

101 Tales of Finding Love



Volume Three

COMPILED AND EDITED BY
IRMA SHEPPARD

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Proceeds from the sale of this book will be donated to the Meher Spiritual Center, Myrtle Beach, South Carolina

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The Game

To penetrate into the essence of all being and significance, and to release the fragrance of that inner attainment for the guidance of others, by expressing in the world of forms—truth, love, purity, and beauty—this is the sole game with has any intrinsic and absolute worth. All other happenings, incidents and attainments can, in themselves, have no lasting importance.

- Avatar Meher Baba

Dedicated to Avatar Meher Baba
whose continuing manifestation
lights our hearts
one by one by one.

He's with Us Once More

Soft, the surf tumbles in.
Dark sky breezes
lift palm fronds into gentle sway.
Stars garland the sea.

A note thrills, as if from nowhere,
unseen hands thrum in tune,
loosen all heartstrings.
Love swells again into our song.

His Love sublime,
as if never forgotten,
its mystery beyond masterful.
All begins again.

—Irma

Introduction

How one person describes his or her journey to recognize the Reality of their connection with Meher Baba, can be true for many others. At the same time, each journey is unique.

I am truly grateful to each of these contributors for recollecting their profound and heartfelt experiences of finding Love, writing them down and sending them for inclusion in this book.

These stories speak for themselves.

Several of the contributors to this collection of stories told me how meaningful the process was of gathering their thoughts and memories, and reliving that time of unutterable joy—finding themselves internally present with Him, the Beloved of all.

In spite of my best efforts to present exactly 101 stories, I confess I became a bit muddled toward the end, and so as of this final Volume Three, we have 102 stories. Is there a Trickster in play?

In His Abiding Love,
Irma Sheppard
Asheville, North Carolina
irmasheppard@icloud.com
June 7 2019

Shortly before his death, Don E. Stevens told us that a great method of staying focused on Meher Baba was to continually engage in Baba projects. Good advice. - Karl Moeller, layoutwalla

Foreword

(or is it really about Forward?)

The multitude of incredible stories found in these pages are all about Meher Baba playing His incredible game with Himself.

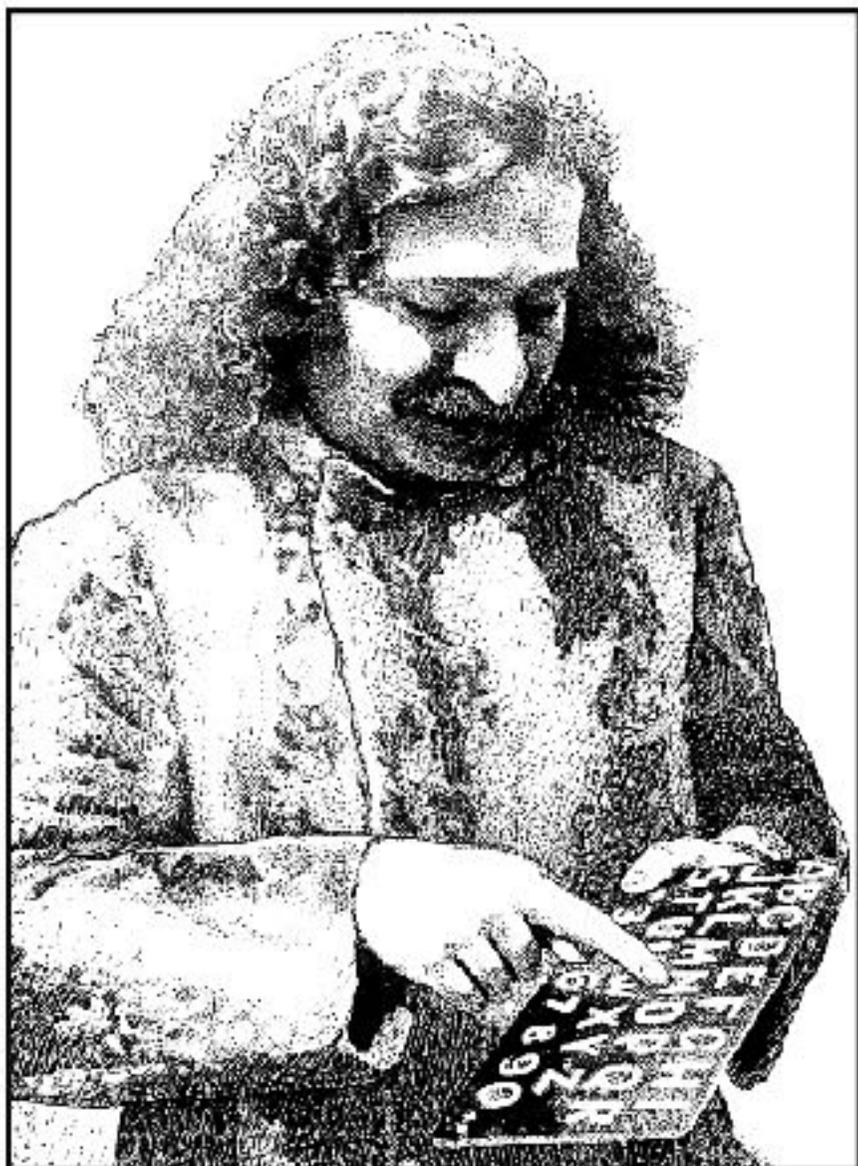
He is SO creative, and He alone plays EVERY role.

His creation is continually moving forward.....forward....forward. These stories provide us with glimpses of the creative nature of the Avatar during His latest incarnation which we are so blessed to be part of. We are all slowly moving forward until one day we will wake up and see that we are really Him.

He has an infinite imagination and these stories prove it.

ENJOY!.....ENJOY!.....ENJOY!

Charles Gard'ner
June 2019



Clive Adams

101 Tales
of Finding Love

A SEEKER'S
JOURNEY:
FINDING GOD IN OUR TIME

by Clive Adams

101 Tales of Finding Love



This photo was taken on the steps of Guruprasad in May-June 1969, 6-8 months after coming to Baba. I was 21 years old. I am sitting next to God's sister, Mani S. Irani, with dear Mehera nearby. A picture is worth a thousand words.

Introduction

AS I REVISITED MY EARLY LIFE and the events that led me to the greatest discovery of any lifetime, I began to realize my journey may have relevance and value to others seeking the 'Way and the Truth.' This, of course, remains to be seen, but I can't help wondering if this story may be a small, yet integral part of the spiritual awakening currently unfolding throughout the world. This chronological history of my personal spiritual awakening may offer insights and guide posts for seekers of truth from all walks of life.

Family Background

My parents were born and raised in England, descending from a long line of Irish, English and Scottish ancestors. I was born in London, England, on June 29th, 1948. In 1950, the four of us (including my six-month-old sister, Susie), immigrated to Toronto, Canada, traveling aboard the Queen Mary. After five years, my dad received a good job offer from Revell Toys, based in Santa Monica, California. We stayed in an old beach motel, between Venice Beach and Santa Monica for a few weeks or months, and I still recall walking along the beach path, seeing all the strange looking people. I used to think we had landed on a foreign planet, so different were the people and energies of Southern California in those days. I was very much enamored of the atmosphere there.

After a few years in Los Angeles, we settled permanently in a newly built home, located high atop the picturesque Palos Verdes Peninsula, twenty-five miles south of Santa Monica. (Meher Baba took a day trip to Palos Verdes in the 30s, according to Jean Adriel, who was with Baba on the outing. The group picnicked at the beautiful La Venta Inn, overlooking Los Angeles and the Pacific.) On walks to the beach I would often pass by La Venta Inn.

After a few years, my parents obtained their United States citizenship and later my sister and I also became naturalized citizens—happy to live and grow up in the idyllic environs of Southern California during the '50s and '60s. We maintained strong connections to our extended British family throughout the '50s and into the '80s, returning to England for regular visits. Grandma Katie visited us from England nearly every year, for up to three months at a time. She and I had an especially close connection. Things really changed in the mid-1980s with the loss of Grandma Katie, followed shortly by that of my mother. In 1985-86, my father bought a second home in Southern England and he used to live part of the year in England and part of the year in the States, until his death in 2000. Nothing was the same after this. Years after coming to Baba, I discovered that Grandma Katie had lived right next door to where Delia De Leon (one of Baba's western circle members) was to live, on Kew Garden Road, across the street from the famous Kew Gardens, where Baba is said to have had a special meeting with 'The Spiritual Hierarchy.' I visited and had tea with Delia, right next door to where my grandma would have lived in the 1920s.

Sometime after my mother and grandma heard about Meher Baba from me, they each recalled having heard about Him, sometime in 1931 or 1932. They remembered the front-page articles in the London Times and other newspapers, with photos, announcing the arrival of the 'Silent' Messiah from India, Meher Baba, to the shores of England. The fact that Meher Baba and Gandhi arrived in England on the same ship, Rajputana, caused a sensation among the press, as well as the public, with many assuming that Meher Baba must be Gandhi's Spiritual Advisor, which in a way He was. Gandhi's purpose in coming was political in nature, while Meher Baba's purpose was spiritual, focused on contacting and assembling His Western 'Circle' members and laying 'spiritual cables.' Mom recalled that the Messiah/Gandhi articles in the newspapers were the number one dinner table topic of conversation in their home and probably throughout England as well.

How I Discovered Meher Baba

Growing up near the beach towns of Southern California in the 1950s and '60s was an incredible experience for a somewhat impressionable young English boy. I began surfing around the age of ten, sometime in 1958. The combination of ocean, sun and vigorous exercise, helped to improve my health and strength and noticeably improved my mood and attitude. From an early age I suffered from severe hay fever, asthma, allergies, and blood sugar imbalances—surfing helped alleviate and heal the worst of these. I never felt better than when I was at the beach surfing, breathing salt air, lying on the beach and absorbing the sunrays. For a time surfing and girls was all I thought and dreamed about.

My interest in organized religion was negligible, much to the dismay of my father and the Catholic Church hierarchy, who tried every trick to indoctrinate me into the dogma of the Catholic religion. My mother was an agnostic and rarely attended church. I was a rebel at heart from a young age and had little or no interest in what mainstream religious and conventional authorities believed. I sensed from an early age, that most systems of belief were highly suspect. I remember asking my mom about death and what happens after we die and her answer caused my mind to recoil, because the answer simply didn't make any sense. She was simply repeating conventional wisdom. I had the same reaction when questioning Catholic priests and other religious authority figures about the purpose of life and death and the hereafter. The answers I received, simply didn't add up, resulting in a gradual state of disillusionment with most grown-ups and authority figures. I sought my own counsel and experience.

By the time I was twelve, Mom and Dad were becoming fed up with my wayward attitude and rebelliousness toward them and all forms of authority. This especially upset my father and we got into heated arguments, which led to name-calling and a few physical fights. My mother tried to defend me, playing the peacemaker—I had some arguments with her too, but Mom had more empathy and understanding than my father.

Teachers, principals, counselors, psychologists and priests tried to influence and/or change my behavior, but in the end were forced to throw in the towel. I didn't care how much I was censored, threatened, ridiculed or punished, I continued to go my own way, although if reasoned with, I could be highly cooperative and helpful to my parents. (I loved helping in the garden and learned a lot about gardening from both parents.) By this time my grades were pretty hopeless and stayed that way until I left high school in 1966. I had little or no interest in academic or scholastic accomplishments, because I felt most of what was being taught was false, if not bogus. Looking back, it is clear that I was seeking and longing for Real Knowledge and Truth.

Two years before finishing high school, I was introduced to LSD, mescaline and marijuana, possibly in that order. I was fifteen or sixteen years old at the time (1963-64). My first LSD trip was life changing and I took it a number of times in quick succession. I was so impressed by the psychedelic experience, that I started sharing LSD with everyone who was interested. I turned on hundreds of newcomers to acid (LSD), which later led to much trouble and karmic payback. In 1964, shortly after the introduction to LSD, my parents decided to move the entire family back to England, with the intention of staying there indefinitely, hoping thereby to avoid the temptations and dangers which Susie and I were falling prey to in America. We drove back across the United States to New York, where we boarded the ocean liner SS United States, heading to England.

After a month or two in England, the karmic pull of my former life and friends, began to draw me back to California, with the result that one day at age sixteen I announced to my parents that I had purchased an airline ticket (with money I had saved from five years working as a paperboy), intending to fly back to California immediately. I went back to my life in Palos Verdes, staying with friends. Within a few months of my return to the States, the rest of the family followed, due primarily to the fact that Mom missed her home and garden and her life in California. She found

Clive Adams

England no longer to her liking. My dad could easily have stayed in England, because he loved it and had a good job, but it wasn't meant to be. Our family destiny was in California and we all had to return.

My mother began to realize something was up with me, especially when I would come home quite late, high as a kite on acid and babbling incessantly about God, Truth, Spirituality, sometimes into the wee hours. Mom and I had always shared a strong psychic and spiritual connection (bond), so I couldn't help but share with her any insights, ideas and spiritual knowledge I might have gained from the drug experiences.

The sense among many of my peers, of the '60s drug generation, was of participating in some kind of revolutionary movement to shake up the status quo. Some of us felt we were pioneering a new path to higher states of awareness and consciousness. Massive change was in the air, reflected in the traumatic events of the 60s—the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jack and Bobby Kennedy, the Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War. In addition we were experiencing the most powerful musical, values and sound revolution in the history of the planet! The '60s generation came of age through a wholesale rejection of many cultural stereotypes, values and beliefs, promulgated by the reigning capitalist culture. Many of us who survived and thrived in this tumultuous decade, fully expected the world to change dramatically, overnight, by sheer collective psychedelic force. Unfortunately, this expectation was totally premature, but we didn't know it at the time. There was a special energy moving throughout California and all over America during the '60s. Universal brotherhood, intentional and unintentional community and positive social changes and movements seemed imminent and possible.

Out of the drug enhanced experiences of the '60s came a series of conscious realizations, one of which was the conviction that we humans were more than a mere physical form and the body was beginning to be recognized as a vehicle for consciousness and our higher selves. We began to sense that our conscious mind and

awareness transcended what conventional science and religion currently interpreted as ‘reality.’ Under the influence of LSD and mescaline, the physical body often appeared as a mere shell, housing a subtle, light filled energy form, comprising energy centers, which appeared to emit various wavelengths of light and associated color combinations, dependent upon which center (chakra) was involved. These early drug experiences led some of us to the conviction that conventional explanations for life and death, seemed to lack some critical information/insights, in terms of the totality of being, living and dying. Through the tumult of the ‘60s, a primal urge, which we might call ‘The Seeker Urge,’ was gradually awakening, leading to the pursuit of spiritual knowledge and truth. The books of Edgar Cayce, Paramahansa Yogananda, Vivekananda, Ramakrishna, Kahlil Gibran, astrology, yoga, Eastern Mysticism, ‘60s rock music and the lives of the Christian mystics and saints, all played a major role in the awakening of a ‘wave’ of seekers during this era.

By 1966-67, it began to dawn on many that drugs might not be the optimal path to reach permanent states of higher consciousness. Psychedelics may have opened a door to new states of awareness, but we began to suspect (including me), that we could only go so far with external, or artificial aids. This led to a wave of interest in meditation, yoga and Eastern Mysticism (the Beatles and Maharishi), along with a newfound interest in evangelical and alternate forms of Christianity—especially prominent among the surfer crowd. But for many, the Christian approach didn’t offer the kind of ‘red meat’ we were seeking. At this point, Life (Higher Powers) intervened and vastly altered my destiny.

What happened next?

I had been distributing LSD and pot for a couple of years and was in the process of letting these tools go, when lo and behold, I was arrested on charges of possession and distribution of LSD. Up to 1966, LSD was still legal, but around the time the law changed, the police began to get serious about curtailing the spread of drugs, at which point I became a prime target. The authorities

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were well aware of my history as a distributor of LSD/pot and they tried on numerous occasions to lay traps for me. Finally they succeeded, but to convict me they had to turn circumstantial evidence into something more. To do this they had to recruit someone to testify under oath they had seen me dispose of the drugs by throwing them off a cliff, which they in fact had not seen.

The authorities were determined to make examples of specific individuals (among whom I was one), because so many wealthy and influential families and their kids were turning on to psychedelics, that it created an international incident, covered by national television at the time. The FBI held a big Pow-Wow for parents and students at Rolling Hills High School in 1966, some months before I got busted, with the aim of alerting everyone to the dangers of mind-altering drugs. I freely admit to turning on hundreds of young people to LSD, which led to my eventual arrest, but I was motivated by the belief that we were on the leading edge of a revolution in consciousness and psychedelics were playing a necessary role. I was targeted by the authorities and was considered too dangerous an influence to continue to be allowed to run free among the Palos Verdes citizenry.

I was trying my best to give up any further entanglement with drugs, but it was near impossible to completely break free, due to the influence of friends, the past, the easy money and the culture we were part of. At my trial in the fall of '67, I was rudely awakened to discover that I had been convicted on the LSD distribution charges and sentenced to twelve months in prison. Wow! Karma and the authorities had won in the end. My parents had stuck by my side throughout the court proceedings, but they probably felt I deserved what I got and secretly hoped the experience might make a better person of me.

Talk about a wake up call. All of a sudden I found myself escorted from court under restraint and placed in County Jail, initially for seven weeks of hell—a whole new phase of life had begun. I was in shock—depressed, mortified and fearful of what the future held. I felt totally helpless.

I spent six or seven weeks in County Jail with hardened career criminals, maniacs, drug pushers, murderers and a few sane people. Then I was shipped to Tracy State Prison, in Northern California for a couple of months, sharing my cell and cellblock with many hardened criminals. This seemed like heavy duty, karmic payback for turning people on to drugs, but what I didn't realize at the time was that God had plans for me and this was shock therapy to prepare me for what lay ahead. Meeting career criminals convinced me once and for all that prison was the last place I wanted to spend my life, but I made the best of the experience. I noticed early on in prison life that someone would often show up as a protector at just the right moment. Once I was sharing a bunk bed with an angry psychopathic murderer who punched me out, almost knocking me unconscious, after which the Hells Angel who ran our cell block promptly warned everyone there that no one was to touch me again, because as he said, "This guy's spiritual—leave him alone." Thank God for the Hells Angels!

Around the third month in jail, I was shipped to a minimum-security facility in Ontario, California, called YTS—each prisoner had private individual cells. This was absolute heaven compared to what I had experienced the previous three months, but the facility was still populated by many unsavory characters, including Hispanic gang members with whom I never made friends. There were also some cool black guys and hippie types that I got along with, including a well-read Black Muslim and a really intelligent Hispanic, who was a friend of Cesar Chavez and his movement. These guys were intellectually astute.

Thus began a new phase—Mom brought special books I requested, and we had wonderful picnics out on the lawn. She brought a copy of *Autobiography of a Yogi* and Khalil Gibran books. I was given a record player to play Ravi Shankar, Beatles, Bob Dylan, Donovan and Rolling Stones records. When I read *Autobiography of a Yogi*, by Paramahansa Yogananda, I started to have spontaneous spiritual experiences and found myself accessing meditative states. I was enthralled by Yogananda's Master's lineage (especial-

Clive Adams

ly Shri Yukteshwar and Babaji) and finding a ‘high’ Spiritual Master began to percolate in consciousness.

I’d play Ravi Shankar at dawn, sitting on the cement floor of my cell in a meditative posture. This sometimes caused a ruckus with some on the cellblock, who then would start to yell, “Turn that shit off, Adams!” I tended to get so high listening to Indian ragas and meditating, that I barely noticed the other prisoners’ complaints and do not recall ever turning the music off—I felt the music and meditation provided a positive spiritual atmosphere to counteract the generally negative atmosphere of the prison. As days rolled into weeks and then months, I found myself shifting in and out of higher states of consciousness. It became more and more obvious that one did not require psychedelics, in order to reach higher states of awareness. I took zero drugs while in prison.

These spiritual states seemed to grow in frequency and had a timeless quality about them. Unlike LSD, where you shot up and then several hours later you came down with a crash, these experiences led to a profound inner change—it became possible to spontaneously renounce drugs, once and for all outgrowing them. This was one of the gifts I received from my time in jail, because I had the luxury of time to reflect deeply on what was important. I also noticed that a new sense of power and energy seemed to build within.

I began to run as a form of daily exercise—my first experience of the rush of endorphins (outside of surfing), the natural high one gets through intense exercise. Running and meditation contributed to my physical and spiritual renewal and taught me the importance of exercise for maintaining health. My time in prison was like being in a monastery, in terms of the inner life that unfolded. After six months I felt like the prison held my body, but the ‘Self’ that I am, was free. This attitude confounded the prison guards, authorities and some prisoners. What happened next raised the bar to another level.

The Awakening

After six months in jail in the early summer of 1968, I signed up to view a series of films with spiritual themes: “The Ten Commandments,” “The Robe,” “Barbarossa,” “King of Kings.” In “King of Kings,” starring Jeffrey Hunter as Jesus, we came to a segment where Jesus and His disciples were walking over the hills of Galilee, on their way to the place where Jesus was to deliver the “Sermon on the Mount.” Jesus was good-naturedly bantering back and forth with his disciples. As this Divine exchange took place, I completely lost myself in the moment, so absorbed did I become in the familiarity and power of the scene. Suddenly, without thinking, I felt a powerful urge to ask Jesus a question, momentarily imagining I was there among His disciples. The simple question arose, without any conscious mental effort: Why is it you are always found in the past, or expected and anticipated sometime in the future, but You are never here (in a body) when I am here?

As I asked this question, I felt a great sorrow and spiritual longing to be with this special Being. My conscious mind wondered where this question came from. Immediately I received an answer in the form of a powerful thought transmission. “I am here now in a human body (on Earth) and no Age has needed me more than this Age!” Following this, I received a collage of images: a massive atom bomb exploding, followed by scenes of war, battle scenes and other forms of world chaos. My sense at the time was these images were sent to confirm and implant the reality of the previous thought transmission: “...no age has needed me more than this age.” Then I felt a wave of bliss enfold me and I don’t remember seeing the rest of the film, so absorbed was I in the love and bliss of the moment. I remember the sensation of floating back to my cellblock in a state of blissful contentment, somehow I didn’t seem surprised by these sudden revelations.

After this experience, many of my fellow inmates sensed I was emitting a powerful energy and some gave me wide berth and/or a form of respect. A wide energy field seemed to flow around me,

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radiating into the prison. A handful of inmates began to ask deep questions about the meaning and purpose of life and for some unknown reason, the answers seemed to flow from me when needed. I found myself able to offer help and direction to others, although I did not know where the information was coming from.

I was inspired to spread love and peace during the few months I had left. After the initial experience of talking to Jesus (God) and getting such an amazing response, the natural tendency of my mind was to doubt it ever happened or doubt the amazingly precise answer I had received. These doubts might have persisted, except for one major fact—a ‘Presence’ would enter my cell and envelope me in ‘Divine Love’ around the same time every day for a period of time following the experience in the movie, and I would feel recharged, at ease and all doubts would vanish. I recall a subtle scent of roses seemed to accompany these visitations. This experience lasted for some time. Sometimes I would ask who and what this Presence was? God, Jesus? BUT ALL I EVER HEARD IN RESPONSE WAS A PROFOUND SILENCE AND THE SCENT OF DIVINE LOVE.

During this period of grace, I initiated a group effort to stage the first ever ‘Love-In Event’ to be held at our prison facility. It was well attended by many of the prisoners and we had good fun. The gang member types tried to derail the event, but in the end it was a great success and a charged atmosphere pervaded the event.

I was suddenly informed that my twelve-month sentence was reduced to ten months, on the basis of good behavior. I sensed the authorities wanted to get rid of me, but it could have been my imagination. I was now scheduled to get out of prison in September of 1968, instead of late November. As it happens this was a critical factor in what followed.

After my release in September of 1968, I got a steady job driving a delivery truck for a company owned by a dear friend’s father, and moved back in with my parents in Palos Verdes. I was able to stay out of trouble and start saving money, while figuring out what life

had in store. I had been apprehensive about leaving the secure daily regimen of prison and reentering the world—a common reaction among prisoners, because one becomes thoroughly institutionalized after a lengthy period in jail. I knew there would be all sorts of temptations and distractions when I got out, and there were—within a week of being released I tried marijuana again and absolutely hated the experience. I realized at that moment that I was finished with the drug world. After just a single experiment with pot, it was clear it no longer held any allure. I could also see that all my friends had not progressed in any way since I had been gone and this really was disturbing. I was thinking, “What does life hold for me? I cannot continue to hang out with my old friends.”

I began to attend weekly services at a Yogananda Center in Redondo Beach, on Pacific Coast Highway. I really felt at home in this humble Eastern Spiritual Center and I used to naturally meditate on the Christ photo, prominently displayed in the center of the altar, between Yogananda’s various gurus and his photo. The Christ was obviously the highest spiritual authority among the various gurus, higher than Babaji, based on how the photos were placed. For me, this meant Yogananda acknowledged the Christ as the highest spiritual authority on Earth. I met an interesting older woman, who, I think, had met Yogananda. She looked like a cross between a Tibetan Buddhist Monk and a crazy California eccentric. She was very honest (she reminded me of a twin soul of Agnes Baron) and she had been on the spiritual path for decades if not lifetimes. She invited me to move into her home in Redondo Beach and I accepted.

After beginning to go to services at the Self-Realization Fellowship church, I heard the name of an old surfer acquaintance of mine mentioned, Jimmy Irons. Someone said he was following a spiritual master from India named Meher Baba. The thought went through my head, “This guru isn’t going to catch me, like he caught Jimmy.” I knew Jimmy was a strong-willed and independent individual and if he had decided to join this new spiritual following, the Master must be some kind of heavy weight. I for-

Clive Adams

got about this odd mental reaction on my part and forgot even the name of Jimmy's guru.

A few days later I was walking down Hermosa Avenue in Hermosa Beach and came upon a bookstore that hadn't been there before I went to jail. On the door was a large poster with the face of a man named Meher Baba. It was the 'Ancient One' poster. As I read the words printed on the poster, "I was Krishna, I was Rama, I was this One, I was that One and Now I am Meher Baba," a thought went through my mind: "Either you are exactly who you say you are, or you are the biggest fraud to ever come down the pike, but you are definitely nothing in between." I had no idea where that thought came from. I looked at the face and intense eyes of Meher Baba on the poster and somehow on a subliminal level, this brief photographic encounter with Meher Baba connected to my experience in jail of asking Jesus the important question during the movie, "King of Kings." I knew on some level that Meher Baba was declaring himself the Christ figure of the age. I also felt I had been 'caught' in His net, in the sense that I am an intensely curious fellow and now I was forced to investigate whether Meher Baba was real or fake.

I wandered into the bookstore. But a strange thing happened—I couldn't read any of the book titles, every time I tried to focus on a book, the jacket cover and titles would just fog up and disappear. This freaked me out. As I turned to leave the store I saw a pamphlet called "God in a Pill" by Meher Baba—it appeared to be floating off the table. In a panic I put a quarter down and fled. I read the entire booklet as I walked along the beach. By the time I was done I realized Meher Baba communicated with unusual power and authority—I couldn't find anything to disagree with, in terms of His comments on drugs. It confirmed what I had intuited in jail about the upside and downside of drugs. It still hadn't dawned on me that Meher Baba was who He said He was. If it hadn't been for divine intervention, I might not have put two and two together until much later.

A few days later, I was hanging out in the living room of the Redondo Beach house with the Tibetan-looking lady, her son and my sister, plus a few spiritual seekers from the SRF crowd. Suddenly we heard a commotion in the street and went to investigate. Jimmy Irons was just pulling up on his motorcycle and was calling us to come out and help him push a car that had broken down nearby. We followed him to the stalled car and helped the driver, an Indian fellow, jumpstart his car—he drove off and we never saw him again.

We walked with Jimmy back to his motorcycle, said our good-byes. Though Jimmy was intent on leaving, his motorbike wouldn't start, no matter how many times he tried to start it. Finally in frustration, Jimmy said, "I guess Baba wants me to stay here." I was surprised by this statement—it seemed to convey the idea that his Master controlled his motorcycle and everything else that was going on in his life—a novel concept to me. We all went back in the house and Jimmy told us everything he knew about Meher Baba.

Jimmy spoke poetically, with great conviction and intensity for six hours, till almost 11 P.M. He would have kept going, but just then we heard a loud commotion across the street, breaking the flow of the experience. Just prior to this, I had had the thought that if Jimmy kept talking about Meher Baba, we all might get swallowed up in the blissful emanations filling the room, never to be seen or heard from again. There was so much spiritual and love energy in the room that we were almost drowning in it. Again I could smell a divine perfume in the atmosphere. At the exact moment I had this thought, we heard the sound of a car crash out front and we floated out of the house to investigate. A car had gone out of control and crashed into a fire hydrant, causing a forty-foot plume of water to shoot up into the dark night sky. We all enjoyed the excitement of this strange incident, while inwardly feeling it was a natural external manifestation of what we were experiencing within, and that it had been staged for our benefit. Water, Love, Bliss, Love, Bliss, Water—it put an exclamation point to the wonderful sharing by Jimmy. From that moment on, I

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knew Baba had me in His crosshairs. The two back-to-back experiences with Jimmy in a matter of a few hours were too much of a coincidence to ignore and it dramatically sped up my interest in finding out exactly who Meher Baba was.

The following day I went down to the Hermosa Beach Baba Bookstore and bought *God Speaks*, *Avatar* and the *Discourses*. I read *Avatar* by Jean Adriel first, before reading the other books, which were written by Meher Baba Himself, and *Avatar* made a huge impression on me. It was a spiritual classic in its own right and was the perfect bridge to introducing seekers to Meher Baba's life and teachings. Just prior to all these strange Baba experiences, I had been reading *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. Jimmy Irons and many SRF people were also reading Ramakrishna and the works of his chief disciple, Swami Vivekananda. Ramakrishna was the perfect introduction for understanding, because unlike Yogananda and the saints, Ramakrishna was a Perfect Master, or Sadguru of His time and many of us were able to discern the huge qualitative difference between Ramakrishna's state of consciousness and that of a saint. We began to see a glimmer of what it means to become "God-Realized" and reach the apex of consciousness. Thus we could read about Meher Baba and see that His state of consciousness matched that of Ramakrishna, with one major difference: Baba declared Himself the 'Avatar of the Age,' the direct descent of the 'Godhead' into a human form, like Jesus, Buddha, Rama, Krishna, Zoroaster and Mohammad, whereas Ramakrishna was a man who had achieved oneness with the God in this lifetime and 'returned' to our level to share the experience and help a few lucky souls reach perfection. Meher Baba was claiming to be the One and only Godhead, Who returns at the end of each cycle of time and Whose job it is to keep His lovers and seekers moving forward towards God- Realization!

101 Tales of Finding Love

Since 2013 I find myself researching and investigating all things Baba, almost full time. My son, Eruch Adams and I founded and maintain a Meher Baba information website. (See www.meherlegacy.org.) The purpose of the Meher Legacy Project (as it is known) is to provide verifiable documentation, context and facts about Meher Baba, His Teachings and His Advent. I split my time between Richmond, California; Asheville, North Carolina; Myrtle Beach, South Carolina and India.

Mary Barrett

101 Tales
of Finding Love

Baba Is My Master!

by Mary Barrett

101 Tales of Finding Love



Mary age 20

Mary Barrett

I THINK I WAS ABOUT THREE YEARS OLD when God called me out of sleep. I heard a strong deep voice say my name. I sat up in bed and said, "Yes." I knew it was God. My bedroom was full of light. It was early morning. I was ready.

As I remember this moment so many years ago, when I sat up in my bed and said yes, I answered God and was ready to learn what He wanted.

At the age of twelve, I knelt in the lower church of St. Paul's Catholic Church in Hingham, Massachusetts. The kneelers down there were wood without the soft padding of the upper church kneelers. My knees usually found the hard wood painful, but in the moment I am describing, the pain I felt was in my heart. I was weeping and talking to God or myself or maybe the universe. I was angry. It felt so terribly unfair! It was unfair and seemed cruel. Cruel that God came to be with us only once, as Jesus. What about all of us now? What about me?

By the time I was fourteen years old I was stating to my mother that I no longer believed in God. This was a reaction of anger. A statement: "I don't really need You, God, and You aren't here for me anyway!" But, this didn't last long.

I think I was sixteen when my best friend handed me a book that her brother told her to give me—*The Everything and The Nothing*. I recall sitting on the long, wide screened porch of my parents' home, looking at the black and white photo of Meher Baba. As I opened the book and began to read the words, my mind glazed over. I could not understand what I was reading! I had no idea what this man was saying. But I remember His Face. And His Face followed me for several years in books, cards and posters that littered the doors, walls and pages of books that I encountered.

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As a teenager, I heard someone speaking about Meher Baba once on TV, possibly on the David Frost show. I have no memory of who was interviewed—Allan Cohen maybe—or what was said or even when I watched it. My mother must have also been watching because after the show she asked me why this person kept silence—as if I knew. I told her that people weren't heeding God's words and Meher Baba was silent because we need to listen to God in our hearts. Then I forgot about it.

By age nineteen I was looking for belonging and security of some kind. Not within a dogmatic paternalistic religion, or the world I had grown up in. I carried inside myself a great deal of pain and loss, as was true and still is for many. My self-esteem and confidence were very low. Of course I didn't know it, but Baba was keeping me going, moving toward Him and protecting me from immature choices and sometimes dangerous situations.

I had dropped out of college and was living in a house on Cape Cod, Massachusetts with several other young women. I was working as a telephone operator. This was in 1971 and still a very "hip" time of scruffy jeans, long hair, long skirts, smoking joints, doing drugs, etc. I was pretty naive and not into the drug scene, but most of the people I knew were, and I looked the part and was definitely rejecting the status quo of my privileged (although not healthy or happy) white Catholic upbringing and looking for something else. My bedroom was on the second floor of the house. Every time I used the stairs I saw Meher Baba's smiling face on a "Don't Worry, Be Happy" card on the door of the top bedroom.

In Winchester, Massachusetts, was what you might call a sister house to the one I lived in. It was much more communal—food, funds, household responsibilities, etc. Friends of some of the women I lived with would visit us from that other house. This is how I met Lynne, from Greenville, South Carolina. And I ended up moving to that house.

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By now I was carrying around Baba Ram Das's *Be Here Now*. And of course Meher Baba's face was smack in the middle! And it turned out that Lynne had a poster of Baba on the wall of her bedroom. As several months went by she and I learned more about each other. Lynne had gone to Baba meetings near Boston and there had met a Baba follower named Walter, who it seems, had moved to Myrtle Beach, South Carolina and was working at the Meher Spiritual Center. (This is Walter Witkowski, who worked at the Center, sweetly greeting and serving Baba lovers and Baba for many years.)

I remember one time sitting in the living room of the house, writing in the communal journal. I had just experienced the insight that the universe was within me. I had experienced it as feeling huge and surprising and unexpected! What I recall now is the sense of vast space within me. At the time it was daunting and exciting. I knew it was important, but I didn't know what it meant.

I don't know how it came about, but Lynne and I made the decision to move to her home town of Greenville, South Carolina. Once there we spent a lot of our time going to the library for books on Eastern mysticism. Lynne had heard of a guru of some kind who lived fasting on a mountain top in India and was called Babaji. She had heard that taking his name in meditation was important. So we did!

It wasn't long before Lynne contacted Walter and we headed to the Center. We met Kitty, Jane, Fred and Ella Winterfeldt and many others. I think Stella Hernandez was at the Center on one of our visits.

Of course I found the Center and everyone there to be a wonderful experience. Meher Baba was clearly an amazing teacher, as I felt was true of Ramakrishna and Yogananda and others. For me God as a universal Presence was my path, and I was definitely not interested in a male "master!" This was nonnegotiable and I did not hesitate to state this.

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And now I am just going to jump to the end here. I was in the kitchen of our small apartment in Greenville. I can't remember what I was doing, what time of day it was or anything, except one moment I was on my feet and the next I was on my butt on the floor, laughing out loud and declaring, "*Baba is my Master!*" Laughing at myself, the huge comedy of it. No male master for me!!

Weeks later I learned that my Master, Meher Baba, was no longer in His body. This was a crushing blow. Again, I had missed meeting my Savior, my Lord. I wept very hard. And those first few years with Baba I had many times of crying with longing for Him. Despite the pain of it, I also found it satisfying. That desperate longing in a way made me feel closer to Him.

This was 1972. I was twenty years old.

Mary Barrett

Currently, I live on Cape Cod in Massachusetts. I have two creative and loveable adult sons and daughters-in-law. As well as one totally amazing five-year-old granddaughter named Isobel who lights up my heart and is a gift of joy.

I'm a practitioner in Reiki and Soundcode Therapy, trained in Coaching With Horses and as a HeartMath coach. Horses assist me in all of this!

The truth is that I am still searching and as we all do I come up against pain and challenge that stump me. I struggle and fear and hide and then surprisingly, amazing learning and insight appear and uplift me. In the past decade Baba has asked me to dive very deep in ways I never expected or wanted. In return He has pulled me closer. Thank you my Beloved Lord!



Artwork © Claire Mataira

Alta Burnett

101 Tales
of Finding Love

An Unexpected, Surprising
Discovery—Meher Baba

by Reverend Alta Burnett, Ph.D.

101 Tales of Finding Love



Alta, January 2009, at Qutub Minar,
New Delhi, India

Alta Burnett

ONE DAY IN MAY 1984 A GOOD FRIEND from college years handed me a book and said the equivalent of “read this.” It was not the first time one of us had shared an interesting book with the other, and the transaction at the time seemed ordinary. The reading of the book, however, was anything but ordinary. It changed the trajectory of my life.

What was the book? It was Shirley MacLaine’s *Out on a Limb*. In the latter half of the book, MacLaine explored two phenomena which blew me away: reincarnation—we live not just one but many lives, and God’s omnipresence—God fills all space, all creation, from the tiniest atom to the solar system and beyond. Somehow, as I read, I knew both to be true, and my entire being—body, mind, heart, soul—*tingled*, danced for joy! This was the best description I could give of the experience at the time. Now one might say I began to vibrate in synchrony with a new, higher, or at least different “tune.”

This unexpected, surprising experience served as a spiritual turning for me. I knew from that time my life would never be quite the same. I did not know how it would be different; I simply knew that it would be different. It set me in a new direction, beginning with far and wide searching—especially the reading of materials I had not even known about before. I dabbled briefly into spiritualism, attending a couple of different class-series at the local spiritualist church. I read books written about out-of-body experiences, books written by and about Edgar Cayce and by Ruth Montgomery, as well as *Initiation* by Elisabeth Haich and *Key to Yourself* by Venice Bloodworth, all of which had a great impact. For at least two years—an exciting time of exploration, learning, and discovery—I read eagerly and voraciously, unable to take it all in as quickly as I would have liked.

One particularly meaningful discovery—and an important stepping stone from Shirley MacLaine to Meher Baba—for me was Unity, a Christian religious organization which advocates the power of affirmative prayer and of positive thinking and, growing out of the nineteenth-century New Thought movement in the United States, was founded by Charles and Myrtle Fillmore in 1889 in Kansas City, Missouri, United States (five years before Merwan Sheriar Irani's birth in India).

Although I did not know it at the time of discovery and for some time thereafter, Unity began as a result of a profound healing which Myrtle experienced while in her early forties when she was ill with tuberculosis. Not ready to die and clutching at every straw, one day in the spring of 1886, she and Charles attended a lecture by a Christian Science practitioner from Chicago, Dr. E. B. Weeks. Although Charles left the hall feeling the same as before, Myrtle left aflame with a new, life-transforming conviction: "I am a child of God and therefore I do not inherit sickness." (James Dillet Freeman, *The Story of Unity*, Unity Village, Missouri: Unity Books, 1978, pp. 44-45)

Taking within herself this new "Truth," Myrtle closed herself in a room and studied the Gospels of the *New Testament*, especially Jesus' words concerning healing. Realizing that "life is everywhere—in worm and in man," that "life has to be guided by intelligence in making all forms," and that life would do just what she wanted, she began to speak words of strength and power to every part of her body, even asking for forgiveness for previously calling them diseased. Sitting next to an empty chair, she knew that Jesus Christ's Spirit occupied that chair, supporting and encouraging her in her pursuit of healing. She also began to be watchful generally of the thoughts she let into her mind and of the words she

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spoke. Gradually, with the passage of days, weeks and months, there was noted improvement. With the passage of two years Myrtle was completely healed. (Thomas E. Witherspoon, *Myrtle Fillmore: Mother of Unity*, Unity Village, Missouri: Unity Books, 1977, p. 38-43)

Noticing the profound change in Myrtle, Charles began to pursue healing for himself. Soon others—family, friends, neighbors—began to come to them for prayer support. Desiring to share their discovery of “Truth” more broadly, in April 1889 the Fillmores published the first issue of “Modern Thought,” which is recognized as the beginning of Unity. (Today, Unity’s reach is worldwide, particularly through its daily devotional, “Daily Word,” and its prayer function, Silent Unity, which receives more than a million prayer requests annually.)

As a scientist I might have been very skeptical of all of this had Myrtle’s healing experience been my first exposure to Unity. However, by the time I actually did learn of it, I was already so “taken” by Unity—in principle at least if not yet in practice (details of Myrtle’s healing process were instructive to me in the doing of “practical Christianity,” as the Fillmores often referred to Unity)—and by Unity’s new way (for me) of looking at especially God and Jesus that skepticism was momentary. It just felt so right that there is only one Presence and Power in the universe; that God is absolute good, active and present everywhere and in everything; that there is a spark of divinity—the Christ Spirit—within each one of us and that we are naturally and inherently good because of this God-Divinity within us; that we are spiritual beings having human experiences; that Jesus is our Master Teacher rather than, or more so, than our Savior; that we “save” ourselves by following Jesus’ example; that thoughts held in mind manifest after their kind—we create our experiences by what we choose to think and feel and believe;

that we can connect with God and can bring out the good—wisdom, healing, peace, prosperity—in our lives, as Myrtle did, through affirmative prayer (talking to God—“I am healthy and whole,” “the love of God enfolds me”) and meditation (listening to God); that we can actually make a difference in our world by doing and giving our best to live the truth we know; that people, events, places, and circumstances in the Bible represent aspects of oneself. Instead of resisting the “new,” my heart and soul were set to singing and my mind and body to “tingling” once again.

A completely unexpected aspect of my discovery of Unity was feeling a “call to ministry.” One day about May 1990, I realized that this “new” phenomenon had simply, quietly appeared in my awareness, as if from nowhere. It was simply there, like having something suddenly present in the center of a perfectly still, quiet “space.” What a surprise that was! Having always been active in church since the early years (one of my earliest childhood memories—I was probably three at the time—is my singing “Zacchaeus Was a Wee Little Man” at a Sunday night service in the small Methodist church in the rural western Kentucky community where I grew up; I remember it probably because I forgot some of the words but was able to continue singing after my pianist-sister coached me a bit), and even having matriculated at a “church” college, nonetheless becoming, being, serving as a minister was not something I had ever considered, maybe because women simply were not ministers or pastors then. I spent some time praying about that one—about six months, in fact! Saying “yes” to that calling, I became an ordained Unity minister in 1996.

Although I was “taken” with Unity, I was aware, even in the early stages of excitement about it, that Unity was not the “all in all.” I do not know how I knew this; I simply did. Perhaps it was the recognition that, although there seemed

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to be greater truth or authority behind Unity's teachings than anything I had known before, they still did not seem complete or able to take me to God-realization. What came as a completely unexpected surprise was discovering, during the same lifetime that I discovered Unity and about the same time I felt the call to ministry, that which I now believe is the "All in all"—Meher Baba! The profundity of this discovery occurred gradually for me, however, not suddenly as it has for many.

During the years following the reading of *Out on a Limb*, I also began to practice meditation regularly and privately. Later I invited a small group of friends to meditate with me, which we did once a month in my home from 1987-91. At our meetings, before my friends and I began to meditate, I usually gave a bit of religious or spiritual instruction, mostly from Unity. One day, in response to something I said, one of my friends, the late Fran Capodanno, shared another perspective on the matter, attributing her remarks to a "Meher Baba." I paused for just a second or two and then proceeded with my planned remarks. Not too long thereafter, at another monthly meeting, the same thing happened. This time I paused again, longer this time, long enough, in fact, to ask two questions, the answers to which I have never forgotten: How do you spell "Mayherr Baba"? Who is Meher Baba? The answers: M-e-h-e-r B-a-b-a, and He is the Avatar of this Age. I pondered the answers for several seconds and then continued with my planned remarks. Probably not surprisingly, I just could not quite take it all in and digest it in the moment!

During the next ten years or so, even while I trained and began to serve as a Unity minister, my friend occasionally would hand me a small picture-card of Meher Baba and a small pamphlet or booklet of some discourse written by Him and occasionally we would talk about Him, either be-

cause of my asking a question about Him or her offering a comment about Him. In this way I began to learn not only more about Meher Baba but also that there were a great many books written by and about Him, DVDs depicting His life, CDs of songs of praise to Him, etc. It was all interesting and fun. But for the most part—still being really into Unity and actively engaged in Unity work—I just let Meher Baba sit on the back-burner of my spiritual life. Or at least it seemed so at the time. I suppose I have always been a seeker, so I guess I should not have been surprised that Meher Baba would not stay there permanently, on that back-burner, even if I had put Him there! How grateful I am now that He did not!

As I look back on it, I realize that, even as I did Unity ministry, I was drawn more and more, if not to Meher Baba per se, at least to what He had to say about both spiritual and mundane matters, and especially to the whole phenomenon of spiritual Masterhood and spiritual discipleship. After a while I began to wonder and ponder more and more about what it would have been like to be a disciple of Jesus. Finally, one day it occurred to me that, with the little I did know about Meher Baba and His disciples (*mandali*) and the books and other resources by and about Him, I could learn a great deal about discipleship by reading about His life and work. So for the first time, I bought one of Meher Baba's books—*Discourses*—and began a serious reading and studying of it.

It was not long before I realized a couple of things: First, Meher Baba's *Discourses* not only answered questions about being a disciple of a Master, but also more basic questions about being a spiritual aspirant. I quickly learned that being an aspirant comes first, that being a disciple is way down the spiritual path from being one who aspires to love and know God! And it gave a great many practical guides about issues of everyday life not only for the spiritual aspirant but also

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for any and all of us. Intellectually, the answers were very satisfying!

Second, simultaneously really, at some deeper level within me, this book also answered life's fundamental questions: Why is there a physical universe? How did we come to be? Who/What are we really? What is the meaning and purpose of life? Why is there evil? Why is it important to be good? Meher Baba's answers to these and other questions struck me as profound. And not only that. They resonated within me with a *Voice of Authority and Truth* far beyond anything I had ever experienced before. That was so satisfying intellectually. But much more significantly, my "heart" or "soul" felt refreshingly, deeply satisfied, fulfilled, more quiet and still—and perhaps more grateful—than ever before. My entire being tingled, danced for joy—began to vibrate in synchrony with an even higher tune. It is difficult to describe, but it was quite wonderful, awesome!

About this same time, I learned that members of Sufism Reoriented sang or said Meher Baba's name for thirty minutes each day. I learned a few years later that, as part of their devotion to Him, they also looked at pictures of Meher Baba for fifteen minutes each day. Even later I discovered that Unity and Sufism Reoriented have similar symbols—a winged globe for Unity and a winged heart with the number "1" placed in it for Sufism Reoriented. Feeling my meditation practice to be in something of a plateau at that time and liking to sing very much, I decided to sing Meher Baba's name for thirty minutes each day as a form of meditation, using tapes I bought from Sufism Reoriented. Later I added looking at Meher Baba's pictures for fifteen minutes to my meditation practice.

Initially, doing this seemed rather weird and I felt a bit guilty. After all, I was singing Meher Baba's, not Jesus

Christ's, name! Nonetheless, because the tunes were so different, sweet, and captivating, I persisted, with as much focus and devotion as I could muster. Besides, the words were easy to learn—*Meher Baba, Meher Baba, Meher Baba!* After a while, singing Meher Baba's name began to feel more natural and, sometime later, exactly the right thing to do. One day after about two years of daily singing, to my great surprise and delight, I realized that Meher Baba had drawn me into the embrace of His love and grace. How sweet it was to realize this—and to feel it! It still is! (Remembering it always brings tears to my eyes.) I should have known. In seminary I had studied Dr. Rocco Errico's book on The Lord's Prayer, titled *Setting a Trap for God*, telling that this is what we do when we pray and meditate—we set a trap for God—and God catches us! It was incredible! Thank You, God!

The “euphoria” of that experience has been tempered during the ensuing years by Baba's work on me, which has not always been easy and often has been unsettling and painful rather than comfortable and pleasant. Sustaining me in this ongoing process are His presence, the realization that He is giving me an invaluable boost on my spiritual journey, and His love in spite of all of my shortcomings and weaknesses!

In the early years before the “euphoric” experience, and even for some time after, I questioned: Who is this One, this spiritual Master from the East—from India? Who is Meher Baba, this supposed Avatar of this Age? What does “Avatar” mean? Is this One really the Messiah, the Christ, the Buddha, the Prophet, the Messenger come into our midst at this time, as He publicly proclaimed in February 1954? Is Meher Baba really God in human form on Earth? If He really is that, then what does that mean really—for me and for all of us? And if that were not enough, could this scientist mesh Meher Baba and science? I had not had any real difficulty meshing United Methodism and science and

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Unity and science in my life, but would I be able to mesh Meher Baba and science? (The answer to this last question is “yes.” It has been such fun to understand evolution, for example, from both scientific and spiritual directions. What a delightful, refreshing, enlivening twist Meher Baba brings to the entire phenomenon!)

This western Protestant-Christian, scientist, and now Unity minister was definitely wrestling with all of these questions and particularly with this new thought—that the long-anticipated One had actually come! Although the return of the Christ has been a centuries-old longing, it still required a whole new rearrangement of mind and heart and life to have that actually be so for oneself!

As I continued to read and study *Discourses* with an eye toward discipleship, I also began to read and study other materials by and about Meher Baba, all the while questioning and pondering and singing His name every day. Soon I discovered that I was gaining new insight and understanding about Jesus. Suddenly enriched, His life and teachings came alive for me. Unity had given me the opportunity to look at Jesus in an entirely new way from the United Methodist way, which was wonderful. Although I feel the *founders* of Unity would not agree with the way many in Unity now look at Jesus (their late nineteenth-early twentieth century view would have been more traditionally Christian)—that He was a human, with an advanced soul, yes, but nonetheless a human, who achieved God-realization during His early years and then began His ministry as a result of that—it gave me a new way of looking at Jesus as first human and then divine. That gave me hope for myself!

What I discovered through Meher Baba’s writings was that I was being brought back more or less to the more traditional Christian way of looking at Jesus as suffering Savior. It

was not the same really, because it was definitely up the spiral at least one whole turn from the view I had had through United Methodism, with Unity somewhere in between, but that is where it brought me—back to the more or less Christian way of looking at Jesus. I had some resistance to that!

Three new pieces of information about this “up the spiral” way of looking at Jesus were different, intriguing, and eventually satisfying to me: the Avatar was the first soul to know and experience “I am God,” the Avatar henceforth has incarnated on Earth repeatedly to help our souls to know and experience “I am God” also, and Jesus was just one such advent of the Avatar.

In addition to all of that, either directly or indirectly, Meher Baba answered other questions related to Jesus as well, such as the tradition of Mary’s being young and Joseph’s being older, the missing years of Jesus’ life, who John the Baptist was and what he did for Jesus, who Mary Magdalene was, the crucifixion, and the resurrection.

At some point during all of the inner wrestling, I discovered books written by Don Stevens, one of Meher Baba’s western *mandali* who was not only an English-speaking American but also a scientist totally devoted to Meher Baba and had been since 1952 when he first met Meher Baba. Don granted me the privilege of an interview at Meher Spiritual Center in April 2007. I was delighted to meet Don and, at his invitation a year later, to participate with him in the January 2009 Beads on One String tour in India. Reading Don’s books and learning his coming-to-Baba story were a great help in my becoming open to the possibility that Meher Baba truly is the Avatar of this Age and in giving me the courage to let my life and mind and heart open more and more to Him. It was a gradual opening and a gradual accepting that Meher

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Baba really is the Avatar of this Age. What I came to realize over a period of time is that, as I accepted from my end, Meher Baba assured me inwardly from His that He is indeed the Avatar of this Age!

It was still some time later, however, that the “this Age” part of “Avatar of this Age” finally sank fully into my being. It dawned on me slowly that Meher Baba was here not just any old time. Meher Baba was here during *my* lifetime! And then some years later it finally “hit” me! Why can it not be so? Why should it not be so? Why would it not be so? At least in the Christian world of my upbringing, it was preached repeatedly that it would happen about this time in history. And indeed it did—during my lifetime! How sweet it is! Thank You, Meher Baba!

I feel richly and deeply blessed not only to know about Avatar Meher Baba but also to feel His abiding presence and to experience His love, forgiveness, and steering hand in my life. I am deeply grateful that, well before I knew of Him, He knew me and left the following hints of our connection for me to discover after I had become “well-hooked” on Avatar Meher Baba:

(1) Meher Baba was involved in the 1952 automobile accident along a stretch of US Highway 62 in central Oklahoma; I grew up on a farm about a mile from the same highway, US Highway 62, in western Kentucky, and

(2) Meher Baba and four of the *mandali* (Chanji, Kaka, Adi, Jr., Beheram) spent two nights at Moana Hotel in Honolulu en route to China and India, with a one-night stopover in Japan, in June 1932; I spent two nights at Moana Hotel en route to South Korea and Japan in May 1974; although it is unlikely that I occupied the same room as Meher Baba—there were perhaps one hundred and fifty rooms when He

was there, and perhaps twice as many when I was there (I stayed in Room 601)—I am confident I followed His footsteps through the same lobby and along other places where the Avatar of this Age, Meher Baba, walked. How sweet it is! How sweet You are, Meher Baba!

My life in Louisville, Kentucky, which has been home-base for several decades, is filled with activity. I lead a small Meher Baba study group and sing—mostly in “retirement” centers and a couple of Unity churches—with a group called Voices of Joy. When invited I serve as guest speaker at Sunday services and officiate at wedding and funeral/memorial services. I make pastoral visits in hospitals, funeral homes, and “retirement” centers. I tend to house and home and support my husband who is still “professing” mathematics at one of the local universities. I serve as guardian for and travel weekly to a nearby town to visit a nephew who resides at a center for the intellectually and developmentally disabled. And, when asked, I write articles for publication in *Glow International*. Life is good! Thank You, Meher Baba!

Avatar Meher Baba ki jai!

Renee Bussanich

101 Tales
of Finding Love

He Found Us Again

by Renee Bussanich

101 Tales of Finding Love



~Top row Patrick Carlson, then Chaghanmaster's wife and daughter with him in the middle. Left to right bottom Eric Nadel, Renee, Heather Nadel, Gil Alvarado. December 1971.

Renee Bussanich

WHERE DO OUR STORIES EVEN BEGIN? They are all merely brief episodes in the long journey home through ages and lifetimes. This lifetime this story began with feeling the strong presence of Jesus as a very young child, later reading the lives of the Saints, and eventually realizing the oneness of all religions. Then I went to college.

It was the late sixties when everyone was busy getting their secret “sound” from the Maharishi group or wandering around to see the little kid who was supposed to be a guru, or into *Be Here Now* with Baba Ram Dass. It was the Bay Area, during and post hippie days when politics were intense and everyone became seekers. We were throwing the *I Ching* like mad and reading all kinds of things to try and make sense of the nonsense as well as the experiences we just might have had with certain drugs.

Heather Nadel and Judy Ernst were the friends I met my first day at Stanford, there on my hallway in the dorm. I was freshly arrived from conservative Eastern Oregon to the Bay Area just at the end of the Summer of Love, full of curiosity and ready to explore everything. There were many adventures during those days as we experienced the sit ins and the war and the whole cultural sea change that was happening. It was a rich time of music and poetry, travels to Europe and near misses with disasters. There had to be Guardian Angels sent by Baba taking good care of us through it all.

During this time at Stanford I also met Eric Nadel and Charlie Kehler who were living in a treehouse at the University of California Santa Cruz campus. Eric brought interesting things to share with us—various chants and experiences and books. I read *Autobiography of a Yogi* and found out that when the disciple is ready the Master must come, so decid-

ed the best thing to do was to try and be ready and not sort through the multiple gurus who were showing up in our world. Heather read *God Speaks* and reported that maybe that's who Baba actually was.

Then one day Eric appeared spreading the *Discourses* in front of me and declaring that this was finally IT! "Heard that before from you," I thought, "so we will see." Then later Heather and Eric went together to the Meher Spiritual Center in Myrtle Beach, and when Heather came back, up went a poster of "Don't Worry, Be Happy" at the top of the stairs in the house we shared. I would look at it coming up and think, "Well that's lovely, but kind of naive." But the picture was nice and I began to realize there might be a lot more perhaps to this Baba thing as I witnessed their relationship to Baba growing. And they, thankfully, accepted me and my own place on the journey without judgment. I often remember how important that was for me.

Eric took us to the Arbor Cafe and Wholly Foods, places in Berkeley owned by Baba lovers. I met the group at Pepperland commune in Santa Cruz (Charlie Kehler, Bif Soper—with hair way down to there—Patrick Carlson, Will David and others), all interesting folks wending their way along the same path. Later, as I sat on a rock high in the Sierras one day, looking down at a train winding its way along the river, I realized that my life was down there, and meanwhile I was absenting myself from the living through the supposed higher learning that LSD, etc. could possibly bring, but in doing so I was missing out on actual life and had exhausted whatever I thought I might be getting from the drug experience. It was (mostly) over at that moment.

Then Eric suggested that we go trekking into the Sierras, so Heather and I and another friend put on our backpacks and

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followed him into the heart of the mountains for an adventure and a chance to get away from the noise and cacophony of the busy Bay Area and Stanford and all that tugged at us there. As we walked further in, on Silence Day, my mind had a chance to unwind a lot of inner noise, and that continued for the next few weeks there in the high Sierras to the point that I was hearing music on the wind that sounded like pan pipes and strange dreams started to show up.

One dream was especially vivid and recurring. I remember telling Heather and Eric about it (and they very wisely did not offer any comments). In the dream I was somehow with a group of East Indian people who were very friendly and enthusiastically telling me I was soon to come to India! They would laugh when I demurred and would point to a calendar, assuring me that I was coming at that time. Each time I had the dream it became a bit clearer that this was meant to happen even though I had no plan at all to travel, no current passport and certainly no money.

A few months after we came down from the mountains, Eric decided to go to India while Heather and I stayed together in a house in Palo Alto. After only a couple weeks there, I had another one of those dreams with Indian people and the calendar, but this time at the end of the dream all I saw was Baba's beautiful face full of light and beaming at me. I woke up, still seeing His face lingering in my vision. While still trying to make sense of all this, a telegram arrived from Eric from India. Heather opened it and read that Eric suggested she should come to India right away and they could get married there and not wait. Heather looked at me, still holding the telegram, and said, "Do you want to go to India?"

And my response was, “ Well I guess I have to!” It was near “that time” on the calendar I saw in my dream. It was December, 1971.

Heather had a job as a writer where Betty Lowman also worked. Heather had a contract to write some childrens’ plays, so we decided to write one each day to pay for our tickets to India. The company agreed to pay her fourteen hundred dollars with the promise that she would come back from the trip and edit them. So from neither of us having money, passports or visas and even having a fender bender, we made enough money to go, got the visas together, and made it onto the plane to New York and India within just over two weeks. It had been such a time of ups and downs, a time of “we can, and then can’t, and again we can,” so that there was no time for my mind to get involved in questioning what was happening. On the airplane, over the Atlantic on the way to London, Heather looked at me and said, “It looks like we ARE going make it and let’s shake on it!” Literally the next thing we heard over the Air India intercom was that war had broken out with Pakistan and planes were possibly not going to be let in to India, and that anyone who wanted to should disembark in London! We went ahead anyway and our plane was the last one to make it in there for some days.

Heather says when we landed in London, we found out the war broke out with Pakistan, and that the plane before us heading to India was hijacked, and the next plane was grounded. But because we were on Air India the plane was going anyway. A lot of people decided to get off the plane but we stayed on it and got through. It was several days before another plane got through.

Meanwhile Bombay was in total blackout when we arrived and there were no lights on the bus we rode over the Ghats

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that night with Eric and Patrick Carlson. All the while I was giving myself permission to leave if I wanted to, thinking I would maybe stay a couple of days and then I would go to Delhi to see the Taj. But one of the first things I heard when we landed was that the Taj Mahal had been covered with black tarps because of the war with Pakistan and it was closed. I didn't have an out! I was beginning to think this might be a set up.

Resigned to be there, next morning I found myself at the base of the walk to the *Samadhi*. As we started up the hill, I suddenly had the overwhelming experience that I was a very young, brown skinned girl on her way to the place where Jesus was interred. This experience was so powerful that I literally could not wear shoes, so I took them off and walked in the dust to the top of the hill, still feeling like this girl from another time. Heather and I went into the *Samadhi* together, and realized later that we had the same experience going in, that Baba was Jesus and we had found Him. (Well, He found us again). We both grew up Catholic and had had some experiences in Europe that made us feel we were early Christians together. We were home.

The next three weeks were a kind of magical timeless time, meeting *mandali* I never knew existed, visiting and spending a night in the empty Guruprasad palace with Korshed, going to Shirdi and Sakori with Eruch, mornings and tea with Mansari, whole days at Meherazad, and biking everywhere. I knew so little about the *mandali* that at one point I actually asked Mani where she was from! But what treasures were ours as we came in contact with the companions of the Beloved and heard their stories every day. We basked in the love Baba was giving us directly and through these amazing disciples, and I am forever grateful for this experience. I have gone to India many times and still have never made it to see the Taj Mahal. And never missed it.

101 Tales of Finding Love

Renee is a psychotherapist and lives in Asheville, North Carolina where she spent several years working as a specialist with the Buncombe County School District, organizing and training the crisis teams and providing counseling, and she is currently working in private practice. She is on the Board of the Meher Archive Collective.

Angela Lee Chen

101 Tales
of Finding Love

Trail of Breadcrumbs

by Angela Lee Chen



Dr. Goher and Angela, Meherazad, November 2000

Angela Lee Chen

IN 1992 I WAS ATTENDING YALE, taking tai chi classes in a local group that met weekly in an out-of-the-way classroom. We had a visiting tai chi teacher who would come every third week or so—one of the senior members of the class would have a potluck dinner in his honor at her house in Guilford, Connecticut, which was about twenty minutes away from class. I had no car at the time, and though I had been offered rides before, it just didn't appeal since I had a boyfriend waiting on me for dinner and time together.

One night in class, the visiting teacher was especially jovial, cracking little jokes and making small puns in French that I was laughing at. He offered me a ride to the potluck. Having recently broken up with my boyfriend, I thought why not, I would go for a little adventure.

So I rode with him and we had a fun conversation about all sorts of things—spirituality, Enneagram personality traits, tai chi wisdom. I don't specifically remember that ride, but these are the kind of conversations that excited me while being around him. It felt like I had just gotten a taste of water after not even realizing I was in a desert.

The potluck was fun, but conversation on the ride back to my apartment in New Haven was even more so. Over the next few months, he and I would have long phone conversations between his visits to teach us tai chi. Soon, he would answer my questions best by pulling down Meher Baba books and reading to me from them.

I was a biology major at Yale, and wasn't sure what I was going to do next. I had already written off Western medicine, having had some unsatisfactory encounters with doctors in my life. I had been shadowing at a veterinary hospital to see

if I would like that life, but that was also not a good fit. So much of what I observed there were things like docking tails and de-clawing cats. I had found work as a lab assistant in a cell biology lab, but I was just buying time. I knew that biology research was not my future, especially since every little insight resulting in a published paper was earned by the sacrifice of hundreds or maybe thousands of lab animals. Years later, I heard Krishna Kant Shukla state that the side effects of drugs are the karma of how those drugs were researched. Having seen hundreds of albino lab rats die in my presence (I never did my own euthanizing), I rather agree with him.

It wasn't long before I proposed marriage to the tai chi teacher, and he concurred that it was a good idea. Soon after becoming engaged, he came up with the idea that Acupuncture school might be a good fit for me: "a perfect way to combine the study of life (biology) and the study of energy (tai chi)." He handed me a book, *Between Heaven and Earth*, still an excellent book I recommend to my patients.

The book was a page-turner for me. I ate it up and within days I was researching acupuncture schools. The closest were in New York City, and I made the decision almost immediately to drop work as a lab assistant, move in with my fiancé in Bronxville, New York to commute to acupuncture school.

School started; first-year classes were intense. I was going through a little anxiety as I scanned the classified ads, looking for a job that would be flexible and part-time in order to accommodate my morning classes. After only a week of looking, there it was—a job showed up, in my mind a blessing from Baba, even though I was not consciously a Baba lover yet. It was a guy/gal Friday job, basically someone to

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do some basic administrative assistant work, and it would be part-time.

I had to interview in a little building close to Central Park, 33 W 67 Avenue. On the appointed day, I held the ad from the newspaper in one hand as I navigated my way through the city. *Yes, this is the right street.* Left or right? I walked down the sidewalk looking at all the numbers... *yes, this is it!* It was a beautiful old building with stone sculptures decorating the doorway, and a wrought iron grille over the heavy front door. Pushing it open, I found myself in a white marble foyer with a brightly lit spiraling staircase to the right, white marble steps contrasting tastefully with black-painted wrought-metal balusters. A little elevator with old-school scissor gates opened up to my left as a smiling attendant welcomed me in. I requested the attic as he cheerfully closed the gates. "Oh yes, Sam's office?" I nodded, put at ease by his friendly manner as he operated the crank to command the elevator to rise.

Sam was immediately informal with me, and I was hired on the spot. Very relieved, I went about my life, classes in the mornings, a subway ride to work, an evening of intense memorizing. A couple times a week, I participated in tai chi classes, and at home conversation continued about spirituality and Meher Baba.

My now husband hadn't been attending Meher Baba House events for some years, but I was interested in meeting Bhauji and Darwin Shaw when they came to town. My enthusiasm gave him a reason to accompany me. Soon we were attending almost all the Meher Baba House events. Within the year, I was suggesting we visit the Meher Spiritual Center in Myrtle Beach.

On my spring break in April 1997, we booked a Spirit Airlines flight, and my husband arranged to be picked up by his cousin who still lives in Myrtle Beach. It was beautiful weather. The sights were so different from New York. I was glued to the windows, taking it all in. I remember noting the tackiness of the commercial sections of Highway 17, but still enjoying the beach vibe.

Arriving at the Center was of course magical, the quietude and speckled light falling through the trees so peaceful. I had so many amazing conversations in the kitchens and after meetings, hearing one wondrous Baba story after another: some were stories of meeting Baba, while others were about little miracles Baba would effect. It was an enchanting and delightful week. On the flight back to New York, I lightly touched my husband's forearm and softly stated, "I think I am a Baba lover!"

It was that easy and undramatic, like walking into a calm lake, deeper and deeper until I realized I was in over my head!

Back to school and work, life moved along. One new project Sam had for me was to work on his family genealogy: he had been corresponding with various branches of his family tree, gathering stories and photos, and my job was to put all that together. Besides being fun, the project had the added perk of being invited to his family reunion that summer, where everyone would get a copy of this book I helped lay out.

Sam lived on the first floor of the same building where he had an office in the attic. The apartment spanned two floors, the entire first floor being living space, with a clearstory second floor for bedrooms and a library. It had been furnished with a grand piano and lush antiques. I tried not to be too obvious as I gaped around the apartment.

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I finished acupuncture school, and was working as an acupuncturist out of the house, when out of the blue Cathy Haas Riley called, saying she and Tom were visiting her sister, who lived nearby, within the week. “Do you want to meet up? And do you want to see where Baba stayed in Scarsdale and in Harmon?” Astonished, I was quick to agree to meet.

Although I had heard about Baba’s accident in 1952 and His stay in Scarsdale, it had not occurred to me to seek out the location. It was in fact a mere six miles from our Bronxville house, up the Bronx River Parkway. In fact, just being on the Parkway is a pilgrimage because Baba travelled between the Scarsdale house and Ivy Duce’s apartment in Manhattan every day for two weeks! My mind was buzzing with excitement over this information all the way until we met up with Tom and Cathy to see the house.

The Scarsdale house at 14 Cohawney Road is perfectly manicured, set in an expensive neighborhood, everything immaculate, tasteful and gorgeous. We parked a short distance away to be discreet and walked around the block. No one seemed home, so we gazed at the house a little bit. It was a very peaceful setting, and in the following years, I would occasionally drive by to just to feel closer to Baba when life was stressful.

Our next stop was even more amazing, 180 Old Albany Post Road in Harmon, twenty-two miles from our house. The all-stone construction was perched on a high cliff overlooking the Croton River—it was very dramatic. Being on site as Cathy told the story of how Baba came to be staying there in 1931 and 1932 made the history come alive. This was where Darwin Shaw drove for hours to meet Baba and just missed Him.

And amazingly, this was where Baba plucked a wildflower for Elizabeth, instructing her to remember this date. That wildflower story and seeing the actual pillow and diary in Baba's Abode at the Meher Center are some pivotal points in my coming to Baba. To connect that story to a place not far from where I was living was mind-boggling.

Unfortunately, it was not long after when my marriage started to become more strained. I felt stifled by his need to dominate both conversation and my life, privately at home, as well as publicly or in his tai chi school. I was driven to more and more involvement in Meher Baba House to distract myself from my domestic dissatisfaction. I took on their newsletter, stepped up the calendar of events, and invested in video equipment to record guest speakers, taping talks and making them available to others.

Ironically, the videotaping became an overblown point of contention, where I was being accused of having a motivation of monetary gain. I presented my accounts, which showed I was very much in the red with the project, but even so, the sanctuary of Baba House blew up in my face. Soon after, my marriage disintegrated also, and I moved into my own apartment. When Baba wants to dissolve a situation, it just crumbles—and a new situation emerges from the rubble.

I started a new acupuncture practice in White Plains, which was a big transition. But in my newfound state of independence, I ventured out into the world like I had discovered a new playground. I explored everything from farming herbs to jewelry making, to studying drumming and *tabla*, briefly. That was how I started spending time with Cliff.

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In 2005, I felt a strong pull to attend the dedication of the Burleson House in Oklahoma, and started service on the Avatar Meher Baba Heartland Center Board. I created their newsletter, and Cliff started to join me as I went to Oklahoma annually for Board retreats. I organized all the logistics of the two-hundred-strong sixtieth anniversary Sahavas with rented vans to shuttle people around from the retreat center to programs at the Heartland Center and the accident site. It was an exciting time to be involved.

After I had spent nine or ten years on the Heartland Center board, my father passed away very suddenly and I had a crazy year taking care of my mother who had Alzheimer's. She needed full-time and part-time assistance, and it was entirely too much for me to keep all her plates spinning while trying to maintain a Center fifteen hundred miles away. I stepped off the board.

A year or two went by before I found the time to read Darwin's Shaw's book, *As Only God Can Love*. An awesome book in its detail, it is especially amazing for giving specific addresses. My eyes popped out of my head when I saw Ivy Duce's apartment reported as 33 W 67th Street, 3rd floor. That was the self-same building I used to work in for Sam!

Having been in his apartment, I had a fairly clear idea of what her apartment on the next floor up would have looked like. I flashed back to Don Stevens personally telling me his story of meeting Baba as he sat at our breakfast table. Don was a young Sufi, a student of Ivy Duce's. She introduced him to Baba as "my Don." Baba replied without missing a beat, "I have known Don since the dawn of time!" —in one fell swoop, dismissing Murshida Duce's claim on Don, and stating His own infinitely longer claim.

At the time Don told me the story, I hadn't learned the address yet. Now that I knew, I could clearly picture the stairs leading upwards to the clearstory second floor, where he retreated to recover from his first meeting with Baba. Don had a wonderful experience that afternoon, tasting a hint of Baba's omniscience, which you can read about elsewhere.

Later, Baba's entourage squeezed into the little elevator, the very same one that I also rode in decades later, as Don was left to ponder over the afternoon's experiences. This being 1952, Baba was in a cast from the accident in Oklahoma. He was bundled into a tiny Civil War wheelchair. When I first hear the story, the antique wheelchair sounded quaint and somehow circumstantial, but now knowing which elevator they were using and having myself experienced how small the elevator was, it became clear why a tiny wheelchair made sense.

In that flash of recollection, reviewing Don's story with the new knowledge that I had been to that address many, many times—that is when it hit me that Baba had His eye on me all along. I used to think that I came to right to Him—no fight, no drama, not much of a Baba story. It turns out that all along, it was He who left me a trail of breadcrumbs, and like a bird I was lured right into His net, just like Bhau Kalchuri used to describe. All the pieces of my Baba story fit neatly together like one puzzle, and I was oblivious to that realization for years! How was I so fortunate to be worthy of His attention? It was very humbling, and at the next *dbuni*, I gave Him my whole life. He has not given me any reason to regret doing so!

Angela Lee Chen

Cliff and I finished whatever we had to finish in New York, and Baba very emphatically moved us to Myrtle Beach to be close to His home. Since moving here, I have found so much joy in His community and His Center. My creativity is flourishing, as is my acupuncture practice. I feel like I am on pilgrimage every day. All thanks to the Beloved for giving me so much richness of the heart.



Artwork © Claire Mataira

Michael Childs

101 Tales
of Finding Love

God Remembered Me!

by Michael Childs

101 Tales of Finding Love



Michael Childs accompanies Irwin and Ed Luck,
June, 1969 Darshan, Guruprasad
Courtesy of Larry & Rita Karrasch and meherbabatravels.com

Michael, Bhau Kalchuri and David Childs, August 2011



Michael Childs

ON FEBRUARY 1 OF 1969, an ex-girlfriend invited me to a Meher Baba meeting that would take place in New York City, where I lived at the time. I wanted to see her again, so I agreed to meet, without asking where it was going to be held. I looked it up in the phone book under the phonetic pronunciation of Mayor Baba. Failing to find it, a macrobiotic restaurant in the Lower Eastside popped into my head, which had a bulletin board papered with posters of gurus and holy men. Maybe someone there knew of this Mayor Baba. Someone did and gave me the number of Gary (?), which I had to memorize as I was in a phone booth with a gigantic phonebook and no pencil. I called the number. No answer. Then I remembered that I tended to switch numbers around—today that's called dyslexia, then it was known as stupidity. I switched two numbers, called again and Gary answered, much to my amazement. He gave me the address of the Society for the Avatar Meher Baba. After negotiating the NYC public transit system, I arrived after the meeting was over and my friend had come and gone.

The leader of the group, Harry Kenmore, had left for India that day. It seems that Meher Baba had passed away on January 31, in India. I remember thinking that I would never have his embrace, but at the time, I didn't know who or what he was. There was a large picture of him similar in size to the one of Scientology's founder from whose organization I had recently made my escape. "What was I getting myself into," I wondered. "Another crack pot cult?" I met an attractive young woman there, Cindy Gumpel, now Boz, who talked to me about Baba. The following evening, she took me to her home in Brooklyn where she lived with Jim Meyer and Mary Knowles. On her front door was a poster of Baba, which said, "You and I are not We but One." I liked that. Inside the apartment there was another large poster, which

said, “I was Rama, I was Krishna, I was this One, I was that One, and now I am Meher Baba. I am the Ancient One.” His eyes seem to focus on nothing and everything. It was an extraordinary portrait. A business card with Baba’s picture hung on a wall with the following quote: “I am the Divine Beloved who loves you more than you can ever love yourself.”

“What does that mean,” I wondered, “How can anyone love me more than me?” Then the next quote, “I and God are One,” bowled me over.

“This man has a pair of balls,” I thought. “He just puts it right out there.” Like on a tennis court, he had lobbed a ball to my cynical Jewish intellectual mind, and I did not know how to hit it back. None of the gurus and pretenders I knew had ever said that. They encouraged their followers to say it, but none made that declaration. I grappled with an unfamiliar concept: the Perfect Being. How can anyone know everything? How do I evaluate that concept? How would I know a Perfect Being from an imperfect one? In my mind’s eye, I put the tiny figure of Baba on the business card into the cosmos of billions of stars and infinite space. “How can he encompass that?” I thought. In my mind, the figure turned into a door. As it opened, light poured out. I remember thinking, “Maybe there is a way out.” Shocked, I realized that I had felt trapped in the physical universe. “Maybe there’s a way out, a way to transcend it, a way to transcend time and space.” Even now, as I write these words, the enormity of the thought, which fractured the shell of my existence, still resonates with me to this day.

I remember thinking, “Maybe he is God. Let’s keep an open mind and check it out. Maybe...”

Michael Childs

Cindy put me under her wing, eventually introducing me to all her Baba friends, including Tom Riley and his wife, Yvonne, who lived in upstate New York. Most importantly, she took me to the Monday Night Baba group led by Fred and Ella Winterfeldt. We became fast friends. I enjoyed the unpretentiousness of those meetings. Again there was a large picture of Baba, smiling, His legs crossed, relaxed, perhaps Guruprasad in the background. Fred and Ella, whose names and personalities were merged into one name by Baba as “Fredella.” At every meeting, they recited the prayers and played “Begin the Beguine” by Artie Shaw.

Correspondence went between Fredella and the *mandali* about the *darshan* Baba had called before He passed. Would it take place or be canceled? Then Eruch remembered an incident with Baba when he, Eruch, expressed his concern to Baba about His health and the stress the *darshan* would put on His body. Baba replied by telling him not to worry, it would be the easiest *darshan* He would ever give. In fact, He'd give it lying down. That clinched it. The *darshan* was on. I remember thinking, “What's the big deal? He's God. He knows everything, including when He's going to die.” When Baba was interred in the Tomb, Eruch placed a stone under His head so He could see the proceedings better. It was typical of the care Eruch had given Baba through decades of service.

I was ambivalent about going to India. After all, I was a nubile. Besides, did I qualify? The invitation was to the lovers of God to come to India for Meher Baba's blessing and to be in His company. Was I a lover of God? Up to that moment, I would have said, “No, religion is for people who can't think for themselves. Maybe there's a God, maybe not. I don't know.” Regardless of my thoughts, I kept the door open to God. Fredella were very kind. Fred's smile was a ray of sunshine in the polluted sky of NYC. That gave me

something to hang on to. He encouraged me to visit the Meher Spiritual Center in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, and see for myself. Perhaps I'd experience Baba's love directly.

The Center was (and still is) lovely. Five hundred acres of barely touched land, adjacent to a long lake, separated from the Atlantic Ocean by sand dunes, the constant roll of the surf is always audible, like a Brahmin priest intoning "OM." I was first interviewed by Kitty Davy, who wanted to know what brought me to the Center. She was so kind, lovely and lively, that my heart went out to her unreservedly. She became my role model for old age. In fact, I am now the age she was when I met her, seventy-eight. If I could become as wise and enlightened as she, I would die a fulfilled man. I knew Baba was God. Only God could draw such a fabulous soul from mankind's billions. Add Fredella to this growing list of remarkable people I had met, all the reading I was doing, and the perfume of Baba's presence at the Center—all led to the dissipation of my reservations about Baba's Godhood. I felt cracks form in the dam I had built around my heart.

A poem by Rabindranath Tagore expresses my inner struggle at this time:

Lamp of Love

Light, oh where is the light?
Kindle it with the burning fire of desire!

There is the lamp but never a flicker of a flame---is such thy
fate, my heart?
Ah, death were better by far for thee!

Misery knocks at thy door,

Michael Childs

and her message is that thy lord is wakeful,
and he calls thee to the love-tryst through the darkness of
night.

The sky is overcast with clouds and the rain is ceaseless.
I know not what this is that stirs in me---I know not its
meaning.

A moment's flash of lightning drags down a deeper gloom
on my sight,
and my heart gropes for the path to where the music of the
night calls me.

Light, oh where is the light!
Kindle it with the burning fire of desire!
It thunders and the wind rushes screaming through the
void.

The night is black as a black stone.
Let not the hours pass by in the dark.
Kindle the lamp of love with thy life.

(from the *Gitanjali* by Tagore)

I committed myself to the *darshan*. A Baba friend, Cliff Ives, lent me the airfare (I still remember the amount: \$785.) I got a job with New Line Cinema, a burgeoning film distributor, trying to book rentals of our library of contemporary filmmakers, like Jarmusch, to people who didn't care. I had my pick of territories. Because I wanted to swing by the Center as often as I could, I chose the South. That was in February of 1969. Since coming to Baba, my life was coming together. I had a job, a girlfriend, a new cadre of friends. Life was looking up. In addition, I had an extraordinary adventure on the eve of our departure to India, which I don't have the time or space to tell here. It involved my boat on which I lived and puttered about NYC. I had to deliver it to

a chef and her daughter who had rented it as a summer cottage. The journey involved sailing past the city at night, nearly sinking, getting lost, nearly being swamped by huge Atlantic rollers and going aground just a few miles from our destination. It was an incredible adventure, providing me a map of my spiritual journey. It was, in fact, a metaphor on a grand scale. Bhau asked me to write a book about my spiritual adventures with my ghazals. I'll write it down then.

Our group was the third such group to attend the Great Darshan, as it came to be called, organized by the Society of Avatar Meher Baba. It was the beginning of the monsoon season. On the eve of our departure, I retrieved my fourteen-string guitar from a luthier who had just made a new neck for it. It was so long that it protruded unprotected from the guitar case. One good rainstorm and the instrument would have been destroyed. That didn't happen. It turned out that I was perhaps the only instrumentalist who was an experienced accompanist. I soon had a long list of singers to accompany. On one rehearsal at Guruprasad, we were off to one side of the main hall where the gathering was to take place. I looked at Baba's armchair, His photo on the seat, His sandals on the floor—and I didn't feel anything. My face was stoic, but my heart fell. I was so disappointed. I had traveled ten thousand miles for a photo. I consoled myself by saying God is everywhere but it tasted like ashes in my mind.

“Baba!” Silently, I cried out in my heart, “Reveal yourself to me! Enough reading! I want You!” We finished rehearsing. The next day was the grand event. A charming Indian family sang, “We welcome you,” accompanied on a harmonium while a tiny girl, tinkled and swirled to the music. It was joyful and heartwarming. Francis gave his famous talk about being upside down in a garbage can. Maybe others spoke, I don't remember. When Eruch stood before, I took notice. I

Michael Childs

fell in love with him at first sight. Clothed in khakis, a white T-shirt, clean-shaven but for a pencil moustache, short hair, muscular: he was so unpretentious, so humble, we were taken with him immediately. He started off by saying what a magnificent Beloved is Baba, how all those present had come so far to be with Baba, many of whom had never known him, and who had come anyway, because He had issued the Call, "Come unto Me." Those weren't his exact words, but that was the gist. "We loved Him as God," he said, "but we knew Him physically. We had His company. But you, you love Him as God, without His physical presence. It is incredible. What a mighty Beloved!"

I don't know when it happened, but Eruch and the room disappeared. I found myself on a cloud standing before a fourteen foot gilt framed mirror. As I looked into the mirror, I saw my True Self, the Ineffable. What I saw was indescribable. It was a brilliance greater than a million suns. I knew without a doubt that I was in the presence of God. I wept. Even now, I stand before that mirror and weep. It is a heartbreak and a joy, which I would not relinquish for a single moment. I remember thinking, "Here I am, a piece of shit floating in the sewers of New York City, *and God remembered me. God remembered me!*"

Filis said she saw Baba hugging individuals in the room. Each one of us had our own unique experience, which we saw and remember through the language and images in our minds. That was mine. I searched for that experience for nine years, hoping to open that door again and stand before my Lord. Then I learned that it didn't happen in 1969. It exists beyond time. It IS. The door is always open. It's we who lose our way. The key is a clean conscience. So simple. So hard to do.

What a mighty Beloved!

101 Tales of Finding Love

I came back to the gathering. Afterwards, I started walking through Pune, across a bridge, watched women beating clothes on rocks, wandered into a garden. It had started to rain, gently, cleaning away my sanskaras, blessing me. I walked until I came to an ancient compound, which I found out later is where the Parsis bring their dead to be eaten by vultures. A priest greeted me with folded hands. I befriended his son and we ate a buffalo milk popsicle together. I had come to leave my old self behind and to be born anew.

There were many adventures still to come. There were highs and lows. It has all been worth it.

Ghazal A

Every night I make my bed,
but you do not come to comfort me.

Every night, I set my lamp to lead you to me,
but you pass me by.

Every day I clean my house of dust and cobwebs,
but the spiders never sleep.

Self-righteous fools speak of love
with hearts encased in stone;

better that they should weep with pain
than build more walls.

Dangling helpless in your silken web,
consumed with pain and ecstasy,

their words are epitaphs for my tomb while
I wait for you, Master Cobweb Builder;

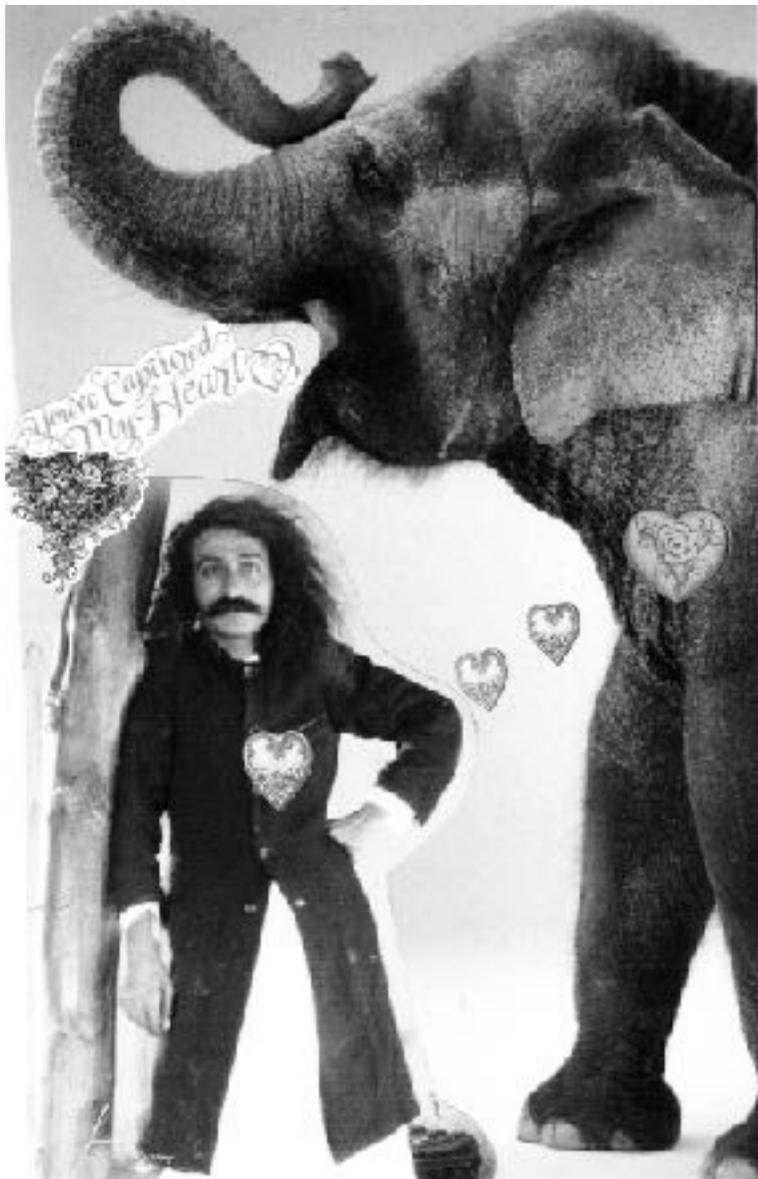
Michael Childs

Knower of my heart and mind! Deliverer of my soul!
Lord! Break the thread that binds me!*

Michael Childs lives in South Pasadena, California, with a wonderful woman who fell in love with him when he read his poetry at Meherana in 2009. After a career as a professional artist, musician and printer at Sheriar Press, he remains an avid woodworker to this day. “That's my life in a nutshell and it's not over yet.”

* From “An Alphabet of Ghazals” © 1989-2015 by Michael Childs – All Rights Reserved

101 Tales of Finding Love



Collage by Irma Sheppard

Lois Colton

101 Tales
of Finding Love

He Set the Trap

by Lois Colton

101 Tales of Finding Love



Top, Lois in 2013, on the Beads on One String Heartland Pilgrimage

Bottom, Lois and the Wenches, Oregon, 1974-75



Lois Colton

I WAS RAISED IN A NEARLY GODLESS FAMILY. My mother came from a long family line of American Unitarians and her approach to spirituality was mostly intellectual. My father was an avid atheist who felt that any religious practice was just a crutch for the weak. I, however, even at a very young age, openly longed for a connection to God, perhaps not the traditional Judeo-Christian God, but for the essence of God at least. When I'd ask my mother the question, "What is God?" she readily answered that God as she understood it was the spirit of love and goodness. This was a concept that I could grasp and use, but I remember that I wanted something more. I was envious of the spiritual conviction I saw others experience. So with my parents' permission, from age five on I attended many kinds of church services with my school and neighborhood friends. One week I'd spend a wide-eyed hour on my knees in a Holy Roller church listening to the passionate cries of parishioners speaking in tongues, and the next week I'd be learning about crystals or Hinduism at Sunday school at the Unitarian Fellowship. These things were all intriguing to me, but the real spiritual journey of my youth came from the experiences I had in community with others and in nature as a Girl Scout.

My little heart soared in passionate love and conviction whenever I put my hand over my heart and recited the Girl Scout pledge, "On my honor, I will try: To do my duty to God and my country, to help other people at all times, and to obey the Girl Scout Laws." The Girl Scout Laws said my honor was to be trusted, I was to be loyal, my duty was to be useful and to help others, I was to be a friend to all and a sister to every other Girl Scout no matter what creed or class or race she belonged to, and I was to be courteous, cheerful, thrifty and pure." These were things I could be passionate about.

At Girl Scout camp every year from age eight on to eighteen when I became a camp counselor, I lived and breathed God as I saw Him from my growing pantheistic perspective. I saw God in everything and everyone and in every challenge and joy. I saw God in the gold-veined quartz I'd pick up on the trail or the vultures that soared over the ponderosa forests that ranged below the peak I'd just climbed. I'd look in all directions and see God in the transforming clouds in the sky, the leaves budding, growing, and dying on the trees, the rock outcroppings protecting ruins of ancient cave dwellers, and in the industry of the red ants making highways across the iron-filled dust at my feet. I felt breathless exhilaration at these moments in nature, as I did while singing camp songs around a blazing campfire. These camp songs were the hymns for my "church" and why wouldn't they be, with lyrics that pleaded, "Peace, I ask of thee old river.... peace, peace, peace. When I learn to live serenely, cares will cease. From the hills I gather courage, visions of the days to be. Strength to lead and faith to follow, all are given unto me. Peace, I ask of thee old river... peace, peace, peace." My love for this God was fervent and all encompassing, and it was from this view of the Divine that I became readied for my future encounter with Meher Baba.

But before I heard of Meher Baba by name, I felt His presence in my heart. Only later, after becoming a Baba lover and learning about His travels in America, was I able to translate the odd experience I had had in 1970 in Oklahoma, as Baba tapping me on the shoulder to get my attention for our future encounter. My new husband, Steve, and I were working as Vista Volunteers in rural Oklahoma as part of the United States government's civil rights and poverty programs. I remember a gloriously beautiful May day, when we'd gone exploring by two-lane roads up and down and through the rolling hills and farmlands near where we lived

Lois Colton

east of Oklahoma City. We'd stopped midday at a dilapidated Depression era homestead and picnicked in the tall stalks of very green "waves of grain." I was breathlessly and inexplicably full of a sense of 'God as love' all day, and I remember that my poor husband was just a side story to the bliss I was feeling, and that he was somewhat confused by what had overtaken me.

That evening he suggested that we go to a town near by where he'd heard the local junior college was putting on a performance of the opera "Tommy," written by the rock band, The Who. I was rather ignorant of the music scene so important to my peers at that time, and The Who and the opera, "Tommy" meant nothing to me. But in my state of general bliss, I was open to anything and joyously embraced his suggestion.

After dinner we drove out Route 66 and came to the little college where the "opera" was being performed. It was being held in the college's little cafetorium. The long school lunch tables had been pushed back from a stage area located at the end of the room. We found seats in the folding chairs arranged in front of the stage and waited till the lights went off. As soon as the music began and the stage was illuminated I realized that what we were going to be watching was not a live performance by local talent, but a very amateurish pantomimed performance of The Who's recording. The record spun on a turntable and music blared from the speakers into the darkened cafetorium, which soon reverberated with guitar strums and Pete Townsend's voice singing about "a deaf, dumb and blind boy who could sure play a mean pin ball..." I muffled my urge to laugh. The scene was so hokey. Then his voice sang out into the room, "See me, hear me, touch me, feel me." My heart suddenly burst with longing and I began to weep uncontrollably without understanding why. Such an emotional outburst

wasn't like me, and it wasn't until years later, when I learned of Pete Townsend's connection to Baba and of Baba's car accident on Route 66 on just such a May day in 1952, so near to where this odd experience had happened to me, that I understood why my heart had felt so broken during that silly performance.

Four years later in 1974, after my husband and I had moved to Portland, Oregon, Baba choreographed the dance steps of our lives so that it was unavoidable for us to hear of Him by name and be drawn into His love. Steve was in graduate school and I was working most days as a substitute teacher. We lived in half of the upstairs of an old four-plex apartment building in the inner southeast part of the city, and recently two young men had rented the other upstairs apartment which shared our balcony. We hadn't yet met these neighbors, though one had mistakenly tried to climb in our bedroom window after a night of obvious revelry.

I didn't yet know many people in Portland, and don't now remember how or why I even got the idea to, all by myself, apply for a job as a wench at a new Medieval Feasting restaurant opening up in an underground space in Portland's Old Town near the river. I'd never even thought of working as a waitress before, and had no idea what being a feasting wench would entail. But somehow I got hired for the job and once the restaurant opened for its raucous business, I learned what I'd been hired to do. We, the "bawdy wenches," wore rather authentic looking costumes of long green fully gathered cotton skirts and white linen ruffled blouses with revealing necklines. Our waists were cinched in by wide leather cummerbunds, and we had what looked like linen night caps over our typical '70s long hair, which we wore parted in the middle and clamped into a tail down our backs.

Lois Colton

The feasters at the Medieval Inn ate and drank in a long underground tunnel of a room, built with giant stone boulders that had been brought over from China as ballast on sailing ships in the 1800s. The feasts were wild drunken events—food and wine sloshed on the tables and floors freely as the revelers moved through many courses of food, using only a knife for a utensil. Along with the minstrel, we wenches announced each course by raising our ceramic goblets and chiming, “Me Lords and Ladies, for your next course we bring you a whole stuffed trout, a haunch of roasted lamb, or a slab of prime rib, with roasted potatoes, etc.” And always more wine, which from time to time spilled down the back of a misbehaving customer or his drunken damsel. Every night after the feasters tottered out of the restaurant, we wenches were left to scrape the remains into garbage bins and pile heavy ceramic plates into the kitchen for washing. It was in this wild scene of *maya* at its best that Meher Baba was served up to me as what would become the main course of my life.

As I said, I didn’t know any of the other wenches when I started working at the Medieval Inn. I hung back a bit insecurely at first, as several of the other wenches and the bartender seemed to be close friends and fellow graduates of Stanford. Judy, John, and Renee had all just returned from India, it seemed, and talked about two of their friends, David and Alice, who were also just returning from India and would soon join us at the restaurant. In those early weeks together I stood just near enough to listen with hunger to their conversations about people in India who appeared to be like close relatives to them, people with unusual names like Mani and Eruch and Pendu and Goher and Mehera. Then one night while we were cleaning up after a particularly rowdy feast, and I was listening as usual as Judy and Renee were talking, I heard them say, “Meher Baba” by name. Of course, Baba’s name hadn’t been spoken to me di-

rectly, and I knew nothing of who or what He was, but in that moment I heard Baba's name like a loud healing gong, reverberating in my soul. An experience of wholeness subsumed me. I remember that I gave a deep and audible sigh and my inner voice said with total conviction, *Ah, there it is*. And there it was, the God that I'd searched for as a child and had felt as a young adult. Without the need for any intellectual analysis, I clearly knew at that moment that at last I had found my spiritual home, or it had found me.

But I worried about what my spiritually skeptical, intellectually driven husband would think if he knew of my new spontaneous conviction. So I waited. Soon it was clear that Baba had set a trap for Steve and me to find him. One day as I was driving to work, the cars Judy and Renee and I were driving nearly crashed into one another at the corner by our four-plex. In this way we discovered that they both lived within two blocks of Steve and me, and that one of the guys in the apartment next to ours was Carl, another of their Baba lover friends from Stanford, who would soon begin courting Judy, his future wife. Within a very short time, this group of Baba lovers who were also our neighbors, became our very close social friends, and for several years we shared a productive vegetable garden, out loud reading, charades, and many evenings of gourmet food and conversation about mysticism and Meher Baba. This was what Steve needed. And like young romantics, my husband and I together began to "fall in love" with Baba through both our hearts and minds, a love affair that outlived our marriage, but not our friendship, and has never waned.

Lois Colton

I currently live in Hood River, Oregon where I think I have finally finished my career as an adult basic skills educator. I am working on completing my memoir collection of essays about my twenty years of secretly sharing Baba's love as a teacher to adult, maximum security male inmates in the Oregon State Penitentiary.



Artwork © Claire Mataira

Doug Cox

101 Tales
of Finding Love

Baba is Beyond the Mind

by Doug Cox

101 Tales of Finding Love



Doug Cox and Manija Irani, 1986



Doug Cox and Susan Herr, Myrtle Beach,
South Carolina, 2016

Doug Cox

I WAS NINETEEN YEARS OLD, attending the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. I was studying electrical engineering. In the fall of 1968, my sophomore year, friends of mine persuaded me to “try” pot. I began to smoke marijuana and hashish, and to “snort” crystal methedrine (or speed) and to take LSD.

Thanks to Baba, we all know (now) that drugs are more than harmful; they go to the brain and change your brain chemistry. Heroin addicts (I was not one) are the worst affected. It takes a monumental effort and a great deal of time to extract oneself from the effects of heroin consumption. (This is not to say that drugs administered by a doctor for their medical effects are bad, *per se*.)

Although I did not really know it, I was becoming more and more a “druggie” and less and less attentive to my studies. I was close to flunking out of school.

It was in the middle of October that I took my first, and most intense, acid (LSD) trip. This trip created a variety of interesting and provocative experiences, but I will not bother describing their characteristics here. I will say that I experienced (or thought I experienced), as I came down from the LSD high, a series of levels of consciousness.

That trip created a huge amount of information and experience for me to think about in the coming weeks. In those weeks, I dropped acid a few more times, but none of those times matched the intensity of the first trip.

In December of 1968, I happened to see Meher Baba’s picture. It was in the Universal Message flyer, I think. I

thought very little of it—that photo of a strange-looking guy—and tossed the flyer aside.

Then, I went home for Christmas break. My coursework and grades were very bad, and a crisis for me was looming. What would I do about school?

After coming back to school from Christmas break, I still had no better idea what to do about school.

On or around January 12, 1969, I was conversing with a group of students at dinner in the dining hall. I had started pontificating (as college boys tend to do) about drugs and consciousness and levels of consciousness. During that conversation, Bob Cushman, who was a friend from my home town, started telling me about Meher Baba. We started discussing spiritual points—He probably told me a few spiritual facts—but I resisted the idea of Baba as “God in Human Form” until Bob told me one thing:

“Baba is beyond the mind.”

When I heard that, it was like a switch thrown in my brain: at once, I knew that Baba was real and true and that experiences from the mind are not.

Ever since that moment with Bob, I have followed Meher Baba fervently, reading as much Baba literature as I could obtain and eventually going to India. I have never really felt anything that I could call Baba’s “love,” but I have seen that once He grabbed me (in a split second), my whole life has been devoted to loving Him more and more. Call it “seeing His Love (for me and for others) in hindsight and in occasional glimpses.”

Doug Cox

From January 12 to January 31, 1969 was a very short period. Initially, I wanted to go to India to see Meher Baba. Bob told me that Baba was in seclusion. Somehow I missed out on the plans for the Great Darshan in April of 1969. After Baba's passing, I was too young, too stupid, and too broke to fly to India (or even get a passport). Looking back, I am quite sorry that I did not go to the mass *darshan* in 1969.

In the year before I took LSD and met with Bob, I had been somewhat of a spiritual seeker. I had flirted with the Rosicrucian ideas, the current thoughts of fundamental Christianity, some Buddhist thought, and had discussed some of the Greek philosophers with a neighbor who was studying religion and philosophy. I knew something spiritual was going on, but could not quite define it.

After "coming to Baba," I quit drugs, forgot completely about any religious notions other than Baba, and turned my schoolwork around. Baba truly rescued (or saved) me from a life involved in the grosser forms of illusion.

Presently I am sixty-nine years old, retired, living in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. My date of birth is July 25, 1949. Bob had lived in Massachusetts, Spain, and Myrtle Beach, and is now "with Baba."



Artwork © Claire Mataira

Elaine Cox

101 Tales
of Finding Love

That's All
There Was To It

by Elaine Cox

AS A YOUNG CHILD WITH NO SIBLINGS YET, I played alone but I was always very content. I had my drawings and coloring and sculpted with modeling clay. I also had my imaginary world and played out scenarios of American Indian life. On rare occasions I had wonderful experiences of bliss, which flooded over me, and I remember usually expressing them by dancing around joyfully no matter where I happened to be at the time. They were not often but they were very distinct.

At age ten my family moved to Oklahoma City, then to Tulsa, for my father's new job. After high school I attended Oklahoma University, where I met and married my first husband, Bill, who was in graduate school at that time. In 1964 we transferred to the University of Kentucky for his two-year Masters program. The second year there we met another student, Jerry Paulson. We became very close friends and spent a lot of time together. He was a great storyteller and we listened to his tales for hours. In the summer of '66, with that academic program finished, we moved to New York City on a grant for study towards Bill's Phd. at New York University. At the same time Jerry moved to California.

One year later in late summer of 1967, we got a phone call from Jerry—he was coming through New York on his way to India and said, “ I have something to tell you!” He wanted to stay at our place on the lower East side. Of course we said yes, excited at the idea of having him stay for as long as he wanted.

Jerry told us of his adventures in California, and of his meeting with Mik and Uschi Hamilton. And they had told him of this Master who was God in human form, Meher Baba. Jerry's goal was to go to India and meet Meher Baba. I don't

Elaine Cox

remember much else he said about this on his arrival, but he had in his pocket Fred and Ella Winterfeldt's phone number and address.

Now a little background: previously that summer we had been hanging out in Tompkins Square Park along with a crowd of hippies stretched out on the grass, smoking. There was a young man tiptoeing between the supine bodies, handing out small pamphlets and he gave me one: *God in a Pill?* I glanced at it, noticed the small drawing of a face, but paid no attention and probably threw it away. Maybe a week later, my husband came home to tell me he had been in a shop on Avenue B and had seen a large framed photo of this 'Meher Baba.' I thought, "That's nice." This shop turned out to be owned by Cindy and Henry Dacek, Baba lovers and soon to be friends. So, when Jerry told us about Baba, these familiar 'bells' went off in my head. You see, Baba had been 'tapping' on my window twice, but it took hearing it from our friend, Jerry, as only he could tell it, to actually pay attention—that something was happening here.

So we joined Jerry in attending our first Monday night Baba meeting at the Carnegie Hall rehearsal rooms. This crowd was so different from the people in my world, which was built around art, publishing and politics, I could not at first put it all together. They even seemed to have nothing in common with each other except Meher Baba. I tried to work out which 'group' they were in. Ha!

There was John Bass, Fred and Ella, Adele Wolkin (then McCuen), Beryl Williams and Bernice Ivory, Irwin and Edward Luck, Marion Florsheim, Sheila Krynski, Thom Fortson, many others and occasional visits from the wonderful Darwin Shaw. We met in various places up and down 57th Street, in addition to the Winterfeldts' home, after which

we'd hang out at the Horne and Hardhardt automat, where we'd talk about Baba with coffee and pie.

Jerry got a job for five or six weeks to earn money for his ticket on Icelandic Airline to Luxembourg. From there he hitchhiked all the way—over the mountains in Turkey (in winter), eventually arriving in Delhi. He moved about India from city to city for months, staying with various Indian Baba lovers, waiting on word from Adi K. Irani that Baba would see him. He finally did see Baba for two visits in one day—one of the last young people from the West to see Baba.

After Jerry left for India, we continued going to those Monday night meetings, though I can't explain it. I don't remember much about them—I was just drawn to keep going. Sometime after Jerry had gone, I was standing at my kitchen sink, hands resting on the edge—I don't remember what was going through my mind when suddenly, very gently, an 'atmosphere' descended quietly, around my head and shoulders. It was very definite. The air had changed around me as if a cloud, but without any visible quality. At the time I didn't think of it as a Presence. I didn't think at all. It just stopped me in my tracks and these four words came into my head, *Oh, this is Home.*

I had not been seeking God before this and I'd never had a sense of homelessness. But I knew at that moment it meant my absolute home was Meher Baba—that everything Baba IS was my real home. And that's all there was to it. This quiet epiphany was profoundly monumental in my life and turned everything around 180 degrees. All the attachments to politics simply evaporated. That's all there was to it—everything!

Elaine Cox

Since that time I've been aware that Baba has led my life always. At some point I saw a film of Baba giving *darshan* to thousands, when His eyes changed focus, His fingers began fluttering on the rest of His armchair, and I was hit with the long ago memory of those moments in childhood of sudden bliss. Those were the moments! He's always been there!

He's always given me the things to do that would lead to the next thing to best serve Him—from trade books and art books in New York, so I could work on books about Baba, and from drawing maps for archeological books to archival work.

I have now retired to Asheville, North Carolina and have the opportunity to share here what I have learned. I can never adequately express my profound gratitude to Baba for bringing me to Him this lifetime.



Mehera Irani and Elaine,
Meherazad, India, August 1987



Artwork © Claire Mataira

101 Tales
of Finding Love

Daily Love Letters
To Baba:
He Never Forgets
Our Anniversary

by Patrick Davis

101 Tales of Finding Love



Patrick Davis ca. 2019

PICKING BABA FROM A LINE UP

It was Labor Day Weekend 2009 as I walked into the upper room of the Ram Das Library at the Omega Institute in upstate New York, with a simple question on the heart:

“If I had a guru, WHO would he be?”

To my surprise I found a meditation corner with a wall of pictures where several venerated spiritual masters from the east were all lined up for an individual to sit down and contemplate. Sitting in the chair provided, I then faced them all with a soft gaze. One image among the host of options was luminous as it met me. I walked over to the image and leaned down to read the name and saw for the first time the words, “Meher Baba.” Finding a reference book in the library that summarized the lives of eastern spiritual masters, I would learn that this name simply meant *Compassionate Father*.

Moments before slipping into the library to find some quietude, I was in a crowded hall of over two hundred people whose chants I could still hear in the background as I stepped away to be alone with the question that suddenly arose in the heart. Hearing in the background the crowd reciting the names of God to music (*Kirtan* is the name of this ancient practice from India) their poetic words formed a background matrix of love while I sat in contemplation. Krishna Das, a Kirtan performer, had jokingly called this annual weekend program, *The Super Bowl of Kirtan*. He was one of many well-respected Kirtan leaders who showed up to share music and stories over a series of back-to-back performances that occurred over Labor Day weekend. This was my second year attending the event at the invitation of

a friend who is a spiritual sister. Each year I attended I was becoming increasingly depressed. I was contemplating the unraveling of an unhappy marriage and a life that was coated with a successful pretense on the outside, while I was slowly dying on the inside.

The Guru Has a Hook in the Heart

Moments before I had left the packed chanting hall to be in silence in the library where Baba's picture found me, Krishna Das shared a story about his guru that ended with him saying, "The guru has a hook in your heart that he has been slowly reeling in your whole life." This devotional image of an all loving being slowly reeling in a heart that always belonged to him inspired me to ask, "Who might be my guru?"

Stories about gurus sounded to me like either the greatest reality a human could experience or a fanciful whim that may never be realized. What did I have to lose by searching for a guru? In some form hadn't the entire first half of my life been a search already? Why not be open to the support of a guru if it was available? For me it was as pragmatic as being willing to stop along a long road trip and ask for directions. What did I have to lose? Little did I know that my quest would be answered that very night in the form of a picture that grabbed my heart from a line-up of gurus.

During my brief library pilgrimage where I discovered a line-up of gurus all beautifully arranged, I was stilled by the possibility of forming a deeply personal connection with a consciousness that holds me patiently with pure unconditional love while the light and dark in my heart unwinds. The guru holds no judgments and shares no projections about our struggles, doubts and fears. He unravels each heart in the unique way that his grace can sustain.

Could it really be as simple as leaning into the love I felt from the picture of this God in human form called Meher Baba? Was what I've been searching for my entire life been found?

The Hook in the Heart Started in Childhood

The hook in my heart for the all-loving consciousness that I've gradually come to know as Baba started in childhood with a connection to the saints and mystical traditions of the Catholic faith. I remember feeling at home with The Universal—the literal meaning of Catholic. Once, in third grade, I heard my older brother arguing with my mom about the merits of being Protestant over Catholic. I ran to my room sobbing in despair and threw my head into my pillow and repeating the lament, “It’s all the same, it’s all the same.” I had an intuitive sense of Baba’s work to bring the mystical heart of all the world’s religions together like “beads on one string” (Baba’s metaphor for the work He was doing). This early experience is one example of how Baba had a hook in my heart from the very beginning. In hindsight there were many others as well.

When I approached midlife, I found that Eastern resources like *The Autobiography of A Yogi*, enhanced my understanding of the mystery of God as it is revealed in the Western Christian tradition as well. With the heart of a mystic, I never felt any division between Eastern and Western traditions. Just as I had felt about the surface differences between Protestants and Catholics my mantra of “It’s all the same, it’s all the same,” continued to be applied on a more global or universal scale. In the spirit of Thomas Merton (a Christian monk who explored connections with the East), I was a life-long student curious about all paths. This naturally expansive inquiry was grounded in the practical experience of working as a chaplain with people holding many different spiritual

beliefs as they passed through times of great suffering and doubt. Life had generously exposed me to the truth at the core of every human heart, that was revealed when we faced the lessons available to us in suffering and at the end of life. Before learning His name, Baba had arranged for the first half of my life experiences to be a study in how different paths may use different language to describe the essential spiritual experiences available to us all.

Slowly Reeling Me In: Daily Love Letters to Baba

In the library where I found Baba's image I took notes from the reference book I found that summarized some aspects of Baba's life. As an encyclopedia on different gurus it was not one of the primary texts that most people use to study about Baba's life's and writings. These brief notes, however, provided me with the morsels I needed to begin my quest of getting to know Baba. Keeping a journal had been a life-long habit, so it felt natural to begin writing to Baba every day as a way explore the connection I felt with Him. The journal I used to track my initial steps toward Baba has a richly colored gold cover with beautiful purple flowers with a quote from Thich Nhat Hanh that reads, "*Our true home is in the present moment. To live in the present moment is a miracle.*"

I still look back on the contents in this journal with a fondness of my innocent novice brain, which allowed Baba to reveal Himself to me without the benefit of a teacher or a community who shared this budding devotion. In later years fellowship with those who love Baba would build on this. At this season of life, however, this is exactly the way Baba needed to form a connection with me. Each day I felt drawn to write a private love letter to Baba that started, "Dear Meher Baba..." A few of the more luminous aspects reflected in the pages of these early love letters to Baba include:

- This is the only journal I have where I was drawn to press a flower between the pages.
- On the first page I wrote about how an experience of seeing a couple disagreeing with love was “widening the circle of the heart.... to care and to be with the passions of others as I came to practice more compassion.”
- From the brief resources I could find about Baba, I began putting into practice His directives around ways to receive grace:
 1. Wishing well for others (at cost to self)
 2. Never backbiting
 3. Tolerance
 4. Trying not to worry
 5. Thinking more of the good points in others and less of their bad

These brief and simple notes gave me plenty of ideals to put into practice in my daily life. In this journal I noted how I was drawn to the ways that Baba was like Christ in demonstrating compassionate acts like bathing lepers and washing the feet of the poor. His ministries of free hospitals and shelters touched me and I highlighted the quote, “*I have come to sow the seed of love in your hearts.*” I also deeply appreciated how much Baba enjoyed music and was intrigued and felt a deep connection to His commitment to keep silence as a way to demonstrate that He didn’t come to teach anything new but to awaken. Being silent had already been gradually becoming a more central practice in my spiritual life in the months before I learned Baba’s name. Everything about Him and His message felt familiar, like I was meeting again a long lost family member. I shook my head “yes” many times and would think, “I have always known that to be true.”

Before the habit of writing this daily letter to Baba fell away, I wrote a one-sentence passage on one specific date in this journal that I would later forget I had written. Years later, Baba found a special way to let me know that He never forgot what I wrote to Him during those enthusiastic honeymoon months of first falling in love with Him. He would find a way to use this passage when I most needed a reminder of His love.

Suffering Reels the Heart In Further to Him

Two years into being aware of Baba, I faced three significant losses that all occurred within two months: An eighteen-year marriage ended at the same time my mother and father died nine days apart on hospice. Due to the loss of the physical family that provided so much comfort, I was devastated and cried most days, while I also leaned into using all of the tools I had been given to facilitate growth during times of loss. I had great teachers due to the privilege of witnessing others pass through dark times. Now it was time for me to demonstrate what I had learned.

For about eighteen months I did a lot of traveling while I grieved full time and worked on a few small remote projects that helped pay the bills. Due to some research on the internet, I had heard about the Meher Spiritual Center in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. I did not take the Center very seriously for some reason and had planned to stop for just one night on my way to visit family in Florida. That one night turned into a week and then a return trip a week later, to join the celebration of when Baba dropped his body (Amartithi) for an even longer stay. The rest of my year was spent making more and more visits to the Center. Eventually, I even moved to an area closer to the Center as well.

All of the wonderful people I met and the ways their love worked on my heart filled up several journals. A devotion to Baba that had been private became amplified as I connected with other human hearts all devoted to Baba as well. There is one major interaction worth noting that let me know with certainty how Baba was reeling in the hook that He had in my heart. Being human, I have my doubts and questions at times about Baba, “So, He claims to be the Avatar of the age? How do I reconcile all the different ways to hold Baba with my own unique path? Am I doing it right?” The passage that I had written in my first series of devotional letters to Baba that I had completely forgotten about soon came into play in a very dramatic and clear way.

Baba Seals the Deal: He Remembers Us Even When We Forget Him

On one visit to the Center in Myrtle Beach, one of the staff would generously answer my questions about Baba. In response to one of my questions, he shared how everyone we meet at the Center (and in the world) was somehow a reflection of Baba. At the Center this experience is magnified. This dynamic applied to not just the sweet connections we have with people, but to the interactions with people that irritate us as well. We are all here to teach one another and to become awake to God in all things. Later that day, I left the Center to watch a movie at a theatre located in a mall across the street. I had been enjoying several days at the Center writing and healing my heart from all of the painful losses. I had even lost track of the date and the day of the week. All of the bliss I was experiencing on this particular trip was good medicine for balancing a heavy heart. Leaving the movie theatre, a total stranger approached me in the parking lot as I got ready to drive back to the Center. In a very rushed and anxious voice she asked, “Do you know what today is?!” Feeling frustrated that she interrupted my

blissful state to make me remember something as mundane as the date, I pulled out my phone and opened up the calendar to answer her question. I told her briefly that it was January 27 and I then promptly got in my car and drove back to the Center. After entering the gate and passing down the slow winding dirt road, my irritation tilted into curiosity as I wondered, “Why did Baba want me to remember this particular date?” Entering my cabin, I opened up my box of journals and turned to the gold covered one with purple flowers where I had written to Baba every day when taking my first baby steps toward Him.

Thumbing half way through the journal, I got to January 27, 2010 where I wrote a strangely short and to the point sentence:

“Meber Baba, Surrender to Thy Will.”

While I had forgotten ever writing that sentence, Baba was winking at me and saying, “You may have forgotten our anniversary, but I didn’t forget.” That’s how compassionate and generous He is. Even when I forget, Baba remembers.

Patrick Davis works as an academic, career and leadership coach, while also teaching processes that facilitate natural healing. He currently travels to heart-centered places like Assisi, Italy and the Great Smokey Mountains of North Carolina and Tennessee. One of his first loves is working in hospice and he hopes to return to being of service in that arena as well.

Lourdes Echeverria

101 Tales
of Finding Love

Recognizing My Beloved

by Lourdes Echeverria

101 Tales of Finding Love



Lourdes and Mehera Irani, Meherazad



Lourdes Echeverria

MY LOVE STORY WITH MY BELOVED BABA begins thirty-five years ago in 1983, in Acapulco, Mexico, a popular tourist destination where I was visiting with family. Among other things, it's known for its nightlife, so I decided to visit a famous discotheque called Baby'O. To make a long story short, the owner was a Baba lover and I met him that night. I remember feeling so comfortable talking about God—a strange thing to do in a club, but I guess Baba wanted us to connect (six months later we were married and later had two children, Eruch and Mani).

Returning to how I began my journey with Baba... Rafael had a photo of Meher Baba in his apartment. I entered his home and at the end of the hallway, I saw a photo of a man. I instantly felt attracted to this person and remember with clarity staring at the photo for a long time. The feeling in my heart was that I had finally found what I had been searching for since early childhood. I asked Rafael to tell me who He was.

He replied, Meher Baba, and explained the meaning of the word 'Avatar.' He then gave me several books so I could learn more about Baba. The first book I read was *Three Incredible Weeks with Meher Baba*.

When I came back home, my sister Lety asked me, "What are you reading? Who is this Meher Baba?"

I just replied, "He's God!" She never doubted for a second. I remember having one hundred percent certainty that He is God, but my love for Jesus was really strong, so I was a bit scared to stop loving Jesus back then. I still didn't know Baba and Jesus were the same One.

So we now go back some years. I feel this is important because I asked God with all my heart and my prayers were answered. My family wasn't very religious or spiritual but in some strange way, I was. No one ever encouraged me to pray, but even as a little girl I remember talking with Jesus frequently. I would walk to church when no one was there, and sit down just to talk to Him. I remember once asking Him, "Dear Jesus, I love you very much, but I don't like You being on the cross. Please come down and be with me always." I knew Beloved Baba had heard my prayer. I was so very fortunate to recognize Him the day I saw His photo in Acapulco.

That same year I married Rafael and he asked me where I wanted to go for our honeymoon. I simply said, "India!" So off we went, to start what has truly been the only important thing in my life—my road in this life to learn how to love Meher Baba, as He should be loved. I had the great fortune and blessing of being able to meet many of Beloved Baba's disciples. I met dear Mehera, the purest soul in the Universe! I was incredibly blessed to have the opportunity to talk with her for long time, to have tea with her and the other women *mandali*. To this day have a special relationship with Mehera, and speak with her often. I have to say that I think she has asked Beloved Baba to help me on many occasions. I've been quite ill on numerous occasions, but have always felt dear Mehera and Beloved Baba of course, taking care of me. I truly believe I've been blessed with the opportunity to feel them near me.

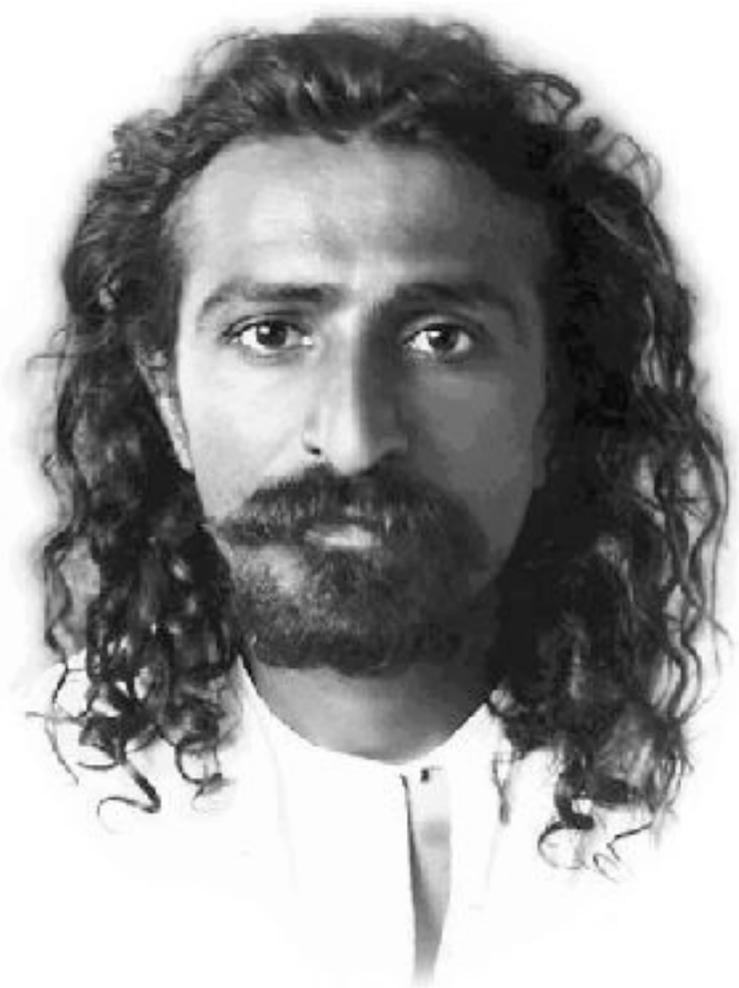
I also met Eruch, Bhau, Pendu, Bal, Aloba, Kitty, Katie, Meheru. Arnavaz, Dr. Goher and Mani. With each one I spent precious time, always trying to grasp as much as I could from their personal experience with our Beloved, but most of all trying to learn how to love Him and to be a good Baba lover. I want my Beloved Baba to be proud of me. I

Lourdes Echeverria

want to honor His teachings, to live a life where by all means, no matter the circumstance, I'm aware that He is the One who does all, the One who decides my life and is constantly near me, to never forget that He is the Only One!

So I say from the bottom of my heart, AVATAR MEHER BABA KI JAI!!!!

My name is Lourdes and I live in Mexico City, born in this city as well. I am a grandmother of a sweet baby girl Naja , and soon Norina will be born. I am basically a Mom and grandmother, grateful to my Beloved Baba for my sweet family.



The Ancient One

Patti Elledge

101 Tales
of Finding Love

The Proposal
and Engagement Ring

by Patti Elledge

101 Tales of Finding Love



Patti in 2012 at the Leopold Cafe in Mumbai.

The Betrothal Ring



Patti Elledge

MY FIRST NIGHT AT MEHER SPIRITUAL CENTER in Myrtle Beach was June 22, 2008. I had spent the day driving to the Center with my best friend, Daniel. I had heard that the Meher Center was a good retreat place that was peaceful and near the beach, but I knew little about Baba. So I made reservations and invited my good friend to come and visit. We drove along laughing, talking and catching up on all sorts of things since we hadn't spent time together for over a year. We bought a tacky romance novel to read aloud to one another in the car, but only got to chapter 2 since it was just so bad. We ate crunchy snack foods out of bags and drank colas. Old friends on holiday together.

In the early afternoon, we checked in, walked to the beach and later cooked dinner. We met several Baba lovers in the Refectory that night and had interesting conversations. Basically other than being open to learning more about Meher Baba, I was "on holiday" with a dear old friend. Mind you, I had good intentions and was of a deeply spiritual nature, having been on many retreats and prayerful intensives. But I had not read much material about Baba except the pamphlet mailed out to newcomers, which I had kept on my dresser for two years. In reality, I'd been looking at Baba every morning, day after day as I got ready for work...waking up to His photograph. I found I liked looking at His face, often thinking, "what a good father He would have made with those kind, loving eyes." But other than knowing He'd lived a life of love and in silence for forty-four years, I consciously knew very little about Him.

Before dinner, I went to the Lagoon Cabin by myself to meditate. It was a warm summer day and the doors were open to the slight breeze. I sat alone, noticing a lovely sweet fragrance of hair pomade and an aromatic musk or sandal-

wood. I breathed in deeply as I sat, aware of the beauty of the aroma—almost as if I had my head buried in His neck, breathing in His scent. It was oddly personal and intimate, alive and present! Still not aware of the many years since that Baba had dropped His body I thought to myself, “*Oh! His scent is still here!*”

I turned in early that first night and easily fell into a deep, sound sleep. Around 2 A.M. I woke up suddenly with my chest wracked in excruciating pain.

With the intensity of the pain, my first thought was to wonder if I was having a heart attack! As I came to, I thought: “*Wait. I am at the Meber Center.*” Oh. I lay there and practiced deep breathing through the pain, allowing the energy to move through my physical body. As I watched it, the intensity was such that I would liken it to “jaws of life” ripping open my chest cavity (that life-saving machine that pries apart a crushed vehicle to free an entrapped passenger). That sounds overly dramatic as I write it, but it literally felt true. It was as if something was reaching into my chest and spreading my ribcage and heart open. There was an expansion of energy, from my heart into my arms and back. This flow of energy from my heart through my arms lasted for what seemed like a long period of time, although I am not sure exactly how long. Two minutes? Twenty minutes? I do not know, as by then I had entered a numinous state.

I was in a sea of energy, which encompassed my entire being. I felt a strong love pouring into me as my heart felt splayed wide open, receiving what I could not understand at that time. I simply wanted to accept what was happening as the gift that it was. The year beforehand had been so challenging to my heart and I am sure I had shut down a lot. I had lost both elderly parents in 2007, and was working to

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close down our family home estate—a tedious and unpleasant experience with my two estranged siblings. My prayers throughout that time had been for grace and kindness to be the acting force in the final days of packing up my family home with my brother and sister. But it had been hard, and left me feeling lost and alone.

Tragically, I had also lost my closest woman friend, Rio, that same year, to breast cancer, only seven months after her diagnosis. It had been such a heart-challenging year! I honestly felt concerned about myself and the toll it might be taking on my physical body. But as we know, you cannot control what rolls out in any given year. I was so thankful to have a week off with my good friend, time to relax, walk on the beach and renew myself by prayerful meditations. I eventually fell back asleep that first night and woke up after nine hours, feeling calm. I was curious about that energy experience of the night before. I did not speak to anyone about it, although I journaled to collect my thoughts and feelings. It felt like a very personal healing had occurred, one I didn't understand fully but felt deeply grateful for.

Daniel and I spent hours at the beach that second day, walking, resting and building sand castles. We had several longer conversations with other visitors at the Center and attended a reading that evening in the Reading Room. It was good. I was happy to be there and open to learning more about this wonderful being called Meher Baba.

The second night I again fell asleep easily and peacefully. That night brought a true “visitation” and it was very powerful for me. I had been asleep for several hours, when I awoke to a vivid image of an incredibly handsome dark-haired man wearing an open necked shirt in the softest white cotton. He was sitting on the edge of my bed, holding on to the ring on my left hand and pulling at it, *asking me to*

be His "betrothed." I had my left hand held up high in the air above me as I awoke. I felt His love for me, in a powerful and yet gentle way. He was physically so beautiful— He took my breath away. His Presence filled the room. He wanted me to become His betrothed!

I was frankly shocked when I came to! I did not know what to say. I felt as though my jaw hung slack, and I was in awe and amazement. I knew it was Baba, but I felt confused and unsure of why He was coming to me in this manner. I had no earthly idea that our beloved Meher Baba comes intimately to His followers as just this: *The Beloved*. It was intimate, tactile and immediate. In the following months I took time to understand this more, to read and go to meetings and listen. I heard others talk about their experiences and began to conceptualize it more completely.

When I returned home I felt it was important to take the moonstone ring off that I had worn to the Center in June. I felt that Baba somehow wanted to know if I was indeed His beloved, so I put it aside. Did I accept His request and proposal? I wasn't sure. I held out, like any sane person might, to learn more about this man and His followers. Were they a bunch of whack jobs? But I told Baba in prayers that I would seriously consider the proposal, and that "I'd get back to Him."

I know. That sounds ridiculous to admit to myself, much less to write here—to tell the God-Man you'd get back to Him after a request to be His "betrothed." But that is what happened.

After spending the summer attending meetings in Asheville, delving into *God Speaks* and *Discourses* and having many lively conversations, I became clearer, yet still I was somewhat reserved. I decided to print off a photograph of "The An-

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cient One” on my very old, fickle black and white printer, expecting the worst but still wanting some form of a photo to hang on my wall. The beautiful piece of near archive-level photograph that slowly emerged from that broken down printer seemed to be another miracle! It still hangs on my wall, unfaded, holding His incredible Presence for me to have coffee with each morning.

As fall of that year turned into the holiday season, I let Baba know in prayer and in daily communication that I accepted His proposal: Yes. I was His Betrothed. I felt it was an honest, real and true acceptance of Who He was to me, and my commitment to Him.

The Plot Thickens: Several years before this I had misplaced a very beautiful tanzanite ring, given to me by a man I had dated. I had turned the house upside down trying to find it, dumping out drawers and looking under furniture. It seemed I'd lost it for good. I had pretty much given up finding it again. However, a week after saying “yes” to Baba, as I was in the midst of a cooking flurry one evening and making a mess of it all, I reached for an apron. In the pocket of that apron, encrusted in pie dough, I found the tanzanite ring where it had been hiding for years. I laughed and was delighted to find it. As I cleaned it off and put it on, I ‘heard’ that it was my “betrothed to Baba ring.” It still does. I wear this lovely ring now as a symbol of His healing, His enduring love and His Presence in my life.

101 Tales of Finding Love

Patti Elledge now lives in Asheville, North Carolina, where she continues to serve as a Somatic Experiencing trauma specialist. She also teaches the beautiful heart-centered work called DARE or Dynamic Attachment Re-Patterning Experience, which assists clients in healing their early heart wounds so they may be free to love and bond once again. See Patti's blog of her month in India:

www.pattiatlarge.blogspot.com.

Cynthia Espinoza

101 Tales
of Finding Love

Homesick

by Cynthia Espinoza



Cynthia, dressed as Mani, for Baba's Birthday Play
Meherabad India 2010

Cynthia Espinoza

JAI MEHER BABA! I hope that you enjoy reading my story as much as I enjoy sharing it!

Let's start with these few scenes: as a small child, I'm skipping down the halls to Lutheran Sunday school; in third grade, I secretly form a Top Secret Club where in undiscoverable privacy, we read the Bible aloud; in sixth grade, I smirk and raise my eyebrows at a Baptist summer camp leader's response that only people who ask Jesus into their hearts enter heaven ("Well, except for babies who can't talk yet"); in eighth grade, my mouth freezes as my mother admits that she hasn't ever read the whole Bible; and then finally in ninth grade, some weeks after becoming a confirmed member of the Lutheran Church, I announce to my family that I simply am not Christian.

My trajectory towards an honest assessment of beliefs was completed in a family whose secrets hid behind an upstanding, Christian exterior. In this family with a multi-generational chain of abuse, I developed an array of (typical) defense mechanisms: perfectionism, shame, self-hatred, aloofness, manipulation, lying. I didn't trust my parents enough to allow them to love me, and self-love was a laughable luxury meant for someone else. I felt alone in piercing pain, unable to understand why people continued through this life or brought new souls into it.

Rather than share this experience in words, I trained my feelings to express themselves in Rachmaninoff's urgency and Chopin's poignancy; I befriended Tolstoy's protagonists, escaped into Shakespeare and found humor in calculus. I marched through high school and the first three years of college as a commander in someone else's campaign. I won

medals, yes, but my inner heaviness drowned the joys and celebrations that would otherwise have created a buoyant spirit.

This inner bleakness quietly accompanied my outward successes until the start of my senior year at Duke, when I found myself with unexplained fatigue and nerve pain. Not knowing how to soldier through the physical pain and ensnaring fears, I collapsed. I cried. I finally asked— or maybe screamed— for help. First, to my mother and then to the family practitioner, and on to this specialist and that specialist at the fine Duke medical establishment, my pathetic presentation was answered with an uncertainty that forced me to assume I would not walk through life to the distant future I had imagined. At Duke's Disability Services Office, I stared at the figurine of a smiling young woman in a wheelchair on the desk of the manager, who explained the driving services available to me. Fear of the humiliation and other unknowns ahead were strong enough to reorient my priorities and awaken long dormant feelings.

I was no longer a normal college student. I started attending the Buddhist group on campus and contemplating the meaning of life's experiences. I took the tremulous first steps to living based on my inner convictions. And startlingly, some of my childhood defense mechanisms began melting into strange, new possibilities.

For instance, I pledged (for the final time) to break my deep habit of lying. Knitting lies around myself in a protective blanket may have served me as a child, but intricate tapestry had long become an indiscriminate barrier between me and anyone, everyone, and even myself. My algorithm to free my thoughts from the groove of lying was simple: I must immediately correct every incidental lie that slipped out of my mouth. And so the absurdity began! After telling a friend I

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had eaten a burrito for lunch and walking out of the room, I had to turn right back around and walk back into the room to say, “I’m sorry I just lied to you. Actually, I ate falafel for lunch.” Or telling a new acquaintance that I started playing the piano when I was ten, only to have to interrupt myself and admit, “I’m breaking my habit of lying and I just lied to you. Actually, I started playing the piano when I was eight.” Needless to say, people found my admissions considerably more repulsive than if I had lit a cigarette in their face, only to extinguish it and reveal my struggle to quit smoking. Fortunately, the minor humiliations of correcting inane lies made me laugh at myself. So I started laughing more.

The changes and awakenings compounded and I began to feel genuinely appreciative of moments, experiences, people. I allowed myself to be silly more often. And perhaps most importantly, I uncovered the ability to see an experience from another person’s perspective. With what felt to me like a superpower, suddenly every person’s story became interesting and worthwhile. Up until that time, my own internal pain had narrowly divided people and experiences into either worthwhile or worthless, with all too many landing in that second bin. When I saw a Chinese medical practitioner who diagnosed and treated me for copper toxicity, my health quickly rebounded. In exchange for just four short months of physical pain (and a year or so of Chinese detox), I gained access to the compassionate part of my being.

I graduated from Duke with my spirit soaring. I wasn’t speeding along a career path, but rather experiencing the world and myself as beautiful for the first time in my memory. I aimed to travel, learn Spanish and savor life. I lived for three months without another English speaker on a farm in the Central Valley of California before meeting an ecology professor’s research team in Peru. In Spanish, I could speak

as I never had in English: simply, honestly, lovingly. Wow! In Spanish, I was able to become someone kinder and gentler. Then the welcoming and generous nature of Peruvians slowed my mind so I could see the exchanges of care in mundane interactions.

While observing breathtaking rainstorms, monkeys, leafcutter ants, macaws, and even a jaguar in the rich Peruvian rainforest, I felt a tugging shadow. Was it that familiar heaviness which my illness had lightened? Was it simply sadness? Why would I be sad? Whatever it was, this long shadow now overtook my nascent desire to “savor life.” Eight months before my intended departure from Peru, I returned to the United States. To my close friends, I would say: “The only way I can describe the feeling is that I’m homesick. But I know it’s not for the place I grew up. Definitely not for my family of origin. And not even for my friends. There’s just no other word for it.” The feeling didn’t make sense to me at the time, but the “homesickness” goaded me forward.

This was January 2008, fifteen months after my illness and eighteen months before my arrival in Meherabad. But I still had no idea who Meher Baba was.

By the time I moved from Peru back to Durham, North Carolina, I knew that my life was a spiritual journey. I loved the Tao te ching and felt its lines of spiritual truths in naturalistic metaphors contained enough complexity for the rest of my life. I rented a room in the house of a man who always had a stack of Indian dinners in his freezer, a set of extreme rainproof gear in his closet and a smile on his face. He must have said “blah blah blah spiritual blah blah” at some point, but we weren’t close and our infrequent conversations only wandered into spirituality once. He said one book summed up his spiritual beliefs, and handed me a thick, teal-covered book with a dark silhouette on the cover. In privacy, I read

Cynthia Espinoza

the first lines, “ALL souls (*atmas*) were, are and will be in the Over-Soul (Paramatma) ...” but closed it before reaching the second page. The thought in my head was, “How can I accept what this person says? I don’t even know who he is.”

That spring and summer, I waitressed to pay the bills, volunteered at Hospice to fill my heart, studied Spanish and read and read and read about alternative health treatments. As I bicycled here and there, I felt the companionship of birds and trees and strangers and children in the beautiful mystery of life. One day at work, an old gentleman customer—a famous ballet dancer, my coworker excitedly told me—handed me a handwritten copy of the Daniel Ladinsky poem, “*Then Winks*,” that he always carried with him. “I think you might like this.” And I did! I loved it! But the bizarre thing was that someone else gifted me Ladinsky’s book, *I Heard God Laughing*, within a week.

In October, I went on a one-night meditation retreat. It was the first (and only) time I had such an experience and I was very excited. The night I arrived, there was a brief introduction, then dinner and bedtime. Before I got into bed, I said my first prayer to Meher Baba, though I didn’t know His name. I had heard about spiritual masters and wanted to speak to mine directly. I said quietly, “I know that You are with me and I would love to meet You. If You would like to show Yourself now, I would be very happy. But if not, I will still know that You are with me.” I went to bed feeling wonderful.

The next morning when the meditation started, everyone entered a quiet, peaceful seated stance with eyes relaxed and open. Well, everyone except me. As the facilitator guided us into rhythmic breathing, I experienced frighteningly intense muscular and nerve pains characteristic of my bygone illness. It felt as though my nerves were burning with acid; my hands and feet curled into pretzels that I could not open.

Sobbing from both pain and fear, I spent the next hours in a secluded room trying to stop crying or at least to open my hands. To my great relief, by the end of the day, my body returned to its normal state.

Emotionally, however, I had been deeply shaken. For the next weeks, I found myself bursting into uncontrollable sobs. I could feel the crying fits coming about ten minutes in advance and so I began to frequent cemeteries, as the only socially acceptable place to express such sorrow in public. I didn't know what was happening. At the time, I did not see a connection between the sobbing, the meditation retreat and the prayer.

Despite my odd fits of crying, I was very happy in the fall of 2008. The world sparkled with beauty, meaning and possibility. I continued my research into natural medicine, which included interviewing half a dozen inspiring professionals in the field.

The last one I interviewed was Gil Alvarado, who during the interview referred in passing to a long story of great importance to him. As Gil would tell you, I apparently expressed such sincere interest that he spent over an hour relating many of the sweet details that led him from hearing Baba's name to attending the 1969 *Darshan*. In this way, Meher Baba's name and stories of His love first came to my heart in November 2008. What I remember most clearly are the tears that streamed down my face as I heard the story. I left the meeting very surprised and a bit confused.

I went home and ordered a copy of the *Discourses*, which I didn't peruse with much interest when it arrived. My sobbing continued and after a couple months, I began to wonder if I might be losing my mind. I went to Gil as a patient—to ask for his opinion. No doubt he needled me with

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acupuncture, but what pierced my heart were the few stories he told about Baba's life with Mehera, Mani and Eruch.

He lent me a copy of Naosherwan's *The Beloved* and Baba's all-knowing eyes came home with me forever. I spent hours on those pages, reading the simple story and deeply imbibing His form.

One memorable anecdote from that time occurred on an evening when I was to have dinner with a group of friends. An hour before the dinner, I had a crying fit. What terrible timing! I was anxious. I didn't know how I could gather myself together and appear in public. Then I remembered Baba. I took His picture and began looking into His eyes. My frown turned into a smile. Twenty minutes passed. My smile grew. Another twenty minutes. My smile started taking over my eyes. Another ten minutes. "Really, I should be leaving!" Another ten minutes. "Okay! I'm late! But I am HAPPY!" When I arrived at the dinner, our host took one look at me and asked, "Now who are you in love with?" And before I thought of a response, I heard myself say, "Myself." Which of course made me smile even more.

February through April passed quickly. In my mind and heart, I lived in Meherabad, Sakori and Nasik amidst Baba and the *mandali*; outwardly in North Carolina, I wondered if I should jump off my bicycle and shout that Jesus had already returned. The stories of Baba's life were so vivid that I imagined sitting around His *gaadi* under the Tin Shed on rickety stools, entranced by His retelling of life when He came as Krishna. For the first time in about fifteen years I let someone love me. And can you imagine? That first someone was God. I was overflowing.

After some very private weeks in this state, I had the sudden thought that maybe I hadn't told anyone about Baba for

fear of personal rejection. I immediately resolved to tell my two closest friends at the time, named for simplicity the Analytical One and the Exuberant One. After a five-minute verbal version of this story, the Exuberant One literally began jumping up and down, screaming and hugging me. She was absolutely overjoyed. I was a bit surprised by the magnitude of response, but it was in the realm of her personality. Then I plunged ahead to tell the Analytical One, whose habit was to join me in questioning and dissecting concepts of reality, self, society, etc. in hyper-rational style. When I finished my story and heard the Analytical One respond, "Well, that sounds like the absolute best thing that could possibly happen to you." I was stunned and couldn't help but wonder if he was feeling well. Did Meher Baba's reality actually make any sense? I had no idea! But I was simply too drunk to care.

In hyper-rational style myself, I planned to study medicinal plants through Peruvian contacts and further my career in natural medicine. I was to spend a few weeks with family and then fly to South America. I had considered visiting the Meher Spiritual Center in Myrtle Beach before leaving, but was told that someone named "Bow-gee" was visiting and there wouldn't be space. I had visited the Center when it was full in April and camped in a tent down the road, but I didn't feel like that was the right approach this time. I called a few Baba lover women in Myrtle Beach to see if I could stay at someone's home, but it didn't work out.

The night before I was to leave North Carolina, I still hadn't finished packing. I was listless. I moved clothing from one bag to another, not able to connect with the urgency of my responsibilities. In the morning, with only hours remaining, I wandered around my room, blankly staring at the final belongings that needed sorting. Finally, I realized that I really wanted to visit the Center. I made one

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last long-shot attempt and called the Center. The receptionist said she had just hung up the phone with someone who canceled their weekend stay: there was one female space for me. I could stay! I shoved the last of my belongings into my trunk and sped away singing Baba's name. What a gift!

My cabin-mates at Myrtle Beach kept smirking at my story, which apparently had some holes obvious to everyone but me. They kept making jokes about getting ready to leave the country for an important journey, none of which I understood until mid-May when I decided that I simply had to go to Meherabad. I planned to arrive at the start of June, attend the Young Adult Sahavas, travel a bit and return to the United States in September. I arrived in Meherabad on June 4th 2009 at 4 A.M. As I waited for Hostel D to open, a watchman asked if I had been to the *Samadhi* yet. I said I hadn't. In fact, I didn't remember what the word "*Samadhi*" meant until after Dolly Dastoor handed me a rag, pushed me over the threshold and corrected my cleaning technique. Then the realization that I was cleaning the stones above Beloved Baba's physical body spread as an irrepressible grin that wiped the tiredness right out of my eyes.

That first week of June, I had my last crying fit as I waited on the Hill for the *Samadhi* to open. Watching the sun rise, I knew all my tears were for Him only. My whole life I had been crying out to Him and He had created each twist of my path so I would end as near to Him as I could possibly be. I spent two-and-a-half years living in Meherabad, meeting so many of His beautiful lovers and spending time with the One who still captures my heart and guides my steps. At last He brought me home. And as Baba told a worldwide traveler who visited Him in person, at home is where the journey really begins.

101 Tales of Finding Love

As of 2018, I live with my husband and three children in the Santa Cruz mountains, California where I write, read, sometimes teach and keep attempting to perfect *masoor dal*. Thank you, Baba, for the opportunity to share one more story of Your perfect Love.

Hunter Flournoy

101 Tales
of Finding Love

Hunted All Along

by Hunter Flournoy

101 Tales of Finding Love



Hunter with Father Elias, AKA Nur (light) Elias,
AKA Ken Wells, August 2017



Hunter Flournoy

Part I

STORIES ARE LIVING THINGS, growing from the moment they are born, flourishing in their time, and eventually dying into the warm earth of all possibilities, becoming food for other stories. Unlike other living things, however, stories grow not only in the unfolding of time; they grow backwards in time as well, sending roots back into our earliest experiences, connecting parts of our lives we never might have suspected of meaningful relationship. They grow outwards as well, sloughing off eventually like a skin that has grown too small for us; and more importantly, inwards, sinking roots deep into the bedrock of our hearts, breaking things open inside us and calling forth the deepest sources of nourishment and strength.

My journey into the Beloved's full embrace is just such a story—who can say when it really began? Was it during another incarnation, when another *Avatar* sat atop a rocky hill, speaking of the mysteries inside us, awakening a longing so deep and profound in my heart that it impelled me through lifetimes of seeking? Was it a more recent lifetime, not so long ago, when my father brought me to Meher Baba and asked for His blessing upon me? Was it the moment Baba brushed His hand over my head, filling my senses with the fragrance of—what was it—roses? The hum of bees in the springtime? Sunlight, flashing off the ocean? Does my story begin with that moment, in another lifetime—the moment I knew I would always be His?

Does the story begin when I was a child in my own lifetime, no more than three years old, talking quietly to someone in the darkness of an upstairs room? My parents heard my voice through the door, calm and quiet, even though I was

terrified of being alone in the dark; and when they came in and asked me who I had been speaking to, I surprised them with a name they had never heard before—yet somehow recognized as a name for Jesus.

The story might begin a little later, at age eleven, when I went to Holy Cross Monastery in Poughkeepsie, New York for an acolyte's retreat. In the silence of the evening, I made my way deep into the crypt beneath the old gothic chapel, found a worn wooden kneeler with cross-stitched cushions, and begged, literally for hours, for my Beloved to show Himself to me. I was swept up in torrents of longing that overflowed any sense of who I was, who I was calling to, or exactly what I wanted. Suddenly, the world responded: it was as if the old stone walls opened up around me, making space for the vast ocean inside me and the endless whirling galaxy that seemed to pour down through the ceiling, filling me with a peace I had never known.

At some point, I rose unsteadily, found my way up the stairs of the crypt, and lay down before the altar, my face pressed against the cool marble and my hands stretched out to the sides, giving myself in utter surrender to my Beloved forever.

I might also begin the story a decade later, when I was twenty-two. My parents offered to send me anywhere in the world as a college graduation gift, and I settled immediately on Kashmir and Ladakh. I picked Kashmir, because I had read that Jesus didn't die on the cross, but travelled to Srinagar, nestled in the foothills of the Himalayas, had a family, kept an inn (where there was, the old stories say, always room), and was given a saint's burial in a small shrine; and Ladakh, where Tibetan Buddhism, which I had always, for no reason at all, completely loved, still flourished.

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I clutched the rail of my little auto-rickshaw as it careened through the dusty, diesel-smoke filled streets of Srinagar, craning my neck forward to catch my first glimpse of the Beloved's tomb, my heart beating hard in my chest. At first, I was not sure if the driver understood where I wanted to go. The rickshaw stopped suddenly in front of a sun-bleached, half-forgotten building lost amidst the labyrinth of the city. There it was—a faded, hand-painted sign that read:

“ZiaratiHazratiYouzaAsouph.”

This was the place, but I knew with absolute certainty in my heart, that the legend was wrong. There was no presence, no light, and no fragrance there. The Beloved had not been buried there at all.

My story of coming to the Beloved could also start with a luminous image that haunted me for years, returning in dreams and random moments of silence. The first time the vision came, I was standing at the stove making stir-fry in graduate school, gently tending the bright medley of snow peas, peppers and scallions in front of me. I heard one of my friends ask the room, “What do you think you will see when you die?” I remember closing my eyes for a second, only to be startled by an immediate vision of a man in a long white robe sitting under a tree in a wide-open landscape, with a winding path stretching out behind Him. He was barefoot, with one arm draped casually over His knee, and the other hand splayed out on the ground behind Him. His long hair hung down around His shoulders and His eyes were very beautiful. He was utterly relaxed and at ease—as if He had always been right there, happily waiting an eternity for me to arrive. He rose up and walked toward me, softly smiling. A thrill rushed through me. I opened my eyes and felt the

steam pouring up from the wok against my face—and yet, I still felt the man’s presence around me, hovering like a mist.

The beginning I usually give my story, for want of a clear starting point, is the first time I heard Baba’s name in this lifetime. I was in an abusive relationship at the time, clinging desperately to the man who spun me through a vicious cycle of praise, stonewalling, and punishment. Flooded by old and new trauma, over my head in depression, anxiety, and self-loathing, I cried out for help, and it came. First, I found a bodyworker who specialized in trauma, and then a therapist she recommended. She said I could meet the therapist at a gathering at a local Unitarian Church.

That night, the guest speaker at the gathering was a lover of Meher Baba. I don’t remember her name, but her love for Baba when she spoke His name made an extraordinary impression. She practically radiated light! I wanted to understand, but some of her words were incomprehensible to me—“Don’t Worry, Be Happy”—an unimaginable accomplishment for me at the time! “I come not to teach, but to awaken.” Ah, this inspired me a bit more, and stirred something inside that I had no words for.

Two other things that evening, however, made the greatest impressions. The first, which terrified me utterly, was the God claim—“Meher Baba is God. Meher Baba is the Avatar, the same One as Jesus.” My stomach clenched in fear and I literally broke out in a cold sweat when she spoke these words. Meher Baba couldn’t be God. Only Jesus was God. I worried that the woman was clearly misguided, maybe crazy, and possibly dangerous. I could feel hellfire curling up around the edges of my feet. The second thing that rocked me to my core, which terrified and thrilled and made me gasp for air like a drowning man, was Baba’s picture. Somehow I knew Him, deep down in the marrow of my being, I

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knew the love that poured forth from His eyes, I knew the scent and feel of Him, I knew, as much as I had ever known anything in my life, the longing that rushed up from the deepest places inside me, shaking me hard. Bewildered, I left the gathering quickly.

Using the information on the flyer she gave me, I ordered a photograph of Him like the one she had shown—"The Ancient One." When it arrived I felt that same terror and excitement, the same churning in my stomach; and when I opened it, the same inexplicable recognition and longing. I quickly tucked it away in my backpack.

I carried Baba's picture there for the next twenty-five years, always with me but never visible, like a coal banked under the ashes. It glowed warmly somewhere inside, but I was too frightened of the fire it might kindle inside me to give it any oxygen.

Nevertheless, that longing quietly moved my whole life. The therapist I met that evening became my first teacher in the arts of healing as I pursued a career in counseling. I left the Episcopal Church, driven away by its homophobia. I moved to New Mexico, trained in the Lakota sweatlodge tradition, the Mayan Fire Ceremony, took hands in the Nur-Ashki Jer-rahi Sufi order, worked with indigenous elders from around the world. I led workshops and ceremonies, worked as a trauma and addiction therapist, and spent ten years apprenticing and then teaching in the Toltec wisdom tradition of Mexico, and all the while, I carried Baba's picture with me, carefully tucked away in my backpack, and the indescribable longing He stirred in my heart. Every now and then, I would see a picture of Meher Baba at a retreat center, or in a bookstore, and would stand there mesmerized, until I forced myself to turn away.

There were glimpses of union, of course, little gifts strewn along the way by the Beloved. Moments of deep tenderness and connection, visions that filled my senses: light pouring to me and through me, an Ocean of Love so vast and deep, with all of us floating on the surface like patches of foam, trapped in the marvelous illusion of our own separation. Still, these heightened states served only to sharpen my longing. In spite of my elders' patient and tender guidance, there were walls inside me braced against the waves of Love. I alternated between seeking and grasping and pushing Him away, in my strange hunt for the One who frightened me most.

What was it that kept me from relaxing into Baba's embrace? On the surface, I would have said that I needed a relationship that was more real, more mature, than the childish religion so prevalent today—"Will you accept my imaginary friend as your lord and savior?" As one priest I loved used to say, "It's time for us to grow beyond a kindergarten Christianity, to grow into a mature, adult relationship with God." Yet, transcendent concepts of God could not possibly satisfy my heart. I had no models for an adult spirituality, one that integrated the immanent and transcendent in a mature way. Nor was I ready for it; I simply had not grown up.

More importantly, despite all my healing work, all of my spiritual practice, I did not trust myself. The trauma of growing up gay in the rural south, steeped in Christian and heterosexual assumptions about the world, had taught me to mistrust my own strongest feelings—my anger, my sadness, my joy, and above all my desire—my heart's deepest longing. I must also maintain a single unrelenting vigilance: I could embrace any spiritual tradition as my own, but I must never, on punishment of eternal damnation, replace Jesus Christ as my Beloved.

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As a result I also didn't trust God. I could identify with Jesus, who suffered at God's hands. He was gentle, patient, making no demands but love—and even that, just a gentle encouragement. He said He was “the Son of God,” somehow God, but removed enough for me to feel safe. Even with all the healing work I had done, however, growing up in a religion which dooms you to hellfire and calls you an abomination, had left its mark; I could imagine a God of Love, transcendent, deanthropo-morphized, and quietly flowing through the world, lifting us up, the way helium lifts a balloon, but absolutely stripped of all real God-ness, because I couldn't trust God. God wasn't safe.

Here was the problem: Baba didn't say He was the “Son” of God. He said over and over, incontrovertibly, “I am God,” and because I knew in the deepest fiber of my being that this was somehow incomprehensibly true, because I felt my whole being rise up in response, yearning towards Him, Meher Baba couldn't be trusted. If Meher Baba was God, Meher Baba wasn't safe.

Part 2

Father Elias, also known as Nur Elias, or simply Ken Wells, was the man who taught me to trust God, and even more, to love Him.

Our meeting still shines in my memory as if it were just this morning. I was couch-surfing at the time, looking for a place to rent in town; I had just moved back to Albuquerque, New Mexico in 1998, heartbroken over the ending of another abusive relationship and discouraged by the failure of a business, when a friend mentioned an old couple in need of cat-sitters for a week, gave me this address, and suggested I go down to meet them, smiling wryly.

I found myself standing before the sun-beaten door of an old adobe home tucked away in a corner of Old-Town Albuquerque, rapping on the aging wood. It was one of those adobes that felt as if it had risen from the earth itself, solid and immutable as ancient stone, all but buried in the wild riot of their garden. The door flew open.

Father Elias: a shock of silver hair dancing in the breeze despite his best attempts to tame it down; sky-blue eyes, shot through with merry sparks of light, a quiet smile that always threatened to break through into laughter, and a long, weathered black robe. His husband, Father Gabriel: tall, serious and silent, and kind as an old cottonwood tree bending gently over Father Elias' shoulder, considering me thoughtfully through glasses that never quite let his eyes show through, and again, a long black robe. I loved them both immediately.

They ushered me into a courtyard overflowing with plants of every kind—fruit trees and flowers and winding grape vines—all tended lovingly by Father Gabriel, and into the quiet, cool depths of an Orthodox Christian chapel, a building no bigger than a double garage, but of another world entirely. Ducking beneath the pendulous bunches of green grapes just above the doorway, I found myself in an entry room stacked floor to ceiling with old books, Indian pottery and regalia, and a little further on, the chapel itself.

What can I say of the chapel? It was only a building, made of swamp sod and old beams, lifted into place by the fathers many years ago, and yet, plastered floor to ceiling with icons and oil lamps and textiles from Tibet, Greece, Russia, Eastern Europe and the Navajo, carpeted wall to wall with Persian Carpets, the chapel felt like the very center of the

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world, overflowing with an almost visible light that soaked me to the bone. I knew I had come home.

I learned that the Fathers, then in their sixties, were the tenders of a small ideorhythmic Orthodox *Skete*, meaning that the monks lived independently in the surrounding neighborhood, worked in the world—often in the counseling center run by the monastery—and gathered daily for worship at the chapel in the Fathers’ home. Father Gabriel was the Priest, and Father Elias was the reader, leading the monks in chanting the long, sonorous prayers hour after hour, using melodies he traced back to the Temple of Jerusalem. They were also all-but-married, and deeply in love.

There are many stories to tell of my time in the Monastery: how I was baptized and took my baptismal name, “*Seraphim*”; how I entered the novitiate, took vows as a monk, studied for the priesthood and worked in the little counseling center; stories of the rough rock tumbler of spiritual community and the wearing away of my sharpest edges, stories mapping out the profound depths of Orthodox spirituality, but for now, there is only this one story, the one that matters most of all: how Father Elias brought me into the Beloved’s embrace.

Father Elias, you see, was a jack-of-all-prayers. Raised on Laguna Pueblo, initiated in the Kivas and brought up in the village church, he had wandered through Episcopalianism, the Baha’i tradition, and Gnostic Tradition. He got drunk with Alan Watts back in the day, sprawled out on Alan’s couch listening to profound mystical monologues. He had been a close friend of Rabbi Zalman Schachter, a member of the B’nai Or, and the Cantor at a local synagogue. He had been a Murid of Murshid Samuel Lewis in the Chistia and Universal Sufi Orders, an Experienced Farmer in Ziraat, and

spent years in the company of the Naqshbandi, Nur Ashki Jerrahi, Golden Sufis, and the followers of Bawa Muhaiyadin, and he had even served as the *muezzin* at the local Islamic center for at time.

Above all, and through it all, Father Elias loved his Divine Beloved completely and utterly, and felt His living Presence in everyone he met. Father Elias also had a name for his Beloved, a name that he spoke only when he was completely alone with me in his private library, or out in the chapel, long after everyone else had retired to the house for food after services. That name was “Meher Baba, the God-Man.”

Father Elias had first learned of Baba through Murshid Sam, who had told him that his own Murshid, Hazrat Inayat Khan, recognized Baba’s divinity and intended to place his Order in Baba’s hands, dissolving the river into its source—a desire that was not fulfilled even partially, it turned out, until his own successor, Rabia Martin, passed the Order down to Ivy Duce, who did her best to fulfill that mandate. (I should say here that I have no written documentation to substantiate these claims, only the clear memory of his words.)

Though Father Elias was elder and mentor and Murshid and Rabbi and Spiritual Father to me, though we spent long hours bent over texts in Greek and Hebrew and Aramaic and Arabic, though he led me carefully through the sweet depths of *hesychast* and sufi practice, these simple, earth-shaking words—“Meher Baba, the God-Man”—were his greatest gift to me, his secret, his deepest love, offered freely in hopes of kindling my own heart. Each time he spoke those words, it was in hushed, reverent tones, spoken more with his eyes than with his lips. Each time he brought me to his library and put Baba’s pictures in my hands, each

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time he handed me Baba's books, he would place them in my hands as carefully as if he was placing them in my heart.

A stubborn, frightened student, I responded, "Father, how does this fit with Orthodox theology? How does this fit with Jesus?" He would pat my shoulder, smile, shrug, and simply say, "Don't worry about it. Read them," he would say, "spend time with them. Don't think too much. Let Him speak inside you."

This gradual wearing away continued for twelve years, sometimes, as insistent and gentle as a mountain stream eroding the stone beneath it. Father Elias loved to say, "The only spiritual path is relationship—relationship here," gently poking a finger into the center of my heart, "relationship with the Beloved. There are no secrets left. There is nothing we have to do," he'd softly smile, "but let our relationship with Him open all the doors, so His love can pour through us into the world."

It was this relationship, above all, that Father Elias sought to nurture in my life. His eyes flashed like lightning once, when I called him my teacher. "Seraphim," he said, "if you ever call me that again, I will kick you out on that curb and lock the door, and you won't lay eyes on me again." He fixed his eyes on mine intensely, and glared over the frames of his glasses. "I am your friend. Your friend. Don't ever place anyone between you and the Beloved, especially me." He broke into a wide grin. "Besides," he said, "that's a lot more fun!"

Sometimes, Father Elias would use the words "the God-Man" more roughly, knowing how they brushed against my trauma and mistrust of God. Whenever I resorted to careful euphemisms—"the Universe," "Spirit"—his eyes would spark angrily, and he'd bark at me, "Say what you mean. You're speaking of God. Trust Him. Come back into rela-

tionship with Him.” When I’d speak of my other spiritual practices, he’d bristle even more. “At some point, Seraphim, we have to come back to the religion of our childhood to heal our wounds around God,” he’d say. “When white people go to a sweatlodge, they can escape those wounds; and that’s good for a time. But my Indian people sit in our wounds when we sit in a lodge—we are surrounded by the people we share those wounds with—and we have to feel them and face them. You were raised Christian, and though other traditions can feed you and grow you, you have to come home at some point, and heal those wounds. You have to come back into relationship. You have to trust God.”

Often, when he saw that I was right in the middle of my trauma, Father Elias would speak more gently of God as the great Lover, as the Beloved. I remember one time, walking through the plaza of Old-Town Albuquerque on a sunny spring day, when he paused and turned to face me. “He’s so close to you,” he would say, “closer than your heartbeat, closer than your breath. Right here,” he said, placing his hand on my chest, “you can trust yourself with this. You can trust Him in you.” The light rose up within and around us, pouring through everything, into and through my own heart, and shining in his eyes like small suns. “It’s good,” Father Elias whispered, “to be with someone else who has seen the Beloved, and knows he is His Own.”

It was not long after that experience in the park that my world was torn apart. Looking back now, I can see how Father Elias tried to prepare me. Three times, he threw his arms around me in my last months at the Monastery, pulling me into him like a hen gathering her chick under her wing. “I hope you find a place where you can be yourself openly,” he said, where you don’t have to fight anymore.” I didn’t understand what he meant—the monastery had become my home—but it was as if he could feel the storm coming.

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As a gay couple, the Fathers had resorted to the only Bishop who would allow them to be gay and partnered, on the one condition that they be “discreet.” For years, they had quietly kept from the Bishop my open ministry in the gay community, and my open participation in numerous other spiritual traditions. Late one winter, Bishop found out, and I was forced not only to leave the monastery, but also to break all contact with the Fathers. Father Elias took his vows with the greatest seriousness, including his vow of obedience, and the Bishop put him under obedience to give me up. I lost my spiritual friend, my deepest and truest outer connection with the Beloved. I was bereft, and cut off from him for years.

In the agony and despair of the months and years that followed, many dear friends and elders rushed forward from every imaginable corner of my life to support and encourage me, and yet the absence of my friend was palpable and constant, and in his absence, the absence of feeling God’s presence once again. Gradually, however, I became used to the emptiness, and stopped sending unanswered emails and making unanswered calls. I began to notice a deeper and more subtle sense of presence arising inside, a quiet movement somewhere underneath my consciousness. Little moments of encouragement began to come: friends who still knew Father Elias, told me that he asked them how I was every single time he saw them. The practices of remembrance he gave me spontaneously returned, and the little rule of prayer he had suggested, became an important part of my daily life. I could not reach out to him, but I felt him, and in him, a reawakening connection with the Beloved.

One day, a miracle happened; I was surprised to find myself picking up the phone several years after losing them, and even more surprised to hear Father Elias answer. “I’m so

glad you called,” he exclaimed, his voice overflowing with joy, “I’ve missed you so much. I love you so much.” My heart ached inside me, pounding against my ribs. He asked how I was, and I found a few words to tell him what had been moving in my life. “I’m glad you’re doing so well,” he said, “and it sounds like you’re just where you need to be.” He paused, resting in the silence for a moment. “Do you remember the prayer of the Heart I taught you?”

“Yes,” I replied.

“Good,” he exclaimed, “I do too. You remember how to use the image of a beloved friend to kindle your love for God?”

Again, I replied, “Yes.”

“Seraphim,” he said, “often, it is your image I use when I do that prayer, to wake up my heart.” I felt the world rock around me, as if I were floating on the ocean in a squall. “But we don’t need to be connected in person any more—we are connected in a way that will never change, that never needs confirmation—we are connected in Him, in Our Beloved. I love you, Seraphim.” With that, he hung up, and six years of further silence began.

Part 3

Meher Baba came to me again in the most unlikely of ways—through a single hair of His head—a bridge as wide as a hair, quite literally.

I had found comfort in the company of Quakers—their non-authoritarian practice of communal listening to the still, small voice within offered a more healing understanding of obedience than my experience in the monastery. One day in August 2015 in Asheville, North Carolina, I was sit-

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ting with a new friend, Keldwyn, after meeting, and saw an odd ring on her finger, a gold ring with a tall bevel of leaded glass, containing a single hair. Something electric shot through me, and without thinking, without realizing what I was saying, I asked, “Is that Meher Baba’s hair?” She looked at me, startled and delighted—there was no way, at that time, I could have known.

Her response was immediate and enthusiastic. “Yes, would you like to wear it? You could give it back to me tomorrow.” Her love for Baba overflowed, and without hesitation she folded my hand around her most precious possession. “I’m so excited for you,” she said. I wore the ring for the entire time, and though there were no epiphanies, no bolts of lightning, I felt something wordlessly beginning to soften inside me, and I didn’t want to miss a single moment of having the ring on.

When I returned it to her, she pressed it to her heart, gave it a kiss, and said effusively, “You need to go to the Center in Myrtle Beach—it will be so important for you. You will just love it there!”

My heart leapt inside me, and the second I saw my partner at home, the words sprang out of me. “Brad, I have to go to a retreat center in Myrtle Beach as soon as I can. To my surprise, he burst out in a wide smile, and said that a healer he was working with had just told him the exact same thing. We called, and booked the retreat immediately.

For days, to my complete bafflement, my whole body hummed like a beehive in springtime, dizzy and drunk with the longing to simply be there, and when we finally arrived, I would have broken into a sprint down the entry road if we hadn’t been driving. We dropped our things in our room quickly, threw open the door ... and everything slowed way

down. I felt as if the sunlight had congealed into honey, pouring through me with each step, drawing my attention to each nuance of light and shadow, every heady fragrance and sound of the forest as I walked to the side door of the Lagoon Cabin, the place where Meher Baba met with His lovers one by one. I laid my shoes under the bench, and stepped inside.

Everything went silent, as my body moved from the door to the pillow before Baba's chair in one fluid motion. It wasn't even me bowing down—there was no chair, no pillow, no room, and no I, just the effortless flow of love into its own open embrace. I bowed down into the silence, as if I were falling into a great abyss, falling until I forgot falling, forgot myself, forgot God. All else disappeared for an eternal moment, and then suddenly, unexpectedly, the world returned in a rush of light and color, and I was standing before Baba's green vinyl chair, not wanting to move a hair's breadth from this place for the rest of my life. Unsteadily, sensing the presence of others around me, remembering my partner still waiting by the doorway, I made my way to the loveseat across from the chair, and peered into the open space above the chair. Baba was no longer there in any way I could perceive, but even the nothing He left behind trembled with a silence, a spaciousness, and a light that simply stopped me.

After a long while, we rose, had a little dinner looking out over the freshwater lake by the kitchen, went briefly to our room, and returned to Lagoon Cabin. Bradley, my partner, went ahead of me while I washed up. Carelessly, I left my flashlight behind, but the walk wasn't long—no more than a hundred feet, probably—and I figured it would be no problem to pick it up later.

It was probably only a trick of the light, in the deepening darkness after sunset. It was probably only the small tree,

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bowed gently towards the path to the cabin, catching the moonlight. Still, what I saw stopped me in the darkness, sending a wave of love and a feeling of clear recognition rushing up through my feet into the canopy: there in front of me for just a few moments, stood Meher Baba. His white sadra and long, unbound hair blew softly in the evening breeze as He gazed right through me, those beautiful almond-eyes smiling with excitement and tender welcome. And then, He was simply gone, leaving me staring intently into the space where He had been, looking for some sign that it might have been real. I continued into the Lagoon cabin, sat down and closed my eyes, and continued to look for Him inside. When my partner gently touched my shoulder, signaling curfew, I quietly walked back with him to our room and tried to feel back into that moment, holding at bay the flood of thoughts that sought to build it up or dismiss it in any way.

The next morning, my partner and I both sprang from our beds, eager to visit the Abode, the house where Baba stayed when He was on the Center. Unfortunately, we chose to walk the lower trail by the lake, dodging and batting our way through giant spider webs, and arrived at Baba's house sweaty and sticky with web. Our tour guide gave us a wonderful tour and ended with a few quiet words in the hallway outside Baba's room. He placed his hand on my shoulder, and nudged me in.

What can I say? A quiet bedroom, a scattered handful of people sitting and kneeling quietly around the bed, a photo of Baba looking satisfied and tousled, like a lover after a long night of passion, gazing out over His beloveds. And a fragrance of something like roses, but sweeter, lighter, and infinitely more intoxicating, that permeated everything around me for days.

I felt a wall inside—the one that had started to soften when I first saw Baba’s hair—simply dissolve, like a misshapen sandcastle dashed into a million sparkling grains of sand by a single ocean wave. I shook with quiet laughter as I realized without a shadow of a doubt that Jesus and Meher Baba truly were one—that my frightened efforts to keep them separate over so many years had only kept me separate from Him, the God-Man, who comes again and again like the ocean waves to call us home. After two and a half decades of hunting God, I realized I had been the hunted all along, and gasped with the enormity of Love that had so relentlessly, so tenderly chased me down, made me forever and ever His own. I pressed my face into His pillow, wrapped in His arms.

Epilogue

Surrender had only just begun, of course; I am only beginning to trust myself, and to trust God, and my grip on His hand has loosened so many times. Ever time I falter, though, something new happens: I feel His hand tighten around mine, giving me the strength and courage to walk on. In moments when I feel very young indeed, He is there as a Friend; yes, you could say an imaginary friend, but I would say, instead, imaginal: perceived through an imagination grounded in love. In other moments, He is the Ocean of Love, a presence and light and love permeating everything, connecting everything, growing everything into its own most beautiful expression. In other moments, He startles me with the nearness of His presence in my own heart, so immediate and real in the felt sense of my body, there is no denying it. Immanent and Transcendent, vast and yet somehow absolutely personal. As Baba once said, the Avatar manifests as a bird for birds, as an ant for an ant, as a grain of sand for sand, and for each of us, manifests in precisely the way we most need in each moment.

Hunter Flourney

As I was driving to the Baba Center for my first solo visit, just a couple of months after my initial visit with my partner Brad, I received a phone call. Father Elias' partner, the priest at the monastery, was on the other end. I pulled to the side of the road. "Seraphim," he said, "Father Elias has taken ill. He's not doing very well, and it would be a good thing for you to speak to him now." I hadn't heard his voice in eight years, but I could tell he was weary and disheartened. "Father Elias doesn't remember much lately, but he'll remember you."

There was a long silence, and I heard him put Father Elias on the phone. "Seraphim," he said, "I just love you so much, and I'm just so happy to speak with you." For ten minutes, he repeated these same words over and over, as if this was his last chance to tell me anything at all, and he wanted me to remember these words forever. I sat there on the side of the road, soaking every word in, tears streaming down my face. Baba had given me back my friend, now that only love was left.

So here I stand, bleary-eyed from long hours on the plane to India in October 2017, after crumpling into the back seat of a car speeding from Mumbai to Meherabad, and running as fast as I could down the winding, dusty trail from the Meher Pilgrim Retreat in Meherabad. The last light of day is fading and a soft light rises inside as the words of the old hymn come to mind, "Let all mortal flesh keep silent, and in awe and trembling stand." I gaze through the door of Baba's Tomb, shaking inside, gazing into the eyes of the painting above Baba's grave, recognizing the image I had seen in my dreams for years, my vision of the man in the long white robe sitting casually beneath the tree. I feel at my side my twenty-two year old self—the one who came to India seeking his Beloved's tomb—sigh with joy and relief at last, final-

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ly finding and found in the presence of His Beloved. The prayers begin. I walk to Him.

Hunter Flourney

Hunter lives in Asheville, North Carolina, with his husband Bradley, and their wonderfully spoiled Boston terrier. He has a private coaching practice, working with the spirit and the breath, and leads retreats around the world.

101 Tales of Finding Love

Alisa Genovese

101 Tales
of Finding Love

Meeting Him Within:
A Detour to His Arms

by Alisa Genovese



Mehera Irani and Alisa Genovese, Meherazad, India, 1986



Alisa Genovese

THE DANCE OF SPIRITUALITY AND PSYCHOLOGY has informed all of my adult life. My relationship with psychology has been intertwined with my relationship to Meher Baba since the beginning.

I was born into a Roman Catholic family and had no exposure to Eastern philosophical thinking or psychology as a child. Although I felt a connection to Jesus, by high school I had declared myself agnostic, because none of the doctrine made sense to me. Deciding to go to college, I wanted to study psychology. I had never read a book on psychology; it was just a sudden flash of insight, which I mysteriously followed. In hindsight, I see it as the beginning of my awakening to seeking. I wanted to know and understand the deeper nature of reality so I thought, at that time, studying psychology was the way to achieve that understanding.

I started my study of psychology at Arizona State University in fall of 1979. In my sophomore year, I had taken a class in Eastern philosophy and mystical thinking, which set off a deep soul stirring that left me with a hunger to know more. I transferred to University of California Santa Barbara (UCSB) in my junior year in 1981. I was already becoming disheartened and dissatisfied with Western psychology. It wasn't offering me the answers I didn't even yet know I was seeking. While at UCSB I met Elias, the man who told me about Meher Baba.

Even before I heard about Meher Baba, I had started going to several workshops and seminars on campus about spirituality. I was particularly drawn to Eckankar, which promised soul travel and higher states of awakening, which were all very attractive to me by then. Elias was older than I was and clearly had a lot of spiritual experience and knowledge,

which I was increasingly drawn to. I had never met anyone like him before. He had been a Baba lover for many years by then. He told me about Meher Baba just as I was ready to sign up to join Eckankar.

It was Baba's perfect timing. I was new to Santa Barbara and was just making friends. Elias and I shared a friend who lived in the same apartment complex as I did. One evening I was visiting Jerry, our mutual friend, and as we were talking, I noticed up on his doorframe a Baba card. As I recall the photo of Baba now, it looked to me like it was a large Day-Glo poster. Baba's face jumped out at me from that high doorway. "Who is that?" I asked spontaneously. Jerry's reply indicated that he himself didn't know. He shrugged and replied, "Elias told me it was his father." I asked him if I could have the card, which I promptly took to Elias.

"Is this your father?" I asked. I actually believed it plausible, as Elias is Palestinian and the photo of Baba did bear some resemblance to him. "Yes," he responded, with a twinkle in his eye. He then proceeded to hand me the book, *The Beloved*. As I was looking through the book, he was telling me that Meher Baba was God in human form. I recall the first thing that came to me, as I looked at these amazing photographs of this beautiful man, was that Baba must be who He says He is, because nobody could make such an assertion as being God in human form, keep silence for forty years, and have nothing in His life disprove it. I was nineteen years old.

I didn't know if Meher Baba was God, but I realized He was certainly not an ordinary human being. Although I felt a powerful familiarity with Him, the very fact of His existence was not enough to satisfy me, as I was seeking to experience a more transcendent Reality of God, which can only be experienced inwardly. Therefore when Elias told me

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that He dropped His body in 1969, I was disappointed. I wasn't interested in worshipping another Jesus on the cross. I found myself edging back to Eckankar, by now yearning for deeper experiences. Elias gave me the book, *The Autobiography of a Yogi* and recommended Self-Realization Fellowship, Yogananda's church, if I was looking for a more structured path. I felt a strong draw to Parmahansa Yogananda. I became a devoted follower of Self-Realization Fellowship for seven years, getting initiated into the highest form of meditation, called Kriya Yoga. I always kept a photo of Baba on my alter as I meditated. I intuitively felt I was readying myself for Him.

By my senior year at UCSB, I was meditating twice a day, and I was growing more deeply connected to my spiritual life. I had finished all my requirements for my psychology major and I had nothing but electives left to take. Western psychology continued to lose interest for me as my focus was primarily shifted toward spiritual dimensions. I used my senior year to study religions exclusively, and I wound up getting a double Bachelor of Arts in both psychology and religious studies.

Within a year, I felt prompted to continue my studies in psychology. However, I now wanted something that could combine Western psychological thinking with Eastern philosophy. I didn't know if such a thing existed. In my search, I came upon Transpersonal Psychology, and it was exactly the synthesis of Eastern and Western philosophies I was looking for. I found the John F. Kennedy University in the Bay Area, which was co-founded by Alan Cohen, who, I came to find out, was connected to Meher Baba. I knew immediately that was where I was going to go. It was the only school I applied to and I got in. I received a Master's Degree in Transpersonal Psychology in 1987.

Although I continued to meditate keeping Meher Baba's picture on my altar, I remained focused and involved with the Self-Realization Fellowship Community. I knew nothing about what was going on with Baba groups in the area and didn't know much about the happenings in India. This continued for seven years. Finally the time was ripe for Baba to turn the key for me to return to Him.

It was while working at John F. Kennedy University. I was a receptionist in the consciousness studies office and two of my fellow co-workers knew about Meher Baba. One was, in fact, a Baba lover. His name was Jim Tomlinson. One day Jim asked me, during one of our many 'spiritual' conversations, if I had been to Meherabad since I'd known about Baba for seven years. He was shocked when I told him I had not. He began to tell me about the *mandali* who were still alive, and how I must get there as soon as possible to meet these amazing close ones. The next day he came with a booklet entitled *Welcome Home*. It contained all the needed information about how to get to Meherabad. The fire was lit in my heart. Baba was calling me.

My boyfriend at the time was a Yoganada devotee. We had met through the Self-Realization Fellowship community in Santa Barbara. He was interested in traveling to India with me. So we began planning our trip for the summer of 1986. I convinced him that our first stop should be Pune and then on to Meherabad. Since neither of us had been to India before, the booklet *Welcome Home* became our guide. Meherabad seemed like the best first stop to orient ourselves and begin our journey traveling around India.

We left in June 1986. We were novices, it was all brand new. Neither of us had ever traveled outside the United States before. Our first miss-step was when we arrived in Pune; we liked it so much that we decided to stay an extra two days

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before arriving at Meherabad. We had no idea we were supposed to inform the Trust of our delayed arrival. So I recall, upon our arrival we were greeted with what seemed like such happy, joyful hugs. Mani herself, who was at the Trust office when we arrived, came to embrace us, saying how happy she was we had finally arrived. I recall being so taken by the warmth of the greeting that I immediately felt I was home. It was only later that we found out that we had actually caused alarm, due to our delay, which I did feel so bad about. Fortunately all was forgiven and forgotten, but not without a clear education about what to do in future regarding any delays. But the impression of that first greeting lingers today.

Another strong imprint from that trip was my first *arti* at Baba's *Samadhi*. As I entered the Tomb I felt my body rack with emotion. Tears began to stream from my eyes as I bowed my head that first time at His feet. I still remember the electrical feeling that coursed through my body. In the seven years of meditation I had never felt anything quite as powerful as that. As I exited the Tomb, Nana Kher was there to catch me as I fell into his arms. He held me, gently rocking as he repeated, "Welcome Home, Welcome Home." There was no place else I needed to go. I knew I was, indeed, Home in a way I had never experienced nor could I explain.

The next day we boarded the bus for Meherazad. Meeting all the other *mandali*, and for me, most especially, meeting Eruch, I knew I did not want to leave. Suddenly traveling around India became much less appealing. I couldn't imagine I would find anything in India that would feel as I felt right here in this provincial oasis called Meherazad. To this day, Meherazad is the center of all Creation for me on this earth.

I recall one day in Mandali Hall, Eruch, asking me how I came to be there. I remember weeping with guilt as I shared how I was not at Yogananda's Ashram. Eruch tenderly responded to my tears. He reassured me that no one comes to Baba's place if it not be His Will. I was meant to be there, Baba had called me. He also told me how so many, over the years, had come to Baba through Yogananda. He assured me that he was a branch on Baba's tree. It didn't matter how one got there, getting there was important. It was of great comfort for me at that time as I was still very devoted to Yogananda.

Of course it grew more complex, as Baba would have it. I was still traveling with my partner, Jim. Although Jim was having his own experiences, which were all good, particularly connecting with Khorshed, whom he had really bonded with; he was still quite excited about the rest of our planned journey. At this point I had not heard what Baba had recommended regarding going straight back home after a pilgrimage to His Tomb Shrine. I felt I had to honor our agreement to continue the rest of our journey, especially since his desire was to go to Ranchi to see Yogananda's Ashram.

Leaving Meherabad was not at all easy for me. I was so taken with being there that I contemplated living there. One afternoon, I sat with Mani to discuss my coming to live as a resident. I was longing for the monastic life, even before arriving in India. I had once tried to join the Self-Realization Fellowship order. Clearly none of this was meant to be, as Baba had other plans for me. Mani took my request very seriously and asked me many questions, particularly about my schooling. I had told her that I was finishing graduate school in psychology. She very sweetly told me that she felt it was important for me to go back and finish my schooling first. She felt this is what Baba would want. She told me how

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Baba had sent several of His close ones to finish their schooling before coming to live with Him. “He was always very practical,” she said. This brought me comfort. After that, she said, “You’ll see what Baba had in store for you.” She neither discouraged nor encouraged me, but truly put it at His feet. I accepted what she asked of me and trusted that Baba would guide me.

With some sense of hope that I might get to live there one day, I reluctantly left after two and a half blissful weeks. Jim and I continued our journey through India. Needless to say our trip was filled with many ups and downs and rugged adventures. Ironically by the time we made it to Kashmir and Ladakh, after traveling for days in second class trains, we were so tired and unwell from Indian travel that we never even made it to Yogananda’s Ashram in Ranchi. Instead we took a plane to Katmandu from Delhi and relaxed there for the duration of our trip.

Just after we returned, Jim and I ended our relationship. He went back to Santa Barbara and I went to the Bay Area to complete my schooling as Mani requested. Within six weeks after I got back I met Robert Dreyfuss, who had met Baba in 1965. His story is an amazing journey of a pilgrim. We began dating and within short order married and had two children. It was all Baba’s perfect timing. I often felt my marriage to Robert was a Baba-arranged marriage, for His purposes.

Nevertheless I never made it to live at Meherabad as a full-time resident, but because of that longing I was blessed to come back yearly for many years and spend six weeks at a time. Robert knew of my sadness of not having the opportunity to live there. He himself had spent four years living there as a resident in the late ‘70s. Therefore for many years he kindly allowed me to go on ahead and spend three weeks

alone. He would follow with children and we'd spend another three weeks. In that way I got to build my own relationships with the *mandali* and the residents and have my time "living there." Baba is so compassionate.

One last very significant part of the story regarding my coming back to Baba's arms: After I returned from India, I still felt rather guilty about not going to Yogananda's Ashram. As a matter of fact, now I felt completely drawn to Meher Baba and yet felt conflicted. One night I had the most beautiful dream. In the dream I was expected to be at a talk Yogananda was giving. I was running late. I felt great shame and tried as best I could to slip inside so that I wouldn't catch Yogananda's eye. The only seat remaining in the auditorium was front row center. As inconspicuously as possible I made my way to that seat, feeling very guilty. I made every effort to not catch his attention. Distracted throughout, I was barely able to focus on him. At the end of the talk I slipped out the side and tried for a hasty escape. As I rounded the corner there he was. There was no escape.

As I looked up I expected to see sternness in his face, but instead what I saw was a beautiful, gentle smile and a radiant softness shining from his eyes. I felt my body relax. He sweetly took my hand and told me with great kindness and much assurance, "Do you think I don't know that you went to Meher Baba's ashram and not mine?" Then he said, and this was the great gift I was given, "It is as it should be, now go with my blessing." In that moment he released me to Meher Baba and I was able to go forward into Baba's arms fully and completely and never look back. Knowing all the while that it was He and He alone who was guiding me.

Over the years, I was blessed to spend much time with the *mandali*, even being present when many of them passed to Him. Being with them was so glorious that I would at times

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have twinges of regret that I missed that seven years with them, as I was meditating. But with time, I've come to realize and accept that as my destiny and feel gratitude for all Baba has given and shown to me. I have been so very, very fortunate. My prayer is that I continue to be able to pay some part of this immense blessing forward to all whom I come in contact with.

Baba guided me to both psychology and Self-Realization Fellowship. In hindsight I can see it was important for me to meet Him inwardly first, before turning outward in my relationship with Him. From this vantage point in my life I feel Baba led me to meditation to fulfill my longing to meet Him inwardly. As Baba uses everything, He used my curiosity and desire to traverse the internal psyche to aid me in helping others. This is the work He did and continues to do through me in my psychotherapeutic practice. This dance of spirituality and psychology continues to inform all of my life. Through psychology Baba has drawn me closer and closer, as the illusions peel away and I see the psyche more and more as a reflection of God in all His various aspects. Currently I live in Berkeley, California.



Artwork © Claire Mataira

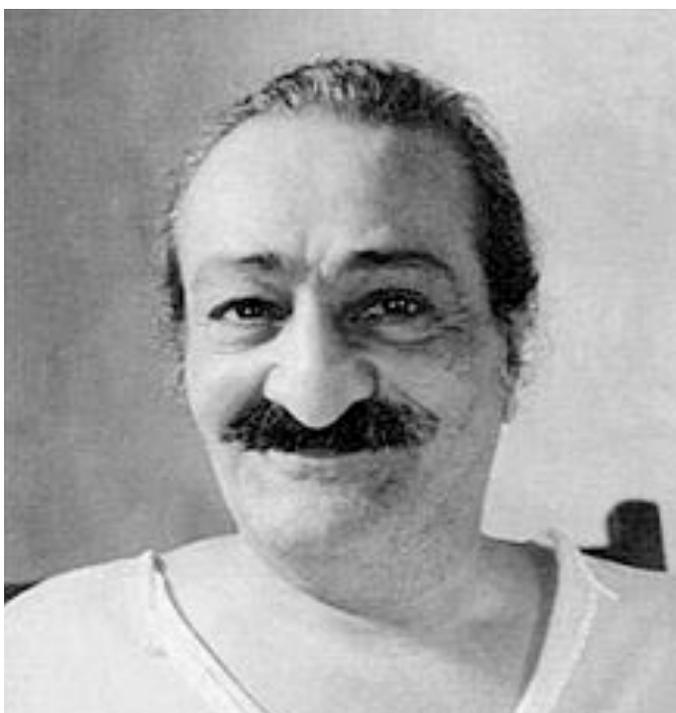
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of Finding Love

The Baba Saga

by Pris Haffenden

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Pris and Chris and Ben-Ben ca. 2018



Pris Haffenden

IT WAS 1969. I WAS WATCHING PETE SEEGER on the television and it hit me: he's going to die one day! OMG! I freaked out. It took me months to get myself semi-comfortable about things. I still felt uncomfortable, but I managed to put it out of my head.

Moving forward to 1972: my best friend had moved up to Northern California, and she invited me up to live with her and her parents. They lived on an awesome farm in the country, a place called Suisun, the nearest town was Fairfield. I was having trouble getting along with my dad, and wanted to move out before the relationship was destroyed.

All was going well, and I had managed to put the whole death thing out of my head. I was feeling pretty happy.

Then it happened again. We were watching a talk show hosted by Dick Cavett. He had Arthur C. Clarke, the writer of *2001: A Space Odyssey* as a guest.

I never saw it coming. He asked Arthur if he believed in God, and Arthur said, "I believe a life is like a candle flame. When the flame goes out, that's it. Nothing else. It's over."

Dick Cavett asked him, "You mean to say, no afterlife? No God?"

Then Arthur C. Clarke said, "No. Nothing. When the flame dies, it is gone."

I nearly went mad with the freak out. I had thought that at least the energy would go somewhere, but NOTHING?

It drove me to distraction. I remember one night we had trout (my friend's father loved to fish), and when he put it on my plate I stared and stared: where was this fish? Was it somewhere else? Had it moved on, or was that the end?

I couldn't watch TV. Everything I saw, I wondered where would they go? When will they die? I drove myself crazy. Once again, I started working to get myself out of the craziness, but it was proving to be almost impossible.

During this time, I managed to get the album, "Tommy" by The Who, and my friend and I listened to it over and over, loving the sound.

One day, as we were playing it, I was reading the back of the album, and I read (and I paraphrase the order):

Vocals:	Roger Daltrey
Guitar:	Pete Townshend
Bass:	John Entwistle
Drums:	Keith Moon
Avatar:	MEHER BABA

What?!? What instrument is this? I'd heard of the sitar, but not this! I asked my friend, and she didn't know either. We decided to ask the record store clerk.

When we got to the store, I asked the clerk about this instrument. He smiled, told me a bunch of things about 700 to 1400 year stuff (that completely went over my head, in one ear and out the other), and held up this book, *Listen Humanity*. I was so confused! I decided to go home and look it up in the dictionary.

When I got home, I immediately looked it up. Avatar: "God-man, Messiah, Embodiment of God."

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EGAD! This guy thinks He's God! How could Pete Townshend fall for that?! I immediately decided to forget the whole thing.

It wasn't to be. At about that time, I began to have this peculiar dream. I was standing, facing a big grassy knoll. On the knoll were many deceased rock stars—Buddy Holly, Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, Jim Morrison—among others. Also on the hill was a fairly short man in a white robe, with long hair and a big moustache. At the moment I saw him, I heard, "You're afraid that when you die you'll disappear? Look—all of these musicians are dead, but yet they are here. There is nothing to fear! Here—tell her, Jimi."

Then Jimi says, "Yeah, man, it's cool—we're all good here."

Then I woke up.

I had this dream many times, wondering what-in-the-heck was going on.

Then one day I was in the library in Fairfield, California, when I noticed a small blue book that was on a table. I picked it up, and a shock ran through me! Upon opening the book, there was the man whom I had been seeing in my dreams!

That was scary—very scary. I decided to avoid that book, but it showed up everywhere. The cafeteria at college, classroom at college—the list went on. Finally, when it turned up in a Mobil Gas Station, I knew I'd had it. I was going to have to read that damn book!

I took the book home and read...and read. It turned my head upside down. After that, I acquired every book by and

about Meher Baba that I could, and read voraciously—for instance, I read *God Speaks* in one thirty-six-hour marathon, no sleep, no food. Here were the explanations I had been searching for! Evolution that made one hundred percent sense! I had, up to that point, never read or heard anything that explained the stream of life in a way that made sense, in a way that felt REAL. This was God Speaking, straight into my soul. I was finally free of the pain, free of the gnawing questions I had for most of my life.

One more thing happened, and it was the thing that cinched the deal with my attachment to Meher Baba. It's a little thing, but meant a lot to me.

It was November 1972. Pete Townshend released his first solo album, "Who Came First." I got it home, and I put it on. I loved the album—this was a side of Pete Townshend I'd never seen!

Our bedroom had a big picture window. The day was cloudy and dark—my favorite kind of day.

The song "O Parvardigar" came on, it began to snow—it never snowed there—and the moment was completely magical.

At that point, I felt that Meher Baba was my Lord and Master. He made so much sense, He relieved my fears.

Only there was a BIG problem. I felt that I loved Meher Baba to the deepest part of my being. I wanted to be a Baba lover, but I was aching because Baba had passed three years before I even knew who He was. How could I consider myself to be His lover? How could I be a Baba lover when I came to Him after He had dropped His body? I cried and I

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cried, feeling that I missed Him. He can't know me, because I didn't know Him until too late. I so ached.

I went to meetings as soon as I saw that there were meetings, in a small place called Meherstan, in Berkeley. I watched the films, joined in the prayers, but all the time I felt that I was a phony.

This went on for a while—my loving Baba, yet feeling that I couldn't call myself a Baba lover—until something happened that changed everything.

I had an accident with my car, and, having no insurance, decided to go to a junkyard to get parts and see if I could pay someone there to put them on. I went to a local (San Pablo) junkyard, and felt lucky to find a fellow who not only had the parts, but would install them for free! I was elated. He told me to leave the car with him and he'd let me know when it was finished.

So, a few days went by, and I got a call from him, telling me the car was done and offering to bring it to me after my college class. I told him where I would be.

After class, at the appointed meeting time, I looked all around for my car. No car. Finally, a big white station wagon drove up, with the mechanic driving. He told me that a friend would meet us with the car (there should have been huge alarms and red flags, but I was a stupidly trusting person at the time). I got in.

This fellow drove the car outside of town, out of the city limits, and he proceeded to drive up the side of a hill—a place where there were no roads. I was beginning to feel a bit nervous.

When he got to the top of the hill, he stopped, dragged me into the back of the car and proceeded to tear off my clothes. After that, he began to choke me.

I had never been in any situation like this before. Wondering, frantically, what I could do...then it came to me—Baba! I said to Baba, in my head, "Baba, if you know who I am, I need help. If I say Your name, please help me!"

I screamed, "Meher Baba! Meher Baba!" as loud as I could, given the fact that my throat was very constricted.

Suddenly, he stopped! Completely stopped! He looked terrified, and said to me, "Who is Meher Baba? Who?"

I told him that Meher Baba is my Lord and Master, God in Human form. He is the Avatar, the Christ.

He got the strangest look on his face. He then asked me, "Are you my friend?"

I thought hard. I knew Meher Baba said that one must be honest, but I guessed this might be a special situation—Baba, please forgive me.

"Yes."

At that point, he helped me dress and drove back down the hill, finally arriving at my car—just a block from my home.

From that point on, I *KNEW* that Meher Baba not only knew who I was, but wow! He had just saved my life! He saved me!

I have never had doubt, from that point on, that calling out to Baba will get you through anything. Anything. He is my

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Lord, He is my Master. He is my Goal and the reason for my existence.

It's been over forty-two years since the events above. Over the years I have been fortunate to have had the guidance and love of many of those who have spent their lives with Meher Baba. Now, most of them have gone, but the lessons they have given me will live on forever.

The photo attached is the photo of Baba that I cut out of a Who book and made my own button! I had NO IDEA that there were buttons made for purchase, as it was quite a while before I went to a Baba meeting. When I got to my first meeting in Mehersthan in Berkeley, California, I was amazed by the great collection of buttons and lockets there were! Even so, I wore that button for quite a while!

As a epilogue, I am now living in Santa Monica, California with my husband of thirty-seven years, Chris (we were brought together with in another amazing Meher Baba-infused story) and our little cat, Ben-Ben.

At Baba's sister Mani's behest, we are working together as musicians—we call ourselves the "Still Yet More Chamber Players" based on Baba's Beloved Prayer:

"Beloved God, help us all
to love You more and more,
and more and more
and still yet more,
till we become worthy of union with You;
and help us all to hold fast
to Baba's daaman till the very end."

We play music for people in hospitals, convalescent homes and retirement homes, in addition to busking at a local Promenade. All in all, we have so many gifts from Meher Baba, so much to be thankful for.

Heather Hall

101 Tales
of Finding Love

Tossed In and Running

by Heather Hall

101 Tales of Finding Love



Heather in Mandali Hall, August 2005

Heather Hall

IN THE EARLY SEVENTIES IN CHATTANOOGA, Tennessee I studied Concept Therapy, which taught me the evolution of the soul from rock to the human form. It prepared me to understand Meher Baba's teaching, but it did not prepare me for my first visit to the Meher Spiritual Center.

In the first week of July 1992, my world was being peeled away in a big manner—my marriage was ending, but I was still living with my husband. My only child, Aaron, had graduated from high school and was in Navy Boot Camp in California. The IBM plant where my husband and I worked was closing down for the week and I needed to get away from the house. A friend suggested I go to a place in Myrtle Beach, on the ocean, with little cabins. I arrived more than exhausted and completely unaware who Meher Baba was other than a spiritual leader. Oh my! I was tossed in and running before I could even figure out where I was.

Phyllis Ott gave me a tour of the Center. She gave me a great introduction for my mental curiosity. Summer Turner was my cabin mate for the first night. We sat on the porch of the Cabin on the Hill for a long time, while Summer told me about Baba. Phyllis and Summer freed me to put my mental filter away and let the week evolve. And what an evolution!

The week was very full. Bhau Kalchuri was there my entire stay. There was no single moment when I recognized Who Baba was. As I walked around the grounds, I was full of gratitude and tears that this was Real—that I belonged to a connected spiritual family and that my desire to serve life would take me on some incredible journey. I realized there is so much more to life, and some of it was being revealed to me. I wandered the Center in wonderment and in spirit.

Very quickly I began to feel the Center. I didn't know the words, but my heart was connected to Baba.

On the last day I was on the Center, Baba had fun with me. I was walking by the boat dock with no intention of going on the water when I was spun around and compelled to go for a row. I decided to row to Baba's House—that was a good destination point and I could see the shoreline. The boat was sturdy aluminum. My rowing skills from Maine returned and away I went. I kept wanting to turn around to see where I was rowing. The waters were shallow and full of grass that came close to the surface. At other times in my life this would have been bothersome. I felt that Baba was saying that *wherever He led me, I would have the skills and guidance I needed to do the job.*

I came home from the Center refocused, grateful to focus on my own development. I came home with a carful of twenty-four books, five videos, six tapes, three T-shirts and lots of photos of Baba. Once home, I was sick for a week—a purge of all the tensions and yuks from too long ago. I came out the other end whole again, happy to be getting on with my life. Not looking back.

Baba kept me busy. He spun Aaron and me around on a forty-eight hour whirlwind. On a Tuesday, I had a phone message that Aaron could attend the United States Naval Academy if he could be in Rhode Island by Thursday. When the Naval Academy learned that he was in Boot Camp in California, they informed me that they could not contact him, and that I would have to. How could a Mom reach her son in Boot Camp! I stood in front of Baba's picture and asked Him, "Why are we being given this opportunity if we can't use it?" With Baba's guidance and some gentle persistence, I contacted the right people to get the ball rolling. Within twenty-four hours, the Naval Academy was cutting

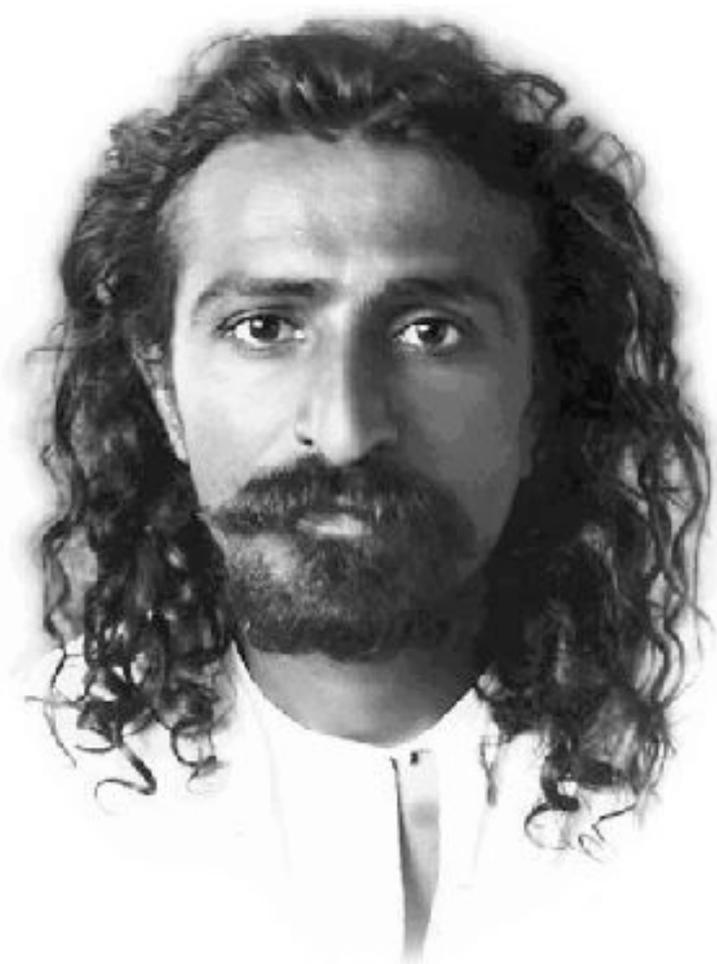
Heather Hall

the orders and within forty-eight hours Aaron was on a plane to Rhode Island with everyone's mouth hanging open—Aaron's most of all.

Since I no longer needed my flight ticket to California for the Boot Camp graduation, I exchanged it for a flight to Myrtle Beach. I returned to deepen my love for Meher Baba. After I returned from this trip to the Center, I began to pack my things to move out of the house. Baba surprised me once again. Among my books, I found the November 1970 Rolling Stone issue with Baba on the cover, inside of which I had underlined “the Meher Spiritual Center.” So I had read it! I also found Don Stevens' *Listen, Humanity*, purchased at about the same time, but not read. I had not been ready until He brought me to His Center. And I am eternally grateful!

Within one year I took a bridge to retirement from IBM, and began my path towards teaching. I decided to walk my heart, to believe in Baba. I discovered a long-held dream to teach high school science that I had deeply tucked away, now sneaking out and taking control. I stopped worrying about money, saying, I'll take one step at a time and trust Baba.

I am a retired high school science teacher, currently living in Weaverville, North Carolina, and loving it. I am enjoying discovering what the next chapter in my life will bring.



The Ancient One

Anne Haug

101 Tales
of Finding Love

Being With Jesus Now

by Anne Haug



Anne, Pilgrim Center, Meherabad, India, 2001.
First trip to India

Anne Haug

AS A CHILD, I OFTEN THOUGHT ABOUT JESUS and contemplated what it would be like to be with Him. I was fortunate to have a happy childhood, growing up in the wooded suburbs of Seattle, spending my time between running around outside and curling up with a book either inside or outside in the willow tree. Our family went to the Methodist church and the inspiration for me was singing in the choir from first grade on—that was where I felt the real heart connection with God impersonal and Jesus. My dad and siblings all sang in the choir and my dad had a booming, joyful voice and he would burst into song at home constantly, singing whatever he was practicing at the time in the adult choir.

After three years at university, I became a hippy and in the early '70s experienced psychedelics as well as yoga, natural food and health—always on a spiritual search. I remember seeing the “Don't Worry, Be Happy” poster of Meher Baba at the natural foods store, but I don't ever remember hearing anyone talk about Baba and I didn't pursue it. I realized after a few years that I couldn't find God using drugs, and understood that even though I had beautiful experiences, I always came back to my “normal” state of consciousness, somewhat worse for the wear. So I quit and soon joined a spiritual community that followed teachings of the “ascended masters” with structures that supported my soul, with strict rules including being celibate or married, no drugs or alcohol and a vibrant, active community in service to God. The One God was always more real to me than ascended masters, but this was my best alternative to loneliness at the time. As I look back on those years, I realize that Baba was guiding me and giving me some inner experiences to encourage me.

An interesting aside: this organization I was a part of, owned what is now the Los Angeles Baba Center, and I used to go to the Dome (then called the Will of God focus) which had an exquisite marble statue of Jesus in the center, around which we “decreed” rhythmical, poetic chants.

After marrying and having two children while on “staff,” and living (first in Malibu, California and then in Montana) for twenty years, we left the group and remained in Montana to raise our children. Now I had time to go within and the search took a distinctly inward direction—meditation, studying Taoism and spending time in nature while raising my family, an experience I cherished.

In early 2001, a friend shared with me a Vedic astrology reading she had just had, and I was so impressed with it that I decided to have one too. It was very spiritually oriented (focused on *dharma, karma, kama, and moksha*) and I kept asking the astrologer for more information. Finally, he told me that everything he knew came from Meher Baba and I should read His *Discourses*. My husband ordered the book for me along with *God Speaks* and *The Path of Love* (without my asking). As soon as I opened the package and saw Baba’s photograph, He took me in to a profound experience of Him and that was it for me. I cried and cried tears of joy and relief, and then read voraciously. He was the missing piece to the puzzle. I had taught world religions in the community Montessori school—that all religions were different paths to God. Now, here were my beloved incarnations of God in one person.

My husband couldn’t accept that, yet always supported my path—with trips to India and Baba centers in the United States. So my life with Baba has been mostly just Him and me, as my husband requested that I not talk about Baba to the children. Because I loved my husband and took Baba’s

Anne Haug

words to heart about what to do when your spouse doesn't love Him, I've practiced keeping Baba in my heart and serving Him in each one. This is what I have striven to do, albeit imperfectly.

When our son was in college, he became a follower of the Yogananda lineage and my husband and my son's wife (who all live here) follow that path too. When I cried to Bhau early on that my husband didn't accept Baba, he closed his eyes for a long moment and then said, "Your husband is very good for you." So I laid that problem to rest, as I knew that what he said was true. And in addition, I must say that my husband is naturally kind and patient—qualities that I aspire to, especially after coming to Baba.

Although I grew up in the Methodist church, my parents were not religious and I had a happy, carefree childhood. My temperamental, charismatic father was a landscape architect and my loving, quiet mom stayed at home. I was surrounded by the beauty of nature where I felt love—especially from my mother. She was very consistent and stable in her love for me and that love was the core of my life. Although I got confused during my hippy years, I feel that Baba knew my motive was love, and finally, at fifty-one years of age, after I had experienced a loving family of my own—my only worldly desire—He came for me. So even though I was older, it was a lifetime of longing to experience perfect love.

After my initial dramatic connection with Baba, I soon went to India. I felt so at home, and fortunately, got to meet the *mandali* who were still there. I've taken five trips in all and feel so grateful. When I first went to the *Samadhi*, I saw the nativity carved into the rock on the outside and didn't realize it wasn't there in the physical plane. When I bowed down inside my experience was captured in this couplet:

With my head at His feet the grace was profound—
Flooded with love while prostrate on the ground.

After my first trip to India in 2001, I experienced a flood of creativity, painting and writing poetry. In 2008, seven years after coming to Baba, the “honeymoon” ended. I struggled with my daughter’s diagnosis of depression while she was at boarding school, feeling that I had failed as a mother, and became depressed myself. It was quite agonizing for me and one day in my meditation, I heard Baba tell me, “Let her go.” I didn’t know how to do that and not long after, a book by Byron Katie, *A Thousand Names for Joy*, came to me. I realized with my husband’s help that this work of self-inquiry was what I needed to dig myself out of the dark hole I had descended into. I feel that The Work was Baba’s gift to me and spent several years absorbed in the program, ultimately becoming a certified facilitator. Most importantly, it supported a beautiful change in my relationship with my daughter as I now knew how to let her go while loving her unconditionally. And then she started telling me that she loved me again and we had a very sweet connection from then on.

I spent some years working with clients individually as well as giving workshops. I still work with clients and have also shared The Work with Baba lovers in India, Myrtle Beach and Mariposa. I had come to the point in the last few years where I wanted to just focus on Baba and I asked Him to help me with that. I became inspired to bridge The Work with Baba’s *Manonash* and gave a presentation in Mariposa on how The Work provides a systematic process to support Manonash—the destruction of the limited mind. If Baba wishes, perhaps in my seventh decade, He will have me share this with His lovers.

I am most interested in thinking, feeling, and breathing Baba. In one sense, my search is over, having found Baba,

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and now it is about the process of clearing more room for Him in my heart through a constant refinement of daily living my life so that it would be pleasing to Baba—no simple task!

I've lived in Montana for thirty-one years in Paradise Valley, a beautiful rural setting overlooking the Yellowstone River and surrounded by mountains. I spend time each morning with Baba, reading and meditating, and then going about my daily life—gardening, homemaking, being with friends and family, running a BnB and still working with a few clients.

I just had the thought to add that when my dad came to visit me after my mom died, and he saw my framed Ancient One picture, he said that He looks like Jesus and I remember saying that He acts like Jesus. Then before one of my trips to India, my dad got sick and I told him I would cancel my trip to come out and be with him and he said no, he wanted me to go and he would be fine. My dad passed away on Baba's birthday while I was at Meherabad. I felt that that was a fortuitous "coincidence."



Artwork © Claire Mataira

Harold Jamison

101 Tales
of Finding Love

My Promise to God

by Harold Jamison



Jake, Harold, and Luke Jamison 2018

Harold Jamison

I WILL START IN THE MIDDLE. In the early eighties, I had been a Baba lover for over twelve years or so, and had a number of visions or hallucinations of past life events. Most of them involved members of my family and my relationship to them, pedestrian past lives—nothing extraordinary. In one I was a soldier in a cold dreary place and my father lay dying in my arms; in another I was a seaman. These and others came unbidden and with complete authenticity; they were snapshots and gave me an inkling of my relationship to my family.

Then this one came to me. I was a young boy or teenager in a military encampment—lots of horses and camels, dust, confusion, people milling about. I was standing near a well. The well had a rope attached to a crude sort of pulley. I was looking over at Muhammad and a small group of men. He seemed to be explaining something of importance. The atmosphere of the camp was tense, as if a battle were imminent. In my vision or whatever it was, it was clear where I was and who Mohammad was.

Anyway, he made a gesture, like anyone would, like Baba would, as if He were thirsty. He lifted His hand to His mouth as if it held a cup and He was drinking. I immediately began pulling the rope with my good hand. Bringing up the leather jug of water, I poured a cup and quickly went to Mohammad. He took the water and drank. Lowering the cup He looked at me and making a gesture as if cutting, He asked me what happened to my hand. I answered, "Mohammad, I was a thief and they caught me and cut off my hand."

He looked at me for a few seconds and then raising His hands to His chest and then moving them outwards, palms up, said, "I forgive you. Don't do it again."

I said, "Yes, Muhammad." And with that I was dismissed and walked away.

Padri often said something to the effect, no one comes into the court of the Emperor without a previous connection.

Now to go back to the beginnings of this life. I was born in New Mexico during the war and my father was stationed in Europe. As a child we moved to Sacramento and then to Mississippi, where my father was stationed during the Korean War. We then moved back to Sacramento and when I was in the seventh grade, moved to Berkeley. On my first day at school I met people I still know and see frequently. Two became Baba lovers and maybe four total from that Junior high school class became Baba lovers.

I was immediately welcomed into this group of boys, troublemakers all. Although I enjoyed my life and friends, because it was the first time I had a stable group of friends, school wasn't my thing. By the time I was at Berkeley High I had been kicked out of three different schools and had spent time in juvenile hall. Why was I in juvenile hall? I returned to sanskaric form. This time I stole cars and did other things. Eventually at Berkeley High I was left back a grade so my friends were in the eleventh grade and I was in the tenth. I hardly ever attended school, but I did like going to the public library and reading when I was supposed to be in school. Mostly I just ignored the threats and exhortations from school officials and my parents.

Finally my parents agreed to let me leave school and I joined the Marine Corps when I turned seventeen. I did

Harold Jamison

okay in the Marine Corps for a while but disregard for authority and alcohol took its toll. Not a good thing under the circumstances. Anyway, I went AWOL and eventually was court marshaled with a sentence of hard labor and confinement to the brig. That was the real deal, if anything is the real deal. When outside the brig, we were shackled hand and foot. It would have been a great scene in a movie if someone else had been in it.

Eventually I was discharged and moved back to Berkeley. Early in 1965, lots of drugs and alcohol and other misadventures. By this time my future looked bleak, high school dropout, I had been locked up at least six times including the Tijuana jail, and had overnight stints for minor and petty stuff.

A friend and I decided to hitchhike to Santa Fe. We got stuck somewhere outside of Barstow near the Mohave Desert, on the old Highway 66. Summer sun beating down and cars swooshing by for hour after hour. And then I had maybe the first thought I ever had. "God, if you get me out of here, I will try and make something of my life." It really was a first thought— always, if I wanted to do something, I just did it; if I didn't want to do something, I didn't. There was no thought involved.

The squeak of tires braking was heard soon afterwards, not immediately, but soon we had a ride to Santa Fe. And of course I forgot my promise to God. I hung around Santa Fe getting stoned and eventually made it back to Berkeley. Heard they were hiring seamen who had no experience. So I got my seamen's ticket and before I shipped out, I noticed a sign saying that Richard Alpert, later Baba Ram Dass, was giving a talk on how to use LSD better. Going into the doors of the Student Union, I noticed a table with some literature on it. One of the people behind the table was

Robert Dreyfuss. Of course I didn't learn that until much later. He and I later became good friends (I still miss Robert). On the table there were some pamphlets, *God in a Pill*, which I promptly threw away, and "Don't Worry, Be Happy" cards. One of which I kept.

At the talk someone asked Alpert who this guy, Meher Baba, was, and Alpert said that Baba was the highest spiritual authority on earth but He just didn't know about LSD. But Alpert would tell Him. I am still grateful for his response because it legitimized Baba, otherwise I might have been less inclined to keep the Baba card. But when I shipped out I kept the card.

I caught the ship at Treasure Island and sailed to Honolulu. Pretty nice deal. Home ported in Hawaii. It was an oceanographic vessel, so we would go out for a couple of weeks, take samples and come back in. I taped the Baba card to the bottom of the bunk above me, so every day I saw Baba's face when I woke up. Next to it I scribbled, "When shall we set sail for happiness?"—a quote I had seen someplace. After six months or so I got off and went back to Berkeley. Continued doing the same thing I had always done but did manage to get a copy of *Beams from Meher Baba on the Spiritual Panorama*.

Before I shipped out again I took *Beams* and a copy of Plato's *Republic* with me. This ship was a cargo ship—caught it in Okinawa where I had been stationed in the Corps, and sailed to the Philippines, Japan, Thailand and to Vietnam. Lots of allurements in those places for a young man, stupid that he was with money in his pocket. I kept drinking and using weed. I kept the Baba card and this time taped it to a bulkhead near my door. Once someone asked me who He was, and I told him, "Some crazy guy who thinks He's God."

Harold Jamison

This was a nice ship, I had the 4 A.M. to 8 A.M. watch, so in the morning at 3:30 I would get up, read a sentence or two of *Beams*, or if I had the time a bit of the *Republic*. Then I'd go on deck to the bow of the ship, ostensibly to look for any hazards or other vessels. I tried to remember and think about what I had read with very little success. So day after day, night after night we sailed through the South China Sea, the Bay of Thailand, the Philippines Sea. Tying up in all the exotic ports. It was a great life, wonderful balmy weather and stars and stars and more stars. Occasional rough weather—a typhoon or two—ship crashing down as we reached the crest of a mountainous wave, the wind an unearthly howl.

Every day I looked at the “Don't Worry, Be Happy” card with Baba's smiling face, but never asked who He was.

Though I remember very little of what I read, I do remember being struck with the allegory of the cave. Some part of me knew that it was no story, but was exactly how it was. I was, as we all are, chained to a wall looking at the shadows dancing on the wall cast by the fire behind us. And then someone breaks free and goes into the sunlight, but when he goes back to the cave to spread the news, no one believes him.

We spent a lot of time going to Vietnam, to Da Nang, from the Mekong Delta up river to Saigon. During one trip we were there when the Tet offense started. I think Baba saved me that night. A girl, for no reason, put herself in peril and snuck me out of a bar when the Viet Cong came in. I eventually left that ship, took my Baba card and went back to Berkeley.

One of the first people I ran into was an old friend from Junior High, Ed Van Buskirk. Knowing I had money, he hit

me up. He wanted to buy a macrobiotic restaurant on University Avenue in Berkeley. I didn't have a clue about macrobiotic, but sure, why not.

So the Arbor Cafe opened and it had lots of Baba posters and pictures. It was frequented by lots of Baba lovers whom I met for the first time. Rick Chapman, Barry Beckett, Alan Talbot, Robert Dreyfuss, Uschi (Ursula) and Mik Hamilton, Allan Cohen and lots of others. It wasn't all macrobiotic. On Friday nights many of us, not any of the above, could be found drinking beer above Kips Pool hall. Then some of us would go to the Student Union where Baba meetings were being held. I still was not able to admit Baba was God. But I did try reading Baba books.

I can't remember the sequence, but around this time I had some dreams of Baba, and had some odd experiences—one was when Baba's name began to overwhelm me. All day long without any attempt on my part Baba's name resounded in my consciousness. It was like an express train, a hundred times a minute with no effort on my part. After a couple of days I was having a hard time keeping my balance—I felt I was about to fall over. Although I didn't control His name speeding through my mind I knew it had to stop. Another mistake. It did stop. Then later we got word that Baba had dropped His body.

I was aware that there was going to be a *darsban*, but didn't pay much attention to it. But then I ran into someone who told me that if wanted to go, I should phone the Sufi center. I still had some money, so why not. I still didn't consider myself a Baba lover, but I went ahead and bought a ticket and was told it was the last ticket.

So a couple of months later I was on a plane to India sitting next to Doug and Priscilla Martin. I wish I could report a miraculous transformation, but no. Nothing special. The

Harold Jamison

long pull up the Ghats, the bus breaking down and everyone getting out to push, Rick Chapman leaning out the window yelling "Avatar Meher Baba Ki Jai." I do remember asking Adi K. Irani, "What is Baba's message in a nutshell."

He looked so very intently at me for a while and then said, "Be kind to others." I do remember Guruprasad and Francis Brabazon's talk, light flashing on and off in time with singing of Arti, other things. But no awakening.

I returned to Berkeley. Months went by. I had stopped all drugs long ago and had entered a Junior College, attended Baba meetings, still worked occasionally at the Arbor Café, but didn't have much to do with it anymore— Dennis Lesea had bought my share. But one day, not having anything to do, I stopped by the Pool Hall. It wasn't open yet, so I sat in my car waiting for it to open. While waiting I had the casual thought, "Why did I go to India? What happened there? In a micro-second it swept over me. *It was the first time in my life I had ever felt Loved.*

PS. Did I keep my promise to God that I had made out on Highway 66. I went back to school took every remedial class offered, eventually graduated from UCLA graduate school of public health. With my wife, we raised two honorable men who never embarrassed me. Like their dad, both were in the Marine Corps, one served in both Iraq and Afghanistan. I had a wife who loved me despite many faults, I had a career, a house and all the accoutrements. Only Baba knows if I kept my promise.

I'm currently living in Monterey, California. Sue, my wife has decided to move back home to Australia.

Jamie Keehan

101 Tales
of Finding Love

How I Became Okay

by Jamie Keehan

101 Tales of Finding Love



Jamie on the Meher Spiritual Center ca. 2019

Jamie Keehan

I'VE SPENT A LOT OF MY LIFE trying to figure out how to be okay—happy, accepted, normal, something. It really started up in earnest in Middle School, when it seemed everyone else had gotten a memo I missed about how to make people think you're cool and likeable. Because I have this inborn tendency to work overwhelmingly hard at life, and figure that if I do things right, it will fix everything, I soon took to the veritable self-help library in my parents' living room, looking for some answers.

I zealously tried on new paradigms and highly effective habits, but, to my horror, I always kept falling back into that undefined mess of "me." Eventually, when I was a late teenager, I started to recognize that what looked like the easier fixes just weren't working. I was going to have to turn to the big guns. I was going to have to—meditate.

I took to meditation like I took to most things. I started going to silent meditation retreats. When I was nineteen, I went on one that was a month long. At some point in college, I began meditating three hours a day (interspersed with a gentle smattering of college courses). When I graduated, my plan was to go to Thailand and stay in an ashram until I was enlightened. An astrologer had once told me I'd have a spiritual transformation at twenty-three. Let me tell you, I was ready.

Parallel to impending enlightenment, though, was another story: dealing with the trials of being a human had not only led me to spirituality but also to an eating disorder. So while I was meditating assiduously and reading spiritual books, I had this other life that I could barely believe was part of me, and that was completely out of control. I frequently thought that *this time* I had it beat, that I had gotten to a

point in my personal or spiritual development when I couldn't possibly engage in that kind of behavior, but then when things got rocky again—there it was.

One of the moments I'm most grateful for in my life was when I finally got so overwhelmed by this cycle that I sought out Overeaters Anonymous. I walked through the doors with some serious trepidation. I came out with a lot of hugs, stories like my own, and, most miraculously and fortuitously of all, the Twelve Steps.

More specifically, Step Two—"Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity." What was that about? I didn't believe in GOD-God. I believed in Consciousness, Unity, eventual enlightenment. But nobody I could like, talk to. Who would help me with my problems.

Turns out, I wasn't the first person in a Twelve Step program to have this issue. After talking and reading and thinking about it, I was convinced I might as well try out the advice of "acting as if" I believed in God. What would it hurt? And because I'm me, I took the three-hours-a-day approach: I REALLY acted "as if." I prayed. I meditated. I repeated God's name (God, at the time), and thought that I'd invented that approach.

And—even writing this brings tears to my eyes—*that's what opened me*. That's what shifted me enough, made just a crack so Meher Baba could come through.

It wasn't right away. I was doing a lot of thinking about God, following my friends to their Christian churches, singing Kirtan, going to Buddhist meditation groups, Quaker meetings—the works. But I hadn't found it yet, the path that was deeply devoted to God, but didn't teach that it was the Only True Way. They couldn't fool me: I had too deeply

Jamie Keehan

loved too many paths to ever believe that only one of them was right. Everything else I could swallow, but that I never could. So I stayed a mutt, not quite fitting into any of these paths, but finding light within all of them.

And then, one morning in 2008 I met a Sufi Teacher-cum-Pharmacist on a golf course. He was part of Inayat Khan's lineage (the ones who weren't reoriented) and he gave me some of Khan's books: books talking about the concept of the Avatar, of each of the world religions being part of the same teaching, just designed for a different age. And about repeating the name of God, to draw us deeper into our own selves and into the truth of God within us.

I couldn't believe it. I couldn't believe that I'd finally found a path that unflinchingly sought God, and didn't turn its back on all the other paths in the world. I started meeting with the Sufi, and I quickly learned Inayat Khan's prayers, praying for guidance from the Christ, the Master, the Messiah, the Spirit of Guidance, three times a day like clockwork.

About a year later, on a plane (I joke that it was the Fourth Plane, but I believe it was actually American Airlines), I met the man who would become my wonderful partner for three years. Standing next to an elevator outside a baggage claim, after some getting-to-know-you banter, his eyes got a little wide like he was about to pronounce an important secret, and he said to me, "Have you heard of Meher Baba?"

I told him I had not. Luckily, he went on to tell me it was the guy who had initially said, "Don't worry, Be happy," an attribution of which I was skeptical, but which was very useful in my later Google searches. On our first date, I received a copy of both *Listen, Humanity* and *Discourses*. Being me, I also purchased *God Speaks*, and started reading it over

and over again. I was twenty-three, so I guess the astrologer was right.

Some people have remarkable experiences coming to Baba—I hear them again and again as I dry dishes in the kitchen of the Meher Spiritual Center. I didn't have any flashes of light as I got to know Meher Baba, or even much of a feeling of freedom or love or anything else. I just kept trekking onward because I had quickly developed a faith that Baba knew what he was talking about, that he was safe.

And he *was* safe. He took all my energy, my intense perfectionism and my overthinking and my “spiritual drive,” he could take it all. My journaling, my repetition of the prayers, my militant striving to remember his name, everything mechanical and desperate and maybe a little pathological about me—he took it and just smiled that smile, just let it dissipate in its time into his ocean of Love.

Somebody once said, when I was in my early twenties, that I didn't “know how to be a person.” It was the worst and most wounding of insults, because it was so true. Back from those earliest days, I was always looking for some way to be, some method for living that would make me okay. I was incapable of just existing. And that very hunt brought me eventually to the One who can just laugh gently at all that, and in whose loving eyes I can allow myself to slow down, to laugh at myself, to unravel a little. To know that what's in the center of all that mess that makes up my personality, all the pieces flying around and falling away—is the safety, the goal, the whole point. And so to not be afraid of the mess.

I alluded, some paragraphs ago, to drying dishes in the kitchen of the Meher Spiritual Center. For those of you who don't know me, that may warrant a little explanation: after blustering around in the world for a while, I had the im-

Jamie Keehan

mense and incomprehensible good fortune to be allowed to come work on the Center. People are always asking me how it's been. I usually start with some version of "good," sort of like you'd answer someone asking how your day's been. But casual though it may sound, it's actually one of the deepest of truths. Never has a period of my life been so thoroughly good. Painful and beautiful and growth-full and just good.

And, since I didn't know where to fit it elsewhere, here's how I'll end—with a second out of time, out of the storyline. Somewhere in my childhood, I'm not sure when, probably right before I started feeling so pressingly the pain and unacceptableness that would drive me on the path to Baba, I was in a rental car facility with my dad. Suddenly, his face lit up, and he pointed above my head. "Jamie!" he exclaimed. "That's Meher Baba!" I looked up at Baba's face, in that posture of total happiness He had after contacting a Mast, beaming. Then we left the shop, and I forgot all about it until I attended my first Baba meeting a dozen years later.

But he had taken a second to wink at me. To let me know that through the growth pains and foibles and agonies of this life and all the others, he's always been and always will be there.



Artwork © Claire Mataira

Betty Lowman

101 Tales
of Finding Love

...in the Asking...

by Betty Lowman

101 Tales of Finding Love



Karen Mitchell, Kathy Weiderhold, Betty Lowman,
Babs Gildersleeve, Cherri Nelson,
Los Gatos, California
Early 1990s

Betty Lowman

IT WAS THE LATE SIXTIES—such a time of hope and dreaming, especially for young folks inventing new ways to live. Baba gathered many of us into His fold at that time.

I was a divorced single mom living in the San Francisco Bay Area in the sixties. Looking for a “cool” job, I saw an ad for an illustrator for an educational publishing company. Naively, with no art training, I applied. My artwork was lousy but they offered to train me as a paste-up artist. I was thrilled!

Every day I drove up into the hills behind Stanford University to Sullivan Associates, an educational publishing company located in a house in the Los Altos foothills. What fun! We were a bunch of young “arty” types, willing to work cheap in a creative environment. One of us, Kathy Wiederhold, was an especially magnetic person, loved by all of us. She was warm, funny and caring, amusing us with her renditions of Lightnin’ Hopkins and other celebrities. Kathy had some friends who were Sufis with Murshida Duce. They introduced her to Meher Baba and she introduced Him to the folks at Sullivan’s.

For some reason, His presence at that company was palpable. I remember a Silence Day when Kathy kept silence and several of us joined her, just for the fun of it. We wrote notes all day to communicate. Because we loved Kathy so much, it was easy to play along with her, even though we didn’t take Baba too seriously—yet.

Baba was still alive at this time in 1968 and plans for the Great Darshan were happening. Kathy was planning to go. Not being a Baba lover, I wasn’t going, but I sewed her a pink dress for the trip, embroidering “a pink Baba dress for Kathy” inside it. I also offered to lend her money if she

needed it. Then I skedaddled off to hitchhike through Mexico with a boyfriend.

Kathy did need the money, and couldn't locate me. Another friend at Sullivan's, Laurel Keeley, helped her out rather dramatically. Laurel said, "Kathy needed the money the next day to give to Sufism for the charter flight. I told Kathy I was expecting a tax refund and perhaps it had arrived in the mail. I left work and went to my post office box. It had arrived!! I then went to the bank and cashed the check. The check was THE EXACT AMOUNT TO THE PENNY SHE NEEDED." Kathy did go to the Great Darshan.

Sullivan's was a magnet for Baba lovers. Several people came into the fold while I worked there: Kathy, me, Laurel, Babs Gildersleeve and Karen Mitchell. Jeanie MacDonald, who had been a student of Margaret Craske in New York, worked at Sullivan's for a time. Later, in the early seventies, Sullivan's commissioned Heather Nadel and Renee Busanich to write short plays to accompany reading lessons. Renee says they took walks and wrote daily, producing a play a day for two weeks, which paid for their travel to India for the first time. In the mid-seventies, Jay Bonner, who later married Baba's niece Shireen, worked in the Sullivan's Art Department with me and Babs. Graphic artist, Nancy Patton, who designed the cover for *Tales from the New Life*, also did some some work for Sullivan's, I'm pretty sure.

After going to Mexico, I went to Canada with my four-year-old son. We wound up living on a communal farm on Vancouver Island with congenial friends who were sort of spiritually inclined, while still using drugs and being casual with sex. It was the real hippie experience—fun, creative and totally unsustainable—like being married to twenty people!

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To earn money, I would go back to California and get graphics work with my old friends from Sullivan's. They would bring me to Baba events. I remember one very charged time in 1970 when Adi K. and Meherjee spoke to a large audience at University of California at Berkeley. There was a ruckus in the audience, someone was yelling at the speakers and had to be ejected by the organizers.

So I would get a little taste of Baba every time I came back to California. I still didn't consider myself a Baba lover—I wasn't ready to follow His directive for No drugs and No sex outside of marriage. (This was His directive as I understood it.)

Time went on. I thought my son and I would spend life at the commune happily for many years, and then it fell apart. I had to make my own way now, without the wonderful support of friends who had left for new adventures. Life got tougher—self-sufficiency was new territory for me, and I had a dear son who deserved a better life than I was giving him. He missed his friends on the commune too. We lived in a little cabin in the woods and I worked as a waitress nights. Quite depressing. My little garden in the back yard was a saving grace. I picked fresh peas gratefully while wondering how to go forward.

I began to earnestly search for an answer, meditating and praying to God every morning. *"Show me the way, let me know what is Your will."* The simple answer seemed to be to go south, where I had grown up, and join my Meher Baba friends. Of all the spiritual groups I knew, this one seemed most down-to-earth. I didn't like the hippie gurus of the time, with incense and bells and chanting. I desperately wanted what was Real. I remember asking for the Truth, fervently, in my meditation, and feeling like I got immedi-

ately in the asking—the answer—impossible to describe in words, yet the feeling so profound.

After a few months of living in the cabin, my son and I boarded a Greyhound bus and headed to Palo Alto California, where my dear folks took us in to live with them in their little one-bedroom house. No questions asked, they were glad to have us home. We were wild ones, our clothes were scruffy, my son's hair was down to his shoulders. Mom took us out clothes shopping, got him a haircut. We put our hippie life behind us. I put on stockings and a "straight" dress and went job hunting. My son was SO happy to be living in a neighborhood, with sidewalks for bike riding, and kids to play with. Suburban life suited him perfectly.

I am so grateful for this extra time I had with my parents. Our relationship had not weathered the sixties well—they didn't approve of my hippie life style, and were concerned for their grandson, whom they adored. Our four years together allowed us to mend fences and relax into the old warm relationship we'd always had. They didn't quite embrace my new "guru," but they were very relieved at Meher Baba's influence on my life!

There was still more fence-mending to do. Baba arranged this nicely. My ex-husband Dave, who, after our divorce, had moved to Nebraska and had a new family: two children and a long-term partner, suddenly showed up back in Palo Alto, saying his relationship was over. His wife wouldn't let him see the kids, and he was heartbroken. I had always appreciated his sweet heart and his huge love for children, so of course I said I'd help him. There we both were in Palo Alto, working together now on setting up child support and visitation with his other two kids. What started out as friendly cooperation warmed up and became a romance. With counseling, we talked out our disagreements and finally decided

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to get hitched again. We married the second time August 28, 1976. We had been apart ten years, I never imagined we'd get back together.

When we started talking about our life, I told Dave that he had to understand that Baba came first with me. "No problem," he said, and in fact, when Meherana was first started, he dove full-on into the project, driving his tractor and trailer all day from Palo Alto many times to Meherana in the Yosemite foothills. He was so happy to be part of the great Meherana endeavor in the early days. When Bhauji came to Meherana, he called Dave "Lemon Tractor Daddy." We were the Lemons—not the Lowmans, but the Lemons," said Bhau.

I figure Dave and I must have some lingering karma. Lingering and still yet lingering. It's a work in progress. We've been together forty-three years now the second time. We have six wonderful children and five grandchildren. In 2006 we moved from Palo Alto, California to Baba House, a three-acre farm in Scotts Mills, Oregon, where many Oregon sava-savas were held. We live there today with a daughter, two dogs and six cats.

At seventy-three and seventy-four, we find that our "dream farm" is requiring more energy than we can summon, so in Baba's time we'll be moving on to the next chapter in our exciting life with the Beloved.



Artwork © Claire Mataira

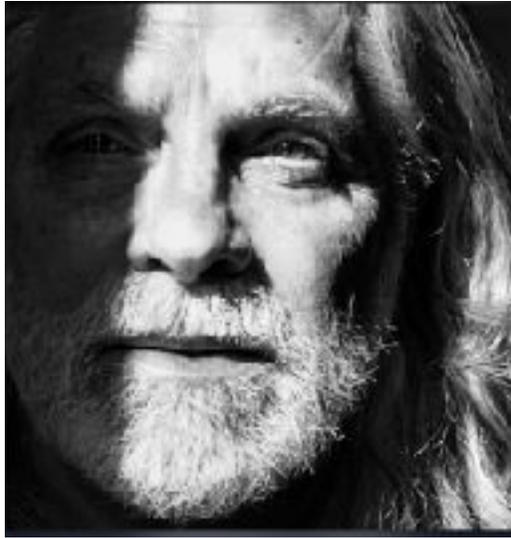
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101 Tales
of Finding Love

Trail of Roses

by Neale Lundgren

101 Tales of Finding Love



Neale with Eruch, Meherazad, India, November 1999



Neale Lundgren

THE STORY WHICH I NOW LAY BEFORE THE READER is one Westerner's account of how he slowly gathered up, one by one, flowers given by the Beloved that would make up an exquisite, divine bouquet.

It was more than two decades ago that I first entered the novitiate of the monastic Order of St. Benedict. It was a languid, steamy day in July on the Church steps of St. John's Abbey in the north woods of Minnesota. Abbot John asked me the ancient question Benedictine abbots have asked their novices since the sixth century: "What do you seek?" I answered, "I, Benedict Neale Lundgren, seek the mercy of God and the fellowship of this community" (It has been a tradition for a novice to immediately "put on" the name of a saint as a symbol of the ego's death process as it slowly—over time—gives in to the love of the Christ).

At twilight, as I stood for the first time before the window in my monastic cell overlooking a loon-haunted lake, I beheld the cloister garden resplendent with flowers of every conceivable colour. My fingers felt the coarse, heavy cotton of my black, hooded robe and weathered belt, which had probably been at one time worn by a previous Benedictine monk, now deceased. I recalled the serpentine journey that had led me here to the doorsteps of the monastery.

It was no coincidence that my days as a traveling musician had led me, unwittingly, to Benedictine spirituality. The Benedictine Order, although ascetic compared to modern styles of living, has for centuries used music and other arts to celebrate the self's journey to recover the Divine. At its best moments, monastic life in the West has encouraged a romantic relationship with God, what Eastern spirituality calls *prem marga* or the "path of divine love."

Meher Baba's First Rose: Divine Discontent

Our traveling music band, “Manchild” was not constructed out of some corporate concept, but naturally sprang up as the result of a spiritual longing for intimacy between the human and divine. The institutionalized Christian Church had become for us like a great mausoleum, where sad and world-weary people came to pay their respects to a man-god who had once walked on the earth, but who had died and was no longer accessible, not even through prayers of supplication. For Manchild, our songs of homelessness became our prayers, and nature, the tavern, the coffeehouse, and the concert hall became our sanctuary. We traveled many roads and broke bread at many tables. Although each of us still carried within ourselves unhealed emotional wounds incurred in our childhoods, we nonetheless sincerely created out of our imaginations meaningful music that reflected the primal, earthy dance with the divine. We wrote our own versions of the rite of initiation that is the lot of every soul that comes into this world of joy and sorrow.

Once, during one of our road travels, I inadvertently came upon the spiritual adventure stories of the German author, Hermann Hesse, and began to devour them, escaping to read them at every available opportunity. Despite Manchild's apparent rising success (we even had landed a recording contract with Capitol Records), I began to withdraw more and more into the imaginative world of secret societies, mysticism, and the dynamic struggles of the soul as seen through the eyes of Hesse. “Could there actually be such places in the world?” I began asking myself as I paged with youthful excitement through the novels, *Siddhartha*, *Narcissus and Goldmund* and *The Glass Bead Game*.

Meher Baba's Second Rose: Search for the Source

Reading the novels of Hesse motivated me to pick up again with the search I had all but given up on. One day in a country town outside of New Orleans, I was taking a walk and noticed a little white church with a spire. It had been several years since I'd even walked into a church. It just so happened that a priest was hearing confession. I walked into the cubicle, crossed myself and remembered immediately as if it were yesterday, "Bless me Father, for I have sinned." After I recounted my tale of woe and wound, the priest said to me, "Welcome home, my son." This was all I heard. Tears came rushing up from deep within, and I returned to my apartment smiling, feeling that I had truly been cleansed and forgiven.

Soon after, I announced to my fellow band members that I was leaving for good and would begin studies in philosophy at the Jesuit University in New Orleans nearby. It didn't take the Jesuits at Loyola long to lead me into the direction of the Benedictine Order, when they gradually discovered my attraction to the early music of Gregorian chant and longing for a more contemplative lifestyle than the Jesuits afforded. So, after receiving my degree in philosophy, which included a four-month hitchhiking trek to some of the holy pilgrimage sites of Europe and North Africa, I applied and was accepted into the graduate programme in theology at the seminary of St. John's University, Collegeville, Minnesota.

During my stay at St. John's Seminary, I established wholesome friendships among my fellow seminarians. But I slowly became disenchanted with the thought of the parish priesthood, for it seemed to me to be a lonely life in the middle of the world, yet isolated from the world's simple joys of marriage and family. At that time I was not spiritually mature enough to understand the Ancient One's teaching on how to

be “in the world, but not of it.” For me it was an either/or situation. I became more and more enamoured with the thought of living a monastic style of life, and would often attend the “Hours” (of prayer) at the monastery church with the community of monks there. After a series of interviews, the monks decided I was ready to enter directly into the novitiate, skipping the required candidacy period (which could last a year or more).

My days and nights as a novice monk were filled to the brim with a close companionship with the Beloved as Jesus. When I recall the regular daily diet of sung prayer, reading the lives of saints, coupled with hours devoted to some form of manual labour, and general simplicity of life, perhaps I had a glimpse of how the first followers of the Christ of this Age, Meher Baba, must have felt when they lived their welcomed *obligations of love* for the Beloved at Manzil-e-Meem.

Meher Baba’s Third Rose: Finding the God Within

Daily life in the monastery included individual meditation practices in addition to group prayer, which consisted of the slow, rhythmic recitation of the Biblical Psalms, called *oratio* (or vocal prayer). In the long silences between the recitations, one could practice *meditatio* (quiet prayer)—the choosing of a word from the particular Psalm just read, or from another Scripture reading of the day, and silently repeating that word with the rhythm of the breath. The third phase was considered less a practice and more a gift of grace; that of being lifted into the continual presence of Christ, called *contemplatio* (the prayer of presence)—an advanced state of intimacy with the Beloved that very few monks in the entire history of the Order reported to have experienced. I never had any “hands-on” guidance from any of the monks in this ancient practice, but learned it myself through my studies of the early “Fathers” of the Church.

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One day I asked Dr. Gabrielé Winkler, one of my theology professors, whom I perceived to be a person of spiritual maturity, to give me guidance on how to progress in prayer. One day during one of our tutorial sessions, Gabrielé handed me the anonymously authored Russian classic, *The Way of the Pilgrim*. After reading this simple and holy work, I became drawn to the meditative practices of *hesychast* prayer (also called the “Jesus Prayer,” translated literally from the Greek, “deep chasm”). I sought direction from Gabrielé, who disclosed to me that she had been initiated into this spiritual practice by a Russian *staretz* (meaning, a “saintly person”). I would learn much later that Meher Baba gave a similar practice to His *mandali*: to take a name of God and repeat it with the rhythm of the breath, so as to diminish the creation of *sanskaras* (mental impressions) and inhibit the strength of the illusion-producing ego.

The controversial Marianist priest, Father Bernard, was a recent “import” on the theology faculty. Although a teacher of the fashionable “process theology” of Alfred North Whitehead, Bernard continually challenged me to bring my relationship with Christ smack dab into the world. He went so far as refusing to address me by my chosen monastic name, “Benedict.” He preferred to call me by my birth name, “Neale.” He lived in a house a few miles away from the monastery/university campus and occasionally held his theology classes and soirées there. I looked upon these evenings with Bernard as dangerous adventures to the other side of the world. He’d cook tasty meals for his students and offer us aged wines and freshly ground, deliciously flavoured coffees.

When I look back now with the eyes of Baba, I see someone who was courageous enough to live in the midst of the modern world, yet always keeping the Ancient One in view.

If Gabrielé's path at that time was primarily one of yogin or external renunciate coupled with ardor for the inner path, Bernard aspired to the way of the *salik*, the internal renunciate; that is, one who accepts all of life and its spectrum of colours—from the highest pleasure to the deepest pain—as God's absolute will. I recall now that Meher Baba and His primary mentor, Upasni Maharaj, frequently chastised any follower who was seduced by the appearances of holiness. Both Gabrielé and Bernard were genuine seekers of God.

Meher Baba's Fourth Rose: God Is Really One

As part of my theological training as a monk I received the opportunity to live and study in Israel. One particular event was transformative for me and forever changed my thinking about religion, catapulting me into the search for *sanatana dharma* (eternal teaching) at the heart of all religion. At this time, I still had not consciously been introduced to the refreshed "Jesus," Meher Baba (eighteen years would have to pass before I would "see" Meher Baba as the Living Christ).

During one of my walks in the "old city" of Jerusalem I felt an impulse to pray at the Western Wall, not as a Christian but as a Jew. This was a conscious thought and it came suddenly, seemingly out of nowhere (later, in the light of Meher Baba, I would see this event as one of my first lessons of "obedience" from within). I put on a Jewish *yarmulka* (headpiece). I bowed my head and touched the Western Wall and began praying for unity among the Jews, Christians and Moslems. As if in an altered state, I proceeded to move through the stone gate dividing Jewish and Moslem sacred space. Upon entering the gate, I realized I had just broken Jewish law according to a posted sign at the entranceway, which strictly forbade anyone to enter the Temple Mount,

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because it was, according to Jewish orthodox belief, a defiled space.

I approached the Moslem wall located behind the Jewish wall and rested my head against its stones, and prayed once again the same prayer for unity. I was now, according to strict rabbinical law, an outsider—an enemy. As I turned around I noticed a group of Moslem children playing in the courtyard. They were looking at me in surprise that I had leaned against their wall in the posture of a Jew. I then proceeded to the colonnade and slowly walked upon the “stones of Solomon” adjacent to the mosque. I bowed to the East in the same way I had recently seen a Moslem Bedouin in the Sinai Desert at dawn along the Gulf of Eilat. I again prayed silently the words: “May God, for all of us, truly become One. Amen.” A guard came up to me and said, “You cannot pray in this area.” Although I didn’t have a copy of the Koran, I was carrying a Bible and happened to open it to the first chapter of the Prophet Isaiah, and began reading from it.

Leaving there, I immediately began walking along the ancient footpath which traverses the Kidron Valley, ending up at the Mount of Olives, the place where, centuries ago, the Romans arrested Jesus. I sat in the Garden of Gethsemane beside a very old and stately olive tree. I looked across the Kidron Valley and gazed upon the Temple Mount, the Western Wall and the Holy Sepulcher. I read Isaiah’s indictment against Israel, where from his mouth the Lord speaks, “Bring no more worthless offerings...your Sabbaths, calling of assemblies” (Isaiah 1:13-13-14). Years later I would hear Meher Baba’s frequent admonitions to the multitude against mechanical rituals of worship, but also how the Ancient One’s fresh teaching of the Eternal Religion eventually degenerates into an externally-based religion, which Sufis call *shariat*. Once institutionalized through dogma, religions

are fated to struggle in this darkness until the Ancient One comes again.

Meher Baba's Fifth Rose: Religion Is Not God

Upon returning stateside to the Abbey, on fire with enthusiasm, I began sharing my new universalist ideas with my fellow monks. Needless to say, they were unimpressed. For the longest time, I felt like a stranger in a strange world.

Although the following years in the monastery were not without their internal challenges, I continued to dedicate myself, in so far as I could, to the daily responsibilities I had undertaken, now as a more seasoned monk, which included teaching a course to undergraduates in literature and theology. By this time I had also composed a sizable collection of original liturgical music, much of it based on mystical themes. Some of my songs had become controversial and many of the monks were split on whether they could be termed appropriately, "liturgical."

I had not yet taken solemn vows, but at the end of each monastic year (which falls in July), I would renew them, as was the custom. The time came when I knew I would have to either leave or stay. I had followed the monastic rule to the best of my ability, and still no enlightenment seemed forthcoming. I was troubled with the growing realization that I would probably not find more advanced guidance on the mystical path among the monks at St. John's, coupled with the disturbing awakening I had had in Jerusalem, that perhaps religion could only bring a seeker a short distance on the Journey of journeys, which I was beginning to see was unfathomable, long and deep, and impossible to tread without further guidance from experienced teachers with knowledge of the path.

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But as the year was coming to a close, it was made painfully clear to me that I was to leave St. John's Abbey, and continue my spiritual search elsewhere. When I recall the first question I was given when I first entered the cloister doors ("What do you seek?"), I had answered that I seek "God" *and* the "fellowship of this community." I had intensely sought God and found God (or at least had experienced a certain taste and glimpse of the Beloved). I had sought fellowship in the monastery, but had not really found true fellowship. Early on, I had sensed I was out of sync with the direction of most of my peers. The monastery's drive toward liturgical excellence had overshadowed the original ideal St. Benedict embodied: radical transformation of the human ego into the Divine Ego through prayer and work (*Ora et Labora*). Rather than prayer-based work, the ideal had become work-based prayer. The focus of the monastery's younger members became more toward ego-based "professional" life, which seemed to overshadow the focus toward God-based "monastic" life. I was perceived among the majority of my peers to be too radical. So my departure was inevitable.

I asked Abbot Jerome for his blessing. I received one hundred and seventy-five dollars in cash from the Abbey bursar and the price of a bus ticket to the place of my choice. The following morning, Father Kieran (fittingly, the first priest who, as Dean, had welcomed me to the seminary upon my arrival years ago) was kind enough to walk me to the front of the Abbey Church to await my transportation. As Kieran embraced me to say goodbye, he hung a Coptic cross of black leather around my neck. I got on the bus and waved a salute to Kieran and St. John's Abbey as the bus headed down that familiar lone stretch of road away from the monastery, ambling southwestward for days, until I finally arrived in Albuquerque, New Mexico. A monk driving a four-wheel drive Jeep picked me up as planned and drove me

another twenty or so miles across an unpaved road to a monastery called, “Christ in the Desert,” on the outskirts of Abiquiu, New Mexico, a small settlement of adobe houses in the desert plateau region of the Southwest.

It was here amidst the night-blooming cactus flowers of Christ in the Desert monastery that I lived out the remainder of my days of simple vows. On the Feast of St. Benedict, in a quiet ceremony, before this small community of loving and accepting monks, I took off the robe and belt which they had temporarily given me to wear during my stay with them. I then handed over the articles of monastic clothing, symbols of the same clothing I had worn as a monk at St. John’s.

Meher Baba’s Sixth Rose: “Be in the World...”

My transition to the world (and eventually into the arms of Beloved Meher Baba), was a long and arduous one. First, I spent two years “chopping wood and carrying water,” living in a rented house on a lake, located a few miles from the monastery. I rarely prayed, in the traditional sense, during this period. I did manage, with the help of friends I had made over the years, to get a job teaching introductory theology to senior students in a Catholic high school in the area.

In a bookstore one day, out of the blue I picked up a copy of the *Bhagavad Gita* in English. After reading through it, I saw parallels between some of its contents and the “sayings” of Jesus. I didn’t even have a clue then that, according to Meher Baba, He was not only Jesus, but Krishna, the self-same Ancient One who comes again and again to the world of gross consciousness to unveil who God is in His non-manifest form. During my tenure at Cathedral High School, I began reading everything I could about religions other

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than Christianity, and was led to the teachings of Buddha, Mohammed and Abraham, and taught courses on the similarities of these teachings to those of Jesus.

My mentors, Gabrielé and Bernard, encouraged me to enter more fully into life in the world, to broaden my studies with the goal in mind to become a professor at the university level. I took their recommendations to heart, and after receiving a scholarship from Emory University in Atlanta, I completed an interdisciplinary programme in psychology, philosophy and religious thought of the turn-of-the-century Europe, a time period in history, to which I felt a strong attraction.

At Emory my search led me further away from the academic world, eventually to seek training to become a counselor of the soul. Later, I took a post as spiritual director for an addiction treatment center. Utilizing the already ensconced 12 Step Program of AA, I worked on integrating essential elements of psychology, psychiatry and religion by introducing teachings from the World Religions, which focused on the development of a Self beyond the limited ego. During this time, I entered counseling myself to heal the emotional wounds of my own past. Having fully taken up life in the world, I married and eventually became a father.

Meher Baba's Seventh Rose: "But Not of the World"

After ten years, I found myself led to investigate a Christian community which seemed to be of mature and seasoned seekers. Among this group I came into contact with persons who had completed years of formation in religious, academic and corporate institutions, and who had previously connected with teachers who were skilled enough to lead them beyond the frontiers of organized religion to the path of *tariqat*, what the Sufis call the way of *inner knowledge*. Al-

though each had completed enough of their own interior work to allow for an authentic and abiding relationship with the Ancient One beyond all religion, most were focused on deepening their relationships with the Christ-as-Jesus. Although I already had a fair amount of previous training in meditative prayer and mystical theology, I entered upon an apprenticeship programme with one of the elders for some time before I was ordained a priest. During these years of formation, I steadily deepened my relationship with the Christ within, and worked to balance this relationship with married life. I felt I had truly received a glimpse of what it means to “be in the world, but not of it.”

Meher Baba’s Eighth Rose: Intellectual Conversion

In 1996, I received from my elder bishop, Thomas, copies of Naosherwan Anzar’s *Beloved*, as well as Meher Baba’s *Discourses* and *God Speaks*. Over the past several months I was aware that Thomas had been basing many of his lessons on the teachings of Meher Baba, and I was becoming interested in learning more about Him. Thomas had not yet openly shared that he had actually “come to Baba.” While Thomas did not seek to impose Baba on me, it became obvious to me that his interest in Baba was much more than intellectual. Reading Baba’s words, I became not only intrigued, but more and more convinced of Baba’s Christ state. But even though I may have come to Baba intellectually, I was still not ready to accept Him in my heart as Christ, and I continued to see Jesus as my Lord and Master, being firmly established in remembrance of Jesus’ name. At times I would repeat silently, “Jesus-Baba, Jesus-Baba,” and asked the Ancient One how I should refer to Him, but received no instant reply.

Three More Roses from Meher Baba: Conversion of the Heart

It was during this time that things began to accelerate. After Thomas returned home from seeing Bhau Kalchuri at Myrtle Beach in June 1997, he told me to let our Atlanta group know that Bhau would be spending a half hour at the Atlanta airport between flights, and that we should all go and get our hugs from him. While this seemed to be a strange request, I trusted him as a mentor, and so I dutifully let everyone know. I went myself, although I did not know what to expect. While following the crowd of Baba lovers behind Bhau, I had an experience of being dunked in the ocean of Baba's love, which included a vision of seeing Bhau turn momentarily into Baba. I have never fully recovered from this glorious incident. From this moment I knew Baba to be the Christ come again, without a doubt. During my prayer on the way home that day, it was made inwardly clear that the name I would begin to repeatedly remember was now, "Baba, Baba."

I soon met, on two separate occasions, Darwin Shaw at the Meher Spiritual Center in Myrtle Beach, and hear of his journey with Meher Baba. I received Darwin's detailed account of his coming to know Baba as the Living Christ, and received a blessing of glimpsing Baba's divinity during Darwin's account of the *sabavas* in India, when Baba unveiled Himself to him and those gathered.

My cup was full and I didn't think Baba would send any more gifts my way. But just months after my powerful meeting with Darwin, I met Naosherwan Anzar, and he blessed my home and family with Baba's loving presence for an entire weekend of sharing and speaking about his life with Meher Baba. Baba just wouldn't let up. One story, which struck me profoundly, was Naosherwan's account of a par-

ticular day, during an audience with Baba, when He asked Naosherwan if he loved Him. Naosherwan said, “Yes, Baba, I love You.”

After a few moments, Baba turned to him and said, “I want you to share with the world that I am God in human form,” and handed him a token, as if to officially seal His commission of Naosherwan to this activity. In the Mystical Christian tradition, this “order” by Meher Baba given to Naosherwan would be considered “apostolic,” and one of the highest honours of service which can be bestowed upon a follower of the God-Man.

Having come to Meher Baba through Jesus, it became clear to me that I should participate in spreading Meher Baba’s name by distributing Baba books whenever I could, and I even began facilitating a Baba study group of Bhau’s *Lord Meher* opus. During this time, a number of Jesus followers in our Mystical Jesus group began coming to Baba.

There are Westerners who can more easily find their way to Meher Baba by first going through the door of Mystical Christianity, the Christ-Within path. Perhaps Meher Baba, after having refreshed and redirected Christianity to its mystical origins, will eventually transform the stream of Mystical Christianity into the one Ocean of Love where there is no religion.

All the memories of my life as a Benedictine monk recounted here have passed through my consciousness with the speed of light. Now there is only Presence, only a deep yes in my heart to it all, to every joy and every sorrow of my life, which had been and which were still yet to come.

Each turning point of my life has been but a flower tossed on the road before me from the Beloved, Meher Baba. Baba

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wanted to know at each stopping point if I was really serious about wanting to experience more of Him. Yes, my Beloved, I was serious. But now, strangely, I am light as a feather in this play of illusion, in one more drama You are creating out of one more fool who is wise enough to hold his hand up yet again, to say: "Take me, I am Yours. Do with me what You wish. You are the Highest Embodiment of the fact that God is the only Reality. What else, King of Love, Meher Baba, would you like to do with this plucked, glad flower of yours?"

It has been almost twenty years since this publication of my journey to God in human form. In the fall of 1999, I was blessed beyond measure to meet and visit with Eruch Jessawala, his brother Meherwan, Bal Natu, Goher, Mohammed the mast, Katie, Arnavaz, Meheru, Najoo Kotwal and other glistening gems of Baba's at Meherbad and Meherazad in India. After returning home, I met and worked closely with Don Stevens and composed music to some of the poems of Daniel Ladinsky, Baba's interpreter par excellence of the poetry of Hafiz.

I regularly visit Baba's home in the West to take in the aroma of the Avatar's presence and to meet with His loving and giving caretakers and other pilgrims who pass through this Garden of Paradise within illusion. I continue to live in Atlanta with my wife and family. I am in my thirtieth year of private practice, counseling souls on their path with God in whatever form the Divine may take for them. I spend most of my remaining time writing books on the soul's journey in the New Humanity.

Neale's story first appeared in the 1997 issue of *Glow International*. Reprinted with permission.



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Scott Maloney

101 Tales
of Finding Love

Coming to the Beloved:
The Long (and Winding) Road Home

by Scott Tower Maloney

101 Tales of Finding Love



Mehera, Jo, Mani and Scott, Mandali Hall, 1988



Scott with Goher and Katie, 1986

Scott Maloney

MY STORY BEGINS with my grandmother, Mayme Kramer. She was an exceptional woman with eclectic interests who lived in a very modern house surrounded by old brownstones in New York. When I was a child, it was a magical place for me, and very different from my family's apartment a mile away. It was here in her library that I first saw Baba's image when I was six or seven years old (around 1964). I probably sat under that picture many times over the next several years, when I stopped to see her on my way home from school, or over breakfast when I would occasionally stay overnight. I have often wished that I had asked her, "Who's that?" I would have loved to hear about Baba from her, and to know her story. I knew Mayme was into all sorts of things—music, art, yoga, poetry, acupuncture, vitamins, and an Indian teacher of some sort—unnamed, he was just another item on the list of my grandmother's unusual interests. I probably guessed that it was his photo in the library, but somehow (incomprehensibly looking back) never asked her about him, and she never brought him up, for reasons I would learn many years later. As it turned out, it would take me twenty years to fall at Baba's feet, literally and figuratively.

I think I was seeking from an early age—I didn't know what, but I had an enduring sense that there was more to the story I was hearing—in school, in church, in my immediate family. I remember not taking naps as a young child and wondering where I was—I would exhaust the physical locations of apartment, city, state, country etc., and get to the universe and wonder what *that* was inside of. I grew up going to the Episcopal church most Sundays. I felt there was something special about Jesus but didn't feel moved or particularly connected to the rituals. I could almost taste something essential, underneath the surface, but couldn't

find it—a fragrance perhaps, of unknown origin. I remember resonating with the line from a popular song by Jethro Tull: “My God is not one you have to wind up on Sundays.” While not overtly religious, the message in my family was to apply the principles—how you lived your life and how you treated others was what counted. My family was an odd mixture of being very conventional in many respects (my father looked like an inspiration for some of the characters in *Mad Men*), and lots of out-of-the-box thinking and exploration (Edgar Cacey, *Urantia Book*).

In seventh grade, I started Transcendental Meditation, and continued with a daily practice for many years after that. I also gradually became interested in psychology and ways to deepen or expand my awareness. I attended some classes that touched on meditation, guided imagery and other visualizations. One experience stands out from this time—a guided meditation to connect with one’s inner resources and guides. When my guide/mentor appeared, He was clearly Jesus. I had a sense of deep recognition and connection with Him— *Oh, of course, it’s you!* and it was all very relaxed. He was young and vital, dressed in white, with incredibly sparkly eyes. No words were spoken, but I was left with the feeling that He would always be nearby and available. Many years later, I recognized this same energy and form in early photos of Baba, along with the realization that He had, indeed, always been with me.

My family had moved out of New York to Connecticut by this time and I saw Mayme less frequently, although still fairly often as the distance was only an hour by car or train. I felt there was something special about Mayme and my connection with her. While I understandably had a natural fondness for my grandmother, there was also an extra sparkle to her, one that many years later I would find often

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in those connected to Meher Baba. I had a prophetic dream a week before she died, in which I calmly heard the news. I wish I had managed to get myself to see her in that week. When she died, in June of 1971, I was sad knowing I would not see her again. With hindsight, it seems surprising that, at thirteen, I was not bereft, but somehow knew it was just as it should be. Sometime after she died, her house in New York was cleared out. Some of the books ended up at my parents' house, including two Baba books that sat on a shelf until they found their way into my heart more than ten years later. I don't know what happened to that picture of Baba. It was likely discarded, along with correspondence and perhaps Baba treasures; because no one present valued them, knew what they were, or perhaps they were intentionally discarded by those who did not approve of Baba and Mayme's connection with Him. It saddens me to think of what was lost at that time, as I would love to know more of her story and connection with Baba. However, I have come to realize there was also a great blessing in this. I did not grow up in a Baba family, with Baba and his Avatarhood a given. Instead, I had a blank slate of sorts, and I have had to find my own way to Him. The path He gave me was one filled with lots of prompts, longing and later fulfillment.

The following year, while continuing with regular meditation I also got into drugs—this seems incongruous with meditation looking back, but at the time it somehow wasn't. Life at home was not particularly peaceful or happy and I took some refuge in various levels of sedation and escape. By the time I was in ninth grade (fourteen-fifteen years old), I was smoking pot every day, starting before school; I was high most of the time. I took LSD a number of times as well, and thought I found, as so many did, a glimpse of a deeper insight and connection, and felt it was a spiritual experience of some kind.

Just before going away to boarding school, at the end of the summer of 1973, I had what felt like a spiritual awakening. Late at night, I was lying on the ground in a friend's backyard at the end of a very mild acid trip, looking up at the sky and a row of tall trees nearby. I saw a giant figure standing in the trees, as big as tall pines—towering over me with his arms outstretched to his sides. I didn't know what to make of this at the time, only that this was a very large and powerful presence. It felt like a visitation of some kind. Years later, I felt Baba had been standing there, so much larger than life.

Beginning the following morning, I found myself in an altered state that lasted for three weeks and became the bedrock of my spiritual path (at least until I finally recognized Baba eleven years later). I felt a calm connection with myself, others and the natural world, and experienced great joy in small things like watching and feeling the wind dancing in the trees. It was as if God was immediately present in everything, and all of creation was His gentle breathing. Looking back, I didn't think of it as God at the time, more like the totality of the universe. There was no worry, no extraneous thinking, just being. Everything was easy, it just was—*presence, connection, spontaneous joy*. This was quite a contrast to a life dominated by typical adolescent insecurities and dulled by drugs.

This experience stopped abruptly three weeks later the next time I used drugs—I remember the moment—looking out through trees across fields in rural Massachusetts, my view and experience of the world suddenly changed from one with great depth to a flat, two-dimensional picture—as if I were looking at the world (and my life) and not being in it. This became a source of great sadness and distress as I tried to find my way back to the enlightened state of mind and being. In that moment, I decided to stop using all drugs, for

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if they could take this experience away from me, I didn't want anything to do with them. This was a great blessing, as I had been smoking pot almost daily for well over a year. There began at this point a desperate search which took me over many years to various sources and traditions—Transcendentalists, Zen, Castaneda, Merton, Alan Watts, Hesse, Krishnamurti, Yogananda, Rosicrucians and Findhorn. Each of these touched me, some in profound ways, but none satisfied a deeper longing, although many described the goal of the spiritual path in terms that exactly described my three weeks' experience. During this time, I wasn't looking for a teacher or master, but rather I was committed to finding and following a path of my own discovery. If anything, I was skeptical or distrustful of the idea of giving myself over to a guru of any kind.

A key person in my journey to Baba was Hilde Halpern. She had been my grandmother's closest friend and her link to Baba. Hilde was born in Prague, Czechoslovakia and trained as a psychotherapist in Vienna where she met her husband, Otto, a well-known physicist who later worked on the Manhattan project. They moved to New York in the 1930s, where she and Mayme met. Hilde later moved to California, where she met Baba in 1956. While they were frequently in touch by letters and phone, the first time Mayme saw Hilde after this, she noticed something extraordinary had happened to her friend, and asked what—to which Hilde replied that she had recently met a remarkable man. As I heard the story from Hilde years later, Mayme was intrigued and wondered who this man was—was her friend having an affair? She thought that unlikely, but saw Hilde was basking in love for some reason and wanted to know more. Turns out this remarkable man was Meher Baba. Mayme asked Hilde if she too could meet Baba. Hilde offered to accompany her to see Baba in Myrtle Beach. She wrote to Baba about this plan and unexpectedly heard that He did not

want her (Hilde) to come, that she didn't need to come, that He was with her where she was. So, Hilde arranged for Mayme to travel with Fred and Ella Winterfeldt from New York to Myrtle Beach, where Mayme met Baba in 1958. I don't know anything of her experience there, other than her name being on the list of attendees and in one of the films, Mayme can be seen passing briefly in front of the camera before Baba comes into view on His way to the beach.

Years later Hilde moved to London, where I spent time with her whenever I could. She was an unofficial god-mother to me, having been appointed by Mayme, and not by my parents, to look out for me and help guide me. I found in her a doorway to a broader life, and an unconditional love that I later recognized in Baba's *Samadhi*. In 1976, the summer before college, I was in London, and at Hilde's suggestion I went to the opening of the Oceanic Center. At this point, all I knew was that Mayme had met Baba, and that she found out about Him from Hilde. So, I went to this opening not knowing much about Baba, nor having a burning desire to find out more. Hilde was going to let me bumble along and find Baba in my own time (or in Baba's time). At the opening, I met Adi K. Irani, who planted a tree as part of the ceremony. I recall asking him if he remembered Mayme. He graciously said he thought so. In retrospect I think I was more drawn by the desire to reach back, connect with and understand my grandmother through people who knew her and her connection to Baba. I was not aware of feeling personally drawn to Baba.

The other thing I remember was hearing Pete Townsend play acoustic guitar in a small hall—accompanied by Raphael Rudd, and at the time hearing Pete live in that setting was a big deal for me. I particularly remember him singing his song "*Bargain*" and being moved by it. I left feeling that I had touched something special, but did not feel

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pulled to find out more about Baba. Now, I can listen to the recording (*The Oceanic Concerts*) and I am transported right back into that room, surrounded by Baba's love that I didn't even know existed at the time (at least not consciously). Some of us are really thick it seems...

After that summer, I returned home and enrolled in Yale, full of the expectation that college was the place to find the answers to my deepest questions (little did I know that I had just brushed up against the answers in London, but hadn't noticed). So, I jumped into courses in philosophy, psychology, religious studies—in the end almost every one of them was a poor substitute for what I was looking for—rather an intellectual, academic explanation that eventually led me to feel depressed, and caught in an unsatisfying embrace of mental machinations. Yale was an exciting, intriguing world full of smart and interesting people, but not the place to find what I most wanted.

After two years I left and tried to find a way back to a path that nourished me on other levels. I spent the summer of 1978 traveling around the United Kingdom, visiting Findhorn and then a variety of alternative schools including Brockwood Park, founded by Krishnamurti. I was moved by his model of education, enjoyed the chance to hear his talks and often spoke with him over lunch. I was particularly impressed that he had rejected the Theosophists' claim that he was the new Messiah or World Teacher. Krishnamurti seemed something of a non-guru and I liked that. In the end however, I was left feeling empty. It all seemed largely confined to the intellect, trying to use the mind to get beyond the mind, and never touching my heart.

Ironically, my time at Brockwood Park almost led me to India. There was a Krishnamurti-inspired school in India, in Madras I think, and there was some exchange between the

two. I had been helping out on the staff at Brockwood Park, and towards the end of 1978 I thought of going to India as part this exchange. If I had gone, I would have made a stop in Ahmednagar—at this point all I had was Mani and Adi’s names in my address book, at Kings Road, Ahmednagar, and a vague idea to find out more about Baba someday. But Baba had other plans; it would be another six years before I found my way to India.

During my time in the UK, I saw a lot of Hilde in London and learned more about her connection to Baba, and about Mayme and Baba. Hilde told me that meeting Baba was the single most important event in her life. She described Him as her “chimney sweep” who had enabled her to completely master (transcend) transference in her work. This impressed me a great deal, as she was the most interesting and compelling person I had ever met in my life. If Baba meant that much to Hilde, then he was worth looking into more seriously. I also went to my first Baba meeting around this time, again nudged along by Hilde who suggested that Craig San Roque take me along. I don’t remember much, other than it was in a basement, there was some poetry and singing. Once again, I found it interesting, but it didn’t touch my heart.

Hilde also told me that meeting Baba had a profound impact on Mayme, and was a great comfort to her. I learned that Mayme took over sending medicine to India, something that Hilde had been doing, and that she attended the Monday night meetings in New York. I have tried to find Baba lovers who knew Mayme then, but sadly have not turned up any. [An aside: I have found references to Mayme while working on the Fredella collection at the Meher Archive Collective (MAC) in Asheville recently. Her name appears several times, in a note from Mani, and on lists of people to whom letters from Baba or the *mandali* were forwarded by Fredella. It was an unexpected gift from Baba to

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find a link to her, and her work for Baba, in these documents.]

I also learned from Hilde why Mayme had not spoken about Baba in our family. My mother, Jo, apparently asked her mother, Mayme, about Baba: “I have two questions for you about this Meher Baba. First, I hear that he claims he is God—is this true?” to which Mayme replied, “Yes, He has said that.” “Second question—do you believe him?” Mayme: “Yes, I do, and I would be happy to talk with you more about that if you like.” Jo: “That’s all I need to know, I don’t want to hear any more.” It seems strange to me that there would have been no further conversation between them about Baba over the years, but if there was, I did not hear about it. I heard from Hilde that Jo was quite negative about Baba, and that Mayme did not say anything about Baba to me because she didn’t want to upset Jo.

Returning to the United States in 1979, I decided to go back to college, and went to Stanford to study psychology and education. I left after a semester, disillusioned by the behaviorist bent to psychology there at the time. I really had no idea what to do next, and ended up attending holistic psychology conferences and taking classes at JFK university near San Francisco over the summer, including a course on mysticism. Along with St. John of the Cross, Theresa of Avila, Ouspensky, and others, Meher Baba was on the reading list. I bought the required books, including the three-volume set of *Discourses*. Once again, the horse was led to water, but didn’t feel like drinking. I liked what I read, but it remained an intellectual interest only. I remember going and talking with Pascal Kaplan who was the dean at the time—unfortunately Baba did not come up in conversation and it was only years later that I heard he was a Baba lover.

After a few more twists and turns, I ended up back at Yale where I finished a degree in religious studies. This time I was fortunate to be inspired by some creative professors and I found myself drawn to early Christian history and those outside the orthodoxy like the Desert Fathers, Gnostics and mystics. I realized I really wanted to know what it was like at or just after the time of Jesus, before it all became a formalized religion. I felt this would be a way to get close to what Jesus had *really* been about in His own time. I also learned something of how the accepted texts were chosen, and some of the political reasons they were edited and changed over time. I wanted to learn as much as I could about these fresh early years, perhaps unknowingly in preparation for the later realization that I was living in those same times in another Advent. I also took a number of classes at the Divinity School and for a time considered following that path. I felt the richness in people who were responding to an inner calling, but I myself did not feel that calling.

After graduating from college in 1982, I didn't know what I wanted to do next. I knew I didn't want to don a grey suit and work in some office in New York. I liked the idea of teaching and of seeing other parts of the world, and the two fit together nicely through a fellowship I received from the Yale-China Association to teach English for two years in China.

In packing for this adventure, I made up a good-sized box of books, to literally put on a slow boat to China. I knew I would have lots of time for reading (Wuhan was not exactly known for its night life), so I selected a variety of books to land there about the time I was to arrive six months later. In this box were two Baba books (*The Perfect Master* and *Listen, Humanity*) taken from a bookshelf in my family's home. I knew they had been Mayme's and figured I would get to

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them at some point in China. They ended up sitting on a bookshelf there for over a year before I picked them up.

In January of 1984, I had a month's holiday over Chinese New Year and decided to go to Taiwan. I found the Baba books and decided to take them along. I travelled first to Hong Kong and then to Taipei, where I spent a few days before heading south to Tai Chong by train. It was on this train journey that I started *The Perfect Master*. I don't remember how far into this book I was, but I distinctly remember the scene around me—the green fields rolling by out the window and chopsticks resting on an empty white cardboard lunch box. In that moment, I had a very calm and clear realization that what I was reading was true, deeply true, and that I did not need to seek any further. It was right here. I can still feel the richness of the green and yellow colors out the window as I quietly landed—in myself, in this life, in Baba. All worry and striving melted away in an instant. *Oh, finally, here is what I have been looking for, for so very long...*

I knew I wanted to visit Meherabad and it took about a year to get there. In the meantime, I finished my fellowship and then spent time travelling along the Silk Road out to the western edge of China. Along the way, I visited many sacred sites that moved me, some of which had been lost for centuries and rediscovered—Dunghuang, Turipan, old Buddhist temples, with scrolls hidden for safe keeping, that managed to escape the ravages of the Cultural Revolution—all links to a forgotten past. I wondered about Baba along the way, and had the feeling I would find a sacred site, *alive and in the present*, in India.

After returning to the United States to visit my family at the end of 1984, I set off for India by way of London in January of 1985. I went to the London Baba center for an Amartithi

gathering (without knowing much about Amartithi), where I met Tom and Dorothy Hopkinson for the first time, along with others I would come to know later. Everyone was happy for me that I was on my way to India for the first time. Hilde had written to Janet Judson, asking her to help me when I arrived, and others gave me various tips for navigating the journey. I still didn't know much about where I was going, or what I would find there, only that I had to go (and some unformed sense that I would find more of Baba there). It was a pull, but I remember faltering when asked by casual friends about where I was going and why. Looking back, I can see that He was reeling me in over many years and many more miles. It wasn't a dramatic forceful pulling, but a slow steady pull that had an inescapable quality to it.

My flight arrived in Bombay at 2 A.M. and I was immediately immersed in a chaotic symphony of heat and sounds and smells and colors and people. I have vague memories of taking a taxi to a recommended hotel, passing the unending sea of the Bombay slums. Next morning, I found my way to a group taxi to Poona, where I crammed into an old black and yellow taxi with three other passengers and a driver. It already felt hot before we set off. Somewhere climbing out of Bombay we had a flat tire. It took forever to fix it, with luggage sprawled all around the side of the road. An hour later, another flat. Long wait until transfer to another, slightly smaller, taxi, with luggage on our laps and tied precariously to the roof. Hot, sweaty, smelly. Arrived in Poona late—was supposed to get another shared taxi to 'Nagar the same day, but when I phoned Janet, she told me it was too late to travel safely and that I should spend the night there and come on in the morning.

I stayed in a small hotel in Poona, likely recommended by Janet, likely with some Baba connection. I had a small map and set out to find Babajan's tree. One of my first experi-

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ences of India was Poona at night, with an avalanche of sights and sounds and smells. Having lived and travelled in China and other parts of Asia, the otherness of India was not entirely foreign, it was both familiar and distinctly new. I felt something sacred and ancient there, and had the sensation that I was walking within old memories from another time.

I found my way to Baba's House and was shown to Baba's room. I was aware that I knew nothing of the history, but knew it was a sacred place. I remember Baba's room was full of photos—I recognized Baba, but not most of the other people in them. There was one photo that completely captivated me, on the wall to the right of the door, about eye level. Even more than the photos of Baba, I felt my breath taken away by the most beautiful face I had ever seen. Someone told me it was Mehera. I didn't even know who she was, but her image unlocked a depth of longing I didn't know I had, yet simultaneously recognized. Perhaps it was in this moment that I had a glimpse of where I was headed and why. At that time the rock in the floor where Baba had banged His head was still bare and exposed. I had read about Baba and the rock and had been very moved by the story. I sat on the floor and laid my hands on it for some time. It was at once a simple piece of rock and also something profound, a doorway to the universe. I was filled with amazement and gratitude to think that God had hit His head and bled on this rock in order to stay in the world. This rock had been part of what anchored God to the material world.

The next day I got another shared taxi to Ahmednagar. I remember the heat and was grateful for no flat tires. I felt as if I was floating through a dream, almost as if the car was not touching the road. We stopped for tea somewhere by the side of the road and I remember the heat and the flies,

and the quality of the light that seemed impossibly brilliant. I became aware of a growing and almost overwhelming fullness inside— everything seemed both unreal and hyper-real. I have memories of the trees lining the road, with their broad white and orange painted rings, and the crazy cacophony of truck horns, and people and animals in the road.

I don't remember if I went first to the Trust, or straight to Meherabad. On arriving at the Pilgrim Center in the afternoon of February 5th, 1985, I was welcomed by Janet, who suggested I may want to go up the hill on my own while it was quiet, for my first visit to the Tomb. I had no idea what I was looking for, not even, I don't think, of the Tomb itself, as I set off across the road, over the tracks and up the stone-lined path. When I reached the top of the hill, it was quiet and very still, as if Baba's Silence was rising out of the dry ground. I hadn't read anything about the Tomb or of people visiting it, and had no frame of reference for the moment.

As I approached the Tomb and its small covered patio, I had no irresistible longing to throw myself at Baba's feet, and no other idea of what to do. I saw Nana Kher standing near the Tomb and he motioned for me to go inside. It was a simple gesture, towards a simple doorway, and the threshold seemed enormous. I had a sense that crossing it would change my life. I remember stepping over the threshold, into the coolness inside, into a timeless space where everything fell away. I don't remember much of my time in the Tomb, or how long I was inside, but I do remember coming outside and being given prasad by Nana Kher, being engulfed in his huge hug and his "Welcome Home" in my ear. With a flood of silent tears streaming down my face, I knew in that moment that I had found Home in a way that I had always longed for—my search and journey was finally over, and also just beginning; I was landing in my Self and in His embrace for the first time...

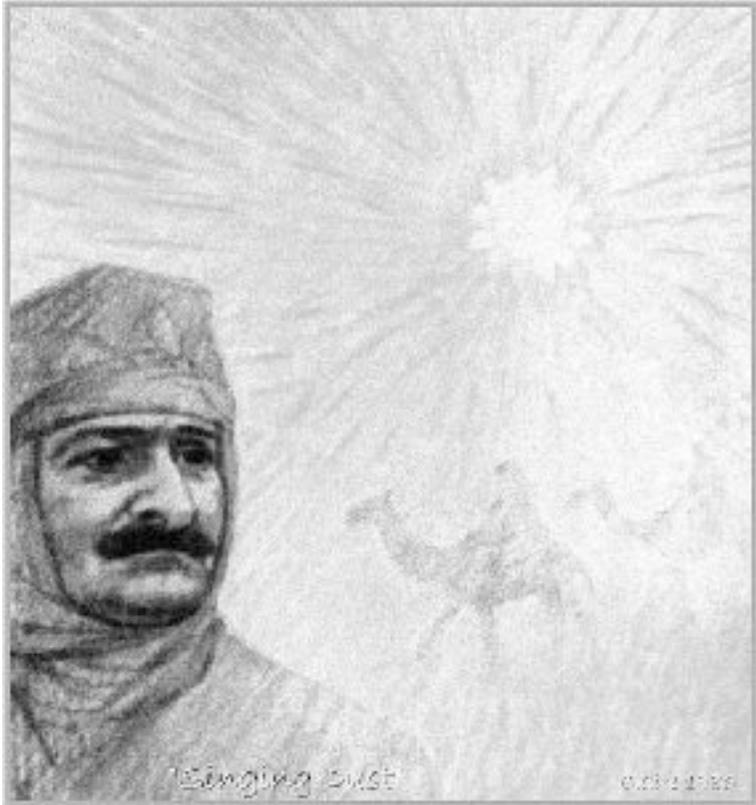
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Postscript: The completion of a circle

When I returned home after this trip, I told my mother that I knew that Baba had been very important to Mayme, as He was to me, and if she ever wanted to go to India I would take her. She didn't have a feeling for Baba then, though her old antagonism had softened some years earlier. After my father died a few years later, she took me up on the offer and we travelled together to India in November of 1988, arriving in Meherabad on what would have been my parents' thirty-fifth wedding anniversary. She was able to meet Mehera and Mani who put her at ease in their inimitable way. This felt like Baba completing a circle in my family, and I could see Mayme smiling.

I currently live in Weaverville, North Carolina, close to Asheville, with my wife Diane Tower-Jones. (We met in 1985 in London, after my first trip to India.) We are happy to be part of the growing Baba community here and to be close to Myrtle Beach. In addition to teaching Chinese medicine, I have also become involved with the Meher Archive Collective, an exciting Baba project dedicated to preserving and sharing Meher Baba's divine legacy.

101 Tales of Finding Love



Artwork © Claire Mataira

Mike Miller

101 Tales
of Finding Love

From Milwaukee
to Meherabad

by Mike Miller

101 Tales of Finding Love



Mike Miller, 1966, 1971 and 2019



Mike Miller

MY LIFE WITH BABA PROBABLY STARTED when I was very young, growing up as a good Catholic boy in working class Milwaukee. My father was very religious in his own way. My mother had her issues with the Church and kept them for decades, as only the Irish can. Perhaps that created a balance in my life or maybe a chink in the armor of self-righteousness that a religion can sometimes decree.

Fast forward to June 1965, when I had miraculously graduated from High School. I say 'miraculous' because by my senior year I had lost all interest in school, and only wanted to continue traveling and playing music with my band, which at the time, was one of the only interracial soul and Rhythm & Blues bands in Milwaukee. I was proud that my band got good enough to play in the downtown Mafia clubs, which were the best clubs to play in Milwaukee at that time. The Don seemed to like musicians and I heard that at one time he played the trumpet. I had a silly thought that if life had turned out differently for him, he would be running right along with the musicians. It was a lot of fun but later on in life I came to look on it as a huge waste of time, and the digging of a huge financial hole that was extremely hard to climb out of. But now I see it was perfectly designed by Baba to put me exactly where He wanted me.

July 1966 at nineteen years old, I was drafted into the Army, the only one of all my pals whom the Army would even consider drafting! Quite a shocking turn of events for a young pothead musician from Milwaukee. Eventually, I got into an army band stationed in Fort Dix, New Jersey, where I got to play with some very talented musicians. Fort Dix was a short bus ride to New York City, where I was fortunate enough to study with a famous jazz saxophonist. Instead of ending, drug use expanded in the army, probably because of

the nearness of big cities to the base. It didn't help matters at all by me buying pot from my teacher and bringing it back. Cocaine and LSD were starting to creep into the mix when I got my 'knock, knock.'

It was becoming clear to me that drugs were not taking me where I really wanted to be, so I would smoke more pot and get more depressed. There was something inside me that kept pushing me somewhere, but I had no idea where. Since leaving the Catholic Church far behind, I had given up religion but not God. In my way I was looking for Him every day even while totally stoned. I tried some other religions, like Baha'i and Scientology, but quickly decided that they weren't for me. There was a clarinet player in the band who was into Eastern mysticism, jazz and, of course, pot. Through him I learned about Krishna, the *Bhagavad Gita*, the *Upanishads* and the concepts of reincarnation, *sanskaras* and the Avatar. While going to great jazz clubs in New York, studying Eastern religions and smoking pot, we formed a fast friendship. He had a brother who lived in the West Village where all the action was, and our favorite place to get high with friends and other army bandsmen who, by the way, are all Baba lovers to this day. I remember thinking how ironic it was that after my lesson I would carry a big bag of pot to this apartment in my brief case with my music books. The week after hearing about Baba, I was carrying *God Speaks* and *The Perfect Master* in the same brief case! But I'm getting a little ahead of myself. Let me back up.

The person who first made me aware of Meher Baba was an old friend from Milwaukee. About the same time I was drafted, he moved to Miami and met some Baba followers. I don't think we were called 'lovers' yet. I had been writing to him about Krishna and not getting too much response, when out of the blue he sent me this wild letter about finding the Avatar, and included not only an unintelligible quote

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but a business size card with Baba's photo on it! My first thought was that he'd found some much better drugs than what I was using. It was not a good photo of Baba and some said it looked like Jerry Colonna, for those of us old enough to remember that comedian of old. I was not keen on the idea of finding out more about Baba, but my friend was insistent to the point of nagging. So I agreed to call a man named Ed Luck in New York.

My first try at reaching Ed got me John Bass, whom Ed and Irwin were living with at the time. If you've never met John, I'll tell that it's not for nothing that Baba made him door-man at the FredElla Baba meetings in New York. He scared the crap out of me and I hung up. With great courage and more nagging I tried again and got Ed this time. After a short explanation we agreed to meet at the front door of the Port Authority bus terminal, never thinking about the hundreds of people passing through those doors all day. The only descriptions we gave to each other were that I would be wearing a tan coat and he'd be wearing a gray coat! The feeling of ridiculousness soon washed away when I saw this guy with a big smile on his face, walking diagonal to the crowd, straight toward me and happened to be Ed Luck.

After many get-togethers and Baba books I could feel myself being reeled in. I'd given up all drug use even before I knew what Baba said about them because this felt like a wonderful healing process. So, back to the West Village. I showed up at the apartment with Baba books and they showed up with hash. "You mean you don't want any of this great hash, Mike?"

"No, I'm just going to sit in the bedroom and read this Baba book." Good thing because that night while reading *The Perfect Master*, I had my experience with Baba. It wasn't an experience of flashing lights or visions like I've heard some

people have had. A friend of mine who happened to be a strong Christian and just a Baba 'liker,' said Baba appeared to her and told her that He was Jesus. No, my experience was nothing like that. For a moment I could feel Baba's presence in that bedroom, and in that moment He let me know that He accepted my surrender. I was to find out much later on that my friends, who were supposed to be smoking hash, were actually having their own profound experience with Baba in that magical moment. But I'll let them tell their own story.

Speaking of magic, I want to say something of what I like to call the 'Baba Tidal Wave' that hit New York in the late sixties. At that time it seemed that the mere mention of Baba's name would 'turn on the lights' in people's consciousness. One of many examples that I remember is one where a few of us new Baba lovers were in a subway station, on our way to a FredElla Baba meeting happily chattering about our new love affair with the present day Avatar, when someone across the tracks on the other side of the station hollered out, "Hey, what's that name you said?" How he heard us in all the noise of a typical subway station was one of the many minor miracles that we were coming to expect in our early lives with Baba.

So we hollered back, "Meher Baba!" with big smiles on our faces.

'I've heard that name before. Wait, I'm coming with you.' So on we traveled to Carnegie Hall where the meetings were held at the time. At the door I looked in and saw what had become the most diverse group of human beings on the planet! I saw a long-haired hippy engrossed in conversation with someone who looked like a bank president. Every ethnicity, race, gender, nationality and age group was represented in our happy, motley crew! Baba's 'Ancient One' poster

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was hanging in every head shop in New York and with all these miraculous things happening, along with this overwhelming feeling of joy we all felt that this surely was the Manifestation. In was a huge group honeymoon. We were soon to learn that after the honeymoon part of our spiritual journey comes the work part. Oh, yeah...work!

But first, there's one miracle incident I'd like to mention. In the army band our job was to play for all military and social functions from award ceremonies to parades. It was on such a parade one hot summer day in Philadelphia that this event happened. The parade was stalled and we were left standing in the sun for about two hours in full dress uniforms, getting more irritated by the minute, when I heard someone shout, "Hey, Miller!" When I looked around I saw it was our chief warrant officer calling me. He was not a very pleasant man and didn't seem to like me too much. Nevertheless, the next words out of his mouth were, "Hey Miller. I still belong!" and out of his wallet he pulled out a 'Don't Worry, Be Happy' Baba card with Baba's smiling face. To clarify, I had told everyone who would stand still long enough in the band about Baba, but not the chief. He was pretty unapproachable, so this event left not only me, but the whole band speechless. Baba lover or not!

After I was discharged from the army I went to Miami to visit my friend from Milwaukee to celebrate. Until that time, other than the army, I had never been out of Wisconsin with the exception of a few road trips with my band, so Miami was a mind blower! So tropical and lush with night blooming jasmine and so many other things that you won't find in Milwaukee. After enjoying life in Miami for a while, it soon became clear that the bills never stop and I still had to eat. Being a musician I was pretty used to being broke, but this was pushing the limit, and besides there was talk of going to India for His *darshan*.

So, off I went to Miami Beach to look for gigs. There are a lot of stories involved in that endeavor but I'll stick with the big ones in the interest of brevity and good taste. The Newport Hotel lobby was a meeting place for musicians, actors, gangsters and con artists. In other words, a heck of a lot of fun! I made it a regular stop on my gig hunt. The nightclub always had three bands and at least one was famous. On one of my stops, a Motown act was playing, and as usual, the band was hanging out in the lobby between shows. I heard them talking about how the star fired the saxophonist and they couldn't find a replacement because no one could read the charts. Well, I just got out of the army band so my reading was pretty good, so I stepped up and told one of the guys that I was available. The guitar player took me backstage to meet the road manager, who told me to come for an audition the next day. The charts were a little difficult but I passed the audition and got the gig. We finished the gig on Miami Beach and they were going back on the road. I had no other work on the horizon and *darshan* was becoming a reality, so I asked the manager, could I go with them, and he said yes. Baba was still in the body at this time but in very bad health, as we were hearing from India. I felt an urgent need to be ready to go when the news came.

Life on the road with a Motown star was a lot different from the traveling I had done so far. For no other reason than to set the stage, I'll say that I was the only white guy in the band. I was accepted and treated well by all the band members and protected in one instance. That happened in Chicago at the Regal Theater on the south side. The Regal was Chicago's Apollo and all the stars of soul and R&B played there. I have many stories about that gig and I promised to keep it short, but I have to say that famous people in the community would always show up at the Regal like Jesse Jackson, Mohammad Ali and James Brown! The female vocalist in our band was close with James Brown and

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a few of the songs in her show were his hits. In the middle of one of them he came on stage and gave her a big kiss and the place went crazy! James Brown was at the height of his career with the hit, "Say It Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud," which the crowd began to chant. It got pretty wild. It should be said that some of the young people who frequented the Regal did not always exhibit their best behavior, and that was the case after James Brown's appearance. When we were ready to go, the guitar player stuck his head out the stage door and saw what he pretty much expected, a sea of wild, worked-up people in a near frenzy at the stage door. Joe, the guitar player and good friend, organized the band to form around me and out we went in a flying wedge to our car and safety.

I'm finally getting to the reason why I wrote about that event. While waiting to go on stage for some show, the whole band was sitting and talking and it finally came up. Someone asked me why I came on the road with them, and without holding back I told them it was to earn money to get to India to see Meher Baba. I explained who Baba is and they found great humor in that and thought I was crazy. It was time to go back and the guys were filing out when the female vocalist grabbed my arm and said very seriously, "After you see that man, you come and see me, okay?" I said I would which, sadly, was a promise I didn't keep. The next time I saw her was in the movie "Lady Sings The Blues" with Diana Ross. She had a big part in it and it looked like her career was taking off.

Summer was ending and so were the gigs for the Motown band. Unfortunately, a lot of the members had developed serious drug issues and the only ones invited back were the guitar player and myself. I was honored by the opportunity but felt I had bigger fish to fry. Back in Miami with not much to show for my big Motown experience, except some

great stories of being on the road and rubbing shoulders with some famous people, it was time to start thinking about *darshan*. However, it wasn't long after getting back that we got the bombshell news that Baba had dropped His body and *darshan* was off! I remember the extreme disappointment that some people had, but not me. I felt that this was some sort of test or step and that all this waiting and yearning wasn't just suddenly all for nothing. I'm happy to say that I was right, because after a period of time we got news from India that the *darshan* was going on as Baba had planned.

There were four of us who traveled to India, and I'll skip a lot of crazy stories on how we got the money for our tickets and got our poor souls to New York. Perhaps in another story. I remember on the plane to India sitting across the aisle from Darwin Shaw's daughter, Leatrice. We were having a nice conversation when she said that a lot of people always ask what it was like to meet Baba. What she wanted to know was how I thought it would be for me meeting Baba. (We were told and believed that Baba would be present at this *darshan*). I said that I had heard a lot of other people's stories of meeting Baba in person, but I was going to try to put all that aside and have my own experience of meeting Him. She thought that was a very good idea.

Zippering through all the events and stories of traveling around in the heat of India with two hundred culture-shocked Westerners, I'll get to the important stuff. I will say, though, that one could only imagine what a massive task this was for the *mandali*. Baba's *darshan* was to take place at Guruprasad, but that wasn't where I got what I came for. Not to make light of the Guruprasad experience, because it was a beautiful place and getting to meet the *mandali* was quite powerful. The four of us hooligans got to spend some time alone with Mani because we took a rickshaw from the

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hotel instead of waiting for the bus. All I can remember from that exchange was how much she looked like Baba.

I don't remember what day of the *darshan* it was that we were loaded up on the buses and taken to see Pumpkin House, Babajan's Tomb, Meherabad and Meherazad in one day! At least I think it was one day. It's not just that my memory has become foggy now, because I do remember being a little foggy-headed then, but here's what I remember clearly. At Baba's *Samadhi* we were allowed to go in and bow down at Baba's crypt. There was no cover on it at that time and we bowed our heads down inside of it. When I did that I felt sort of an internal tap, tap in my head. I mentally asked, "What was that?" and got an answer, "It's something for later. Don't think about it." Once again, not the flashing lights and visions experience, but one that would set the course of my life to this day.

Music has been my *sadhana* this lifetime. It hasn't been an easy one, but it sure has been interesting. The music business is one where you can suffer deep wounds to your heart because to be good at it, you have to put your heart on the line always. Recently, I took the time to admit that I was carrying around a lot of anger and disappointment, and realized it was time to make a big decision. Do I want to keep these deep-rooted grudges, some of which I had been harboring for years, or will I tell Baba that I forgive everyone and everything that I feel has hurt me, and have Baba's Love instead. I've made my decision.

AVATAR MEHER BABA KI JAI !

Today, I'm living in Milwaukee with my wife Helen, the girl of my dreams and spiritual companion. We take great ple-

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sure in getting together with our wonderful Baba group. Once a year we visit the Meher Spiritual Center in Myrtle Beach and I get to play music with Baba musicians from around the world.

I'm performing, writing and producing music here and feel that after some shaky and questionable periods of my life I am now exactly where Baba wants me.

Michael Morice

101 Tales
of Finding Love

O Yes...of Course

by Michael Morice

101 Tales of Finding Love



Michael, landlady Tia Josepha, Jack,
and Tia's sister, 1968/9

Michael and Lisa, Amartithi, India, 2019



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THE MORE I LOOK, the more the pattern of my journey seems to stretch back, and out, into places I would never have suspected of carrying the germ of seeking that was eventually to take me all the way to the Threshold of the Beloved. My story starts in India, where I was born towards the end of the war. My father was a tea planter and, following the custom of families of the British Raj, our parents sent their children to boarding schools at an early age. The first one was a convent school in India run by Irish Catholic nuns, to which I was dispatched at the age of five, with my elder sister who had already been subjected to the regime of nine-month terms a day's journey from home.

These long, seemingly endless, separations are highly relevant to my first remembered experience concerning the nature of existence and the nature of eternity. Seated cross-legged on the floor in a semi circle, we five-six-year olds were given a lesson that I would never forget. The nun, Mother Baptista, had a very large calendar-like affair with folding back pages, which was hung on the front of a blackboard. On these leaves were graphic colour pictures relating to Old and New Testament stories from the Bible. One of them was a picture of hell: iron gratings laid across the earth's surface, and beneath the gratings raged a furnace of red and yellow flames, from within which devils (perhaps with pitchforks) leered out at us with shining eyes full of rabid anticipation. Mother Baptista spoke as follows: "This, children, is a picture of hell. This is where you will go if you commit a mortal sin, and you will need to remember that hell is for ever and ever and ever and...She repeated those last two words enough times (with her Irish brogue it was "evurrandevurrand, etc.") to awaken in me a vision of never-ending torment reaching into eternity, a version of which I retain to this day. This vision was all the more powerful

because of our endless waiting for term to end, or for our mothers to make one of their rare visits. For much of the nine months there was little formal teaching and we had plenty of time to ponder the meaning of ‘for ever,’ and that of mortal sin, which was always vague and could be something as small as a deliberate lie.

Over the years, and especially since my coming to Baba, this experience has gradually transformed itself in my mind from one which could not have been anything but persecuting, into one of appreciation of a metaphysical conundrum: the meaning of time, and of eternity and the infinite, which are actually beyond time and beyond the understanding of our limited minds. Mother Baptista got it wrong, especially at the conceptual level!

I had an early fascination for Jesus as represented in an old book with beautiful illustrations from the Gospels, which I would look at with my father while sitting on his lap; but nothing of a religious nature troubled me for many years. My English boarding schools had much (Anglican) chapel attendance and hymn singing with incense and genuflection, which by the time I was eighteen had put me off religion, most probably I felt for life.

My public (private secondary) school had been founded for sons of the Church of England clergy, and my father and uncles, being sons of an Anglican vicar, had been there before me. The cleric who arrived when I was about fifteen, to replace the heavy drinking but well-liked departing chaplain, was from an organization called SPCK—Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge. Being from the political arm he was, in the opinion of many boys, on a mission to recruit likely looking candidates for the Church.

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At age sixteen I returned from a skiing trip run by a reverend, in which we had belted out hymns in our Austrian Pension, and had been regaled with talks—‘fight the good fight’—on the Christian way of life. After returning to school, I must have been observed to be reading a booklet of sayings from the Bible. These were to be read, one a day, before lights out in the dormitory. Before long, I started to notice our chaplain, who up to now had addressed barely a word to me in over a year, looking at me with a beneficent smile as he passed me in the corridors.

The big word when it came to the question of future holy orders was ‘VOCATION.’ If you had it, that was that, and your career was assured. ‘Having a vocation’ was presented as a fact of life from which there was no escape, and there was no choice but to answer the call. I remember going through a period of fearful dread as to whether I myself had one, and that I was now on the chaplain’s radar.

Another ingredient in this struggle with myself concerned my devotion, verging on obsession, to a song sung by the Negro Spiritual singer, Mahalia Jackson: “In The Upper Room” (with Jesus). This I would play in my room in my grandmother’s house on my portable battery driven gramophone, and repeatedly in my common room at school until it drove other boys mad. The typical question that hounded me was whether this was more evidence of my ‘vocation.’ To my mind as I write, it was a vocation of sorts—me calling to Baba or Him calling to me. When I paid my first visit to the Centre in Myrtle Beach many years later, having flown over specially to be there, the room to which I was assigned was ‘The Upper Room.’ I like to think this was no mere coincidence. But that is jumping ahead a long way.

My dread of being trapped in a vocation had a favourable outcome. Sensing that certain eyes were on me, I brought

the Bible reading to a halt, and my attendance at Holy Communion dwindled to the odd early morning descent to the chapel—the taste of sweet wine before breakfast was always a draw. By the time I left school at eighteen, I was of a definitely secular frame of mind.

Unfortunately, or perhaps with hindsight fortunately, my boarding schools had a far-reaching effect on me apart from questions of religion or vocation. Unlike my ‘prep’ school (age seven to thirteen) there was very little to like about my ‘public’ school (age thirteen to eighteen), unless you were happy with terrible food, indifferent teaching, a complete lack of physical privacy (no doors on the sit-down toilets, enormous dormitories, communal baths and showers), an obsession with sport and with ‘school rules.’ For any infringement of these you could be made by prefects to write out forty word-perfect lines using a fountain pen (no smudges or crossings out) from the lengthy printed booklet of rules with which each new boy was presented on his first day. Perhaps worst of all there was a completely impersonal approach to boys on the part of teachers and matrons and domestic staff, to the point of making you feel the world was devoid of grown-ups who knew anything about you, or had any interest in you. I would guess that one of the main obsessions of the rather joyless micro-managing Headmaster, was the eradication of any chance of homosexual activity, or for that matter, masturbation.

I found a tenuous way through this teenage *rite de passage* mainly by way of polite non-participation in the spirit of what the school stood for (‘don’t ask what the school can give to you, but rather what you can give to the school’). The culmination of this attitude was my refusal to enforce school rules in my final two terms when I was a prefect, for which I was popular, even admired by some and considered weak by others. This spirit of non-participation persisted

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for several years after I left school, and I look back on it as a factor, maybe the factor, that dominated the years leading up to my hearing about Meher Baba. And which, in ways harder to explain, set the stage for my coming to Him. Perhaps I was one who needed that particular kind of discipline. Perhaps also the sense of alienation, the absence of intimacy, the lack of a strong sense of identity and close family life were in some way necessary. Perhaps they precipitated the lack of involvement, the emptiness and despair that might have been needed to make me open and available to such a One as Meher Baba.

A year's enrollment in a course on 'French Civilization For Foreigners' at the Sorbonne in Paris introduced me to another world—a bohemian array of cafes on the Left Bank a stone's throw from the Sorbonne, where interesting-looking people who didn't appear to do much work hung out for most of the day and night. A world of beautiful young women who fluttered like exotic birds on the sidewalks of the Boulevard St. Germain. A world of Gauloise cigarettes and coffee, and jazz dives with authentic black American musicians. The whiff of cannabis in the dives and, in those days always, the slightly shocking whiff to my English nostrils of garlic as you brushed past people in the metro.

My involvement was little more than that of rapt witness and contemplator of a way of life of which I had no previous inkling, a startling revelation after the monastic existence of the foregoing thirteen years. In order to partake more fully in this way of life, at least in the witnessing of it, I dropped out of the course at the university half way through.

Back in London, for the next four years I attempted a poor imitation of the life that had held me spellbound in Paris. There was no university, no job with any 'prospects,' no sense of direction, no advice that seemed worth listening to.

My parents were still living in India, coming back to England once a year in the summer. It would not be accurate to say we were by that time completely estranged. Much of the intention of my shiftless way of life was, in hindsight, aimed at them. In their faces, calculated (unconsciously at least) to make them wring their hands in despair. My father felt he had discharged his main obligation in giving me a private education, and that my behaviour was selfish and ungrateful. He may not have been wrong: there is only a fine line that divides selfishness, fecklessness and righteous anger.

I did mainly low level and manual jobs, one of the more memorable of which was one I did for the best part of a year cleaning houses. In this I gained a glimpse of peoples' sometimes wretched lives in rooming houses, as well as those in the parts of town where people lived civilized, cultured lives, and whose occupants, spurred by curiosity or kindness, were sometimes as interested in sitting me down to talk as in getting me to clean for them.

But all was definitely not well. An emptiness began to open up in me, of which I was aware, but which I felt unable to shift or to fill. There was no sense at all that life, existence here on earth, had any meaning beyond the search for sensation to fill the widening void. Depression, slowly but surely, was enveloping me like a cloud, with sufficient occasional glimpses of apparent sunlight to give me, and others, a false reassurance that I was really okay.

And then, in the midst of depression, perhaps in the moments when I was too depressed to rush off in search of the next physical sensation, and probably spurred on by desperation, a new branch of thought began to grow in the emptiness. Actually, it wasn't 'new' because I knew it had always been there, but it became strangely insistent as time passed. It was a conviction that 'God,' in the sense of a presiding

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higher intelligence, must exist. But in which case, I asked myself, where was He and why didn't He show Himself? I remember thinking, in fact, that God HAD to exist, or else I was done for.

In the times that I was not too down and out and negative and nihilistic to be able to pick up a book, I did actually read a fair amount. Two by Herman Hesse, *Siddhartha* and *Journey To The East*, had a particular effect on me, a combination of fascination and a sense of hope, and also familiarity with the subject matter, although where this all came from I never stopped to ask myself until much much later. These two books had related themes, that of searching for and arriving at the realization of his own Godhood (*Siddhartha*) and in the latter, the elusive search for a living spiritual master, the metaphorical 'journey to the east.' Gurdjieff also had a strong appeal. His *Meetings With Remarkable Men* in particular conveyed a sense of high adventure on the inner planes that I found exciting. (I now have a strong suspicion that I didn't read him until after I came to Baba!)

In the second half of the 1960s in London there was a lot of 'spirituality' going around. A major social revolution was in the air, and for many this was really a spiritual revolution. By courtesy of the Beatles, the Maharishi was making a very big splash in the news, and transcendental meditation was suddenly on the scene and highly fashionable. I tried it, was given a mantra by an initiate, and lasted a fortnight. This doesn't sound very promising but the main point I'm trying to make here is that, alongside my negative self, another person began to emerge, one who was open to the idea that somewhere there was an answer to the 'meaning of life,' along with that growing conviction that 'God' existed.

The idea that there was a point to existence in animal or human form was still an abstract concept, which needed the

spark of experience to really bring it alive for me. However, I remember thinking more than once that were I ever to discover this point I would give myself to it wholeheartedly, even dedicate myself to a cause. I knew I was in a hole from which I couldn't climb out under my own steam, and I remember myself helplessly waiting for someone or something to pull me out. All in all, my fear of involvement in life, and my depression which took the form of angry self-destructive rebellion mixed with abject despair, was balanced by what I would like to have called existential *angst* and a healthy curiosity. This curiosity was nameless in the beginning, but by the time I first heard of Baba, it was asking what had become quite a loud and insistent question.

1968 was the first of two crucial years, the year I first heard of Meher Baba. I had spent several months on the Island of Ibiza in the Mediterranean and had recently returned to London and was staying with a close friend, Sebastian Baker. He had casually mentioned to me that he had 'found a guru' whose name was Meher Baba. At the time I paid him little heed, not realizing he was my first vital link to the One who would permeate and inspire the rest of my existence.

Three 'events' stand out in my mind from a three-month period in the late summer of that year. I had gone to a talk at a place called the Arts Lab in London. Here I found myself talking to a couple of young men whom one could describe as 'hip entrepreneurs.' They wore well-cut if slightly sharp dark suits with rather narrow dark ties, set off by fashionable zip-up boots (arranged inside the trouser leg), and had salon-cut hair only slightly shorter than that which was in style at the time in the scruffier crowd that surrounded them. The subject was gurus in their various shapes and forms. I said that I was interested in finding one, but that the image of a heavily garlanded guru with a white beard

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sitting on a platform with incense wafting all around didn't attract me.

I wanted to find someone who was down to earth, who spoke plain English, was approachable in an everyday sort of way. One of the said entrepreneurial types looked thoughtful, spent a few moments looking off into the distance as if he might be flipping through his mental filing system. Then he looked back at me and said, "Well, there is Meher Baba..." almost as if he were giving me a customized recommendation, one of many he might have made depending on whom he was talking to. I sometimes think of this man and hope he was rewarded for helping me on my way. Whether I consciously made a connection with the name that Sebastian must already have mentioned, I am not sure. To tell the truth, I don't think I was making too many meaningful connections at the time because cannabis use was a frequent habit, which was probably having the effect of weakening my synapses while acting as a rather unsatisfactory anaesthetic for mental pain!

A short time later, at this same 'Arts Lab' venue, I was to attend with Sebastian a talk by Alan Cohen, the Harvard psychologist who had worked with Timothy Leary, and who was spreading a 'no drugs' message on Meher Baba's behalf. His talk was all about Baba and drugs, but still His name was making no discernible dent on my conscious mind. Shortly after that I had what I still think of as the defining experience of my life, but failed at the time to see this as coming from Baba. It happened in the following way.

Someone had given me a powerful liquid amphetamine, which I had decided to pour into my afternoon cup of tea. The next few hours had me spinning on foot all around west London, ending up in a cinema on Westbourne Grove called The International Film Theatre. For the price of a single

ticket, this place showed a succession of old art house films going on late into the night and which ended early on the following day. By the time I climbed into bed it was well past dawn, and instead of falling asleep I began to experience the aftermath of this ‘high’—a truly devastating crash into the depths of dark despair. I felt myself up against a hard, cold wall in a mental and emotional *cul de sac*. My whole life up to then presented itself to me in its bleakest, most miserable form, a feeling so palpable that I began to writhe around in an effort to get out of my body, as if the body itself were the thing which harboured the devastation.

As I did so, my gaze was drawn towards the window of the room, from which a beam of sunlight was shining through a chink in the curtains. On this beam of light came a message, conveyed as if on the undulations of gentle waves, silent at first, but translating itself as it went on into words in my head conveying the strength of love. I will never grasp the exact words, if they even existed in coherent form as actual words, but my limited mind remembers something along the lines that “true love was the most powerful force in the world, that there was nothing that could stand in its way, that it would overcome all weaknesses, all obstacles...”

A formalised version of these words appeared before me one day relatively recently in a quote I saw in a Baba calendar lying on my desk. *True love is matchless in majesty, it has no parallel in power, and there is no darkness it cannot dispel.* These words, which I’m sure I wasn’t reading for the first time, struck me with something of the impact of a priceless discovery. For years I had been reaching for them, or something like them, to convey what I had ‘heard’ that morning in my bedroom in September 1968. However even they, while carrying the force of Baba’s own words, don’t in themselves really convey the sheer majesty and kindness and compassion—an eagle soaring on the airwaves as much as

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waves of the sea gently lapping against the shore, which bathed me as I melted into my bed with tears rolling down my face. In those moments I had not just the conviction, but also the knowledge, that all was well and would always be so.

I remember little else—there is little else to remember—other than a very early phone call from Sebastian, who had first mentioned Baba's name to me several weeks earlier, to tell me he had passed a sleepless night and just seemed to want to talk. I think we had been slightly estranged from each other in the days leading up to this call, and it felt like a welcome reconciliation. I remember telling him that I had decided to go back to Ibiza, where, as I mentioned above, I had already spent several months earlier that year. In fact this wasn't really my own decision, because it came as an immediate and incontrovertible addition, almost an order, seamlessly joined to the 'message of love' and its aftermath. I didn't stop to ask myself why I was going back to a place I thought I had left for good, and with some relief. Simply, that was where I was going, and with the least possible delay.

My first consideration was how to get to Ibiza without spending much of my scarce financial resources, and without hitchhiking. This I had already done more than once, but now the prospect of several nights on the road, and an overnight boat trip from Barcelona, seemed laborious and time-consuming. I remember feeling an urgency in all of this but, typically for me at that time, was not stopping to analyze it. Very soon I received a call from an American Ibiza acquaintance who was in London and asked me to meet him at a certain casino in the West End. I had no familiarity at all with casinos, but went with a five-pound note and some change, thinking that I might put my note on a

lucky number. If I won, I reasoned, I could finance my trip, and more; if I lost, I still wouldn't quite be broke.

At the casino I ran into another Ibiza acquaintance quite unconnected to the man I was meant to meet. He had recently flown from Ibiza to London, and had in his pocket the return half of his ticket which he didn't intend to use, and which he sold me for my five-pound note.

This was the first of a string of 'coincidences' which led me to the person I clearly was meant to meet in Ibiza. I say 'clearly' only with hindsight, as it was only with hindsight that I connected up the flow of events following my experience of 'love in the depths of despair' and saw a pattern not of my own making. A pattern bearing the stamp of a Will that was bearing me to where I had to be in order for the rest of my life's story to unfold.

Gatwick had been developed in the 1960s as London's second airport, and by the time I flew from there for the first time, the distances you had to walk from check-in to your plane were larger than I expected. I lingered in a bookstore, browsing, buying newspapers and comics before making my way to the boarding gate, to find that I had missed the plane! The departure lounge was yawningly empty, but a staff lady at the desk must have seen my completely crestfallen look, and have taken pity. She said, "Hang on, let's see if we can get it to come back." She picked up her phone and called the captain of the plane, saying, "We've got a passenger left behind here, could you come back and get him?... Okay, see you in a moment."

The plane, which had been making towards the runway in the distance, duly came whistling into view, a truly wonderful sight. It was a BA 111 belonging to British United Airways, the best plane I have ever flown on. A mechanical

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flight of steps appeared from the belly of the plane, and my beautiful saviour accompanied me across the tarmac towards the steps, at the foot of which a smiling female flight attendant was waiting to greet me. My only articles of luggage were a knapsack and what was known as an 'Ibiza basket,' made of straw woven on the island and open at the top, with long shoulder straps made of the same material.

The plane's jet engines were creating quite a wind, and as we approached, my newspapers and comics flew out of the basket and scattered over the concrete. In a moment all three of us were racing around collecting the papers (I was later told that no take-off would have been allowed with loose paper on the ground and in the air!), and somehow, with amazing grace and good humour, my two angels packed me onto the plane—where I was greeted by a full load of passengers with incredulous smiles on their faces. This was definitely a holiday crowd.

To say that I felt like royalty when the plane came back, and the uniformed young lady accompanied me across the apron, would scarcely be an exaggeration. Nor would it be an exaggeration to say that the ensuing fiasco with the papers sent me plummeting into confusion and embarrassment, only to be uplifted once again by the sweetness of the cabin staff and the good natured laughter of the passengers.

I arrived on the airport bus in the ancient City of Ibiza that evening, with nowhere to stay the night. My destination was the neighbouring town of Santa Eulalia, where I knew of a house where I could stay, but it was too late to get there that evening, and hotels and pensions in town were notoriously busy and full right up to the end of September. As I sat at a harbour cafe wondering what to do, a man came up and greeted me. We knew each other by sight, but had never talked. He held out a key, told me the address of his apart-

ment nearby, said I could stay the night and should leave the key inside when I left, and made off into the night.

The following afternoon in Santa Eulalia, I was sitting at a table at an open air cafe packed to overflowing with many of the young that were attracted to Ibiza from all over Europe and North America. While fitting in with this crowd superficially, I didn't feel one of them, though for all I knew many of the twenty-somethings there were just as lost, just as eagerly searching for something to give meaning to their lives. All I knew was that I didn't identify myself with this or any set of people or any movement, though I was almost fatally attracted to the lotus-eating life of a Mediterranean island where you could live on a pound or two a day.

On the other side of the square, a small group caught my eye, one member of which was looking my way meaningfully. He stood out because he looked older than the others, perhaps in his early thirties. My first impression was of someone who, in contrast to most people there, looked like a proper grown up, worldly wise, though perhaps a bit cynical. This was Jack, an Italian American actor and sometime theatre director from New York City. He had recently arrived from Paris via the south of France, where he had been leading a group of people in theatrical exercises and experiments modeled on the theories of Antonin Artaud, an exponent of the so-called 'Theatre of Cruelty.'

In this context, the word cruelty did not carry the sense of deliberate harm. As Jack explained it, his exercises were meant to 'draw out the id' in members of his troupe with a view to creating something that came 'more from the gut than from the head.' The upshot of his experiment was that the whole thing had backfired. Members of the group reacted far more barbarously than Jack had intended, and began to turn their violence on each other, then came for him as

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the instigator of their fury, and he had fled the scene. Here in Ibiza he was in good company, the island harbouring at that time many people on the run from something—the law, personal demons, marriages, relationships, people out to get you.

My meeting Jack was the culmination (in hindsight) of the sequence of ‘coincidences’ that followed my experience in my bedroom of ‘love in the depths of despair.’ He would have seemed an unlikely candidate for this distinction, since he was certainly no guru, had no overt spiritual inclinations, was in fact someone who worked the dark side of human relations to the exclusion of the positive, or so it seemed. He appeared to have a clear grasp of human weaknesses, and looked as if he judged his fellow beings largely on those lines. This took him a considerable way in being able to cut to the bone in his dealings with the shadier elements in the Ibiza expatriate community, but it did leave much to be desired on the side of tenderness and affection which, paradoxically, it turned out that he craved.

Within a short time I was sharing with Jack a remote farmhouse that had no running water or electricity. At first there had been quite a noisy crowd sleeping on various surfaces of the house, which steadily thinned out as autumn set in, until just Jack and I were left. Sebastian had been there early on, and my one memory is of him sitting on the flat roof reading a volume of Meher Baba’s *Discourses*. Downstairs a party was going on, with Aretha Franklin being played at top volume in a haze of cannabis smoke. Clearly, because I remember it so vividly, I had taken note of the title of his book, but mainly I remember thinking he was missing out on a lot of fun! It feels to me that at this point Baba was as close to me as my own breath, but at the same time hiding behind a flimsy veil that was not ready to be torn down, in fact not ready for many months to come. When Sebastian wrote to

me the following February to tell me that Baba had died ('dropping His body' was not to be found in my phrasebook), my main reaction was one almost of relief that I could now strike Him off my list of potential gurus. I concluded that Sebastian had chosen the wrong guru and would have to start all over again.

Meanwhile at the farmhouse my winter with Jack unfolded, with Jack paying the tiny rent out of his meagre monthly Trust Fund check. As my own even more meagre funds ran out, I became dependent on him for means to live, a situation which gave him considerable power over me, and which was not to my liking, though I could have left if I'd wanted to. On the positive side Jack was highly educated, well-read, an accomplished musician; he had a broad knowledge of classical music and jazz, with a large record collection which he added to when he spotted something worth buying in Ibiza Town.

He was a fluent French speaker and brought with him not just the aroma of New York, but that of Paris too—and here we had some common ground. Looking back at my state of disarray in the dark years after leaving school ('high school' to American readers), I can see that, despite being a reader, I was in many ways culturally as well as spiritually starved: in Jack I had a teacher, at least for the cultural side of things. From the time of meeting we did have an instant rapport which took us a long way before things got difficult. Jack said that he had spotted my face in the crowd because he saw in me a 'fellow freak'! I remember feeling quite proud to be recognized as a member of something, perhaps an exclusive tribe that I never knew existed, even though I never understood what he really meant, and I wasn't apparently interested in getting him to explain himself more clearly.

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So, over the winter of 1968/69 I was getting an education of sorts in the arts and literature that felt intensive, and came to feel too much so. I began to feel I was dancing too much to Jack's tune—I had somehow become his 'project'; someone he needed to dominate, even devour, in a non-sexual, cerebralized sort of way.

In this isolated hothouse atmosphere it was not surprising that we would eventually clash. More than once we nearly came to blows, and perhaps the ingestion of large amounts of cannabis helped keep a peace of sorts. The previous tenant of the house had been a professional dealer who was currently in jail on the Spanish mainland, and we had duly helped ourselves to the large sack of hashish that we discovered he had left behind.

With Jack breathing down my neck, I had two possible courses of action: to leave, or to dig deeper within myself, to discover some hidden resources I had neglected. In the face of Jack's scathing, well-aimed criticisms about the way I had so far led my life, I got down to writing in my room with the door closed, sometimes locked.

What I discovered was much satisfaction in the act of writing, independently of what the results might be. Writing anything at first—garbled poetry, short stories. Eventually a poem did emerge that Jack approved of, admired enough to set to music after I had left. A later effort, never completed, was a long anthropomorphic story inspired by my own observations of occupants of the henhouse just across the yard. It was about the (actual) wild ginger kitten that lived in the henhouse and was befriended by the rooster, who would put a protective wing over him at feeding time, allowing him to share his food and shielding him from the jealous pecking hens. Some might even say that this story reflected

my situation with Jack, right down to the exclusion of women from our winter tale!

If my discovery of my creativity was the main thing I was to take away from that winter, I would have gratefully accepted that as well worth the difficulties of living at close quarters with this strange, lonely, intense man. However, there were deeper reasons for my being there and meeting Jack, of which at the time I had not the vaguest idea: some things I needed to face in myself, quite independently of the karmic connection I might have had, must have had, with him.

Readers will recall the theatrical activity that Jack had been engaged in just before his flight to Ibiza—the ‘stirring of the id,’ which had led him into trouble, even to the point of being at risk of physical attack. Jack had a talent in this department. Suffice it to say that my own ‘id’ did get well and truly stirred up over the course of the winter. Jack routinely managed to say things so close to the bone that I found myself becoming explosive, not just with rage and potential violence, but also with an uninhibited way of expressing myself that I was discovering as if for the first time, and which Jack approved of when it was not aimed too directly at him.

Sometime in the spring, it was over. There was a ‘last straw’ moment that sent me storming out of the house in a rage, not for the first time. This time a new, more dispassionate mood set in and I felt the end of my attachment, both to Jack and to the situation we were in, and I knew it was time to return to England. I had no money, and I was not about to ask Jack for the train fare home, but I had an old broken down motorcycle someone had left me the previous autumn, and which a mechanically minded bike enthusiast bought for far more than it was worth.

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While I may still have believed that there was something distressingly dark about Jack, we didn't part on bad terms. My going even seemed to have a positive effect on him because after I was gone he threw himself into his music and formed a chamber group composed of various expatriates living in his part of the island. He also wrote asking sincerely for my forgiveness for the way he felt he had treated me, which he believed had caused me to leave.

When I went to see him three years later he was living in the same house in a rather encrusted state, outraged that I would no longer share a joint with him, and quite scathing of the influence—namely Meher Baba—that had caused me to give up drugs. I left with the feeling that he had fallen into the same trap as the mainly American Trust Fund recipients, or 'fundies' as they were called, that the island held in its spell, whose existence became marked by inertia and loss of motivation.

I never saw nor heard from Jack again, neither did I think of him very often until I came to write this account. Then, I found myself firmly reminded that he played a big part in my coming to Baba, a part I had never properly acknowledged. Coming to Ibiza and meeting Jack could never have been just a 'two-way deal' between Baba and me: really it must have been a 'three-way deal' that included Jack. In which case, what was in it for him? Remembering his scathing attitude to Baba when I last saw him, and knowing more now of Baba's ways, I suspect that Baba might have welcomed such warmth of feeling and might even have been making secretive inroads into Jack's inner man well before I met him. While writing this I started to wonder what became of him: had he stayed stuck on Ibiza, or had he managed to get away in time to have a life? I found some answers on the Internet, in an obituary written after his death in 2015 at the age of seventy-seven.\

In Ibiza he had found a music teacher who had recognized his talent and encouraged him to study at the Music Conservatory in The Hague. He had ended up back in New York City as President of the Guild of Recorder Players, a noted teacher and performer, and an organizer of an annual Early Music Festival.

When I read this I had an interesting reaction: one of gladness, almost of pride, for Jack, and of relief that I had not after all left him in the soup for good; and too, a sense of gratitude to Baba. Two other details caught my eye. A photo of Jack at about the age I was when I met him, which bore an uncanny resemblance to me at the same age. The other was a small item that left me with eyes open wide: Jack's birthday was May 24th, also that of my future wife, whom I was to meet on returning to England! Also the date of Baba's car accident in Oklahoma in 1952.

Jack and I were two souls thrown together for reasons beyond our ken, and under conditions that had stirred up a winter storm. I constantly seem to return in my mind to how 'dark' things felt, mainly embodied in the person of Jack, but helped by the darkness of the candle lit house, the memory of shadows everywhere after dark. However, in leaving when I did, I can see that I was not just freed of the personal links that had drawn me to Jack in the first place. While Jack's 'darkness' loomed over our existence sometimes to an unbearable degree, much more importantly, when I left I was turning away from a darkness in myself, sufficiently at least to turn towards the light and embark on the next phase of my life.

When I arrived back in England I remember having an extraordinary sense of lightness and optimism. I saw a lot of Sebastian and through him met some of those who had

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come to Baba in recent times. I particularly remember noticing a peculiar light (talking of darkness and light) in the eyes of those who had recently returned from the 1969 *darshan* in Poona. While it would have been true to say that I was now in Meher Baba's force field without knowing it, thoughts about Baba's relevance to me personally were still remote, if they existed at all.

So, I went through the very warm and sunny summer of 1969 in a rather happy post-Jack, post-Ibiza bubble. Unattached, insouciant of the gathering Baba storm around me, happy to observe Sebastian and his deepening involvement with 'meetings' that carried a vague allure without giving me the wish to go to one myself. During this period I even had a glimpse of a man who was soon to play a large part in my life for the next fifteen years. He had come to Sebastian's house for dinner with a friend, both of whom Sebastian had referred to rather cryptically in passing as 'Sufis.' He had made it plain that I wasn't invited, and I was not even introduced when I walked into the room the worse for wear from smoking pot. Don Stevens—for this was he—did not look up, in fact kept his eyes very firmly down on the table in front of him.

Not long after arriving back in England I was living rent-free at Sebastian's place. I had a lucrative job by night as a waiter at a very busy restaurant and was doing door-to-door interviews by day for a market research firm, making enough money to save for a major trip somewhere. Kathmandu or Kashmir were possibilities, but New York had an even stronger attraction. Beneath my superficial veneer of free-wheeling buoyancy, in the latter half of the summer a quiet desperation was beginning to build up in me. It sought an outlet in travel, or an immersion in the potentially dangerous but challenging setting of somewhere like New York. Without contacts or adequate funds for living for long in

such a city, in fact without signposts of any kind whatsoever, this New York scheme was half-baked in the extreme. I had an idea that I could be a writer, but to be one, I reasoned that I needed life experiences to write about, and the hot-house atmosphere of New York seemed to me the place for this to happen. This idea was partly based on the hair-raising tales that I had heard from Jack of the way the city was in the 1960s.

Ill-advised as this scheme may have been, the idea took root, and was building up a head of steam which began to terrify me more than it excited me. Once I had put it about that this was what I was going to do, my pride held me in its grip, daring me to give up and risk embarrassment both in my own eyes and in those of my friends and acquaintances. Sometime in late August or early September, almost exactly a year from my experience of 'love in the depths of despair,' this 'head of steam' collided head on with an unstoppable, compassionate force, which changed me and my life for ever. In short, I fell in love, and with the floodgates of my heart wide open, Meher Baba walked in and set up shop.

On my way out of the house one day I bumped into a young woman named Barbara Allen, a friend of Sebastian, who had just arrived from San Francisco and was sleeping on his floor. Sebastian was away on holiday and had not warned me that she would be there. That April she had been to the Poona *darshan* with a planeload of Sufis led by their Murshida, Ivy Duce. While in the United States she had been under the latter's 'guidance,' perhaps with a view to her joining the Order in due course, hence her inclusion in the Sufi party for *darshan*. Once back from India, she disentangled herself from the ties she was creating, having decided she would not be a Sufi, and had returned to England.

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Her story was similar to mine. She had left England for California in order to escape a difficult situation, and had returned with a strong wind behind her, having made a decisive break from all that was beckoning her to stay and make a life for herself in the United States. Like two guided missiles programmed to find each other, we now duly met, and fell in love. The French call it a *'coup de foudre'* — 'a clap of thunder.' I'm not sure if it was 'love at first sight,' but definitely it was love at second, third or fourth sight. Barbara was on fire from her experience at the Poona *darshan*. Of all the lights that I was seeing in the eyes of those who had been lucky enough to go, the light in Barbara's eyes naturally seemed to me the brightest. She had a photo of Baba, the same that had been on His chair at *darshan*, which she had propped up next to her sleeping bag on the floor. This photo quickly became a constant point of reference for her, and then for us both. One day, as she pointed to the photo, and as I looked at it for what may have been the five hundredth time, I recognized Him, or remembered Him, for who He was. When the moment came, it was as simple as a door quietly opening to reveal what was on the other side. Inwardly I uttered the words, "*Oh yes... of course.*"

This moment of recognition and remembrance changed my life forever. In that moment my life felt as if it had been reset with a purpose and a direction I had been searching for and hoping for nearly one third of my twenty-four years. Every step I had taken in my life, up to recently so meaningless, took on a significance as if each and every detail had been necessary to bring me to Baba. As if, for instance, all the long separations from my parents, and not forgetting Mother Baptista's classroom lesson about 'hell and forever,' had set up a longing which had been the fuel that had brought me at last to this very special moment.

It felt really like stepping into a new dimension in which for the time being absolutely everything made sense, in which suddenly the whole point of life had been revealed, in which everything and everybody had their place, in which “all was well, and all manner of things were very very well” (to paraphrase an English female sage named Julian of Norwich). And this echoed in a more drawn out way my experience of Love that time in my bedroom one year before, that had set me on the road to Ibiza and Jack—and Meher Baba.

One small detail I always remember with amusement: I fell on the *Discourses*—the very ones I had regarded with cool detachment when I had seen them in the hands of Sebastian—and devoured them day by day like a starving man reunited with his favourite food. Each and every word felt like a feast withheld for too long but now laid out for me to taste and savour, with a repeated inward utterance on my part of “*Why yes, yes...yes of course.*” And in subsequent readings right up to this day, the sense of reading the *Discourses* for the first time is often still there, along with meanings that no longer seem obvious to me at all, and which force me to scratch my head and read certain passages over and over again. But also they come each time complete with their pristine freshness and nuggets of gold.

I may be conveying the impression that in this blissful double honeymoon all ran so smoothly that for months there could have been no bumps in the road, as if all answers to all questions were to hand in an effortless way. However, in the immediate foreground the matter of my projected trip to New York still needed to be dealt with, and here I still had no ready answer. The reasonable thing to assume would have been that, on falling in love I would have dropped the plan forthwith. My ego said otherwise. I had not only sold the idea to whoever would listen. More importantly, I had also sold it to myself, such that this state of ‘being in the

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process of preparing to go' had become a solid, if spurious, part of my identity. I rationalized the situation to myself as something temporary, something I had to do for myself that would therefore be good for Barbara too in the longer run.

In London, reality pitched in before too long in the shape of Don Stevens. Here was a man, recently arrived from California, who took a deep interest in the lives of young people who came within his orbit, no matter how aimless, unwashed or profitless these lives might have seemed. Barbara had taken me to my first Baba meeting at the room provided by Pete Townshend in Wardour Street in central London, where Don talked about one of the discourses. I've already written about that occasion and my subsequent meeting with him in company with Barbara, but in relating that story I had forgotten up to this moment a very telling detail.

On hearing about my New York plan, Don cut to the chase in no time at all. He pointed out in uncompromising terms that the plan was incompatible with my stated feelings for Barbara, and that I needed to make a choice in a hurry. I find it hard now to believe the struggle I had with myself to come to the decision I knew I had to make. I stayed up all night sitting on the edge of a lake in a park saying Baba's name out loud. When I returned to the house in the early morning, the storm had passed and all was calm, as I announced to Barbara the return of sanity.

Within three months we were married and living, or rather squatting, in a large empty Victorian house opposite Kew Gardens that was awaiting demolition and which just happened to be next door to Delia De Leon, Baba's close disciple from the 1930s. Within a few weeks more I had a job at the main London University Bookstore in the Sociology and Anthropology department. Within a year I was embarked on a university degree course in Social Anthropology, and

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also within a year our daughter Mani had been born. Thus started the rest of my life with Baba.

After retiring from our work as child psychotherapists in England, I and my wife, Lisa, moved to New Mexico and then to the area of Asheville, North Carolina to be nearer her grand-children. My main pursuits here are gardening, walking our dogs, interacting with the Baba community and writing. I also visit family in England.

Wayne Myers

101 Tales
of Finding Love

“The Only Thing that
Matters is You and Baba”

Memories from my youthful sojourn
into Meher Baba’s belonging

by Wayne Myers

101 Tales of Finding Love



First photo of Baba seen by Wayne
at Arbor Café, Berkeley, California, 1971



Wayne and Eruch, 1976



Gary and Wayne
at Meher Center

Wayne Myers

“I now understand why different circumstances in my life did not turn out as I wished them to. Had things worked out the way I wanted, I would never have come to you,” said disciple Rano Gayley to Meher Baba in 1934. In reply Baba told Rano, “Yes, you are right. Everything is in my hands and I created such circumstances for you that you would come to me” (*Lord Meher*, p.1926).

THAT TOO IS HOW I SEE MY BABA STORY. Meher Baba came to me. He created the circumstances that only He could that would lead me to awareness of His human form, His name, His words, His gift of recognition, and His divine love. Here is my account of some those circumstances.

It was in the summer of 1971 as I walked up University Avenue in Berkeley, California, that I saw a photo of Meher Baba for the first time. It was a large photo in the front window of a small restaurant called the Arbor Café. Seeing that face stopped me in my tracks. My mind went completely blank. I simply stood, transfixed by that face. When I came out of my trance after a minute or so, the first thought that came to me was not “Who is this?” but “What is this?”

No doubt there was a name and a quotation below the photo, but I have no recollection of those, only of being spell-bound by that face. I was not a conscious spiritual seeker. I was an eighteen-year-old kid right out of high school, having just hitchhiked from Virginia to San Francisco, trying to find my way to people and a community where I felt I could belong. Soon enough, through a series of links that I now know were from the unseen hand of Meher Baba, that face with His name would enter my life forever.

I was born in Washington, D.C. and grew up in nearby Fairfax, Virginia. I had loving, liberally-minded parents and one older brother. My parents were active in the Methodist church and community causes. Their deep Christian faith meant trying to help those in need and to make the world a better place.

My first conscious awakening of a personal nature came in my middle teens in the late 1960s as a young counter-culture visionary and protestor against war and injustice. I marched for civil rights, was arrested at a draft board sit-in, and joined numerous demonstrations against the Vietnam War in Washington, D.C. My personal passions and interests were for nature, music, art, geography, and history.

In the spring of 1968 at age fifteen and a high school freshman, I joined several of my friends in volunteering with the Eugene McCarthy campaign, the anti-war candidate for President, even though we were too young to vote. At the very same time, my mother, age forty-eight, lay dying in a coma that lasted six months. During those months, Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy were both assassinated. My mother died later that summer. It was a momentous time in America and for me and my family personally.

I recall in my mother's final weeks the many times I walked to be alone in a large empty field on the edge of town near our home. I gazed at the distant hills and up to the clouds and communed with God about granting her release. It was a form a prayer although I don't know what I really believed about God at that point. I felt an assurance that reached my heart in reply, but not one expressed in words. In a few years' time, I would look back with the conviction that the reply and assurance I felt came from Meher Baba in His silence, still in His physical body in 1968, deeply in seclusion,

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and three years before I would first see His photo or know His name.

Over the year after my mother died, I rejected the church and decided I was an atheist. I was searching to find out who I was and where I personally fit in, all typical of a sensitive sixteen-year-old. It was a painful and lonely time.

By the time I graduated from high school in June 1971 at age eighteen, I was a long-haired hippie. Within days, I was hitchhiking cross-country to San Francisco to find “my people” and community through the counter-culture but especially the gay liberation movement, today called the LGBT movement—Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender. The San Francisco Bay Area was one of the urban meccas of social acceptance and tolerance to which thousands of LGBT people migrated in the 1970s.

I found my way to Berkeley, across the bay from San Francisco. It was not long after first seeing Meher Baba’s photo there that a couple of friends I had met at some gay liberation meetings connected me to hanging out in a politically leftist and eclectic hippie community of several communes that were all on the same block of Berkeley’s Parker Street. Some of the people were studying Chairman Mao’s Little Red Book. I never did. I discovered the Tassajara Bread book and learned to bake bread.

I met a charismatic woman named Susanna who also lived on the block in a small house. She had put Meher Baba’s “Don’t Worry, Be Happy” poster with His smiling photo on the outside of her front door. Susanna was from New York City and I later learned she had attended meetings at Baba House there before moving to California. I still knew nothing about Meher Baba nor felt any conscious inner pull as yet, but I had come to know a name with His face.

Susanna had a piano. I had played piano from childhood and had memorized some tunes. She invited me to come over anytime I wanted to play her piano. We sang show tunes together. One evening, I had dropped by to play piano and Susanna stepped out with her young son, Neil, for a quick run to the grocery store. I was tinkering at the keyboard, alone in the house.

Suddenly, there was a loud knock at the door. I opened Susanna's front door to behold a hippie fellow with a bushy beard and red bandana on his head. He was grinning broadly from ear to ear. With no hesitation he shouted, "Jai Baba!" and gave me a big hug! I was momentarily speechless, but recovered to say that I did not live there, and that Susanna who knew about Meher Baba would be back shortly.

His name was Satya Klein. He had just driven into Berkeley with his sweet dog, Om, in his VW van all the way from Miami, Florida to the San Francisco Bay Area. Fate had him turn down Parker Street, just an average residential street in appearance, when the "Don't Worry, Be Happy" poster on the front door of Susanna's house caught his eye, so he excitedly pulled over. Satya took me out to the street to show me his VW van. On the front of it was his hand-painted portrait of Meher Baba's face along with the words "Don't Worry, Be Happy!" What are the odds? He then said something about this being "a sign from Baba." It would turn out he was right, but at the time I was thinking this is really weird. Nonetheless, I liked his friendly personality. Thankfully, Susanna returned home shortly and was happy to meet Satya. They talked about Meher Baba.

Satya had been a Baba lover back in Miami for about two years. He had been to the Meher Spiritual Center in Myrtle Beach a few times. Although he grew up as Don Klein, he

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said he chose his new first name Satya when he came across that name in a Meher Baba book that he was reading at the Center. He said it is the Sanskrit word for truth or existence.

He and Om lived in his van parked in front of Susanna's house for a few days. I was crashing in one of the communes across the street. Soon I learned that Satya too had purposefully come to the San Francisco Bay Area as a migrant in search of the gay liberation community and LGBT family. He told me it was Meher Baba, the embodiment of truth, who helped him find the self-acceptance to come out of the closet with Baba's call to self-honesty.

Before his knock on the door, I was already preparing to move into a small and cheap apartment that had become available on the block, but I needed a roommate to share rent. Satya and Om moved in with me and became part of the Parker Street community. I was a bit shocked when first thing, he tacked up photos of Meher Baba on almost every wall! Again, I thought this is so weird. Yet we were already feeling bonded with our destiny, not to be a couple, but best friends for life.

I was still that eighteen-year-old kid trying to find my way to a life where I belonged. Satya was twenty-six years old and became a mentor to me, but most importantly he became my link to Meher Baba. Susanna was the link to my link. Barely realizing it at first, I found myself gazing at Baba's smiling face in the photos on our walls, asking within for Baba's help with my daily life and struggles.

Soon I was reading the Meher Baba's *Universal Message* pamphlet that Satya gave me: "I have come not to teach but to awaken. Understand therefore that I lay down no precepts..." While not fully understanding the words, I felt

drawn to the beauty of them, as I was to Baba's photos. His words struck an inner chord of truth with an authority that spoke to me: "I am the Divine Beloved who loves you more than you can ever love yourself...There was and is no way out except through my coming in your midst. I had to come, and I have come. I am the Ancient One."

Satya had the most wonderful and outrageous sense of humor. His comic sense of the absurd was a delight to me and I could usually keep up. Both of us had grown up watching "I Love Lucy" re-runs on television and we could re-enact entire scenes from memory. I was more Ethel to his Lucy. We invented our own personal theatrics of colorful characters, zany expressions, and campy satires. I hope we sometimes entertained Baba as well.

Two weeks after we met, Satya declared "I am going to India next year and you are going with me." I loved to travel and had a natural sense of adventure. I thought why not? Satya envisioned it as a slow-paced overland journey of possibly six months' time to reach Meher Baba's place in India from Europe. Little did I understand that this was a major embarkation in response to Meher Baba's call that was already entering my life, but of which I was still mostly unaware.

It was October 1971. We found some odd jobs like yard work and house painting. Satya sold his van and I cashed out funds in the bank that had been high school graduation gifts from relatives. Amazingly, in just four months' time, we had the budget we needed if we traveled frugally. We planned to hitchhike and sleep out wherever possible to stretch our funds. In those days, once you reached Greece and points east across Asia, backpacking travelers like us could each manage on two or three dollars a day, seriously, and we did. We invested in decent sleeping bags with a tarp in each of

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our backpacks that turned into an open-ended pup tent on a string when needed.

In February 1972, we embarked on the first leg of our “journey to the East” overland from California to Miami. We lucked into a cross-country ride for just sharing the cost of gas. That way Satya could take his beloved dog, Om, back to Florida to live with a friend there. Plus, we were going to wait out the rest of February in the sunshine until closer to spring to fly to Europe. We had offers to stay with some of his friends or could sleep out in their tropical backyards.

In our backpacks, we each had a Meher Baba’s Universal Message pamphlet and a little wallet-sized card with Baba’s beautiful photo and the words: “Don’t try to understand Me. My depth is unfathomable. Just love Me.” We shared a paperback set of *Discourses* by Meher Baba. Baba’s photos and words were an integral companion and source of sustenance throughout our adventurous odyssey of both world discovery and self-discovery. Yet, about the only thing I knew of our envisioned goal at journey’s end was the name and address of Baba’s secretary, printed in the *Discourses*: Adi K. Irani, King’s Road, Ahmednagar, Maharashtra, India.

My first experience of Meher Baba’s love through a group gathering of His lovers came in Miami. It was at the Key Biscayne home of Peggy and Bill Stephens who hosted regular Baba meetings. Satya had attended the Stephens’ meetings in the past and was eager to return. We arrived to receive the most loving welcome from Bill and Peggy. Their living room was packed to overflowing, as were the Baba hugs. A fellow named Alan Cohen was a guest speaker. I had no idea who he was nor do I recall what he said, except I remember feeling such powerful love, human warmth, and happiness in that room that I thought to myself during the

meeting, “Wow, so this is Meher Baba!” I left there in a blissful state.

In March, we hitchhiked from Miami to Myrtle Beach to the Meher Spiritual Center. I had no idea what to expect. We arrived in the evening too late go on to the Center. The surrounding area was yet to be developed in 1972 so we camped out in the woods in Windy Hill just to the north of Briarcliffe. We found our way back to the entry in the morning.

Marshall Hay and Debbie Meyer greeted us at Pine Lodge reception that morning. We had barely walked in when Elizabeth Patterson drove up in a brown station wagon as if she had been expecting us! I came to learn later that this was very common timing with Elizabeth when new visitors arrived. Before we could be taken onto the Center, Elizabeth said we must first meet with Kitty so she drove us to their shared home, called Dilruba. Satya knew both Elizabeth and Kitty, but of course it was my first time meeting them, a significant and memorable day. At Dilruba, Elizabeth turned us over to chat with Kitty Davy in the living room.

Kitty was one of the most genuine people I had ever met. I felt uplifted in her delightful presence. Her eyes twinkled. Kitty asked me, as a newcomer, what I knew of Baba, what I had read so far from Baba, and which Baba lovers I had already met. The focus of our conversation was her advice to us for our planned overland travel to India. She told us that according to Baba’s wish, we should do three things on our journey: first, to stay out of politics; second, to complete all of our sightseeing before we reach Ahmednagar; and third, it was Baba’s wish that, once done, we come directly home from Ahmednagar. That is what we did with Baba’s grace.

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Afterwards, someone came to drive us back to the Center. I distinctly recall the feeling of that first time walking into the cabin area with a view of the lake between the Original Kitchen and Cabin on the Hill. A gentle wave rushed over and into me of something palpable that was sublime and transcendental. It felt soft and loving. It was my first time at a place that Meher Baba had sanctified with His divine physical presence. I have returned many times to the Meher Center over the years since and can recall the lovely imprint of that first feeling.

The next morning, we were back on Highway 17 hitchhiking to Virginia to stay with my Dad and family for a few days before hitchhiking to New York to catch our cheap flight on Icelandic Airways to Luxembourg. On landing, we hitchhiked to Amsterdam, planning to wait out still wintery late March before continuing to the sunny Mediterranean in April.

In Amsterdam, we sought out the Hare Krishna temple. One could have a daily vegetarian lunch for a small donation if you sang, danced, and chanted Hare Krishna with them for a good half-hour before the meal. No problem. There we met a kind Dutch couple who connected us to a free space to live, a former storeroom in a totally dilapidated and abandoned warehouse along a canal where they also lived. In old Amsterdam squatting was common—hundreds of people were doing it without government interference. While in Amsterdam, we met a young American woman living there who was a Baba lover and we visited with her several times.

We departed Amsterdam in mid-April hitchhiking for some days to reach Greece, passing through Germany, Austria, and Yugoslavia. We spent a freezing bone-shivering night outdoors in the Austrian Alps holding Baba's *daaman*, al-

though I had yet to learn that term. In Belgrade, Yugoslavia, plainclothes police followed and watched us until we finally got a ride out of the city.

Happily, we arrived in Greece. We loved the friendly and hospitable Greek people. Soon we were on a ferry to the magnificent and large island of Crete. It was early May. I had just turned nineteen years old. Crete was beautiful. Red Greek poppies dotted the landscape with vistas of the blue Mediterranean. In the 1970s you could legally camp out anywhere in Greece, so we rolled out our sleeping bags on isolated beaches near the outskirts of villages. Spiritually, Crete became the most important chapter for me along our journey between Amsterdam and India.

After about two weeks of leisurely exploring regions of the island, Satya said he wanted to head to a remote and beautiful beach on the eastern tip of Crete that several travelers had told us about. I felt drawn to take Baba's *Discourses* and go off on my own for a while. We made a plan that I would find my way to that beach in about two weeks' time. I headed for the mountains.

I hiked into the remote Gorge of Samaria on the southwest coast of Crete, a Greek National Park and today a World Biosphere Reserve. A sixteen-kilometer trail began at a mountain top winding down ravines, by cascading streams, and into forested mountain valleys. A rocky streambed became the trail for the final kilometers through a narrow and dramatic gorge that met the sea at an isolated fishing village.

Not in a hurry, about mid-way in the trek, I set up a simple camp on a shaded knoll amidst stunning rock formations overlooking the rushing stream. Other hikers were rare, but an occasional shepherd and herd of goats passed by. I ended up staying there four days and nights. I became intensely

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absorbed in reading the *Discourses* in my solitude, surrounded by the beautiful wilds of Crete. It became one of the most memorable and heaven-sent interludes of my young life. I was transported into another realm as my heart and consciousness expanded—awakened—to reveal spiritual treasures from Baba in His divine love beyond my imagining. It came through the spiritual knowledge that Baba has given to humanity through His discourses. It hit me: “Baba! You mean all creation is illusion and we are really One in God? Our destiny is returning to You out of illusion to become God?” The meaning of life had just been revealed to me from Meher Baba. I had never dreamed I could know the meaning of life. Best of all, Baba awakened in me the immeasurable gift of the recognition in my heart of Who He is.

I was on my honeymoon with Meher Baba with an intoxication, joy, level of happiness and love in my heart that I had never felt before—beyond words. Of course, Baba would eventually guide me back to earth as I adjusted to my new life, a life to be tested, to face my *sanskaras*, but always to be renewed time and again in His love and companionship.

In my euphoric state, I hiked out of the Gorge of Samaria to reach the sea and continued alone for a few more days following the rugged south coast of Crete. One evening as I sat on the cliffs gazing at a spectacular sunset over the Mediterranean, an inner feeling spoke clearly to me. It guided me to know that once Satya and I reached India in the natural course of our journey, I must then head straight to Ahmednagar. Meher Baba’s call and pull felt unmistakable to me. My footsteps had met my heart in understanding that this journey now was indeed a pilgrimage.

I rendezvoused with Satya as planned and we took ferries to leisurely explore two more beautiful Greek Islands and then

the coast of Turkey en route to Istanbul. We loved Istanbul. I learned some years later Baba had stopped there on one of his world tours in the 1930s. It was late July. India was calling and we decided to fast forward our leisurely pace to reach Afghanistan and Pakistan soon. From Istanbul, we took a train for four days to Tehran, where we kept going on local buses crossing beautiful mountain ranges and through vast desert valleys to reach Mashhad, in far northeastern Iran, one of Iran's holiest cities. We pressed on to cross from Iran into Afghanistan reaching the ancient city of Herat that is dominated by a citadel fortress that first dates to Alexander the Great in 330 B.C. We covered 3900 kilometers or about 2400 miles in nine days. We put on the brakes to recover in Herat for a few days.

Afghanistan was captivating. It felt both medieval yet magical, untouched by the modern world, all surface terms easy to conjure from my Western traveler's perspective. It was far more complex than that, but those were the images in which we now felt immersed. Most women wore the burqa in public, but not all, and I sensed a possible glimpse into some of my past lives. The Afghanistan we experienced was a relatively peaceful, stable, and safe country in which to travel in 1972.

The highlight of our twenty-five days in Afghanistan was when we traveled through the Hindu Kush mountains to reach the remote Bamiyan valley along the fabled Silk Road, the ancient caravan route between China and the Western World. Bamiyan was the site of a flourishing Buddhist religious and monastic center for five hundred years from the 2nd to the 7th centuries prior to the rise and wave of Islam. A giant standing Buddha was carved into the face of the mountain surrounded by up to a thousand small caves dotting the same monumental cliff face, each carved out and used by Buddhist monks and hermits centuries ago.

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To us, Bamiyan was a place lost in time. The word “biblical” came to mind. There was no electricity. All structures were made of traditional mud. We stayed in what was basically a traveler’s shelter, one large open room with no furniture. The few travelers for the night rolled out their own bedding on a carpeted floor. People who seemed like nomads had campfires nearby. Donkeys and goats rambled about. We loved it there.

Each day in Bamiyan, with the *Discourses* in hand, I climbed up to spend time in one of the ancient former Buddhist caves adjacent to the giant Buddha overlooking the valley. Baba’s words and messages again transported me to that intoxicated realm, more honeymoon. In that ancient atmosphere, given my own quest in anticipation of India, ever closer, I felt Baba instilled in me a sense of appreciation for the lifetimes and longings of the countless souls over centuries who had traveled, lived, worshipped and died in this place, to honor another incarnation of the Avatar, Gautama Buddha. Yet here I had received the unimaginable gift of having the same Ancient One, now as Meher Baba, reveal His presence to me, having come again in my very lifetime—so fresh, so present, so undiluted in His divinity and love.

Once Satya and I had crossed the Khyber Pass from Afghanistan into Pakistan, the fire within my heart fueled an accelerated push to reach the place where Meher Baba had lived, breathed, and walked. Near Lahore, the border crossing to India was only opened one hour per week as the tensions of the 1971 Indo-Pakistani war were still real. Our chance came and once we navigated the border, we felt an immediate joy to arrive in India.

Our crossing into India took us into Amritsar in the Punjab. At the Golden Temple, one of the holiest Sikh shrines, we took advantage of the generous and welcoming Sikh hospitality at their Dharamshala for pilgrims for two nights. There I told Satya of my heart's desire that I must continue directly on to Ahmednagar. I bowed out of our joint plans to continue to Varanasi, the Himalayas, and Nepal before reaching Ahmednagar. Satya still wished to do some of that first. As we bid adieu with a loving "Jai Baba" on the platform of the train station in Amritsar, he said he would see me in Ahmednagar in a few weeks' time. It was now September 1st.

I traveled for three nights sardined on crowded third class trains, mesmerized with my first immersion into the passing sensory kaleidoscope that is India and its masses of humanity. I arrived at Ahmednagar at dawn. Fortunately, the only thing I knew to say, "Meher Baba, Adi K. Irani, King's Road, Meher Baba!" was enough to be delivered by horse-drawn tonga to the gate of the Trust office compound. The overnight watchman still on duty directed me to wait on the verandah outside Adi K. Irani's office.

After a short while, Adi emerged with a prayer shawl around his shoulders. It seemed I had shown up during his morning prayers or meditation time. He welcomed me into his office and took care of the basic formalities. He sent me to stay at the Dawlat Lodge, opposite the Trust compound. This was eight years before the Meher Pilgrim Center opened at lower Meherabad.

My arrival at the Dawlat Lodge brought to six the number of young Western Baba lovers whom I would soon meet staying there. Each were also on their first pilgrimages to Meher Baba in India.

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For the first couple of days I settled in at the Dawlat, taking it slow and content to sit on the verandah outside my room. I continued reading the *Discourses*. I felt I had arrived. I literally said to myself, "I am here at last, Ahmednagar, the new Jerusalem!" This was the place where Meher Baba, the Ancient One, the Messiah, had lived, breathed, and walked.

My new Baba lover friends staying at the Dawlat would leave for the day and come back in the evening, when we shared dinner family-style on the verandah. They would recount wonderful Baba stories they heard from Meher Baba's *mandali* that day. Satya had mentioned the name Mehera, saying she was Baba's female counterpart, but other than Adi, I was hearing the names of most of the *mandali* for the first time: Mani, Eruch, Padri, Pendu, Dr. Goher, Nana and Mansari. Later I was introduced to them.

On the third evening after my arrival, a message was conveyed to me during dinner. "Mansari wants to know when are you coming to the *Samadhi*?" reported one of my new Baba friends. There was a pause in the usual animated conversation at the dinner table. My friends smiled with a hushed expectancy on their kind faces, all eyes on me, awaiting my response.

The question paralyzed me with embarrassment. I knew nothing about this word, *Samadhi*. That I had arrived in Ahmednagar in love with Meher Baba, was reading the *Discourses*, and was saying "Jai Baba" with as much gusto as the rest perhaps gave my new friends at the Dawlat Lodge the misleading impression that I knew where I should go and what I was supposed to do.

With the question sent from Mansari, my mind raced, *Samadhi*? What is it? Where is it? It sure sounded important. I had heard Mansari's name mentioned with affection a

few times at the dinner table, but I had no idea as yet, who she was or why she would send me that message. Too embarrassed to voice to my friends what I thought, “What is a *samadhi*?” I exclaimed I would go “very soon.” I still had no idea what they were talking about.

The existence of Baba’s tomb-shrine had not crossed my mind on that long journey of destiny to reach Ahmednagar. I knew so little in advance. All I knew was that I was going to where Meher Baba had *lived* his life, to walk in His footsteps. Of course, I knew Baba had dropped His physical body in January 1969, but the edition of the *Discourses* that had carried us throughout the journey was the 1967 printing while Baba was still in the body. The introduction and short bio of Meher Baba in that edition mentions Meherabad and describes Meher Baba having settled there to do His work, but the only physical description of it is “an old military camp near Ahmednagar.” There is no mention of the name Meherazad. I learned of Meherazad’s existence for the first time after arriving in Ahmednagar.

So with Mansari’s message, which implied I was not getting with the program, one of my Dawlat friends offered to take me to the bike-walla in the morning to rent a bike. There was no Trust bus to Meherabad and Meherazad in those days. One had to arrange their own transportation from town. I did not have the budget for rickshaws. I loved the idea of riding a bike. So the next morning on my bike, I cycled to Meherazad. My friends had told me that this was a Meherazad day, so I went there first, planning to bike to Meherabad on the following day.

I cycled along the main road from Ahmednagar to Aurangabad. I had been told the landmarks to note in order to make the left turn toward Pimpalgaon Reservoir some miles out in the countryside from Ahmednagar. I eventually

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turned into the long tree-shaded road, with the green gate of Meherazad gradually coming into view as I cycled on.

I arrived at the gate of Meherazad and came to a halt not knowing what to do or where to go. In a few moments, an endearingly quirky man whose name was Aloba, one of Baba's *mandali*, came out to greet me. Aloba took my bicycle to park it somewhere and then he led me immediately to a long, shaded verandah with green painted benches.

Aloba led me directly to a doorway, where we slipped off our shoes and entered Mandali Hall. No one was inside. I still remember the soft sunlight coming through the open doors and windows, the feeling of the carpets on my feet and Baba's chair covered with beautiful flowery fabric. Aloba led me to a small table with a guest book for me to sign as a new arrival. As I signed it, Aloba dramatically exclaimed in his booming voice, "You are here because Meher Baba has brought you here!" Then he flung both arms into the air and shouted "Jai Baba!"

I felt the truth in Aloba's words—that Baba, in His love, was letting me know that He had been with me throughout the entire journey to bring me to this destined moment, my entry threshold to His home and family that would change my life forever. I cycled back to Ahmednagar in the late afternoon, happy and singing some of my favorite love songs as I pedaled along.

The next morning, I rode my bicycle from Ahmednagar to Meherabad for the first time. In those days, the Arangaon-Dhond road to Meherabad was a mostly empty rural road passing through the open and stark Deccan landscape of fields and pastures, farm huts and farm animals. After a few miles of cycling, Meherabad came into view and I stopped in front of a yellow sign that read "Avatar Meher Baba—

Samadhi Way Up” with an arrow pointing to a pathway over the railroad tracks. The sign baffled me a bit as I still I had no idea of the meaning of *Samadhi*, but it did not matter as I knew I had arrived at Baba’s sacred place of Meherabad.

I walked my bicycle into Lower Meherbad, where a tall thin man appeared—Padri, who parked my bicycle. He was friendly, but not one for idle talk—pointing toward the hill and instructing me to go on up. So I walked up Meherabad Hill to discover Baba’s Tomb for the first time. Nana Kher, a gentle smiling man greeted me with his generous and firm Baba-embrace, saying “Welcome home...welcome home...welcome home.” He invited me to enter Baba’s Tomb. Upon entering, I first greeted Baba’s photo. My next impression was of the words on the marble slab: “Eternal Beloved, Avatar Meher Baba” and then “I have come not to teach but to awaken.” These words felt welcoming to me by their familiarity from Baba’s *Universal Message*. I was also taken in by the beautiful murals painted by Helen Dahm in the 1930s. I gazed at the portraits of Baba’s face on the walls and ceiling. I knew nothing about taking *darshan* although I would soon witness the Indian pilgrims bowing down.

I was alone inside the *Samadhi* for some time. In my mind I knew I had arrived at the closest point in creation to the physical presence of God. As for my heart, did I feel Baba’s Love? Yes, and it’s not easy to describe. If words could describe what I was feeling, they came from Baba’s silence simply saying, *Just be with Me*.

Soon after, I met Mansari, a lioness in strength in Baba in the tiniest of forms, nearby on the hill where she had lived for years under Baba’s order. She asked me with a friendly, yet slightly reproachful twinkle in her eye, “How many days is it since you came?” But I had arrived now and all was well.

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I pieced together that Baba's Tomb and the *Samadhi* were one and the same.

The first time I saw people bowing down inside the *Samadhi*, that custom came as a bit of shock to me. I had no idea that people did that. I also did not understand the taking of Baba's *darshan* nor was it ever explained by anyone. I had to come to my own understanding of it in my own time. I had not seen a single film of Meher Baba, nor read any of His biographies. The Meher Baba I knew said His message was about divine love and that He would do away with attachment to ritual and ceremony. Yet I saw people kissing furniture Baba had used—it confused me because it felt ritualistic. Only Baba knows the heart of each one and the expression of love and devotion from one may appear ritualistic to another, as it did to me.

Beloved Baba came to my rescue through Eruch, who freed me from the quandary over perceived rituals. In Mandali Hall at Meherazad, another young Westerner raised the very question with Eruch, expressing his discomfort with what he too perceived as the rituals at the *Samadhi* given Baba's teachings, even citing Baba's words: "Compared with the essentials of the path, the three most unimportant things are to garland me, to bow down to me, and to sing my praise or perform an arti. These are not necessarily the signs of love for God" (*Listen, Humanity*, p.29).

Eruch's reply was immediate—he extended his arms into the air and exclaimed: "What does it matter to you what others are doing? So what if all the world turns Meher Baba into a religion with bowing down, rites, rituals, and all that!" Then after a poignant and thoughtful pause, Eruch said softly and with great feeling, "*The only thing that matters is you and Baba.*"

Along my six-month journey to reach India, Baba had awakened my heart to His divinity. Through the gift of Baba's *mandali*, Baba awakened me to His humanity and His divine personality. In sharing their life experiences with Baba, each of the *mandali* was a living example of Baba's ways, His naturalness, His work and His love, by their complete acceptance of each person as belonging to Meher Baba.

At the end September on that first pilgrimage in 1972, I felt the call that it was time to go home, taking Baba with me as the *mandali* always told each one while giving their goodbye Baba hugs. As Kitty had told us of Baba's wish back in Myrtle Beach, I headed directly home. Adi had arranged for me to be met by Jal Dastoor in Bombay, who took me to book an air ticket out of India. In a couple of days, I landed at JFK airport and took a bus from New York to my family home in Virginia. All the way home, I felt full to overflowing in Meher Baba's companionship and love.

Satya arrived in Ahmednagar the week after I departed to have his own experience. In looking back, I feel it was Baba's infinite wisdom for Satya and me to arrive in Ahmednagar independently. What we received individually from Baba was direct to each heart, intimately customized by Baba as He always does for each one. The only thing that matters is you and Baba.

After that first pilgrimage, I had great longing to return to India whenever possible. With Baba's grace, I did return to His "welcome home" a number of times during the 1970s and 1980s.

I met my beloved life partner and now husband, Gary Tao, in San Francisco in 1980. Gary and I took our own memo-

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rable nine-month odyssey to India in 1986 across the Pacific via South East Asia ending up in Ahmednagar. We moved from Berkeley to Eugene, Oregon in 2008. Gary is a retired nurse and I am a retired travel agent. We have some beloved pets. We have been fortunate to travel to the Meher Spiritual Center in Myrtle Beach almost every year and love it there. I also have the blessing to be involved with Meher Mount in Ojai, California.

Thank you, Baba, for finding me in this lifetime and for Your Love and companionship.



Meher Baba as the Prophet Muhammad

Artwork © Claire Mataira

Hana Debbie Peterson

101 Tales
of Finding Love

The Waiting Was Over

by Hana Debbie Peterson

101 Tales of Finding Love



Hana and Virginia, graduation



Hana and Andy, Myrtle Beach, 2005

Hana Debbie Peterson

I FEEL BABA HAS ALWAYS BEEN IN MY LIFE, in experiences that I came to see as His Hand. They were surprising, beautiful and assuring experiences of something larger than I was, and which seemed truer than anything else I knew. I moved towards, along with, and held onto those experiences. They led me to Meher Baba.

My first memory, soon after I was born, is of sensing ‘something.’ I inwardly cast around to find it and when I did, I opened my eyes and saw my mother’s big red lips and big white teeth, and heard a comforting cooing coming from this ‘mouth.’ Wondering where I was in space, I cast around again and felt her arms holding me. I knew I was SAFE and I felt grateful that I had been given a loving mother this time. I let go and totally relaxed into her arms.

When I was about a year old and awake late at night in my crib, enjoying moving my toes against the plastic soles of my onesie, I heard my father’s truck pull in the driveway. UH-OH. He was returning home from his country western music gig. He was often drunk then and would pick a fight with my mother. He came in the door of my nursery and lit a cigarette and stood looking down at me. I pretended to be asleep. I heard his thoughts plain as day: “Jesus Christ! I just got invited to go on the road with the band! How can I go? She’s here now!”

I understood the whole thing. I thought back to him: “Don’t you dare blame me! Mom and Wayne (my brother) and I will be just fine! You should go on the road! Do what you love!” Then I wondered how I could have such thoughts since I was just a baby. I heard a voice say, “You are not yet fully incarnated in your new body.” (Of course, now I under-

stand it takes awhile for a soul to fully inhabit the new physical body.)

The first time I discovered my legs could run fast, I was so happy! While running I heard a voice say, "LOOK!" I thought back, perturbed, "I AM LOOKING!" Then at the back of my head on the right, above my ear, something 'clicked,' as though a dial had been turned, or a button pressed. All of a sudden there was nothing but golden light everywhere. I thought, "Where did everything go?" Then the intensity of the light was "turned down," allowing me to see the outlines of the houses, trees, the grass, but this golden light shone through all of them, including the sky. I felt so happy! I tore out running and yelling, "IT'S ALL MINE!"

After this first time, there were so many moments, always out of doors while playing, of nothing before my eyes except this golden light. It communicated something to me, via my body, not my mind. These moments took me out of the confines of my body, leaving me feeling very free and happy. (I felt there were people, especially one woman, who were directing these moments, and who were very loving.) Then I would be back in my body and go on playing. One day I had a very hard time going back in after one of these 'vacation moments' and I felt sad. I heard: "It's time for you to stay in your new body, in your new life. You've been given 'time out' in order to get used to the vibration of this world, and now it's time to stay. You won't be leaving again." I wasn't happy to hear that, but I accepted it.

All through my childhood when I was playing outdoors I would occasionally see one huge eye in the sky. And hear "I AM' over and over. One day I wondered, feeling perturbed, why I was being watched, and how come there was only one eye and not two?

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I'd been born into a family saddled with a man's rage and alcoholism. My father was very smart and talented, but he drank and had a terrible temper even when sober. He had terrifying outbursts and was often violent, hitting us with all his strength. One day when he'd been screaming at my mother, I went to our back yard and climbed a tree, letting my torso be held by a big smooth limb, my arms and legs dangling freely down. A lovely and loving energy came from the tree. I heard: "You know how, when there's a violent thunderstorm, my limbs get tossed all around but don't break? And my bark is rough, but on the inside, I am smooth? Well, you are like me! You get pushed and pulled, but you don't break! And your father is also like me, he acts tough and rough, but inside he is "smooth." He is sensitive and gentle." This was such a healing moment of understanding.

We moved to a new neighborhood, a few miles out of town, after Dad built our house. Miles and miles of pinewoods surrounded the horseshoe of homes, and in the middle, a huge field. I was in heaven. I spent hours and hours alone or with friends, outdoors, climbing trees and exploring. I felt so much love from the ground, trees, sky, wind, wild flowers, birds, rabbits, deer, squirrels, toads and frogs. I collected rocks and stored them all around the perimeter of our house.

When I was around twelve I was sitting on top of a hill just beyond the trees at the edge of our neighborhood, which looked out on a field. I felt someone was watching me, to the right, a few feet away. I turned to see a little bright green snake! I snapped my head back, frozen with terror. Something inside me said, "Oh for goodness sake! Look at the snake!" I forced myself to look. I looked right at the little snake and, to my amazement, heard it say, in a high-pitched squeaky voice, "Please don't hurt me!" My terror

evaporated as I realized that this little snake was afraid of ME! Snakes are afraid of people!?

I felt my body open and through my back came hundreds of people from all walks of life, all races, all shapes and sizes, in all kinds of clothing, male and female, young and old, from ancient to present times. I interpreted this as my freeing people from all over the world of their fear of snakes. I felt happy to be helping them. (I came to believe they were all me.)

My brother and I were completely unsupervised, all day long. He was five years older and he loved sports, so I saw him very little and he never wanted to play with me. So I wandered, free as a bird. I went deep into the shady woods and down to a pond nearby. I climbed tall trees and sat on their limbs. Each day was alive with wonder! Only Sunday mornings were just the opposite. My mother dropped me off at the Methodist Church for Sunday School. My brother got to play with his friends and our father never went to church with us (he called Jesus, “That Jew.” But at the end of his life he repeated Baba’s name for four months—Baba appeared to him before he died and gave him His *darshan*!) I was angry and miserable in Sunday School. I wanted to be outside playing. I didn’t understand why we had to listen to stories of a man who was nailed to a cross. Terrifying! One day alone in my bedroom I started to sing a song I learned in Sunday School. It had a lovely melody and I loved to sing:

*Jesus loves me this I know,
‘Cause the Bible tells me so.
Little ones to Him belong,
They are weak but He is strong.
Yes, Jesus loves me! Yes, Jesus loves me! Yes, Jesus loves me!
The Bible tells me so.*

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All of a sudden I felt God's love in my little chest. It was a warm and happy feeling. I felt I was connected to something bright and endless, like years before when I was little, and it felt so good. This was Jesus's Love! So this is what they were talking about!

My teen years were turbulent, and, unfortunately, I was aware of negative and abusive entities, ghosts, etc. as teens sometimes are. But Nature continued to be my solace and my teacher. I began to experience that 'something,' that 'presence' more. Again, it was so pure, large and so real. It had no shape, no end, and it felt ecstatic—a golden white light—a force that was in and around everything, and in and around me. It was of me, yet it understood so much more than I did. It knew everything and everything was contained in it. I wanted to experience it always! I felt Jesus knew all about this, and was, in fact, this! I used to pray to Jesus to show Himself to me. For a period, I begged and cried at night in my room. He was not church. He was this Presence.

I had a recurring dream of Nazi Germany. In it, I was the daughter of a woman who ran a cafe for the German soldiers. They had taken my Jewish girlfriend. I hated the soldiers and feared them. I always woke up scared. Then one night as I lay in the dark after having had this dream again, I saw a huge circle and in the center was—*me*—"I", and the "I" would go out to the edge and live a life and then come back to the center, then go out again for another kind of life, and go back. It seemed there were an endless number of me's that went in and out, always back to the center me. Thus, I learned about reincarnation, again. This time with the idea of opposite kinds of life, dotting the circle in balanced places all around. Knowing more about reincarnation was a great comfort.

One cold mid-winter evening, when I was about fifteen, I stood staring out my bedroom window, which looked out on our back yard. In the dusk the deep snow looked blue. A big pine was just outside my window and I could see through the snow-laden branches to the dark space near the tree's trunk, where I'd sat awhile that day. All was still. Nature, through my window, was telling me, as usual, that it loved me. I felt an enormous Presence come into the room, behind me, through the side window. I turned. There, in a whitish mist, a very faint Jesus. His hair was long and wavy. He wore a blue robe and maroon shawl, just the way He looked in my Methodist prayer book. His eyes held an intense passionate love for me. He said: "I have a new form! Wait! You'll see!" I felt so relieved and peaceful inside—nothing strange about it. My Master was coming!

One night in a serenely powerful dream, a huge, beautiful white crane came to me. It hovered in dark space, silently, in front of me. Its eyes beckoned me to follow. We flew across countless days and nights. Finally it stopped, still in black space. It turned and motioned for me to sit. I sat in empty space. Then it danced the most exquisite, gentle, sublime dance, all for me. I felt that the crane embodied the joy and timelessness of my own Soul. I'm getting closer!

High school was torture. Sitting all day was torture. Art class was a great relief—I loved to draw and paint. Our art teacher, Mr. Richard Sather, was a wonderful wild man who disobeyed rules, stood on the desks, encouraged us to think outside of the box, brought up social justice issues, and helped us be empathetic towards others. He had a false eye and would sometimes tap it with a pencil. Sometimes he would take it out and let us peer into the empty pink socket! He loved my art and would take a particularly good drawing to nearby classrooms to show it off! The pain of not being united with my Self, with THE BIG, was eased so much by

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Mr. Sather. (When I finally did come to Baba, I took the Universal Message to him and he read parts of it out loud to the class!)

One day in eleventh grade art class, a gorgeous, made up, very coolly dressed and unusually friendly senior, saw me through the big windows that looked out on the hallway. She came in and said to me: "Your people are in Saratoga! Go to the Caffe Lena!" I went that Saturday. I found my people! The famous folk venue, was my weekend 'go to' place from then on. Sometimes I helped Lena Spencer, who started the Caffe in 1960, with serving desserts and coffees. Through the Caffe I made many meaningful contacts and friends, including artists and actors. I also got a job at a very 'cool' store called "Farmer's Hardware," which featured imports from all over the world, and the finest art paper and supplies to be found in upstate New York. I was caught up in a very happy way, getting to know some very sophisticated and sometimes delightfully weird people. Without saying a word, I kept on the look out for my Master: This one? No. This one? No. I saw Maharishi Mahesh Yogi on Johnny Carson one night. Him? No. In 1967 I saw Alan Cohen and Rick Chapman on the Joe Pyne Show, so I heard Meher Baba's name then, but it did not stick.

A few of these Saratoga friends lived in a huge Victorian mansion, called "Annandale," near the campus of Skidmore College. I used to visit on weekends. One of these friends happened to be Renee, the French teacher in my high school back in Ballston Spa. One Saturday in June 1968, I went to Annandale to show my friends that I was in the Ballston Spa paper, having won first prize in an art show, but no one was around. I waited outside. Soon Renee pulled up. When we got to her apartment on the second floor, she asked me for a haircut! I cut a little, tentatively. All of a sudden, Dennis P, a real wild character, stormed into the room:

“So glad you’re here! Don’t go away! My soul brother just arrived from Miami! You gotta meet him!”

He came back a few minutes later with Andy Medina, a handsome Latino man with wavy black hair, a coiffed beard, gorgeous eyes, chunky build, who sauntered, not walked, into the room. “Hello ladies!” he said, grinning. He, Renee and Dennis began talking. I stepped back to watch it all. I was put off by his Latino lover persona, but Renee was charmed! I noticed he was wearing a necklace with a photo of someone in a large plastic oval pendant. I moved in to see a photo of a man who had longish wavy hair, a coiffed beard like Andy’s, and big beautiful eyes which were gazing up. Beams of light were behind Him. I blurted out, interrupting the conversation, “Who is that?” Andy dramatically grinned, then looking away from me, he nonchalantly said, “Oh Him? He’s my Master, Meher Baba.” Then he turned back to Renee and Dennis and resumed the conversation.

I went deeply within. I left the room, went to the hallway railing and stood staring into space. “Could this be my Master?” “No! My Master would not look so coifed and affected. He can’t be my Master!” (Ha! To this day that photo of Baba is the only one I don’t like!) Renee married Andy and I visited often on weekends. Andy always talked about Meher Baba. Interesting, but I circled around Him. On several occasions I tried to take out a Baba book from Andy’s bookcase, but a force would prevent me. The force came out of the books. It pushed me away from them! One day, reaching for a book again but feeling that force, I got very frustrated. A voice said something like, “You don’t need to read, just feel and see.” I understood that. Okay.

Andy and I would talk on the phone. I shared with him anything mystical that was happening to me. One time as we talked, I perceived everything as particles of energy. When

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my cat walked by, at first he was solid, then he became an 'all-energy' cat in an 'all energy' field. It was very colorful and beautiful. I understood that nothing is solid—it's all energy. I told Andy what I was seeing and he said, "Will you go to India to meet Baba after you graduate from high school?" I said, "Yes!" He said, "So, I can write to Baba and tell Him that you will come?" I said, "YES!" (Many years later I asked him if he wrote to Baba. He said he did not, but asked the person who told him about Baba, to write. I have no idea if that letter was ever written, but I was so happy I had said, YES.)

On February 1, 1969, a Saturday, I woke up in near panic. I sensed Andy was in trouble. I drove to his house. A friend of his answered the door but wouldn't let me in. I insisted and yelled at him, "Andy is in trouble and I have to see him! I have to help him!" So the guy let me in. He said, "Andy's Master died. He's in his room and doesn't want to be disturbed." I tore upstairs to Andy's bedroom and just opened the door. He was lying in his bed. I forcefully said, "Andy! Baba is God! He cannot die! He is more alive now than ever!!" Blew my mind that I said that. I had no idea I knew.

That night as I lay in bed, something was different. Usually I would see sparkles of light and then I'd go to sleep. That night there were no sparkles. I asked 'Where are my lights?' I heard, "You don't need them anymore." Then, the whole room filled up with LIGHT and intense LOVE and there was BABA! Oh the LOVE! Oh the LIGHT! Oh the PEACE! I approached Baba and started to cry. He asked me, "Why are you crying?" I blubbered, "Because I want to be with You? Because I want to know You? Because I..." He interrupted, "You are crying because you love Me, and I love you." The waiting was over.

Andy and Renee moved to France. I discovered a Meher Baba Information card he'd posted at a local head shop. I wrote to Box 1101 and dear Rick Chapman wrote back letting me know that Darwin and Jeanne Shaw were just a few miles from where I lived! My best friend, Virginia, who came to Baba too as soon as I told her about Him, and I began attending their meetings. During my senior year, Rick regularly wrote to me and I would always know when a book or letter, or more Baba pamphlets to distribute, were coming in the mail. I immediately contacted them and started attending their meetings in their home in Schenectady. What bliss!

I missed eighty-seven days of my senior year because I was so enraptured with Baba's Presence. I was worried about final exams, especially English—I had not read much of the assigned reading because I was reading Baba books! I could hardly bring my brain into its left hemisphere. The test was multiple choice, which I was good at, intuiting the answers if I wasn't sure, and a poem to interpret, which counted for a significant percentage of the score. How Baba saved me! The poem was about a man on a white horse coming through clouds! I was among the last to leave the gymnasium because I kept writing about the Avatar, planes of consciousness, etc. I got an A!

Beloved Lord Avatar Meher Baba Ki Jai.

I live in Walnut Creek, California. I work in the office of Meher Schools and I am a licensed massage therapist, specializing in Myofascial Release—John Barnes PT Approach.

Ty Provosty

101 Tales
of Finding Love

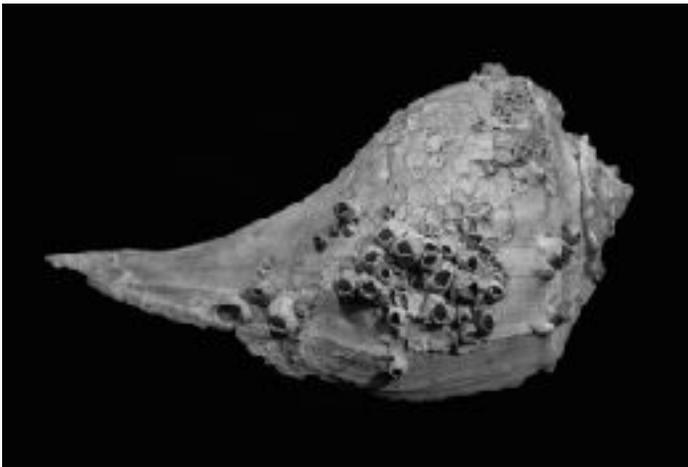
Pieces of the Puzzle

by Ty Provosty

101 Tales of Finding Love



Men at the Farm, West Virginia, 1975. Ty, upper left



The Whelk Shell

Ty Provosty

SOME MAY BE FAMILIAR WITH THE PHENOMENA of how a personal message from “The Divine, Infinite Intelligence, God, etc.” grows in meaning within over time for the recipient. These sorts of messages seem to have a maturation period—they do not fade. In this blossoming a deeper significance is revealed. This story entails just such messages.

I was raised in an expansive family with strong Roman Catholic leanings. My godfather was my father's brother, a Catholic priest. Two of my mother's uncles were Catholic priests. Mom's aunt eventually became the Mother Superior of the Sisters of the Society of the Sacred Heart. The Bishop would regularly come over to the house and enjoy a few cocktails. Papá, (accent on the second 'a' per proper French pronunciation), my grandfather, was an esteemed Knight of the Order of Saint Gregory the Great.

From all of this religious immersion, (some may fairly call it indoctrination), one may gain an impression that my childhood home would have had the appearance of, or even the reality of, a refuge of sanctity. Let me dispel such a notion. Peaceful it was not. Mom and Dad loved each other but fought quite a bit. Initially, almost daily. The list of psychotherapeutic distortions gained within this author through this particular petri dish of a family was broad and deeply impressed.

At the age of seventeen it was my turn to head off to college. I was profoundly eager to leave the family home. College seemed like a perfect escape. I naively thought one could do just that by relocating geographically. At that point in their lives Mom and Dad were not to be interrupted from their personal agendas, so I was plopped on a plane with a large suitcase and sent one thousand miles away to a differ-

ent part of the South. I was never to return to the family home as my place of residence.

In the short space of an academic year I realized I was truly lost and, as I now know, deeply depressed. I had no idea of my path in life. Through my oldest sister I had learned of her plans to join an intentional community of “back to the land,” young, white, post-Vietnam War, like-minded individuals. We were all retreating to the hills of West Virginia where the land was cheap. Most of this crowd was from Texas. Some were idealists. Some were just following a good time and would return to Texas when the weather grew too cold. This was not quite a commune, but definitely a hippie hangout full of naive aspirations for a better life though simple living.

Eventually as the population grew, each of the hardcore couples or individuals built their own dwelling. There were two tepees on the land. I eventually built a lean-to structure on the side of a mountain where I lived for fifteen months with my girlfriend. A year later she became my wife. We were all collecting our water from an open well about a mile away and watching any semblance of firm bowel movements disappear. We would access our vehicles at the other end of a two-mile trek off the mountain to the hollow below. That first summer on this collection of acreage proved to be the most defining of my life.

Bill H. was a smart, seasoned carpenter from Houston, Texas. His long, wavy blond hair and “Father Time” like beard were truly impressive. He eventually taught me how to frame and trim out a house. I discovered that I took to this knowledge like a duckling to water. His mentoring eventually brought me to my life's work as an architect and builder. He was a good teacher. I was starting to find my way.

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When I was in high school it became overtly apparent to me that any religion that claimed it was the only path to God (as the Roman Catholic church did and likely still does to this day), was just wrong about the whole idea of an exclusive club for God. So with that rejection firmly placed, I happily dove into a copy of *The Autobiography of a Yogi*, handed to me that first summer. I was magnetically drawn to the ideas and concepts presented. The book seemed to be feeding me from some unknown existential level that was only now coming into focus. That summer while visiting my girlfriend's parents on an island in Maine, I was visited by Paramahansa Yogananda during the middle of the night. His visitation was quiet, beautiful and profoundly peaceful.

Michael, another summer resident on the farm, had returned from a road trip swing through Texas in early September. He handed me a copy of Meher Baba's *The Everything and the Nothing*. He had picked this small volume up at an alternative bookstore in Austin, Texas. It was through this book that I came to the supremacy of Meher Baba. Four distinct truths were revealed to me through this volume.

First, we reincarnate. This concept was the only mythology that made sense to me in terms of a large concept of a life journey. It was apparent to me then that our journey is profoundly long. Many lifetimes are necessary. (Little did I know just how many.)

Second was the idea that our true Self is actually God. I had an incomplete mythology in which to place this concept at the time. But I distinctly remember that I knew this to be true for all.

The third concept was the Hindu notion of the Avatar—that God in human form descends to this earthly realm,

time and time again in the endless progression of the advancing stream of life. I was most reassured by this notion. It fit into what I already knew in my heart to be true, that all are on the path to divinity.

Finally I read these words from Meher Baba, "...and I am that same Ancient One come again." In that instant I felt a large puzzle piece enter my torso, fitting into what I now know is my subtle body. This puzzle piece had a peculiar shape. I still see this shape today. I also knew unequivocally in that instant that His proclamation was Truth. I was eighteen years old. I did not know what to do with this information. I was not being asked to do anything with this information. But I knew with certainty that all of these ideas were Truth.

In short order after returning to the farm, Michael organized a road trip to a "Center" for Meher Baba. It was located somewhere on the shore of the Atlantic Ocean in the vicinity of Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. So in early November 1974, (I had just turned nineteen), a group of five of us set off in my Chevrolet Nova for the Meher Spiritual Center. We were Michael, Diana, his girlfriend, my girlfriend, Mary, and my sister, Bobbie. We drove through the night in what turned out to be a very long drive of over fifteen hours. These were before the days of most interstate highways in that stretch of the country between West Virginia and South Carolina.

It was around 10 A.M. when we drove onto the grounds of the Center. I was stunned and staggered by what I was now experiencing. It was as if we had driven through a voluminous waterfall. I was drenched from head to toe in what I can only call bliss. I thought I would burst in my belly from how I was being filled with this perfect, indescribable, invisible substance. I was saturated completely.

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It just so happened that we met up at the Gatehouse with a lone hippie traveler. He was from California touring in his VW microbus. After we were given a tour of the Center grounds and became settled into the Far Cabin (for the boys), and Near Cabin (for the girls), the six of us ventured to the beach on foot. I swam competitively as a preteen and teen. I have always loved the water. My folks had taken us to the shores of the Gulf of Mexico for summer vacations. I held these vacations dear. So it was no surprise that I was first of the six of us over the dunes and up onto the beach.

The tide was at its highest. Immediately, I watched as a wave dashed onto the sand directly in front of me. As it retreated, there were six large conch shells deposited, one for each of us. These shells still strike me as such a personal, warm, loving and welcoming gift. The gift was nothing less than perfect. I rushed over and picked up four of these shells. Diana was directly behind me. She picked up two, giving one of hers to Michael. I gave one to Mary, my girlfriend, one to Bobbie, my sister, and one to the hippie from California. Remarkably, the shell I kept for myself was much older with many barnacles. It was also twisting in the opposite direction from the other five. Its spirals were twisting in a counterclockwise direction.

How do I recall this, you may ask? Because I am the only one of that group of five from our community who still has his shell. In those initial moments I was immediately drawn to its uniqueness. It is a detail I remember to this day. What a welcoming gift!

Decades later I learned from a friend that the shells are actually the abandoned homes of whelks, large predatory sea snails that are common to the waters of the northern western Atlantic ocean. (Please see attached photo.)

As it was cold, we did not swim but headed back to the center grounds. On the walk back we all stopped under the broad branches of a very mature and tall pine tree. This was near the Barn on the Center. About eighteen feet above us was a large owl perched on a prominent branch. The owl was looking intently at us. We were silent and captivated. I watched as the owl looked at each of us individually.

After that we just walked off. I am convinced to this day that we had Baba's *darshan* directly from Him in His perfect disguise as the infinitely wise Owl.

It was about ten years later that I learned a deeper significance for the gift of the whelk shell from Baba. As a preteen and early teen on those beaches of the Gulf of Mexico where we would vacation, I would walk along the shoreline by myself looking for a beautiful conch shell. I did this repeatedly over a number of years, never finding what I wanted. I wanted one so badly. I had completely forgotten that innocent wish. But Baba had not! The knower of our innermost heart, realized that wish and fulfilled that innocent desire at His home. Showing me that He is the one true Friend.

Again around ten years later I was reflecting on the experiences of when I came to Baba. I realized then that the puzzle piece that entered my torso into my subtle body was in the shape of the country of France. It seems apparent that this is a past life affirmation of my contact with Meher Baba as Himself in France. I am from a family that is predominately French in ancestry. This in part explains my being born and raised in Louisiana.

I will also say that we know Nothing, that I know Nothing, but we do have intuition. Intuition is like a muscle that only grows stronger when used regularly. This inner guide can be

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our truest flashlight in life, in this apparent darkness, in this illusion some wise ones name as Nothing. What a profound gift is given for all to access and use.

Ty Provosty is a practicing architect. He lives in New Orleans. He has had the privilege of working as an architect on the Meher Memorial Tower in Lower Meherabad, Maharashtra, India. He is currently involved with the Meher Archive Collective in realizing their new campus near Asheville, North Carolina. He is the father of four beautiful children. His two lovely granddaughters bring delight into his life.



Artwork © Claire Mataira

Caryl Saarinen

101 Tales
of Finding Love

The Greatest Story
Ever Told

by Caryl Saarinen

101 Tales of Finding Love



Caryl ca. 2019

Caryl Saarinen

I LOVED THE STORY OF JESUS FROM AN EARLY AGE. My Mother and I would set up a plastic manger scene at Christmas, and I would make a tin foil star to hang above it. Then my mother would read the story of the birth of Jesus. Whether or not the story happened exactly as recorded, the birth and life of the Avatar is "the greatest story ever told," for who would love creation so much as to take on all of its *sanskaras* in order to lift it to another level of development?

I was born to a father who was a cancer surgeon in Houston, Texas, and my mother had been a nurse when she met my father at Touro in New Orleans. He went to Tulane University, training at the Ochsner Clinic with Dr. Alton Ochsner. He had wanted to be a doctor from about the age of ten. My mother went to nursing school in New Orleans. The Second World War had just ended when I was born in 1947. This was while my father was training in New York at Sloan Kettering Memorial. My mother fell down a flight of steps while there and couldn't remember what a formula was. This frightened my parents, and they returned to my father's family for support in Houston, and so began most of my childhood experience there.

I believe that my father was raised as a Southern Baptist, but became Methodist when he met my mother. My paternal grandmother was very religious, and I would go over there at least once a week to spend the night. We would read a scripture before bed, and if I was there on Sunday, we had Sunday school. My father told me in later life that the Chamberlins (my maiden name) were ministers and educators, and I know my grandmother and great-grandmother were teachers. I attended summer school, and while I was there, my father was teaching a young career class, which was very popular with students. I remember that he used a

book for that class on loving by Erich Fromm. I was very young, so I don't remember much about it. I would meet him at the end of class and sit and play tit tac toe with one of his students. Walking around my Sunday school, I was drawn to the pictures of Jesus with children around him, and I loved that about Him. I used to talk to Jesus in my mind.

My father was a seeker and studied other religions. These books about other religions were in our book collection, so they were available for me to peruse. I also liked to read books based on the life of Jesus. My parents were separated for a couple of years beginning when I was twelve, so these were difficult times. I remember going with my father to my aunt's vacation house in Brenham, Texas. I loved the silence and country beauty, and it was there that I read part of *Dear and Glorious Physician* by Taylor Caldwell and realized there were spiritual secrets beyond what most people in the mainstream believe. I didn't think that people in other countries and cultures were going to hell because they were born into different religions. After all, they didn't seem to have a choice where and into what circumstances they were born. I didn't feel a loving God would condemn them to eternal damnation. One has to imagine the thinking at that time in the Bible Belt of the South. My mother gave me a book she found too extreme, *St. Francis* by Kazantzakis, and it was just the thing for me. I used to dream of following him out in nature when I was in Brenham. At that time, I wrote poetry and wrote a poem about him. I wanted to see Jesus. I believed that if He returned, it would be the same as before, that most people would not recognize Him. I eventually read books on the Essenes, too. They said Jesus was one of them. There can be many variations on a life born two thousand years ago.

Caryl Saarinen

Before what I believed was miraculous, my parents reconciling, I spent an Easter sunrise service with my father. It seemed like such a glorious day, because the night before I had asked who Meher Baba was. My father tried never to leave anything lying around about Him, because he didn't want to influence me. I did see "The Awakener" left out on a table once with Baba's picture, and I wondered about it at the time. My mother and I used to spend summers with my maternal grandparents on their farm in Illinois. This would have been in the 1950s, and I think my father had just met Baba for the first time probably in New York. We were sitting out by the house, which we often did in the evening. My father said he had met a man who would speak the most perfect Word. That stuck in my memory.

After the morning of the sunrise service, my father gave me *Listen, Humanity*, edited and narrated by Don Stevens, and I found that Baba's teachings matched my thinking, and I became a follower at the age of fourteen. I am now seventy and am still a Baba lover. It has been many years since I first came to Baba, so it is difficult to remember exactly how I felt at that time. There was no question in my mind about Baba. I felt we were reliving the time of Jesus in many ways. Baba became my main source of beliefs in contrast to the religious dogma of Christianity. At times I felt ecstasy and sometimes experienced the beauty of nature more acutely because of Baba's presence on earth, and I had some interesting experiences because of my belief in Him, ones that could not be ordinarily explained. I went on to express some of my spiritual feelings in music and poetry. I later saw my art training as a spiritual journey.

I have mentioned my father's experiences with Baba because he is no longer here to tell anything of his time with Him, and he might not respond if he were still on earth. My feeling is that his experiences were more important than

mine. Baba had told my father that he and Ben Hayman, through whom we came to Baba, were *mandali* and that they were old, old friends. My father was very private and didn't want people to know, but since he has now passed on, I hope I am not betraying his trust in telling people this. The first time he met Baba, he was waiting to meet Him and wondering why on earth he was there, but he said after he met Him, he knew why. He told me that he didn't know what Baba was but that he had never met anyone like Him in his life. He knew He was special, and he witnessed and heard incredible things. He also experienced Baba's sense of humor, which is something I enjoyed about Baba, too. He made several visits to Baba at various times: Palm Springs, Myrtle Beach, New York and India (the East/West Gathering). He was supposed to be at the "three incredible weeks" gathering of men in India, but he had obligations to his surgery and patients.

When I was in college, I used to go out to San Francisco and visit with Murshida Duce and stay with Joe and Kari Harb. I felt particularly close to Meherji and Adi K. Irani, and to Mani and Mehera.

My parents and I were in India between groups in the 1969 *Darshan*. That was supposed to have been the first time I would have met Baba in person, though we had exchanged correspondence. It felt like He was still there. I visited with the *mandali* and with Mani and Mehera. I wrote a poem for Mehera—Joe Harb, who was also there with his wife, paid for the framing. I wrote it on an embroidery piece I had gotten in Dubronik, Yugoslavia, and Joe and I gave it to Mani as a joint present.

Guruprasad was still standing, and I was fortunate to sing to the female *mandali* there. We were in Baba's bedroom, and there were roses on the bedspread. I remember looking

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around and thinking that the women seemed like roses scattered around the room. I sang the "St. Francis Prayer," and I believe, "Christ in a Garden."

While I was there Mani told me that Baba had enjoyed the poem I had written for Him and sent to Him which is as follows. I added a final line later.

Love is a spring that shall never die—
I shall sing it from the highest mountain,
I shall sing it from the depths of the sea
And I shall sing it for all eternity.

So sing the tune of love to your Self—
To the Lover of all lovers.
This is the fulfillment of all desire—
Here is found the true Beloved.

Souls shall be sparks of Its flaming fire—
They shall scatter in the darkness of night.
But they shall meet in the smoldering embers of Day,
And filter away into the Dreamless Sleep of Tomorrow.

My Beloved, we shall meet in the depths of being—
We shall be fulfilled
Not in lust, but in purest truth.
This Love will endure time
And all other loves shall be only longing for Ours—
For this is the Love of soul for God.

Take me to the highest mountain,
Send me to the depths below,
Scatter my body to the four winds,
But let my soul soar to My Beloved.
Up to the heavens above,
Deep into the depths within.

I had wanted to go to school in Europe, but I really didn't have a clear idea of when or where. My father found a private school in Lausanne, Switzerland, but had half changed his mind about sending me for my junior year of high school, until Baba told him that he should send me. Of course, the experience changed my life, but was not an easy one.

I also wrote to Baba about taking premed and later about doing studies in art, music and literature at the University of Arizona. When I wanted to study premed, Baba said to do it, and He would help me. Later, I decided that I should change majors and wrote to Baba. He said I should do what was best for my study habits. I went into Oriental Studies and finished that, but over the years I ended up getting a Masters in Art. I developed my poetry and have been writing a mystery, and I have developed my voice and sing. So besides teaching, I ended up doing the studies about which I asked Baba so many years ago, though I developed them over years.

While my husband and I spent a sabbatical in Colorado, I corresponded briefly with Kitty Davy. Unfortunately, I have never had the pleasure of going to Myrtle Beach. I visited Meherabad and Meherazad twice, and I have had the fortunate opportunity to meet some of the wonderful individuals who have made up the circles of people who love Baba. I have had Tucson, Arizona as my base since I went off to college and have known waves of Baba lovers who have called Tucson home, at least for a while. We just lost a person whose life was dedicated to Baba, Nancy Wall. She did so much to hold Baba lovers together here and in other places. We will miss her, but know she has gone on to Baba.

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Since my retirement from teaching art, I have continued writing, singing, drawing and painting. I have two children, a son, Sascha and a daughter, Amber, who have turned out to be very fine people. My husband is retired and was a professor of geography and well known for his area in human geography. We have been fortunate to travel all over the world and have lived in other countries, and we love to study other cultures and peoples, but we also love Tucson and always come home. Baba has helped me have an interesting life. Jai Baba!



Artwork © Claire Mataira

Jim Stebbins

101 Tales
of Finding Love

How Baba Came to Me

by Jim Stebbins

101 Tales of Finding Love



James and Shirley Stebbins, Maryville, Tennessee
October 2017

Jim Stebbins

IT WAS 1968 AND I WAS LIVING IN SAN ANTONIO, Texas after a stint in the Army at Fort Sam Houston. I was staying in a large apartment building with nine apartments and about thirty young folks. A friend handed me a copy of *Avatar* by Jean Adriel. When I opened the cover to the picture of Meher Baba, all this light poured off His image and I knew that I had to find out more. I read as many books as I could get my hands on and set a plan to go to the Meher Spiritual Center in Myrtle Beach.

On my first trip to the Center, I wanted to find out more about Baba and I also wanted to get on a sailboat and get out of sight of land with a couple of friends.

At *Dilruba* I met Kitty, and when I noticed the same picture on the mantel and told her of my experience, she took the picture down and gave it to me. That gesture meant a lot to me, as have so many other examples over the years of the rare and delightful openness and loving kindness of so many of Baba's finds.

The next few years were filled with a marriage, the birth of my son, getting a degree from University of North Carolina-Asheville, trying Transcendental Meditation, growing my own, and reading about every new age offering that the early seventies had to offer.

When I discovered that the Transcendental Meditation mantra I was using was the name of a female deity in the *Saraswati* tradition, I decided that since I was already having experiences of Jesus while meditating, I would switch to the Jesus Prayer for my focus in meditation. I kept this up for about twenty years, eventually making it to Mount Athos in 1985, with the intention of seeing whether the monastic life

was for me or not. Although wonderful and deeply challenging, it was not my choice this lifetime.

In 1993, I was helping a friend move and she had a pile of Baba books on the table, which she had set aside for me as a gift for my helping her move. The second round of reading cemented the deal and I have been doing my best to remember Baba and love Him ever since.

I think that Baba had me investigate the smorgasbord of spiritual offerings so that I could translate the different perspectives they presented when the need would arise in conversations.

An experience in the Lagoon Cabin pulled all these strings together for me. I was sitting peacefully in His presence, when suddenly I felt myself physically standing in the hot sand of the Middle East, walking side by side with Jesus and thinking how difficult it is for a Jewish man to believe that he is somehow God. Jesus looked at me with deep love and understanding of my situation, and said to me that I would die for Him three times before we met again. I came out of this experience shocked at how real it had seemed. More like time travel than just vivid imagination.

I took this experience as a removal of any residual doubt I might have had about whether Baba was Jesus, and have felt even more secure about the “beads on one string” ever since. This love affair continues to grow deeper and more enriching as it unfolds through time. Jai Baba.

I am living in Maryville, Tennessee. Retired and enjoying a life filled with love and transformational conversations.

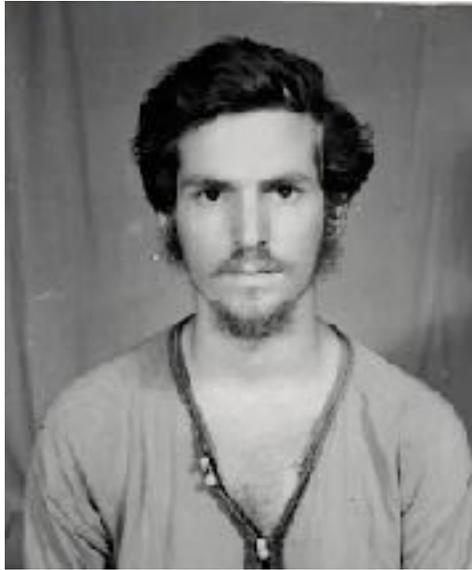
Daniel Stone

101 Tales
of Finding Love

Two Masters-One Beloved

by Daniel Stone

101 Tales of Finding Love



Daniel, 1972

Daniel and Eruch, Mandali Hall, 1998



Daniel Stone

I WAS A CHILD OF THE '60s. I grew up in Maryland where I attended a very progressive Quaker High School. Interestingly enough, there were one hundred students in the school, and six or seven of us became Baba lovers (though it didn't happen till later). I got involved in the hippie scene of the day—I was a working musician on weekends (if a bit legally under-aged), got involved in the counter-culture, and like so many of my era, experimented with psychedelics.

I had troubles in my teenage years, including some tragedies, to the point that when I took LSD at the age of fifteen, it was transformative. That experience showed me there was a different state of consciousness that was available, different from anything else I'd known up to that time. But I continued to experiment with drugs over a couple of years.

I graduated from high school in 1968, and then went to college in Boston. During that time I was exposed to Eastern mysticism, started doing meditation, read books from different spiritual masters, attended spiritual workshops, and overall explored the possibility of spiritual development. It was during that time that I first heard of Meher Baba, from a classmate from my high school—she was the daughter of David McLelland, one of most famous motivational psychologists at the time, and a colleague of Tim Leary and Richard Alpert. She gave me my first Baba booklet, *The Moving Finger Writes, Volume 2*. This was the first I heard of Meher Baba and vaguely understood that He had said He is the Avatar.

I also belonged to a food co-op in Cambridge and one member of the co-op lent me a copy of the *Discourses*. I had three distinct reactions when I read this; the first was that

this was far and away the most authoritative presentation of spirituality that I'd come across by this point. By contrast, everything else I was reading seemed like it was written by people who knew something, but were essentially feeling their way in the dark. But it was clear to me that Baba was writing as someone who fully knew what He was talking about, and was presenting it to me as a reader from the vantage point of a fully realized being.

The second reaction was that Baba's admonitions against sex outside of marriage were beyond my own predilections at that time, and I wasn't prepared to fully follow the guidance that He was providing.

The third reaction was that I couldn't find a method that could be followed with Baba. Of course, He was unequivocal that He is the Avatar, but the question then of "how do you follow Him" seemed elusive to me. At this time I was focused on various methods such as meditation and yoga, and was therefore left unsure about how to approach Baba.

At the same time, I felt something very strongly drawing me to Him; just seeing His photo once, I felt a magnetic pull towards Him. So when I heard that Alan Cohen was giving a talk at Harvard on "Drugs, Consciousness, and Avatar Meher Baba," I decided to go. I enjoyed the talk, and then Allan showed a film of Baba visiting the Meher Spiritual Center in Myrtle Beach that I especially liked. At the end, we were all given a "Don't Worry, Be Happy" card with Baba's photo on it; when I got home that night I posted it on the wall next to my bed. I recalled that I had heard that Baba had said that if one remembers Him even once a day, one will remember Him at the time of one's dying, and thereby "come to Him," so I made a vow to be sure to remember Baba every day. However, I also continued in my overall spiritual search for a path that I could follow.

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One stop on that journey that was also very meaningful for me, was a talk I attended by Baba Ram Dass (now Ram Dass) at the Arlington Street Church in Boston. Ram Dass had just returned from India where he'd been with his guru, whom he called Maharaj-ji. Along with probably many others who were there, I was totally absorbed by what he had to say about his guru, and could only wish to go to India to find him myself. However, Ram Dass made it clear that his guru did not wish to be known, and therefore he offered no identifying information about Maharaj-ji—including his real name or where he was from. But I knew that this was a very special man. So there were two very special beings in my life at that time, Meher Baba and Maharaj-ji.

I had by that time dropped out of college and served two years alternative service, having gained a conscientious objector draft status, based primarily on my background in a Quaker community. A year or so after seeing Ram Dass, I had completed my service obligation and had nothing more that tied me to my life in the Boston area. I was not in school, I didn't need to continue working, and was generally free. But what to do with this freedom?

By that time I had a girlfriend who had moved to England to study at the Emerson College, a Rudolf Steiner college in East Grinstead. Since I had no further demands on me and had some savings, I decided to go visit her and then travel around Europe. At the time my parents lived in the Washington, D.C. area, so I packed my few belongings and went to D.C. to see them and drop off my car, for what I imagined would be an indefinite period of world travel. This was in early January 1972.

When I got to D.C., I contacted a good friend, Steve Butterfield, a high school friend whom I had lived with for a

while in Cambridge and who was now living in D.C. As it turned out, Steve and I had been exploring spiritual realms together when we were in Cambridge, before he had decided to return to D.C. During the intervening year, Steve had become quite interested in Ramakrishna, whom he believed might be the Avatar. After I'd first heard of Meher Baba while still in Cambridge, I called Steve to ask if he'd heard of Meher Baba. When he told me that he'd not heard of Him, I explained that Baba claimed to be the Avatar of this age. Unbeknownst to me, in the time between that call from Cambridge and my return to D.C., Steve had become a Baba lover.

When I contacted Steve on my return to D.C., he was just planning his first trip to the Center in Myrtle Beach, and he asked me to join him. At first I was hesitant, as I was focused on planning my trip to England and Europe, and didn't want to be distracted. But since he was my good friend, and I was of course the person who had told him about Baba initially, I relented and agreed to go, as long as we wouldn't be staying too long.

In the middle of January we headed down to Myrtle Beach. Steve was not aware that one could stay on the Center, so we landed at a campground next to the Center, where we spent a frozen night sleeping in his car. Upon awakening, and after a long hot shower, we found our way onto the Center. When we arrived there we found out we could actually have stayed on the Center, so we shifted from the campground to staying in the Green Cabin on the Center.

I found the atmosphere of the Center to be lovely and serene. However, as I began to interact with the other guests, I found them to be, well, strange. It seemed like many of them had intimate personal relationships with Baba. They would say things like, "Baba has hidden my keys

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from me today.” I couldn’t understand the basis for any of this personalizing of Baba. So in response I put up something of a wall.

That day or the next, Steve and I were called over to Dilruba for what I later learned was a standard interview that Kitty Davy had with all newcomers. Kitty was at that time in her eighties, and had been living and serving on the Center since 1952, ever since Baba had left her there to help out, after she had lived with Him in India for many years.

We arrived and were shown into her office. Kitty seemed like a nice old lady, quite normal. As far as I was concerned, this interview was for Steve’s sake, since he was the Baba lover, and I was simply a friend of his. So Kitty started the interview by asking Steve some questions; but she soon turned to me and asked what I was doing in my life.

I told Kitty that I was getting ready to go to Europe; at that she looked at me rather intently and said, “I think you’re looking for something.” I remained quite silent, thinking to myself, “Who is this old lady to be peering inside my mind?” She turned her attention back to Steve, pursuing some other line of inquiry. Several minutes passed and all of a sudden, she turned back to me and said, “I think you *are* looking for something; and I think if you go to Rishikesh you will find what you are looking for.”

Well, that stopped me. I knew a little about Rishikesh, having read *Autobiography of a Yogi* by Paramahansa Yogananda; and in that book, he gave quite an interesting description of this most *sadhu*-friendly town in northern India. I also was under the impression (quite right as it turned out), that this was not a place normally associated with Meher Baba. And this made a difference to me, as I did not feel she was simply “handing me off” to some higher Baba authority to con-

vince me about Baba. In other words, I knew she was not proselytizing, but actually offering me specific direction.

Nevertheless, being in a somewhat rebellious mood, I said to her, “Well, I think I’ll go to Europe.”

To this Kitty said, “If you go to Europe, be sure to go to the four spiritual places that Baba told us about.” (These were St. Mark’s in Venice where Jesus had been, Avila in Spain where St. Theresa had lived, Assisi the home of St. Francis, and the Ligurian coast.) She also said that if I were in England, I could look up her relatives, and she gave me the contact information for several of her family members. And with that, the interview was over.

The remainder of the time at the Center was also uplifting, though as before, I did keep a distance from the Baba lovers. A few days later on our trip home, I was replaying the experience of the Center in my mind, and came to reviewing the time with Kitty and her suggestion that I go to Rishikesh. I was struck with a deep intuition—probably the deepest intuition I had ever experienced up to that moment—that she was absolutely right. So I turned to Steve, who was driving, and said, “Steve, I’m going to Rishikesh.”

A week after returning from the Center, I had a ticket in hand to fly to England on my way to India. I had found in a copy of the *Last Whole Earth Catalog* by Stewart Brand (a hippie “bible” of the time), a half page article about how to travel overland to Nepal. I tore this article out, and it was the only guidebook I had for the journey.

I went to England first and spent a month with my girlfriend. At the end of the month we both agreed that we should break up, since I was on my way to India with no expectation about if or when I might return, and she had her

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own spiritual path to follow in the Rudolph Steiner tradition. I began my trek eastward. To make a long story short, I traveled by train, hitchhiking, and then by bus commanded by a group of European young people, on my way through Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan. Because the border was closed between Pakistan and India, I flew over the border and landed in India.

My destination was Rishikesh, but I decided that I would have a little adventure before going there, since I had the idea that once I “found what I was looking for” in Rishikesh, I might never leave. So I decided to go for a pre-spiritual trek in Nepal. At that time the Jomson trekking route in the Annapurna range had just opened up for Westerners. At about one hundred and fifty miles roundtrip, this trek ran from Pokhara Valley up to Jomson (just south of the Tibetan border). It was very primitive at the time, with no amenities such as hotels or restaurants for Westerners. It was stunningly beautiful, and rugged. Along with my companion, I would go from village to village, and when it was time to stop for the night, we would simply knock on the door of one of the huts in a village we’d come to, and using hand gestures ask if we could eat there and sleep on their floor. The Nepalese people were unstintingly friendly and generous in providing our necessities, and in the morning after a simple breakfast, we would be back on the trail.

On one of those days, we were hiking along the trail and stopped for a rest. There was a dark-skinned man with long hair who was coming from the opposite direction, but was also resting at the same place, so we began to converse. It turned out that his name was Carlos, and he had just come from spending time with Maharaj-ji. I was excited, since as far as I knew, it was not possible to find him. But here was someone who could tell me where to find Ram Dass’s guru! Not only that, he told me Maharaj-ji’s real name, which was

Neem Karoli Baba. So Carlos gave me the essential information for locating the master, and then off we each went in our different directions.

Once I had completed the trek, I was now ready to reach Rishikesh—at that time a relatively small town, located near where the Ganges comes out of the Himalayas in the northern part of India. There were many ashrams there, and in the hills around Rishikesh were caves where yogis lived—a town of *sadhus* and seekers. When I went to Rishikesh, I still wasn't sure what it was that I would find there, I only had Kitty's encouragement to orient me. So I found myself wandering around the area for a couple of weeks, checking out different ashrams, and waiting for some call—inner or outer—to reveal itself to me.

Up to this point in my search I had assumed that what I needed was a practice to follow in order to fuel my spiritual search. Rishikesh is, in some ways, the seat of many practitioners of yoga, meditation and prayer. This town seemed to epitomize the ascetic approach to God. I was determined to stay there. However, over the next couple of weeks of wandering in and out of ashrams, a realization began to dawn on me. I began to realize that I was in a fundamental way not suited to an ascetic life. I didn't have, perhaps, the temperament and certainly not the discipline to restrict my life to these kinds of spiritual practices to the exclusion of all else. This realization didn't come all at once, but it grew over a couple of weeks to the point that I could no longer ignore that reality.

Coming to accept that reality, however, was depressing. I had come all the way to India to find a spiritual life, only to find that I wasn't suited to it. Perhaps the only alternative was to return to the West, give up on the spiritual life, and start over in some materialistic pursuit as the basis for my

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life. Fortunately, I recalled from my reading that there was one factor that superseded all spiritual practices—the intervention of a living master. At that moment that I remembered there was a living master I could visit, and he was actually quite close to where I was in Rishikesh. His name was Neem Karoli Baba.

So I proceeded to travel by State Transport (ST) bus to Nainital, from which I took another local bus about forty-five minutes down windy roads until it stopped across a creek from a temple. I got out and walked across a stone bridge and into the temple grounds at Kainchi. One of the people there directed me to a small building where the master was giving *darshan*, and I went in. The master looked at me, and after a few moments said *Jao*, meaning, “Get out.” Of course, I had no idea what that meant, and he repeated it, and I was then ushered out.

I joined the other devotees, including about two dozen Westerners, in waiting for Neem Karoli Baba to come give us *darshan* later that day. Mid-afternoon he came out and sat on his *tucket* (wooden bench), wrapped in his blanket. The devotees all sat around him, and there was an hour or two, comprised of silence, singing, and some limited verbal interaction. The master did not speak English, so anything that he said was translated by one of the Indian devotees who was also present. However, much of the time, Neem Karoli Baba seemed to be in another world, and we were all just bathed in his presence.

After it was over, I was approached by some of the other disciples, who asked me what I was doing there. On finding out I intended to stay for some time, they helped orient me to my surroundings, and arranged for me to stay in a hotel in Nainital, where several of the other devotees were living. So began a period of about a month in which I joined the devo-

tees in daily pilgrimages to the temple at Kainchi for twice daily *darshans*, one that began around 6 A.M. and lasted a couple of hours, and the other that was usually mid-afternoon. Thus, my first experience of *darshan* from a master.

Over the next few days I joined the *satsang* of Westerners who journeyed daily to the temple/ashram. Mornings were spent with Maharaj-ji and the rest of the day was spent hanging out in the temple grounds reading, meditating, having lunch and tea, and visiting. In the later afternoon, Maharaj-ji would join us again for a couple of hours when there was often chanting of the name of Ram or Krishna or other holy beings; and this lasted until we left around 6 P.M. Each day the routine was similar.

For the first few days I simply took in the experience, but after a few days I began to feel something churning and moving inside me—an awakening that I'd never experienced, though it seemed disconnected from anything external—it was not a function of the exercises, prayers, meditations, talks, or anything else I could discern. Rather, it was the awakening of love; and as the days went on the experience deepened. One night I awoke from sleep with the experience vividly inside me—I saw the image of Maharaj-ji all around me. I was hooked. The experience of love was deeper, far deeper than anything I'd ever experienced. The love was completely palpable and yet completely independent of anything other than the inner reaches of my own being. I later found out that the word for this was *Guru Kripa*—the grace of the guru—bestowed without any reciprocation on the part of the disciple. Grace is given on all levels—spiritual and material. Instead of being asked for money, someone came to me, on Maharaj-ji's behalf, I believe, to ask if I needed money to enable me to continue to stay there. No strings attached.

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For the next several weeks, I felt myself to be completely drawn into Maharaj-ji and his presence. However, while those who were in the *satsang* were almost uniformly disciples or *chelas* of Maharaj-ji, I never found myself considering to become a disciple. Most of them had names given to them, such as Dwarka, Krishna Das, Ram Dass, etc. I was never given a name, nor did I long for one. Instead, I felt over time a growing restlessness which was confusing to my mind, since I had found in this relationship with Maharaj-ji something that was so far beyond anything I might have dreamed of. And yet I could never honestly say to myself that I was his disciple.

This restlessness left me feeling that I needed a change, but where to go? It turned out that a few things happened while I was still there that suggested my next steps, though it took me awhile to connect the dots.

Ever since I'd been to the Meher Spiritual Center and had been given a Baba button, I used to occasionally wear it. One day, several of us from the *satsang* went to Delhi, where each of us had some business to conduct. On this day I happened to be wearing that very same button. We arranged to meet for lunch at a Chinese restaurant in Connaught Place. At lunchtime I arrived at the restaurant, which was located inside a hotel, so I walked in, past the reception counter and into the restaurant. Before I got to my seat, I heard a booming voice behind me say "Jai Baba!" I turned around and an Indian man introduced himself as Jal Dastur. He said he and his business partner, James Cox, were just checking out of the hotel when he saw me walk past and noticed the Baba button. He was very warm and friendly, asking me what I was doing there. I told him that I was staying in Nainital with Maharaj-ji. Jal encouraged me to come to Ahmednagar when I had the chance, to meet the *mandali* and experience Baba's atmosphere there.

So that was the first clue I got about where to go, though I didn't recognize it at the time. There was very little by way of teaching that occurred at the ashram, so there was a void of spiritual input to help me digest my inner experience. However, one day a copy of *Life at its Best* seemed to just show up at the hotel where I was staying. Lacking anything better to do, I read this pithy book and found that the words Baba said in it resonated deeply in my heart as words straight from the Source. A second clue.

Then one day another pilgrim named Tom showed up, who had just come from Meherabad, and because people realized I had a connection with Meher Baba, they directed him to talk with me. Tom regaled me with stories of his time sitting with Mani and the other *mandali*. I was starting to be hooked.

As my restlessness increased, one might think that He had given me sufficient clues that I was to satisfy my restlessness by a trip to Meherabad. Not so—I was a harder nut to crack than that. In continued confusion about how to resolve this feeling that I had to leave the one place that seemed the fulfillment of all I longed for, I decided to consult the i-Ching about my dilemma of where to go. Sure enough, the i-Ching in an unusually specific way, told me to go to south from Nainital—exactly the direction of Ahmednagar.

So after bidding goodbye to Maharajji and receiving his blessing, and with every expectation of returning at some point, I embarked for Ahmednagar. After stopping in Nasik for a ten-day Buddhist *Vipassana* meditation course, I found my way to Ahmednagar, and at dusk I was let off the bus just outside the Trust Office. This was on July 12, 1972, a date I remember specifically because shortly after my arrival I

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ran into Adi K. Irani and a number of other pilgrims at the Sarosh Canteen. They had just returned from the *dhuni* at Meherabad.

So I entered what I had decided would be a two-week stay there, to take in whatever I could from the experience before heading back up to Nainital. I found a good enough place to stay at the Dowlat Lodge, and joined in with the Baba lovers on their daily pilgrimages to Meherazad and Meherabad.

I must admit I was rather put off by the Baba lovers, much as I had been at the Center, where they all seemed to have a very personal relationship with Baba, a relationship that seemed abstract and unachievable. At first all I could see at Meherabad and Meherazad were the *mandali*; I heard great stories, looked at beautiful photos, and visited a gravesite. I had just come from a living master and so this all seemed distant from that experience. But I was determined to stay for two weeks before returning to Nainital.

After being there for several days, one day I went to Meherazad, traveling with the other lovers on the ST bus that deposited us at the end of the long lane leading up to Meherazad estate. That day I was walking alone and was thinking to myself something like “Daniel, you have been associated with Baba now for some time, but haven’t found a way to connect with Him; why is that?” Having said that, I recalled something that Eruch Jessawala had said the day before in Mandali Hall. Eruch was recounting what Baba had said about how one falls in love with Him. According to Eruch, Baba had said that falling in love with Him happened the opposite way that falling in love happens in the world. In the world, one meets someone, falls in love, and from that moment they can’t stop thinking about the object of their love.

However Baba said that with Him, it was just the opposite. One first starts by thinking of Him constantly and then one falls in love with Him. So as I reflected on this, still walking down the lane to Meherazad, I thought to myself that for so long I had known of Baba but never found a way to connect. Perhaps this was the clue I'd been waiting for; after all, I had decided to stay in 'Nagar for two weeks; so I could at the very least spend these two weeks thinking of Him. But then the next question that occurred to me was, "How to think of Him?" I had very little to work with to answer that; in fact, the only thing I could think of was to take His name. What else could I do?

So I started to repeat Meher Baba's name inwardly as I continued to walk down the lane. And just as I started to repeat His name, I felt a deep well opening in my heart and the experience of His Love and Presence became immediately overwhelming. It was the exact same love awakening experience as I'd had with the opening of my heart that I experienced with Maharaj-ji. It was as if Baba had been waiting all the time from when I'd first heard of Him to that moment so I would actually turn to face Him directly and sincerely before He revealed Himself.

While the love experience was identical between Maharaj-ji and Meher Baba, there was one difference. I had never felt from Maharaj-ji that he was my master, no matter how special and important he was to me. However, my awakening experience with Meher Baba was imprinted with the message from Him: "I am your Master." With this I immediately knew that my search was complete. I had come home to Him.

Over the years I have reflected on all this and three things became clear to me. One is that the relationship between

Daniel Stone

the Master and the lover/disciple is fundamentally based on connections. There were people who showed up at Maharaj-ji's ashram, just as they showed up in Meher Baba's presence, who seemed to feel little or nothing from their contact with the master. Yet there were others who were completely opened up and transformed by the experience. Baba has indicated that the experience one has with a master is solely based on the connections that have been forged in one or more past lives.

The second thing I came to understand was about the nature of connections. I know that it is said there is usually only one master for any individual, though I had understood that there are exceptions to this. Laura Delavigne was a long-time disciple of Hazrat Inyat Khan who then became a follower of Meher Baba. Likewise, there are others who were connected to Sai Baba, Upasni Maharaj and others, and who then became the disciples of Meher Baba. Therefore, the nature of the connection is also important. I knew that there was a connection between me and Maharaj-ji, but it was not one in which, in this life at least, we had a master-disciple relationship. Nevertheless, Maharaj-ji played a key role in bringing me to Meher Baba; and Kitty Davy had been an essential link in that chain. So I had connections with all of them, but each one played a different role.

The third insight for me concerns the need for a living master. Some believe—and it is reinforced in the *Discourses*—that one must be with a living master. Maharaj-ji was a living master. However, it was completely apparent to me that like Baba, he was not in truth his body. There was nothing I experienced with him that was a function of anything he did or said, or anything he had me do or say. It was all happening in a realm that was quite apart from the physical form.

And then I came to Baba. That experience of coming to Him, though He was no longer in His body, was essentially the same depth and power of that which I'd received from a master in the physical form. As Baba said, "I am not this body." The truth of this as I understand it, applies especially to Perfect beings such as the Perfect Masters and the Avatar. So the search for a master in the body when one has the possibility of a connection to the Avatar is simply unnecessary, and a distraction from the boon and blessing that is available through the Avatar. All that matters is the internal connection, which, as He said, is available to one and all through His remembrance.

Currently Daniel Stone lives in Myrtle Beach; having had a full career as an organizational change consultant, his professional practice is starting to recede, allowing more time for Baba, music, and other areas of interest.

Mark Trichka

101 Tales
of Finding Love

I Didn't Have
A Care In The World

by Mark Trichka

101 Tales of Finding Love



Ca. early 1980s

Mark and Lisa's wedding, June 25 1988
Putney, Vermont



Mark Trichka

THE FIRST TIME I HEARD OF MEHER BABA was in 1979. I was twenty years old and had moved away to Massachusetts after growing up in Connecticut. I was told about Meher Baba by a friend named Peter Louvis. When I had first met Peter a few months earlier in Vermont, we compared notes on the various spiritual books we'd read that made big impressions on us. The book we had both just finished reading was Paramahansa Yogananda's *Autobiography Of A Yogi*. We agreed that it was quite a revelation for us.

Based on the books I'd read, and the longing and searching I'd experienced, I considered myself a spiritual seeker and felt ready for whatever came around the next bend.

Peter told me that he was searching for a spiritual master, and from time to time he would report back to me. Each master he investigated, Muktananda, Kirpal Singh, etc. seemed promising at first, but eventually they didn't click for him.

One day when we were talking on the phone he told me that he had found his Master and that His name was Meher Baba. I could hear the conviction in his voice.

The next time we got together I read a little bit about Baba from the books Peter had just purchased. One of them, *How A Master Works* by Ivy Duce, included a definition of the term Avatar and the statement that the Avatar reappears every seven hundred to fourteen hundred years. That made sense to me. I listened to Peter narrate his experience of traveling to the Meher Spiritual Center in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina and also to the Walnut Creek, California Sufi Center. There he met people who had been in contact with Meher Baba. I was able to recognize and accept Meher

Baba as the Avatar and also as my Master, Father and Friend. My conviction came quickly and easily.

At that time, I was living on Cape Cod. I was playing mandolin in a bluegrass band called Raw Honey and we were gigging all over the Cape and in the Boston area. Peter suggested I make it a priority to meet Meher Baba's disciples. I wasted no time and headed to the Meher Spiritual Center in Myrtle Beach in March of 1979, riding Greyhound buses as far as Philadelphia, then hitchhiking the rest of the way. In Philadelphia I met some fellow hippies and they kindly invited me to crash in their YMCA room. That night I had a series of dreams about the importance of treating others with compassion and love. I felt that these dreams were an important beginning to my pilgrimage.

As I hitchhiked south along I-95, one ride took me across the Susquehanna River in Maryland. It was late March 1979. A partial meltdown was taking place at the Three Mile Island nuclear power plant in Pennsylvania. It was the most serious accident at an American commercial nuclear power plant. The driver and I listened to the news reports over the car radio as we drove over the river knowing that the disaster was happening upstream from us. I was tremendously relieved once we got far away from it. I had camping gear with me and the next night I camped in the woods just off the highway in Virginia.

The next morning I got a ride all the way to Myrtle Beach from a guy from Virginia who had just finished a prison sentence on a cocaine charge. He was driving a convertible and was quite friendly. We agreed to split the cost of a hotel room in downtown Myrtle Beach. I didn't tell him that I was trying to get to the Meher Spiritual Center. When morning came, I left my backpack and mandolin in our hotel room and went out to a pay phone. I looked up Meher

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Baba in the phone book and found the number for the Center. I was aware that it was an extraordinary and curious moment in my life to be looking up “God” in the phone book. I dialed the number and a man with a Hispanic accent answered. I later came to learn that this was Ralph Hernandez. I told him that I would like to visit the Center. He said that I was welcome to come and visit right away. I got the address and started hitchhiking there immediately. For some crazy reason I didn’t even bother to go back to the hotel room to get my belongings.

It was difficult to find the Center, since the entrance was marked only with a modest sign that said “Meher Spiritual Center.” I overshot it at first, but then found the entrance on my next pass.

Ralph welcomed me at the Gateway and I felt deeply fortunate to have found my way there. A young Baba lover offered to drive me into the Center and show me around. While he was doing so he gave me a copy of Alan Cohen’s book *The Mastery Of Consciousness*. I was shown around the Center and felt a very deep connection. I decided to stay there overnight. I wasn’t sure if I would ever see my mandolin and backpack again. I did not feel the least bit concerned about it, which was quite out of character for me. I stayed overnight in the Lookout Cabin.

The next morning I decided that I wanted to continue staying on the Center for several more days. I quickly hitchhiked back to downtown Myrtle Beach to the motel room that I had shared with my friendly ex-con. He had checked out of the hotel and all my stuff was gone. Again I felt completely unconcerned. Connecting with Baba’s home in the West made me feel fully alive. It also made me feel that I didn’t have a care in the world. I started walking away from the hotel and down the main drag near the boardwalk. All of

a sudden I saw the guy from Virginia driving his convertible toward me. I could see my backpack propped up his back seat. He saw me and drove right up telling me he was glad to see me and that he had been looking all over for me. I thanked him profusely, although I kept silent about my visit to the Center and about Meher Baba. He gave me back my things and I headed straight back to the Center.

When I returned, I met with Kitty Davy and was thrilled to meet her. I was struck by her friendly English manner and by the great depth I could see in her eyes. She told me to read the *Discourses*, *God Speaks* and *Listen, Humanity*. I was very fortunate to get to play the mandolin for her in her office.

I was also thrilled to meet Jane Haynes. She gave me a beautiful poster of Baba. Because I kept referring to Baba only by the name “Meher” (which was what felt natural to me at the time), she mentioned that she was fond of doing that as well.

I stayed for a few more nights in the Lookout Cabin. I remember sitting on the screened porch on April Fools’ Day trying to write poetry to “Meher.”

After I left the Center I hitchhiked around North Carolina. I visited a friend in Gastonia and then camped near Linville Falls. Along the way I read the book I’d been given, *The Mastery Of Consciousness*. It gave me a clear and succinct overview of Baba’s life and messages.

On Easter weekend, which in 1979 was the middle weekend of April, I met my Raw Honey bandmates at the Union Grove, North Carolina music festival and we competed in the bluegrass band competition. We didn’t win, but we did reach the finals. In fact we were one of the crowd favorites.

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We certainly were an oddity since we were from Cape Cod and were playing bluegrass—a music native to the North Carolina area. The southerners were quite tickled by us. I mentioned Meher Baba and about visiting the Center to my bandmates and friends, but it did not have the same impact on them as it had on me even though it was one of my bandmates who had shared *The Autobiography Of A Yogi* with me. After that I mostly kept quiet about Baba.

A few months after my first visit to the Center I bought and read the Baba books that Kitty had suggested. It was a deep and wonderful reading experience for me. When I told Kitty that I was from Cape Cod she mentioned that she knew two Baba lovers also living on the Cape: Stuart Baker and Don McBride. She gave me their contact info. It turned out that Don lived right around the corner from me in the town of Woods Hole. Eventually I worked for Stu and Don's construction company, which helped me finance my first pilgrimage to India in 1982. (I'm also grateful to the Louvis family for their help in getting me to India) We began to have occasional Baba meetings at our homes on the Cape.

I moved to Vermont in 1984 and in 1988 married Lisa Brande, who became a Baba lover after finding out about Baba from me. We divide our time between Vermont and the Gulf Coast of Florida. We play music together professionally and have been doing so for many years. Lisa and I have had the good fortune of making many trips to India and playing music for Baba's *mandali* and for the other pilgrims. I greatly enjoy writing, performing and recording Baba songs with Lisa for the Baba community.

Beloved Baba has kindly kept me close ever since I first found out about Him. I'm very grateful for the fellowship of my Baba friends. I have such a fondness for all of Baba's places; especially the Meher Spiritual Center, where He won my heart and brought me into His fold all those years ago.

Varinder Vartak

101 Tales
of Finding Love

Meher's Meher

by Varinder Vartak



Nikhil, Meher and Varinder Vartak,
March 2018 in Thane, India

Varinder Vartak

OUR JOURNEY TO BABA began with intense pain and suffering. My husband and I had been a happy couple for the past seven years. We were excitedly waiting for our first baby. Our world shattered with the passing of our dear daughter in November 2016, just forty-seven days after her birth. We suffered the worst pain anyone could go through—losing a child.

With her passing came a very big realization that we are not just a body. There is something beyond the gross. Another big realisation was the power of true love. Love remains when everything else goes. We questioned the existence of God, but I was not going to leave Him until He gave me all my answers. Someone up there was listening to the cry of my heart—Someone I was to rediscover very soon. I knew that my daughter still existed and I was so desperate to find her and her whereabouts. My daughter was a part of me and I was worried about her.

It was just a week after her transition that I read about Meher Baba in a book and I felt some connection. It was in fact my mother who dreamt of Him that night. The journey to rediscovery began that day. Baba had begun His work of healing and He was trying every possible way to pull me out of that dark grief. I could feel Him healing and talking to me in my sleep. I envied my friends who had their little ones with them. One particular night I had someone telling me in my sleep, "Remember the love that you share with your child, no other does."

I still didn't know that it was Baba who was helping me. Messages started pouring from random people around me. Baba was doing His job and was trying every possible way to soothe my aching heart. He kept assuring me that she was

not gone forever, but would return again in a new form. She had just gone away to get Baba into our lives, to rekindle that past connection with Him. We undertook a trip to Meherabad also during that period. I knew I had come Home. My baby's purpose was fulfilled.

Numerous dreams and messages came—some were glimpses to another world, some were pieces of advice and some just expressed pure love. Baba kept me occupied with all sorts of experiences in that waiting period (before trying for another baby). Seven and a half months had passed after losing her and I was losing all my patience to have her back. I was getting closer to her.

One specific dream was when I saw Baba in a dream. It was in a setting of an old school and Baba told me that He would be there around me, but disguised. I didn't understand what it meant. A couple of days later a student in my school (I work in a school) randomly told his teacher in a math class that he was getting the feeling that Miss Varinder is going to be pregnant again. This colleague of mine shared this with me later in the day. That was the day I conceived again.

Baba was, in fact, disguised in the form of that small child. And a couple of days later I read a post by Manididi saying that Baba's grace comes disguised. I connected all the dots that day. After that day I was guided in all little things—right from when to take the test and which doctor to go to. He stood by me like a mother taking care of a baby. My due date was 31st January (Baba's Amartithi day), but I delivered early on 1st January.

My daughter came back to us in the form a handsome little boy this time as a wonderful New Year's gift. When I held him for the first time, it was such a precious reunion. We

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have named him Meher and he is seven-and-a-half months old now. That pain still lingers in one corner of my heart, but I am happy that our daughter's purpose is fulfilled and that we have Baba in our lives now.

When I first read about Baba being referred to as God, I felt it was very strange. But now Baba is my God—when my heart was crying in pain He listened to the cry of my heart and helped me.

Just one month after my daughter's passing, my sister had a dream. She doesn't remember seeing anyone, but it was a voice telling her not to cry and to find a new name for my daughter as she is going to return soon. Her new name should be the combination of her previous name "KIA" and "MEHER." She was told that the new name had to reflect "MEHER" to the outside world.

After my son's birth, I was still not sure—was this really my daughter in a new form? I asked Baba for a confirmation. Though we had already thought of naming him "Meher," my mother-in-law still got the initial letters of his name from the horoscope (In India babies are named after the initial letter taken from their horoscope). The letters that came for him were "KI". Our daughter's name was "KIA." Meher's pet name (nickname) is "Kinu" now.

My daughter didn't bring just us into Baba's fold, but many others who needed Him. We feel blessed that Baba has chosen us as instruments to spread His name.

In His love forever. Jai Baba!

I am Varinder and my husband's name is Nikhil Vartak. We are based in Mumbai, India. I am a visual artist and teach in a school and Nikhil is a software engineer. We have been happily married since eight years now and have a lovely little seven-and-a-half month old boy, Meher. We have seen many ups and more downs in our lives as a young couple. But pain has been our biggest teacher—we have realised what life is and what is the purpose of our life.

Paula Pam Wainwright

101 Tales
of Finding Love

Listen, Listen, Listen
To My Heart Song

by Paula Pam Wainwright

101 Tales of Finding Love



Paula with Mehera in 1986, Meherazad, above,
and at Meher Spiritual Center, below



Paula Pam Wainwright

LISTEN, LISTEN, LISTEN, TO MY HEART SONG
LISTEN, LISTEN, LISTEN, TO MY HEART SONG
I WILL NEVER FORGET YOU,
I WILL NEVER FORSAKE YOU
I WILL NEVER FORGET YOU,
I WILL NEVER FORSAKE YOU

—PARAMAHANSA YOGANANDA

THE FIRST TIME that I visited the Meher Spiritual Center I was nineteen years old. I had many seasons of life before me—a seeker who was searching for something I could not name. During that week at the Center, I met God internally and was touched by His grace and the sweetest, most intimate, companionship I would ever know. I was beyond enchanted, had a honeymoon which seemed to last for a long time after our initial meeting. He entered my heart and has remained with me throughout my days, all through these many years that followed, despite those times that were profoundly difficult and at times quite dark.

Several weeks ago I retired from a working career of over forty years. The gift that I am giving myself is a week's stay at the Meher Spiritual Center. Though I have visited many times over the years, this visit seems more timely and symbolic at this particular time. As I finish my Baba story, I begin to look backwards upon the seasons of my life. I return to His Center now, where it all began. How perfect is His timing.

I was born in Geneva, Switzerland on November 29, 1953 to parents who were both born in Brooklyn, New York and were American citizens. My father was studying medicine at the University of Geneva. Shortly after their wedding in the summer of 1951, my parents sailed across the Atlantic to their new life in Europe. I remember being given snippets

over time, stories told to me growing up, having photographs explained, but to me they were just stories as I have no conscious memories of my two and a half years spent there.

Several years ago I was visiting the Meher Spiritual Center in Myrtle Beach and staying in the Guest House reading part of Volume 2 of Mani's book *The Joyous Life*. Volume 2 begins with a trip to the West by Baba and His *mandali* in 1952—their visit to Myrtle Beach and their stay at the Center, as well as the tragic accident they endured in Prague, Oklahoma, their recuperation back in Myrtle Beach prior to their leaving the United States, and their stops in Europe en route back to India. The group spent time in England, then with lovers in Switzerland and sites in Italy before spending several “restless” days in Geneva where Air India was on strike, so their travel plans were somewhat delayed. They were finally able to fly to Karachi on August 21st and then back home.

The story I tell myself is that my parents somehow passed Baba and His party—at the airport, on the streets of Geneva or perhaps strolling around Lake Geneva during the few days Baba and His *mandali* were waiting to fly out of Geneva on their return home. I have often delighted in imagining my mom locking eyes with Mani's dancing eyes, or my dad passing by Baba and receiving that glance that would change the course of a life for eternity. Perhaps, their paths did cross in those days and the seeds were sown—my birth a little more than a year later. It is at least an enchanting story to tell myself.

We returned to the United States when I was two and a half years of age and lived in Brooklyn for several years with my grandparents in their apartment. During that time my brother was born, three years younger than I. After kinder-

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garten my family moved to the west coast of Florida, first to Clearwater, then to Dunedin, where my dad was employed as a medical doctor.

Several things in the South were confusing and uncomfortable to me. One was the two sets of public bathrooms and water fountains, with signs for “colored” and “white.” I had never seen this in the North, which was much more ethnically diverse, so this was hard to understand. Another was that I was the only Jewish student in my entire public school, and we were the only Jewish family in our neighborhood. The local culture of this southern town was primarily Christian and white. These experiences had an impact on me—that feeling of being “other.”

In the early morning hours of January 11th, 1963 an event occurred that changed the course of my entire life. My father, who was thirty-five years of age, died suddenly in his sleep. I heard a small gasp and my mother pleading with my Dad to awaken, but to no avail. I was in the bathroom getting ready for school when this unfolded and within moments found myself in their bedroom, frantically attempting to wake him up as well. In no time at all, the house was filled with so many people. I remember being in my father's study, spinning around in his brown leather chair. I had seen the ambulance take him away in the stretcher, saw my mother leave with him. One of my Dad's partners from work, who was also a good friend, told me everything was going to be okay, but I knew deep in my bones this was not so, that he was never coming back. I remember my mother returning from the hospital and collapsing in her father's arms and saying, “He's gone, he's gone.” I remember how absolutely alone I felt, a feeling that stayed with me for so many years after.

A recurring experience I vividly remember having upon falling asleep at night: I am lying in bed alone and so scared, night after night with what seems like a vast dark abyss before me. I am so cold and frightened, no one to talk with, no company of another, perhaps it was the same for my little brother. How I wish I had thought about him and tried to be a comfort to him at the time, but I imagine I was trying so hard to understand and make sense of what had happened, and to just hold on myself. Thoughts and questions would come rushing in, like where do we go when we die? What does it mean to die? How can a person be here with us and then just suddenly disappear as if into the mist? So difficult to process for a nine-year-old mind and heart.

In 1963 there was no active Hospice movement in the United States. There was little to no community understanding of death, loss and grief, what families needed, how to accompany children through the process. It is because of the misunderstanding of what was really needed to process grief effectively, that a decision was made by the adults in charge to not have my younger brother and I attend the funeral and memorial events. I do not remember anyone really speaking to us about what had happened. It was like a bad dream. People told me to be a “big and strong girl” for my mom, but I received little support. It was such a difficult time. Much later in life I came to understand that when one parent dies, a child often loses the other as well, as the surviving bereft parent is grieving themselves and often unavailable emotionally for the children, which without outside support is so daunting for all concerned.

I eventually spent much of my career in nursing, in Hospice and end of life care, something about my early personal experience of grief and loss prepared me for this intimate work with others, especially children. I always believed this work was my true soul work. In 2012, I had the honor of

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caring for Mom as she passed on. Our time together was extraordinary, also so sacred, a healing beyond measure. I saw how much loss she had endured in a life, how those losses formed her, hardened her and yet in the end when everything that is not real faded away, when all the masks and persona's dissolve, what is often left is softness and love, sweetest love.

How catastrophic this loss of my father was to me! Dad and I were very close. He was the parent I felt really “got” me, whose eyes I felt light up when I walked into the room. He encouraged my creativity, arranged art classes for me, bought me a piano when I was seven years old and arranged for the loveliest teacher, Grace Waterson, to give me piano lessons. He taught me how to play golf and took me for the first ride in his brand new Dodge Dart convertible with the red leather interior. The last night I saw him he had taken me to a classical music concert. He brought so much warmth and sweetness to my life, and in one moment, it was gone forever. We stayed in Florida to finish the school year and then returned to New York to live with family, in Rockland County.

As a teenager I pulled myself out of confirmation classes at our local synagogue /temple as I was mad at God and remained angry at the one who took away the one person whom I loved so much. In addition, the classes held little meaning to me besides a place to gather with friends. This anger that I carried towards God lasted several years until I distinctly remember yearning for something more spiritual—something alive for me, with meaning and significance, to perhaps explain things. In Junior High school I was briefly interested in mysticism, but not much bore fruit in this domain for quite a while.

In High School in the late sixties and early seventies, I did my fair share of experimenting with drugs, including psychedelics and the lifestyle of youth in those days. It was a time full of idealism, hope, vision and transformation, for which I will forever feel grateful. During my experimentation with drugs, I began to seek a greater understanding of what life was about, to question the purpose of life, of suffering. My quest for meaning took primary importance, coloring much of my life—values, music, books, interests and friends. Many afternoons I practiced yoga, watching Richard Hittleman on television lead me through practice and poses. I became an avid journal writer at around sixteen or seventeen years of age, which I have continued to the present. Writing and poetry have always been a primary means of self-expression and an important tool of self-care.

One weekend when I was seventeen, my friend and I were visiting my relatives who lived near the ocean. We had taken a small amount of LSD while visiting the beach that day. Within a short period of time we were tremendously altered, able to communicate with each other without words, a glance was enough. Each particle of sand on the beach became gems that glistened in that sunlight like dazzling jewels. When some boys on the beach yelled out, “Do you want to be buried?” meaning in the sand, I immediately began to experience where we were as a state of consciousness called “heaven and hell,” where I could visit by mere thought and intention. My friend and I went back and forth, visiting these different levels, meeting one another when summoned by the other, as if traveling in a celestial elevator. At one point during my experience I totally thought that I was a Divine Being, that “I was God.” Although this vision was grandiose at the time, in retrospect I came to honor this experience as offering me a genuine profound nugget of wisdom, as I, we, all, are essentially God; although this experience I’d had was chemically induced, I realized then and

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there that the rest of the journey was an internal one. A drug had opened me up to a most universal concept but could take me no further. There was no longer a need to continue to experiment with hallucinogens.

Thus my more conscious journey as a spiritual seeker began. I fantasized going to India to find a guru, and secretly wished my family would move somewhere that was “happening”—perhaps California where so much more appeared to be going on. Life as it was felt so ordinary and mundane. I hated that. I so longed for more, yet could not name what it was I was seeking. It is interesting that out of my High School graduating class, three of us became Baba lovers, a fourth classmate married a Baba lover. The four of us have maintained a warm and caring friendship with one another. Three of us now live in Asheville. While in High School I went to New York City to a *satsang* of a friend’s guru, but left disappointed, as I knew this path was not for me. I had also once read, “When the pupil is ready, the teacher will come.” This very thought, faith and a deep knowing would accompany me over the next few years of my journey, and provide some solace.

I did not attend my High School graduation as I went off to Israel for a nine-week adventure, part of it working on a Kibbutz. My mom thought this experience might connect me with my ethnic and religious roots. The summer proved to be a huge transformative and learning experience in my life, but it did not bring me home to my “Jewish roots.” I did however, have a profound *déjà vu* experience while in an ancient mosque in the old city of Jerusalem—I knew without a doubt that I had lived there in another lifetime.

My path through college was circuitous, largely because I did not have a strong vision for myself—who I was or what I wanted to do. I chose nursing as suggested by others, as a

practical career and was enrolled in the school of Nursing at the University of Miami in the fall of 1971. I dropped out after one semester as I did not want to commit to such a heavy science curriculum at that time. While at the University of Miami, I attended off campus classes in Transcendental Meditation, and practiced it for bit of time after leaving Miami. Although I seemed to resonate with the practice of meditation, I did not feel this was my spiritual path. When I returned to Miami years later and was an active participant in the Baba group there, I learned that Lawrence Reiter (Hermes) had actually held *God Speaks* classes on the University of Miami campus during the time I had attended. I do not have any conscious recall of seeing flyers or of hearing Baba's name during that time.

After one semester in Miami I returned home to New York and enrolled the next semester in Rockland Community College's experimental program which allowed for more choice and flexibility in my course of study. One of the offerings for English credits in this program was a class called "Mysticism." This spoke to my sensibilities and piqued my interest. On the first day of class, Bruce Hoffman, the instructor, talked about his experience in India shortly after his spiritual master "dropped His physical body." (Meher Baba's last *Darshan*.) I had never heard death described like that before. I wish I could convey the light, the vibrancy, the sanctity of the experience he described. I felt as if I had witnessed, in hearing this story, something so profound, and I wanted more. The energy in that little classroom upstairs was something I had never before witnessed in this life. I devised a way to bump into the teacher after class, so that I could find out more about his teacher, Meher Baba. I longed for more information, more stories and more experiences like what we'd had in class that afternoon. I had so many questions. My head and my heart were so full. I asked Bruce Hoffman for advice on how to find out more about Meher

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Baba. Bruce was most gracious to me. He recommended I visit a bookstore in New York, called Samuel Weisner's, and suggested I begin by reading two of Meher Baba's books, *Avatar* and *Listen, Humanity*, both of which I purchased soon after and loved. They remain some of my favorites until this day.

The following fall took me to a small experimental liberal arts college in Franconia, New Hampshire, in the White Mountains. The physical location was idyllic. Many of my high school friends from New York were already attending. I had a lot of freedom to explore different disciplines and paths of study, which I really needed at that time. In one psychology class, "Psyche as Symbol," I was introduced to the life and works of Carl G. Jung. I was just so inspired and could not get enough of the material. Years later I pursued a graduate degree in Psychology with a focus on Imaginal/Depth Psychology, first introduced in that class many years before.

In a weaving/fiber arts class, I noted a young woman who wore a locket with a photo I recognized as Meher Baba's face. Weeks later we talked as she sat close by me in an assembly after the tragic death of some students. The mood on campus was somber and profoundly sad. Donna and I were drawn to each other and introduced ourselves. We went back to her room and spent hours talking about Baba, her spiritual journey thus far and mine. We discussed the possibility of making plans that coming spring to visit the Meher Spiritual Center in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. Neither of us had ever been there. This was the first time I learned such a place existed. The air was infused with excitement and the possibility of what awaited. We did visit Baba's Center in the spring. We met in the Port of Authority terminal in NYC, and traveled for several days on a Greyhound bus to Myrtle Beach, where a young couple, I believe

Barbara and Malcolm, met us at the bus station. Before long we were on the Center's grounds and entered one enchanting world!

After checking in, we were escorted to Dilruba to meet Kitty and Elizabeth, Baba's early Western *mandali*, whom we had briefly read about. A priceless visit—the warmth and care extended, the attention to detail as they provided us with self-addressed stamped post cards and insisted we notify our mothers that we had arrived safely. I realize now that we were quite young, Donna eighteen and I nineteen, as many young Baba lovers were then.

We stayed at the Center for over a week that first visit, and I had a variety of experiences. I returned often during my young adulthood years when I lived on the east coast. Although I did feel the absolute, unmistakable enchantment and beauty of the place, and the love that was more than palpable, I initially struggled with the concept of God having taken human form. And in my lifetime, of all things! Perhaps it was that I was raised in the Jewish faith without a living God in form, but it was initially difficult for me to embrace the concept that Baba was a Divine Avatar, Who had come again, in this age, in this form. I carried my question to Baba deep within me wherever I went, not unlike a whisper of a prayer, *Baba, Baba, please show me Who You are!*

Not long after I was aware of this conscious inquiry, Donna and I walked to the beach on the main footpath from the Center. I remember it so vividly—that spring day, the smell and taste of the salt air, the sounds of the woodlands, a small patch of sand on the left side of the footpath leading to the beach with the words written in shells “I AM THE OCEAN OF LOVE.” I still feel the enchantment of those moments—the familiarity, the deep knowing that I was being accompanied and held, and had always been accompanied,

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no matter how long it had been since I had felt so desperately alone and abandoned. I knew at that moment that I had not been forgotten. I felt infused with a love so sweet and tender, a kind of love that was deep and nourishing, that bathed every cell and fiber of my being. I sensed my heart soften right there in those moments, like a giant exhale of surrender and deep experience of pervasive peace. For the first time in as long as I could remember I felt as if I were “home.” I am amazed at how tangible it all seems to this day, how fully this memory inhabits and infuses my very being. How great is His love.

Moments later Donna and I were on the beach, looking out on the Atlantic, which felt to me like the limitless Ocean of Love. Gazing down on the sand, I discovered a beautiful, fragile sand dollar. While I was studying this new gift from many angles, it began to fall apart, leaving me with little white pieces, all of a similar shape. I put the sand dollar and its remnants away carefully and brought it back to the Center. That evening I showed it to some folks in the kitchen and was told about the old legend of the sand dollar. According to legends and poems, the sand dollar represents the birth, death and resurrection of Christ. Sand dollars also represent peace. Legend has it that there are five doves that are “free to bring goodwill to the world when the sand dollar is broken.” I was moved by the symbolism of it all, and it may have been part of the answer I was looking for. This Silent One was speaking to me internally and would remain with me throughout my days.

Donna returned to New Hampshire and I to New York after our pivotal experience at the Meher Spiritual Center. The following semester I returned to the University of Miami to complete my Bachelor in Nursing degree. I became active in an already thriving Baba group in Miami—a very exciting time. I befriended Peggy and Bill Stevens who both worked

at the University. We enjoyed charming picnic lunches around the campus lake, and on Friday nights they would take me to their lovely home in Key Biscayne for weekly Baba meetings. I still remember the ambience in their home, the phonograph playing the rich voice of David Miotke as the East West Gathering album played. Peggy and Bill became “spiritual parents” to me in the two years until I graduated.

I will be forever grateful for my time from 1978 to 1981, spent in southern California, as part of the Los Angeles Baba group. Most memorable was the intimate friendship I developed with Baba’s Western women disciples, Filis Frederick and Adele Wolkin, with whom I corresponded through the years. I have been given such beautiful mentors in this life, of how to dedicate my life to God and to a spiritual life. In those years, my first husband, Christian Stalberg, and I were also part of a communal Baba household called LAMB, Lovers of Avatar Meher Baba, in Venice Beach. Our household included Fred Stankus, Ken and Kathleen Havens, Ralph, Davana and Mani Brown, Greg Butler and several others. In March of 1980, I gave birth to our son, Ian. In 1982, we moved to northern California, where I spent the next twenty-four years. I was blessed to make three pilgrimages to Baba’s homes in India, in 1978, 1986, 1996.

I feel I have come full circle—finally documenting my personal Baba story, and returning to the Center for a week at this time feels so timely and most symbolic. I end my story with a poem I wrote this morning in The Guest House where I am staying.

Paula Pam Wainwright

IF YOU WERE TO ASK

If you were to ask me what it is like, I would tell you
It is like no other place, you see,
He never leaves.

It was love that built this home for Him, and love
that sustains it still.

The water on the lake remembers, flowing so calmly
as if it were straightening up the house
as a welcome mat.

The birds still sing for Him—I hear them tuning up
their voices, all the time,
in sweet song and reverie.

If you were to ask me what it is like, I would tell you
the woods are alive.

The trees tell the stories of how God
walked upon these earthen pathways,
silently blessing this whole wide world till it
became a prayer.

Yes, that is what it is like,
the softest whisper of a prayer
that meets you in the heart and stays with you
forever.

I met God here when I was nineteen.

He called to me one day when I was searching
the world for something I could not name.

I have had His company all these long and winding years,
as the days have unfolded,
one after the other.

Outside, songs fill the air,
even the silence is alive with “Presence.”

Oh my Beloved, when I am here,

I am privy to a love story like no other.

If you were to ask me what it is like, I would tell you.

It is like no other place.

You see, He never leaves.

101 Tales of Finding Love

Paula lives in Asheville, North Carolina with her former husband and now again partner, Andy Wainwright. One year ago their son, Taylor, and his partner, Lucciane, gave birth to a micro premie, Caliana, who turned one on January 27, 2019, wide-eyed, vital and strong. Paula recently retired from a career of over forty years. She now hopes to dedicate herself to pursuits that nourish soul—spending more time in these beautiful mountains, getting healthy, lots of art-making, writing, spending more time with family and friends, and most especially, making memories with her granddaughter, Caliana. In the near future Paula plans to participate as a volunteer at MAC (Meher Archive Project), located in the Asheville area.

Kathy Whedon

101 Tales
of Finding Love

The Prodigal Sister

by Kathy Whedon



Kathy at Panchgani Cave, India, above
and at Lower Meherabad, India, 2012



Kathy Whedon

BEFORE THE OCTOBER THROUGH JANUARY lead up to Ground Hog's Day 2012, I was not a seeker and I was not interested in Baba. I was surrounded by my Baba contacts, but I didn't know it.

At the age of twenty in the summer of 1974 I did hear of Meher Baba in my parents' home in Stillwater, Maine from my older brother, Jim, when he returned from India, but I have no recollection of this event. The only reason that I know this occurred is because my closest, lifelong friend—we met in kindergarten—was also there, and she tells me now that I was there in the same room when she first heard of Baba. Carol Russo listened to Jim, but I apparently did my best to ignore and forget what Jim said. Later, when Carol became a Baba lover, I registered only a vague awareness of this aspect of her life.

Meanwhile, through Jim, our mother was becoming interested in Baba and later that year Mom became friends with Ken Lux. My mother lived for thirty more years, but I am not aware that I ever heard a word about Baba from her. Eventually Mom wrote to Jim that she was reading a book about Baba, “with not just interest but fascination,” and that “just reading the book seems to bring me into some kind of a relationship with Baba.” My mother went on to visit the Meher Spiritual Center in Myrtle Beach twice, corresponded with Kitty Davy and Jane Haynes and attended Maine Baba meetings. I pushed any awareness I had of this as far away as possible and finally learned this about Mom in 2012 from Jim, eight years after Mom's death.

Throughout the decades there was the “Don't Worry, Be Happy” poster at Jim's house and there was the framed photograph of Jim with Mansari in my parents' TV room, but I

would just walk on by. When visiting Carol in Myrtle Beach in 2004 she took me to the Center, but I did the whole tour as if I had my eyes closed.

This sets the stage for my coming to Baba—a stage where I stood for nearly forty years, unhearing and disinterested, alongside my Baba family: my brother, my mother and my closest, lifelong friend.

During the three days when our father was dying in October of 2011, I became aware that there was something going on with my brother Jim, something very real, but unseen and unspoken. Right there in the room immediately after Dad's death I turned to Jim and said, "I am going to follow you." A very strange statement indeed.

Compelled to spend time with Jim, I frequently drove the five hours to visit him and Nancy in New Hampshire. That's when Jim began to tell me Baba stories and that's when I kept asking him to tell me another story.

Nearly forty years after first hearing His name, I began to read about Baba. I became obsessed with learning more. In my reading, however, I would skip over any reference to His divinity. That, for me, was too much. Any reference to God ruined for me what was otherwise quite wonderful. Still, I read on.

And then Jim made a wonderful offer. He would send me on an all-expense-paid week-long visit to the Meher Spiritual Center at Myrtle Beach. By the end of January we had worked out the details and I made my reservations with the Center Gateway Office, which then sent me, via email, my welcome letter.

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It was Groundhog's Day morning. I had just gotten out of bed. It was cold. I built a fire in the wood stove and made coffee. I felt stiff, groggy and chilled, not in a state especially conducive to having the kind of worldview-shaking, exhilarating moment I was about to have.

I opened up my email, found the welcome letter, printed it out, and sat down to read it with a cup of coffee at my kitchen table. I read about the need for a flashlight and closed-toed shoes. Then, the second paragraph explained that Baba called the Center His home in the West, and that since it was His home, this was a place He would never leave. The paragraph ended by saying that people come to the Center from all over the world, *"many feeling Meber Baba's loving presence here."*

As I read these last seven words I was filled with an indescribable feeling. My entire body was stunned. This was sudden—it grasped me completely—it was powerful beyond words, more powerful than anything I had ever experienced, very emotional, and way, way beyond thoughts and thinking. It swelled and filled me like a childbirth contraction, but much more consuming, taking over all of me with utter and complete joy. It was unforgettable, and it was life changing.

What had just happened was an experience without any thinking involved. But when the love wave calmed down, next came thoughts:

"Although I may crave for this experience to continue, if instead it takes thousands of years before I feel love of this magnitude again, not only will it be worth the wait, but also the time of my waiting will vanish as if it was the same length of time as it takes to snap one's fingers."

And:

“If I were to walk around like this all day long today, I would be God.”

Timelessness. God-consciousness. I knew the purpose of my life from now on was to come ever closer to God, to Baba. I would happily face the aeons until I would be with Him again.

When my eyes could once again focus, I saw that I was gazing at the opposite wall upon a framed, charcoal drawing my mother had made of a snow covered road in a forest, a road that led to a distant bright vanishing point. My mother had made her creation by copying the scene from a black and white photograph I had taken. Later, when I turned the frame over I saw that Mom had entitled her work “The Road Less Taken.”

That was Groundhog’s Day 2012. I had absolutely the most marvelous time at the Meher Spiritual Center two months later, and three months after that I was in India.

Since 2012 life goes on, but now I feel I’ve done a sort of about-face from my pre-Baba state of mind in which I ignored all things Baba. Now it is things non-Baba that I may block out. I don’t intend to be aloof, but that’s the word that probably best describes me. I have Baba songs playing in my head.

Kathy Whedon

Presently, up here in Northern Maine, at work I teach children, at home I practice on musical instruments and for fun I drive to Baba meetings. Long term, I'm working toward retiring so I can spend more time traveling to the many Baba destinations in the United States and worldwide.



Artwork © Claire Mataira

Linda Zavala

101 Tales
of Finding Love

Reeled into the
Fisherman's Net

by Linda Zavala

101 Tales of Finding Love



Linda, August 1978,
near Carmel, California



Linda Zavala

HOW DID I COME TO MEHER BABA, the Avatar of the Age, or how did He come to me or perhaps the question might be—How did He reel me into His Divine Fisherman's net?

First off, I did not grow up in a religious or spiritual family. My only spiritual thought was when I would walk home from junior high school and sometimes think, "Is this all there is to life?"

In 1959 when I was sixteen, a friend from high school asked me to attend her church. There I met a man who was five years older, a college graduate and nice-looking. He was the second young man I had spent some time with at church, and since all I could think of was how I could leave home, after dating and becoming intimate, we married as soon as I was eighteen. Shortly thereafter we decided to become Episcopalians and we were baptized as adults.

Several years later on a gray day in Hollywood, as a young mother of twenty-one with two boys, my husband's infidelities and verbal abuses under my belt and a recent tonsillectomy, I heard a family literally wailing in grief over a loved one a few houses down. The sounds went on and on as I stood at the window listening, and again I thought, with my throat throbbing and my children crying in the background, "What is life really all about and where can I go from here?" I had no idea what twists and turns life would take or which way to go.

In 1967 at twenty-four, I divorced and was then free from an abusive marriage. I tried to get out of a state of depression, went to therapy, wanted to become a free spirit again or so I thought, had encounters with marijuana, LSD and the law, and lost custody of my children. After the divorce, having

spent a short amount of time with thieves and murderers in the county jail and having lost my children, I started to more seriously question the meaning of life. This included leaving all drugs behind. Later I realized that Baba was preparing me for my meeting with Him.

One might say my *karma* was driving me through some experiences that would eventually move me towards the ultimate experience of finding a true spiritual Master. Since I was a Christian, I started reading Christian books on spiritual questions such as the writings of Teilhard de Chardin, psychology, Carl Jung, mythology, metaphysics, St. Germain and Manly Palmer Hall's theosophy. I practiced some Hatha Yoga and I started to dance.

One day some gay friends said there was a really interesting dance teacher nearby who took a unique approach to movement and suggested we take a look. The studio was upstairs so we went up, but the door was locked as we'd come late. The teacher wouldn't open the door. There was a small window that we peeped through to watch the movements. We stayed on the landing for quite a while, and for me the window was a peephole into something very mysterious and interesting. I didn't even know what that meant, however I immediately thought, "I have to do this!"

My free spirit and philosophy of free love in the '60s began to be transformed with the energies brought forth in the class called Continuum. From the outside looking in, one might think the class was modern interpretive dance, yet it was actually much more than that, with a very gifted and innovative teacher and guide—my first "guide." My dance teacher had studied modern dance and ballet in New York, then traveled and taught in Haiti for five years and learned about the native dances and the Afro-Haitian religion. She was very influenced by the drumming, the spontaneity of

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the dance and the bringing forth of “spirit” in the Haitian culture. She came back to the United States and started her own method using drumming in class and using the movement of the spine as the central focus. As with many dance instructors, her rules for the class were to be followed strictly for the purpose of allowing unseen energies to come forth and allow for new levels of awareness. The spinal energies were being nurtured and brought forth through these repetitive movements and the drumming. My intuition, which was silenced in childhood, was slowly being awakened. The teacher later said that when she first met me I seemed like a somnambulist, just sleepwalking through life in a trance.

After some years with the dance group, my inner self started to awaken and a number of things from the subtle world started to happen. One example was that occasionally I saw thoughts traveling through space before they were spoken, like ribbons moving on the wind. After several years of dance class, I took a three-week intensive where we went to class in the morning, evening, and much of the weekend. Towards the end of the Intensive, I was sitting on the edge of the room and my hands spontaneously went into a *mudra* position and I started breathing really heavily and deeply. Then the pranic energies started traveling through my legs, arms and hands. My arms were being lifted up by a spontaneous force, then my spinal column became very upright as if it were breathing, tears began falling down my cheeks and I found myself saying, “Thank you Jesus, thank you Jesus!” over and over again. My whole body was streaming with energy. From then on I had the healing touch.

During my mid-twenties I had a few “spiritual” experiences:

One weekend, I’d had an intense but strange kind of headache like a migraine. In the afternoon I lay on the bed on my back and heard a buzzing sound around my body,

then the buzzing energies started moving up my legs and into my body—the buzzing sound was paralyzing and I felt I couldn't move. I was literally feeling electrified as the energies moved up through my whole body. Then I saw a vision of the All-seeing Eye in my forehead. The Eye was black on the outer rim and violet on the inside. In the center of the Eye I saw various kinds of spiritual teachers coming one after another—like looking at a kaleidoscope of people, all gently smiling at me—then the last One who came said, “Don't be afraid, others have gone before you and you will also come.” I think, after some deep reflection in later years, that it was Meher Baba in His thirties, Who was the last One coming through the vision. I realized later that the sound I heard was of bees buzzing, which is the sound of the crown chakra. I was completely drained after that.

I had several intense *kundalini* experiences which led me, oddly, not to want kundalini sex, but to want to be celibate. When I told my men friends I wanted only platonic relationships, as might be expected—my dates began to dry up. They would just hang up the phone or walk away shaking their heads wondering what was wrong with me. Baba, unbeknownst to me, was leading me away from the pleasures of the carnal world. Turning my life upside down!

I decided I had to find another kind of life. I moved into the health field, first as a practical nurse, then as a massage therapist. I decided to discuss the issue of a better career choice with my dance teacher, who was the most influential person in my world at that time. She impressed me so much that I thought, “Whatever she suggests, I will do.” Indeed, she suggested that I might be interested in becoming a chiropractor. I took her advice, interviewed her chiropractor the next week and signed up within two weeks to begin chiropractic college.

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For the next four years when I drove to college in Pasadena, I would sometimes notice a spiritual bookstore with a large poster in the window of a spiritual man—it said “Don’t Worry, Be Happy. I will help you.” I would look at it and just keep driving. One day after just graduating, my intuition prompted me to go in and find out more about this “spiritual teacher.” Upon meeting Dana Field, the caretaker, I was given two books on Meher Baba, namely *God Speaks* by the Master Himself and *Listen, Humanity* by Don Stevens. I also picked up a poster of Meher Baba with Mohammed the mast, where Baba is caressing the God-intoxicated mast. Baba’s statement underneath said, “True love is no game of the faint-hearted and the weak.” Dana gave me the books and the poster since I didn’t have the money to pay for them. He said, “Just pay the money when you have it.” I was impressed by his generosity.

After graduating from chiropractic college in 1974 I wanted to move out of Los Angeles, where I was born, as I never felt comfortable there. I had a friend who was a professional dowser and was involved in metaphysics—we decided to move together to Santa Barbara. Dana had given me the name of Leslie Tejada as someone we could contact about the Baba people in the Santa Barbara area. So we made our first contact with them shortly after getting settled. They were very gracious, hospitable and seemed not cult-like in any way—just open and fun. I proceeded to find out more. I put the new poster of Baba and the mast on the wall at the foot of my bed. Every time I looked at it I felt like crying and saying, “Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!” I don’t know why I felt like saying that—it just came out. Previously in my life I had always felt there was a black hole of deep longing in my soul. Now each time I looked at the poster, the feeling of gratefulness kept coming through, seeing Baba’s love for the mast in the most compassionate way. My

deep longing was being touched by the Master and the love that radiated out from Baba.

To my great joy, Baba, the greatest of all Fishermen, started tightening the net to draw me in. However, my friend was not interested in Baba and started to be jealous of my interest in Him. While drawing closer to Baba and after months of jealousy and tumult, our relationship fell apart. I felt that Baba was saying two things to me—enough of metaphysics and enough of the occult. *"Just come to me and you must come alone."*

I continued attending the Baba meetings at Jimmy and Leslie Tejada's home in the canyon area of Santa Barbara. The narrow mountain roads were very dark when I returned home to Montecito. Many times when I got in the car and started down the road I felt there was an angel sitting in my passenger seat. He was very serene and very un-human. He would always have a slight smile on his face.

I spent several months back in Los Angeles studying for my chiropractic exams, subletting a friend's apartment as she was going on vacation. I spent twelve hours a day studying and it paid off. The exams were held for five days and at one point when I was feeling nervous, I felt an angel standing behind my back and gently touching me saying "Don't worry. Everything will be fine." I passed with flying colors.

During the several months I was waiting for my license, I did odd jobs. One day I was going to a day job and driving on a two-lane road that cut through a large golf course in Montecito. It was late morning and the sun was shining brightly on the grass. Suddenly I saw Baba's face in every dewdrop on the blades of grass reaching far out over the grassy areas. Baba was smiling in every dewdrop. The entire golf course seemed filled with His face. The feeling of bless-

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ings from Baba was there—like, “Just be happy in my love and everything will work out.”

Even though I was busy reading Baba’s writings, having experiences with Baba and attending Baba meetings, I was still not sure if Baba was my master—or was Swami Muktananda, whom I had met in person some months back, my master? So I internally asked Muktananda if he was my master-to-be? After some time passed he gave me a dream and said, “No, I am not your master, but you will find Him.”

Baba continued to draw me deeper into His net in the following year, giving me a little *prasad* here and there, as my life crashed on the rocks. The honeymoon was just beginning.

My license finally came through in 1976—I started my practice in lovely upscale Montecito Village and I rented a guest cottage on a large property. Early one evening I was at a Baba meeting when we heard there was a forest fire close to Montecito, so I rushed home. I was not allowed to go to my cottage as the fire was too close. Many of us were evacuated for several days as a thirty-million-dollar fire raced through the neighborhoods, which were filled with lots of mature growth and large oak trees. I made up my mind during the evacuation that if Baba was going to take all of my possessions, I would have to surrender to His Wish for me and trust in Him—that was very hard but I surrendered. When I returned to see if my cottage was destroyed or still standing, I was so relieved to see it still intact, as there were large oaks over the cottage that could have easily caught fire. Something prompted me to rush to the back door window to look at the house next door, only to see that it had burned along with the trees around it. I heard a little voice say, “See how close you came to complete destruction? I saved you.” Was it Meher Baba? I felt it so.

I thought I had rented a nice little cottage in a wooded neighborhood in Montecito, but a number of things began to happen that made me feel I should return to Los Angeles. My landlords, as cocaine users, didn't like me having any visitors or patients. Suspicious, they started harassing me and my visitors. I noticed smells of bacon and eggs as I was cooking, though I was preparing something completely different. When in front of the stove I felt I was standing in a shadow of some sort. I woke up one night to hear someone snoring loudly next to me. Since there was no one there, I mentioned this to a psychic friend and told her I thought it might be a ghost. She said, "Well, I didn't want to tell you when you wanted to move in that there was a ghost, because you liked the cottage so much." She agreed to help me remove "him."

So we got together in the bedroom one day and placed the Bible and books by Meher Baba and all the photos I had of Baba on the bed and started praying together. Pretty soon the house timbers started crackling and a huge whirlwind started coming up from the bed like a funnel cloud. We were saying to each other, "Let's just hold on tight till 'he' goes." It was scary. At one point I kept repeating, "Baba, Baba, Baba...please help!" Finally, whoosh! 'he' was gone and the entire bedroom was filled with a light blue light streaming out to the next room. The light remained there as long as I lived there. I strongly felt this light was coming from Meher Baba and His compassion for the ghost.

Now the ghost was gone, so I relaxed and felt better, but again I started to think that maybe I should move back to Los Angeles. One day the *I Ching* or the *Chinese Book of Changes* fell out of the bookcase on its own, as if someone had pushed it from behind—it fell on the floor, open at a certain reading. I thought that was rather strange. I picked

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it up and read the hexagram. The gist of it was: it is time for you to go even though others will not like it and will try to pull you back. Ah...now, I felt that I was given permission to move on. Several months passed before I was actually ready to move back to Los Angeles.

I remember one day while I was still in Montecito, I went into a hardware store and I was waiting in line to pay for my items. There were maybe four men in front of me and behind me. They were construction builder types getting their supplies. I just focused for a minute or two on their manly energies and was enjoying these men, and then God— Baba — shut off my sensual bodily energies in one fell swoop. I felt a line of energy move straight down my body like an axe. I felt He was saying “Okay, that’s it. I am shutting this off.” After that He didn’t bring back those types of feelings till I met my next husband-to-be. At that time, I didn’t really understand what a spiritual life was and that sacrifices would need to be made in order for the ego to go, so I thought it was peculiar and interesting that Baba was intervening in my life. But I didn’t take it that He was now my Master and my life was His—therefore He would start redirecting it. This I only came to understand later.

This was 1977. I felt, after much joy in finding out about Meher Baba and much personal agony in Santa Barbara, that Baba was pushing me to move back to Los Angeles. My new life and wish for a nice practice in a smaller town was short-lived. A Baba couple connected me with a young man who had met me at my first Los Angeles Sahavas. He said I could stay in his apartment for two months for free, as he had just gotten a music gig and would be away. Then I would have time to find an apartment. So Baba and the Baba guy paved the way for me to go back to Los Angeles. Baba made it easy for me—He is so clever and knows all the right moves. Was

there a “master plan” here? The “honeymoon” was now like the petals on a flower opening wider.

Little did I know that the old Hollywood-style bungalow I moved into for two months had several Baba lovers and a Baba couple living there in the other bungalows, and that my next husband-to-be was just across the way. One of the Baba men in the bungalow complex kept telling me about the man across the way and what a wonderful guy he was—an artist, a poet, with really “cool” ideas. I relented finally, to be nice to my new Baba friend. I was introduced to Mario and that was that, except that sometimes my curiosity made me watch him as he left his apartment.

Then after two months I was moving out and I thought I would be polite and say goodbye to Mario. After talking with him for two hours I knew I had met someone very special. So I suggested that he visit me in my office for his pre-diabetes if he wanted to. I didn’t think he would call, but he did. Baba, the Divine Fisherman, knew that my husband-to-be was living just next door in what I called the Hollywood Baba Outpost. My year of agony, spiritual ecstasy, and meeting new Baba friends and many God-directed new beginnings brought me to where Baba wanted me to be. I was now completely dedicated to Him—in the Divine Fisherman’s boat.

Baba knew oh so well that my soul needed a God-man of the Divine world and a man in this corporeal world too. Over nine months Mario and I became very close and intimate—he was my best friend. Then Baba started putting pressure on me about marriage or celibacy, reminding me what He said on the matter of sex outside of marriage. Through His photo by my bed He started saying, “So what is it going to be?” I was in love with Mario so I decided to please Baba and proposed to Mario instead of waiting for

Linda Zavala

him to propose to me, as he was not a Baba lover at that point. So this was my little secret conversation with Baba. Mario said, "Can I tell you my answer in a month?" I was shocked that he didn't say yes right away. So for a month I was on pins and needles, thinking if he doesn't say yes I will have to give him up. Then at the Los Angeles *Sahas* I was in the Infirmary room and Mario was watching the film "*O Parvardigar*" in the meeting hall in the evening when Baba spoke to him through the film and said, "I want you to marry Linda. Go and ask her now."

Mario was shocked since he was not really a Baba "lover," so he waited to see if Baba would say it again. His eyes kept blinking and he couldn't believe what he was seeing. So Baba said again, "Go and find her and propose," and signed the "okay sign" with His hands. So Mario thought, "I guess my goose is really cooked now, but since Baba seems so serious, I guess I had better do what He says." He walked out of the meeting hall in a daze and thought, "Am I really going to get married now?" So he came outside to find me in the twilight and I was coming out of the infirmary. We both spontaneously stepped into a painted double circle in the parking lot and he proposed in a most gentlemanly way. I was 'over the moon' with joy.

Mario was a Catholic and was not looking for a "master" as he had Jesus, yet Baba was drawing him closer to a life centered on Meher Baba. Mario is the only person who ever came to Baba through me as far as I know. As one goes through life with Meher Baba, one sees the constant guidance and care that Baba takes to move one in the right direction for each individual. Even though we both had mystical and spiritual experiences when we were young, we feel they were baby steps along the way guiding us to our true destination—to be lucky enough to come to the awareness

of Meher Baba's divinity in this age and His love for all humanity. We feel so blessed.

We are native-born Los Angelenos. However, five years ago, Mario and I moved a little northeast to La Verne, to a retirement complex—but still close enough to visit the Los Angeles Baba Center, Meherabode. After many years in the film industry, Mario retired and decided to go back to his first love, art. I retired from the health industry to care for Mario. He has since developed illnesses, requiring my caregiving for a number of years and for the last year he's been in a nursing home. My two sons and I have come together again and worked on many missed years together. I am blessed with two lovely sons and three grandsons. Our dance with the Divine still goes on. My new goals are to go more deeply into the concept and the reality of what Meher Baba has always told us—namely that the universe exists because of love and only because of love. So my daily affirmations and focus are simply on this fact and an effort to continually remember this as the kaleidoscope of life moves through my day.

“Love Alone Exists.” —Meher Baba.

Meher Baba's Universal Message

I have come not to teach but to awaken. Understand therefore that I lay down no precepts.

Throughout eternity I have laid down principles and precepts, but mankind has ignored them. Man's inability to live God's words makes the Avatar's teaching a mockery. Instead of practising the compassion He taught, man has waged crusades in His name. Instead of living the humility, purity and truth of His words, man has given way to hatred, greed and violence.

Because man has been deaf to the principles and precepts laid down by God in the past, in this present Avataric Form I observe Silence. You have asked for and been given enough words—it is now time to live them. To get nearer and nearer to God you have to get further and further away from "I", "my", "me" and "mine." You have not to renounce anything but your own self. It is as simple as that, though found to be almost impossible. It is possible for you to renounce your limited self by my Grace. I have come to release that Grace.

I repeat, I lay down no precepts. When I release the tide of Truth which I have come to give, men's daily lives will be the living precept. The words I have not spoken will come to life in them.

I veil myself from man by his own curtain of ignorance, and manifest my Glory to a few. My present Avataric Form is the last Incarnation of this cycle of time, hence my Manifestation will be the greatest. When I break my Silence, the impact of my Love will be universal and all life in creation will know, feel and receive of it. It will help every individual to break himself free from his own bondage in his own way. I am the Divine Beloved who loves you more than you can ever love yourself. The breaking of my Silence will help you to help yourself in knowing your real Self.

All this world confusion and chaos was inevitable and no one is to blame. What had to happen has happened; and what has to happen will happen. There was and is no way out except through my coming in your midst. I had to come, and I have come. I am the Ancient One.

—Meher Baba

AVATAR MEHER BABA
(1894-1969)

Merwan Sheriar Irani, known as Meher baba, was born in Poona India, on February 25, 1894, of Persian parents. His father, Sheriar Irani, was of Zoroastrian faith and a true seeker of God. Merwan went to a Christian high school in Poona and later attended Decan College. In 1913, while still in college, a momentous event occurred in his life ... the meeting with Hazrat Babajan, an ancient Muslim woman and one of the five Perfect Masters of the Age. Babajan gave him God-Realization and made him aware of his high spiritual destiny.

Eventually he was drawn to seek out another Perfect Master, Upasni Maharaj, a Hindu who lived in Sakori. During the next seven years, Maharaj gave Merwan 'gnosis,' or Divine Knowledge. Thus Merwan attained spiritual Perfection. His spiritual mission began in 1921 when he drew together his first close disciples. It was these early disciples who gave him the name Meher Baba, which means 'Compassionate Father.'

After years of intensive training of his disciples, Meher Baba established a colony near Ahmednagar that is called Meherabad. Here the Master's work embraced a free school where spiritual training was stressed, a free hospital and dispensary, and shelters for the poor. No distinction was made between the high castes and the untouchables; all mingled in common fellowship through the inspiration of the Master. To his disciples at Meherabad, who

Meher Baba's Universal Message

were of different castes and creeds, he gave a training of moral discipline, love for God, spiritual understanding and selfless service.

Meher Baba told his disciples that from July 10, 1925 he would observe Silence. Since that day he has maintained silence throughout the years. His many spiritual discourses and messages were dictated by means of an alphabet board. Much later the Master discontinued the use of the board and reduced all communication to hand gestures unique in expressiveness and understandable to many.

Meher Baba traveled to the Western world six times, first in 1931, when he contacted his early Western disciples. His last visit to America was in 1958, when he and his disciples stayed at the Center established for his work at Myrtle Beach, S.C.

In India, as many as one hundred thousand people have come in one day to seek his *Darshan*, or blessing. From all over the world there are those who journeyed to spend a few days, even a single day, in his presence.

An important part of Meher Baba's work through the years was to personally contact and to serve hundreds of those known in India as "masts." These are advanced pilgrims on the spiritual path who have become spiritually intoxicated from direct awareness of God. For this work he traveled many thousands of miles to remote places throughout India and Ceylon. Other vital work was washing of lepers, the washing of the feet of thousands of poor and distribution of grain and cloth to the destitute.

Meher Baba asserts that he is the same Ancient One, come again to redeem man from his bondage of ignorance and to guide him to realize his true Self, which is God. Meher Baba is acknowledged by his many followers all over the world as the Avatar of the Age.

101 Tales of Finding Love

HOW TO LOVE GOD

To love God in the most practical way is to love our fellow beings. If we feel for others in the same way as we feel for our own dear ones, we love God.

If, instead of seeing faults in others, we look within ourselves, we are loving God.

If, instead of robbing others to help ourselves, we rob ourselves to help others, we are loving God.

If we suffer in the sufferings of others and feel happy in the happiness of others, we are loving God.

If, instead of worrying over our own misfortunes, we think of ourselves more fortunate than many many others, we are loving God.

If we endure our lot with patience and contentment, accepting it as His Will, we are loving God.

If we understand and feel that the greatest act of devotion and worship to God is not to hurt or harm any of His beings, we are loving God.

To love God as He ought to be loved, we must live for God and die for God, knowing that the goal of life is to Love God, and find Him as our own self.

MEHER BABA

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Meher Baba's Universal Message

"I HAVE COME TO SOW THE SEED OF LOVE IN YOUR HEARTS SO THAT IN SPITE OF ALL SUPERFICIAL DIVERSITY WHICH YOUR LIFE IN ILLUSION MUST EXPERIENCE AND ENDURE, THE FEELING OF ONENESS THROUGH LOVE IS BROUGHT ABOUT AMONGST ALL NATIONS, CREEDS, SECTS AND CASTES OF THE WORLD."

Originally published by Meher Spiritual Center, Inc. 1964

GLOSSARY

aarti, arti or (in Sanskrit) arati: Song or prayer offered in devotion to God.

All-seeing Eye: (From early Christian iconography) The Eye of Providence, the Eye of God.

Amartithi: (Hindi) January 31—the anniversary of the day Meher Baba dropped His body in 1969. Literally, “immortal date” or “deathless day.”

angst: (German) [ahngst] Fear.

asana: (Sanskrit) Seated in cross-legged yoga fashion.

Atma: (Hindi) The individual soul.

Avatar: (Hindi) God in human form—the direct descent of God into creation.

AWOL: (English acronym) Absent without leave.

Baba: Father

baraka: (Arabic) Power or blessing—a byproduct of Sufi ‘work.’

bar mitzvah: (Hebrew) ceremony for Jewish boys at age 13, regarded then as ready to observe religious precepts.

Beyond Beyond God: The original state of “God-Is.”

bhajans: (Hindi) Sharing. Any song with a religious theme or spiritual ideas.

bhakti: (Hindi) Devotional worship directed to one Supreme Deity.

Glossary

bodi cha: (Sanskrit) Blessings. Barley tea.

chai: (Hindi) Spiced Indian tea with milk.

chela: (Sanskrit) Disciple.

chinmudra: (Hindi) Gesture or seal of consciousness.

Citafal: A fruit—the custard apple.

cul de sac: (French) Dead end.

daaman: (Hindi) The skirt or hem of a garment.

darshan: (Hindi) Audience with or sight of the Master, Who bestows blessings on devotees.

Déjà vu: (French) The feeling that one has lived through the present situation before.

dharma: (Sanskrit) In Hinduism, the principle of cosmic order.
In Buddhism, the teaching of the Buddha.

dhuni: (Hindi) A sacred fire having the power of a saint.

didi: (Hindi, Gujarati) Intimate name for one's older sister in India.

Dilruba: (Hindi) A musical instrument, known as “the soulful heart stealer.” The name given to Elizabeth Patterson by Meher Baba. The name given to her home at The Meher Spiritual Center in Myrtle Beach.

Gadi, gaadi: (Hindi) A cushioned chaise longue.

Guru Kriya: (Hindi) Grace of the guru.

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Hesychasm: (Greek) A mystical tradition of contemplative prayer in the Eastern Orthodox Church.

Kalki Avatar: (Hindi) The Destroyer of filth, atop a white horse, with a drawn blazing sword, foretold to appear at the end of the Kali Yuga, the present epoch.

kama: (Sanskrit) Desire, longing—sensory or aesthetic enjoyment, emotional attraction.

karma: (Sanskrit) The principle of cause and effect; the intent and actions of an individual influence the future of that individual.

kirtan: (Hindi) recitation of the names of God.

Kundalini: (Hindi) A form of divine energy located at the base of the spine.

mandali: (Sanskrit) From ‘mandala,’ meaning ‘circle.’ Members of Meher Baba’s close disciples were referred to as ‘mandali.’

Manonash: (Sanskrit) Annihilation of the mind.

masoor dal: (Hindi) Spiced red lentils.

mast: A God-intoxicated soul on the Path.

maya: (Hindi) The realm of illusion.

mela: (Sanskrit) A gathering or fair, possibly with a religious focus.

moksha: (Hindi) Transcendent state due to the release from the cycle of rebirth impelled by the law of karma.

mudra: (Hindi) Symbolic hand gestures used in ceremonies, stationary and in Indian dance.

Glossary

Murshid: (Arabic) A Sufi teacher or guide.

Murshida: (Arabic) A female spiritual guide.

murid: (Arabic) An aspirant or student of the Sufi way.

nazar: (Arabic, Turkish) Gaze, watchful eye.

Obeah: A kind of sorcery practiced especially in the Caribbean, Jamaica. Also, Santeria (Cuba), Vodun or Voodoo (Haiti).

Oversoul: The Divine Spirit which pervades the universe and encompasses all souls.

Paramatma: (Sanskrit) The Oversoul.

Parvardigar: (Persian) Title for God. Literally, 'sustainer.'

pran, pranic: (Hindi) Vital life force.

prasad: (Hindi) prasada (Sanskrit) A small item of food, often a sweet, given to worshippers after worship.

qawwali: (Persian/Arabic) Sufi devotional music.

Rifa'i: (Arabic) The Sufi lineage named after Ahmad al-Rifa'i (died 1182). Iraqi Sufi master who founded the Rifa'i Order.

rishis: (Hindi) Seers, great sadhus, sages, who after intense meditation, realized the supreme truth and eternal knowledge, which they composed into hymns.

Sadguru: (Hindi) A Perfect Master.

sadhana: (Hindi) Striving, endeavor. Daily spiritual practice.

sadhu: (Hindi) A pilgrim or advanced soul.

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sadra: (Hindi) Garment, robe.

sahavas: (Hindi) A gathering of devotees in the company of the Master, that they may enjoy His physical presence.

Salik: (Arabic) One who consciously has divine experience of any of the six planes. An internal renunciate.

sama: (Arabic) Audition. Sufi meetings where music and zikr are performed. Qawwali.

samadhi: (Hindi) A trance state brought on through spiritual meditation. The Tomb-shrine of Avatar Meher Baba.

sanskaras: (Sanskrit) mental impressions affecting karma.

sanyasi: (Hindi) fourth life stage—renunciation.

sanatana dharma: (Sanskrit) An eternal teaching.

Saraswati: (Sanskrit) The Hindu goddess of knowledge, music, art, wisdom and nature.

satchitananda: (Hindi) Representing existence, consciousness and bliss.

sat nam: (Sanskrit) True knowledge

satsang: (Sanskrit) Sitting together with a guru or a group of spiritual students, focusing on truth.

seraphim: (Hebrew) Angelic beings associated with light, order and purity.

Shakti: (Sanskrit) Power, energy, force.

Shri or Sri: (Sanskrit, Hindi) A title of respect used before the name of a man.

Glossary

Siddha Yoga: (Hindi) A spiritual path guided by meditation teacher and master, Gurumayi Chidvilasananda.

siddhis: (Hindi) Divine Powers. Also occult powers.

Skete: (Greek) A monastic community in Eastern Christianity that allows relative isolation for monks, but also allows for communal services and the safety of shared resources and protection.

sohbet: (Turkish) A discourse, a teaching session. (Sufi)

subha: (Arabic) A string of beads used in praying and in meditating. Also, tasbih.

tabla: (Hindi) A pair of drums.

tariqat/tariqa: (Arabic) The spiritual Path. A Sufi order.

tonga: (Hindi) A light carriage drawn by one horse.

tucket: A wooden bench.

yarmulka: A cloth skullcap worn by Jewish men.

yogin: (Hindi) One who practices yoga. An external renunciate.

zikr: (Arabic) Remembrance of Allah by verbal repetition of names of Allah or of other phrases used by Sufis.

BOOKS BY MEHER BABA

Beams on the Spiritual Panorama. Essays by Baba given to the editors of God Speaks.

Discourses. Practical spirituality presented by the Source of true knowledge.

The Everything and the Nothing. Discourses for those who long for Truth.

God Speaks. All-encompassing spiritual cosmology and involution of the spirit. Mankind's journey from its origin and back to God.

Listen, Humanity. Account of "The Three Incredible Weeks," narrated and edited by Don E. Stevens at Baba's direction.

BOOKS ABOUT MEHER BABA

As Only God Can Love, by Darwin Shaw—an early American disciple's experiences with Meher Baba.

Avatar, by Jean Adriel—Meher Baba's life narrated by an early American disciple.

The God-Man, by Charles Purdom—focus on Meher Baba's journeys, work, silence.

How a Master Works, by Ivy Duce—Murshida of Sufism Reoriented recounts her experiences with Meher Baba.

The Joyous Path, by Heather Nadel—the life of Meher Baba's sister, Mani.

Meher Baba Resources

Lord Meher, by Bhau Kalchuri—a comprehensive account of Meher Baba's life and work in twenty volumes.

Love Alone Prevails, by Kitty Davy—an English disciple's account of life with Meher Baba in India and in the West.

Mehera-Meher, by David Fenster—the Divine Romance between Meher Baba and His chief female disciple.

Much Silence, by Tom and Dorothy Hopkinson—succinct introduction to Meher Baba.

That's How It Was, by Eruch Jessawala—heartful tales of daily life with Baba.

The Wayfarers, by William Donkin—thorough account of Meher Baba's work with masts.

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Stories of coming to Meher Baba
from His lovers around the world

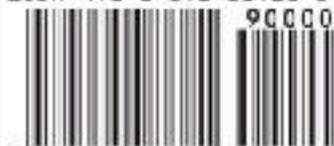
“THE RIVERS OF SPIRITUALITY
HAVE RUN DRY,
AND IN THE SPRINGTIME OF CREATION
MY OCEAN WILL FILL UP
THE DRY RIVERBEDS.”

—MEHER BABA

Volume Three

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