

# *Disobedient Slave*

Poems to Meher Baba



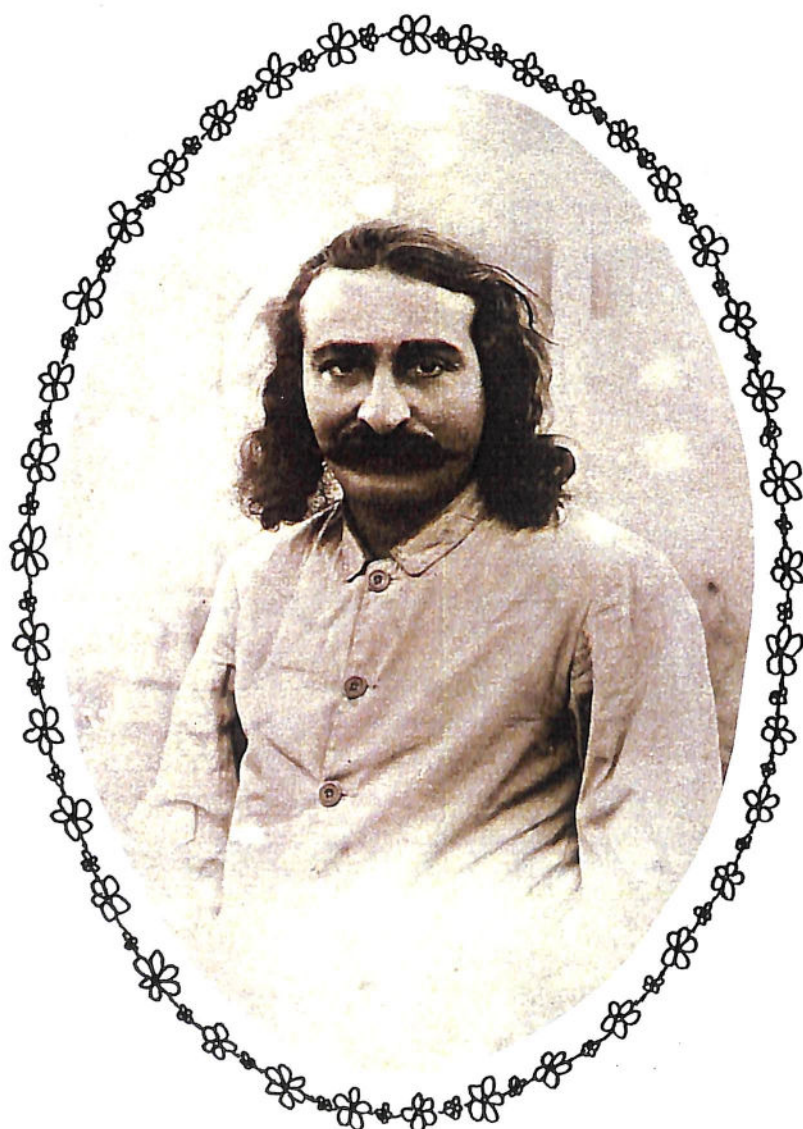
by Eric Teperman

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The poems in this book were written from 1990-2001.

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.....Baba, please,  
give us more and more of your silence;  
and help us to receive it;  
and help us to know you've been giving it to us all along  
without our even knowing it.....



*"When my universal religion of love is on the verge of fading into insignificance, I come to breathe life into it, and to do away with the farce of dogmas that defile it in the name of religion and stifle it with ceremonies and rituals."*

*"I am unmindful of all the qualifications you have. The only qualification I want you to have is love. Love me and I am pleased with you."*

—Meher Baba

## *Acknowledgements*

I would like to thank Beth McWhirter for her friendship and actual help in seeing these poems into book form.

I would like to thank Susan Roth for assembling this book from all my manuscripts. Without her great help, the transformation would not have gone so smoothly.

I would like to thank Arielle Teperman for wanting so much to be a part of this book, for the decoration around Baba's photograph.

And mostly I would like to thank Baba, who has made all divisions disappear so that even in the vivid limitations of our lives his Oneness is apparent.

## *Introduction*

Being with Meher Baba is not about spirituality, even though spirituality can be derived from him. It is not just about Truth, even though Truth and Rightness flow from him. Being with Meher Baba, God help me, is not even merely about love—even though love is the very reason for being with him in the first place. (And the last place too.)

For a person to seek Truth is to repeatedly encounter lies and falseness. For a person to seek spirituality is to divide life into the spiritual and the un-spiritual. To even seek for love and to be loving is to experience frustration every day. To know Meher Baba is to have life's whole meaning all at once all the time as everything falls into the love-play with the man who is not only the Divine Master and the Eternal Beloved; not only the heavenly Father and also the Living Christ; not only the One Real Friend, perfect companion and exemplar man: he is who he is without saying a word. You are *with* him and you are captivated, and you know everything you will ever need to know. Then, everything you will do or not do, think or not think, succeed or fail at, will all fall into the relationship one can have with this man who is simply a man and also not merely a man at all. He is the one we have always wanted to meet and the human being we have always wanted to become.

People can, if they want to, dispute whether Meher Baba is who he says he is: The Ancient One, the God Man come again. But arguments of that kind are, ultimately, vain. He is mine and I am his; and, to paraphrase Baba himself: if Meher Baba is not God, then God is not worthy of being God.

You, who say God has no mercy,  
come hear my tale:  
My Master came looking for me  
in my misguided wreck of a life.  
He revealed his universal presence to me;  
and when the glow of that experience faded,  
he revealed his human face to me.  
Since that time he has shown me such love that I cannot deny him.  
He has cleared obstructions in me  
to feel this immeasurable love  
and enabled me to love him.  
In return for this hand of kindness  
I have repeatedly turned my face from him.  
I have sworn oaths and made promises  
to live only for him—only to turn aside.  
I have asked for his help,  
only to turn aside.  
I have beseeched him, when feeling completely helpless,  
to just do it all for me—  
only to turn aside.

Thousands of times I have failed  
yet he shows me the open hand of his love.  
Thousands of times I have turned aside,  
just stuck in the hem of my own nature,  
and still he will smile at me.  
Where is there mercy greater than this?  
Ten thousand Hitlers can slaughter millions of worlds:  
they know him not and have not turned aside—  
but I know him, I *know* him  
and still turn aside.  
Where is there mercy greater than this?



I cannot ask you for anything  
because you give more wisely than I can request.  
I cannot praise you  
because who knows better who you are—you or I?  
I cannot sing, and feel it,  
unless you inspire me by singing.  
I cannot write of my experience  
unless you enflame me.  
I cannot recite prayers with feeling  
except when you say them with me.

I can only remember you and say your name—  
then my song is sung, my prayers are done,  
my poems are wrung and your praise is won;  
because even in my weakness and deceit  
your face comes down like a single drop of rain,  
that somehow explodes into limitless drops and covers the earth.

My mind seems to dry all life from this land  
and the winds of these vagrant desires  
blow my substance all over the map;  
    But your remembering me  
causes me to remember you.  
And your single drop of rain,  
amazingly and most naturally,  
bores down to release again  
the well-spring of transparent love  
that you placed in me at the beginning of time.

What are all the prayers and songs  
and poems and praise  
beside that moment when you unearth that love,  
resplendent and beautiful,  
unadorned by the world,  
but from which all the world flows?

Baba, time marches on;  
but I don't want you to recede  
into the background,  
into time itself  
like some precipitous god  
or even the most wonderful person in a wonderful story.

I need to see the sleeve of your shirt,  
your powerful, compassionate eyes,  
the stubble on your face  
on the days you don't shave.

I know I neglect you sometimes  
but I never stop loving you, needing you.  
Even the fish on the line  
doesn't always gaze at the fisherman.  
Please keep me alive long enough  
in the bottom of your little boat  
so that I may finally stop thrashing about  
and look at you, without break,  
while the sweat drips off your chin.

When we were younger  
we followed, always, the Big Sound.  
By the time you came  
we had followed one sound after another;  
and you,  
you just pulled aside all that sound  
as if it were no more than a curtain  
and entered our world with your silence.  
Whatever each one of us might have thought about love,  
we found that all the love in the world (and more)  
comes from you.

Baba, you are like everyone  
but there is no one like you.  
You look just like us,  
but when you look at us  
you penetrate our secret hearts;  
Then our hearts seem expanded  
until they're beating right below the skin,  
all over,  
so that your touch of love is greeted with love  
and we can finally grasp with our hearts  
the un-understandable.

Baba, you are like everyone  
but there is no one like you.  
You ride with us in our cars  
and walk with us on our streets,  
but it seems that everywhere  
everything is going to you.  
We are not mystics, Baba,  
but you make us feel your reality  
behind all these forms  
and love you all the more.

Baba, you are like everyone  
but no one is like you.  
You sit with us in our kitchens  
and die with us in our beds;

and people, somehow, don't seem like people anymore,  
but something else;  
and we don't understand exactly what we all are anymore,  
but it's you, Baba, it's you.

You are like everyone, Baba,  
but there is no one like you.

In this world of misery  
we live for ideas:  
ideas of freedom, ideas of justice,  
ideas of peace, ideas of happiness.  
We are always at the mercy  
of the realities of this harsh world;  
And even though we imagine and long for salvation  
every day of every life,  
it is always unexpected when he appears,  
beyond expectations and imaginations,  
beyond ideas and even beyond salvations.

He looks at us with such love,  
such destiny,  
that even in our endless dance of sufferings and deaths  
he is beautiful—  
so beautiful  
that it's not necessary for him to displace death  
or alter the measure of our sufferings.

We cannot understand this  
even when we love him;  
but looking at him looking at us  
it no longer matters  
and we somehow know something  
even if we cannot understand.

Actors and poets may show us in their craft and  
play of words—grace, love, humility;  
but when the play is over they are unbearably stuck,  
condemned to the same sufferings,  
the same small triumphs and conceits  
as the rest of us.  
He has no mask.  
He does not play-act to show a representation  
of beauty, nobility and compassion;  
He is these things.  
He is one of us, even though he is us.

I don't understand.  
I can't understand.  
I don't want to understand.  
I just want to look at him  
looking at me  
and hear the sound of his breathing  
as he embraces me.

Music had disappeared from my world,  
and, it seemed, from the world itself.  
I felt I'd been silenced so I could hear my own muteness,  
hear my own heart straining.

Where did you come from  
that I did not even hear you coming?  
I was no longer capable of sound myself;  
I should have heard your footsteps—  
yet you just appeared  
as though you'd been there all along.

What kind of water did you pour on this earth  
that made my vacant garden blossom and sing?  
And what kind of tempest did you bring  
that's brought this song into silence?  
It's not like my muteness before:  
This love of yours has a vibration,  
a music all its own  
that closes my lips with the soft power of its hum.  
And while you used to welcome my harmonies so often before,  
you rarely do now—you don't even bid me be quiet  
as your solo just saturates me,  
as I become more and more aware of my own limits  
and more and more aware of your own capacity to sing.

But when you do ask me to sing along,  
the power of your silent voice reverberates all though me  
and even my poor voice sounds beautiful when I sing with you.

What is life, anyway?  
What does it matter?  
Live and die,  
live or die;  
does it matter at all?  
It seems to,  
though I don't really know.  
What do we do, anyway?  
We're happy, we're sad,  
we're busy, we're bored;  
we're helpful, we're isolated,  
we love and we're loved, we're paralyzed and we're alone.  
The say it's an illusion;  
They say it is real.  
It feels like a waste.  
I don't know why we suffer and die  
and I don't know why I love,  
but I can't stop the one  
or stop doing the other.

I am just lost without you, Baba,  
and sometimes I'm even lost with you.  
Please just hold me, Baba; it's the only reason we are here.



Please forgive us, Baba:  
the saint may crave the spirit  
but we crave the nearness of your man-form.  
I don't mean the nearness desired  
by what you said was mere devotion;  
I mean the nearness of knowing you are walking  
in the same world as us.  
That we could hope to see you, sometimes,  
and not just love you inwardly,  
not just love you in the people we meet.

Never mind the talk of your infinite being—  
It is because of your being infinite  
that we want to look at you  
to touch you  
to converse with you in your finite form.  
You have initiated the ultimate love affair:  
We could never not want you on this human level.

In future times between your times  
there will be those who love you better than us;  
but you have given us a taste  
of the ultimate here on earth—  
can you forgive us for not wanting less?

Baba, what do I know of you?  
So many years ago you invaded my life  
like a sudden summer might invade  
the deepest freeze of the loneliest winter.  
I have been living, since then, off the presence of your warmth,  
and yet I feel no more capable of starting a fire myself  
than a child would.

Baba, what am I to do with you?  
Since you betrothed me  
I have not been much more spouse to you  
than a mannequin at Macy's,  
but still you are kind to me and show me your face  
and make me crave your beauty.

Baba, what am I to think of you?  
You put your name on all my thoughts,  
and still I can't juggle in the winds of this world.  
I drop everything,  
even your name sometimes.

What good am I to you?  
I love you because you are so beautiful,  
because you love me,  
because now I cannot breathe without you;  
Why do you love me?  
Please don't answer that question;  
just let me get closer.  
Even if I am far away in my imagination only,  
let me get closer and closer 'til your fragrance surrounds me  
and I am not just betrothed to you,  
but you inhabit me.

Your silence is so much the most beautiful part of everything I hear,  
it's amazing that I wish so much to hear your voice.  
Not the voice you use to break your silence,  
but the voice you used in the beginning,  
when you spoke to those who did not yet know  
that you are the Avatar,  
the voice you used when you sang as a young man,  
your hair disheveled  
your clothes in rags  
your heart already nothing but a great white fire.  
I can see you now:  
transfixed, the Indian dust on your pants and feet,  
your voice filled with such fire and tenderness,  
such love and subjugation,  
that all who heard you were carried  
not just to God's feet  
but straight into His heart.

Even now I hear the sound of that voice in this silence.  
All my life I have sung the harmonies:  
first, to the ballads of this world,  
then to your song, your silent song.  
These harmonies are so limber they sometimes can startle  
as they complement your tune;  
but when you pause  
I just get lost in mid-phrase—  
    and I wish I could have the strength  
to sing the melody of your love  
and not just depend upon it  
to dance my harmonies around.

I wish I could sing your melody with you, Baba,  
and I wish I could not just know you now  
as your garden comes to full flower,  
but be there at the beginning  
when the seed-beds weren't even laid out yet;  
it was just you,  
so young and beautiful,  
your voice so extraordinary,  
so transforming of all who heard,  
so human.

There are no answers in this world;  
and all paths are slow paths.

If we stay in the enclave of family and town,  
we become slaves of devotion to every quirk of culture  
and defenders of a way of life as if it were life itself.

If we set out on our own for freedom of choice,  
we become such slaves to ourselves  
that cooperative life in a household or society  
becomes an endless line of bitter, little wars.

There is no salvation in Nation or Religion,  
and no help in science or romance.  
Every possible way can narrow down to insular defensiveness.

There is a flame in us at all times, keeping us alive,  
and we don't even know what it is.  
Only when he blows on it,  
and it rises and burns what we have placed so close to it,  
do we realize we can rely on nothing besides him.  
Candle or lamp, we are just wicks burning the fuel of our lives.  
Soon the fat is gone and then the wick itself will burn,  
burn until it becomes brittle ash  
waiting for him to crush into powder.

He comes,  
and for thousands of years people say his name,  
sing his name, shout his name;  
some of it good, some of it bad.  
Even of those who *love* his name,  
who among us will actually love him  
when he comes each new time?  
Only he knows;  
and while some are lost in pious prayer or ecstatic dance,  
he will go and choose his own  
from the souls of this world.

People ask, Baba; you know they ask.  
You send them and they ask—  
"Who is he? Who is Meher Baba?"  
And while I answer them honestly (without missing a beat),  
the answer that keeps banging against the backs of my teeth  
is—"He is the One for whom God Himself is not enough."

This unspoken answer,  
this blasphemy against *all* conventions,  
is bound to spring out one day.  
You are such a beautiful paradox (and you know it!)  
that this is the most truthful thing that I could say.  
And like a tree can't take back its apples  
after years of nothing but lovely green leaves,  
it will only be one more evidence  
of the life you have given me.

And one more thing, while we're out on this limb—  
it is only the having you  
that makes this life without you  
bearable.

Baba, please,  
not just this pilgrim life for me,  
with all of its bowings and bendings at every turn,  
and wiping our faces on everything you touch;  
in such a hurry to sing  
we rush to fill your ears with pleas and praise.  
Protect us from piety, protect us from ourselves!  
We do everything with your tomb  
but slice it and eat it.  
Help me to make my heart as clean and fragrant  
as the room your man-form lies in;  
And forget about making my heart a shrine for you, Baba—  
    make it into a handkerchief  
    to wipe the sweat off your face.  
Let me live *for* you, live *with* you.  
Let it be life *with* you and not just poetry and prayers,  
not just songs and proclamations,  
not even just salvations,  
but a living life. Let us live *with* you,  
so in the midst of this beautiful, mundane, impossible world we live in  
I can finally be *your* constant companion,  
truly caress the heart of every person you send my way  
with as much feeling as I caress that white stone on Meherabad Hill,  
finally love you as you've loved me  
since forever and a day,  
without stop  
without exception  
without distraction.

We are a human race of prisoners,  
and to what? We don't even know.  
Sometimes we feel the bonds so tightly around our soul  
that we will do *anything*  
to make ourselves feel free.  
But these "anythings" don't free us,  
and we're left with the memories of freedoms,  
not even knowing they were false,  
and continue to wake up each day  
in chains.

More than any slave of any nation,  
we are slaves to ourselves:  
to our fears,  
our desires,  
even to our very thoughts.

He comes, and he is so beautiful,  
that he pulls our attention away from our wants  
away from our repulsions  
even away from our selves.  
His face is so extraordinary  
it must be the reason the Word was made flesh.  
His words are so beautiful  
they must be the reason that language was born.

I am dull-witted and charmless,  
yet he seeks out my company;  
I am weak and foolhardy  
yet he still trusts me;

I can be brusque and inept,  
yet he still loves me;  
I can feel lonely and fatigued and he will inspire me, refresh me,  
infuse me with his being.

This freedom we so dearly want  
is not printed on paper  
or granted by judges

or won by brave armies;  
it is the light just *pouring* from his eyes  
melting our chains  
burning our bonds  
turning our endless stream of desires into vapor.

Unlike the thirsty who long for water,  
we don't even know what we really lack  
until he comes,  
strolling into our lives,  
awakening us to the real truth about love,  
and giving himself to us totally  
as we slowly open our arms to him.



I love women. I love their grace, almost like angels, the keepers of  
beauty in this world.

I love their tenderness and devotion, like God's own healing touch,  
their enthusiastic joy over little things makes a life with them just  
glow.

I love their voices, whether winding high in wordless song,  
or soft as a lover's good-night  
—a woman's voice is like her love itself  
and draws me closer to God.

I love their sacrifice and strength, inspired by God within,  
not even knowing it is He who moves them to such power  
to make others happy.

I love women's love.

I love men.

I love their male beauty, like guardians in their grace.

I love their gentleness which springs from real strength;  
their dedication and discipline, which won't allow a break;  
which overrides fear and prevents stagnation;

I love their voices, whether loud in unbridled play  
or soft like a father's embrace

—the sound of a man's voice is like his love itself  
and draws me closer to God.

I love their sacrifice and devotion, inspired by God within,  
not even knowing it is He who moves them to such power  
to make others happy.

I love men's love.

I love my Baba,  
so perfect in every way.

So plain a man there never was,  
and never one so beautiful.

His words are like no others:  
they make all else besides God disappear;  
But I love his silence even more,  
as it reveals God in all I see.

Maybe the angels can see the lights  
that follow his every move,

or hear the sweet hum of melodies  
stirred by the action of his care;  
All I can see is my all-in-all,  
devoid of decoration,  
complete all by himself,  
but allowing me  
and everyone else  
to enter into him  
and share the oneness of his love.

I wish I could sleep for a thousand years.  
I love this life and I love life itself;  
I love this beautiful dance  
and most of all  
I love you. It is all because of you.  
But sometimes I just feel: why must it be so hard?  
Why is every fiber of our existence and being  
attached to some kind of "want",  
so that letting go is so long and so hard?  
I wish I could sleep for a thousand years  
and wake up at your doorstep again.  
I *love* all my brothers and all of my sisters  
and I can't help it, you see,  
you've put all this love in my heart;  
and I love this dance  
that feels like we are in mid-air sometimes  
and I wish I could sleep for a thousand years,  
wake up at your doorstep when you come home again.  
This life is a blast; it's a feast *and* a famine,  
a long stretched-out wonder *and* tragedies galore  
and I can't help but feel you,  
the force of your being moving through it all  
and I wish I could sleep for a thousand years,  
like an afternoon nap,  
and see you coming home for your first evening meal all over again,  
your face like the rising sun  
at the end of the day  
trying to make this whole world catch up to you  
and not lag behind like we do all the time;  
Is it any wonder we're tired?

My friend,  
you stand there and ask me,  
"Who is Meher Baba?"

If I tell you  
that he is the living Christ,  
that would not be enough even though he is that.  
If I told you he is the *ultimate* beloved of all my heart,  
that would not fully describe him  
even though I can express myself fully, through love, to him  
as I can to no other;  
and he is far more full of love than I could ever be.  
If I told you he is my best and dearest friend,  
my constant companion,  
who is with me even when I am not expressly thinking of him,  
that would not be enough  
because as my friend he never fails me  
while as his friend I sometimes fail him.  
Maybe more than sometimes.  
And even when he corrects me and guides me,  
it is always benevolently.  
If I told you he is my real father,  
that would not be enough  
because he is also the whole of my family, in the realest sense,  
all by himself;  
and he is also the father of all;  
and more than that, he is the inner-dweller of all,  
making me feel an unbreakable, loving bond  
with all I meet and all whom I haven't met.

So, if you ask me, "Who is Meher Baba?",  
I can easily say to you, from my heart,  
"He is this wonderful man I've been following for almost thirty years,"  
and that is a true thing I can tell you;  
but when you ask me,  
you, who are yearning for Truth,  
you, who are looking for the source of undying light in your own heart,  
then *that* answer would not be enough,  
and my response, in one way or another,  
would be like Meher Baba himself,  
and have no beginning  
and no end.

You make yourself so ordinary;  
but you let us know who you are.  
I stand before you, silent,  
but my heart is singing;  
my feet are still,  
but my soul is dancing.  
You smile at me, and, really who knows, besides you,  
what it's like to be the human being you've become?  
You love pours down like great, silent waterfalls,  
mountains of purest water falling into my little cup  
pushing out the bottom but still overflowing...  
Call it water, call it wine—  
after a drink or even a drop, served from *your* hand,  
how can anyone be *anything* but your slave?  
You empty our curio cabinets and expose our vacant dreams.  
What else can we do but serve you?  
Could there be any joy for us away from your wish?  
You light a smokeless fire in us:  
the flame burns inward instead of out,  
as romance gives way to real love.

You drew us from every distant place in the world  
and every remote corner of our lives.  
You even make us an extended part of your household.  
This is more than grace, better than luck...  
There is no name for what you do to us.

What can I say about you, Eruch?  
That you lived as close to God  
as an ordinary man is able to?  
That you combed his hair  
and slept under his bed?  
That he actually enjoyed your company?  
Every word I say makes me feel as though  
I am putting some distance between us  
to gain some perspective,  
some view of your life with our Baba,  
When all I want is some of that closeness  
that you and the others  
shared with him.  
All the words we have are best unsaid at this time,  
so maybe we can get drawn by him  
a little closer,  
a little closer,  
no longer be drawn and quartered  
by all the addictions of this world  
and start to see *his* face on all our desires,  
hear *his* soft breathing  
when we want just the closeness of the human form;  
start to feel more of the real friendship he surrounds us with  
every second of every day.

Oh, God,  
The moon can catch the sun's light full face  
and still be cold as an icy night.  
Baba, I'm not even a crescent moon,  
and I feel chilled to the bone.

Please, bring *all* these moons closer,  
closer, closer still,  
because we need to *burn* with your heat.  
Let *us* be your one miracle:  
let us burn but not be consumed  
so we are filled with the sight of you!

Baba,  
if these poems bring you any pleasure at all,  
that is all they are worth  
and were worth the writing.  
If they bring any happiness or a thought of you  
to any of your lovers,  
that is all they are worth,  
and were worth the writing.  
And if they bring even one person  
to your feet,  
to your heart,  
who did not know you before,  
that is all they are worth,  
and were worth the writing.





All proceeds from the sale of this book  
will go as a donation to the  
Meher Baba meetings from  
which it is sold.

~ E. T.