest form of meditation. Nothing can be better than that.

Baba made the *mandali* live this life of total dedication to Him and one-pointed focus on Him. They enjoyed it, although it was terribly strenuous and required the greatest attention to His slightest need at all times. The tiniest lapse and Baba would invariably know about it and point it out. That would hurt the *mandali* the most, to have failed Him in any little thing, so they tried their level best just to anticipate His requirements.

Once the boys would bring the newspaper out to Meherazad, Eruch would usually read it out to Baba during the afternoon sessions. The paper would come rather late to Ahmednagar, and hence, to Meherazad. At that time the newspapers were brought by a taxi from Poona to Nagar. That taxi was called the “*Times Taxi*”—because it carried the *Times of India*—and it would also carry passengers and, often, pots of Poona water for Baba’s use. The driver, Narayan, knew about Baba and was always ready to be of service. There were just two servant boys who would cycle all the way from Meherazad to Khushru Quarters and then back again with the paper and mail. There was no Trust Office at that time, although Adi’s office was in the Khushru Quarters compound, and Adi would pass on the mail from there, and when the newspaper arrived, it would also be sent out, which is why it would come late.

The previous day’s afternoon mail would be read in the morning, and then the morning mail of that day would be read in the afternoon session. Sometimes if Eruch was occupied with some work and I was there, then Baba would ask me to read the newspaper.

Regarding reading the papers, Eruch would tell me, “You just read out the headlines, and whenever Baba snaps His fingers, you read the text under that heading.” I would read the headlines as instructed, and sometimes He would show interest, so I would then read out the whole article. Baba also had a sign for “Forget it,” and sometimes He would stop me partway through an article to go to the next headline.

Unusual things or important political news were the types of stories that tended to interest Him, and then He would have the news on those topics read properly. The usual bickerings of politicians would be passed over. Sometimes Baba would comment on the news—for instance, when we were at Guruprasad in 1967, there was a six-day war in Israel. Israel was being attacked by five nations all around it, and single-handedly it rebuffed its enemies on all fronts. Baba said, “Little tiny thing, and see, it explodes like this and destroys the enemy! What courage it has!” Baba was happy with the way Israel was facing the situation single-handedly. Such types of comments would come from Him—many times He would make such comments.

Then it would be time for me to leave. Back in Poona there would not be much time left to wind up loose ends, get back to my job, and make everything ready for Baba’s upcoming summer stay at Guruprasad. As I’ve mentioned, many things would need to be brought from outside for the use of Baba and the *mandali* at Guruprasad, and it required quite a lot of preparation. My job at the office was easy—I was disposable, and I could get leave when I wanted. That arrangement was good for Baba’s work, and my office at New India Assurance was in a convenient location as well.

The people in my office never interfered with my work for Baba, but they never showed much interest either, although they all knew that I was a Baba-lover. One time my manager, whose name was Jamshed Engineer, would not give me leave, but I said that I *had* to go on leave, that it was imperative that I go, so he then allowed me to go. I told him that it was for Baba’s work, and he made a sarcastic remark to the effect that “What’s the use of giving you pay raises, because all your pay you are going to give to Meher Baba!”

I replied, “It’s your great fortune that you are giving me this pay, so that I can give it to Baba, and as such you are indirectly helping me to do that!”

On that occasion, when I arrived at Guruprasad Baba asked me, “How were you able to get leave?” and I told him what had happened. “You said that to him?” Baba asked. He was in fact very tickled.

Baba would sometimes ask me about my job. One time there was some unrest, some union activity that had started in the company. Never before while I had been there had there been any union activity—everything had been nice and quiet and peaceful. We were eventually forced to join the union, however, and accordingly we had to abide by the union directives.

I was made the union leader because I was the senior worker in that office. I didn’t have much interest, of course—I wasn’t concerned with the pay or anything, and the union members knew that. But one had to fight for it, and so I played my part. We had slogans that had to be written out and displayed by the workers and placards that would be held up outside the office, and we had to shout slogans like “Down with the management!” and “Exploiters!” and so on, you know, the usual things that labor complains about regarding management.

Baba came to hear about the union activity in my office, and one day He said, “What were you shouting? Shout the slogans before Me.”

I was so embarrassed that I could hardly make a sound. “Come on,” He said, “speak out! What were the slogans you were shouting?”

All this was all in the local language, Marathi, and to my surprise Baba enjoyed the slogans. “You say all those things? Such nasty things?” He asked.

“Yes, Baba, it’s a union directive, and we have to follow it.”

There was one fellow at work, by the way, with whom I didn’t get along. He caused me a lot of trouble, telling lies about me to our superiors, and that went on for quite some time. Finally I decided that I had had enough, and I determined that I would go to my superiors and tell them that either they dismiss that fellow or I would leave. That night, however, as I lay in bed I thought about the whole thing, and it occurred to me that this was not the sort of action that would please Baba. I had never spoken to Baba about it, but my feeling was that it wouldn’t please Him. With that thought I abandoned my plan to give my bosses an ultimatum.

The next morning when I went to work, I found that all my animosity towards that fellow had vanished! Instead of harboring ill feelings in my heart, I felt only compassion and Baba's love for him. Over time that fellow's behavior changed as well, and so the situation resolved itself.

In 1963, as soon as Baba arrived at Guruprasad He told Eruch, "I want to go to Bindra House right away. I want to see Gaimai." I was also there, so Baba, Eruch, and I and one or two others drove down to Bindra House. All were busy preparing Baba's food, and suddenly they heard the horn of Baba's car. They rushed out, not expecting to see Him because that was the day of His arrival, but to their utter surprise they saw that we were helping Baba out of the car. As Baba got out of the car, my mother rushed out and Baba embraced her, saying, "Did you receive the letter I asked Eruch to send?"

"Yes, Baba," she said.

Baba said to my mother, "Of late I have been remembering you quite often. I don't know what makes Me think of you so often these days. I just couldn't resist coming and meeting you right away!"

My mother started to weep and said, "Baba, You are so tired. This could have been deferred to some later time."

"No, no," He said, "I had to see you right away! Come," He said, as she fell into His embrace. It appeared that something must have been happening within her heart—she must have had a deep urge to see Him, some special feeling about seeing Him—and that may have caused a response in Baba, and we saw that response taking shape before our eyes. Very often on tours Baba would respond to His lovers' internal heart-calls and pay visits to places where He hadn't planned to go. His actions always seemed to be quite spontaneous. It was a reminder to us all that if we really want to have Him with us, He is always there. It is our job to have that great yearning for Him.

Before Baba's arrival at Guruprasad that summer, Eruch had written from Meherazad on the 14th of March, 1963:

My dear Mumma,

Beloved Baba wants me to write to you, saying that He is being reminded of you so often since past three days. [Gujarati, translated] Since the last four days, Baba is asking, how is it that He keeps remembering you? Baba wants to know the why of it! Beloved Baba sends His LOVE and wants me to convey to you that He is made very happy by your love for Him. Baba wants you to give His love to His very dear Manu and Meherwan.

Yours lovingly, Eruch.

Now it seems that Baba had asked Eruch to write again nine days later. On the 23rd of March Eruch wrote again from Meherazad:

My dear Mumma,

Beloved Baba wants me to inform you that He knows well how much you love Him, and He wants you to know that He loves you much more than you love Him, and this is the reason why you are very frequently remembered by Him. [Gujarati, translated] He is constantly getting thoughts about you.

Beloved Baba sends His love to you, dear Manu and dear Meherwan. In spite of our arrival in Poona tomorrow, Beloved Baba insisted that I write to you today an express delivery letter, hence this letter to you with much love from me and from each one of us at Meherazad, to all dear ones in Bindra House and Ganeshkhind.

Yours lovingly, Eruch.

This was a very remarkable incident, and it was how the 1963 Guruprasad stay commenced. That summer was the time of peak activity for Baba at Guruprasad. Thereafter the level of all of Baba's public activities gradually tapered off. In 1963 there were many dates for programs, and most of the weekends Baba allowed people from all over the country to come and have His *darshan*, and Guruprasad hall would be packed to capacity on a regular basis. Most of Baba's seclusion work was done at Meherazad, but Poona was a place of recreation at least for this year. Baba said that when He went back to Meherazad He would

have to start intense seclusion work again, but that these programs were a sort of recreation for Him, and He allowed His lovers access to His presence quite freely.

While Baba was at Meherazad in 1963, by the way, there was an incident that Eruch narrated to me later. One day a taxi arrived at Meherazad in the afternoon, carrying two young people and one extremely old man in his nineties named Mr. Pardhiwala. They hailed from Dahanu, a coastal town in Maharashtra, and they said that they had come for Baba's *darshan*. Baba had retired to the women's side for the afternoon, so Aloha, who was keeping watch at the time, told them that they would have to return at 4:00 p.m., and if Baba allowed it, they could have His *darshan* at that time.

It so happened that on that particular day, Baba came to Mandali Hall early in the afternoon, at around 2:00 p.m., and when He was told about those visitors He was extremely upset. For the next couple of hours He constantly berated the *mandali* for sending those people away. "Such an old man, why did you all do this?" He gestured.

Finally at 4:00 p.m. the three persons returned, and Aloha announced their arrival. Baba asked for them to be brought into the Hall, and when they came in, the old man greeted Baba most lovingly and embraced Him tenderly. He said that it had been his dearest wish to take Baba's *darshan* for a very long time. He had once met Baba years ago in Dahanu, and that was the only time so far that he had had Baba's *darshan*. Ever since that time he wanted to see Baba again, but no one would bring him. Finally these two Parsi boys felt sorry for him, and they told him that they were going to go to Shirdi to bow down to Sai Baba and so they offered to bring him along to Meherazad after their visit to Shirdi. As it happened, they changed their minds once they visited Shirdi and wanted to return directly to Dahanu, but Mr. Pardhiwala refused to budge, saying he would not go without Baba's *darshan*. If they didn't take him to see Meher Baba, he declared, he

would stay in Shirdi and die there. Finally they had to relent and so they did bring him to see Baba.

After narrating this story to the *mandali*, Mr. Pardhiwala told them that they didn't know Who they were looking after. He told them that Baba was a delicate flower and needed the most tender and considerate care. The *mandali* in fact were both touched and shaken up by his talk. Baba let him sit by His side close to His chair for a while, and He lovingly visited with him. He said to Baba that his longing for Baba's *darshan* had finally, after years, been fulfilled. The two young men with him also got Baba's *darshan* and were full of joy and wonder that they had met Baba. "We didn't know Who You are! We are so fortunate that we came with Mr. Pardhiwala!" they said, and they asked for Baba's forgiveness. Mr. Pardhiwala blessed Baba, as elders do before they leave. Then the three of them got back into the taxi and left.

After they left Baba said to the *mandali*, "I have been wanting someone to come and bless Me for a while now. This man came and did just that, thereby fulfilling My wish." Mr. Pardhiwala and those two young men were never heard from again.

In Poona Baba would take walks in different public gardens as a part of His exercise regime. We would take Him to parks in various parts of the city. There was a zoo called Peshwe Park where an elephant named Laxmi would give rides to adults and children, and in some of the films you can see Baba feeding some bread to her.

Then there was the Empress Garden, which was behind the Poona Racecourse, a beautiful garden with big tall trees, a sort of botanical garden in the old days. Now it is in bad shape, but then it was very well preserved and very secluded. Baba used to like to go there to take walks. There was a big pond where tall bamboos and lotus flowers would grow—it was a very beautiful place. And of course there were the Ganeshkhind Gardens where Dadi used to work. Even when Dadi wasn't

there, we could go there. It was extremely secluded as well, being situated just behind the Poona University campus.

Another favorite place for Baba's walks was a sort of semi-private road maintained by the Turf Club, just adjoining the race tracks. It ran from the club house to the entrance to the racecourse, a sort of secluded back road. Early morning Baba would go there and have a couple of rounds. The road is still there today. There is one film in which I make a rare appearance—I would generally keep away from the camera—I think it was at Empress Gardens, and I am walking with Baba.

Baba also liked to walk in the Sambhaji Park on Jangli Maharaj Road, near the Deccan Gymkhana. We would take Baby Mehera there too, and she so loved it that she would run away rather than go home! Baba had taken her and the family there, and we had all walked around with Baba.

During that summer the family would go to Guruprasad very often. We would hire a victoria carriage, drawn by a horse, and everyone would go with packed lunch and spend the day with Baba. During the afternoons our family would have a picnic in the Bund Gardens or would eat in the guest house on one side of the Guruprasad grounds in the back.

I would visit daily, and when there were programs we would put fans near the windows to cause some movement of air because, being the months of April and May—the hottest part of the season—it would be so stuffy and hot otherwise.

Despite the high ceilings and the veranda all around, whenever a *darshan* program started it would be very oppressive inside. There were so many people crammed into the hall that it would become very hot and humid—so many people breathing and sweating in that enclosed space made it quite unbearable sometimes. People would overflow all over the veranda and outside, and there would be *darshan* queues inside. Small children wailing and crying, the sound of the *bhajans* being sung, people talking—it all made for a very noisy atmosphere. People would stand in the queues with babies in their arms, and the babies would become tired of this crush and rush and naturally would cry with their discomfort. In addition, there

would be dust everywhere. Baba would sit throughout it all, every such program, pouring out His Love despite His frail health.

These programs would go on throughout the summer, and in spite of the crowds everyone was very happy to have Baba's *darshan*. They didn't mind the physical discomfort because His presence made it all worthwhile. Big artists would come to perform before Baba, and Baba would give time to those artists as if giving them the chance of their lifetime, the chance to give a performance before Him. Baba would accept any request by an artist to come and sing before Him.

Golwalkar was there, of course, and he brought many new artists. He himself brought a new instrument that he had invented, which he called *tar shehnai*. It was a violin to which was attached a horn. He would play the bow and it would sound like the *shehnai*. I walked into the side room and Golwalkar was performing with this instrument. I just sat down quietly, but Baba gestured to me, "See, see? It's a new instrument he's playing!" I hadn't even noticed it, but Baba pointed it out to me, and I was surprised to see such a fantastical new instrument!

There were many new artists. Begum Akhtar kept her promise, and she gave a feast of *ghazals* for two days. She had a cough and cold before coming, and Baba signed, "Although she has a cough and cold, see how beautifully she sings despite this!" Her basic grounding was very classical, but she was also an expert with the *thumri* and *ragas* in her own inimitable style. Baba was in great form, and it was a joy to watch Him. You should have seen when He would start to warm up to a program. He would take an active part in it, and He brought out the best in the artists. Actually, being in His presence brought out the best in everyone, artist or not.

There was a little comic incident that occurred at that time. There was a new singer named Mohan in Bombay, and he had a voice similar to the voice of a famous film actor and singer named K.L. Saigal, who had a very beautiful voice. This new singer would sing *ghazals* exactly imitating

Saigal's way of singing. The Bombay Centre had discovered him, and he began to sing there, and the people at the Bombay Centre would come to Baba and say, "Baba, You would like to hear him sing!"

So Baba had a telegram sent inviting Mohan to sing at Guruprasad. His initials were M.Y. Mohan. In a telegram they don't put those periods, and so the telegram read "My Mohan." This man was extremely elated. He was a new Baba-lover, so he sent back a telegram saying "Your Mohan would be delighted to attend and sing." It was a funny play on words. Anyhow, he came and sang really beautiful songs, you know, full of pathos and with great feeling in his voice. Madhusudan usually sang *bhajans*, but he learned some of the songs in Mohan's style from him, and he sang them before Baba later on. One of the most memorable songs was "*Kamzor nigahon ka yahan kaam nahi hai*," which means "There is no place here for those whose eyes wander here and there (weak individuals whose eyes are not constantly focused on the Beloved)." So Mohan sang and then there were several other performers.

There was also a *burra katha*—three Baba-lovers from Andhra performed on a sort of improvised stage before Baba in Telugu. One person with a *vina* would come, nicely dressed up, with makeup and all that, with a big head gear like Swami Vivekananda, the famous disciple of Swami Ramakrishna Paramhansa. He reminded us of Vivekananda, and he had a very beautiful voice. Although we didn't understand most of what they sang, we got the gist of it from the names that were sung—Shireenmai, Sheriarji, and so on—that they were telling the story of Baba's whole life.

Shireenmai and Sheriar were mentioned, and then how the child was born and Baba's ministry. These Andhra Baba-lovers had performed this drama during the East-West Gathering, and they would do that performance time and time again in villages and towns. It was a very popular form of art and folk music in Andhra, similar to the *kirtan* in Maharashtra but in a different format. There would be singing, then an interruption of the musical form by another person who would interject a question or comment, then a reply from the first man while one fellow

played the harmonium. Three people performed—it was a very interesting play, and Baba liked it.

A big Andhra group also came, then the Hamirpur group. The Andhra people were rich, from Godavari District, extremely wealthy and well off, while the Hamirpur people were extremely poor— but in fact they were very rich—equally rich—in Baba's Love.

During that time there was an Andhra Pradesh Revenue Minister who was also a Baba-lover. He was in the cabinet of the Andhra Pradesh assembly, and he came with his wife and wanted to wash Baba's feet with milk and honey, a practice that is a Hindu tradition. Baba agreed, and He told the fellow to come the following morning. That was unusual, because Baba did not allow His feet to be touched at that time. Baba gave him special permission, and the next morning he came with a big silver dish, and with milk and honey he washed Baba's feet very tenderly, and then the dish of liquid was taken away and given as *prasad* to the lovers. They also brought silver *padukas*—a type of traditional clogs that are the simplest form of footwear, usually made of wood and worn by *sadhus* and other mendicants—which he put on Baba's feet and then took away.

In the early days that man had a very beautiful wife named Sitadevi, who was a *mujra* singer and dancer. *Mujra* dancers traditionally performed in royal courts and at the homes of the very wealthy. Even though she was married to a very influential politician, she still continued to perform, and so she came into contact with the Maharaja of Baroda, the husband of Shantadevi of Baroda whose palace, Guruprasad, was Baba's summer residence.

The Maharaja met Sitadevi during one of her performances, and she seduced him. He was a very progressive ruler and had introduced laws for the upliftment of women, abolishing bigamy and bringing in very progressive legislation. But this woman somehow seduced him, and he fell for her, so there was an affair, and poor Shantadevi was the aggrieved party. In this way a relatively enlightened and progressive ruler was trapped.

Anyway, the woman eventually ran off with the state jewels, so both the Revenue Minister and Shantadevi were aggrieved parties! The Maharaja was brought into great disrepute, and he had to submit his resignation in favor of his son. It was a sordid affair and it ruined him.

The Maharani subsequently was a very unhappy woman, and the Revenue Minister was a very unhappy man. During the *darshan* program that I have been describing, both were sitting at Baba's feet, on either side of Him. Baba had brought both of them together—there was no rancor in their hearts for each other, and they had put all the wrongdoings of the past behind them. There they were, sitting in front of Baba, and that was His miracle—to bring those two people before Him at the same time.

Baba made many house visits in Poona that summer, which was a new thing. He probably did it before on a smaller scale, but that year it was at its peak, and He would make one house visit after another.

At first a couple of cars would be with Baba, and then eventually there would be a big convoy of six or seven cars going one after the other, and people on the streets would stand and look, thinking that it was some big governmental procession.

Those house visits and resulting processions were a daily occurrence. Baba's car would lead the convoy, going to various houses, and everyone would invite Baba to their house and Baba would go. Baba went to Bhikhubhai's Meelan Photo Studio right in a terribly congested part in the heart of the city. His studio was on the first floor, and Baba had the problem and pain with His previously broken hip joint, but in spite of that, He climbed up the steps. You can see that scene in a film taken at the time.

When Joseph Harb and Ben Hayman—"BenJo"—had come for a visit, Joseph had asked Baba if he might be permitted to settle in India, and Baba had agreed. At the time of the East-West Gathering Joseph and

his wife, Kari, came to Poona and settled there. They didn't have a house at that time, but Joseph got in touch with Meherjee, who bought a plot of land and began constructing a house for him. In the meanwhile the Harbs stayed in the Napier Hotel, which is no longer in existence. It was a big, sprawling hotel at the end of MG Road. Later it was acquired by the military, and now it is all in ruins.

The hotel was managed by a Parsi, and it had a homey atmosphere, more like a club than a hotel. Joseph had a room there, and he rented a couple of additional rooms so that he and Kari could settle in reasonably comfortably.

Joseph had brought all his household belongings and a new Chevrolet, and on one occasion he drove Baba from Guruprasad to his house. It was the one and only one time that Joseph did that, and he was extremely happy and proud to have the chance to take Baba for a ride in his car. Baba also visited his quarters at the Napier, but it later happened that Joseph fell ill. He had some trouble with his gall bladder, which flared up, causing Joseph to become very seriously ill—doctors suspected a malignancy in his gallbladder. When he described all this to Baba at Guruprasad, Baba consoled him saying “Don't worry! Get yourself operated on here—My *Nazar* is on you. Nothing will happen. Who says you have cancer? I tell you it is all right. Get it done.”

So Joseph had the operation, and it turned out to be a benign growth. The surgery was performed by a very well-known surgeon in Poona named Dr. Gharpure. He was a brilliant surgeon—educated in England with the topmost qualification—he was a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons. It requires tremendous experience to gain that award, and the man was a top-notch surgeon.

Dr. Gharpure, as it happened, was fond of the good things in life—you know, “eat, drink and be merry.” He was also very fond of the company of women. But in physical appearance he was a rather wild-looking fellow, which belied his supreme skill in surgery. One wouldn't imagine that he had such great surgical skills hidden in him from his outward appearance.

His hair, what was left of it, was quite wild and unkempt, and he was a very unconventional character. Baba humorously remarked that he was supposed to be the Romeo of Poona at that time because he had so many women chasing after him, probably for his money! Baba asked us, “How could women be attracted to such a person? See, he’s nearly bald and so ugly!” We all had a hearty laugh. Baba had a wicked sense of humor at times. One could imagine women preferring someone handsome, and this fellow looked so wild, but he was really very skillful and very rich.

It turned out that Baba’s brother Beheram had a perforation of the intestine that also required an operation, in this case, an emergency surgery. Beheram’s intestines had become so fragile that even after a long time was spent cleaning the abdominal cavity, it was still a very difficult and delicate affair to sew up the ruptured portion. Had the surgery taken place only a few hours later Beheram would not have lived, but Gharpure performed a great operation and he survived.

I learned about all this from a friend of mine, Fali Kolah, who was studying medicine at the time. He was permitted to observe the surgery, and he told me that he had never seen such deft surgery in all his time as a medical student, so that speaks volumes about Gharpure’s skill. Gharpure did a remarkable job.

At around that time the wedding of Gulnar, Beheram’s daughter, and Janghu Sukhadwalla had been fixed. Preparations were going on throughout the time of Beheram’s illness and surgery, and Beheram recovered well enough to attend the wedding. Not only that, he lived many years after that as well—much time elapsed after Baba dropped His body before Beheram passed away. Such was the skill, and the good fortune, of Dr. Gharpure, who came to Baba’s attention through these incidents.

Joseph Harb was fine after the surgery, but as time passed he found the environment in India not very suitable for his wife, Kari, and himself. They eventually asked Baba what they should do, and He advised them to return to the States, so they disposed of everything and did so. He gave the car that he had brought to Meherjee, and Meherjee’s family

used it for many years to come—a “gas guzzler,” they called it, but it was a lovely, comfortable car.

There were other house visits also. Baba visited Sardar Raste, the one who was instrumental in getting Guruprasad for Him. He lived in a huge mansion called “Rastewada,” which was a type of structure that they would have in olden times. Different chieftains would have their own “wadas,” a sort of self-contained community with high walls all around and a building built around a central courtyard, open to the sky. It had huge gates outside to bar all enemies from coming in. That *wada* is still there, built with pillars and floors of Burmese teak which would cost a fortune now, just opposite the Poona Centre, which had originally been Sardar Raste’s land too. During Baba’s house visit at Rastewada, Madhusudan performed the *arti* he had composed for Baba.

There were “sherbet parties” in Guruprasad during Baba’s stay. In India “sherbet” refers to a liquid composed of cold water and sweet lime or some pineapple or orange concentrate, like a fruit squash. It would be prepared in a big vessel, and Baba would personally be there stirring it with a big mug. We would hold out our glasses—the *mandali* and any of the visitors at the time—and Baba would dole out the sherbet into each of them.

Often that summer Baba would pay a visit to Bindra House in the afternoon. At 2:00 p.m. He would take a slow drive from Guruprasad to Bindra House. Steam would be coming out from under the hood of the car because it would be around 120 degrees in the sun, and all the windows of the car had to be shut because Baba never liked breezes blowing on Him, so it was like an oven inside.

When everyone stepped out of the car, they were covered in perspiration. Baba seemed to like that, you know! Jimmy Mistry would be there, and sometimes Nariman Dadachanji. Jimmy and Nariman

would travel from Bombay to Poona in the summer, leaving every Friday on the Deccan Queen, and returning on the Deccan Queen on Monday morning. They would bunk down with the *mandali* at Guruprasad during their visits. Jimmy was quite witty, and Baba always liked witty people around. Baba liked that company, having His old chums, so to speak.

Sometimes there would be ice cream parties. There was a man named Kishan Chand Gajwani, a multi-millionaire who owned several textile mills and cutlery manufacturing units along with various other businesses. He had heard of Baba at the Bombay Baba Centre. The secretary of that center was Sorabji Siganporia, a very devoted soul, and Sorabji and Gajwani got along very well. Gajwani is the man who brought the chair in Meherazad's Mandali Hall for Baba's use. Baba used the chair a lot because it was really very comfortable, and Gajwani had given it to Him with love.

Gajwani was a very nice gentleman, possibly in his early eighties, with a very sweet personality and an innocent face. He was quite straightforward and honest in all his dealings, even his business. He came to see Baba with Sorabji and fell in love with Him, never losing hold of His *damaan*. He was quite "ripe," as it were—ready to come into Baba's fold.

Gajwani would order ice cream from Kwality, a very famous place for ice cream. They would get this "casata" ice cream from Bombay. Casata is made in the shape of a globe, with cake coated with nuts on the outside and three layers of ice cream inside—pink, orange and green. Those ice cream globes would be cut into wedges, and Baba would serve them to all who were invited. It was the most expensive ice cream available—only someone as rich as he was could afford it. Slices would be cut, and Baba would dole out big pieces to each of us. Many balls of ice cream would be brought on such occasions. Gajwani was madly in love with Baba, and spending money was nothing for him.

I remember that summer there was a man staying with the *mandali* named Meherdas, and he too would take part in the ice cream parties. He had joined Baba only a few years before. His was a different story, this Meherdas—he was from Hamirpur side, and he used to sing good *bhajans*.

It is said that one day he was singing *bhajans* at a Baba-lover's house, and in the midst of one *bhajan* the Baba-lover's small child, who was very ill, died. Somebody brought the dead child to where Meherdas was singing, and he took the dead child on his lap and started to sing Baba's *bhajan* with such great devotion that suddenly the child revived! There was a big furor about all this, naturally, as it was a big miracle.

Baba was not very happy about that miracle, because it was not good for Meherdas (his name had been Ramdas, and Baba named him "Meherdas" when he joined the ashram). Baba sent a telegram to the effect that it would have been better if the child had died! Baba was not happy because that incident and the reaction to it elevated Meherdas' ego, and people were diverted from following Baba to worshipping Meherdas. Baba never liked that, inasmuch as any diversion of attention would be detrimental to Baba's lovers, so Baba took great care with these things.

Baba had Meherdas brought to Meherazad, and He kept him in the ashram for quite a few years. He had some inner experience of Baba and was very drawn to Him. He had a long beard and long hair, and Baba had it all chopped off. Everything was gradually removed. Baba wanted us to remain normal. The slightest attention to oneself and the ego starts playing tricks, you know.

Baba had to be very careful. He was a very careful mother to us, never allowing us to stray. The ego is such a tricky thing that it could lead you astray without you knowing what was happening. Meherdas was quite normal after he lost all that hair. All pretensions were gone after that.

So Meherdas and Pukar were at Guruprasad that summer, and they were enjoying the ice cream *prasad*, and suddenly they got the urge to finish their ice cream quickly, so they went and put water in it and drank up the whole thing. Pukar felt very tickled about their clever idea. Just then Baba came in and said, "You finished your ice cream?"

"Yes, Baba, we did it very fast—we put a little water into it and drank the whole thing up."

Baba's mood suddenly changed. "What? Did I give you ice cream to do this sort of thing with it? You have insulted My *prasad*! I am most unhappy about this. Come on, get up right now, pack up, and both of you go back to your home towns. I don't want to see your faces again."

All of a sudden everybody's ice cream started to melt. Baba was all fire again—one of His fiery moods. There was probably some thought of mischief somewhere in their minds, and Baba came to know of their thoughts immediately. He was there, as it were, when that happened.

Poor Meherdas and Pukar! They walked limply back to their quarters and began to pack up their things, getting their bedding rolls ready and so on, and then they started to slink out with their trunks, but Baba called them back.

"What do you take Me to be? Is this all a big joke, that I sit with you and be one of you? Is this the way you treat whatever I give you? Instead of treating it with utmost respect, you add water to it and insult My *prasad*?" We didn't understand what had happened, but for some reason Baba was very annoyed.

We were all scared stiff. Taking liberties was what Baba didn't like, and that was being brought home to all of us. Immediately we were put in check. Anyone taking any liberties whatsoever was immediately restricted by Baba. Meherdas and Pukar were brought back, and Baba said that it was not good, but that He forgave them this time and allowed them to stay. Poor Pukar was sobbing like a little child. He was very soft at heart, you know. Outside he had this fierce exterior with a big, muscular body, but he was in tears when he was leaving, and when Baba forgave him he was all the more in tears. Baba embraced them, and the atmosphere suddenly cleared, and it was all nice and fine and everything was forgotten. Those were some of the little incidents and events that would take place at Guruprasad.

We used to play draughts—Americans call it "checkers"—and Kumar was an expert at the game. Sometimes Ramjoo, who was also excellent,

would be there, and they would have a duel, and Baba would watch them play. There is a photograph of Baba watching His brother, Jalbhai, and Kumar playing—Jalbhai was also very good.

We also played another game that Sadashiv Patil had brought. It was the gambling game of dice that the Pandavas and Kauravas of ancient Indian history had played. The Pandavas lost their entire kingdom while gambling with dice, and they even pledged themselves and their common wife, Draupadi, to become slaves in the end. Eventually they were exiled for fourteen years, at the end of which they returned and had to fight a war, with the help of Lord Krishna, to reclaim their kingdom. That story, of course, is told in the ancient epic *Mahabharata*.

With this game a cloth of four pieces is joined at the center, and four people can play at a time. It is a very complicated game, which Baba played with Patil as His partner. Baba vowed to learn it from Patil—in the beginning Baba would just throw the dice, and Patil would play for Baba.

The goal was to reach the center square without being intercepted by the enemy. As I say, it was a very complicated game, and we played with shells as dice. The shells, if they fell the reverse way, upside down, were points in some way. At one time in Guruprasad this game was all the rage, and everyone played it for fun. Bhau was made to learn the game, too. Baba would warm up the dice in His palms and throw them with all gusto. It was a nice pastime. No gambling, mind you!

Games are one of the ways that people can forget themselves and concentrate without much effort. It's an enjoyable thing. Baba gave great importance to playing games—cricket, seven tiles and the like. They helped the players to forget themselves, and that helped Baba do His Universal Work, thus indirectly making the players participants in His work!

I remember once at Meherazad, while playing seven tiles I broke the tiles twice—that is, I knocked down the stack of tiles with my throw—and Baba asked Kaka to pay me two *annas*! So Kaka solemnly went to fetch his purse and brought out two *annas*. Sixteen *annas* were equivalent to one rupee.

Baba actually had Harry Kenmore play seven tiles at Meherazad, and somehow he managed to break them, too. A member of his team called out to him before his throw that the tiles were halfway between them, and Harry, though blind, could judge where the tiles were just by hearing the direction and the distance of his partner's voice. Baba would clap and praise Harry, and Harry would be all puffed up by it, you know. Baba had a way of making Harry feel great, while at the same time getting a big kick out of it for Himself.

One touching story from that summer had to do with Esfandiar [also spelled Espandiar] Vesali. He had been a small child in the Meher Ashram school for boys in the mid-1920s at Meherabad. Later he was shifted to the Prem Ashram when that started. After studying for some time in Baba's school, he was sent back to Iran.

Ever since his time at Meherabad as a child, he had not seen Baba, and all of a sudden it seems that he had a great urge to be with Him. Baba's many periods of seclusion, the New Life, and other things, one after the other, prevented him from coming to visit—something was always getting in the way. Esfandiar had heard, however, that Baba was going to give *darshan* in 1963 while at Guruprasad, and he was very keen to come, so he wrote to Baidul about it. At that time Baidul was in charge of correspondence with the Zoroastrians in Iran.

Esfandiar's letter came to Baidul, and Baidul read it out to Baba. Esfandiar wrote that he was very keen to have the Beloved's *darshan* once again, but owing to financial restrictions he was unable to come. He wrote, "What a pity that I cannot come, but please convey my love to Baba and pray to Baba on Esfandiar's behalf that He makes it possible for me to come, because I can't restrain myself any longer now!"

Baba heard the letter, and he asked about Esfandiar's main source of income. Alopa told Baba that Esfandiar had an orchard there, and that he made a living by selling fruit. Of late there had been a severe drought,

and accordingly his crops had failed, so Esfandiar was very despondent about the whole thing.

Baba asked Aloba to write back to Esfandiar and tell him that every morning he should go stand before each tree and say aloud something to this effect: "Meher Baba wants you to produce an abundance of fruit, so that after selling the fruit I can earn enough money to go and visit my beloved Lord, Meher Baba."

Aloba thought Baba was joking, and he didn't take Him seriously. A couple of days later Baba asked him, "Well, did you write what I said?"

"No, Baba," Aloba replied.

Baba looked surprised and asked, "How come you didn't?"

"Baba," said Aloba, "I thought You just mentioned it as a sort of joke."

Baba was upset and He instructed Aloba, "Write immediately and send this letter!" So he did write what Baba had said, and that is exactly what Esfandiar did. Each morning he went to each tree and read out this message from Baba. And that year somehow there was a frost, and none of the other farmers' orchards produced any fruit. But Esfandiar's orchard was full of fruit, and he sold it all at a big profit because of the shortage in the market, and so he was able to make it to Guruprasad in 1963. After many long years he saw Baba once again, and Baba allowed him to stay there for some time before returning to Iran. Even when he did try to leave, Esfandiar's ship would somehow not be available, so he came back to Poona three times. The third time Baba said, "Whether there is a ship or not, from now on you don't come back to Poona." Baba ordered that he must stay in Bombay until he got a proper passage back and not return again. That was his last visit to see Baba in the body, and his first and last trip to Guruprasad.

In later years, from the 1970s onwards, Esfandiar would come to India and pay visits to Meherabad and Meherazad. By that time he and his family had emigrated to the U.S.A. where he would often give Baba talks at various centers. Baba had given some esoteric experiences to the boys

at the Prem Ashram. The general public thought that strange things were going on there, and eventually it led to the winding up of the school. It was Baba's way. He built and he broke down—schools, hospitals, ashrams, homes—all went the same way. That was so that we would remain focused on Him and not get attached to the external edifices. It seems to me that Baba used these projects as a builder uses scaffolding. The scaffolding is very elaborate and a lot of work goes into it, but its purpose is to enable the masons to finish the work on a structure—it is never meant to be permanent. Once the work is finished, the scaffolding is removed.

So, as I've said, 1963 was quite an active summer stay for Baba. Francis was staying with the *mandali* at that time. In earlier days Francis had opted to stay with Ramakrishnan, the head of the Poona Centre, because at Guruprasad there was no quiet place for Francis to work. As a result he would go all the way to Khadki on the outskirts of Poona where Ramakrishnan was staying. Ramakrishnan was working in the government ammunition factory there, about six or seven miles away from Poona Station, so he and Ramakrishnan used to cycle back each evening.

Francis was told by Baba to be at Guruprasad at 9:00 a.m. each morning. So as not to be late, Francis tried to make a habit of being there by 8:45, but even then Baba would take him to task for being "late." That was because even though Francis kept coming earlier and earlier, Baba was always waiting for him in *mandali* hall, no matter when he arrived. Finally Baba asked Francis what he was trying to do. Francis said something like, "Get here on time," and Baba said, "But what was My order to you? It was to be here at 9:00 a.m." Baba went on to tell Francis that he should have worried only about obeying His order. If it was Baba's pleasure to say that he was late each day, he should have just accepted it instead of coming earlier and earlier.

Later on we got access to another building, a water tank, located in back of Guruprasad. There was a room on the ground floor, and Baba asked Francis to stay there. It was quite isolated from the main bungalow so he

could work there undisturbed. I rented a big desk for him, and he would work away late in the night writing poetry.

Francis had a habit of muttering loudly in his sleep, you know, so he would start making speeches at night, and people who didn't know about his habit would be surprised. "What's happening?" they would exclaim, and there was Francis, fast asleep but talking away loudly!

Francis was another example of one of the tough, rugged persons around Baba. An Australian poet, he spent about ten years with Baba at the end of Baba's physical lifetime, and during the course of those years there was a great transformation in him. Whatever little superficiality he may have had was all shorn off. He was such a tough character and extremely strong, with huge wrists. He had even had an operation performed on his palms to make his fingers stretch out wider to aid in his playing the piano! Francis was a great artist and a great poet, no doubt. His mind was always on poetry, and he would spend his time putting the experiences he had while staying with the Lord into verse.

There is always professional rivalry among artists, of course, and a very distinct aspect of it came out with Francis. For him the competitor was Hafiz, owing to Baba's great love for Hafiz's poetry. Every now and then Baba would call Aloba and ask him to recite a particular *ghazal*. It was remarkable how, if Baba simply gestured a few words to him, Aloba could recite the entire couplet or quatrain that Baba had in mind.

Baba would repeatedly praise Hafiz. "Never before or since has such a poet been born! He was a Perfect Master *and* a poet, and the intricacies of the path are so subtly and beautifully revealed in his poetry!" Baba would say that although there are instances of several other Perfect Masters writing poetry, none could surpass Hafiz in sheer beauty and excellence. "The shades of meaning that Hafiz could give, and the beauty of the language of his poetry—it is unsurpassed," Baba would say, and His facial expressions would reveal how strongly He felt about Hafiz's greatness.

As a result of all this Francis rather naturally seemed to be jealous of Hafiz. It probably didn't help that often Aloba would recite Hafiz in Persian at Baba's direction, yet Baba wouldn't translate the lines for Francis.

This went on for some time. Francis, meanwhile, was working on his own poetry. That was the reason why he had not originally stayed at Guruprasad. Guruprasad had been too crowded for him, and he wanted to have quietude for his work, so he only began to stay at Guruprasad when that water tank room became available. He was working on a new form of poetry that Baba had taught him, *ghazals* in English, which were later compiled into the book *In Dust I Sing*. Francis would read all those *ghazals* out to Baba. Each day Baba would ask him, “Anything new?” and he would read them before Baba, Who would listen with great love and feeling. Sometimes Baba would have him repeat the *ghazals*. Francis continued to work on those *ghazals* after returning to Meherazad. Baba frequently praised Francis to no end, and so the writing and reciting went on and on. Baba heard the whole lot of his poems, and then He asked him to repeat them several times.

Once, after having Francis repeat a *ghazal*, Baba asked the others around Him, “Do you know why I am asking him to repeat this? It’s because I am committing them to memory. In this Advent I have been quoting Hafiz time and again, and in my future advent I am going to quote Francis, so I’m committing his poetry to memory.” Francis, however, took it all with a pinch of salt and would merely grunt, feeling that Baba was praising him only to appease him and was setting him up just to bring him down later.

Over the years I observed that these rivalries—whether between *mandali* members or, in this case, Francis and Hafiz—would always surface for one reason or another. Baba would inevitably bring them out. But I felt that when Baba said that He was memorizing Francis’s *ghazals* so that He could recite them when He came back, He wasn’t joking. Baba seemed quite serious about it when He was saying it. If you would take that as a joke, you would have to take everything He said as a joke—it was said in the same way as He said anything else of importance.

I remember one *ghazal* that Baba liked very much was called “Because of Love.” Every now and then Baba would say, “Come on, now. Repeat that *ghazal*,” and sometimes Francis would be in a very grumpy and

grouchy mood, and he would have to read out that *ghazal* even though he was not in the mood to recite it out loud. Baba would catch him in such a mood, and in His usual way He would irritate Francis to the point that he would burst out in aggravation. It might not have been about reciting a *ghazal*—it could be anything.

Once he just exploded in front of Baba. One morning Baba came early to the *mandali* hall at Guruprasad where we all had assembled. Baba started to say something to Francis, and all of a sudden Francis burst out loudly and started to shout, “Stop it, just stop it! I can’t take it any more! I have had enough!” He just gave vent to his frustration and anger, shouting loudly at Baba, and suddenly everybody was rather distressed at what was happening, and Baba seemed very unhappy too.

Francis ranted and shouted in this manner for two or three minutes, repeating “I am fed up. This is too much!” Baba heard him out without interruption, and then He looked very sadly at Francis and said, “Francis, I never expected this from you.”

Suddenly Francis realized what had happened to him, and he came to his senses, as it were, and he began to sob loudly. He bawled like a small child. Something must have happened inside him, and Baba was working it out of his system. Baba looked on with such a sad expression on his face that Francis just melted in front of Him. He wept his heart out in front of all of us. We all started to cry. Baba probably used the incident as a catalyst to bring out something in each one of us present that day. It was a very poignant situation. After Francis stopped sobbing and calmed down, Baba called him close and embraced him for a long time.

Baba would suddenly bring such things out. While we would be joking and laughing, these situations would develop and completely turn around, just as it happened in the case of Pukar and Meherdas. Once Baba had finished His work with them, He would call them and embrace them, and soon everything was forgotten.

Only Baba could pierce the shells that these tough, crusty characters had around them. Nothing else could shake them—not even an earthquake

would move those strong and rugged old people. But Baba could slice through them like a knife through butter.

When these situations would suddenly develop, we were able to realize that Baba was working on something inside of Francis. Francis once happened to mention to me, “I cannot bear this Man’s infinite patience.” We were on a walk at Meherazad. “You know, this Man, just with His patience, is grinding me to dust. I can’t bear it any longer!”

Baba would be suffering patiently, and Baba would endure everything—the moods, the bickerings and everything else that would go on here and in the outside world. Francis would be a witness to all this, and slowly it was hammering him. I had never thought of it like that until Francis mentioned it to me, and I was very impressed by the way he said that. Perhaps that is what inspired Francis to give his book of *ghazals* the title *In Dust I Sing*.

The fact that Baba would just accept anything a person would do could fluster anyone. It was, of course, His love that brought out all these feelings in a person.

Another time in 1963 the Poona Centre performed a drama at Guruprasad in which the historical Avatars of the Age were depicted in a play. All six Avatars were shown, and what each one propounded at the time was acted out. Where Baba usually sat would be where the performance would be held in the Guruprasad hall, and Baba’s chair was shifted so that He sat with the spectators.

The seventh Avatar was Baba himself, and Rustom and Sohrab were the actors—Rustom as Eruch and Sohrab as Baba, dressed up like Baba. In the play they suddenly walk in, and Baba was watching all this, and He was tickled pink with what they were performing—reading out the board and giving out messages, mimicking Baba perfectly. Baba was delighted, and He was shaking silently with laughter. They said something about Baba’s Love being manifest, and there was a big roar in the crowd and Baba’s “*Jai!*” was being shouted out and everybody was enjoying it to

the hilt. They did a very nice job. They are very good actors—as I’ve mentioned, it is a family trait.

Baba not only acted as a man, but He totally *became* a man for our sakes.

The Secretary of the Cricket Association in Poona heard of Baba’s interest in cricket and came one day to say, “Baba, there’s going to be a prize distribution to the cricketers, and we would like You to give out the prizes.”

Baba looked askance but said “All right.” He was in the mood at that time, so He agreed. On the afternoon of the event everything was decorated. All the shields and cups were placed near Baba’s chair, and the cricketers were called in. Of course there was a big crowd of Baba-lovers there as it was also in the midst of afternoon *darshan*.

The names of the cricketers were called out, and Baba gave out the prizes. Each one would come, a prize cup would be handed to Baba, and Baba would hand it to the cricketer. Baba gave a good message, also, that He always liked the game of cricket, and He still liked it although He was not able to play it any longer. He said that He expected the cricketers to play in the right spirit of the game, to entertain the crowds and to play entertaining cricket.

It was during that summer that one day a very beautiful Siamese cat suddenly appeared. It was a rich golden-brown color, with blue eyes and lots of fur, truly a pedigreed cat. Baba was surprised to see a cat appear in the house. As you may know, Baba would always feed animals a lot, almost more than they could easily take in. That was Baba’s habit with pets—to overfeed them. At least that’s the way it appeared to us. Baba was probably giving those animals His *prasad* for whatever was in their lot. At any rate, the cat became an instant favorite of Baba, and from that day onward the cat never left Guruprasad while Baba was staying there.

Everyone wondered whose cat it was, and one day the owner appeared. She was a charming young lady named Dolly Diddi, a Parsi woman married to a Punjabi. She came to Guruprasad and inquired about a cat named Pegu matching this cat's description.

We said, "Yes, yes, he has been here. We didn't know whose cat it was."

"That's my cat," she said. "I have come to get it. May I take it back?"

"Of course," she was told.

She called the cat, and the cat immediately came and purred. She held it and took it back to her house, which was across the street from Guruprasad, a little way down the road. Her husband was a building contractor, very well-to-do, so they had a big posh bungalow there. They could have afforded such a cat.

The next day the cat came back to Guruprasad. This time Dolly knew where to find him, and she took him away again. She tied him up nicely, leashed him like a dog, but every time he would give her the slip somehow or other, and the cat would once again come over. This happened so often that eventually Dolly got tired and said, "Well, if the cat wants to stay here, I don't mind, but may I bring food for it so that I can feed it?" Baba gave permission for that.

With the excuse of the cat Dolly Diddi started to come to Baba. She had heard about Him, and now she took great interest, and her sister, who was living in the area, also took interest, so their family started coming for Baba's *darshan* and they became Baba-lovers. All this happened through Pegu the cat!

In short, the cat became a permanent resident of Guruprasad. Early in the morning, as soon as Baba's bedroom door would be opened by the women, the cat would be waiting, and he would be the first one to enter, jumping onto Baba's lap where Baba would pet him. That animal had an attraction to the Lord, waiting for Baba's *darshan* early each morning. He would roll at Baba's feet, and Baba would play with the cat with His foot, so that that lucky cat received the touch of Baba's feet.

You can see the cat in one of the films, rolling under Baba's feet while Baba played with him. Pegu was a really lucky cat, no question about it!

Then Pegu began to stay at Guruprasad even after Baba left! Poor Dolly would have to bring food to him daily. Sometimes I would be there, and she would bring a big bowl of fish, and he would lap it up and disappear back into Guruprasad. The cat would dismiss her, but she loved him so much that she kept on feeding him.

This went on. At the end of one of the summer visits I remember that after Baba had returned to Meherazad, He kept on asking about Pegu. He said, "I hope Pegu is being properly looked after." Khorshed and my family and I would stay behind after Baba left in order to clean up and close up Guruprasad and take away all the things we had brought for Baba's use. Then we too would go, Khorshed being the last to leave. And this time, by mistake, Khorshed locked Pegu into one of the cupboards on the women's side. Meanwhile at Meherazad Baba was remembering Pegu and kept saying things like, "I wonder if Pegu is all right. Nobody is in the house—I hope he didn't get locked up." And the women would say, "Baba, how could that happen?"

The cat, poor thing, was scratching away, but nobody was listening. Eventually, on the second or third day after we had closed the place up, the manager of Guruprasad, Mr. Mohite, happened to hear a scratching noise, and fortunately he had the keys to the cupboard and he opened it, and out dropped Pegu, haggard and famished, on the point of dying, but fortunately he was saved.

Some time in December, 1966, Pegu must have gone for a stroll on the road. The traffic in Poona was increasing daily, and he got run over by a big truck and was killed on the spot. It had been three years since Pegu had discovered Baba, and Baba was informed about his death by telegram.

There were many informal gatherings with Baba that summer. One individual named Sam Mody would sometimes attend those gatherings—


he was brought by Dr. Alu Khambatta, and Baba had gone to school with his father. One day Baba started reminiscing about those days and said that Sam's father was very good at math, whereas Baba was not. So the way Baba passed the math exams was that He would look at Sam's father's papers and copy his answers! Sam Mody went on to become the foremost cardiologist in Poona, where he eventually set up and has managed the N.M. Wadia Institute of Cardiology for many years.

All in all, it was a very lively stay at Guruprasad that summer, but eventually it came to an end, and there was the usual farewell at Bund Garden. We would all be called in the morning, and the manager and I had to be at Guruprasad to take charge after everybody left. After the farewell at the Bund Garden I would come back and wind up things with the help of the family.



Chapter Thirty-three:

Qawwali Program in Ahmednagar and Guruprasad Anecdotes

ne time Baba called us for a *qawwali* program that took place at the Ahmednagar Centre. Some people from there were called, and a group came and a program took place. After the program Baba had arranged for a *bhajia* party. *Bhajias* are fried fritters made with chickpea flour, and Baba liked them very much. He also liked the slightly crunchy and salty chickpea preparation called *gathia*, which He didn't have to chew because they melted in the mouth.

To return to the point, after the *qawwali* program we had a *bhajia* party with nice singing. Chhagan Master was given the job of getting good *bhajias*, but the ones that he brought were very hard, almost like pieces of wood. People generally like crunchy *bhajias*, but these were exceptionally hard. Before they realized it, however, everyone took huge helpings of the *bhajias*, but because they were almost inedibly tough, they couldn't finish them.

I offered what was left on my plate to Gustadji—he was very fond of *bhajias*, and although he had no teeth, he could chew up the hardest possible thing and eat it with nothing but his gums. It was remarkable—he was a person in the best of health, always with pink cheeks. Seeing

me unload my *bhajias*, other people also brought the *bhajias* they couldn't eat to Gustadji, and soon he had a big pile of everyone else's *bhajia* leftovers!

Suddenly Baba came around and said, "What's this, Gustadji? Where did you get all this?" Baba was quite annoyed. "Who gave *bhajias* to Gustadji? He'll fall sick. Throw them out at once!"

Gustadji signed, "No, Baba, I'll be all right, I'll be all right." Baba made Gustadji throw out most of the *bhajias*, but He did allow him to keep a few.

Baba wouldn't eat them that day, either—He only liked soft *bhajias*.

My sister Meheru used to tell us that when Baba was staying at the Links bungalow in Bangalore, He still had a single tooth left—all the others having been shaken out by His banging His head after Babajan's kiss of Realization—and she said that He took very good care of it.

For the *mandali* Guruprasad was fun because it was a break from the routine, but it was also a lot of work—there were always many people coming and going, and they had to do all their daily chores, but Baba's mood was good, and that was good for them. They would play cards or La Risque—as I've mentioned, sometimes there would be twenty or thirty people playing this game, with Baba seated in His chair at the head. The games would always entail a great deal of shouting, chaos and confusion. As I've also said, the twins, Rustom and Sohrab, being small children, were not allowed to play the game, but they got to assist in dealing the cards and playing for Baba, which of course was great fun for them.

Amrit's father, Kumar, would be there, and he would not want to rub his nose before Baba when he lost the game, so Rustom and Sohrab were assigned the task of forcing him to do so. Those two big, robust boys would try to force Kumar to rub his nose, and he would resist, you know, purposely to add drama to the scene. Everybody would enjoy the scene, especially the losers—Baba said that they were the real winners because

they got the opportunity to rub their noses before Him. The winners, of course, were happy to have won the game.

At the end of Baba's stay at Guruprasad that year He bid farewell to the Poona lovers. For the last day He called the Poona "*bhajan mandali*" and asked Madhusudan to sing some *ghazals* and *bhajans*. He sang his heart out, and Baba was giving out so much love on that last occasion that we were all almost brought to tears in front of Him. There was also a farewell song in that program, making it still more difficult for people to hold back their tears. Baba seemed to have opened a little bit of His heart's window, you know, and everybody was flooded with His Love.


After He left people felt very sad—never before had they felt the intensity of Baba's Love like that. One of the Poona people, Bhausar, met me later and said, "After that day I went home and cried like a child. I had never wept like that before. I don't know what happened to me! Baba suddenly seemed to have flooded my heart with so much love that I just wept and wept, and my family couldn't understand what was wrong with me." It was just something that Baba did at that time—everyone felt it.

Bhausar was a Ticket Checker [TC] with the Indian Railways. He was a great help to Baba-lovers from all over India who came for Baba's *darshan*. He would be able to get the big groups bulk bookings or help smaller groups and individuals with reservations for travel and accommodation. He provided tremendous assistance, and he worked ceaselessly and silently, without expectation of praise or reward, truly a great lover of Baba. He was quite a tall, hefty person, still alive in 1994 despite several ailments, but he has since passed away.



Chapter Thirty-four:

1964

nce again in early 1964 it was time for my usual stay at Meherazad for Baba's Birthday occasion. Whereas in 1963 Baba had ordered that there should be no public celebration, in 1964 there was celebration on a grand scale all over the world.

The servants were given the privilege of decorating the place in their own humble way, so they brought Chinese paper streamers and lanterns, balloons and bells, and hung them under the roof, mainly in Mandali Hall. It was the privilege of the Meherazad staff to work the whole night to decorate the room and especially to decorate Baba's seat.

The Hall has been renovated twice—once during Baba's lifetime, and once after He dropped His body. On Baba's Birthday we all rose early and cleaned up and went into the Hall, and at exactly 5:00 a.m. Eruch would call out "Avatar Meher Baba *ki Jai!*" seven times with us joining in, and then we read out the two prayers. Some *arti* record might be played, because at that time there were no singers among the *mandali*. We would have a nice breakfast of *rava* or *sev*, with a little yogurt, and the women did the same.

On the women's side they decorated Baba's breakfast table with birthday cards when people were allowed to send greeting cards and telegrams.

The telegraph office found Baba's Birthday to be a nightmare for them—it would be completely jammed up with the international and India-wide influx of cables. Feram would write very witty letters about how he would go there, and they would give him a stool to sit on. At first the clerks would respect him, although his appearance was very shabby and his dress very simple. He would write notes to Baba because he was a very witty fellow, saying things like "The first time I went to pick up Baba's Birthday telegrams at the telegraph office I was "sirred" and "stooled." This was a reference to the clerks giving him a stool to sit on!

During the Birthday celebrations there were many special stories that were sent to Baba for His information. The Delhi Centre's Birthday program took place for seven days, and a part of the celebration on Baba's Birthday itself was broadcast by All-India Radio [AIR] at 10:00 p.m. that day. During that broadcast Amar Singh Saigal, a senior MP and a close associate and confidante of the Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, recited the Master's Prayer in Hindi. Though Baba had retired many hours before, the *mandali* informed Him of this event the next morning, and He was very happy about it.

I don't recollect much that happened during that year at Meherazad, and soon it was time for me to depart. I filed the usual cables and telegrams, and then I returned to Guruprasad to prepare for Baba's stay once more in the summer.

In 1964 Baba had sent out circulars that His seclusion would continue and that He did not want to be disturbed. So, according to His wishes, nobody ventured to go to Guruprasad and therefore it was a very quiet stay. Only those of us who were allowed to visit Baba could see Him and be with Him, or those whom He called for work. There was no *darshan* program. Whenever I had time off from my office I was allowed to go to Guruprasad. Mumma, Manu and the rest of the family could come when they were called, but I was allowed to go whenever I had the time off. Except in 1968, when Baba stopped anyone from entering Guruprasad, this pattern continued.

Baba did promise, however, that He would open the Poona Centre. Therefore, on the 1st of May, 1964—the appointed day—Baba went in the early morning to the recently constructed center. Only Baba-lovers were allowed to come that day. It was not a public *darshan*, and Baba had announced that outsiders should not be allowed to come. It was a quiet affair, but that quiet affair turned out to be quite big because the hall was packed to capacity.

Pervin Karkaria, Meherjee's daughter, had the privilege of driving Baba in their car from Guruprasad to the Poona Centre. There was a ribbon with the colors of Baba's flag tied across the door, and Baba was given the scissors to cut the ribbon. Then He was given the key to the door, and He opened it.

We were all outside in the compound. At that time the Centre had a different entrance, from a different side altogether. There is a road that has the *dharamshala* of Gadge Maharaj on its opposite side, and from there was a small lane that led up to the Centre. That lane was subsequently given over to the K.E.M. [King Edward Memorial] Hospital, and an alternate access road was established from the current side at the back of the hospital. Anyhow, at that time Baba entered through the original route.

After Baba entered, all followed suit, occupying the hall. There were almost a thousand people, between the hall and the gallery on top, and more outside as they couldn't all fit inside. A small children's program was given for Baba's entertainment, and I remember that my niece, Mehera Kerawalla, was there to recite the prayers, "Beloved God" followed by the Master's Prayer and finally the Prayer of Repentance. She was just five or six years old, but she just rattled off the prayers in a nice loud voice. She was quite bold then, as she is now as well.

Then there was a little dancing, and Baba started to give *darshan* to each one, something unscheduled, I think. People filed past and bowed down at His feet.

Soon after that program Baba began to suffer from cervical spondylosis, and from then onwards He was no longer able to embrace large groups

of people at a time. Till then it was only His hip joint pain that was bothering Him. Sometimes it would be very bad—I suppose it all reflected His Universal Work. The doctors were unable to do much about it.

So the *darshan* program was concluded, and by about noontime Baba returned to Guruprasad, and that was it for the rest of His stay in Poona, because Baba didn't give any further *darshans* after that except for a few that He would call.

As I mentioned previously, the approach road to the Poona Centre was different when it was opened than in the later years when the K.E.M. Hospital wanted to expand its activities. They had land on either side of the approach road and asked the Centre and the other three occupants of adjacent pieces of land who were using that approach road if they could build on it. All agreed, and another approach road was given to them and the old road became that of the hospital.

When K.E.M. established the new approach road, they had promised that it would be wider, but they never fulfilled their promise, so there was a lot of bickering and ill feeling. Then there was a washerman who had an unauthorized structure there, and the K.E.M. authorities wanted to thrust the responsibility for evicting him onto the Poona Centre, but it was not possible to evict him, all the more so because he named the laundry service “Avatar Meher Baba Laundry” or some such thing. He even got Baba's brother Jal to inaugurate the laundry! That's how people try to take advantage, you know.

K.K. Ramakrishnan was very upset about the whole thing, and there was a lot of unpleasantness throughout the whole history of the Centre. For instance, when that plot of land was to be given for the Poona Centre, things didn't go according to plan right from the start. It was a big plot, right in the heart of the city, extremely strategic, in a very busy locality. Today that land would be priceless. Sardar Raste owned the land, and Gadekar, Ramakrishnan, Kutumba Sastri—the first chairman of Avatar Meher Baba Trust—and several other people who had influence with Sardar Raste approached him. He was immediately convinced to donate the whole plot for Baba's center. But before the people planning the

center could officially have the land transferred by legal deed to the Meher Baba Centre Trust, some old employees of Sardar Raste got wind of the plan, and they went that same night to him and convinced him not to give such a big plot.

“Why do you deprive us? We have served you so long. Please allow us to occupy a part of this plot,” they pleaded.

The next day when the Baba people tried to transfer the deed, Sardar Raste said that something should be given to his old employees also. Nothing further could be done about it, because, after all, it was his land and his donation.

The old staff were not good neighbors. There was endless trouble when the Centre was built, especially with the garden that was there, encroaching all the time. They would come and damage the property. Also, the privacy of the Centre was lost because those people had their entry from the same approach road, and the land that would have been ideal for exclusive Centre use, with room for future expansion, was ruined.

After the plot was acquired, funds were lacking to construct the building, so Jalbhai, Baba’s brother, volunteered to raise money for the Centre. He went on a tour of Andhra Pradesh because it is one of the most prosperous states. The land is fertile there, unlike the North, which is quite poor. Jalbhai gathered quite a lot of donations from non-Baba-lovers too. Many from Poona donated, and eventually there were sufficient funds to start the construction.

Meherjee was put in charge of construction, and his friend, a Mr. Merchant, the contractor who had also built Meherjee’s factory, helped build the Poona Centre. He was a very good person but rather slow in his execution, so the construction work progressed gradually for quite a few years.

Ramakrishnan was becoming impatient. You see, the land was rich agricultural land, so when the foundations were dug, they had to go ten feet just to strike hard rock. That was ten feet of pure black cotton soil! A lot of money went into the foundations, and that slowed the work considerably.

So Ramakrishnan, not in the know of these things, was becoming ever more impatient, but Merchant was thorough in his work, so he wouldn't listen to any complaints. He just went on with his work at his own pace.

Eventually Ramakrishnan was so fed up that he got another contractor to lay the concrete foundation slab. Then he realized the difference in workmanship, because unending problems occurred with the slab. The walls were like an ancient castle, solid and firm in spite of the loose soil underneath, but the slab started to leak after a couple of monsoons, and it was a perennial problem for the Centre until they built a tin roof on top to stop the leakages. Ramakrishnan paid the price for his impatience.

After the opening of the Centre there were constant feuds between Baba people, and every time Baba would come to Guruprasad, those feuds would come to a boil. The first thing Baba would have to do when he arrived was to call the various parties and settle their differences—get them together again and ask them to work in harmony. It was, after all, in Baba's Cause that they were working. Each year this would go on and on and on. That is the story of how the Poona Centre came to be.

The Bindra House people were life members of the Poona Centre, and most of us were intimately connected. Baba had also asked us to visit the Centre as often as we could. It was only about a fifteen-minute walk from Bindra House.

Before the Centre came into existence, Bapusaheb Shinde had a footwear shop that was our first meeting place. On Mondays his shop would be closed, and a few of us would assemble and sing Baba's *bhajans* and the like with Madhusudan and company. But there was no room for people to sit. It was his first shop, and after that he got a bigger shop elsewhere, but it also was in the heart of the city.

Later there was a man by the name of Sardar Mudaliyar who had a nice little cottage close to where the present Poona Centre is located, and he said, "Why not have the meetings in my place?" So the venue got shifted

to his house, which had a big hall, about three-quarters the size of Mandali Hall at Meherazad. It also had a veranda outside where we could all gather before and after meetings.

I remember during the house visits He made, Baba also came to that house. He paid a visit to the Poona Centre's original location, and the Mudaliyar family and all the neighbors had laid out their lovely *saris* all the way from the road leading into their house and had strewn rose petals on them for Baba to walk on. I hope they have treasured those *saris*. They are priceless things now, as Baba had trod upon them.

A very tragic incident occurred at the Mudaliyar family's home, by the way. They were very devoted to Baba, and every year they would celebrate Baba's Birthday in their house. Mudaliyar had a son who would decorate the place for the occasion. Just a few days before one of Baba's Birthdays in the 1960s, the son had climbed up on scaffolding and was scraping the walls prior to painting them, when he slipped from quite a height and landed on his head with a loud thud and fell unconscious. He died from the accident, and of course it was a terrible tragedy for the family, but still their love for Baba was so great that it did not prevent them from going ahead with Baba's Birthday celebration at the time. I think Baba sent a very loving message for the family.

Eventually even the Mudaliyar place became too small, and that's why the idea of a new center came into being, and it was eventually opened by Baba. The first floor was like a big balcony, similar to what there is in cinema halls. People would go up there to sit when the lower hall was full. That space is now used as a dormitory to accommodate out-of-town Baba-lovers. It is supposed to be very comfortable and serves the Baba community well. The Poona Centre takes good care of this facility.

Another tragic accident occurred that year involving a Baba-lover named Jal Dorabjee. He was a school-days friend of Pendu, Padri, Adi and that

group. Pendu and Padri used to live near each other in Poona, and Jal Dorabjee also lived close by. They all used to go to the same school, and they were friendly with each other for a long time. Jal Dorabjee also eventually came to love Meher Baba.

For several years all the food for Baba and the *mandali* would come from Bindra House, but later, when there were so many programs at Guruprasad and Baba called more and more people to have lunch, the pressure started to increase. Najamai, who was sent over to Bindra House to help prepare the food, couldn't take the strain any longer. Everyone was getting on in years as well, so then Baba said, "That's it. Now we'll get food from outside for the *mandali*." Only Baba's food would come from Bindra House.

Jal Dorabjee came to know about this, and he immediately offered to send food for Baba. He had a "hotel"—the term for a small restaurant in India—behind the railway station in a small building called the Edward Hotel. He also had an actual hotel on Dastur Meher Road near Baba's house called "Jimmy Lodge." His son ran that one—I think Jimmy was the name of his son.

At any rate, Jal Dorabjee used to stay at the Edward Hotel, where he would provide boarding and lodging for railway passengers. The place had a nice homey feeling, and he would cook for his clients and the like. So he said, "Baba, it's no problem for me. I have big vessels, and this is my daily job, so I would be happy just to donate the food."

Baba said, "No donation. You have to take something."

"All right, Baba," Jal said. "I'll take one rupee per head."

Baba said, "All right." So that was the fee that he charged to supply sumptuous meals. He was also a caterer for Parsi weddings and *navjotes*—thread ceremonies—at that time. He supplied food for the guests at such events, and he would send the same food to Guruprasad at the same subsidized rate, so the *mandali* would have occasional feasts as a result. Jal Dorabjee was a very large-hearted, nice person, and he had the good fortune to supply lavish food to Baba's people.

One day in this period we got the news that Jal had suddenly lost his daughter and granddaughter in a drowning accident. His daughter had been married to a man named Keki Billimoria, and they used to live in Bombay. She was a beautiful girl with blonde hair and blue eyes, quite fair, and Jal Dorabjee was very fond of her. It turned out that she and her husband and daughter had gone on a boating expedition to Elephanta Caves, off the Bombay coast, for a picnic. That place is a well-known tourist attraction.

On the way something happened to the private boat, and it overturned and capsized just before it could reach the Elephanta Caves. Many people on the boat also drowned besides Jal Dorabjee's daughter and his little one-year-old granddaughter—it was a big tragedy. I don't know how the son-in-law survived. He was young and strong—a good-looking fellow—and he may have been able to swim to shore.

There was naturally great sadness in the family as a result of that accident, so despite His seclusion, Baba asked them to come over. They were in the Guruprasad hall one day when we were there. Baba consoled them, and after they left the son-in-law said, "What a peaceful feeling I had. All that grief and feeling of hurt that I had simply disappeared when I was in His presence, and how peaceful I am feeling here. I wish I had come earlier." A year earlier, when the *darshan* programs were going on, his wife had come for Baba's *darshan*, and she had tried to persuade him to come but he had refused. "I wish I had listened to my wife and come with her, but it is this tragedy that has brought me into the presence of such a Being," he said.

Then, of course, the other tragedy was Nehru. One day in May—it was May 27th, 1964—I was in the insurance company office working, and suddenly we heard a big commotion outside. Someone with a loud gong was leading a rabble and asking offices to close down. Someone rushed out from the office to find out what was going on, and he was informed that Nehru had died.

We closed the office and were given the day off as a mark of respect. His death was a total surprise. He had had a stroke, but it was kept quiet and the public was not informed because there would be a battle of succession. Quite a tussle occurred after Nehru died. I immediately phoned Guruprasad and Eruch came on the line, and I told him what had happened because the news had not yet reached Guruprasad and so he hadn't yet heard.

He went immediately to inform Baba. Apparently, a day or two before, Baba had begun to ask Eruch, "Supposing if Nehru were suddenly to come here to have My *darshan*—how would that be?"

Eruch said, "Baba, it's not possible because there is a lot of protocol involved—there would be security and all of his entourage and so on, and he couldn't come suddenly like that for Your *darshan*."

Baba simply gestured, "Oh." The matter didn't end there, however. Baba kept on and on about Nehru suddenly visiting. He would pose the same questions to Bhau during his night watch, as is narrated in *Lord Meher*. Baba was constantly worrying about Nehru, and on 26th May 1964, He even said that if Nehru had a second stroke, it would be a fatal one. Sure enough, at 2:30 p.m. the following day, the news that Nehru had passed away was given to the nation. It was then that the *mandali* understood why Baba kept on talking about Nehru coming to take His *darshan* without an appointment! It was just a casual, passing remark, but when Nehru died a day or two later, the importance of that remark was felt. Nehru's soul must have come to pay its respects to Baba there and had His *darshan* all of a sudden. We eventually realized what many of those seemingly casual remarks meant.

Baba gave a nice statement about how Nehru was a true "karma yogi," and that India was fortunate to have had such a leader. He said that India would have to wait another seven hundred years to have another jewel like him. It was a great compliment from the Lord Himself. Without question it bespeaks the greatness of the leader, who was loved immensely by the people. While Nehru was in power the Congress party

had no difficulty bulldozing the opposition in the elections. There was quite a lot of stability. After Nehru died there was a lot of tussle, especially since he had never named a successor. There was an election, and Lal Bahadur Shastri was elected to be the Prime Minister, and he proved quite capable in spite of his small stature—his looks belied his real stature. He even conducted a war very successfully against Pakistan a year later. But the strain was too much for him, and he died a year after that.

Sardar Amar Singh Saigal was closely related to Nehru; they were together in the Liberation Movement from the time of the British. They were great friends, and Saigal, being an ardent lover of Baba, had forcefully brought Baba's messages and Name to most of the government people and certainly to Nehru. In those times we had a lot of ministers participating in Baba's Birthday celebrations and Silence anniversaries.

I remember that when we were with Baba at Guruprasad, Shantadevi—the Maharani who owned the palace—used to come from time to time to be with Him. She would spend a while on the side of the men *mandali*, and then Baba would send her in to be with the women. It was always a nice visit.

Though Baba had not had meetings with many of the Poona lovers during His 1964 summer stay at Guruprasad, He did allow a farewell visit at Bund Gardens and allowed His lovers to have His *darshan* as He was leaving Poona. There was great rejoicing among the Baba community because they would at least have a glimpse of their Beloved before He left.

It so happened, however, that about a week or so before Baba was to leave, the monsoon broke, and it began to rain quite heavily. Baba was quite concerned that His lovers wouldn't be able to have His *darshan*—it was the one and only *darshan* He was giving that summer, mind you. Again the rains were interrupting His work, playing some mischief. So Baba let it be known that instead of Bund Gardens, He would allow His

lovers to come to Guruprasad and bid Him farewell in the hall there instead of at Bund Gardens.

Consequently, all gathered on the day of Baba's farewell, early in the morning, and I remember that the sky was quite dark with heavy clouds. People were arriving in droves, filling up the veranda and the side *mandali* hall as well. Baba was seated in the main hall.

It so happened that Ramakrishnan was late in coming. I was in one corner of the hall, and from His chair Baba pointed to me and asked, "Is Ramakrishnan coming or not? Because it is getting late!" So I made my way out of the room to find out, but he was nowhere in sight. I went to the gate, but there was still no sign of him, so I came back and reported to Baba, "Baba, I don't see Ramakrishnan anywhere."

After about three or four minutes Baba again told me, "Go! Find out what's wrong! Go see if Ramakrishnan has come or not!" So again I had to move people out of my way and cause a big commotion while leaving the packed hall, rather reluctantly I must say, because I was being deprived of Baba's presence as a result of this Ramakrishnan! I went out, saw no sign of him, returned, reported to Baba, and went back into my corner. Baba said, "What's up? What's going on?"

A couple of minutes later He again said, "Go and see. Has he come?"

By this time I felt quite exasperated! Why was Baba picking on me to go and look out for this fellow? I was missing so much time with Baba because of his late arrival! Although I had been with Him all of this stay, at that moment I had forgotten that fact, so a little resentment built up within me. Again I went and searched, and again there was still no sign of Ramakrishnan.

I came back, reported to Baba, but this time I stood outside. I felt it was no use going back inside because He was going to send me out again and it would be troublesome. I didn't understand why He was sending me out.

Suddenly it dawned upon me—what am I thinking? Baba is giving me some work, and I am resenting it? What for? So it dawned upon me how

important it was just to obey what Baba tells me and not to want to be in His presence all the while. I realized what a foolish thought had come into my head, and I then realized why Baba was picking on me. So now I waited for Him to tell me to go see about Ramakrishnan, but after that He never asked me to do it again. The lesson was driven home. I stood outside, but no call came, and in the meantime Ramakrishnan arrived. See how patiently Baba drives home lessons, in spite of all the rush and hubbub? One has to be subservient to His wishes and forget everything else.

You see, Baba was remembering me the whole time, and I was resenting it! He was probably bringing out this emotion in me to clear it up. That is how Baba used to work with all of us and bring out various issues, but He had to show so much patience to do all this, and to do it despite all the other work around Him.

When Ramakrishnan came, Baba met him, gave some final instructions to everyone, and each lover came by to kiss Baba's hand, and that was the end of the 1964 stay at Guruprasad.

After Baba reached Meherazad, the pain in His neck worsened considerably. He started to have numbness down His shoulders and the whole length of His arms. X-rays were taken and they were sent to Dr. Ginde in Bombay for his opinion, whereupon Baba was diagnosed with cervical spondylosis.



Chapter Thirty-five:

1965

When I came to Meherazad in 1965, I found that Baba's neck problem was getting quite serious, and it seemed that the pain was not responding to any amount of treatment. Eventually Dr. Ginde was called from Bombay. The local doctors had suggested that Baba be given traction, meaning that Baba would sit with some sort of loop tied across His head and lifted by weights so that His head would gently be lifted upwards. The theory was that His spine was too compressed because the cartilage between the vertebrae had collapsed.

Goher was rather anxious about starting such a treatment, and she thought it would be better to have Ginde come to oversee the whole thing. Ginde came immediately. Whatever he was doing, as soon as any call from Baba came, he would drop everything and rush to Meherazad, despite being the top neurosurgeon in India at that time and being extremely busy. If you wanted to contact him, it would be an impossible task, but for Baba he would drop everything.

He was a very dedicated surgeon, and sometimes he had to spend ten-to-twelve hours in surgery for a particularly difficult case, and he wouldn't budge from his spot until he was finished. Ultimately that work took a toll upon his heart, and the day came when he had a massive heart attack.

On one occasion after the attack he came to Baba and said, "I wouldn't have had that heart attack, but my people forced me to go some place for worship where there was a temple, and it was there that I had the attack. I had no mind to go there, Baba. Now that I have You, I really have no other place to worship." Such was his devotion to the Lord. Ram suffered a second heart attack on the 31st of January, 1969, as He was rushing to get to Meherazad on time to attend to Baba. Then, three or four years after Baba dropped His body, Ginde passed away from a third and fatal heart attack.

Anyway, Baba's cervical spondylosis gave Ginde the opportunity to keep rushing to Baba, and he made full use of it despite his own heart problems. So he came, saw what was going on, and said, "Traction? Nothing doing! Baba should never be given traction!" He said that the main issue was that Baba should not be sitting or moving about too much. Ginde suggested that the more He lies down, the more the compression of the vertebrae would ease up and Baba would feel better. So he recommended that Baba should spend quite a lot of time lying down, even during the daytime.

Dr. Ginde then went to Baba's bedroom and personally inspected the bed, and we all went along with him. He made Baba lie down and prescribed a pillow with the correct height, and he described how Baba should turn, how He should lie on His side, and how His feet should be supported so that there would be no strain on His neck. He took so much care and concern.

After this, Dr. Ginde said that Baba should wear a neck collar, so he went back to Bombay and returned a few days later with a man from Poona who specialized in making cervical collars—he had a shop in the Deccan Gymkhana area. Ginde prescribed two collars, and that man took the proper measurements of Baba's neck and chin contours to make the collars to fit Baba exactly.

One collar was a sort of traction collar with two metallic rings, one above the other, connected with rods and lined with foam, with screws to adjust the height. When the collars came, Ginde fitted them onto Baba and

adjusted the pressure. I was the one who had to put the collars on Baba, so he showed me how to do it and how to buckle it at the back and how to adjust the height.

Baba was supposed to wear the traction collar with the metal rings for at least two or three hours in the morning, and then again in the evening. For the rest of the day there was the other plastic collar, which also had foam lining, that He could use for walking about during the day. But the main thing was that Baba had to recline. A couch was brought to Mandali Hall—the same couch that used to be in the old Meher Free Dispensary in the room where they now give treatments to residents. Baba would be seated as usual, He would have His prayers and other morning work, and after that was all over, I would put the traction collar on Him for some time.

Baba was also directed not to swivel His neck, but rather to turn from the waist and shoulders, keeping His neck straight. It was painful to see Him all trussed up like that. Even though the collar wasn't bad, He still had to move in a rather strained way, and it seemed very uncomfortable, especially compared to the graceful way that Baba usually moved His neck.

Though it was a painful sight for us, Baba went through it all. The pain was constantly nagging and quite severe, so all this treatment had to be done. A few days later after bringing the collars, Ginde again came along, this time with an expert masseur named Mr. Joshi. Ginde said that Baba should be given a body massage every day because His physical movements were being restricted, so we should at least keep His muscles in good trim. He directed that a proper scientific massage should be given to Baba every day.

So Ginde brought that special masseur from the Bombay Hospital, a man whom Ginde was supporting financially so that he could learn modern massaging techniques. He had been sent to some foreign place to learn the latest techniques before coming to Meherazad. He gave Baba a good massage, and afterwards Baba felt very relaxed. He complimented Ginde for bringing such a well-trained masseur.

Baba told me, “You watch what he does because you are going to do it when he leaves.” So I watched very intently, as did Bhau and Eruch, because we all had to take over once the masseur left. Mr. Joshi taught us how the muscles had to be manipulated, not kneaded or roughly handled, because that could cause tears in the tissues and can result in the patient getting tired. On top of it all, Baba’s body was quite delicate. His skin was extremely sensitive—it had a sort of translucent sheen to it. I can’t describe the unique beauty of it, but we had to be very careful whenever we were handling His body.

Mr. Joshi showed us the latest techniques, and he demonstrated how to relax Baba’s entire muscle system. Dr. Ginde asked Baba’s permission to stay overnight so that he could reassure himself that Joshi was doing his job well before he returned to Bombay. In the evening Dr. Ginde asked to see Baba’s Seclusion Hill, which is to say that he wanted to climb up it. Eruch was a bit reluctant to do so because Ram had had a massive heart attack a year or two before and continued to have heart problems. He said, “Doctor, the road is rough and there is a steep climb up to the base of the Hill.”

“Never worry,” rejoined Dr. Ginde. “I am quite fit.” He got himself ready, so Eruch, Ram, Noshir Khodabanda Irani—one of the persons allowed to stay with the *mandali* at the time—and I proceeded on that walk.

We went to the base of the Hill, and Dr. Ginde was struck by the serenity of the place. At that time it was really peaceful. There were no settlements for miles all around. Seclusion Hill is still very quiet, even now, but at that time it was absolutely tranquil. Struck by the beauty of the place, Ram said, “Eruch, why don’t we go a few steps further?”

Eruch said, “Yes, Doctor, if you feel like it, but are you sure you will be all right?”

“Yes, have no worries,” Ram replied, and so we went up a little way farther. At that point Eruch said, “Doctor, I think we should turn around now.”

“No, no. I would like to go a little further,” he said.

He just kept going up and up, despite Eruch's pleas to stop. Eventually he said that he had tested his stamina, and he was sure he could make it to the top. "I think I am all right. I have no distress in my heart, and I know what I am doing. Have no worry."

In the meantime the women happened to see us going up, and they reported it to Baba, and Baba began to get restless, saying "Eruch should have more sense than to take him up there. What if he gets a heart attack? He's a heart patient—how is Eruch allowing him to go up there?" He kept fretting and fuming, sending Bhau to see where we were and whether we had come down yet. What a scene! Baba was extremely restless and concerned about Ginde, and meanwhile Ginde was feeling fine and having a great time, enjoying the beauty of the Lord's Seclusion Hill.

We reached the first level, and Eruch asked him to stop, but Ginde said that he felt he could make it all the way to the top, which he was sure couldn't be far. And in fact he just went right up to the top. Baba was very worried, and people around Him kept telling Him not to worry. That was the funny part of the whole thing—Ginde was enjoying himself, and all the while Baba was worrying about him.

There was a beautiful sunset that night, and Ram fell in love with the Hill, as it were. We were there for some time, and then we went back down. I remember that Noshir went straight down the Hill, not staying on the path at all, even though Eruch called out to him to stick to the path. Baba heaved a sigh of relief that we were safe, but He sent word that Eruch should have had better sense than to take Ginde up the Hill, and Eruch sent word back explaining what had happened and that Ginde was beyond his control.

At that time the monsoons had ended and the skies were nice and clear. Ginde sang a nice *bhajan* for us. In the quiet of Meherazad he got a harmonium and sang a song in praise of the Lord. Immensely talented people like Ginde sometimes have hidden skills like that as well.

It so happens, by the way, that Ginde's brother is a singer of Indian classical music, and once Ginde brought his brother to sing before Baba, but Baba didn't appreciate Indian classical music much.

So the next day Ginde left, but Mr. Joshi stayed behind to attend to Baba for a while. I remember that some of the *mandali* were in the Hall with Baba, playing cards, and Baba heard Joshi's voice coming from the front. Baba said, "Oh, he shouldn't see us playing cards."

"Baba, where's the harm?" someone said.

"No, it wouldn't be good for him to see us. Lock the door." So Baba was content, although He told us not to make much noise. Baba was very mindful of people who were not ready for certain things, and He made sure not to present those facets of His being to such people. We couldn't comprehend His plan, of course—He alone would know what a person required.

Joshi stayed for three days, during which time he gave Baba massages and showed us how to massage Him as well. Naturally the massage at the nape of His neck had to be done extremely carefully so as not to disturb the vertebrae in the slightest. Joshi doubted that I had the skill to handle Baba's neck, so Eruch mainly handled the neck, and I massaged the rest of His body. I did that for the rest of my stay, every day. It was a great good fortune of mine to be allowed to do that.

Baba's condition was a collapse of the vertebral spaces that, if neglected, could result in pinching of the nerves and eventual paralysis. First the nerves start to emit excruciating pain, and that was the pain that Baba was suffering from, ceaseless and continuous. It made Baba very restless, and there was no relief. Even painkillers would not be of much use because as soon as the drug wore off, the pain would be there again. At this time the pain had just started to radiate down Baba's arms.

I believe Baba's neck condition was the result of the strenuous life He had led. In the New Life Baba bowed down to literally thousands of *sadhus* and saints, and His body was continuously strained to the limit. Baba never spared Himself, so eventually the physical body was showing signs of giving way—it was a sign that the end was coming.

Although Ginde tried his level best, the pain would not subside, and Ginde was very upset and very restless as a consequence. Baba would tell him not to worry about it, that the pain was a reflection of the Universal Work with which He was burdened. He would say that the pain would go away when His work that caused the pain was finished. He nevertheless told Dr. Ginde that he should try his best to alleviate the pain, and that Baba would try His best to increase the pain! Somebody piped up to say, “We do hope Ginde wins the battle!” This theme continued for quite a long time, but eventually it came to an end.

The cervical collar was set to stretch Baba’s neck very slightly upward, and we were to increase the screws gradually to open the neck up even more. Eventually it did help, but there was no shortcut to it.

Baba would lie down on the couch in Mandali Hall after the morning sessions were over, and we would massage Him if time permitted. I would work from the feet upwards to the hands and fingertips as Mr. Joshi had shown me, and I had a wonderful chance to handle Baba’s precious body. As I would give the massages, Baba would help me by taking up positions that made the work more convenient for me. At other times Bhau and I would sit in Mandali Hall and each take one foot and press it.

Kaka Baria had also been very ill. Some time previously he had had to be hospitalized for kidney failure. He had a severe attack of uremia, which affected some centers in his brain because of the toxins that had circulated in his blood stream. Somehow the doctors were able to rid him of that condition, and he recovered reasonably well, but some parts of his brain were definitely affected and irreversible damage had taken place. His speech became incoherent—it was difficult to follow what he said, and he behaved rather like a little child. For example, we would be massaging Baba’s feet, and Kaka would sit there in the Hall and simply watch Baba, that’s all. All his attention was on Baba—there was nothing else in the world for him now.

Then all of a sudden Kaka would get up and walk very slowly and majestically over to where Bhau was seated, then raise his hand and bring it down with a loud thud on the back of Bhau's head, so hard that Bhau would nearly fall over. The first time that happened Kaka acted as if he had won a great battle! He extended his hand and asked Baba to shake it. They were both quite solemn. Kaka then turned around and solemnly walked back to take his seat on the pouf.

One day he got into the mood to repeat that act over and over, so Baba eventually said, "Kaka, you have given enough treatment to Bhau today." It had been two or three whacks at least that he had already given, and I was afraid that Kaka might soon divert his attention to me! Bhau seemed to have a very tough head, so he could take those blows, and maybe Baba was getting rid of God-knows-how-many *sanskaras* through Kaka's little antics.

Despite his wayward behavior, though, Kaka always and invariably showed the same respect, attention, adoration and love towards Baba that he had before the brain damage. His love for Baba remained unaltered, right to the very end of his life. Kaka's case gives us a clue that Baba's relationship with each of us is not connected to the mind or the brain but rather directly to one's heart.

Kaka used to do night duty before his health problems, and Baba permitted him to do it even in that compromised condition. Kakaji was given the easiest time, from 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. In advance of his duty he would pace up and down restlessly, but with his attention all the while focused totally on Baba. As soon as Baba clapped and he heard the signal, he would go inside to be with Baba in His room.

Kaikobad often played games with us. He was an expert card player—extremely skillful. I was the dumb fellow of the lot, and I would partner with him on Baba's order. He was so skillful that in spite of my lack of skill, we would win, and Baba's party would be defeated. When playing

pees ni kot—literally translated it means “the dealer’s coat”—if the declaring party calls the trumps but the opposing side wins all the tricks, there is an uproar, and much abuse goes to the declaring party. We call that “*gookot*.” “*Goo*” means “shit,” and it signifies that the dealer now has to wear a coat of shit. In one such game Kaikobad and I came to the point where we were about to be able to inflict this ignominious defeat upon the other team, but Kaikobad conceded the last trick so as not to shame Baba’s party. I wanted to win, but Kaikobad told me I had no sense at all even to think of it. I had gotten carried away with the game.

That game was played with four people, and it was very relaxing for Baba. Baba’s partner was often Meherdas, who was staying with the *mandali* at the time.

As I’ve mentioned previously, Baba was careful that people who didn’t understand His ways would not get the wrong impression by seeing us get carried away in the spirit of the game. Then there were some people like Kaikobad who would remind us of our priorities. Meherdas—the one who sang Baba’s *bhajan* to bring a dead boy to life and who saw Baba as Ram—was very free with Baba, and Baba encouraged him to be so. On the one hand, if he was even a little bit restrained Baba would encourage him to act freely, and on the other hand, Kaikobad would warn him not to be disrespectful toward Baba. Baba would encourage him not to restrain himself, but Kaikobad didn’t like it. The longtime *mandali* would virtually never take liberties, but Meherdas was a relative newcomer and didn’t have that same sense. Baba would often let him cross the line and not reprimand him, but rather He would let him be himself. Like any newcomer to Baba, he was taken down the rosy path for a time.

Meherdas would stretch out his feet, and Kaikobad didn’t like it. He would take Meherdas aside and say, “Have some sense! You are facing the Lord of Creation, and is that proper to extend your feet in His direction? Don’t put your feet out like that. It is so disrespectful!”

So Meherdas would change to accommodate Kaikobad, and Baba would say, “Why are you sitting like that today, all cramped up?” Baba had a

way of getting around the older *mandali* too, so His order was more important than anything any of us might say to Meherdas, and that also rankled Kaikobad.

Kaikobad was always with Baba from the time he joined the *mandali*. Only after Baba dropped His body did he move to Meherabad to stay with his family. Mostly Baba gave him certain specific work, and he had to repeat Baba's Name a certain number of times each day, and sometimes Baba would sit with him for some time, bowing down to him.

Kaikobad generally kept to himself, and he didn't come around when the *mandali* were doing correspondence. He would be present for the prayers, but he had other things to do. He had some inner experiences, a sort of offshoot or byproduct of the work that Baba made him do, experiences that Baba didn't give any importance to. The important part was that he was doing Baba's work according to His direction, and in doing so he happened to have some experiences.

Kaikobad's role was very unusual, and the only one whose role was somewhat similar to his was Pleader. Baba said, "Had it not been for My Grace, Pleader could never have done what he did." In fact, Pleader had a great fascination for God-realization, but something happened in the course of his discipleship and he left Baba for quite a long time. At the end of his life he again came to Baba, and in the last minute of his existence he seemed to have some experience. Pleader left the *mandali*, but the Bombay Baba-lovers whom he trained in Baba's ways are a testament to the fact that Pleader never really left Baba.

I recall that Baba first had Pleader stay in one of the meditation cabins next to the *Samadhi*, and then he was moved to the kitchen room. There he was to fast on milk alone and not leave the room, not even to go to the toilet. Once a day in the morning a *mandali* member would come and take his chamber pot away to empty.

One night Pleader was lying down in his room when he saw a cobra hanging from the beam of the kitchen ceiling, looking at him with its hood flared. By Baba's order he could not go out, so he kept lying like that with the snake suspended over his head. In the morning when

someone came to take his pot, he told him about the cobra, and it was caught and killed.

Noshir Irani, whom I mentioned earlier, was also peculiar. One day he announced that he didn't like his name, and he asked Baba to give him some other name!

Baba said, "All right, from today we'll call you Sam. That's more concise and convenient for all." He was happy about it. He was a very funny character.

That fellow constantly jabbered about one thing or another—in short, he talked incessantly. Baba got so tired of his jabbering that one day He said to him, "Whenever I am in the Hall, you have to observe silence." So from that time on he couldn't talk before Baba, and that was a great relief to Baba.

Sam would do such funny things that would irritate all of the *mandali*, especially Francis. Francis couldn't tolerate the way Sam would disturb Baba. One day there was a big fight between the two of them that led to a physical brawl, and when it came to Baba's notice, Baba was not very happy about it.

Francis then asked forgiveness of Baba, Who said, "No, you shouldn't lose your temper like that. Learn to restrain yourself." Sam was at Meherazad for a year, more or less. He was with us for quite a lot of time. He was a quaint sort of person, and he must have had his karmic account to settle with Baba.

Sam's elder brother, Boman, was quite different—he was a thorough gentleman, married, with children, a very nice-natured person. The whole family were all devoted to Baba.

Jimmy Mistry would tell very funny stories about Sam. Once he told me that Sam used to live in Bombay, where he was in the stevedoring business in partnership with his brother, and that there would be no end to the fights between the brothers.

One day, as Jimmy was repairing his car, bent down looking under the lifted bonnet [hood], Sam suddenly came up to him and said, "Why do you hate me?"

Jimmy was totally surprised because, he said, he had never seen the guy before. Sam came so suddenly and asked that question so loudly that passersby could hear everything that was going on. Jimmy was utterly embarrassed, and he said, "But I don't know who you are! How could I hate you?"

Sam introduced himself and said, "From your demeanor I can tell that you hate me." He was such a person, constantly trying to pick fights with anyone he came across. Jimmy told this story to Baba, and Baba enjoyed it.

One day, though silent, Sam conveyed to Baba that he would like to do meditation. Baba responded, "Okay, when I come into the hall, you go up to Khandoba Hill and do meditation there." So every morning before Baba came, Sam would go up the hill and meditate there for several hours. Baba would still be in the Hall, and Sam would come into the Hall afterwards and sit there but not speak.

One day Sam was describing how he used to fight with his brother, and he made a big drama out of it. It was quite a sight to watch him try to tell the story in silence about how he would fight with his brother, how he would give him a hit but his brother, being a hefty fellow, would catch hold of him and thrash him. One time he was beaten so badly that his whole face was swollen for days afterwards, he told Baba. All the while, Sam was still always looking for a fight. That was his temperament. Yet he was large-hearted. On Baba's Birthday I remember that he got a big bolt of material and had clothes made for all.


One day Sam suddenly disappeared from the ashram, baggage and all, and we never saw him again. I think he simply left one fine morning and never came back. Some time later we heard that he was living in a little village called Shendi near Pimpalgaon, and that he lived there for quite a few years, even after Baba passed away. He was quite a character.

One day Sam's brother, Boman, came to see Baba at Guruprasad. Baba commented about Sam's peculiar nature, and Boman said, "Baba, he has always been like that. He picks fights with any passing stranger for no reason at all! One day, for example, he was walking along the road, and there was a victoria standing on the side. Sam walked up to the horse and started bothering it. He picked up the horse's tail and was looking under it when the horse, which could take no more of this nonsense, turned around and bit him hard on the bum." "Oh," Baba gestured, "why didn't anyone ever tell Me this? No wonder Sam was behaving like that—it was all because of the horse biting him!" Such was Baba's divine sense of humor!



Chapter Thirty-six:

1965 (Continued)

n 1965 Baba's Birthday at Meherazad came along, and as usual the *mandali* gathered in Mandali Hall and loudly called out Baba's "Jai!" seven times, said the prayers and the like, and in general celebrated Baba's Birthday exactly as usual. During the day Begum Akhtar unexpectedly came and requested that she be given a chance to sing before Baba. She was not anticipated at all, but rather just appeared that morning—it was a surprise visit.

So there she was, and Baba was very happy, despite the fact that it was a disturbance to His seclusion. She pleaded with Him and Baba agreed to see her, and she sang a few *ghazals* and Baba thoroughly enjoyed them. It was a fitting birthday present for Baba to see the top-most *ghazal* singer of the country come especially to sing before Him because of her intense love for Baba. Many years earlier she had had prior commitments when Baba wanted her to come, and as Baba said, "The time has to come when one wants to be with Me," and now she was craving His presence. She was a very popular artist, in great demand everywhere in the country, so attending Baba's programs, canceling her commitments, coming to Meherazad for Baba's Birthday occasion and giving a wonderful performance for Him was a big deal. There was a

program at the Ahmednagar Centre that evening, and she went and sang for Baba there, too.

Around that time I remember that Adi Jr., his wife, Freiny, and Shireen, who was six or seven years old at the time, came to Meherazad. Shireen was beautiful, and she was free to move from the women's side to the men's side as she pleased. Once I remember we were working on some correspondence, and Shireen suddenly materialized at Baba's side and she said, "Baba, I have made a hat for You." It was a hankie with four knots at the corners, and she put it on Baba's head. She said, "Baba, You look nice now, so keep it on." Then she romped off. Baba kept it on, looking very comical. Shireen was very fond of Baba from her early childhood.

Sometimes Shireen would barrage Baba with childlike questions, such as, "Baba, these snakes and *gekkos* frighten me. Why did You create them?"

Baba looked at Eruch and said, "Say something to her."

Eruch didn't know what to reply, so he said, "When you are frightened it makes you remember Baba, so these frightening things serve some useful purpose."

Shireen didn't seem to like that and she said, "I can remember Baba without these things!"

Then Baba said, "All right. Look how nice and pretty you are. But in the morning, don't you have to go and sit on the potty and remove the dirty and unclean things in you?"

She said, "Yes, Baba."

Baba continued, "Doesn't that make you feel good, to keep yourself healthy and nice? Accordingly, just as with the ugly things that come out of you, these creatures have to come out of Me, and they do serve some purpose."

In very simple language Baba explained these things, and Shireen was immediately satisfied with that explanation. Baba could communicate with little children and with the Principal of Delhi College with equal ease.

A funny incident happened at Guruprasad in the mid-1960s. Madhusudan, who was the primary singer in the Poona Centre, was often called by Baba to sing at Guruprasad. One day he told Baba that he would like to have a recording of his *arti* done, a sort of regular record on the usual disk. Baba gave him permission to do so during one of his visits to Guruprasad.

So we were sitting in the *mandali* hall at Guruprasad, and Madhusudan came with his big troupe. A high quality recorder was brought to record the song, and later it was to be taken to a studio where a phonograph disk would be cut.

Once he had it all set up and the whole Poona Centre “*bhajan mandali*” had assembled, Madhusudan sang the main part of the *arti* while directing the singers by waving his arms about like the conductor of an orchestra. Baba was enjoying the scene and started mimicking Madhusudan, waving His own arms about too! Every now and then Madhusudan would stop and say, “No, no, this is not right—we must try again.”

It became very funny in the end because every time something would happen, Madhusudan would stop everything. The recording would not be up to the mark, he felt. Eventually it was decided that they should all go to a professional studio and get a professional recording done. Baba gave him sufficient time, but because all these funny things happened, the recording was not successful. But Baba enjoyed the whole scene—the takes, the retakes, and the whole process of recording a song.

The latter parts of the 1960s were spent mostly in seclusion. Baba was coming to the end of His ministry, and His work was speeding up. He withdrew Himself more and more, and even the closest *mandali* felt distanced from Him. In later stages He wouldn’t even hear the correspondence, and, unless it was an emergency the *mandali* had to reply on their own, drawing on all the experience they had from their years with Baba. For anything less than an emergency Baba just didn’t want to be brought into it. Smaller things were just a disturbance for Him.

Baba was starting to operate in this way in 1965, but as the years went on it became more and more pronounced. In those later years we could feel that Baba was under great pressure and that His health was frail and failing, and consequently a constant weight was on our minds. On the one hand His physical health was failing, and on the other hand was the continuous burden of His increasingly strenuous Universal Work. It was difficult to witness that burden in the later days.

The only exception to Baba's withdrawal from the day-to-day life of the *mandali* and His lovers worldwide was the 1965 *darshan* held at Guruprasad in the summer of that year. It was for Easterners only, and it was also the last of Baba's public *darshans* in this Advent. Because He had restricted the *darshan* to Easterners only, He sent instructions to His Western lovers not to attend, assuring them that they would have His *darshan* later on.

Circulars were sent out with these instructions, but there were a few exceptions. Harry Kenmore was an irrepressible person, and there had to be an exception for him. Joseph Harb was already in Poona, and I think Ben Hayman came again. I think Peter and Leigh Rowan came from Australia to the *darshan* held at the Poona Centre, but apart from those few, no Westerners came to that *darshan*. Baba had fixed December, 1965, for the Western *darshan*, and He told his Western lovers that they could come at that time.

May, with its intense heat, seemed to be Baba's favorite time of year, and 2:00 p.m. in the afternoon His favorite time of day, at the peak of the daily heat! Baba seemed to have some affinity for heat. In Mohammed's time, of course, He was in the desert, and that experience seemed to have carried forward into this Advent. Apparently Baba didn't mind the heat—in fact, He preferred it!

Even when He would retire into His room, Baba would have the doors and windows closed and the curtains drawn. The poor watchmen had a heck of a time, sweating away, feeling very stuffy and hot, and of course the mosquitoes would do their best to add to the discomfort. The hot

season seems to have been His favorite time. He never liked even the slightest breeze—let alone the wind—blowing on His face because it gave Him the sneezes.

One time we went out for an outing, and the wind began to blow hard, and immediately Baba had a spell of sneezing. He just kept on sneezing and sneezing, and one of us had to hold a big handkerchief for Him. His sneezing may have had something to do with His Western car accident, but even before that we would see that He always covered His nose whenever there would be any breeze.

Baba's mother and His sister, Mani, were the same way. They would always hold a handkerchief to their noses, and they were very susceptible to drafts or cold air. Mani also had some of the same characteristics, and she never used a fan. Mehera, on the other hand, was the exact opposite. She always liked the open and fresh air.

Baba got colds and sinus infections easily, and anyone who had a cold would be quarantined immediately. I used to suffer from allergies myself, and occasionally somebody would say, "Baba, Meherwan has a cold," and Baba would say, "No, no, it's an allergy. It's not communicable." So I would be excused. I have also always been susceptible to cold air.

So, as I've said, Baba would select the hottest time of the year for His programs. The May *darshan* was to be a fifteen-day affair, but Baba ultimately changed it to a week because of the weak state of His health. In addition, Dr. Ginde was opposed to the event because of Baba's cervical condition, and he advised Baba not to embrace people.

Baba reluctantly agreed, and a notice was sent that Baba would not embrace people, that the period of *darshan* would be just a week, and that people should bow down to His feet, which had not been allowed for a long time. This was the first time many of His lovers had the opportunity to bow down to His feet. Baba sent out a circular that in the past He used to bow down to His lovers, but now it was time for them to bow down to His Love for them. So the lovers bowed down to Baba's feet in the

darshan program held at the Poona Centre on the first day and thereafter, for the rest of the week of *darshan* programs at Guruprasad.

A very large crowd was expected, because for many years there had been a restriction on Baba's *darshan*. A committee of Poona people and others was formed to help secure accommodations for everyone at different locations, and volunteers were placed at each location to look after the Baba people and even to secure their belongings when they went out to have Baba's *darshan*. The workers tried their level best to make it a smooth function, and despite the tremendous rush because everybody wanted to seize that precious opportunity, by Baba's Grace it was very successful.

The program was intended to be a *darshan* only for Baba's lovers, but the lovers' army had become quite huge by then. This was the first opportunity after the *darshan* tours in the 1950s and after many years of longing. So many of His lovers had wanted to be with Baba for many years, and this was their chance. The Andhra people were getting special railroad cars put onto the trains to accommodate the crowds, and the Hamirpur people were hiring buses to bring their groups in. The Bombay and Gujarat groups came too, so all in all there were huge crowds.

Baba specified that He should not be disturbed until the first of May, so for the first month all was very quiet at Guruprasad and only a few of us were with Baba. Once again the *pandal* was being constructed at the back of Guruprasad, with Bapusaheb Shinde doing his work and Burjor Bode a great help as well. Many people rendered assistance to us in the effort to make the many, many preparations required for the event.

The previous year Baba had promised Ramakrishnan, the secretary of the Poona Centre, that He would give *darshan* the next year at the Centre. So on the first anniversary of its opening, 1st May 1965, Baba went to the Poona Centre to fulfill His promise. The opening of the Centre had been a rather small affair, but this was a huge event because people had congregated from all over India. The hall was packed to capacity, and there were *shamianas* and tents outside and they were full too, and a queue formed all down the approach road and right out onto the main road for probably a mile.

I had to attend to all the marketing before I came, though Eruch warned us that we ought to get there as early as possible. We had to push our way in just to get onto the premises. There was no question of getting into the queue.

The *darshan* began, and people filed past Baba. His chair was placed right at the edge of the dais, and people were taking *darshan* as they passed by in front of His chair. It was a lovely program.

Of course, Baba's health was frail. When I had been at Meherazad I could see that Baba was suffering from neck pain and hip joint pain, and He was generally in a very weak physical state. But on the day of *darshan* Baba was quite different. He was extremely radiant and beautiful, and on that day particularly, He looked especially resplendent. Everyone who came was struck by His beauty. After many years of waiting, His lovers were finally able to see Him, and there was a mad stampede to be with Him, to be in His presence.

When the *darshan* was over, Baba came back to Guruprasad, and some of us were there. He asked, as usual, "How was the program?" and we all said, "Very good, Baba!"

"How did I look?" He asked me.

I said, "Baba, You looked extremely beautiful and radiant," and Baba was quite happy with the reply. Whenever Baba would ask "How did I look?" after such a program, that answer would make Him happy, all the more so as it was really true.

I suppose that the love that His lovers poured out to Him made Him respond that way. He would be full of color, and it would be a different spectacle altogether from what we were used to. He was always in a good mood after each *darshan* program, but the nights were hell for the watchmen. All throughout the *darshan* week, however, or ten days or whatever it was, Baba kept up very well.

On the second day, and all the days thereafter, the *darshan* was at Guruprasad rather than at the Poona Centre. Baba was equally radiant

there. The Poona people were asked to sit in the back rows because they had often had opportunities to see Baba outside of the *darshan* events.

It had rained heavily the night before the first day's *darshan*, so everybody was worried that they would get wet, especially having the experience three years earlier at the East-West Gathering when they were all doused with rain. The *darshan* at the Poona Centre was in the hall, but on the morning of the first day it cleared up somewhat. The shower that night had been quite fresh, and that made the heat somewhat less, but in the afternoon it became quite muggy again.

At Guruprasad the *darshan* was under the *shamiana*, out in the open. So as not to take any risks, we had put up a corrugated tin roof over the *shamiana*. There was no rain after the first night, but the tin roof made the interior like an oven. It was a little dark and hot, and it suited Baba just right. He was totally drenched in sweat, and Eruch constantly had to mop His brow owing to the perspiration caused by the intense heat. I think that the crowds were even larger than for the East-West Gathering—vast numbers of people came for this chance of having Baba's *darshan*.

We saw that Baba was offered something to drink, and afterwards He asked with gestures if those attending had something to drink and a place to piddle. You can see Baba make this gesture in a film that was taken of the *darshan*. Baba sat through the *darshan* for many hours, and He took a lot of physical discomfort upon Himself.

For the back rows Baba would stand up and wave all around so we could get a sight of Him from a distance. Baba would appear like a tiny dot at the end of the huge *pandal*. Baba gave the Easterners all His Love, and they were all very satisfied.

After the big *darshan* a few people still had not received Baba's blessings, and requests were pouring in, so Baba extended His program for two or three days more, not in the *pandal* but in the *mandali* hall inside Guruprasad. It was packed with those who remained and wanted to have their last *darshan*. It was the last time they would see Baba, although of course we didn't know that at the time. That would be His last public appearance to His lovers.

Anyway, there were many volunteers for the program who had never even come to Guruprasad, but Baba didn't forget them, and so one day He gave *darshan* specifically to all the volunteers who had worked for Him. They had their day, and they were rewarded for their labor of love by the Lord of Love Himself. He filled them with His loving presence until their hearts overflowed, and they had very close contact with Baba, unlike the crowds, so they were well rewarded for their work.

Baba's neck pain was there throughout, and the hip pain was coming and going. Baba was constantly experiencing some sort of pain, and the intense strain of the *darshan* aggravated His neck and hip. That made the rest of the stay a very difficult thing for the few of us who were with Baba. He would often groan with His pain and suffering after the big show was over.

After that *darshan* program Baba's seclusion started again, and then Guruprasad was out of bounds for the general public and many other lovers, and the rest of the stay was very quiet. We had some very intimate days with Baba in His close presence.

One of those days we were with Baba, He was sitting on the front veranda on the *mandali*'s side of the porch, and we were chatting away about nothing in particular when Baba suddenly remembered one stanza of Kabir, very rhymed and rhythmic. The stanza goes like this: "*Rang lagat lagat lagay, Bahu bhagat bhagat bhagay. Bahut dinka soya manova jagat jagat jagay.*" This translates as follows: "It takes a long while for the cloth to absorb the dye. After repeated efforts one gradually learns to run—you can't just straightaway learn to run. A child has to make the effort to stand up, take a few paces, and eventually he is able to run. It's a gradual process. Similarly the mind that has been sleeping for many eons awakens little by little, until it is fully awake."

One word in this little poetic fragment was "*bahu*." "*Bahu*" has two meanings—"daughter-in-law" in Hindi, and also "more" or "much." So Baba was playing on that word—I remember He mentioned that about

the word. Baba would gesture, and because it's a very well-known couplet, somebody would just recite the whole thing.

While on the subject of Kabir and his poetry, one time Baba had heard another couplet of Kabir and later He asked Eruch, "Do you remember that couplet of Kabir we heard the other day?"

Eruch said, "Which one, Baba?"

Baba said, "The other day—do you remember? There was something somebody said..."

After some thought Eruch said, "Baba, this is what I remember today," and he gave out a couplet. It runs like this: "*Kabira khada bazaar mein, maangay sub ki khair. Na kahu say dosti, na kahu say bair.*" The meaning is "Kabir is standing in the market place, praying for the welfare of each and everyone. He has no friendship with anyone, nor any enmity for anyone."

Baba said, "That's a good one. It's very profound." It wasn't the one that Baba had in mind, and Baba couldn't recollect the particular one He had heard. But Eruch at that moment had recited another one, and Baba said that it was a very good couplet.

The couplet that Eruch recited bespeaks the Sadguru's attitude towards Creation. He neither has any affinity toward anyone nor any hatred for anyone because he sees himself in everyone, so he seeks the welfare of all without any attachment. These types of little events would take place on the quiet days, spontaneous and unforgettable.

Sometimes Baba would ask for a certain line from Kabir, or Baba would quote one Himself. Kabir is very popular in India, like Hafiz in Iran, so many people know Kabir's sayings. The *Kabir Vani* is the full collection of Kabir's teachings, verses and stories, and they are very popular, especially in North India. Kabir made the profound and esoteric easily understood by the poor and uneducated masses of India.

Bapusaheb Shinde was a great Baba-lover, and like Gadekar, Kamble and Doiphode, he was a real gem in the Baba community. As it happened, all of them were *Harijans*. Mahatma Gandhi had coined that term for the untouchable castes because the word means “people of the Lord.”

Bapusaheb was a great help to all Baba-lovers in Poona. He was from a backward caste—adherence to the caste system being very prevalent in those days—and he was instrumental in bringing quite a few of his tribe to Baba. Like Gadekar he was a cobbler. The first Baba-center meetings were held at his shoe shop in Poona City, as I have mentioned earlier.

Bapusaheb had a shoe factory on the banks of the Mutha river. The Kasba Peth district, which is well known to Baba-lovers because of Baba’s early history there, is also on the banks of that river, or partly so, but his factory was on the far side of the bridge near the Karve Road, low on the river bank.

During those devastating floods of 1961 which I have described earlier, his factory was totally washed away, and as a result he was in a dire financial state. He never mentioned any of this to Baba, of course—he never thought to mention his distress to Baba, and he was always cheerful before Him, but Baba knew that he had suffered a great loss and that it would be difficult for him to come out of the ordeal.

One of those days that we were sitting in Guruprasad, Baba called Bapusaheb near, and He asked Eruch to hand him a packet, which I later learned contained some amount of money, about a thousand rupees. It was not a large amount, but more a sort of token, and initially Bapusaheb was most reluctant to take the money. He accepted it from Baba with great reverence only after Baba insisted that he should not refuse *prasad* from Him. Baba said, “Utilize it and you will prosper.”

After that time we saw that that little gift from Baba caused Bapusaheb to flourish as never before, so besides his existing shop, which he was managing to run by getting his inventory and supplies from outside, he was soon able to re-establish his factory and buy yet another big shop in a very posh area. He bought a big three-story building for himself in a

nice locality to house his large extended family—his brothers and sisters and all. He was doing very well in just a couple of years, and we saw how Baba's little *prasad* can help.

Bapusaheb made good use of the wealth he obtained by spending it in Baba's Cause, and that's why he was able to give us so much help during the East-West Gathering, as well as in the 1965 *darshan* and for many of the Baba programs that would be held at the Poona Centre. He was always ready to finance any Baba events.

After the 1965 summer program was over and just before Baba left, however, Bapusaheb Shinde caught a very bad infection, an incurable type of skin problem called pemphigus, very rare, so he was not well, and learning of this Baba said, "My *Nazar* will be on you." Baba consoled him, and after Baba left Poona that year, Bapusaheb's health began to deteriorate very fast. He got terrible sores all over his body, and the sores were oozing so he had to be hospitalized. We took him to Dr. Grant because he was known to us through his association with Baba, and Bapusaheb was being looked after as well as possible. Ultimately he was discharged and he went home, but he neglected the steroid medication that had been prescribed as a palliative treatment.

There was really no cure for his disease, and eventually he became very seriously ill again and had to be re-hospitalized. In a month or two he died, and so we lost a great stalwart in Baba's Cause. He was a tall, well-built person, generally healthy and robust, but in no time he just passed on. Baba sent a very nice telegram that Bapusaheb had shared in Baba's suffering and that he was very fortunate, and that he had come to Baba. Baba said, "Bapusaheb Shinde dedicated his life in My service and now towards the end he also shared in My suffering." When he passed away it was a great blow for the Poona Centre people. When he died in December, 1965, we heard that Baba also mentioned to the *mandali*, "I have lost Bapu, but Bapu was fortunate to find Me."

At that time the medical fraternity had discovered what it considered to be a miracle drug called DMSO. It was a byproduct of the paper industry, a clear liquid that penetrates the skin when you apply it. There was great excitement that doctors might have discovered a way to treat arthritis and rheumatic joints. Because Dr. Ginde was so concerned about Baba's neck condition, when the drug came out he was extremely excited about it, and he experimented with it on his wife, who was crippled. He experimented with applications of the drug for her, and it apparently helped her a lot. He even made her drink it to make sure it was safe!

DMSO appeared to be quite effective, and Dr. Ginde was happy with the results. One day we were at Guruprasad just chatting quietly with Baba, when all of a sudden we heard a car pull up to the side portico. You see, Guruprasad had three entrances—one on each side and the main one in the center. The center one had the big porch and the marble steps and granite pillars, very fancy, but the side ones had just ordinary steps. There was a veranda all the way around.

Ram Ginde climbed up the side steps very excitedly, and he came directly to Baba.

Baba looked surprised, inquiring, "How is it you have come?"

Ram said to Baba, "Baba, I have gotten hold of something that I'm sure will help Your neck condition, and I want to try it right away!"

Baba gestured, "You're sure it's all right?"

Ram said, "Baba, I have experimented with it on my wife. I made her drink it also, so it's quite safe."

Baba said, "Okay, go ahead then."

Dr. Goher was called and was asked to bring some cotton buds. Baba bent His neck forward, and Ginde started to apply the fluid on the back portion of His neck. Then he handed the bottle to Goher, and she continued to apply the treatment in front of us. Ginde left instructions with Goher on how often to apply it and the like, and then he had to rush off again.

The chemical was applied the next day, too, and nothing happened. On the third day Baba developed a severe rash on His neck that spread to His back and His groin. The drug was in His system and causing those eruptions. Baba's skin being very delicate, the rash was very prominent and naturally added to His discomfort.

Goher immediately informed Ginde, and Ginde was shocked to find that this had happened when nothing had happened to his wife. He was naturally very distressed about it. The next day Baba was sitting before us, and He said, "I am worried about Ginde. I hope he doesn't just come here all of a sudden again. He must be very anxious about Me, but I am feeling all the more anxious about him!"

Baba was always fretting about Ginde. Someone, possibly Eruch, said, "Baba, I don't think that he would just come over like that. He would inform us if he were to come." But no—in a few minutes there again was the car, and there was Dr. Ginde.

Baba said, "Didn't I tell you?"

Ram couldn't restrain himself—in the midst of the day's heat he came rushing up, and when he saw Baba's condition, there were literally tears in his eyes. He was so grieved and distressed that he had added to Baba's discomfort rather than giving Him some respite from the pain.

Baba consoled him, saying, "Don't worry! It's a part of My suffering, and it has to be there." These were the ways that Baba would console someone. Goher applied some Ayurvedic treatment prepared from aloe vera that soothes the skin. In our language we call it "*kumari asav*." It's good for both skin problems and stomach upset. Ginde said that it was the best thing to do at the present. No further applications of DMSO should be administered. Ram was barely there for an hour, and then he had to rush back to Bombay again, all in the midday heat. Baba was worried that the stress of the incident would strain Ginde's already damaged heart. Ginde was worrying about Baba, and Baba was worrying about him.

One day, seated at Guruprasad with very limited correspondence being read to Baba, Eruch read out the weekly report that had come from Padri at Meherabad about happenings there. Padri had been ordered by Baba to write once each week. In this particular report Padri casually mentioned at the very end of the letter, “By the way, I just want to inform you that one of Baba’s pets that was given into my care suddenly disappeared one night, and we could hardly trace his remains. I think he was devoured by a hyena or some such thing.” As soon as Baba heard that, He was very, very upset and angry.

He said, “Is this the way Padri writes about My pet? A thing that I have given into his care?” That particular dog was one of the litter from Bhooty from the Himalayas. Baba had been at Silver Oaks in 1956 recovering from the second accident, and Kaka Baria and I had come from Meherazad bringing three little pups. I had joined Kaka on his way to see Baba, so I was there when he showed the pups to Him. Baba retained Mastan, the dark one, for Meherazad, and the other two puppies were put into Padri’s care. One of them was the one that Padri lost. Baba seemed very upset about it. It was a sort of lesson to us also, that whatever thing Baba gave us to take care of, we had to be very careful with. Baba’s mood had suddenly changed—His eyes began to flash fire, as it were, and there was consternation all around.

Baba said, “What was the watchman doing? Have him sacked right away! Those old people are no longer any use.”

Eruch tried to pacify Baba by interceding on Padri’s behalf. “Baba, the environment at Meherabad is very difficult—there is always a security problem,” and so on and so forth. That encouraged some of us to pipe in a little—a few words wherever possible, but Baba would not be mollified. He told Eruch to write Padri and tell him to pack up his bags and baggage and get out of Meherabad immediately. We were all taken aback. Padri had been with Baba since the very early days, and now for him to be kicked out just like that shocked us. But given Baba’s mood we couldn’t say anything.

Baba then said, “Let’s play cards.” We started to play, but no one’s heart was in it. It was a very solemn and subdued game, I should say, and Baba, noticing the atmosphere, suddenly stopped and asked us what was wrong. We just stared at the floor.

“Do you think I was too harsh?” Baba asked, but again we couldn’t say anything. Baba then surprised us by saying, “Let’s take a vote. Does anyone agree with My punishment for Padri and the watchman?” Not a hand was raised. “Do you want Me to forgive Padri and the watchman? If so, raise your hand.” Unanimously each of us put his hand up. Baba just said, “Forgiven.”

Immediately the tension was gone and a cheerful atmosphere prevailed again. But Baba did ask Eruch to write to Padri to tell him that He was extremely annoyed by Padri’s casual approach to the matter and that in the future he should be much more careful and all that sort of thing. Baba was annoyed both at his allowing the pet to die like that without taking proper care of it as well as at Padri’s offhand manner in writing about it.

A few months later Charles Purdom, who wrote two excellent biographies of Baba—*The Perfect Master* and *The God-Man*—and Koduri Krishna Rao, who built Mehersthan in Kovvur, died. Those two stalwarts passed away, one after the other, and it was very tragic that we lost such major Baba-workers.

Koduri Krishna Rao had been a very well-to-do person in Andhra. He owned several luxury yachts and would ply them in the Godavri river. In fact, Baba stayed on one of them during the Andhra tour to be away from the crowds—the crowds would never leave Baba alone. Day and night there was noise, and mobs of people never ceased to cluster all around Him. I wasn’t on those tours, but I heard about them in detail, and there is good film footage of them as well.

Koduri Krishna Rao, as I’ve said, was the person behind the building of the temple, Mehersthan, at Kovvur. Baba had patiently sat for a sculptor and permitted casts to be made of His feet and hands for that center. I

remember a man coming to take the casts, and Deshmukh wanted to take Baba's photograph in the midst of the casting process.

Baba said, "In this condition you want to take My photo?" Deshmukh had brought a new camera that had three lenses protruding from it, supposedly to create some three-dimensional effect. Deshmukh insisted upon taking a photograph, and I think he did take it, but I don't know if the picture came out. Baba said, "I will look like a leper with all these casts on My hands and feet. Why do you want to take a photo of Me like this?" Deshmukh, however, could not be denied.

Baba liked the results of the casts very much, however. Baba sent several of His close ones, including Adi K. and Bal Natu and also the Maharani Shantadevi, to the opening of Mehersthan on His behalf.

Towards the end of the summer Baba stopped going out, but He would send the women and men *mandali* out separately to the cinema to see pictures. Among the last ones we saw was a crazy film called *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad World*. It was nicely done, with hidden treasure and mad motorcar rides and a man kicking the bucket. There were also a few films like *The Absent-minded Professor* that we saw towards the end.

That was Baba's Guruprasad stay in 1965. Nobody was allowed to see Baba after that first week of May, which was the last real public *darshan* that He gave. Baba left without even a farewell visit. Then the December *darshan* that had been scheduled for His Western lovers was cancelled, and Baba sent out a circular that all those lovers who had hoped to come should remain resigned to His Will and that He would give His *darshan* to them somewhere, sometime. It was 1969 when Baba fulfilled that promise after He had dropped His body. That *darshan*, of course, was immense, a great and unique occasion.



Chapter Thirty-seven:

1966

Now we come to 1966, and again I am back at Meherazad for my annual stay. Again Baba was in strict seclusion. Big notices were put up on the driveway where the New Life caravan was then located—boards in three languages declared in bold letters, “Avatar Meher Baba has stopped giving *darshan* to anyone. No visitors allowed.” Baidul kept guard near the mango tree. His cabin was there, and he would stop anybody who might be coming in, and if not him, then Aloba. Baba’s Birthday affair that year was also very quiet. We faced Him as we said the prayers, and He faced us. Baba never turned His back to us during the prayers. That’s a point that never occurred to me at the time. Now that Baba is not here physically, of course, we face the chair as if Baba is sitting there.

There was not much of a function on the Birthday, but it was cold outside, so Naja served us hot tea and we looked forward to that.

There were stacks of cables and telegrams from all over the world, and Eruch read them out, and most of the morning was spent dealing with the correspondence. It was, in truth, like an extra workday. Baba wanted us to send messages to certain people who had worked very hard and to

new centers that were opening on that day or imminently. At the end, the whole stack of letters, cables and replies would come to me for filing.

Just because the orders were not to write to Baba did not mean, of course, that some people didn't violate those orders. In the early days of the seclusion, we would read the letters out just the same, but later on Baba changed the orders, and we were not to read out letters unless they were important. Baba gave the *mandali* the authority to reply to those letters on their own. There were lots of letters with deaths, births, marriages, marital problems, divorces, crying, laughter—it was all a continuous drama that would unfold before our eyes.

I noticed that despite all the restrictions, someone or other would always show up at Meherazad. Practically every day some straggler would visit, and Baba would have to get up and look cheerful before him or her, and it would be a great strain and disturbance. We could see that He didn't like it. Somebody said, "Baba, I think we should tell the watchman not to let anybody inside, and that will stop them causing disturbance to You."

Baba said, "No, that's not the point. They should on their own not come. That would please Me." In those last few years a little grace was being given to those who didn't follow Baba's orders, and they had their way, you know.

Once in the old days, I remember, there was a mendicant who would come to Meherazad, and Kaka would give him some food. Baba would sit there and watch, and one time He said, "This fellow comes every day. He is getting into the habit of begging food here."

Somebody said, "I'll go tell Kaka not to give him anything anymore."

Baba rejoined, "No, no, no, don't do that. Never come in the way of charity."

There's a saying in Gujarati: "None should put a foot on another's stomach." Baba would raise His foot when quoting that saying. It means that no one should make another person go hungry. So Baba was saying, "Let Kaka do what he wants to."

Before I came that year, Robert Dreyfuss got through the barrier in November of the preceding year and he had the time of his life here—

two or three days he was here, a wonderful stay. I remember his vivid account of all the details, which is quite a wondrous thing because now we have to rack our brains to recall details of those past years.

Lal Bahadur Shastri's death occurred during this time. When the Prime Minister who succeeded Nehru took over, there was another aggression from Pakistan over Kashmir, and there was a big war, but India was quite successful and captured quite a lot of Pakistani territory. The global powers intervened, especially Russia, and they brought great pressure to bear on us, and a cease-fire was declared. Then an agreement was made for the two countries to engage in negotiations at Tashkent.

The whole Russian cabinet, Lal Bahadur Shastri, and Ayub Khan from Pakistan were there, and Baba kept fretting about Lal Bahadur. Baba would gesture every day, "He's a tiny man, very lean. Would he be able to bear the strain of all this in the cold of Russia's winter?"

Bhau would tell Baba, "Baba, please don't have Your eye on him. Let Ayub be the one to die. He's a big, strong man. Let poor Shastri live, and cast Your glances on Ayub instead!"

But a few days later we learned that Shastri had had a massive heart attack and died. It was an unfortunate end to his brilliant career. In fact, before Shastri went to Tashkent Dr. Deshmukh went to see him, and he presented a copy of Baba's *Discourses* to him as well as some other books, and he took a photograph of Shastri holding Baba's books. Baba said, "Shastri was very fortunate that he heard My Name before he passed away, because that would help him very much. He was a good soul."

Baba then prepared to come to Guruprasad. Circulars were sent out that Baba wouldn't be seeing anybody while there, and when Baba came, of course, there was nobody there to meet Him except we few who were allowed to be there—myself, Meherjee, sometimes Jalbhai, sometimes Beheram, Janghu Sukhadwalla in the later years, and a couple of

others—people connected with work at Guruprasad. Of course, whomsoever He wanted to see He would call.

Baba's stay started in a very quiet manner, but at the Poona Centre there was a lot of friction and quarreling going on between Baba people amongst the *bhajan mandali*. Egos were asserting themselves, and some in the group thought that the *bhajan* party thought itself to be superior. Meanwhile the *bhajan mandali* thought that they were the life of the whole thing. There was so much bickering that someone went into the Poona Centre and destroyed all the musical instruments there! The whole matter came to Baba's ears, and Baba said, "It's time to give them a little prod."

So despite His seclusion Baba suddenly said that the Poona Centre people should all come before Him, and a meeting was called. All the Poona Centre people came. Quite a big crowd was there, and at the outset Baba soundly berated everybody. He said something to the effect of, "Whenever I come to Poona, I always hear that there are problems with quarrels and bickerings at the Poona Centre. Never a year goes by without a complaint from you people about each other. This pains Me a great deal. The whole idea of working for Me is losing your individual ego, not asserting it. It is better that you close the whole place."

Baba had His own ways of working people up, you know. They were all taken aback. It was a very tense atmosphere. Baba made no bones about hiding His displeasure. He continued, "And then I heard about this incident of the musical instruments being destroyed. You might as well lock up the Poona Centre right now—I'll have nothing further to do with it!"

There was stunned silence. People were looking around at each other as if they were small children who had done some mischief and were being reprimanded. Baba then began to tell them, "Look, if you really want to please Me, this is not the way. You should learn to tolerate each other." Baba's lesson went on for quite some time. He was bringing out people's pent-up anger and asking them to express it in front of Him so that all the little issues would be laid on the table—how one person had irritated another and why they felt irritated. Everything was being brought out into the open.

Baba said, "Now forget everything and start afresh. That would please Me." So everybody braced themselves to leave all the bickering aside and start afresh. Baba was happy with their resolution, and there was a happy ending to a meeting that began so somberly. This was not the last time some quarreling about this topic came to Baba, but future difficulties were not on this scale. This was the last collective meeting on the problem because Baba was withdrawing more and more. It was the last collective meeting on any problem, actually.

Baba didn't get angry at me very often. I was a timid sort of person and didn't want to cause Him any displeasure, and consequently I usually kept a safe distance.

We were sitting around Baba one day, and He said, "See, you people are sitting here in front of Me, and I am sitting in front of you, and yet I say that all this is illusion. You people, although I tell you that it is illusion, you will not believe Me. Can anybody tell Me how you can reconcile this situation? Although you feel that all this is so real, here you are sitting in front of Me, with earth under you, the floor under you, and I am here sitting, and I say that I am not here and neither are you here; it's all illusion." He asked people to explain.

I suddenly had a bright idea, and although it was not my turn, I spoke out. "Baba, I think of the analogy of the dream. We have a dream, and in the dream we feel how real everything is, and we don't feel that it's not true, but when we wake up there's nothing left there."

Baba said, "Are you speaking out of turn? I didn't ask you. Anyway, your reply is good." These were quiet moments with Baba.

We played cards, but the games were not like the old boisterous games from years before when the hall was filled and there were big crowds with Baba. These games were on a much quieter scale. Baba was not

much in the mood, so there was not much cheating in these games. It was just to pass time that we played, and most of the time we could see that Baba was very withdrawn, more and more each day. He was all the while doing His work, and yet trying to be with us and give us His company, so what more could we expect?

It was not exactly that He was absorbed, but His old liveliness was absent most of the time. We witnessed and felt the suffering that He was undergoing from His neck pain, the collar, His hip joint—all His physical disabilities and the generally weak condition that He was in—and it made us feel quite sad. Of course, we couldn't show that to Him. In the back of our minds we had this terrible feeling, and it increased more and more, that the time was approaching and His work was reaching a climax.

One afternoon Baba had called some of us for a card game, but then He suddenly decided to retire early to His bedroom. He sent word to all who had gathered there to play cards with Him that we should go and have ice cream instead. He said that we shouldn't feel bad about not being able to see Him. So we all trooped to one of the ice cream stalls at the railway station, and we all enjoyed an impromptu ice cream party and then went home. This was Baba's humor.

One other thing comes to mind with regard to Baba's Guruprasad stay in 1966. In mid-April He allowed an American named Jim McGrew to see Him for just a few minutes—he was a recent college graduate who was in India thanks to the Peace Corps. He had heard of Baba from Rick Chapman while they were both students at Harvard College in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Jim returned to America after meeting Baba and eventually wrote a book called *Avataric Advents*, which beautifully compiles everything that Baba has said about each of His former Advents.

At the end of the 1966 Guruprasad stay there was no open *darshan* for His Poona lovers, except for that little Poona Centre workers' meeting that Baba had held. Baba returned to Meherazad quietly without a farewell.



Chapter Thirty-eight:

1967

I was at Meherazad in the early part of 1967, and Baba's seclusion continued unabated. It was getting more and more strict, and the only exception He made was for Bill Le Page. Baba had promised him earlier that He would call him for a few days to stay at Meherazad, and at the right time Baba sent the message that he should come for His Birthday. So Bill came in mid-February for a couple of weeks when I was there. I think that was the only time he got to stay with Baba so closely and for such a prolonged time.

There were a few humorous incidents connected with Bill at the time. I remember that Baba used to come every morning from the women's side to have His usual walk. One morning Baba stood before Bill and looked at him in a very inquiring manner. Bill wondered why Baba was looking at him so seriously, and Baba said, "What are all these hairs sticking out on your cheekbones?"

Bill said, "Baba, I don't shave them because they will become thicker and start hurting."

Baba said, "What about Joan? Wouldn't they prick her? You see, that's why Joan is getting so frail in her health! Shave them off!"

Poor Bill was so embarrassed, and he said, “Yes, Baba, I’ll get rid of them.” That day He went and cleaned himself up, and he looked quite handsome after that.

Bill stayed in Room Number 7 at Meherazad, and Francis was staying in the adjoining Room Number 8. Francis was constantly working on his poems, and he would generally be quite busy. On the other side in Room Number 6, which was the small storeroom, was Baidul.

One day Baba asked Bill, “Did you sleep well?”

Bill said, “Yes, Baba, I did sleep okay.”

Baba asked, “Did you *really* sleep?” because Francis had a habit of giving loud lectures while he was sleeping, and as a result big sermons could be heard right outside of his room. Meanwhile Baidul, on the other side, was a notorious snorer, so Baba said, “With Baidul on one side and Francis on the other side, I can imagine how well you slept!” Baba said it reminded Him of “The Charge of the Light Brigade”—“cannon to the left of them...volley’d and thunder’d....” Baba was quoting from the famous poem by Alfred Lord Tennyson.

Bill was very busy working with Francis at forming the charter for Avatar’s Abode. Baba wanted them to finalize it so that it could be read to Him before Bill left. Since Francis was staying with Baba, Baba wanted the entire property to be in Bill’s name, and thereafter Bill would have to form a Trust and bequeath the whole property to the Trust. Eruch was asked to assist, and they sat late into the nights to prepare that charter. Then it was read out to Baba when it was ready, and Baba approved it.

Then it was Baba’s Birthday time, and the staff decorated Baba’s chair very beautifully and built a big arch above the chair with a large balloon over it—it was a gorgeous sight. When Baba came in and was seated, we greeted him with “Happy Birthday!” Bill was holding a string with a sharp blade at its end, and at a signal from Yusuf, the driver, he cut the balloon so that it burst open, and a big shower of rose petals fell on Baba. Yusuf had worked all night to get those rose petals into the balloon. Baba enjoyed that.

Bill had brought some cassettes of recordings by Jenny and Ruthie, his two daughters. Ruthie was the elder and Jenny the younger. Francis had sent some of his songs to be set to music in Australia, and the two girls joined in a wonderful singing duet. Bill brought the tape over, and it was played before Baba, and we all liked it very much.

Baba said, "It's beautiful, and I would like them to continue to sing like this and spread My Name by their singing." Baba asked Bill to convey His love to them and to his wife, Joan. He also remembered Michael, Bill's son, on that day.

Francis was composing songs at the time, and he told Baba that he was starting a song that repeated Baba's Name—Baba's "*dhoon*," a *bhajan*-type song, as it were. He used a harmonium as an accompaniment, and Baba liked it. Francis didn't have a very pleasing voice, but he sang Baba's Name nevertheless.

On the evening of His Birthday Baba sent Bill to see the procession carried out by the 'Nagar Centre and asked Bill to participate in it. I think Adi and Sarosh were also in the procession.

Harry Kenmore had been given instructions from Baba always to hold a public program on His Birthday, so he would reserve a room in the Barbizon Plaza Hotel and invite people to that posh place with a big hall—Harry was always for great and grand things. That year he somehow convinced a radio station in New York to record the program and broadcast it to the world the next day. Being shortwave, the program could be heard all over the world, and Harry got special permission from the government to beam it to India.

Harry sent a message that the broadcast would happen at a certain time on the 26th of February, and that the *mandali* should make a point of listening to it. Someone had sent a big transistor radio to Meherazad, and Baba asked me to locate the station. Three or four days prior to the broadcast I found the frequency and listened to the station as a trial, and we could hear the signal code quite clearly, so I told Baba that I had found the station.

As I've said, the program was to be broadcast the day after Baba's Birthday, and we all gathered in the room at the side of Mandali Hall and tried to listen to the program on the radio. Unfortunately, that night there was lots of atmospheric disturbance, and only a few snatches of the program could be heard. We heard Harry singing his favorite song, "Swanee," but just a few sentences, and then "Happy Baba Birthday!" quite loudly. Baba sent a message to him that we got to hear some parts of his program, and he must have been very happy about it.

Bill brought a sculpted head of Baba from Australia that had been given to him by John Bruford. It was a very beautiful piece of sculpture, made with great love and perseverance. John had some handicaps, but still he created a masterpiece, and he gave it to Bill to carry over personally to Meherazad and present to Baba.

When Bill got to Meherazad and presented the little bust to Baba, Baba was extremely pleased with it and said that it was really perfectly done. He asked Bill to send his love to John and to say that the Perfect One was really happy with his perfect work. Indeed, it was really beautifully done, one of the very few sculptures that really resembles Baba and brings out His features very well. It is now kept in the Blue Bus at Meherazad—it is the little white sculpture of Baba's head. An exact replica was sent later, and it is in the museum at Meherabad. John then cast a bust from those plaster sculptures in bronze and sent it for Baba. That one is now in His bedroom at Meherazad. He was supposed to make several bronzes for various centers, but the project never materialized.

Frankly, virtually no one liked most of the statues that were created of Baba. There was one at Kovvur for which the artist had come several times, and Baba had given him numerous sittings, but people were not really very happy with the outcome. It is, of course, extremely difficult to bring out the exact features of Baba in a sculpture.

During Bill's stay, after Baba retired for the night, we would go out on walks with Eruch. Bill, Eruch and I would walk, sometimes on the

approach road, sometimes on Seclusion Hill, sometimes towards Khandoba. Eruch would tell stories of times with Baba, and Bill and I were fascinated with those stories and never tired of hearing them.

One day while Baba was sitting in the Hall, Bill was sitting there looking very morose because it was coming to the end of his stay. Baba asked him what was on his mind that he looked so glum. He replied that whenever he went to talk about Baba back in Australia, people not only shut their doors but also their windows, and that he felt very sad that nobody was prepared to listen to Baba's Message. Baba looked at him for some time and then gestured, "I will now turn the key. Be brave—go forth and continue your efforts to spread My Message of Love and Truth." Bill said nothing because he was quite diffident about the Australian public's attitude.

Bill was asked to leave on a certain day, and on that day that he left, we were sitting in Mandali Hall, and Baba called him and gave him one of His own white shawls to take with him.

After he left Meherazad Bill travelled around India speaking at various centers as instructed by Baba. He was warmly welcomed by all the various Baba groups, and they were most receptive to what he had to say. When he returned home to Australia, he again started his work of spreading Baba's Message, but now, however, he found that people wanted to hear what he had to say and welcomed him into their homes!

Bill then approached the ABC—the Australian Broadcasting Corporation—to give a message to the Australian public about his recent visit to India. Much to his surprise his request was readily accepted by the Station Director, and the interview was broadcast all over Australia. Soon offers to come and speak to various groups flooded his mailbox, and he saw, to his great surprise, how Baba really had "turned the key."

There was a Baba stalwart named Sardar Amar Singh Saigal who, earlier in his life, had been a freedom fighter, and he had gone to jail several times during the British Raj. He was also a great friend of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India. After Independence, of course,

there were elections, and Saigal stood for election and won a big majority. Ever since then, whenever there were elections he would participate and easily be re-elected. He was very popular in his constituency and sincere in his approach with the electorate. He was from Madhya Pradesh, and he was a very honest and sincere person. Everyone loved him.

One year the Baba Centre in New Delhi invited him to give a talk at Baba's Birthday celebrations. It was there that Amar Singh saw His picture for the first time and came to know about Baba. Amar Singh was a devout Sikh and followed Guru Nanak wholeheartedly, but the first time he saw Baba's face, he saw Guru Nanak's face in Baba's, and that was his signal that he'd found his Master. From that day forth he worked tirelessly in Baba's Cause. Though he was a politician and a Member of Parliament, he spent most of his time in spreading Baba's Message.

Once during the Shah of Iran's reign he was selected to be part of a parliamentary delegation to go to Iran and other places. Before he left he asked for the addresses of Baba-lovers in Iran. The delegation was to be put up in five-star hotels with lavish menus and royal treatment, but Saigal would not stay there. He would seek out Baba people and wanted to stay at their homes, howsoever humble they might be, spurning all the luxury that was available to him. Such was his devotion to the Lord.

He would speak about Baba in India without any reservation wherever and whenever he got an opportunity, and at that time many government dignitaries came to hear about Baba, and they would even come to Baba functions such as Birthdays or Silence Day anniversaries. As long as Amar Singh was alive, the dignitaries came, but after he died it all fizzled out. Baba must have had some work to do with those people, the early leaders, perhaps because of the sacrifices they had made for the nation—many had undergone great hardships. A number of those people even accompanied Saigal to *darshans* and had the great good fortune of seeing Baba.

During my stay at Meherazad it was time once again for the parliamentary elections, and Amar Singh stood once again for election. But by then it was common knowledge that it doesn't pay to be an

honest politician. If you want to make both ends meet, you have to be a real politician, but Saigal Saheb was more of a Baba-politician than an earthly one. His finances were extremely strained because he was scrupulously honest, and in India you need a lot of wealth and power to project yourself to the electorate—to go out on tour and to let your name be known. He simply didn't have the funds.

Despite that hurdle he went on in his old style and would address meetings large and small and contact whomsoever he could. Meanwhile Baba was in the hall with us, saying, "I don't think Saigal will be elected this time. He has no money, so how can he get elected?"

Pendu was a great advocate of Saigal and said, "No, Baba, he must win! He is going to win!"

Baba said, "But how is it possible? He has no funds—he can't travel and therefore can't reach the people, so how will they hear of him?"

Pendu always sided with Saigal, but Baba said, "No hope this time." There was a little tussle, as the election was a common topic of conversation in the hall.

Finally the election results started flowing in. The counting was going on and the initial results were pouring in, and Saigal's rival was capturing all the votes, leading by a huge margin. Baba sent word to Pendu, "See? I told you—there's no hope. Just forget it this time."

But Pendu stayed glued to the radio. And then the other constituencies' results were starting to come in, and they were all for Saigal. So from way behind he caught up with his rival, and he ultimately came in with a good majority and won the election. You should have seen the joy on Pendu's face—he was like a small kid, and it was as if it were a victory for *him*. We all were happy, of course, and Saigal's success was quite a point of attention for us at that time.

Saigal never took a penny from anyone nor spent money in the wrong way. He really lived in Baba's ways. That is why he had no money, but still the people realized his worth. The Indian electorate is very wise in

that way. Although most of the electorate is illiterate, they still had the sense to elect good people. It's a great miracle that democracy is rolling on in India, against all odds—perhaps because it is Baba's birthplace.

Baba had many former revolutionaries and freedom fighters among His lovers—like Pukar and Shatrughan Kumar—and He made lambs out of those lions.

Two incidents I recall from my stays with Baba at Meherazad, although I am not sure exactly which year they occurred. One time we were in Baba's room, and Goher brought in a plate of peeled apples. It was one of the fruits that Dr. Grant had permitted Baba to eat. Other fruits were prohibited because of Baba's blood sugar problems, although He liked mangoes and papaya.

Baba actually detested apples even though Elcha would send a very soft variety from Simla. They were the "Royal Delicious" variety, a very beautiful fruit, one of the best of the apples grown here. But Baba never liked it. Baba let Goher put the plate on the table, but when she left, Baba beckoned to me, "Come on—eat this." I started to eat slowly, and Baba admonished me, "Eat quickly!" Baba was thinking Goher might come back and catch Him giving the apple slices away. I did finish eating quickly, before Goher could come in again. Baba tried to outwit His *mandali* like that, but at the same time He didn't want to upset or hurt them.

Another time Janghu Sukhadwalla, Meherjee Karkaria and I were called to Meherazad for some work around the time of my birthday. Baba didn't come to the Mandali Hall in the afternoon at that time, but instead we spent the time with Him in His room. Sometimes Baba would call us into His room like that.

Eruch had taken all the correspondence and the newspapers with him to read before Baba. Baba was sitting in the chair Kenmore had brought for Him, and chairs had been put in the room for us to sit too, which made me feel very uncomfortable! I didn't like sitting before Baba on a

chair—I was more used to sitting on the ground before Him. Once the work was done, Eruch told us that it was time to leave.

Baba stopped him and gestured, “Wait, wait, what’s the hurry? I have some work with Meherwan.” So we sat down again. Baba reached under Him and brought out a little packet that He handed over to me. It was a beautiful white shirt, and He presented it to me. I still preserve that shirt and always used to wear it on *His Birthday*. That was the essence of my Meherazad stay that year.

Baba’s neck pain gradually tapered off, and He stopped mentioning how much it bothered Him. The doctor had said that it takes time for the vertebrae to calcify, and once that happens, further depression stops and the pain subsides. Until that time the collar helped keep His neck in position, and eventually it corrected itself, though Baba suffered residual stiffness in His neck.

Just before I left, Baba remembered to tell me that when He came to Guruprasad in the following year, He would again not like any disturbance and that His seclusion was to continue. He asked me whether the Poona people would feel hurt if He didn’t see them again during His visit. I said, “No, Baba, they should never feel that way. I am sure that they would be happy with whatever is Your wish.” It was so important to Baba that He asked me the same question twice, wanting to be sure that I thought the Poona Baba-lovers wouldn’t mind. Baba was happy to hear that, and a circular was sent out by Adi K. Irani to the effect that when Baba came to Guruprasad, none should disturb Him and that His stay would be very quiet that year, 1967.

When Baba came to Guruprasad, the boards from Meherazad, telling people to stay away, were put up just outside the front veranda. In English, Hindi and Marathi there were messages saying that Baba had stopped giving *darshan*. Any person coming to Guruprasad with the

intention of taking *darshan* should surely have been intimidated by those messages, boldly printed in red and white lettering.

The Poona lovers were informed that it was their great responsibility to see that Baba's seclusion went absolutely undisturbed. They were the people who could make or mar the seclusion. Realizing that, the Poona lovers stuck to what Baba's circular asked, and there was no incident that I can recollect of a violation of Baba's wishes. It stands as a great credit to the Poona lovers that they obeyed Baba one hundred percent in that respect. Baba arrived very quietly with no fanfare. Just a few of us were allowed to come, and we were there to receive Him.

That visit was marked by Baba beginning to walk again after His accident at Satara. On the day that He first arrived He had a brisk walk on the veranda. He asked us how He was walking, and we said that we were very happy to see Him walk like that, as of old, with His arm resting lightly on Francis or Eruch or some other person from the *mandali* to give balance. He was walking very well. We also noticed that His neck pain was almost gone, and that there was no more need for the collar.

When He started this stay, a new phase seemed to have taken over, and Baba was starting to exercise. Eruch would make Him do physical exercises in the *mandali* hall, and He would kick a bedding roll placed in front of His right foot so that it would strengthen His leg and thigh muscles. Baba would also do pull-ups on a bar on the doorway, and He did various other exercises as well.

There was a room upstairs off the main hall at Guruprasad where Bhau used to stay, and I remember that in the earlier days Baba would exercise by climbing a few of the steps. A railing of bamboo was put up with cloth tied at intervals so that Baba could hold on to the cloth and practice climbing a few of those wooden stair steps.

Now Baba was taking interest in exercises that He never liked to do, and He would rush through all of them. If He had to do arm exercises He would do just a couple and say, "Now I've done it."

Goher would say, "Baba, but this is not it. You have to repeat it more often."

Baba would say, “No, it’s enough.”

If the time came for Him to do some exercise and He already had it in mind, then He would do it on His own. A few days later He asked Eruch to call Dr. Ginde “to show him how I walk.” Dr. Ginde was called, and as soon as he received the message he came posthaste, and Baba walked with him on the veranda. Baba was walking so fast that Ginde, with his weak heart, became breathless. Baba stopped and said, “Well, what do you think of My walking?”

Ginde was ecstatic about it. “Baba, I’ve never seen You walk like this before in my life.” It reminded us of the old days, though Ginde had never seen Baba in those times. He was delighted and he said, “Baba, this is great. I really am surprised. This is a miracle! Medically it is not possible that You should be able to walk like this.” He was all praise for the way that Baba had recovered the ability to walk.

It so happened that during this period Rick Chapman, who had met Baba at Meherazad in August of the preceding year, was staying in Poona for some weeks after touring the places Baba had visited in Andhra. We would see him regularly at Bindra House, as he would turn up almost every evening at the time Eruch would get back from being with Baba at Guruprasad. Rick had brought a movie camera with him to India and gave it to Eruch for use in filming Baba in future, and Baba returned it to him with a film—taken on that camera—of Him walking on the veranda at Guruprasad. Baba told him to show it to His lovers back in America to give them an idea of how He was able to walk again.

As time went on Baba would increase His pace and walk faster, but unfortunately one day His vigorous walking caused Him to strain His back, and He got a catch which brought an end to this little resurrected golden phase. The strain was so bad that even breathing was painful.

So the chair and wheelchair were back, and Baba had to stop walking altogether. Eruch had some similar problems—he had been very strong, but one time on one of the *mast* tours he had lifted a very heavy weight and got a sudden pain in his back, and from that day on he had a very

bad back. We applied a hot iron to Eruch's back with good results, and we suggested this remedy to Baba. Baba said, "All right. Anything that could give relief."

Baba would lie down on the couch, and Pendu would heat up the electric iron and massage Baba's back. Sometimes Pendu would turn his back on Baba to talk to us, and Baba would gesture that it had been in place too long and was burning him. After that Eruch would bring some liniment and rub that in. When we were done we would hold Him up and wrap an elastic waist support that Goher had brought for Baba around His body at the height of the affected muscle. Eventually that ailment went away, and we were relieved, as Baba began once again to walk a bit.

Baba had given me permission to visit Guruprasad whenever I could get time to come over. Baba's meals would be prepared at Bindra House, so I would first have to do the marketing on a daily basis. After attending to that and other housework chores, I would rush over to Guruprasad in the mornings to be with Baba for an hour or two and then go to my office from there. I remember that during that period I had a great deal of closeness with Baba, because fewer people were allowed to come and I was able to go more often.

That summer was unusually hot, so it was good that Baba didn't have to wear the collar because it would have been very uncomfortable for Him. We got news that at Meherazad all the sources of water had dried up. The well was almost dry, and many of the big trees had died.

When Baba had gone on the *mast* tours, the *masts* would often give him something to eat, and one *mast* had given him five mangoes. Baba took the seeds from those mangoes and planted them in pots and used to water them Himself every day. Once the saplings sprouted, Baba had the *mandali* plant all five in a row in the area that is now in between the old clinic and Eruch's room. They grew up into full-sized trees, but the drought killed one and the others were suffering.

Padri had gone over to Meherazad to survey the situation, and he sent word asking, “Baba, could we have a bore well drilled here?”

Baba gave permission, so a site for a bore well was selected at the location where one of the mango trees had died—the space now being vacant—and they started to drill. They went down fifty feet, but there was no water. They went down further, almost eighty feet, and not a drop of water could be located.

Padri sent word to Adi to ask Baba what they should do. Eruch took the call, and then he went to Baba and reported, “Baba, no water has been struck. They are asking what they should do.”

Baba paused a while, then He said, “Let them go ten or fifteen feet more. Don’t stop boring.”

The message was relayed and work resumed at Meherazad. In another three or four feet they found gushing water that saved the day for Meherazad, because it helped to tide over the terrible drought of that year, although three more of the mango trees died. The lake had completely dried up, and there were big cracks in the bed of the reservoir, and even heavy vehicles could drive across the lake.

That well lasted for almost twenty-seven years, by the way, until these later years of drought have finished it off. Until we struck that bore well, there wasn’t enough water at Meherazad. Many wells are drying up now. Three or four days ago one of Meherazad’s neighbors, a farmer with animals, told us that he just had his well dry up. They don’t even have drinking water left, and the summer hasn’t even started yet!

So, when the bore well produced water, it was sent for testing, and it turned out to be free from any contamination—there was no source of contamination anyway in those days—so we had good, clean water. A hand pump was fixed to the bore, and all the *mandali* took turns to work the pump and fill up the small tank that stands to this day in front of the Mandali Hall veranda.

In the earlier years Baba would visit Bindra House more often. Whenever He left Guruprasad during His Poona stays, He most frequently visited Bindra House. But that year, 1967, there was just one visit. As usual it was in the afternoon, and Eruch, myself, Meherjee and one or two other *mandali* accompanied Baba.

At Bindra House there was a sitting room, or hall, with a table and the same chair in which Baba had been photographed in Ganeshkhind, and that's where Baba came and sat straightway, and then He met with each of us. He called each one by one in turn and embraced him or her. Then He said, "Call the neighbors." We had a neighbor by the name of Julie Alvarez, a Goanese Christian. Her family had lived in Bindra House before we did, back in the 1940s, but at this time they had just one room on the ground floor. We were occupying the rest of the ground floor. They were a very happy-go-lucky couple with five children in that one room. Most of the Goanese are like that. They eat, drink, and are always merry.

Anyway, I remember that Julie and her family were called because at that time Baba never called anybody. Then Baba said to call the landlady, Sheela Bindra. She came down, and Baba blessed her also. This was going to be His last visit, which we hadn't realized then. He was giving His *darshan* to all who resided there. It was the first time He met Mrs. Bindra, though He would sometimes see Julie and her family because she had a window that opened out onto our front veranda. There was a swing there on which Baba would sit, and they could see Him. Baba would pass by, and sometimes He would peep in and see them.

Baba probably wanted to speed things up so that everyone could come in His contact before the hundred years elapsed. Anyway, that was Bindra House's last physical *darshan*.

In the last few days of the 1967 Guruprasad stay Baba said that He wanted His Poona lovers to come so that they could see Him walk. So, as a reward for the meticulous way that they had kept away from

Guruprasad all the months of His stay there, Baba gave them a show. He was walking nicely at the time.

Baba said, “We’ll arrange it in such a way that prior to My leaving they can see Me walking. We’ll do it on two days. On the first day the women and children can come, and on the second day the men lovers can come and see Me walk.” So it was announced, and there was great jubilation amongst the Poona Baba-lovers.

On the appointed day, which was the day prior to His departure, the women and children came. Baba’s room was on the western side, and people were standing on both sides of the veranda. At the appointed time the bedroom door was opened, and Baba strode out of His bedroom, supported by Francis. He took great big strides, and before the women could realize what was happening, He just strode past in a flash, so fast that Francis was running to keep pace with Him. A film was made of the event. Baba was just floating in the air it seemed, and He was gone in a jiffy, entering into *mandali* hall.

That was it. Baba sent word to “Ask all of them to go back.” Some of those present hardly saw Baba, that’s how fast He walked. That was the *darshan*. They were all very happy to see Baba walk, but it was like putting a drop of water in the mouth of an extremely thirsty person. It just whets your desire for more. But they had to go back. Baba wouldn’t see anybody after that.

The next day it was the men’s turn. The *mandali* came to ask me, “Would I accompany Baba for the walk?”

I felt quite scared about that. I said, “No, no, I would rather some senior *mandali* would do that. I feel incompetent for that task,” so they selected an old-time Baba disciple named Sadashiv Patil. He escorted Baba for the second performance, which was identical to the first day. Again those present were left in stunned silence, as it were. It was a real sight to watch, even for us, because Baba never walked that fast. I think He was preparing for this show His entire stay at Guruprasad.

My mother and the rest of the women said that Baba gestured in Gujarati, "*Jo, hun chaliyo.*" Translated this roughly means, "See, I walked." But more importantly it also can mean, "See, I am leaving." That was the last time most of the Poona lovers saw Baba in the body.

Only a few of us were invited to the wedding of Dara and Amrit in December of 1968 and had the chance to see Him once more. That opportunity at Guruprasad would be the last time most of those people would see Him. The last impression they had of Baba was of strength rather than weakness. That's what they carried away in their minds when they returned home.

An hour or so after walking on the veranda before the men, Baba left for Meherazad.

So Baba left Guruprasad with a brief burst of speed, slipping in and out of everyone's view very quickly. Baba was a very slippery customer, I must say. It was a signal of what was to follow, I think. In fact, the Poona Centre secretary, Ramakrishnan, commented on this, saying "Baba walked past us so quickly. We never realized that He was giving us a sort of sign that this was His physical passing away from our midst."

I think most of them never saw Baba again in His physical form. A few were called later for a program, but it was very few.

In eternity, of course, it's just a flash, after all, and in truth it's not even a flash. Baba says that it is all absolute illusion. Nothing has ever happened, and nothing will ever happen, but our mind refuses to accept anything beyond this time and space. We just take these as so many words, and it doesn't sink in more than skin-deep. The patterns of our lives change so fast that they prevent us from concentrating on the true Reality. We stay focused on the surface until we gain the maturity to penetrate deeper. Then we realize that everything we have known is just illusion.

Baba's seclusion continued undisturbed at Meherazad. Eventually it was almost the end of the year, and a sort of complacency about things had

settled in. Then suddenly we were given a rude shaking in the form of an earthquake, the first major earthquake in the Deccan Plateau.

The Deccan Plateau was supposed to be the most seismically stable region on the Indian continent. But for the first time in modern history, in the first week of December we had a major earthquake that originated near the Koyna Dam. There is a theory that that giant dam, which was built on a fault, was responsible for triggering the earthquake. Some scientists say the theory is absurd—that a little collection of water like that could move such a huge land mass. That big lake is but a tiny drop in comparison to the size of the Deccan Plateau itself. Ever since then, however, we have been having earthquakes in the Deccan Plateau.

Early one morning, I remember, I was lying down fast asleep, and suddenly my bed began to shake violently, and I first thought that some thief had gotten under the bed and was trying to shake me out. I had a peculiar feeling, and then there was a deep rumbling sound, very frightening, and I realized that it was an earthquake. There were a few seconds of extremely violent shaking, and then people rushed out crying “Earthquake!”

We heard that Meherazad also shook. Goher tells us that she rushed into Baba’s bedroom and bent over Him, thinking that the roof might collapse, and that at least she could prevent Baba from getting hit directly. It was a sort of instant reflex on her part because she was in charge of Baba’s body, the doctor responsible for keeping His physical form safe.

It turned out to be a terrible earthquake. It wiped out the village near the Koyna Dam and left no trace—many hundreds must have died. There was a lot of damage. Fortunately the dam survived the quake—otherwise it would have been a monumental tragedy that would have wiped out many cities and villages downstream. A huge mass of water was contained within that dam. The engineers who designed the dam had been warned that there was a fault beneath the site, and I think they designed it with that in mind, and the dam didn’t fail.

In any case, there was a lot of damage. I heard from Goher that there was quite a lot of panic at Meherazad. Up to that time there had been a

flood, a major earthquake and lots of droughts. It was all part of His Divine Plan of awakening people.

Before I came to Meherazad in January, 1968, there was a remarkable incident concerning Dr. Brieseman. He was the doctor who had replaced Dr. Pedersen at Booth Hospital in Ahmednagar, and when Baba passed away, it was he who sent the ambulance and who came to certify Baba's passing away.

At some point Dr. Brieseman had gone to Happy Valley for a picnic with his family. While they were relaxing there they were attacked by huge hornets—some village urchins might have disturbed their nest by throwing stones at it. The poor family was severely stung and got panicky, rushed to their car, and on their return drove past Meherazad.

Dr. Brieseman knew that he couldn't make it all the way to the hospital in that condition, so they came rushing into Meherazad from Happy Valley, where he collapsed, swollen from head to foot with big stings all over his body and the hornets' stingers still sticking out of him. His wife and his child were also in very bad shape.

Baba had already retired at the time, but there was a big commotion in the compound as the *mandali* rushed to help. Goher and all the *mandali* rushed to the doctor and his family and gave first aid. There was no electricity at that time, so by the light of hurricane lanterns they started to extract the stingers, which in turn caused a lot of additional pain. Hundreds of stingers had to be pulled out by hand, and that finally gave the family relief. It was a major incident at Meherazad. They could have died, but they managed to get help and were saved.

That was the end of that eventful year, 1967.



Chapter Thirty-nine:

1968

Now we come to the final year, 1968. It was time for me to come to Meherazad, little knowing that it would be my last stay in Baba's physical proximity. In 1969 I wouldn't have any further chance to be with Baba.

A funny incident occurred before I came. The door to Mandali Hall was usually kept a bit ajar, and one day a little puppy slipped in while the prayers were being said before Baba. It was very scrawny—it must have strayed over from the village or nearby huts. Baba noticed it, and He looked askance, as if He were wondering how this thing got in. The *mandali* were about to shoo it off, but Baba said, “No, no, no, take it somewhere and ask the women to send some milk for it.”

It was given milk, and once a famished puppy gets a little food, it will never leave. Baba didn't have the heart to send it off, so it stayed at Meherazad. Perhaps Baba had the intention to keep it here. Nothing could happen by chance with Him. So the puppy was adopted.

Baba's habit was to feed pets more than they could ever contain, so the puppy fattened out very fast. It became a chubby little pup with a peculiar physiognomy—it had a small head so you couldn't tie it up, because the

collar would slip over its head quite easily. A funny type of dog it was. It probably became deformed early on because it had been starved.

By the time I came, this pup had grown into quite a nice-looking dog—healthy and certainly well fed! Baba said to name him “Rammu,” which means “to play” in Gujarati. Rammu was kept for Baba’s pleasure, and he was given to Mehera, who started to train him and teach him tricks. He would jump over obstacles on being shown a piece of toast. Once he jumped, he would be given the toast as a reward.

In the mornings Rammu would be tied up to a scrawny *neem* tree at the end of the row of buildings. Baba would be engaged in the prayers and other things, but after all that was finished and Baba was relaxing, Rammu would be released.

As soon as they untied Rammu, he would shoot like an arrow through the door to be near Baba, and Baba would feed Rammu toast, or sometimes a sweet toast would be called for from Poona. I used to send rusks—sweet toasts, similar to small pieces of zweiback—from Kayani Bakery in Poona especially for Baba, and He used to feed those expensive toasts to Rammu. Baba pampered the pets much more than the *mandali*!

After prayers Goher would come on her cycle with tea and rusks for Baba’s breakfast. Baba would dunk the rusk in the tea and eat it. Sitting in His chair, He would put up His feet on the pouf, and Rammu would sit on one side of Baba’s feet. Baba would hold the rusk on the other side, and Rammu would jump over Baba’s feet to the other side to get it.

Eruch wasn’t too amused by this. “Baba, what is this? You are spoiling that pet unnecessarily. It’s not good, Baba—Your hip is so badly injured and supposing the dog falls on Your feet. It could hurt Your hip joint and cause more trouble.”

Baba would gesture, “Nothing of that sort will happen. Don’t worry. This is a relaxation for me.” After seclusion work He would relax, you know.

Mastan and the puppy were shown to each other, and the little puppy began to bark at Mastan! Mastan was a huge, shaggy dog from Bhutan,

and the tiny puppy was scared so it barked, but Mastan ignored it. That made everyone think it would be all right to keep the puppy. Mastan was usually tied up, anyway, so the puppy had a clear field.

Another source of relaxation for Baba was Kaka Baria. As I've mentioned, Kaka had had a severe attack of uremia which affected his mind and speech, but it seems that it was for the best, because he became a source of great entertainment for Baba. Baba would give out a sentence and tell Kaka to repeat it. Kaka would just babble out some incoherent sounds trying to speak that sentence. He couldn't form a single word, and some strange sounds would come out, and it was so funny that Baba would laugh like anything. Then he would spell out the word, "toy," signifying "Kaka is My toy." Kaka was, in fact, really like a little doll, quite plump and stout. In fact, after doing all this Kaka would laugh and wink at me. He knew that he couldn't speak properly, and he was sharing in the enjoyment at his own expense. Remarkable! Kaka in the prime of his health had been of tremendous service to Baba, and towards the end of his life he was serving the Lord in a different way.

Despite this silliness, Kaka was very meticulous about his routines. He could follow his daily patterns, but he could not handle anything out of the ordinary. That made him very funny, because he would just be going along like an automaton. Every morning he was ready to accompany the boys carrying the lift chair over to the residence, Kaka being the "bodyguard" of Baba, and then he would strut alongside the chair from the porch outside Baba's room to Mandali Hall. He had had seven major heart attacks, mind you, something of a medical record, and he was still going strong, in good spirits and fiery as usual, always up for a fight with Baidul.

The night watch in the earlier part of the evening would be Kaka's, and he would pace up and down outside Baba's bedroom in anticipation of it. Baba would point out to the women, "See how eager he is for Me to call him now," and Baba would have to search for reasons to call him in. He was like a little baby.

Baba would also call Kaka Baria "Bilbo," from the Tolkien trilogy. Baidul, on the other hand, was "Gollum." Mani was an expert at creating the

different voices while she was reading, and they seemed to become live characters before Baba. Baba said that there was a similarity between the spiritual line and the Tolkien trilogy, especially the first book of the series, *The Hobbit*. Gandalf the wizard Baba likened to the Master. How inspired Tolkien must have been to write in such a fashion! How fortunate he was that his books were a source of entertainment to Baba.

But one incident that occurred before my visit was neither funny nor relaxing for Baba. At the time He was working daily with Kaikobad in the room adjoining Mandali Hall, behind closed doors. I think Baba was bowing down to Kaikobad—we could sometimes hear Kaikobad repeating the Name of Ahuramazda, but we never asked Kaikobad what happened.

One day Kaikobad slipped and fell heavily, and in so doing he fractured his hip joint, and consequently Baba was very upset because that accident would come in the way of His work. As a result Eruch and all the *mandali* rushed about and tried to get Kaikobad fixed up quickly so that he would again be fit enough to assist Baba in His seclusion work. It was very unfortunate.

When I arrived at Meherazad that year, Kaikobad was in a wheelchair and still unable to walk. Dr. Alu Khambatta was called to stay at Meherazad to attend to him—she was lucky to get to come and stay with Baba. She stayed in the small room at the end of the cottage veranda on the men's side, Room #6.

Dr. Madhivala was a very famous "*hadvaid*," an indigenous bone doctor. There's a liniment for painful joints and bones that he invented called "Madhivala's Liniment" that is still used today. Baba had Dr. Madhivala brought to Meherazad to see Kaikobad and to treat him so that his fractured hip would heal more quickly, and Madhivala set the hip without plaster and eventually Kaikobad recovered.

Kaikobad was not much of a part of the "social life" of the *mandali*. He was at Meherazad when Baba was, but otherwise he didn't mix with us much, and he was often busy all day with whatever work Baba was giving him to do.

One evening we were all sitting outside. The area surrounding the buildings was completely open to the sky, and we would sit out on benches and chat before we all retired. Baba was in His room, and one evening Pendu suddenly came over and said to me, “Baba wants you. Come quickly!”

I went running to Baba’s room, and it was quite dark inside. At that time there was no electricity at Meherazad, so a lantern was kept outside Baba’s bedroom window, and the light from the lantern was the only source of light in Baba’s room. I could see that Baba was sitting on the edge of the bed, and He was munching something. Baba was often hungry in the night, and so He would ask for a little snack from Najamai.

He asked me to come close, and He gave me a piece of *bhakra*, a sweet cookie that the Parsis prepare out of wheat dough and butter. Baba was very fond of *bhakra*, so my mother had prepared some and sent it with me for Baba. He said, “Eat this.” I ate it. He said, “What is this your mother has prepared? So hard? Can I chew this?”

I said, “Baba, but the doctors’ instructions are that we should not use too much fat and butter in Your food, and to make it soft more butter is required, so Mumma couldn’t do that.”

“All right,” He said. “Look, taste this,” and He gave me another cookie that Roda Mistry had sent. It was extremely soft and nice. She clearly didn’t care for any doctors’ instructions. He said, “See the difference? Can you taste it?”

I said, “Yes, Baba, but what can be done now?”

He said, “All right, forget about it,” and then, “What were you doing just now when I called for you?”

I said, “Baba, the *mandali* and I were just having a little chat...”

“Who was there?” He asked.

I mentioned the names—“Eruch was there, Pendu, Kaka, Najamai and Dr. Alu....”

Baba seemed unhappy about it. “They were there? Najamai and Alu?”

He sent me back. A little later Pendu came and told Najamai sternly, "You must go back to the women's quarters. Baba doesn't approve of this." Poor Alu, hearing this she fled to her room and locked herself in. Pendu was sent back to further admonish her. He said, "Do you hear that? Baba doesn't want you people chatting away. Stay in your room." Baba was very strict at the time, even with the *mandali*.

I remember years earlier that Aloha had been the target of Baba's attacks for a time. Baba was constantly picking on Aloha. If he sat here in the Hall and looked at Baba, Baba would say, "Why does this Aloha keep staring at Me? I feel so uncomfortable," and poor Aloha wouldn't say anything. Baba would do that sort of thing with various of the *mandali* in turns.

Even then, at that late stage, the training continued. One day Baba called Aloha to press His feet, and Aloha was sitting there pressing Baba's feet, and Baba suddenly grimaced with pain. He had a cramp in one foot, and poor Aloha was made to feel that he was responsible for the cramp!

I suddenly piped in, "Baba, I have a good liniment cream, Dr. Sloan's, which I use for my cramps. Should I try it on You?"

"Bring it quickly!" Baba said, "I can't bear the pain!" I rushed out and got it, and I started to massage the liniment into Baba's foot. Baba said, "Yes, that feels nice." But after a few minutes He said, "It's starting to burn!" Baba's skin was so delicate and sensitive, and He had a reaction to the liniment. "What have you done?" He asked me. "Now it's more trouble to Me," and it was my turn to grimace because of feeling that I had been the source of more discomfort to Baba.

Adi Jr., Baba's brother, was around then, and he said, "Baba, I think it would be best to wash Your feet with soap and water. The burning will go away then."

Baba said, "Go get some, quickly," so he ran out, returned, and applied *his* remedy, and eventually Baba said, "Now it's all right," and the tension was finally over.

Adi Jr. had come for a long stay, partly to arrange for the wedding of his son, Dara, and partly of course to be with Baba. During the time of his visit he would repeatedly want to have private conversations with Baba, and Baba would have all of us leave the room so that they could be alone.

But after a while, for reasons of His own, Baba told Eruch that all the *mandali* should return to the Hall after only a few minutes. Accordingly, when Baba would tell us to leave we wouldn't stay out long and then we would all troop back into the Hall. Adi Jr. naturally felt annoyed at this, and no one ever let on that this had been Baba's order, so he felt that the *mandali* weren't obeying Baba's previous request to leave the two of them alone.

One day Baba suddenly got the whim to ask us if we had one wish, what we would wish for. I remember Adi Jr. said, "I wish the *mandali* were more respectful about Your condition," because he felt that the *mandali*, despite Baba's poor health, were ignoring His orders.

Eruch was asked what he wanted, and he said, "Baba, make me such that I would not want anything." Baba then asked me what I would want from Him, and I said, "Give me desirelessness." The first time I just mumbled that very softly, so Baba gestured, "What is he saying? Tell him to speak loudly!" I spoke more clearly and loudly the next time. As it happened, a few days before this during one of our walks Eruch had brought up the subject of what to ask for if Baba ever gave me the chance, and he told me to ask for this. That was because Eruch himself had been told by Baba that if a Master ever asked one to make a wish, it should be for desirelessness. I didn't know head nor tail about what it meant, but Baba seemed pleased with my response.

When it came to Francis Brabazon, he said, "Baba, I wish You would never mention Hafiz again in my presence!" Baba looked so sad on hearing those words, but He said, "Be it so," and I think that from that time onwards Baba did not mention Hafiz again before Francis.

Before Baba's Birthday Baba had expressed the wish to have a *qawwali* program, so Gajwani was contacted in Bombay and told that he should arrange (and pay for) a *qawwal*. Gajwani was very happy to do that.

Baba's favorite *qawwal* was known as Siddiq Qawwal from Jaipur. After a series of frantic telegrams and other modes of communication, the man was contacted, and he agreed to come to Meherazad to give a performance. So some time before Baba's Birthday this *qawwali* program took place in Mandali Hall.

Baba had called Nariman and Jimmy from Bombay and a few other close Baba people from Ahmednagar to be present during the program. Adi Jr. had been in England for quite a few years, and now he too could enjoy being in Baba's presence for the program. A good *qawwal* could give a heart-satisfying performance, but when performed before Baba the result was something very special.

We all enjoyed it, and Baba was in a great mood. Baba liked the *qawwal's* rendering and the verses that he chose, and He was very happy with the singing. The *qawwal* sang all morning and everybody was happy. I was sitting at the back, and Baba beckoned to me to come and press His feet during the program, because it was hurting Him to sit for a long time.

Baba announced suddenly one day that He was entering a very strict phase of His seclusion, and every morning He would have to work closeted in the Hall. The *mandali* should not make the least noise so as not to disturb Him. Baba said that when He did His work, we had to be very still, to stay in our little rooms and to do our work very quietly. "You all will be helping Me in My seclusion work by keeping quiet and not disturbing Me at all," He gestured. Just then a loud boom was heard from the military bombing range nearby. All the window panes rattled because of the impact of the explosion. Baba remarked that sounds like that would not disturb Him, but the slightest sound that any of us would make would cause immense disturbance in His seclusion work.

I remember vividly that the next day Baba came into the Hall earlier than usual, around 7:00 in the morning. The back door was bolted from inside, and we were asked to leave Him. Bhau was given watch duty. The front door was latched from the outside, and Baba worked alone, sitting in His chair.

That first day we were all very quiet, staying in our rooms and striving to make no noise whatever. I was with Eruch in his cabin, which was also my room for those visits. After a few minutes we heard a loud thud and then the sound of water splashing. Eruch and I looked at each other but didn't say anything nor move an inch because we didn't want to create the slightest disturbance.

All was quiet thereafter, and there was no further sound. Because it was so quiet, the thud was very loud, and we were all petrified. It was the first day, barely an hour gone by since Baba had begun His work, and there was already a big disturbance and a splash of water, too. Nothing happened, though. Baba's seclusion continued. Baba clapped off and on, and we could hear Bhau's hasty footsteps answering His summons.

After a couple of hours Baba again clapped, and Bhau went in. Baba told him that His work was done and that we should all be asked to return to Mandali Hall. We all trooped in, and we participated in the prayers as usual with Baba. After the prayers we all filed past Baba and each of us put his right foot on the pouf. Baba would touch His forehead to each one's foot seven times, and each time His forehead touched our foot we had to shout the Name of God in our own religion.

After the prayers were over He asked, "What was that noise that I heard during My seclusion? Could you people not obey My order, one simple little instruction?" He looked very pained about it. It seems that Pendu had accidentally dropped a big pot of water that he had stored in the room to do some washing quietly so that he wouldn't disturb Baba.

Pendu said, "Yes, Baba, I tried to be over-careful, but the water pot just slipped from my hand. I feel very sorry about it." The water had been kept on a stool, and afraid that it might fall off and disturb Baba, Pendu

decided to put it on the floor where it would be safer, but instead he dropped it while moving it. He asked forgiveness from Baba.

Baba said, "It's not your fault. It's Maya, trying to create some disturbance in My work. But this incident has lent more force to My work because I had to strive harder to resume My seclusion work from the point when I was disturbed by the 'noise.'"

At that time some bombing practice was being done by the Air Force at a site a few kilometers to the west of Meherazad. Bombers would come from the Poona military airport, and big explosions would go off nearby and the whole building would shake. Baba said, "Look, this bombing noise does not disturb Me, but the slightest noise that comes from My close ones is a source of infinite disturbance to Me, so you can imagine what a responsibility it is for you people not to cause Me any disturbance in My work."

He probably wanted us to concentrate on Him while He was doing His work. "No sound must come from you—not coughing, sneezing, nor clearing the throat. Better not to move about—you might stumble or step upon something that would make noise," He said.

This happened day after day. I noticed that Baba was advancing the time of His work daily—each day He came a little earlier. I remember even now that it was quite dark some winter mornings when He would arrive at Mandali Hall, sometimes as early as 6:00 a.m.

On the second or third day somebody walked past Mandali Hall, and again Baba mentioned it. He looked up at me and said, "What the heck are you doing while I am in seclusion? Can't you see that there should be no disturbance here? Can you not do this work?" He hadn't told me anything about my having a duty in this regard earlier.

I said, "Yes, Baba, I'll keep watch." So from that day on I got to sit on the veranda opposite Mandali Hall and keep watch for Baba. If anybody tried to approach the open space outside the Hall, I would frantically wave them off. I remember that one day Mani came along to have a talk

with Adi Jr., her brother, and I started to wave her off, signaling that Baba didn't want disturbance. She started to tiptoe her way back, walking very carefully, and I was worried that if she trod upon a leaf or a twig, I would be in trouble.

The whole day would have been spoiled because I had not kept proper watch. It was very tense. Mani realized that she should keep quiet, but she didn't know it was my job to keep watch and ward people off. Fortunately no disturbance occurred, and I heaved a great sigh of relief. That is how intense Baba's seclusion was, and while I was at Meherazad it was the daily routine.

Baba's work in His seclusion was so intense that Baba said that He actually had great difficulty maintaining a link with the Gross World while doing it. He would tell us during the day that His link with the Gross World was like a thread, and that the strain for Him to maintain that link was immense. But if He didn't maintain it, His body would drop! His Universal Work didn't cause Him as much strain as maintaining the link between His physical body and the Gross World.

To maintain His presence in the Gross World, Baba had to start pounding His right thigh with His fist. All the time while He would be working, He was hitting His thigh with His fist very hard, so much so that the muscle had become very hard. Baba would ask me to massage His feet later, and I noticed that His legs were like logs of wood. His body had become very frail with this extra physical suffering.

Sometimes the work was so intense that Baba felt faint. Baba asked Bhau to tie a sash around His waist and around the chair to prevent Him from falling down. That gave us an inkling of what Baba must have been doing during those hours. The work He was doing was and is unimaginable to our limited consciousness.

I had never seen Baba that exhausted. It was a new thing for me. The *mandali* must have seen Baba in that condition during the hundred-day seclusion at Mahabaleshwar. But now Baba's physical condition was deteriorating owing to the constant—rather than previously intermittent—work, so it was more and more of a strain for Him.

On the 31st January, 1968, Baba wanted a meeting to be held, and a few people from Ahmednagar and Meherabad were called. Amongst them were Adi, Sarosh, Viloo, the Khilnani family, Padri, Jangle and Chhagan. Dhakephalkar, the pleader, was also there.

Baba had set the meeting for ten o'clock. I remember that Baba had just finished His seclusion work, we had done the prayers, and Baba was relaxing with Rammu the dog when suddenly we heard a car horn ten minutes before the appointed time. Sarosh and Adi had come. Sarosh, being trained by Baba, was always early, but he honked his horn and Baba was very upset.

"How is it that they come early like that and disturb Me?" He sent someone out with word that they should retreat beyond Baidul's watch cabin on the approach road and wait there quietly and not disturb Him.

Baidul's "cabin" was really just the packing crate from the refrigerator that Elizabeth had sent for Baba. Because Baidul sneezed so loudly and would thereby disturb Baba's seclusion work, he was given the duty of staying at his "cabin" to make sure that no one approached Meherazad who hadn't been called. Baba had inaugurated the cabin with drums beating and a procession to the cabin, where Baba officially opened it.

The other cars arrived and also waited. After some time Baba called them, and when they came in Baba severely berated Sarosh. He said, "What made you blow the horn?"

He said, "Baba, that was just to announce our arrival, that we had come."

"But then why did you come early?"

"Baba, that's Your usual rule, that we should arrive ahead of time and not be late."

"But don't you know that I am in seclusion and require a little relaxation to come back into the feel of the world after working on higher planes? You have disturbed Me, and I am very upset." Indeed, Baba was visibly upset.

Poor Sarosh, all he could say was, "Baba, I ask Your forgiveness. I didn't know that it would disturb You."

Baba said, “All right,” and that was the initial reception that Sarosh got for coming early.

I don’t recall what the meeting was about, but I remember that at the end of it Baba said that he would go inside the residence and that He wanted us to see Mehera for the first time. Baba said she would say “*Jai Baba!*” to us, and that we should fold our hands and say “*Jai Baba!*” to her. All this was quite a surprise for all of us.

The meeting was over at about noon, and Baba was taken in His lift chair to the women’s side. He had told us, “I will go, and when I send word, you all come.” When we got the word to come, we all walked over and found Baba sitting in His lift chair on the veranda with Mehera standing by His side.

When we had all arrived she folded her hands and said “*Jai Baba!*” and likewise we all folded our hands and said “*Jai Baba!*” in return. It was the first time that any of us from among the men *mandali* had seen her as adults. Of course in the old days when I was in the women’s ashram as a young boy, I was sometimes near Mehera, and I would be there when Baba called everybody. But this was the first time even for any of the permanent resident *mandali*. I didn’t feel anything particularly significant about that meeting, just that Baba wanted us to do it, so we did it.

Then Mehera was sent inside, and Baba asked some of the *mandali* what they thought of Mehera. They said, “She looked beautiful, very radiant...” and so on, and Baba was very happy to hear that. Mind you, one year later, almost to the hour, Baba dropped His body. It was the 31st of January around noontime. Baba was, as it were, preparing Mehera to come out into the open. Her time for being in strict seclusion was over, and it was to be a different life for her. She had to take Baba’s place because Baba would no longer be with us.

It may seem strange that the *mandali* had never seen Mehera before, but whatever Baba instructed us to do, we did. If Baba told us not to see Him, we would turn our faces away when we might be confronted with the sight of Him. Obeying Him was much more important than anything

else. That's why nobody had seen Mehera's face, and nobody had even tried to. It was out of the question.

The separation of the men and the women with Baba was one of the basic facts of Baba's Advent. That's why there is a wall across Meherazad. We never went to the women's side, and they never came to ours, at least not until much later. Goher was the only exception in the early years because she was the doctor to the entire ashram. She was also the general manager on the women's side, and she came when called for some work. There was a bell that was rung when Baba wanted her to come to the men's side. In later years Mani was also permitted to come for correspondence, family letters and the like, and then there were two bells, the big one for Goher and the smaller one for Mani.

A few days before Baba's Birthday He gave out a circular that said that this intense phase of His seclusion would end on His Birthday, 25th February 1968. But a few days before the Birthday Baba gave out another message that His seclusion would have to be extended up to 25th March, and that after that date something great would happen that has never happened before and would never happen again for billions and billions of years!

Now it so happened that a few days later Baba was in the Hall, and he called Eruch and said, "I want a little change in the message that I have given, a change in the dates." Eruch took down Baba's message, in which He again extended the seclusion to some specific further date. Eruch wrote it down, and then Baba said that the "something great" would happen soon after that new date. Eruch prepared a circular accordingly and sent it to Adi's office.

A couple of days later Baba again told Eruch, "I want to change the date again." So He gave some other date, another little extension of a few days, so Eruch sent a man quickly to Adi's office to stop the printing of the newest circular and incorporate the change in the dates. The rest of

the circular was to remain the same—just the change for the extension of the seclusion period and the time for the great event to occur.

Another few days went by, still before Baba's Birthday, and again Baba called Eruch and said, "I want another change in the date. Now make it 21st May 1968."

This time Eruch was a bit exasperated. He took it down, but he said, "Baba, is this final? Or should I expect another change very soon?"

Baba then looked very seriously at him and said, "No further change." Baba spelled out "N," "O." I was sitting there massaging His feet, and Baba said to me, "Speak out 'NO!' seven times, very loudly!" Very emphatically He told me to do this, so I started shouting "No, No, No...." I lost count of the number of repetitions, and I think I said it just six times. Baba was counting on His fingers, and He said, "I said *seven* times, and you said it only six times? Now repeat it all over again. And *loudly*—I want it louder than that!" So I started to shout even louder, and Eruch was hearing all this, quite unperturbed, and this time I counted on my fingers so as not to lose count. Baba said, "That's final. It's sealed. Send the message." Eruch sent the man again, and that was the date that was given out. There was no further change after that.

The circular came out that Baba's seclusion was being extended up to the 21st of May, which meant that Baba would be in seclusion when He came to Guruprasad. The people in Poona were alerted of this news.

That same afternoon a very peculiar but significant incident occurred. A huge black-faced monkey suddenly appeared in the Meherazad garden. It started jumping all over the place in the big trees, and then it leapt onto the roof and came crashing down from the first floor roof onto the roof of Baba's bedroom. It broke many tiles, and there was chaos and confusion all over Meherazad.

At first everyone thought that they could ignore the monkey and let it go away, but it was creating so much damage that eventually all the servant boys were called to bring big sticks, and they started to shoo the monkey

away, but it would jump from one place to the other and kept roaming around doing lots of damage.

Eventually the servants were able to drive it away. The next day Baba came to the Hall and said, "See? It's quite significant."

Eruch was quite glum. He said, "Baba, what's the significance of this monkey business?"

Baba said, "It happened on the day that I extended My seclusion, so it has great significance."

Later that year we heard that the Irani calendar started from 21st March, and they have names for each year, like the Chinese calendar, and in the Irani calendar it was the year of the monkey. See the coincidence! We found that out later, of course. Eruch wasn't very impressed about all these coincidences, but at least he was happy that the date was final and that there would be no further rushing about to change the circulars.

In general we paid absolutely no attention to Baba's circulars naming specific dates, particularly ones about Him breaking His Silence. Our focus was so much on Him that the day of any of His predicted occurrences would come and pass by and nobody would pay any attention to it. I don't know how the outside world felt, but really, we never wondered why nothing happened on the various named dates or what His "predictions" were all about.

In fact, when the 21st of May came and passed, there was no big incident, but still many people were saying, "Well, Baba's seclusion is over so can we have His *darshan*?" But they didn't mention anything about the big "something" that was supposed to happen soon after 21st May. Their attention was solely on having Baba's *darshan*, showing how clearly Baba's authority was present.

Whatever He might have meant by the great event that was supposed to occur, we haven't given any thought to it. It will happen in its own time. As Baba said, His words never go in vain, and the real significance

of what He has said eventually unfolds. So the world may be in store for a great happening, but we don't know.

It was time for Baba's Birthday. Baba had sent a special prayer to be read out by all of us. On 25th February 1968, we men *mandali* gathered in the Hall, and Eruch read aloud:

"O GOD, HELP BABA TO ACCOMPLISH HIS WORK ON 21st MAY 1968!"

That was something new that Baba added on His Birthday that year. We all shouted the saying aloud, and then we did our usual calling out "Avatar Meher Baba *ki Jai!*" seven times. We recited the usual prayers thereafter. Baba also gave out another profound message for the occasion of His Birthday that year:

"ON THIS MY APPARENT PHYSICAL BIRTHDAY I SEND MY HOMAGE AND OBEISANCE TO MY LOVERS WHO LIVE FOR ME AND WOULD, IF ORDERED, DIE FOR ME.

A final Birthday message was prepared, but it wasn't given out until Baba dropped His body.

For the first time the Ahmednagar Centre thought of holding a public procession in honor of Baba's Birthday in 1968. They told Baba about the idea, and He was happy with it, so preparations were made and a big cut-out, life-sized photograph of Baba was prepared. Posters were printed and put up all along the route of the procession.

On the eve of Baba's Birthday Eruch and I went out for our evening walk. At that time Eruch used to take long walks because Baba had ordered that we all go for walks. We went a few paces down the private road, and the sky suddenly became terribly overcast, and there was thunder and lightning in the distance. We thought it would be wise to come back so we hastily retraced our steps, but before we could reach home it

started to rain cats and dogs. We had a mighty big shower, perhaps the first ever on Baba's Birthday, and it was such a shower that the river down below began to flood and several animals and goats were washed away, and there was quite a bit of damage and destruction.

It continued to pour throughout the evening and night, and Baba started to worry about the procession that was to take place in Ahmednagar. He said, "How will they go for the procession if it is going to rain there?"

Bhau was keeping night watch at the time, and Baba kept sending him outside into the rain to find out whether there was any news from Ahmednagar. I think Bhau sent a servant to call from the pumping station to find out if it was raining there. So Bhau got soaking wet each time he went out, and Baba appeared to be totally oblivious of that and kept sending him back and forth repeatedly, to the point that eventually Bhau was totally wet outside but boiling hot inside! He thought, "Here Baba is totally neglecting me, and in Ahmednagar they are having a grand celebration and lots of fun!"

Word came that there were no rains in 'Nagar for the present. The clouds were holding up. Baba told Kaikobad to pray for no rain there, and it was quite a tense atmosphere. Bhau was furious that Baba was repeatedly sending him out into the downpour that was continuing at Meherazad, but then suddenly Baba told Bhau to bring Him a towel that was in His room. Baba then personally started to dry Bhau off, and all that anger and resentment that had built up evaporated. So Baba had a way of stirring things up and then bringing them back to normal again.

It so happened that the procession started, and they had a very good time, and everyone enjoyed the procession immensely. There was a lot of dancing, *bhajans* and various programs along the route, and in a leisurely fashion they all returned to the Ahmednagar Centre, completely oblivious of what was happening at Meherazad. It is said that after the procession returned, a cloudburst took place in 'Nagar, too! So Baba was holding back the reins on the rain, as it were. It appears that in this Advent Baba fretted most about the rain and the condition of His lovers.

Baba would make the whole place here run round and round in circles until the whole situation had been defused. By stirring things up Baba would accomplish so many things.

Thereafter the 'Nagar Centre held those sorts of processions for quite a number of years. It seems that the rains had inaugurated them.

It was now time for me to depart Meherazad. Usually when I would leave after my typical month's stay, Baba would just embrace me and I would go. But this time Baba held on to me for a long time, and I was anxious that I might be causing Baba some discomfort because He had to stand for the embrace, but He held on and I wondered why. He held on to me for a long, long time, and then I saw a really loving and compassionate look on His face, and that was the last embrace I received from Him. I remember that quite clearly—my last embrace with Baba in the physical form.

He always kept saying, "My words are never in vain. They will always fructify and come to pass," but it is we who don't understand their significance nor their timing, and we feel that Baba was always just saying so many words. We sometimes think, "Why is Baba going on talking about this or that?" But it is simply our limited minds—they cannot understand the significance of His words.

I didn't realize that that would be the last time that Baba would embrace me. I still remember the expression on His face—sadness in His eyes, a distant, far-away look, His face full of love and compassion. That experience has remained with me ever since. It was unforgettable.

I went back home, and as usual I was making ready for Baba's stay at Guruprasad for the coming summer months, and Baba had given instructions even to me that I must not come to Guruprasad during His stay. Meherjee, Baba's brothers, and a few others who were always allowed to visit Baba were also prohibited.

On the day of Baba's arrival we went very early to Guruprasad to make the final preparations. Just as everything was ready, Baba's car came into the main gate. Seeing this, we bolted from the side gate before Baba's sight could fall on us. That was the order, and we were very

careful about it. Later we learned that that was the first time that Baba had come to Guruprasad in Donkin's Wolseley, with Donkin driving, instead of the DeSoto.

Usually when Baba was at Guruprasad His food came from Bindra House, and Baba would send Naja and Rano over to help Manu prepare it, but this year even that procedure was stopped. This year the food had to be prepared at Guruprasad, and Najamai and Rano were kept there. All the *mandali* who accompanied Baba never stepped outside of Guruprasad, and none of us in Poona stepped into Guruprasad. Mail was allowed to pass in and out, but that was it.

Once Baba arrived He decided to continue His seclusion work while at Guruprasad, and it was decided that He would do it in His bedroom. A big yellow sofa chair from the Guruprasad main hall was shifted into His bedroom and placed just by the side of His bedstead to make it more convenient for Baba to work.

Baba resumed His seclusion work, and the restrictions on noise were the same. After the seclusion work was over in the mornings, the *mandali* would be called, and Baba would be escorted across the veranda to the Guruprasad *mandali* hall, where they would do the prayers. Baba's body would be drenched with perspiration after the seclusion work. Eruch would wipe Baba's body and help Him put on a fresh *sadra* before escorting Baba to the *mandali*'s side.

When Baba started to work in His bedroom and got the chair placed in there, He let it be known that no one should ever touch that chair. Baba was so very particular that He repeatedly gave instructions that everyone should take great care so that not even by the slightest accident should they touch the chair. Baba said that it would be very dangerous to do so, and that even one's clothing should not brush against the chair.

Meheru tells us that once she and Khorshed were given the job of cleaning Baba's room. No servants were allowed into the room lest they touch the chair. One day she tripped over something and nearly fell against the chair. Somehow with great effort she prevented that catastrophe from

happening, but I think that her skirt just slightly brushed against the chair and she received a terrific electric shock. She felt afterwards that if she had fallen on the chair, she would have been finished.

Immediately after that Baba came and asked what happened, and she had to confess. She said, “Baba, I’m sorry, but this is what happened.”

Baba said, “Look, I’m warning you. I won’t be responsible for the consequences, so be careful not to touch this chair.” There must have been some great, high-powered work going on there with lots of universal energy going through it! It seems that Mehera was given permission to touch the chair, but she was the only person allowed to do so.

Baba demanded absolute silence, but Naja had the habit of getting excited while she was cooking, so to prevent any disturbance, Baba required her to be silent throughout her stay at Guruprasad. Khorshed, who was to assist her in the cooking, received the same instructions. Those two characters, on silence or otherwise, never reacted favorably to each other. There must have been quite a fuss! Naja was short-tempered, and she had the same sign for onions, tomatoes, eggs, potatoes—everything was this one sign, and poor Khorshed would always bring the wrong thing. There was always a silent quarrel going on between them. Baba had His humor everywhere—that was typical Baba humor.

One day the two of them were called into Baba’s bedroom, and Baba asked, “Naja, what have you cooked for Me today?” She began to make signs, and Mani was to interpret them, but Mani could only make out “SOS.” She was wondering what the emergency was, and for a few moments she couldn’t figure it out, but finally she realized that Naja was trying to convey “saas,” a special type of white sauce that Parsis make with eggs, fish, chicken, and the like—it was a big favorite of Baba’s. It was Baba, I think, Who helped Mani to decipher what Naja was trying to say, and everybody, including Baba, laughed. Naja got all red because nobody could understand what she was trying to convey. So, in spite of the somber situation, there were these moments of humor and mirth. There always are with Baba.

The seclusion work continued. I was allowed to phone Eruch from my office if there were anything that needed to be conveyed, but that was the only means of communication. We would communicate on some pretext or other, and if Baba made an announcement, Eruch would tell me, but otherwise nothing was given out, and nothing was to be communicated.

For the first few days the seclusion work was going on very smoothly, but toward the end of the month we heard that Pukar had suddenly become very frantic and restless because Baba was continually postponing the end of the seclusion. One day Pukar got this whim, and with another ten or twelve people he came all the way from Hamirpur to Poona. They assembled before the Guruprasad gate and wanted to enter. The *mandali* and the watchmen prevented them from coming in. Pukar began to shout loudly on the road and made a scene. "I will die rather than go back, and I am going to sit here on a hunger strike, and I will give up my body here. I will not shift from here now." They all squatted on the ground and said, "This is it. You forget us now!"

Pukar was a character. Revolutionary blood was in him, you know. He was just itching for some action, and he didn't like this prolonged seclusion. It was against his nature, as it were.

So there was this big racket going on outside, and that caused Eruch to come out. Eruch phoned us, and he told us to come over and convince them to clear out. "If Baba comes to know about all this, there might be some calamity, so come quickly!"

Ramakrishnan and I rushed over and tried to persuade that mountain of a man. He was very adamant. He said, "I don't want to hear anything you people have to say. Let me die here! I don't want to go away."

We said, "No, Pukar, this is not the way." We cajoled him and consoled him, and we did all that we could do, and with great difficulty and even a little pulling here and there, he agreed to leave. I think we took him first to the Poona Centre, where Ramakrishnan "broke his head" trying to convince Pukar for many hours. Then Ramakrishnan somehow persuaded them to go to Ahmednagar and see Adi K. Irani, Baba's secretary, and

talk to him about it! Ramakrishnan contrived that plan to get them out of town. Pukar and his group went to 'Nagar and went directly to Adi's office, and then poor Adi had to break *his* head with them.

In the meantime a message came from Guruprasad. Baba had come to know about what happened. Baba sent word as follows: "Tell them to go back to Hamirpur and not to wander about aimlessly like this. Tell them this from Me."

Adi then said, "Look, this message has come. Now what do you want to do?" That was it. Pukar's fervor just melted after he received that stern warning from Baba, and he disappeared from the scene. That was the only untoward incident that occurred at that time. Nobody from the Poona group even dared to approach Guruprasad. Ramakrishnan came only because he'd been called to take Pukar and his group away.

The 21st of May came, and Baba declared that it was the end of His work in seclusion. Baba told the *mandali* that some residual work was there, and now there would be a short period of "exclusion" after the seclusion. Baba could invent words very quickly. He would be in this phase for another month or so, after which time it would be over. So the work continued at Guruprasad.

Later on we came to know that Baba's physical condition had been deeply affected, because each time He emerged from seclusion He was totally fatigued, completely bathed in sweat, and it was more and more strenuous for His whole body. The *mandali* could see that Baba was really suffering tremendously, taking tremendous burdens upon Himself. I think the *mandali* even would say to Him, "Baba, why don't You work a little less rigorously?"

Baba said that if He did that, the work would get prolonged and the entire course of events would change, so He had to do what He had to do, irrespective of the consequences to His body.

It was quite a tense situation, and that is how that Guruprasad stay ended. It was time for Baba to depart again, so Adi, Don and Waman—the driver—came a day or so earlier. Don had his new Wolseley car, which

he had gotten from his father in England. Baba liked the seats very much. They didn't hurt His hip joint so much. Baba sat in Don's car with the four women *mandali*, and the rest of them rode in the DeSoto that Adi brought, and Waman would drive Adi's Chevrolet. The whole entourage went in those three vehicles, and Bhagirath's truck took away all the baggage, pots, chairs and whatever they had brought from Meherazad for their use and Baba's.

On the day of departure we were called to Guruprasad, but we were given instructions that we had to stand at the side gate. Once the group left Guruprasad and went out of sight, we were to enter. We weren't even to look in the direction of the bungalow while we were standing there—we had to look away toward the other side of the street. As they left a car horn was sounded, and we waited a while and then went in. We caught just a fleeting glimpse of the last car as it left the grounds. Baba left early in the morning, and after all had gone, we went inside and did all the cleaning up. That was it for Guruprasad in 1968.

Baba returned to Meherazad, and in Meherazad also, although He was no longer in seclusion, all the restrictions were still in place. Baba required some time for recuperation and had to give some finishing touches to His great work.

Baba's body began to develop spasms, and Goher was quite anxious about it. One day Goher wanted some medicines, and she sent word to Adi to phone me at Poona to get them urgently for Baba. I rushed to a drug store and cycled hurriedly to the bus stand. A bus was just leaving for Ahmednagar. I stopped it and asked the driver to please take the packet to Ahmednagar. I didn't know him, and he was very surprised by me. He asked what he was supposed to do with it.

I said, "Just carry it to the Ahmednagar bus stand, and somebody will come to collect it from you." I took down his name and the registration number of the bus, and he left with the parcel. Then I rushed back to the office, made an urgent call to Adi, and I told him to send a boy to

meet the bus. I told him that the bus was stopping in 'Nagar, but it would be going on to another station, so if it should leave 'Nagar without being met, the parcel would be lost.

All ended well. The boy found the driver, got the parcel, and he rushed to Meherazad, so literally within four or five hours of Goher's request, the medicine reached Meherazad. All there were very surprised—it was all Baba's Grace that we could get such things done.

Meanwhile Baba was formulating plans for a *darshan* program to take place after the conclusion of His seclusion work. By this time there was tremendous impatience on the part of His lovers all over the world to have Baba's *darshan*, especially amongst the Westerners for whom Baba had put off giving His blessing year after year since the 1962 East-West Gathering. So there was great expectancy, and Baba had told us quietly, "Let us now start formulating plans..." for the "Great *Darshan*" that was to follow His seclusion.

Baba said that He would like to give *darshan* from 2:00 to 5:00 p.m. daily at 'Nagar! The Civil Hospital had just recently been constructed, so Sarosh, being the mayor of Ahmednagar, got permission for the Westerners to be accommodated there. It was not yet ready to go into operation as a hospital, so that was possible. Various other sites were procured for the Easterners who were going to come for the *darshan*.

When a lot of requests for attending the *darshan* started pouring in, the *mandali* realized that it would be impractical to hold the program in 'Nagar. Baba then decided to move the venue to Poona and to hold the *darshan* in the central hall at Guruprasad during the months of April, May and June, the summer months in Poona. A circular was drafted, and He said, "I do not want to give any public *darshan*. It should be *darshan* only for My lovers and those who would love Me. Only after I break My Silence will there be *darshan* for the world at large."

Dates were being set for different groups, including Andhra, Hamirpur, Gujarat and other Eastern states. Baba also wanted the Westerners to come in groups so that there wouldn't be too many people at once. He

wanted a restriction on numbers because the hall couldn't accommodate more than a few hundred people at a time. He did not want an outdoor *pandal* for this program, as had been the case for the East-West Gathering, but rather one small gathering inside Guruprasad at a time. The Westerners were to be given four days, I think, but there was a circular giving out all the details.

I had been corresponding with Eruch, who was working with Francis on the plans. Periodically those plans would be read out to Baba. Eruch suggested, "Baba, giving *darshan* in the afternoon to Westerners and Easterners together would be too much. Why not have Westerners in the morning as we did in the East-West Gathering?"

Baba made a wry face and said, "No, in the mornings I feel drowsy, not up to the mark."

Eruch flared up, saying "But Baba, just imagine— how is it possible that You could be giving *darshan* to so many together in the afternoons?!"

Baba said, "All right, all right, let there be *darshan* in the mornings for the Westerners." The discussions were quite heated. Baba was quite serious about the whole thing, but little did we know that He would indeed give *darshan* but hardly in the manner that we expected.

The plans were finalized around October, and I remember that on Eruch's, Meherjee's and Homai's birthday—13th October—a workers' meeting was called. Volunteers from Poona, Bombay and Ahmednagar—all those who would help with the program—were called for a meeting at Meherazad, and there Baba laid out His plan for the Great *Darshan*.

Subhash Pokale, a budding journalist from Poona, saw Baba for the first and only time in his life during that meeting. He would write Baba articles for the English and Marathi newspapers, and he helped in spreading Baba's Name far and wide in the country because those newspapers had a wide circulation all over India.

At that time some of the Poona Baba-lovers got to see Baba again. Baba's seclusion work had ended, but He was still very strict. He said

that nobody should step on the carpet that was spread before Him, that they should skirt the carpet and simply sit in the hall, and that nobody should touch Him.

Baba declared that He had completed His seclusion work 100% to His satisfaction and that He was ready to give *darshan* once He had enough time for His health to recover.

The “Great *Darshan*” would be held in 1969 from 10th April to 10th June, and it would be only for His lovers. When His Manifestation would take place, He said, the public would have His *darshan* nonstop.

In the 1960s Baba had not given many public *darshans*. The public had not been invited in 1965—that *darshan* period had mostly been for Baba’s lovers from different parts of India. The 1962 East-West Gathering was the same. Baba kept only one day available to the public then. So, apart from that and the open *darshan* on the first anniversary of the Poona Centre in 1965, there had been no public *darshans*.

Baba passed out the circular detailing the proposed *darshan* and asked for suggestions. Some useful discussions took place as those present digested Baba’s plan.

Because it was Meherjee’s birthday, Baba let Meherjee come to Him and kiss His hand after the meeting was over, and He quickly asked him how everything was at home and how his business was going. He was the only one allowed to approach Baba during the meeting. During those moments Meherjee was able to say quietly, “Baba, for the first time my business has turned the corner, and now I see light at the end of the tunnel.”

Baba said that His Nazar would be on the business and that he would prosper. “Have no fear,” He said. And indeed, Meherjee’s business did prosper. Later on I became associated with his company, and I saw how beautifully his business progressed. Baba also inquired whether Meherjee’s daughter, Pervin—who had recently got married—was pregnant. When He was told that the couple was taking precautions so that they could do family planning, Baba gestured, “Tell them to hurry

up, hurry up!” It was, of course, His *Leela* that in spite of their family planning measures, Pervin conceived very soon after.

Kishan Chand Gajwani from Bombay was at the meeting that day, and remarkably, after that meeting he died within three days of returning home. He was quite aged, but he was hale and hearty at the meeting. He led such a pure life that he was quite healthy and fresh-looking. Baba once asked him, “Do you sleep at night?”

He said, “Yes, Baba, I have no problem falling asleep, but I sleep for only three hours.”

Baba asked, “How come?”

He replied, “Baba, I meditate on You up to 12:00 midnight, and then I fall asleep. At 3:00 a.m. I wake up, and then again I start meditating on You.” After that early morning meditation he would attend to his flourishing business. Gajwani was very wealthy and supported Baba’s work financially—he had helped set up the Bombay Centre with the assistance of Sorabji Siganporia. We wish now they had taken a bigger place, though, as the group has gotten so large.

We all returned home after the meeting was over, and preparations were put into action immediately because there wasn’t much time. The Great *Darshan* would be a big affair and require much planning and preparation—Baba said that the East-West Gathering and other meetings would be nothing compared to what would happen now, because there was great fervor all over the world for Baba’s *darshan*.

Meherjee was in charge of handling all the replies from the foreigners. Nine charter flights had been booked, and we thought that more would likely be required. There was great consternation everywhere. How would we accommodate all those people? What would happen?

I remember that it was almost November when my uncle Meherjeemama, the eldest in our family, suddenly took ill. He had some urinary problems,

and he was admitted to the hospital. The doctors wanted to do some surgical intervention because his urine had ceased flowing. The doctors supposed that his life was nearing its end.

Dr. Brieseman at Booth Hospital was rather anxious about Meherjeemama's health, and he was not sure whether to conduct a surgical intervention or not. Foreseeing that surgery might be necessary, he was getting Meherjeemama's blood checked in anticipation of it. Through those tests it was found that he was highly anemic, so much so that an immediate blood transfusion was necessary. Accordingly he was given a transfusion and was being made ready in the event that surgery might be necessary.

All this news came to us, and my mother was very anxious. She asked me to take her to 'Nagar, so we boarded a bus, came to the family home at Akbar Press, and from there—it was 21st November, I think, the day before my birthday—we went to Booth Hospital to see how my uncle was.

When we arrived we found Meherjeemama lying in bed, looking surprising well and quite cheerful. Adi Sr. was also there, having come to inquire about him. I asked Adi to inform Eruch that we had just arrived, because I was supposed to be in Poona in case there should be any errands from Meherazad that needed urgent attention. Baba's health was not good, and such errands were arising more and more frequently. During those later days medicines would very often be called for from Meherazad, and, as with the instance I described when I managed to send a packet by way of a public bus driver, I would have to rush to send them by the earliest conveyance possible for Baba.

The next day, while I was at Akbar Press, a car arrived with the message that Baba was calling me. It was my birthday, and I thought that that might be the reason why He was doing so. The car took me the short distance to Khushru Quarters where Adi stayed, and when we got there I found that Baba was seated in a car near Adi's office. I was asked to get into the car with Baba, and I did, sitting next to Baba on the front seat. Then we drove all the way to Meherazad.

Sitting in His chair in Mandali Hall, Baba looked at me askance and asked, “Why did you come to Ahmednagar?”

I told Him that Mumma and I had come the previous day to see Meherjeemama, who was sick in the hospital.

Baba rejoined, “You came without My permission? How is it that you came?”

I explained the emergency nature of the situation, and Baba heard it all and then said, “Okay, let Mumma stay, but you should return tomorrow and be in Poona.”

After I had explained about Meherjeemama’s blood transfusion, Baba asked me, “How do I look?” I just spontaneously said, “Baba, You look very pale.” That was the first time that I had seen Baba look so pale and haggard, much more so than even the time prior to the East-West Gathering when His health was so low. Baba then turned to the *mandali* and said, “See, he’s finding Me pale.”

Eruch and Pendu were there, and they piped in, “Yes, Baba, we are constantly telling You that You are neglecting Your nourishment and Your health. See now, Meherwan is also saying this. Listen to what he is saying.”

Baba said, “Why don’t they give *Me* a transfusion? I am so weak—don’t *I* require a blood transfusion?” It was a seemingly casual remark. Eruch and the others said, “Baba, why would You need a transfusion?” Nobody took it very seriously.

To change the topic Baba said, “Today is Meherwan’s birthday. Call for some treat from Goher.” Goher brought a packet of chocolates, and Baba, with His own hands, gave it to me, a present for my birthday, and He asked me to kiss Him on both His cheeks. That was it. And then, of course, I left.

Since Baba had ordered me to leave Ahmednagar and return home to Poona, I did so the next day. Only a few days later Baba’s health began to cause even greater concern. Every Thursday Dr. Grant, as an honorary

visiting specialist from Poona, used to pay weekly visits to Booth Hospital in Ahmednagar, and he would take rounds there with Dr. Brieseman. On one of those visits Dr. Goher called him to Meherazad to examine Baba, and when he did, he asked for a blood sample. When it was analyzed they found that Baba was highly anemic, and he recommended that Baba have an immediate blood transfusion.

There was a lot of dillydallying, but finally Baba said that it should be done. Dr. Grant had a blood bank of his own in Poona. He had a great fetish for dieting, and he made Baba diet also. Najamai would curse him like anything because he would create so many restrictions in Baba's diet—no fat, no proteins, and so on, and Baba was getting weaker and weaker.

Dr. Grant came to Meherazad to give Baba the transfusion in mid-December, and he brought properly matched blood. Typically, despite His poor health, Baba gave a beautiful discourse to Dr. Grant. Meherjee, who had brought Dr. Grant in his car, told us about the whole thing. Baba spoke to Dr. Grant about the troubled condition of the world and how the height of hypocrisy had been reached, and Baba stated that His suffering was to alleviate all the evil that was taking place in the world. He said that although scientific progress is necessary and must be maintained, at the same time spiritual progress must accompany it. That was Baba's work, He said—to bring everything to its highest level. Dr. Grant was the lucky recipient of that beautiful discourse.

It seems that every time Dr. Grant would come to see Baba, usually at Goher's desperate requests, Baba would look radiant and in good health, and before he could examine Baba, Baba would start asking *him* questions such as, "How is *your* health? What diet do you take? You should eat this, or you should have that...", all as if Baba were the doctor and Grant were the patient.

Dr. Grant would end up telling Baba about the things he was dealing with—all the trouble he had with his work and otherwise—completely forgetting about Baba, and poor Goher would be beside herself, although she knew Baba was doing all this purposely. The moment Grant would

leave Baba would once more revert to His extremely weak and fragile state, and this drama would faithfully be re-enacted whenever Dr. Grant would be called.

We don't know who that lucky man was who gave his blood to Baba, nor did the man who donated know anything about his great good fortune. That was one of the games Baba played. There was some talk about whether the Avatar could take blood from another person, and Baba said it had nothing to do with His Avatarhood. It was an unpleasant thing, but it had to be done. Baba never spared Himself any suffering in this Advent.

After I returned to Poona, my mother stayed on at Akbar Press, helping with the nursing, taking turns with Banumasi, my other aunt. They alternated in taking care of Meherjeemama while he was in the hospital.

Mumma was there for quite a few days, but after about a fortnight or so Baba asked my mother to go home, telling her that Baba's *Nazar* would be on Meherjeemama. Very soon thereafter Meherjeemama's urinary tract blockage cleared up naturally without any need for an operation, so he was saved the stress of surgery and its complications. With that positive development he was out of the hospital very soon afterwards.

The "seclusion" and "exclusion" were over, and this had been a period of recuperation. Baba was allowing people who were called for work to come to see Him at Meherazad, so overall there was more freedom.

Baba had taken me to task for coming to Booth Hospital because we had instructions from Baba that we should not leave Poona without His specific orders, and if we were to leave, we were to inform Him immediately. It had been a lapse on our part, which He had to point out.

During my stay at Meherazad in 1968, Baba and Adi Jr. were busy making plans for the wedding of Adi's son, Dara. After I left in November, preparations for the wedding were in full swing.

Despite Baba's ill health He was taking great interest in calling certain people, not calling certain other ones, and always changing the list of invitees for the wedding celebration, usually adding more names. Baba was taking more interest in that wedding than anyone else, including the parents on both sides, probably to divert everyone's attention from His health. Despite His very critical health, all those preparations were going on.

Baba decided that the function should be held on the 22nd and 23rd of December, 1968, with the 22nd to be celebrated as Mehera's birthday. That's the reason why Mehera's birthday is now celebrated on 22nd December. The wedding reception was to be the next day.

Baba's condition was getting more and more serious, and Goher persuaded Baba to allow her to consult Dr. Grant yet again. After much coaxing Baba agreed, and Meherjee was scheduled to bring Dr. Grant to Meherazad to check on Baba. A day before the program at Meherazad Baba had another blood transfusion, the second. When I came to attend, I was to bring the latest report of Baba's blood and urea count from Dr. Grant in Poona.

Manu, Mumma and I came to 'Nagar with the Kerawalla family, and we all stayed at Akbar Press. On the 22nd we accompanied the party of about two hundred people that left for Meherazad in several buses. We had not seen that number of people at Meherazad since the original housewarming for the estate in 1947 or 1948.

On the 22nd there was a big affair. Dara and Amrit got engaged that day, exchanging engagement rings and garlanding each other before Baba. Mehera's birthday cake was cut before Baba, and Baba distributed it as *prasad*.

At that time there was also the *navjote* ceremony of four little kids—Meherrukh, who was tiny at that time, as small as her kids are now, and Rayomand—Hoshang and Havovi Dadachanji's children—Dolly Dastur's niece, Mehernaz, and Dara Dadachanji's son, Nozer. The *navjote* was the "thread ceremony" that initiated them into the Zoroastrian faith.

Baba had been very insistent that any children who were ready for their *navjotes* be brought before Him so that He could perform them Himself. Baba had sent a message three times asking if we wanted to get Dolly's *navjote*—Roshan and Sam Kerawalla's younger daughter—done too, but Banumasi, in her ignorance of what was to come, replied that Dolly was still too young for the ceremony! As always on such occasions, Baba's message on rites, rituals and ceremonies was read out to the children, to the effect that "religious ceremonies, instead of freeing one from *Maya*, keep one firmly bound to it. I have come to make people do away with ceremonies. God can be attained only through love. Therefore love Me more and more until you know Who I am!" It's a very beautiful message that Baba used to give out on those occasions.

After the *navjote* ceremonies there was a nice dance program. Sarosh and Viloo's granddaughter, Homai, was about five or six years old at the time, and she gave a very good classical dance performance in the *Bharatanatyam* style. I remember that there was meant to be a recording of background music for her performance, but unfortunately the music system failed just as she was starting to dance, so her mother, Gulnar, clapped to keep time, and Homai danced just to that.

After the dance was over and everybody applauded the little girl, Elcha, Kumar and others were called up, and Kaka Baria was called to the stage. They sang a song, and Kaka sang too. Kaka, of course, had lost his speech altogether, so he was just ranting away some unintelligible sounds, and everyone was clapping in unison, and Baba had a good laugh at all this as did the whole audience. It was a very funny spectacle.

After that there was another song by Baba's twin nephews, Sohrab and Rustom, with their friend Bejan accompanying them. They sang "There's a Hole in the Bucket" with different voices and acting out the various scenes that the song describes, and it was quite hilarious and Baba enjoyed the whole thing. The songs added a little lightness to the atmosphere, which we appreciated because we were all quite tense over Baba's health at that time.

Even as these functions were going on, Baba's health was not at all good. Toward the end Baba wanted everybody to form a queue and file past Him. Nobody was to greet Him, but rather everyone was asked just to fold their hands and file past. I was asked to speed up the whole thing and make sure no one tarried before Baba because He was finding it difficult even to sit on the chair there.

Perhaps Baba's suffering wasn't evident to all the people there, but the close ones who knew Baba saw that He was undergoing great hardship despite putting on a very bright face. We could see that He was not well, and we were very concerned. That was Baba's last "official" appearance in this Advent.

Naosherwan Nalavala was due to arrive on the 23rd, but there was nobody to receive him at the station and bring him to Meherazad. When I came to Meherazad the next day, Eruch said, "You should go back and receive Naosherwan and bring him here quickly before Baba retires." So I rushed back in the Jeep with Kutumba Sastri's son, Bhaskar, driving to the railway station. I was accompanying him because he didn't know who Naosherwan was and wouldn't be able to identify him, and as a consequence I missed the whole program of the second day. The train was very late—instead of coming at 7:30 in the morning, it arrived at 11:30.

As soon as Naosherwan got down from the train we rushed to Meherazad. By that time the function was all over, and Baba had retired to His bedroom. We were directed to go into the bedroom, and Baba asked why there had been a delay. Naosherwan explained that his train had been very late. Baba then asked each of us to come over to Him and give Him a kiss on each of His cheeks, which we did. Before we departed I remember Baba saying, "Remember, I am God!" We left, and that was my last *darshan* of Baba in the body—noontime on December 23rd, 1968. That would be the last physical *darshan* of Avatar Meher Baba for me.

Before I departed Baba had gestured that since I was there, I should stay in the room with Him for a while longer, but I said that the buses were

going back to 'Nagar and that I might as well go back with them. I was not fated to stay. Even at that time it had not occurred to me that Baba was reaching the end of His stay with us.



Chapter Forty:

1969

Baba was clearly getting weaker. We had seen His physical body in quite a frail state before, but we never thought that He was going to drop His body. It appeared to us that this time was merely a phase of intense seclusion work that was taking a particular toll on His body, and that after the work was done and He had sufficient rest, Baba would be back to His normal health.

For me, then, His final decline was a complete surprise, though towards the last few days of His earthly life we would get premonitions. We had uneasy feelings, but we would just brush them aside as something we shouldn't give much attention to. But Baba's health was really very bad in the last few months. It was constantly in the back of my mind and weighed very heavily upon me. I wasn't even at Meherazad, but I still felt the pressure.

Earlier, when I had been with Baba, one time He vomited and made a gesture, "I feel like I'm going to die." I just shook my head, "No, Baba." We never thought that Baba would just slip away like that. I never imagined that I would have to live past the end of His life. But I remember that Baba would say, "I'm now going to pass away. I'm fed up." Towards the end He was getting more and more tired, and the burden was

becoming unbearable, but somehow we thought it might be a passing phase. That was the hope that we nurtured.

Sarosh's daughter, Gulnar, and her husband, Hirji Adenwalla, had come for the wedding and had stayed on afterwards. About two weeks after the program at Meherazad, Hirji, who was a medical doctor, came to Meherazad.

He had heard that Baba's blood test results showed a very high level of urea, but when he had asked whether there was any telltale odor about Baba's person, he had been told that there was not. He found it impossible to believe that there could exist such a high level of urea in the blood without the usual accompanying odor. He also thought that such a level would inevitably result in impaired mental functioning, as it had with Kaka, and he asked Eruch about Baba's mental state. Eruch had responded, "We don't find anything abnormal."

Hirji had said, "You needn't try to hide these things from me. I'm a doctor. Let me know exactly what the situation is."

So Eruch got a little peeved and said, "If you think that I am hiding something, let's go and you can see for yourself."

Hirji responded, "But with that level of urea in the bloodstream, nobody's mental responses can be normal, so you are either trying to mislead me or somehow trying to cover things up."

So Eruch went inside and asked Baba's permission to bring Hirji in, and then they both went into Baba's room. When they went inside, Hirji couldn't believe what he saw. Baba looked so well!

Hirji started talking to Baba, but Eruch noticed that while doing so he was also trying to get close to Baba's body and was sniffing about, trying to ascertain whether there was any ureic odor. Within no time Baba was giving him replies and discourses on spiritual matters, to the point that Hirji completely forgot the purpose of his visit—he became completely absorbed in what Baba was saying. After a while he realized what was happening, and he was amazed that with that concentration of urea,

Baba was able to give deep spiritual discourses. That incident made him understand with certainty that Baba was no ordinary person.

After that Hirji became very close to Baba, although it was rather late. Of course he had had great respect for Baba in earlier times as well, but now his heart was drawn close to Baba. Baba must have done some work within him that turned the key.

Not long after that I received a phone message that Baba's condition was causing ever greater concern and that "We are thinking of shifting Baba to Guruprasad, and it would be very imminent." I was told to rush to Guruprasad and start making preparations there for the party to come and stay.

I went to Guruprasad and got the manager to start cleaning up the place, but very soon thereafter I received a letter from Eruch saying that Baba had decided not to come to Guruprasad, so I shouldn't make any more preparations but await further messages. Eruch did say, however, to be on the alert and to expect them on short notice. So for the time being Baba's coming was shelved.

Towards the last week of January, 1969, again I received a message from Eruch that Baba is now relenting and saying that "It is quite troublesome for Drs. Ginde and Grant to be brought to Meherazad," and, "I think we will shift to Guruprasad. When can that be arranged?"

Eruch said, "Immediately, Baba. If You give us the signal, we can go straightaway. I'll phone Meherwan right now."

Baba said, "Give Me some time. I'll think about it." The next day, though, Baba cancelled the whole idea of shifting to Poona.

The *mandali* had tried to convince Baba to come to Guruprasad previously, but Baba had resisted. Now, given the turn in His health, they were becoming adamant. Baba finally said, "If you want Me to drop My body now, take Me to Poona! My condition has no medical grounds at all. It is purely due to the strain of My work. Do not call the doctors again until I tell you!"

We were all on tenterhooks because news kept coming of Baba's blood reports that indicated the severity of the situation. The high urea content was the main cause of concern. The hemoglobin content had improved because of the blood transfusions.

The days dragged on, and Baba's blood urea kept getting worse. I received several letters from Eruch during the last few days of Baba's physical life. In one of those letters, I think dated 23rd January, Baba was passing through a very acute phase of suffering. The previous day He had created a little *bhajan* on the spur of the moment, and the refrain was, "Sai Baba, Babajan, Meher Baba *che Bhagwan*." "*Che*" means "is" in Gujarati.

Baba told Eruch to repeat it to Kaka and to make Kaka sing it. Kaka started to shout, and he brought out such funny sounds that even the *mandali* burst out laughing, and Baba was laughing so much that Eruch wrote that Baba had never laughed so heartily. Two or three days later Baba again made Kaka go through this singing business, and again Baba laughed. That was the last week of Baba's physical existence, and His humor was there till the very end.

As I have said before, Kaka couldn't express himself following his bout with uremia, and he must have been terribly frustrated, but he also would start laughing when Baba would laugh. If I were there, Kaka would wink at me to indicate that he was enjoying the laughter at his own expense. He saw that he was a source of amusement to Baba and that pleased him. That was his greatness too, to give Baba enjoyment even at the cost of himself.

In another letter Eruch mentioned that Baba had given permission to Dr. Grant to come to Meherazad to examine Him on the 30th, which was a Thursday. Friday was the last day of the month of January, the 31st. Meherjee was to bring Dr. Grant with him from Poona. Then in a P.S. Eruch wrote, "Meherwan, Baba gives you permission to come to Meherazad whenever you are free, and Baba has no objection to your coming here (with Meherjee and Dr. Grant)."

Meherjee came to see me and he said, "Look, when I went last time, Baba told me that the next time I come with Dr. Grant I should bring you to Meherazad also, so you have to come." I told Meherjee that I wouldn't come. I said that I felt that it would be a great strain on Baba, and if I went He would have to talk to me, and His condition was so weak that I didn't want to place that burden on Him. Why give Him such needless bother? So I refused to go. Meherjee and Dr. Grant did go on the 30th, and the first thing Baba asked Meherjee was "Did you bring Meherwan?" His sign for me was "little brother," as I am the little brother of Eruch.

But I wasn't there. I regret that decision to this day. I never knew what was to follow.

Years earlier Baba would spend the night in Pendu's room after His seclusion work was finished. Eruch would sit outside Baba's room and keep watch. One night he was keeping watch when he suddenly saw a snake come slithering by and enter through the space beneath the door. It was a tiny little snake. Eruch had been ordered not to move or to make any disturbance, but what could he do? The snake was going inside, and in the dark he couldn't make out whether the snake was a poisonous kind or not.

Eruch placed his flashlight on the tail of the snake, and it started to turn around. In the meantime Baba clapped, and Eruch was ordered to go inside immediately, but if he did, the snake would be released and also get inside. So he tarried a few seconds, continuing to trap the snake, and when it emerged he bashed its head and then entered.

Baba was clapping away furiously. When Eruch entered Baba said, "What kept you? Didn't you hear My clapping?"

Eruch said, "Yes, Baba, but," and he described what had happened and why he had delayed responding to Baba's summons.

"So what if the snake was there? Wasn't My order more important?"

Eruch, of course, had been concerned that the snake would cause harm to Baba, but see what Baba had to say. In Baba's game there is always a conflict between the orders we receive and our own reasoning. That is how it is.

So Eruch's slightest slackness hurt Baba. To love Him means to be extremely attentive to His every wish and constantly to divert our attention from ourselves to Him. That is the real meditation—constant concentration upon Baba's wishes. That was the meditation all life long for the *mandali*. Their spontaneous meditation was for them to be concentrated upon Baba all twenty-four hours per day, every day of their lives.

Baba had to take great pains to see that they did just that. It was a game He had to play. I missed the opportunity of a lifetime to be with Him again, but I didn't go, and the 30th came and passed. Eruch was writing to us at Bindra House a daily report of Baba's condition, so we knew what was happening. Unfortunately, I didn't keep most of those letters. Only the last few were preserved, and the rest were destroyed.



Chapter Forty-one:

Baba Drops His Body

We now come to the last day, 31st January 1969. In the afternoon the phone rang, and Meherjee's daughter, Pervin, was on the line. She said that she had just received word from Adi's office that Baba had passed away. When I heard that I couldn't make out what she was saying. So I asked her to repeat herself. She said, "Yes, that's what I heard. Baba has passed away this afternoon, and they have taken His body to Meherabad to be put into the Tomb there. That is the news that I have received."

I was stunned into silence. I didn't know how to respond. I just put down the phone and went out of the office to collect my thoughts. I didn't know what to do next. I was supposed to try to pass this news on to the Poona people as much as possible. First I went to my boss and told him what had happened, and I said "I have to go—please allow me leave for a few days. I cannot tell you how many days it will be."

He was quite sympathetic and said, "You can go right away. Have no concern about anything here."

I didn't know where to go first, but Baba's house was closest to my office, just a couple of minutes cycling distance, so I rushed down there

and entered Baba House. Beheram was the only person there, sitting alone by himself.

He looked up and said, “Yes? What is it?”

I just blurted out what had happened. I didn’t know what to say, and I just said, “Baba has dropped His body and has just passed away.” The news was such a shock to Beheram that he began to bang his head with his hands and started to weep loudly. This then caused me to cry there. I didn’t know what to do. I tried to console Beheram as much as possible. I said, “Look, you must be brave now. The thing is we have to do something—to get prepared and go to ’Nagar as soon as possible. So collect yourself and try to think about going to ’Nagar as quickly as possible,” because that suggestion had been part of the message I had received. So saying, I had to leave to carry the message elsewhere.

The next nearest place was Viloo House, where my cousin, Roshan Kerawalla, and her children were staying, as well as her brother-in-law, Dadi Kerawalla, who had recently returned from America after earning his doctorate there. I wanted to go next to give the message there. While I was on my way, however, I ran into Beheram’s wife, Perin. This time I was more discreet, and I told Perinmai, “Come, I have to give you some important news.” She followed me into Viloo House, where Dolly Bastani also happened to be visiting with Roshan.

In a rather gentle way I broke the news. “Look,” I said, “a phone message has come that Baba was not feeling very well the last few days.” I prolonged the whole thing a bit, and then I finally said, “Baba has now passed away.”

They were all stunned to hear that. Again I said, “Yes, Baba has dropped His body. Now we all have to get ready to leave for ’Nagar, so please get prepared and be practical about the whole thing.”

So saying, I left Viloo House and went home. Mumma and Manu were there, and they were naturally surprised to see me home so soon from the office. I said, “I have to tell you something.” I took them inside and very gently tried to break the news. Like me, they couldn’t believe what

had happened. Mumma was distraught, and Manu was totally dumbfounded. It was something that nobody had expected. Mumma and Manu started to move here and there without any purpose. They went to Baba's photo and started to pray. I said, "Now let's be practical. We have to leave as early as possible. Start collecting your belongings and pack up, because Baba's body has to be interred tomorrow." That was the message that was sent out first, which caused a lot of confusion later.

I had asked Pervin where her father, Meherjee, was. She said that he had returned from Meherazad the day before, and that he had gone to Bombay to fly to Delhi the following day. "We are not expecting him back any time soon." I was dismayed.

Next, the Poona Centre had to be informed. I must have phoned and informed Ramakrishnan. He and Jalbhai both rushed over to Bindra House while we were still there. They wanted to know what had happened, but all I knew was that short message that had been conveyed to me by Pervin. "Everyone should go to Meherabad"—that had been part of the message. I said, "You all should quickly get ready to leave soon," and so they left.

The landlady, Mrs. Bindra, sent her servant to say that there was a phone call for me on her line, so I rushed up to their flat. It was Meherjee. I asked where he was phoning me from, and he said he was at home. I said, "You didn't go to Delhi?"

He responded, "No. You know, I had a sort of premonition not to go to Delhi. I took the first train and came back." He continued, "Look, I am going now to 'Nagar. You all be ready. I'll be there in about an hour's time, so get packed and be ready, and I'll bring the three of you from Bindra House with me." I rushed down and told my family to get ready, and we threw some spare clothes and daily necessities into a bag, packed up, and locked the house.

In the meantime Minoo Bharucha, who later did the electrification work for Meherabad and Meherazad, had come from Nasik. He used to live in a house on Main Street, or Mahatma Gandhi Road as it is now known,

and He came to Bindra House for a visit just at that time. He said, “I have a car, and I can give some of you a lift there.”

I said, “Look, my cousins are there—Dadi, Roshan, and Mehera and Dolly. Can you give them a lift?”

He said, “Most willingly,” so they came in Minoo’s very old car. They had some car trouble along the way, but they made it. Mumma, myself and Manu, together with Meherjee and his daughter Pervin, all went in Meherjee’s car. It was about 7:30 p.m. in the evening when we finally locked up and left for ‘Nagar.

It was a journey in the darkness, and it is a certainty to say that there was darkness within and without. Meherjee kept saying, “What has Baba done? What is this He has done?” He was also taken totally by surprise. We said nothing, and he kept going on like that. Manu and Mumma were quietly sobbing in the back, disconsolate. Nothing could be done.

We reached Meherabad at about 10:00 or 10:30 at night. We went first to lower Meherabad to the Mandali Hall there. It was all very dark, with no electric lights. Padri was there, and he came with a little lantern. We got a brief explanation of what had happened from him.

Padri had earlier been called to Meherazad, so all the *mandali* were with Baba on that day. Eruch had also written a letter that we received later when we went back to Bindra House.

Padri told us that before he left Meherabad he had gone to meet Mohammed the *mast* to tell him that he was going to Meherazad. To Padri’s surprise Mohammed responded, “*Dada laa bhetaylaa jaato*,” which means “I’m going to meet *Dada*” in his native Marathi language. Mohammed always called Baba “*Dada*,” which means “big brother.” Mohammed said, “*Kuthe jaatey, Dada aaj ithe yenaar*.” (“Where are you going? *Dada* is coming *here* today!”) Padri couldn’t understand what Mohammed was trying to tell him and left it at that.

When Padri got to Meherazad, Baba was very restless and was having constant spasms. Each time He had a spasm Baba’s entire body would

lift off the bed several inches, and the *mandali* would have to hold Him down. The slightest movement on His part brought on a spasm. Baba asked for some homeopathic medicine, and just before He dropped His body He joked, “Your homeopathic medicine is no good,” or something to that effect, to which Padri replied that there still remained a dose to be taken. Earlier in the month of January, by the way, Padri had told Baba that it was now time to “close the shop,” and Baba replied that, on the contrary, it was now time for the shop to open!

Padri told us that Baba experienced one big final spasm and stopped breathing. Eruch tried to give him artificial respiration, and he worked at it until he himself collapsed on the floor. For all his efforts he couldn't revive Baba.

We could hear the sound of a drum while we were down in lower Meherabad, but otherwise it was completely dark and there was no movement. It was a full moon night, which was a great help for at least a week of our stay there.

We went up the Hill. As we were climbing it was all still and silent but for the wailing sound of a villager singing on top of the Hill, the sounds of which wafted down to us. We wondered why it was so quiet—not a sound.

When we arrived at the top of the Hill, it was all very dark, and no one was there except my aunt Banumasi and my cousin Meheru Mehta. There was a platform just outside of the Tomb. That was the only place one could sit up there—there was no *Sabha Mandap* at the time. The singer we had heard while walking up was sitting under a *neem* sapling that is now the large *neem* tree outside of the *Samadhi*. The area was quite barren and open as there were hardly any trees there at that time.

We were among the very first to arrive. It was us, my aunt, Chhagan Master, and one or two others. Someone brought a lantern and took us into the Tomb. There in the dim light was Baba's body. We could just make out His face. The rest of His body was wrapped up in cloth and shawls. It looked as if He were in a deep sleep, with a far-away, serene look on His face. He looked very fresh. We could barely make Him out

in the dim light. We had *darshan* of Baba there for some time, and then left. There was nothing we could do.

Later we learned that Eruch had persuaded the women to leave the place and return to Meherazad. They agreed very reluctantly. Eruch thought that they must have a break from the day's events.

We also learned that when the *mandali* had first brought Baba's body to Meherabad, it had rested in His cabin—the Tin Cabin adjacent to the *Samadhi*—as Padri was not quite finished preparing the Tomb.

After Baba had dropped His body, Padri immediately returned to Meherabad to get the Tomb ready to receive Baba's body, and it was only then that he realized the significance of Mohammed's words—“*Dada* is coming to Meherabad today!” So many signs, and so little comprehension!

On reaching the Tomb Padri took out the *farsi* and the dirt from the crypt and then put a plank over the bottom of the crypt on which Baba's body could rest. Meanwhile Donkin realized that they would need ice to preserve Baba's body, so he set off in his car with Sheela Kalchuri in a search for it.

It turned out that there was no ice available anywhere in Ahmednagar. There had at one time been an ice factory, but it was now closed. So Donkin headed out onto the Nagar-Poona road, planning on getting ice from Poona. Just outside of the Ahmednagar city limits, however, he noticed a big open lorry full of slabs of ice. On making inquiries about it Donkin found out that someone in 'Nagar had ordered the ice but then had cancelled the order!

The lorry driver was in a quandary as to what to do with all that ice, whereupon Donkin immediately agreed to purchase the whole consignment and got the lorry driver to follow him to Meherabad, hardly able to believe in this miraculous providence! The truck dropped off all the ice just beside the *Samadhi*, at the spot where Mehera's grave is now situated.

In the meantime Eruch had put some of the *farsi* under the plank so that Baba's head would be slightly raised.

Mansari was there, and I think my mother and Manu stayed with her, but perhaps they went back to Akbar Press. Meherjee and I went down the Hill, and Padri gave us each a mattress to sleep on in Mandali Hall. We just lay there, biding our time. There was a lone singer and a solitary drummer accompanying him up on the Hill, and he had composed a long song on Baba's life called "*Meher a chi Meherabad*." It had a recurring line with the words "Baba's Meherabad." It was a sad tune, adding to our misery. It was as if our whole life had ended.

Meheru's brother, Falu, arrived at about 2:00 a.m. or so, and we told him what we knew and he went up the Hill. Minoo Bharucha, his wife and the Kerawalla family arrived soon after that and also went up the Hill to take Baba's *darshan*. We soon followed—it was probably around 4:00 a.m. when we climbed back up the Hill.

At about 8:00 a.m. the women *mandali* came back from Meherazad with Eruch. They went into the *Samadhi* and said Baba's prayers and sang *arti*. We could see the anguish on the faces of the women. Mehera was totally disconsolate, and Mani was supporting her and giving her encouragement to bear the ordeal. She was devastated, of course—no question about it.

On their way from Meherazad that morning, by the way, Mehera and the ladies passed by Shridhar Kelkar, his wife Perviz, and Dinamai Talati, who were coming towards Meherabad in a *tonga*. Even in her extreme grief, Shridhar recalls, Mehera stopped the car and got Dinamai to get in with them. Such was her concern for Baba's dear ones.

After prayers and *arti* the women came out of the *Samadhi* and went into the East Room. A little time later people gathered around, and there was considerable discussion about covering Baba's body.

Prior to Baba's dropping the body, Ram Ginde had received a message that Baba wanted to see him on the 31st. He had started from Bombay

early on that Friday morning, and he went first to Dr. Grant's clinic in Poona to meet with him on the way.

On the morning of the 31st Baba was constantly asking, "Has Ram arrived?" Baba wanted Ginde to examine Him and was waiting for him. But Dr. Grant delayed him saying, "What's the hurry now? When I went there Baba Himself said 'My time has come,' and I think He will very soon pass away."

Ram later said that he was a fool to visit Dr. Grant en route because he wasted so much time. He didn't know how dire the situation was at Meherazad at the time, and he later reproached himself for going to Grant's place at all. When he came to the Trust compound en route to Meherazad, he had a great urge to pass a motion, and in so doing he had his second major heart attack there. Despite that, and despite that he knew he was having a heart attack, his love for Baba was so great that he quickly passed the motion and raced off to Meherazad. He arrived just minutes after Baba had passed away.

So Ginde was present when Baba's body was taken to Meherabad, and when he was asked whether they could keep the body uncovered, Ginde said that he thought that it was not advisable to postpone interment for more than a few hours. He said that it should be covered up very soon, and the *mandali* were preparing to do that.

In the meantime Sarosh arrived, and when he heard what was going on he started to shout. He said, "Look, the doctors have had their day. Now that Baba has dropped His body, the body is the possession of the Trustees. The Avatar Meher Baba Trust has begun to function. We are going to decide what to do, and we are not going to listen to what the doctor has to say!"

He was quite emphatic about it. He was very upset that Eruch had brought the body to Meherabad. He wanted Baba's body to be taken in procession through the streets of Ahmednagar so that the people would have His *darshan*, but Eruch never liked the idea of taking Baba around like that, exposed in such a fashion.

Sarosh said, “Look, you have deprived thousands of people of their last sight of Baba. I will not allow this to happen. Come what may, I am not allowing you people to cover up Baba’s body. Let us see what happens. If there is a problem, it will be my responsibility. Let the people have Baba’s *darshan* as long as possible.”

The women were told this, and in fact they also felt somewhat good about it. They would want to be with Baba as much as possible, too. It was consequently agreed that the interment should be deferred at least for another day.

The crowds began to come as the day wore on, and the news spread that Baba’s body was open for *darshan*. Huge crowds arrived, including all of Arangaon. It was hot, dusty and dry during the day, and it was very cold at night. There was a cold wind that sent shivers down our spines—it was particularly cold that winter, I remember. Despite the weather and the milling crowds, Baba’s face remained as fresh as a flower, as if it were a freshly-plucked rose. It was as if Baba were just in a deep sleep. Baba appeared to be way in the distance, as it were.

The *darshan* went on and on, into the next day also. In the meantime, in Adi’s office the phone was ringing throughout the day and night, with phone calls coming from all over India and all over the world. Everyone was asking what was happening, when the interment would be, and whether they should come, but nobody could give any reply because nothing had been decided.

A telegram saying that Baba was to be interred on February 1st was causing a great deal of confusion for outstation Baba-lovers. Many people just came, unmindful of whether they would get the sight of their Beloved or not; they simply thought that they should come. They listened to the dictates of their hearts, and so many were rewarded with His *darshan*, while the others who reasoned and thought there was no sense in going lost the opportunity.

The next day, also, Baba’s face was as fresh as always, so it was decided that the *darshan* would continue. Baba’s body was kept on an incline

with His head slightly raised, and it reminded us of what Baba had said earlier. When He was bent upon giving the “Great *Darshan*,” Eruch would ask, “Baba, why do You want to do all this—two months of continuous *darshan*—and how will You be able to do it with Your health in this condition?”

Baba would then ask Francis, “Francis, suppose if My health is very bad and I just give *darshan* reclining on a bed, would My lovers mind My doing so?”

Francis would say loudly, “No Baba, I do not think it would be so. On the contrary, they will feel it a great privilege that You have allowed them to have Your *darshan* despite Your weak condition.”

Baba would turn to Eruch, “Listen to what he says!” And then, “Suppose if I were to give *darshan* reclining with My eyes closed, would My lovers mind *that*?”

Francis again would say, “No, Baba. On the contrary, it would be a still greater privilege for them that in such a condition You have nevertheless allowed them to have Your *darshan*!”

And again Baba would say, “Eruch, listen! You carry on with your preparations for holding the *darshan*. It is My job to give the *darshan*.” Thinking now about what He was telling us, it is all so clear. There was His body lying in the crypt—He was truly reclining with His head a little bit raised so that people could see Him, and His eyes were closed. All those casual remarks that Baba had made during the last few months suddenly became clear, and we realized that whatever He had said was coming to pass, that His remarks had been signs of future events and not idle comments at all.

When we arrived at Meherabad we were unprepared to stay on there. Besides that, Meherabad had no facility to cater to the numbers of people who eventually came at that time. There were many, many people just hanging around every day, and there was not much food available there.

For the first day or two people were essentially without any food. On the third day, I think, Meherjee and Chhagan Master decided that they should do something, and so Chhagan went to the market in Ahmednagar in Donkin's car. They bought some vegetables and dal and rice, and Donkin brought Chhagan back to Meherabad with those supplies.

So it was that Chhagan once more had to cook for a large number of people. He found a big pot, built a fire beneath it, and he prepared *khichuri*, a mixture of lentils, rice and vegetables which is a very popular and simple dish cooked in India. With that food he began to serve the people who were gathered at Meherabad—they were all very hungry, and many hundreds had a nice meal after a couple of days of eating little or nothing. And the food lasted on and on and on! Everybody was amazed that so many could eat from the single simple meal that had been prepared.

Chhagan had been cooking for Baba's people since the time of the Prem Ashram and the school days on the Hill more than forty years earlier. That day after Baba's body had been brought to Meherabad, Chhagan did a good job of cooking once again, and we all relished that *khichuri*.

With so many people hanging around there, Sarosh got very nervous because there weren't the necessary facilities for them to stay, so on the fourth day after Baba had dropped the body he announced that "All people from outstation should please leave. It is straining the resources of Meherabad. We can't manage to have you all around here, so think about other people who will be deprived of being here if you stay on and please leave." People were reluctant to depart, of course, because they wanted to stay until Baba's body was covered, but some did leave just as new people kept arriving.

Many little incidents like that occurred. People would sleep on the platform outside the *Samadhi* or in lower Meherabad, or go to Ahmednagar—whatever they could manage—because there was no shelter there at Meherabad. It was all very primitive, and nights were very cold. We literally couldn't stop shivering.

There were ever-increasing crowds wanting to have Baba's *darshan*, and the *mandali* didn't mind. Baba's lovers did naturally want to have His *darshan*, so much so that some people came from the West. I don't know how they managed it. Rick Chapman and Allan Cohen came on the day prior to the covering of Baba's body. On the night of the interment itself Rick joined Eruch and me in sleeping in Baba's cabin.

And the irrepressible Dr. Kenmore came, of course. Don Stevens, Adi Jr. and Delia were there from England. Mainly the crowds were from Ahmednagar and nearby towns and cities, and as more groups came to know that *darshan* was continuing, people were pouring in. During all those days the Tomb was not shut for more than a few minutes at a time, several times during the day. At midnight Eruch would descend into the crypt and wipe Baba's face and readjust the cloths wrapped around His body, and he would change the ice and clean away the old sawdust. Apart from those brief pauses, *darshan* went on night and day. The pink roses were still pouring in, and so Baba's body was covered in His favorite color, pink. Fragrance from those flowers filled the air because the old roses were piled into the small meditation cabins next to the Tomb.

On the third or fourth day a big group from Andhra came, and when they saw that there was no electricity, they went rushing to 'Nagar and got some generators. That resulted in the first ever electricity up on the Hill. As I've said, there was absolutely no shelter, so again, on the third or fourth day, a small tent was erected on the Hill to give at least some protection to the milling crowds standing in the sun there and waiting to have Baba's *darshan*.

There were all sorts of scenes as the days rolled by. Some people were so emotional that they would faint and have to be carried out. Others just wanted to be in Baba's presence. Many Baba-lovers, close ones, were just floating around, not knowing if they should go back to their homes or what, not knowing at all what to do. It was all very uncertain.

Day after day Baba's face became more and more fresh-looking, so much so that on the fourth day there was actually a glow and radiance on

Baba's face that surprised everyone there. After the fourth day or so, the body slowly started to shrink. Still, it was clear that there wouldn't be any sort of deterioration that would require the immediate covering of the body. That would never happen. "Go on," Baba seemed to be saying, if we had the courage. At one point Goher actually went down to palpate Baba's abdominal cavity to check for gases bloating it, and to her astonishment there was absolutely no collection of gas inside. Baba, in short, seemed to be game for continuing to give "*darshan* lying down, with His eyes closed"! That's how it was.

It was, in truth, a miracle. No physical body could ever have survived like that. There were blocks of ice on the sides, but nothing else, no embalming whatsoever. Anything could have happened, but nothing did. The body stayed intact despite the intense heat every single day.

Eruch would have the queue stopped twice a day, so that the whole *Samadhi* could be cleaned up—flowers, dust and everything. Eruch would go down in the crypt, rearrange the blocks of ice, check Baba's face very gently and tenderly, and generally attend to the inside of the Tomb before letting people in for more *darshan*. The women *mandali* came off and on as they felt up to it.

The *darshan* went on and on and on, night and day, without break. There was not a time when there was no queue—there were milling crowds all through those seven days. I minded the queue as much as I could bear, and then others would come and relieve me. Eventually people got over their initial shock and the numbness that it had caused, and there was a feeling something like being in Baba's *sahas*, as if He were giving *darshan* to us. A different atmosphere started to build up as the days wore on, a change from the intense initial grief. There would be *bhajans*—queues of people singing Baba's *bhajans*—and a great, very loving, reverential atmosphere developed there.

I noticed that on all those days when Baba was giving *darshan*, people were bringing fresh roses for Him. That week, starting on the morning of 1st February 1969, there was suddenly a glut in 'Nagar of one of the

most fragrant of roses, the Persian Pink rose. In India it is called *Gauthi Gulab*, or Native Rose. It was Baba's favorite of all the roses, and it has a very delicate fragrance and a lovely pink color. It isn't a perfectly shaped hybrid, being a member of the *floribunda* family. It was the best fragrance for a rose, however, and there was an abundant supply of those roses, as if the rose bushes of the region had wanted to adorn Baba's body for one final time, this being their final homage to the Highest of the High. Never before and never after have we seen such a flood of those particular roses in the Ahmednagar market. It was surprising—people brought basket-loads of roses, and Baba's body was covered with them. In addition, His face also looked pink and rosy.

Eventually it was evident that nothing would happen to Baba's body, but the *darshan* simply could not just go on like that. And during the last two days the color in Baba's face did seem to begin to fade.

We realized that it would be Baba's Birthday according to the Parsi calendar on the 7th of February, and on the fifth or sixth day the Ahmednagar Collector came to Meherabad and took *darshan*. Then he talked with the men *mandali* and said that he was responsible for the health of the district, and that it was time to think about covering Baba's body. The women *mandali* were consulted, and they reluctantly agreed that we should decide that the 7th should be the day to cover Baba's body—all were bolstered by the recollection that Baba had told the *mandali*, "On My Birthday I'll be very strong!" That was a sort of indication, they felt, that Baba had told them that it should be the day of His interment, because the 7th happened to be Baba's Birthday according to the Parsi calendar.

Word was sent out that on 7th February Baba's body would be interred. The night before we held a meeting with the few volunteers who were there to decide the procedure. A three-sided wooden box had already been made to lower over Baba's body, so there wasn't much further preparation that needed to be done.

We decided that at 11:00 a.m. we would stop the *darshan* queue, and the Trustees, whoever were present, would assemble with some of the

close disciples and *mandali*. They would lower the wooden box into the crypt and cover Baba's body from the top. We planned how to arrange the crowds, where to keep them, and whether they should be there at the *Samadhi* when the interment started.

Before the time arrived, however, Sarosh suddenly gave the order to stop the *darshan* half an hour early, so a good many people were deprived of their last view of Baba. But just before the *darshan* was stopped we heard a car pull up, and Edward and Irwin Luck rushed to the Tomb. They arrived in time to have Baba's *darshan*, and they were the last two Westerners to come to Meherabad for that most extraordinary last *darshan*. Their love was such that it brought them to Baba just in the nick of time. The ice blocks around His body were being removed as they arrived, so they were fortunate enough to help with that service.

The women *mandali* came for their last sight of their Beloved Baba, and Mumma and Manu were with them. After they had that visit, Eruch had prayers said by Baby Mehera, who had been standing outside offering ash from the urn that was burning day and night since 1st February 1969; and later again the prayers were recited by Harry Kenmore. Then the *arti* was performed, and finally the box was carried in by Sarosh, Adi and others.

I was also called to be present, but I was controlling the crowd at that time so I missed being there at the end. Ropes were attached to the box cover, and it was gently lowered onto Baba's body. Baskets of roses and rose petals were then scattered over the box, and finally each one inside the Tomb threw a handful of earth onto the box. Then the *darshan* line was started again, and each person took a handful from two big mounds of earth kept outside the Tomb.


I had got away from the crowd control duty by then and was able to put my own handful of earth onto the box covering Baba. Very soon the whole crypt—the pit into which Baba's body was laid—was totally full of earth, and it formed a big heap. And then it was all over.

By noontime on the seventh day Baba's body was covered. Slowly Meherabad emptied as people began to return to their homes. How fortunate were those who were able to come and see Baba for the final time, before His beautiful physical form was hidden forever from our sight.



Chapter Forty-two:

After Baba's Interment

 neece Hassan was also there on the day of Baba's interment, and after Baba's body was covered he began to take photographs of Meherabad and of Baba's old photos and documents. Later he began a project of microfilming Baba's correspondence and related documentation, and we still have those microfilms. He also took a film of Allan Cohen and Rick Chapman interviewing a few of the *mandali*—Eruch, Francis and Mani—and we actually saw that video once. I believe that the Sufis have the original.

Kaka Baria had been brought from Meherazad on the very first day. He knew that Baba had dropped His body, and he took up his position at the door of the Tomb and didn't budge from there for most of the seven days. On the final day he sat outside the Tomb and never moved from that place from the morning till late in the afternoon. At the end of the day he was all covered with dust from the dirt being thrown into the crypt, but he still wouldn't move from there. When it was all over, my aunt went to him. Banumasi was very close to Kaka Baria because they both had lived in Bombay, and he would come very often to her house

and she would go to his. She coaxed him to get up, get a wash and have some nourishment.

On the 21st or 22nd of February Kaka was sitting on the green reclining chair outside what is now Falu's room on the men's side at Meherazad. He had a big grudge against Sarosh because he felt that Sarosh had been instrumental in covering Baba's body and had then thrown soil on it.

There was a Trust meeting at Meherazad that day, and when the Trustees arrived, Kaka got up and started to show his fist to Sarosh as if to say "I'm going to pound you if you come close to me." Kaka then went back to his chair while the others went in for the meeting. Later that morning they found him slumped over, dead. That was the end of Kaka. Goher was called, but there was nothing she could do. Kaka was buried at Meherazad as he had requested.

Kaka was a source of great amusement to Baba, as I've mentioned before—in the later years after his illness, Baba referred to him as His "toy." It was as if Baba's toy stayed only long enough to perform that service of amusing the Avatar. Once his work was done, Kaka, too, departed to become one with his Beloved Baba.

A few months thereafter Donkin also had a major heart attack and passed away. It came as a surprise because he was strong and athletic, but there was some heart medicine lying in his room where he had been found. Perhaps he was having heart problems that he never revealed to anybody.

Donkin was staying in Sarosh and Viloo Irani's out-building in the military area of Bhingar in 'Nagar. Viloo's servant had come to deliver his usual morning tea and knocked on Donkin's door, but there was no answer. The servant raised the alarm and the door was broken down. They found Donkin dead. He had possibly died in his sleep. So Baba's "*ladko dikro*"—His much-loved son—likewise did not survive long after his Divine Father dropped His body, and he joined Him in a very short time.

Baidul also died not long after that. Kaka never wanted Baidul to be buried in Meherazad. Baidul had fallen ill with high fever, and his condition was serious. Towards the end, when a pit was dug at Meherazad because Kaka had been having frequent heart attacks and Goher thought it best to be prepared, Kaka got anxious that they were preparing to bury Baidul there! He got this thought in spite of knowing that the pit was meant for him, because he was the only one who was going to be buried in Meherazad. As a result, for the first time Kaka started to look after Baidul's nourishment and well-being. He would bring him some cookies and things as if to say, "Eat this—it will help you." Kaka would do very funny little things like that. When Baba was still in the body He would hear about those things and have a nice laugh over them. Baidul died at Meherazad just less than a year following Baba's dropping the body, on 23rd January 1970.

We stayed in Meherabad for a few days after the interment, and when the *mandali* left for Meherazad, we returned to Poona. I continued with my office duty.

Even during those last seven days of the gathering at Meherabad, people were asking Eruch and the *mandali* about the Great *Darshan*. Eruch would tell them, "Baba has given the invitation to you all, He has not withdrawn that invitation, so it is up to you to decide to honor the invitation or not to do so. The *darshan* will be on." But nobody knew how the *darshan* was going to be—it was all left to Baba.

Events later revealed how Baba's words would really be brought to fruition. The starting date for the *darshan* had been fixed for 10th April 1969. Eruch informed me that I should get Guruprasad ready. The *darshan*, of course, was to be held in the hall itself for the people who were invited in groups.

There were originally nine international charter flights and more were in the offing, but when the news went out that Baba had dropped His body, some cancellations took place. Three charter flights still did come, and it

was just as well that the original numbers were reduced because it was with great difficulty that we could cope with even that number of pilgrims coming from the West, let alone the crowds of Easterners.

There had never before been such an extended *darshan*, running for two months, and what a *darshan* it was! When the *mandali* arrived at Guruprasad, I remember Pendu came in and, at the entrance of Baba's bedroom, he broke down again and began to weep like a little child. Pendu felt Baba's absence very much. The *mandali* in general were very downcast and strongly felt Baba's physical absence. But when the *darshan* began there was such a flood of Baba's Love—and the pilgrims who came received that Love and reflected that Love back to Baba and the *mandali*—that it lifted us all up. A tremendous transformation took place. It was a different story after that.

It was truly a “great” *darshan* that took place. Everybody felt Baba's presence, especially in Baba's bedroom. We saw people just weeping their hearts out, just as if they were in Baba's presence. The atmosphere was so charged that one time I just couldn't stand to be in Baba's room. I had to leave, it was so surcharged in there. It was much more intense than on the occasions when Baba had been there, as if Baba had let loose a flood of His Love. Everyone got drenched, and still it poured and poured from Him and from His lovers who had come at His behest to have their promised *darshan*.

The divine aspect of Baba's Love was manifest at that time. Of course we missed His beautiful physical form, but then this *darshan* more than compensated for that. It was a unique *darshan*, and Francis has given a beautiful description of how people came and had Baba's *darshan*.

That *darshan* went on and on. Sometimes in the afternoon there would be nobody there, but Eruch would sit before the microphone and call out Baba's Name, His “*Jai!*”—and he would be there for some time. Sometimes the hall would be totally empty, but I think that was just on two or three occasions. Some groups didn't come, but usually the hall would be all full and Baba's atmosphere was always present.

Whenever I had time off from work I would go over to be there, and Mumma, Manu, Banumasi, Roshan, Mehera, Dolly, Homimama (Roshan's father) and Dadi also would go whenever they could. Everybody was free to go now. The Easterners respected Baba's wish and stayed away during the Westerners' time there in the mornings, but the family could go at both times because Eruch and Mani had both told them that they could come if they wished.

The first charter flight to come in was the Sufi group from San Francisco along with other Baba-lovers from that area, and they started off the *darshan* program on the morning of the first day. Among the many performances that they gave, the most impressive was a dance to Baba's "American *Arti*," performed by Hank Mindlin and Carol-Leigh Jensen. Hank Mindlin was the composer of both the lyrics and music and also the lead singer. I think that Baba had heard that *arti* and actually made some changes in the words.

The Poona lovers had their scheduled times to attend, and others from out of town had their times, and whatever Baba had decided with regard to the schedule of the programs was respected. Maharani Shantadevi was there for part of the time, and she would sit with the women *mandali*.

For two months it was a feast of Baba's Love there. After the Great *Darshan* ended the *mandali* left to return to Meherazad. It was the last time the *mandali* would visit Guruprasad.

We took permission from the Maharani to take certain items from Guruprasad, including the sofa seat in Baba's bedroom on which Baba did His last seclusion work and the chair in the dining hall on which Baba used to sit. We took the big Baba photos that were on the wall also, much to the Maharani's dismay.

So the *mandali* returned to Meherazad, and then the *darshan* began in Meherabad and Meherazad, and it is still going on to this day!

Now Guruprasad itself is gone. Not long after Baba dropped His body the Maharani's brother offered the bungalow to the Trust, but not the rest of the land and buildings that went with it. The Trust had very little money at that point, and the taxes and upkeep would have been substantial, plus the fact that the building by itself, without the grounds, would not have had the same charm or atmosphere. So the Trust decided not to accept the offer.

Instead, Guruprasad was sold to a developer named Atur Sangtani. It turned out that he had some feeling for Baba and thought a statue of Baba should be erected on the property. Nobody among the Trust or *mandali* was particularly interested in that idea, and it was suggested instead that a small memorial be built on a part of the property. When Guruprasad was torn down, Meherjee bought some of its materials at an auction. He was able to buy the door to Baba's room, two of the windows with "GP" etched on the glass, some of the tiles, a few pink granite pillars, and some of the railing that ran along the front porch.

A small one-room structure was built near the road using those materials, with a little veranda in front. Ironically, the original tiles from Baba's bedroom are on the veranda, and the marble from the front veranda was used as the flooring inside the memorial. One of Baba's chairs was installed inside, and there is a plaque displaying a nice talk that Francis had given at the groundbreaking ceremony for this Guruprasad memorial in 1973. It has a nice atmosphere and is open to people year round.

After the "Great *Darshan*" I did feel greatly the absence of Baba's physical presence, and it would many times cause me quite a lot of depression, but I would try to keep busy in the work and try to get over it. Of course I continued to go to Meherazad every year for all the later years while I was working in Poona.

After Baba dropped His body Meherjee used to come to see us quite often. He was quite fond of me, and he would often ask me to come join his business. I was reluctant to do so because Baba had asked me to take up the insurance job, and I had continued with it all along as I have

mentioned. Originally Meherjee had not been very insistent with his suggestions, but after Baba passed away he again approached me and said, "Please come and join me."

The thing that really prompted me was that he wanted to go on a tour of the United States, along with Adi K. Irani, in 1970 I think it was. He said, "Look, I have nobody to look after my business. Won't you come? It will be doing Baba's work..." and all that, and somehow he talked me into it. So I came to Eruch and discussed the prospect with him, and he advised me to join Meherjee. So I quit my job and joined the concern as a partner in the business. I had been in the insurance company for almost eighteen years, and thereafter for another eighteen years I was with Meherjee.

Before joining him I told Meherjee that once a year I would always go to Meherazad. I wanted to keep up that custom for January and February. So I would come here each year and be at Meherazad during Baba's Birthday. That pattern continued until Mumma and Manu and I shifted to Meherazad permanently.

As some background, once Baba had written to us to say that if He were to drop His body before He called us to come to stay with Him, Mumma, Manu and I should come and stay in the ashram, be it Meherabad or Meherazad. I had received a letter from Baba to that effect in the mid-1960s. He had added in that letter that "Of course, nothing of that kind would happen. You all will be dead and gone before I drop My body. But just in case something happens, remember to come and stay. Mumma and Manu should be with the women, and Meherwan should be with the men." So when Baba dropped His body I talked to Eruch about the idea of our moving to Meherazad.

Eruch said, "For the present you should continue where you are, because we don't know what is going to happen here. It's all so uncertain, so the practical thing is just to carry on as if Baba is still there, and let things work themselves out." So we carried on in Poona.

When my father died in May, 1959, our landlord at Bindra House called me and said, “Look, now, your father has expired, and it is time you people find some other accommodations. I have a daughter who is finishing her MBBS (Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery) degree, and when she graduates I want this ground floor available so that she can open a hospital here. This was my plan from the beginning. Don’t you want to help me in this?”

I said, “Well, I’ll ask my elder brother and let you know.” So I went over to Guruprasad and told Eruch what the landlord had said.

Baba was sitting inside the hall at the time, and He heard me talking to Eruch and asked, “What’s going on? Come in here and tell Me what’s happening.” So I told Baba about the landlord’s request.

Eruch said, “Well, Baba, we can always tell him to find some suitable accommodation for us, and then we’ll depart in peace. We don’t want to create trouble for him.”

Baba said, “Fair enough, but let’s see who leaves first—whether he goes or we go. Who knows?” It was just a seemingly casual remark that Baba made.

I conveyed our message to the landlord, and as it happened, it turned out to be impossible for him to find alternate accommodations for us, so our response ended up being a nice way of saying “No.”

Subsequently we made an agreement that he would give us four years to vacate, and then we would leave. That would give us enough time to make alternative arrangements. I consulted a lawyer, and he told me to “Go ahead and sign the agreement. It’s a good thing because for four years he cannot get you out, and after four years the Rent Act is such that the agreement will be null and void.” The lawyer was a friend of Sadashiv Patil, and he charged me Rs. 5 for his advice! He was a very simple but very clever man. So I signed the agreement with all his terms in there, and after four years the landlord never asked me again. It so happened that just before we finally did vacate, he died. So he was the

first to go, and what Baba said very casually in Guruprasad turned out to be a hint of what would eventually happen.

When Col. Bindra died, the place was quietly sold off to a building contractor who came and offered us some compensation and then demolished the whole place, turning it into a big housing complex. So in 1990 our “twenty days’ stay” was finally over after forty-seven years, and Baba’s instructions to us to come to Meherazad were fulfilled. Everything Baba wanted has come to pass.

We moved into Meherazad in 1990. Before our arrival Eruch and Mani had arranged to put a back porch on what used to be the store room next to the room Baba occupied during the forty days’ seclusion in the Blue Bus. I moved into that old seclusion room, and Manu and Mumma and Kesar, our servant, moved into the old store room. The tiny galley or passageway between the Blue Bus and the rooms became a very small kitchen space for us all.

I do hope that as you have read this book it was Baba Whom you could visualize, and blissfully in that absorption you have forgotten me. That was my endeavor, and I do hope I’ve succeeded at least to that extent.



Additional Stories About Baba

There are so many stories about Baba and His *Leela* that I haven't been able to include in the narrative for various reasons. I will, however, add them on at the end so that the reader will find the same joy in reading them as I do in telling them.

Baba and Maiji

As I recounted earlier, Baba and Maiji—His mother—had a very close though not always calm relationship. Maiji was headstrong and expected to be obeyed by all, even her Merog, who was the Avatar! And in this Baba would indulge her as much as He could.

Mumma and Manu recalled how He would always strive to humor her. During His most strict seclusions He'd still visit her in the evenings. He would be totally exhausted, but He would sit with her and listen to her complaints or her narration of the day's events most lovingly and patiently. Sometimes, as Baba was preparing to leave, she would call Him back because she had forgotten something she wanted to tell Him. So He would go back and sit down again. Mumma says that once or twice she called Him back three or more times, and still Baba patiently came and fully gave of His time to her with no thought for His own exhausted physical condition.

Other times Baba would be in a playful mood and would say that He wanted to sit in Maiji's lap! She would object and tell him that that was not appropriate, that He was too big and too heavy, but sit in her lap He would! She would then chide Him, saying, "How does it look? You sitting in my lap! What will those madams (in the neighborhood) think of us both? Merog, it does not look good at all. Also, You are so heavy, get up now!" But Baba would only get up when He was good and ready. He would gesture that the madams could think what they liked, but they

were probably thinking how lucky He was that He could still sit in His mother's lap.

Maiji would constantly challenge Baba's instructions, as some of the stories I've narrated earlier show. But Baba would still indulge His mother and would show her only the utmost love and respect, without allowing her openly to break His orders in the ashram.



Professor Shastri and “Meher Ekam”

Pandurang Shastri was the Professor for Oriental Studies and Sanskrit at Deccan College. He walked by Guruprasad often, and having heard of Baba, one day he came in to see if he could have Baba’s *darshan*. Baba used to ask him to sing the prayer by Adi Shankaracharya, also known as the “*Atma Shatakam*” or “*Nirvana Shatakam*.” It is a *śloka* in six stanzas written by the great Ādi Śaṅkara—the first Śaṅkārācārya—summarizing the basic teachings of *Advaita Vedānta*, or the Hindu teachings of non-dualism. It was written between 788-820 AD.

Baba actually sent Bal Natu to Professor Shastri to check whether the Sanskrit wording in the Madhusudhan *bhajan* “Meher Ekam” was correct. Balaji went to Deccan College, found the professor at his staff residence, and showed him the song. Pandurang Shastri read it through and told Bal Natu that the song was written with love and so the ordinary rules of Sanskrit language would not apply—it was good as it was. Bal returned and reported his comments to Baba, who was very pleased.



The Court of the Perfect Master

Meherwan paraphrased a story from the Perfect Master Upasni Maharaj: in the court of a saint, one finds good and pious people, the sort of men and women one expects to find on the Path. In the court of the Perfect Master, however, one finds the entire panorama of humanity—everyone from the worst scoundrels to the highest saints. Why is this so? It is because the saint's vessel is limited so it is easily polluted. But the Perfect Master is the Infinite Ocean, and no matter how much filth is poured into it, it remains clear and untainted.

Upasni noted that this is one of the signs of the Perfect Master—his court includes all.

Meherwan on “the Mind”

The mind apparently has led the way through all the steps of evolution as consciousness developed from the most rudimentary to full. Then, after untold reincarnations as human—that is, full—consciousness, the mind is confronted with an inexplicable urge to surrender to the Perfect Master or Avatar. “What the heck is this!?” exclaims the mind. “I have been a successful leader thus far. Why should I move aside after all these eons?!” The Master at first gives the mind a long leash, allowing it to feel a sense of control. But gradually the leash is shortened until one day it is pulled tight and the mind must “heel.” All this time, through the infinite guiles of the Master, the mind has actually been participating in its own destruction.

Finally, when only the empty shell of the mind remains, the Master removes even its appearance so that consciousness, which had stuck with the mind and identified with it for its entire existence, is left with Nothing. And into that infinite vacuum of Nothing instantly floods Everything. Thus consciousness, which had been attached to the limited mind, becomes unattached and experiences Everything.

Meeting Upasni Maharaj

As a child of five or six Meherwan Jessawala met the Perfect Master Upasni Maharaj.

Maharaj traveled extensively in India and would occasionally visit the home of a doctor near Nagpur. That doctor, Dr. Punaskar, had been the chief physician at the “lunatic asylum” (as it was called then, referring to the effect of the moon on mental processes) into which another Perfect Master, Tajuddin Baba, had checked himself after appearing naked at a British tennis club in Nagpur in the early part of the century. (Both of those Masters had, of course, played roles in launching the Advent of Avatar Meher Baba.)

Dr. Punaskar had turned his home and grounds into an ashram, “Tajnagar,” dedicated to Tajuddin Baba after recognizing his greatness, and Upasni would visit there in his travels.

Gaimai Jessawala, Meherwan’s (and Eruch’s) mother, was living with her family in Nagpur and would visit Maharaj when he was staying at Tajnagar during the 1930s. At that time and until she and her family were called to live with Meher Baba in 1938, Baba placed no restrictions on her seeing Maharaj.

On the occasion that Meherwan remembers, he and his sisters, Manu and Meheru, went with Gaimai to see Maharaj around 1935 or ‘36. He recalls being brought into Maharaj’s presence and looking up and seeing this giant man wearing just a loin cloth, gazing down at him. Meherwan had a small garland in his hand to offer in respect to the Master. Seeing this, Maharaj came over to him and said, “I will come down to your level.” Then he slowly lowered himself until he was on his knees before Meherwan, and he then bent his head forward so that Meherwan could place the garland around his neck, which Meherwan did.

I asked Meherwan about Upasni Maharaj’s demeanor. My impression had been that he was generally rough and tough and almost scary at times. Meherwan said no, that on the contrary, his manner as a rule was very sweet.

Baba and Food

At the time of this story, Meher Baba was staying at Guruprasad in Poona. Lunch (vegetarian and non-vegetarian) would be brought over for Him and the *mandali* and for those visiting....

Meherwan describes the scene: “One day Baba expressed tiredness, and announcing that He was retiring, He told all there to have their lunch. Now our Parsi community is fond of jokes and pranks, and Nariman and Meherjee decided to tease Sadashiv Patil, a Hindu by birth and therefore vegetarian. So as they went to the lunch, they lightly prodded Patil, saying, ‘Patil, why are you still eating vegetarian food?! You have been with Baba for so many years, and you still cling to your vegetarian food! Come on, have a change, have some non-vegetarian food.’ Patil said, ‘No, it is not religious scruples that make me stick to this food, but from my childhood I have never eaten non-vegetarian food and it just doesn’t appeal to me. But if you want me to do so, then I’ll have some right now.’ Nariman and Meherjee immediately backed off, saying, ‘No, no, we are only teasing you. We are not serious.’

“But Eruch, sitting nearby writing letters, overheard the conversation, and when Baba returned to the hall, he brought up the subject of food. You know, when Beloved Baba would come into the *mandali* hall at Guruprasad and sit down, He would then fold His hands to us and then gesture to us to sit down as well. And sometimes, as He folded His hands, such beautiful hands, I would see an expression of pensive sadness, and I would think: there is the very Heart of Eternity, and I do not have the courage to enter it.

“After Eruch had narrated what had been said about food, Baba replied, ‘No one sitting here is so very important that God is standing behind your chair watching what you are eating.’ Those were His very words.”

Baidul and Nilu

At one point in His stay at Satara in the early-to-mid 1950s, Meher Baba drew Baidul aside confidentially. He instructed Baidul to “needle” Dr. Nilu and to keep up that needling until Baba indicated to him to give it a rest. Accordingly, the next time the men *mandali* were gathered around Baba, Baidul spoke out, saying, “You know this fellow Nilu, Baba—I happen to know that when he was in college there was a girl there who fell in love with him. And so Nilu took advantage of her feelings for him, and he shamelessly had an affair with her!”

Nilu, who was present and hearing this, shouted, “This crazy fellow! I will break his Irani neck if he continues to speak these lies!!!”

Baidul, however, egged on (secretly) by Baba, continued to plaster on the details of Nilu’s “affair.” Nilu was ready to jump onto Baidul and wring his neck when Baba clapped and silence fell.

Baba turned to Nilu and gestured, “Was there a woman such as Baidul describes when you were in college?”

Nilu replied reluctantly, “Baba, there was a woman in college who seemed to love me, but I never showed any interest in her or led her on in any way. As far as I know she never married. I don’t know what became of her.”

Baba gestured, “You see, there was a kernel of truth in what Baidul was saying, wasn’t there? You had that *sanskara* (mental impression), but by My intervention it never came to fruition as it might have otherwise. Remember this!”

Manu Jessawala—Meher Baba’s “Martha”

Manu (born “Manek”) was the second-oldest child and the oldest daughter of Papa and Gaimai Jessawala. On August 1st, 1938, the family, at Meher Baba’s request, gave up their life in Nagpur and moved to be with Him. Eruch, the eldest, joined Baba as a *mandali* member at that time. Manu (the name was shortened by Baba at Mehera’s request), who was nineteen, was given work in the ashram kitchen, and Meheru, the youngest daughter who was about sixteen at the time, helped as a personal attendant to Baba.

So Manu cut up vegetables and helped prepare curries and *dal* and baked *chapatis*. One day she was slicing onions by herself in the kitchen when Baba walked in. Cutting onions may bring tears to the eyes, of course, and that was the case with Manu as she turned to greet Baba. He looked at her and asked, “How are you feeling? How are you doing here in the kitchen?” She replied, “Fine, Baba!” He looked at her again and said, “You are down here in the kitchen, away from Me, while your sister, Meheru, is with Me much of the time. Has the thought ever entered your mind that you would rather have her duty than yours?” Manu replied, “Never, Baba. You have given me this duty, and I am happy to be wherever You say.”

Baba embraced her and told her, “You are My Martha (referring to the biblical character). You have pleased Me!”

Baba's Dog Peter

In the 1960s Baba would be carried from the women's side at Meherazad to Mandali Hall in the morning. Peter, Mani's Cocker Spaniel (which had been given to Baba in Mussoorie, in the North near Dehra Dun), would follow along in the "procession" and then would lie down in Mandali Hall at Baba's feet and go to sleep.

One morning Baba had Mani called into Mandali Hall. There were two bells, a larger one to call Goher and a smaller one for Mani. (Mani's "office" was near Mandali Hall, on the veranda of the smaller bungalow.) So Mani came hurrying over to Baba when her bell was rung.

Baba gestured toward Peter, saying, "He is asleep and dreaming." Peter's ears and paws were twitching, and he was making sounds synchronizing with the movements. Baba continued, "He is dreaming that he is running over hill and dale, through woods and over streams, chasing animals and birds and even being chased himself by other, larger dogs. He is having a big adventure. But all the while he is lying here at My feet!" Baba gestured toward those in the Hall, "So it is with you. You pass through your lives, absorbed in your adventures filled with happiness and suffering, but all the while you are dreaming at My feet."

Meditating on “Sunny and Bunny”

In 1939 during the Blue Bus tours Baba moved the women (more than thirty Westerners and Easterners) and a menagerie of many varieties of “pets” to The Links, a spacious bungalow with grounds and various out-buildings in Bangalore, India. Most of the women, in addition to their other duties, had at least one of those “pets” to care for. Margaret Craske was in charge of a pair of dogs: Sunny and Bunny. The story, as told by Baba’s beloved Mehera in *Baba Loved Us Too*, picks up from there:

“Baba had given us meditation for a specified period each day. No one was exempt; each one had to see to her chores, including the pets, and be ready when the bell for meditation was rung. We would rush to our places with Baba’s photo in front of us. He was to be our meditation. Now what happened was this. After a few minutes Rano heard giggles. At first she ignored them and continued with her meditation, but in a short while she heard them again. Soon Rano’s meditation was half on those giggles! Finally she recognized that it was Margaret’s voice. When the meditation period was over Rano asked Margaret, ‘What was so funny?’ ‘It was Sunny and Bunny,’ Margaret replied, ‘I kept on saying “Sunny...Bunny” instead of “Baba...Baba”!’”

Shireen, the Avatar's Mother

Meher Baba's mother, Shireen, was quite worldly-minded and was suspicious of the motives of most of the women around her son. Shireen particularly disliked Gulmai, the mother of Rustom and Adi K. Irani and one of the very first persons to follow Baba after Upasni Maharaj directed her and others to go with Baba at the beginning of His Advent. Meher Baba referred to Gulmai as His "spiritual mother," which Shireen disliked. Shireen would talk with her "spies" in the ashram and get reports as to whether Gulmai was visiting her son.

Once, after Gulmai had just left Baba's company, word came that Shireen was on her way and would soon arrive in Lonavala, the hill town between Poona and Bombay where Baba and the *mandali* were staying. Baba called all the women together and warned them that the "cannon" would soon arrive and that they should deny that Gulmai had been there. Knowing His mother, however, Baba called Meherwan Jessawala, who was a boy at the time, and coached him to deny as convincingly as possible that Gulmai had been present. Baba told Meherwan to look up, not down, when he answered Shireen's interrogations, and, if Baba winked at him, to agree with whatever statement Baba had just made. Shireen was not easily hoodwinked, thus the extra caution.

When she arrived and queried the female inhabitants about Gulmai's recent presence, they all dutifully denied that she had been visiting. Shireen immediately dismissed their denials as a ruse and also dismissed Baba's own denials. So Baba pulled out His trump card and called Meherwan, whom Shireen knew to be an honest young boy. Meherwan answered her questions as

previously rehearsed, and, when Baba would give him a slight “wink,” he would repeat whatever Baba had just said.

Shireen listened to all this and then turned to her son and said, “Shame on you, Merog! You are teaching this boy to lie at this age! What kind of message is this giving him?! You should be ashamed!”

There was no putting one over on Shireen, even through the guile of the Avatar.

Shireen had a hard time accepting her son’s sudden change after the kiss from the Perfect Master Babajan drew away the veil from His consciousness and revealed His Infinite State when He was nineteen. She also did not like the women who were drawn into Baba’s net and who, from Shireen’s perspective, only reinforced her son’s status as someone great. (Mehera, Mani—Shireen’s daughter—and Gaimai, who was Eruch and Mehrwan’s mother, were some of the exceptions to Shireen’s dislike of the women around Baba.)

There is a legend in India of an emperor who was praised to the skies by the women around him, and who, partly as a consequence of being entranced by such praise, fell from his high position. Shireen was worried that something like that would happen to her Merog, her affectionate name for Baba. She expressed that fear to Gaimai, who replied, “Mother, how can you compare your son to an emperor? He is God Himself!”

Eruch in a Mood

Once, while Meher Baba was staying at Satara with His *mandali*, Eruch began to feel sad within himself. Despite his efforts to appear cheerful and unconcerned, Baba picked up on his mood and gestured to Eruch, “What’s the matter?”

“Nothing, Baba. I’m fine.”

Baba replied, “Come on. I can see that there’s something wrong. Tell Me.”

So Eruch blurted out his feelings: “When I was younger I felt compassion for others in my heart. I was patient with them and tolerant of their foibles. But now I feel nothing but impatience with these people. I lose my temper easily and have no feeling of love for them. This makes me very sad. What’s happened?!”

Baba looked at him and gave a dismissive gesture. “When you are with Me, I begin stirring the pot of your mind. And as it is stirred, these impressions, which before were hidden, get mixed into your daily consciousness. Keep your focus on Me and don’t worry about these thoughts and feelings. They must and will manifest. As long as you stay with Me, all this is nothing. Forget it!”

Never Refuse His Call

Regarding Meher Baba, Meherwan told me on the summit of Seclusion Hill, “Never refuse His Call; never miss an opportunity to be with Him!”

He Is Mine from Head to Foot

[In a talk Meherwan gave at the 50th anniversary of Meher Baba's 1958 Sahavas, he described what happened when he came before Baba for *darshan*.]

“When it was my turn in the long queue, I embraced Him, and after bowing down I was trying to walk away hurriedly when Kutumba Sastri held me by the hand and made me face the crowd at Baba's behest. Baba then said, pointing to me, ‘He is Mine from head to foot.’ I felt quite stunned at this unexpected remark and was in quite a daze for some time.

“That was my only personal experience of the force and power that His words carried. And I felt how Beloved Baba was stirring the very depths of each and every person's being just by a casual remark or two or by a touch or a loving glance.”



On Taking Baba's Name

[Meherwan often reminded those who came to hear stories about his life with Baba to repeat Baba's Name. Especially at the end of his life he emphasized over and over that the most important thing for a Baba-lover is to repeat His Name. The following comments have been excerpted from a talk that Meherwan gave in Mandali Hall at Meherazad, as well as from parting advice he gave to more than one pilgrim in variations on this theme.]

In the last months of His ministry especially, Baba would constantly be telling all of us to practice taking His Name as continuously as possible. He once had said that there is power in My Name. There is more power in My Name than even Myself, and even I repeat My Name! So that's how much importance He gave to the repetition of His Name.

So, you have to begin mechanically. You have to make the effort to keep repeating His Name throughout the day, whatever you are doing. It doesn't take [any unusual] effort to take His Name—no price to pay, no scriptures to go over. [Take it] internally...otherwise people will think you are mad, you would start attracting attention! It's better to leave it inside you.

While cooking you can repeat His Name; while listening to us you can repeat His Name; while you were asking me a question, I was repeating His Name—that's how you should repeat His Name in your daily life. Don't set time aside for that. It's not a ritual—it's a way of life that happens, and then it will become a sort of support for you.

When you have to face somebody on some occasion—you have to speak out or something—just keep repeating His Name and face the crowd, and He takes over! Yes, He takes over.

Learn to do that. It takes effort. In the beginning you have to make the effort to do this—later on it becomes a sort of habit, and you just automatically keep repeating His Name.

In all religions in the world, the Lord's Name is given prime importance.... All the saints and sages and Perfect Masters, they stress the same thing: repeat the Lord's Name.... "In your mouth let there be the Lord's Name, and in your eyes let there be the sight of the Lord.... Try to make Him the *being* of your being." That was by Tukaram.... constantly he was repeating His Name.

[Repeating His Name] is the simplest way. It doesn't require any expense, it's free of charge, you can avail of it whenever you want, so Baba also said, Make use of My Name, and My Name has the power to protect you from all the allurements of the world. If you constantly repeat My Name, the allurements of the world, they cease to affect you, gradually, and you will become indifferent to them.... They will be there... but without any attachment to it. So that is the power of His Name.

Another thing is it also cleans up all the muck that is within all of us: all the lust, greed, anger, passion that we are all filled with—there's a huge mountain of all this within us—that has to be cleaned up. This Name starts to clean that up, it hollows you out.... That's the way to purify your heart—it will make you nice and clean and clear, and when the time is right, you just become one with the Name.

So it's a double-edged weapon: it's a weapon of defense for allurements, and an offense for cleaning up things [within]. Two things it does—[it's a] double-edged weapon. Time and again Baba was telling us in the later months, the last months: repeat My Name, keep repeating My Name, and He said the whole world will start doing that. A time will come when the world situation will become so difficult and so stifling that the only recourse that will be left is that they will start repeating My Name. The time seems to be coming close now. Everywhere there is chaos, everywhere there is confusion.... But if you are ensconced safely in His Name, you feel safe in the midst of all this turmoil that is going on.

Take Baba with you when you leave this place....But how will you take Him with you?....By remembering Him....But then how will you remember Him?....By taking His Name constantly.

As I was about to leave him, he firmly squeezed my hand and said, “Take Baba back with you and repeat His Name—there is nothing else to do.”

Meherwan was in a lovely and playful mood, acting like, I would imagine, he would have in his teens. We hadn’t seen him like this before. Then, in a very serious tone he said “You must repeat His Name!” I replied, “I’m repeating His Name at night, but I find it hard during the day.” Meherwan replied, “You must repeat His Name—let it flow through you. Baba told us that He had repeated His own Name to give the repetition of His Name great power.”



For further information concerning literature by and about Avatar Meher Baba, contact Meher Baba Information at the following website:

www.MeherBabaInformation.org

Books, information, and other materials related to Meher Baba may also be available, in the United States and around the world, through local bookstores or through groups and centers devoted to Avatar Meher Baba.

For information about visiting the principal places of pilgrimage connected with Avatar Meher Baba—including His Tomb-Shrine (*Samadhi*) and home at Meherabad and Meherazad in India—write directly to any of the following centers:

Avatar Meher Baba Trust
King's Road (Post Bag 31)
Ahmednagar
Maharashtra State
India 414 001
(www.ambppct.org)

Meher Spiritual Center
10200 North Kings Highway
Myrtle Beach
South Carolina 29572
U.S.A.
(www.mehercenter.org)

Avatar's Abode
Meher Road
Woombye, Queensland 4559
Australia
(www.avatarsabode.com.au)