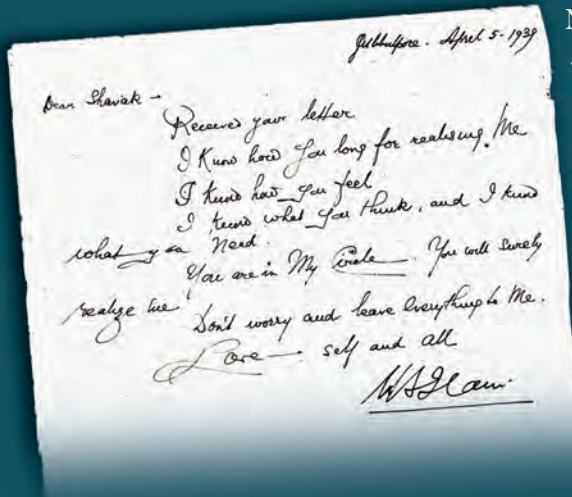


He Gives the Ocean

THE STORY OF THIS FAMILY depicts in a very touching way the true human side of the God-Man in all His perfection. Savak and his wife,



Letter from Meher Baba to Savak, Jabalpur 1939

Nergiz, surrendered totally to Baba, who transformed their worldly lives into lives well-lived for God. Some of the words Beloved Baba said to these people are worth deep consideration. For instance, He told Nergiz, who went to Baba in despair because her husband was neglecting her in his search for God even in the first months of their marriage, "I have not come to divide, but to

unite." Or when Savak asked to be released from doing night duty for Baba due to failing health, Baba said, "I release you. You have no strength to leave Me and go unless I say so." Although both Nergiz and Savak lived the latter part of their lives away from Meherabad, in Bombay, the Kotwal family have had nothing but Baba in their lives. They live only for him. The two sisters, Najoo and Hilla, are pearls in Beloved Baba's love, and young Meherwan is a diamond.

I bow down to the love of every member of this family for Avatar Meher Baba. They have had no other ambition but to serve Baba wherever they were or are placed. What an extraordinary family!

Bhau Kalchuri

Meherabad, 24th May 2001



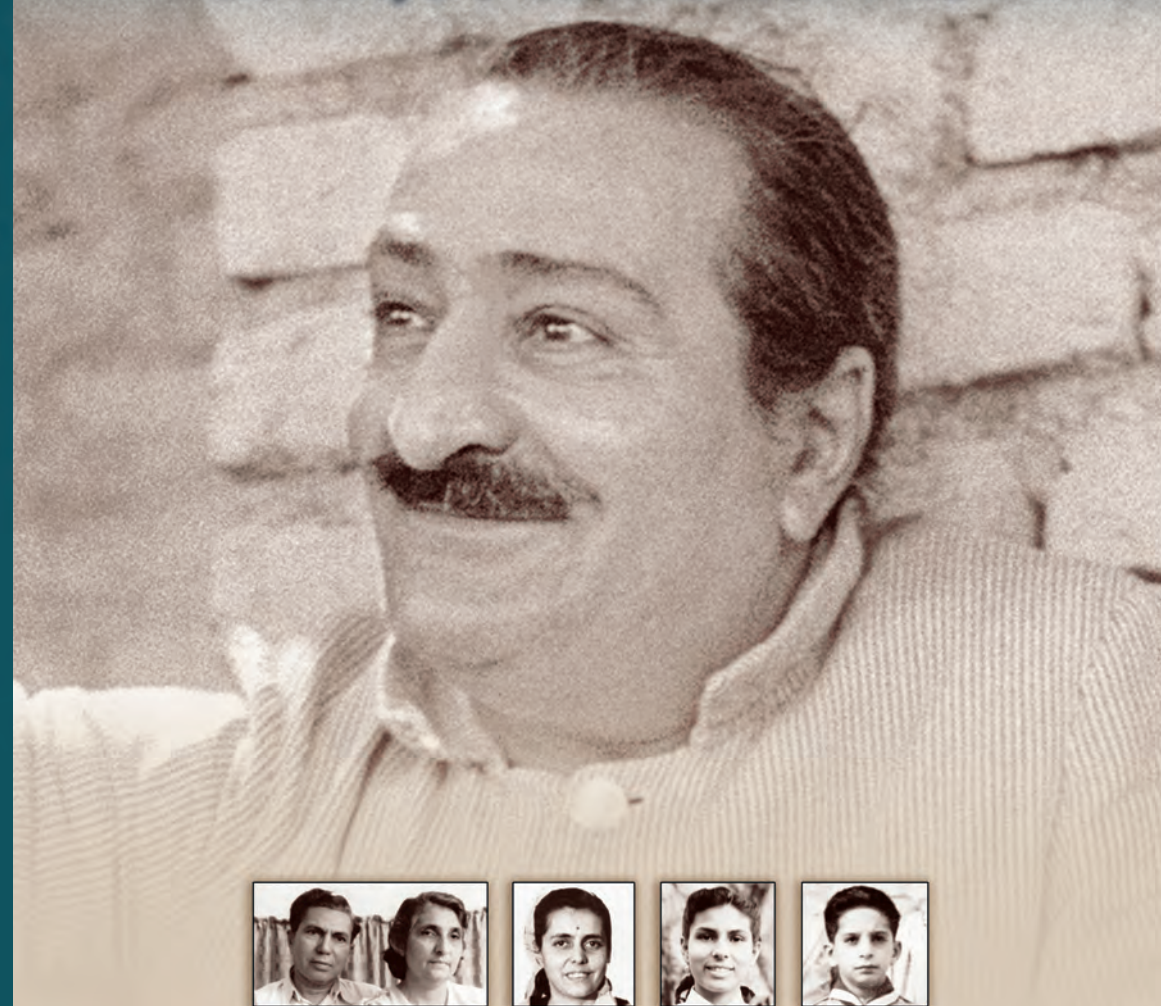
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He Gives the Ocean

**NAJOO
SAVAK
KOTWAL**

He Gives the OCEAN

BY NAJOO SAVAK KOTWAL



**STORIES OF THE SAVAK KOTWAL
FAMILY'S LIFE WITH MEHER BABA**

**SHERIAR
FOUNDATION**

H E G I V E S
T H E O C E A N

He Gives

Stories of the Savak Kotwal Family's Life with Meher Baba

Jabalpore - April 5-1939

Dear Savak -

Received your letter
I know how you long for realising Me
I know how you feel
I know what you think, and I know
what you need.
You are in My Circle. You will surely
realize Me. Don't worry and leave everything to Me.
Love - self and all
W.S. Gaur

Meher Baba in Jabalpur, 1939 (right)
about the time He wrote the letter (above)
to Savak, Najoo's father

the Ocean

by Najoo Savak Kotwal

2006

SHERIAR FOUNDATION

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Cover photograph of Meher Baba in Meherazad taken June 1949 by Padri.

Title page photograph of Meher Baba in Jabalpur taken 1939 by Elizabeth Patterson.

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For Our Beloved God-Man and Big Daddy

Avatar Meher Baba

Our adorable Mehera

and enchanting Mani

In Memory of

Our dearest father Savak and mummy Nergiz



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FOREWORD

I KNEW MY DEAREST FRIEND SAVAK KOTWAL VERY WELL, for he served Beloved Avatar Meher Baba faithfully while living with Him as one of the *mandali*. For the sake of one lover, Savak, who had surrendered his life to his Beloved, Baba, in His compassion, took on the responsibility of this man's entire family, seeing to the upbringing and education of his three children. Savak's faith in his Lord was unshakable; he loved Baba wholeheartedly and obeyed Him implicitly. You will find many examples of Savak's obedience throughout this book.

Savak was always very helpful to new Baba followers. Once when we were all at Satara, a meeting was to be held in Meherabad, so we were loading a truck in preparation for our journey there. A new follower of Baba, Kohiyar Satarawalla, was helping to load the luggage. One of the *mandali* said, "Why do you take this trouble? We are doing this work." Savak replied, "He wants to serve Baba. Why do you stop him? Let him serve." Kohiar felt happy that he was allowed to continue to help. After the work was finished, Savak brought a banana to Kohiyar saying, "This is Baba's blessing. You accept." Kohiyar took it joyfully.

Savak's good sense of humor made him pleasant company. Once in 1956, while Baba was in the West, a group of us men played a prank on Savak. Though Baba was not there, Savak was still keeping watch at Baba's bungalow in Meherazad because the

women mandali were there. I dressed up as a woman from Hamirpur with my face completely covered, using the end of my sari as a veil, as that was the custom in that part of India. Then I went into Dr. Donkin's room. One worker, a boy, was sent to inform Savak that a lady was in Dr. Donkin's room and was refusing to leave. Immediately Pendu and Donkin went into the room and they shouted, "This is a private residence. Go away immediately! How dare you come here?"

When Savak arrived, he instantly felt pity. "She must be having a problem," he said, "so let us not be harsh." Pendu then asked some questions and I pretended to weep and finally confessed that I was an unmarried woman with a child coming. On hearing this, Dr. Donkin firmly told me to leave, and Pendu said again, "Get out. How dare you come here?"

Savak, still very sympathetic, took me to the watchman's cabin and asked whether I had any food. I told him I was starving, not having eaten for four days. Savak told me not to worry, that he would bring food. Meanwhile, Pendu came to chase me off again, and Savak ran after him to stop him, but Pendu grabbed the veil and yanked it off, and there I was!

Savak was shocked. "You people have made a fool out of me," he said as he left, but he later forgave us. Savak was so kind-hearted. He always wanted to help others, and he was almost never harsh with anyone.

The story of this family depicts in a very touching way the true human side of the God-Man in all His perfection. Savak and his wife, Nergiz, surrendered totally to Baba, who transformed their worldly lives into lives well-lived for God. Some of the words Beloved Baba said to these people are worth deep consideration.

For instance, He told Nergiz, who went to Baba in despair because her husband was neglecting her in his search for God even in the first months of their marriage, “I have not come to divide, but to unite.” Or when Savak asked to be released from doing night duty for Baba due to failing health, Baba said, “I release you. You have no strength to leave Me and go unless I say so.” Although both Nergiz and Savak lived the latter part of their lives away from Meherabad, in Bombay, the Kotwal family have had nothing but Baba in their lives. They live only for him. The two sisters, Najoo and Hilla, are pearls in Beloved Baba’s love, and young Meherwan is a diamond.

I bow down to the love of every member of this family for Avatar Meher Baba. They have had no other ambition but to serve Baba wherever they were or are placed. What an extraordinary family!

Jai Meher Baba!

Bhau Kalchuri

Meherabad

24th May 2001

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

ABOUT TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO my sister Hilla and I thought about writing the story of the Kotwal family's life with Avatar Meher Baba. At that time we tape-recorded first Mummy speaking about her life and later Father's account, all told by them in Gujarati. After that we put the project aside. However, Beloved Baba willed that we should proceed with our memoir and, as if putting together a jigsaw puzzle, He brought together the pieces, in the form of His followers who helped us to make our dream come true. So many of His lovers offered support in some form or other that we restarted the process in November of 1999. My sister and I first recollected stories that our parents had missed mentioning on their tapes. Hilla then helped with writing about our brother, Adi, our sister-in-law Freny, and their son, Meherwan. After that we worked alone, I on my part of the story in India, and Hilla on hers in England.

Beloved Baba's Avataric greatness is evident not only in the work He did on His tours and with the *masts* and the poor, but also in the little personal touches that each one of us who loves Him has received. The ways in which He showed His love for the Kotwal family can be put into a nutshell, expressed in an old traditional song which our nephew Meherwan used to sing at school when he was very young. It describes the intensity of Meher Baba's love not just for us, but for the world at large:

God's Love—
It's so wonderful!
O wonderful Love!
It's so High
you can't get over it—
It's so Deep
you can't get under it—
It's so Wide
You can't get around it—
O Wonderful Love!

Mummy and Father were most fortunate to be in intimate and constant companionship with Beloved Baba, whether they were in His physical presence or far away from Him, accepting that to live this life would not be easy. They were totally immersed in and sustained by His Ocean of Love for the duration of their earthly lives, as they are now in their eternal lives. As for Adi, Hilla and me, we were greatly privileged, as our parents gave us God on a golden platter. We were allowed to float in His Ocean of Love and enjoy some of the intimacy and company of the God-Man as we basked in the warmth of that divine and perfect love.

It is my hope that this book will help newer Baba-lovers who did not see Him in human form to understand what Baba meant when He said, "I am not this body." These lovers can still enjoy a dip in that ocean by looking for Him within and coming to realize that He is in their every heartbeat, as close as their own breath, for He is with them just as surely as He was with us. I hope this book will help to awaken the world to the fact that God descended on this earth as Meher Baba because of His love for His creation, as demonstrated by

the countless acts of grace in His human and divine relationship with us. Finally, I hope people will read this book not with the mind, but with the heart, for the heart is the key to understanding divine love.

Many seekers who have walked with me up Meherabad Hill or have heard these stories in the dining room of the Pilgrim Centre have found their hearts overflowing with love for Baba. Many have been curious as to what it was like to live in close proximity to Him, and to know the human side of God. May this book help to give them that understanding. I have included material concerning the divine love Baba had for His lovely Mehera, His Beloved, the chosen counterpart to the God-Man in this Advent. And I have included stories about the charming and vivacious Mani, Baba's sister, a rare and multitalented woman.

For the Kotwal family, Avatar Meher Baba played a variety of roles. For Father, He was both guru and God-Man, and Father's only wish was to serve and obey Him implicitly. For Mummy, Baba was the compassionate Mother she lost as a child, and her love for and faith in Him were awe-inspiring. For Hilla, Adi and me, He was our Big Daddy, loving and caring for us to perfection as a parent, seeing to our every need, forgiving us when we stumbled and gently guiding us to do better.

While Hilla and I were wondering what title we should give this book, we remembered that Bhau Kalchuri, Chairman of the Avatar Baba Trust and author of the twenty-volume *Lord Meher*, a biography of Baba, was our father's closest friend among the men mandali. Baba said Bhauji would play the role for Him that the Apostle John played for Christ, because Bhauji would travel the world, spreading Baba's message, just as John did Christ's. When we asked Bhau about a title, he spontaneously said that it should refer to the ocean.

Thinking about his words, and about Baba's telling Father, "To you I will give the ocean," I began to look at the many qualities of God represented by the ocean. I read several volumes of *Lord Meher* and books by Eruch Jessawala and Bal Natu. I then reflected back on all our lives as they unfolded with Baba. He came to my help as I began to describe the grandeur of His attributes while visualizing the time we lived both with Him and away from Him. Finding these attributes became like divine nectar to me as I relived the incidents illustrating them, and eventually we settled on *He Gives the Ocean* for our title.

Baba is the Ocean of Knowledge, a capacity so vast it is hard for our finite minds to grasp. He is the Ocean of Bliss, showing us occasional tiny flashes of that limitless joy even as we lead our everyday lives. He is the Ocean of Love, who as God-Man comes to live on earth to uplift mankind spiritually, taking on our suffering so that ultimately we may become free of the bindings and impressions of past lives. And He is the Ocean of Silence, who did not speak for the last forty-four years of His life among us, but who communicated, from his beautiful, eloquent eyes, rays of divine love. The Ocean always is, and ever was. Just as it receives the rivers of the world with all they carry, the pure and the tainted, so Beloved Baba, as the Ocean of Mercy, accepts both our good and bad actions, dissolving our accumulated impressions in His limitless depths and gradually purifying us.

For us humans, the Divine Ocean is too high, too deep and too wide for our limited minds to fathom, but the stories told here will, I hope, offer at least momentary glimpses.

Najoo Savak Kotwal

9th November 2005

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

TO BELOVED BABA: Only You could have made it possible for us to write and publish this memoir of the Kotwal family. We can never thank you enough, so all we will say is, “Help us to love You more and more!” Working on this book has been a great privilege and a continuous meditation, for which Hilla and I are thankful to You, the Lord of the Universe.

This memoir is interwoven with Your infinite love, compassion, and caring for a family that, in Your infinite mercy, You adopted to love and nurture. Wherever we have been or will be placed, You always were, You always are, and You always will be our God-Man and Big Daddy.

To our parents, Savak and Nergiz Kotwal, for the greatest gift they could have given: bringing us to the feet of the Master. Thank you, Father and Mummy for your wisdom, your love, and for the inspiring example you set for us in your devotion to Beloved Baba.

To Baba’s mandali, East and West: These men and women disciples of Baba were and are absolute gems; whether rough or polished, they carried the same message: Mastery in Servitude. Through their example our characters were molded from childhood to behave as Baba wanted us to, and they enriched our lives greatly.

To the Women: Thank you for the example you set at the Meher Retreat, where we learned from you honesty, punctuality, and tolerance for one another. You taught us not to backbite, to

consider any work assigned as Baba's work, and to understand that we all had equal status before Baba. You inculcated in us the habit of remembering Baba constantly in whatever work we did, whether household or professional, as all work is done to serve and love Baba and to please Him.

To the Men: From you we learned righteousness, sincerity, meticulous work habits, and obedience to Baba. You treated us as sisters in His ashram. You taught us not to differentiate between educated and uneducated, rich and poor, big and small, for Baba is present in all.

To Bhau Kalchuri, a true friend to our late father, Savak, who graciously agreed to write the foreword to this memoir despite his many duties and his frail health. His doing so shows true support and love by encouraging the telling of stories about Lord Meher to the world. We salute you, Bhauji, as a special gem among the mandali.

To Nancy Wall, who encouraged and motivated me to undertake the writing of this memoir, assuring me that she would edit the work and seek help in having it published. She shouldered an arduous task in transferring our handwritten manuscript to her computer, then editing and re-editing it. Nancy, dear, yours has been a real labor of love for our Beloved Baba's cause, to which I bow with all my heart. You are indeed a true Baba-lover.

To Sheila Krynski, who in her devotion to Baba has put in a Herculean effort in seeing to the publication of the book. Sheila, dear, this shows your one-pointed effort to spread Beloved Baba's love, and your endeavor will help to reveal Beloved Baba's human side. I salute your love for Baba, which has made it possible to get this memoir published.

To Abbot Neale Lundgren of Atlanta, whose unflinching

search for God inspired me to complete this manuscript. What struggle and strife you went through, and you ultimately found Him in the form of Meher Baba, the God-Man. I heartily bow to your undaunted search for God, and I thank you for your willingness to help with this memoir.

To Dr. Anne Moreigne, Janet Judson, Heather Nadel and Nan Wicker, who have for many years been urging Hilla and me to write our memoirs, to share with the world the depth of Baba's love for a family He adopted and to reveal the different roles He played as the God-Man in nurturing this family.

To Andy Lesnik, Irene Holt, Irma Sheppard and the late Ann Conlon, who devoted much time to reading the manuscript and making helpful suggestions. And to Kendra Crossen Burroughs for her excellent copyediting.

And, finally, to Minoo Bhangara, our family friend, who has for many years faithfully helped me with transportation to and from train and bus stations for my many trips between Bombay and Meherabad.

AVATAR MEHER BABA KI JAI!

Najoo Savak Kotwal



HE GIVES
THE OCEAN





Baba as He looked when Savak first met Him

PHOTOGRAPH BY G.M. SHAH

FATHER'S DREAM COMES TRUE



The Kotwal Family, 1937.
(Seated) Banufui, Hilla,
Adi (on tepoy), Nergiz.
(Standing) Soli,
Najoo, Savak

The journey that took the Kotwal family to the feet of Avatar Meher Baba began with my father, Savak Kotwal, an ardent seeker of God. Savak was born into a staunch Zoroastrian family on 16th November 1904, in Bombay. One of his first memories was that of Dinshaji, his father, praying in the early morning hours; another was his father saying to him, “True love comes only from

God.” When Savak was four, his mother, Bachamai (the suffix *-mai* means “mother”), died in childbirth. The new baby boy, Soli, was taken by a maternal aunt in Navsari, Gujarat, while Father was temporarily looked after by the family of Beherammama, a maternal uncle (as indicated by the suffix *-mama* added to Beheram’s name), and his widowed sister. Dinshaji quickly married again so there would be someone to care for little Savak, but his second wife did not treat my father very well, particularly after she had children of her own. Savak, seeing the love she showed her own children, was confused by her unkindness toward him and sought comfort in his father’s words. Young as he was, he began looking to God for love and wondering where He might be.

Once Savak started school, he showed himself to be an extremely intelligent student. In his day few boys from middle-class families ever reached high school, but my father, in spite of all odds, successfully completed his high school examinations. At the time he took these exams, he was extremely worried about Dinshaji, who had been shot during a scuffle with a man who had come to rob his neighbor. A brave man, Dinshaji had tried to intervene and catch the thief. As a result of his wounds, his arm had to be amputated. Despite Savak’s concern about his father’s condition, he passed his examinations with high marks and because of his success, particularly his excellent grasp of mathematics, he was soon made a cashier in the Bank of India, Zaveri Bazaar Branch. His boss, who had interviewed him for the job, was British. Due to their intrinsic honesty, Zoroastrians were held in high esteem by the British, and most of the cashiers in banks at that time were of Zoroastrian heritage.

My father was, like his father, very brave. He was also an accomplished athlete. As a young man he entered the Bombay-Poona cycle races, and once he won a race. To show his strength, he would fill a large, narrow-necked brass container with about fifty liters of water, lift it with his teeth from the ground, and stand up. Because he practiced gymnastics regularly, he had a strong, muscular physique. He must have been quite an attractive young man, for he caught the eye of Nergiz Meherjibhai Lakdawalla, a lovely young woman who came frequently to the bank. Savak liked her too, but in those days it was the practice for parents to select a bridegroom for their daughter. Savak knew this young woman's family would be looking for someone far more prosperous than he.

Nergiz's background was quite different from Savak's, as her mother, Najamai, came from a wealthy, cultured family. Like Savak, however, Nergiz had suffered some painful losses—the deaths of a younger sister and her mother. Heartbroken over her mother, thirteen-year-old Nergiz had poured love and attention on her paternal grandmother, who was not treated well by her own children. Nergiz looked after her until she died of old age. Even when she was young, Nergiz was always kind, thoughtful and generous in her treatment of others, but except for her paternal grandmother, she didn't care much for her father's relatives with their extremely orthodox Zoroastrian ways, reflected in their conservative dress and behavior. Nergiz considered their conversations boring, as they talked mostly of food, jewelry, money earned or spent, and Zoroastrian rites and rituals, especially those concerned with people who had passed away. These relatives spent money lavishly on such rituals, but they were not at all generous to those in need. They criticized the behavior of people from

different castes and creeds which they considered inferior, never mixing with such people. Nergiz understandably avoided her father's relatives as much as possible, as their lives did not make much sense to her. She was, however, quite spiritually inclined, a devoted young woman who went daily to the fire temple to pray, remembering God in her every action. In short, she practiced the teachings laid down by Zoroaster—"Good thoughts, good words and good deeds"—in her everyday life.

Nergiz was very fond of her mother's family, and she enjoyed spending time with these wealthy, sophisticated relatives. After her mother died, they treated her lovingly, took her to plays, concerts, operas and recitals, and taught her to enjoy the good things of life. With the British in India in those days, these were common forms of entertainment, and she particularly enjoyed attending piano recitals. Nergiz loved waltzes, and even later, as an old woman, she enjoyed listening to tapes of her favorites.

These relatives also bought her clothes in the latest fashions, and Nergiz loved dressing elegantly. Conversations revolved around cultural events or nature—trees, gardening, birds, animals, farming—and also more domestic topics such as sewing and embroidery. As she listened, she developed a taste for all these subjects and, like any intelligent teenager, she imitated the conversation of the adults. Unlike her father's family, her mother's relatives were concerned about society's problems and involved in efforts to correct them. They were followers of Gandhi and actively participated in the "Quit India" movement, Gandhiji's attempt to rid India of foreign rule. Nergiz, influenced by them, became a "freedom fighter." In the early mornings women and teenagers in white *khadi* saris and dresses went through the streets and lanes

of Bombay, loudly proclaiming slogans, demanding that the British “quit India” and go back to their motherland. This practice, called *prabhat-pheri*, or “early morning rounds,” was designed to awaken people to their rights as citizens of India and to help send the foreigners packing.

Nergiz traveled frequently to Poona to visit her cousin Gool Mehta at Bapu Bhavan, previously known as Bapu Cottage, on Toddywalla Road, near the Poona Railway Station. This bungalow has now been taken over by the government of Maharashtra as a Heritage Bungalow, since Gandhiji often stayed there. Gool and her husband used the bungalow for their nature cure clinic, but it was also the site of many of Gandhi’s meetings concerning the Revolutionary Movement, and Nergiz, who listened first as a passive spectator, began to acquire revolutionary ideas. Hearing Gandhiji and others speak helped her to understand that all people, whether rich or poor, are created equal.

It must have been partly this belief that led Nergiz, my mummy, to choose Savak Kotwal as her life partner. She was only eighteen years old. Savak, five years her senior, was intelligent and handsome, but far below her in terms of economic status. They must have seemed an odd match to many; nevertheless, she married him over the objections of her father, in a simple ceremony on 21st May 1927. Today such love matches are common, but my parents were pioneers.

ALTHOUGH SHE HAD MARRIED FOR LOVE and almost immediately conceived a child, Mummy soon found her happiness in the match fading. Only three months after the wedding, Father suddenly became more interested in seeking God than spending time

with his new wife. He had come across a book written by Sadguru Swami Ram Tirath called *In the Woods of God-Realisation*, and he was so inspired by it that he started wondering, “Why should I not see God?” He found another book, this one by Swami Vivekananda, who had established the India Vedanta Society, which later spread across Europe and America. The third book Father discovered, written in Gujarati, was the work of a well-known writer of his time, Soma Desai, a Zoroastrian living in Navsari (and whose niece Mani, later called Mansari, would, like Father, later become a close disciple of Meher Baba). Desai’s book, *Sakorina Sadguru*, turned out to be the most important of the three, as it was about Sadguru Upasani Maharaj, and it contained mention of Meher Baba. This was the first time Father saw Baba’s name.

Around this time Father thought of seeking a guru in order to find God, so he started running after *sadhus* at Chowpatty Beach, Bombay. He was a novice on this path, so he didn’t know how to tell a true sadhu from a false one. He went from one to another of these so-called seekers of God, asking them if he could feed them, hoping to come across a true guru whom he could follow. One day Father went to visit Sadguru Upasani Maharaj at Walkeshwar, Bombay, where about two hundred people had gathered to take Maharaj’s *darshan*. Maharaj had that day given orders that no one should touch his feet, but nobody mentioned this order to my father before he went in. When Father’s turn for darshan came, he garlanded Upasani Maharaj, then laid his head on Maharaj’s feet. At this Maharaj became very angry, and he slapped Father’s face in front of all, saying, “You are spoiling my work and your work too.”

Father, a novice in spiritual practices, was terribly embarrassed. He didn’t feel that he was to blame for what he had done,

so he quietly went out, vowing he would never again come for Upasani Maharaj's darshan. After he had walked some distance, however, a man came running after him with a message. "Maharaj said to tell you that because of His specific spiritual working, He gave you that slap. He said you should not feel disturbed over it." Once Father's embarrassment subsided, he thought about going again for Maharaj's darshan. The next time he met Upasani Maharaj, this time at Sakori, the Sadguru again slapped him, but now Father knew that the slap was for his spiritual benefit. He was actually quite happy to receive it, as he had read that Upasani's slap was given to wipe out *sanskaras* like greed, lust and anger.

Needless to say, with Father's entire focus on reading books about spirituality and finding a guru, his attitude toward Mummy changed. On walks along the seashore at Churchgate, occasions that should have been pleasant and romantic for a newly married couple, Father would bring Mummy to tears, telling her that all of life was a big zero, that nothing—not wife, nor child, nor the world—was of any importance. Or he would make her sit until midnight listening to *Kabirvani*, a book of stanzas in Gujarati by the Sadguru Kabir. She began to fear that Father might leave her and the world behind and go live in a forest in the Himalayas. Father never inquired about her health or asked about their coming child. It was beginning to seem to her as though her family might have been right to oppose the marriage. Mummy had absolutely no one to confide in, and she became increasingly nervous and frightened.

Mummy's father, seeing his daughter's plight, was angry with his son-in-law and often told Nergiz she should divorce him, saying, "Leave this good-for-nothing fellow and I will get you

married to a decent man befitting our status, and you will have a happy life.”

“How could I divorce Savak, Father?” Mummy would reply. “He is not running after other women. He is not taking alcohol and then beating me up. He is in love with God and he is seeking God.” Even though she was miserable because of his neglect, she refused to divorce Savak, for she was a good and dutiful wife. She stuck to him because, despite the way he was treating her, something in her heart responded to his spiritual search.

Father continued looking for a guru, leaving Mummy alone a good part of the time, often going to Poona to see Babajan, another Sadguru. He would take a train from Bombay on Saturday evening after work and reach Poona on Sunday morning, then stand all day long at Babajan’s place before returning to Bombay. Sometimes Babajan wished to go to Bund Garden, so Father would give Rs 5 for *tonga* fare to the *mujawar* attending her. Father would accompany her in another tonga to Bund Garden, where Babajan would sit for half an hour and then return. He had many unusual encounters with Babajan. Once as they were traveling to Bund Garden together, Babajan looked at Father and said, “Today I will immerse you in the River.” Only later, after he had met Baba, would he fully understand her words.

During his search my father also visited Tajuddin Baba, a gentle Sadguru, very different from the fiery Upasani Maharaj. And he traveled to Kedgaon, where Sadguru Narayan Maharaj had an ashram, and stayed there two nights before returning to Bombay. Father found Narayan Maharaj to have a very regal presence, and it was at Kedgaon that Father received the direction he had been seeking. Narayan Maharaj said to him, in front of Kaka Baria, who

was also to become a disciple of Meher Baba, “This is not the place for you. Go to the Parsi Sadguru at Ahmednagar.” Upon hearing this, Father made arrangements to go to Ahmednagar to meet Meher Baba the very next weekend, late in October of 1927—a journey that would forever change his life.

Father often told us, “The minute Meher Baba looked into my eyes, and I into His, I knew He was my guru and I had reached my goal.” Baba plucked some rose petals from His garland and gave them to Father to eat. Father said, “Only He knew what He was doing.” As it turned out, Baba gave him rose petals to eat quite often. On that first meeting, Baba asked Father whether he was single. When Father replied that he was married, a look of disapproval crossed Baba’s face, for no matter how fervently Father intended to serve his guru well, his ability to do so would be hindered by worldly responsibilities. Nevertheless, Baba began to give Father certain tasks which he could perform on weekends.

At this time Baba had both a mast ashram and a mad ashram, and He sometimes asked Father to bring either masts or the mad from Bombay to Him in Meherabad. Even though Father did not think he could tell the difference between a madman and a mast, somehow his instincts led him to make the right choices. He would gather up eight or ten madmen or masts in Bombay, make them change their clothes and put on kafnis, long white shirts reaching to the ankles, and then take them by train from Bombay to Ahmednagar all by himself. At ‘Nagar he would have them all sit in a bullock cart for the ride to Meherabad.

There in the ashram, Baba came daily to clean the toilets Himself and throw the contents into a pit. His disciples dug the pits in advance and kept them ready for this purpose. Sometimes Baba



Savak Kotwal at
the time he first
met Baba

would ask Father to assist Him. Then Baba would bathe the men, wipe their bodies dry, and put them in clean kafnis. Father also helped in other ways. Baidul, one of Baba's *mandali*, would sometimes request that he bring some cheap blankets, shawls or cooking vessels for the ashram, and Father would bring them willingly, as these items were all for Baba's work.

Later Mummy also willingly contributed toward meeting these expenses, for she was generous with her wealth, and she loved Savak. She would soon come to love Baba as well, but in the beginning Father's search for God made life very difficult for her, particularly because the most intense part of that search took place during the first several months of their marriage, between August and the end of October. Mummy—young, frightened and pregnant—was so miserable that she neglected her health and became anemic. She did not complain about her unhappiness, but she finally decided to do something about it. When she came to know that Savak was running after someone called Meher Baba, she was determined to confront this person. She managed to find out when Meher Baba was coming to Bombay and where He would be staying. And bravely, on the appointed day, she went without Father's knowledge to Dina Talati's place in Bombay Central. When she arrived, a person named Vishnu told her, "Baba has just left and will be back in the evening." Mummy, very disappointed, said with disgust in her voice, "I shall stay here even until midnight, until I meet this Meher Baba." She was waiting in the sitting room, alone and dejected, when suddenly she was aware of a man in a fragrant white robe drifting past her and disappearing into an inside room. She was sure He must be Meher Baba, although she had never seen Him. Then Vishnu, who was one of Baba's *mandali*, came to

her and said, "Meher Baba has come, and you are called in."

Mummy entered the room and stood in the doorway. "So you are that Meher Baba," she said angrily.

"Yes," Baba replied in gestures, "I am Meher Baba." One of His disciples spoke the words as Baba gestured.

"I have just come to tell you that you are the cause of all my miseries," Mummy informed Him.

Baba appeared astonished. He gestured for her to sit beside Him.

"I am not going to sit near you," Mummy said, sitting down opposite Him. She then started sobbing, pouring out all her woes to Baba. "You have taken my husband, Savak Kotwal, away from me. We were married only five months ago, and he loved me then. I am now almost five months pregnant and he is completely neglecting me. On weekends he goes to meet you in Ahmednagar. He does not care for me because of you."

With compassion in His eyes, Baba told her, "I have come to unite, not to divide. Don't worry. Everything will be all right."

In later years Mummy would describe to our whole family how His words sounded so true and His look was so merciful that she was certain He was not a fake but was Truth personified, so she went over and sat down close beside Him. She told us, "Baba was so loving, so understanding, that I felt as if I had found my mother, whom I lost when I was only thirteen, in Him." She opened up to Him completely, pouring out all the misery she had held inside since Father began his search for God. She told Baba how she had married Savak against the wishes of her father, explaining to Him that she was now so confused and frightened that her whole body trembled. She talked of the severe pain she had been experiencing

for three months in her back and abdomen and begged Baba to guide her.

Beloved Baba listened to her patiently and then He took a rose from a vase nearby. He plucked a few petals and lovingly put them in her mouth, just as a mother would feed a small child. As Mummy chewed the rose petals and swallowed them, her pain completely vanished, as did her trembling. Baba then gave her a locket with His picture and told her to dip it into a little water every day and then drink the water until she felt completely well. He embraced her lovingly and repeated, “Do not worry.” Those rose petals were Mummy’s—and also my—first *prasad* from Beloved Baba; because I was in her womb, I too received the benefit of His blessing! Mummy felt so much love for Baba that she confessed to Him that she loved Him, that she felt as if she had found her mother again. She left rejuvenated, feeling peace and joy for the first time in months. And from that first meeting until the end of her life, she looked on Baba as her mother.

For a long while Mummy did not inform Father that she had met Baba, nor did Baba mention to Father that Nergiz had come to Him to complain about the way he was treating her. When Father found out that Baba was in Bombay at that time, he also went for Baba’s darshan, and Baba innocently asked about Mummy, inquiring particularly about her health. Father displayed ignorance and indifference, as he had never asked Mummy anything about her health. Baba showed surprise, then chided Father, saying, “You don’t know? How can that be? Once you have taken up the responsibility of a family life, you should never try to escape it, but deal with it courageously, because one should not shirk his duty toward his wife and a child about to be born.” Baba further

instructed Father, "From now on, you are not to come to Ahmednagar unless I call you." Thus He put a full stop to Father's irresponsible behavior toward Mummy and to his weekend sojourns to Ahmednagar. Soon after, on 16th February 1928, I was born, Nergiz and Savak's first daughter. They named me Najoo in honor of Mummy's mother, Najamai.

Later Father took Mummy to meet Baba, but nothing was said about her previous visit. Mummy told Father that she thought Meher Baba was a highly spiritual person. On hearing this, Father was very pleased because now he could serve Baba with the help of Nergiz, who held the family's purse strings. Father earned a decent salary, but he kept only a quarter of it for his pocket money. The remainder he gave to Mummy to run the home and save whatever she wished. It was Mummy's generosity that allowed Father to serve Baba by purchasing blankets, shawls and cooking vessels for His ashrams. She would have shared her last loaf of bread with others, this most remarkable lady who Baba later said had a heart of solid gold.

Until Baba scolded him about neglecting his family responsibilities, Father had continued to visit not only Baba, but Upasani Maharaj and Narayan Maharaj as well, saying to them, "May Meher Baba's grace fall on me." Now, having to stay closer to home, he began visiting Chowpatty Beach to see a sadhu who called himself Tyagi Baba. Someone informed Meher Baba about this new contact of Father's. The next time Baba visited Bombay, He called Father to Him and said, "Tyagi Baba does not have even a whiff of spirituality in him." He added, "*Badshahni dosti kidha pachi sipahini khushamat kerwani zaroorat natthie*" ("Those who know the Emperor do not bow to the guards"). Baba then told Father, "If you still wish to keep contact with a spiritually advanced soul, you may

visit Tipoo Baba, who is my spiritual Chargeman, my governor for Bombay. When you visit Tipoo Baba, you introduce yourself by saying, “*Badshahne mujhe bheja hai.*” (The Emperor has sent me.”) Father was happy to hear these powerful words that Baba had given him to be used for his introduction to Tipoo Baba, who was said to be on the sixth plane of consciousness. And since Baba had placed restrictions on his visits to Ahmednagar, Father also felt some consolation, as at least he was allowed to meet with Tipoo Baba. When, as per Baba’s instructions, Father first visited him and said, “*Badshahne mujhe bheja hai,*” Tipoo Baba immediately stood up with reverence and said, “*Allah hu Akbar, Dua Kher*” (“God is great, my salutations”). He repeated the “*Dua Kher*” six times more. Then he lay down again on his *coir* string bed.

After that first meeting, Father began going daily to see Tipoo Baba, as his residence in Bhendi Bazaar was on the route Father took home from his job. When people came to pay their respects to Tipoo Baba, he would usually say, “*Ja! Ja!*” (“Go away! Go away!”) But he never said this to my father, who would sit near him for half an hour before returning home. Once, when Father put his head on Tipoo Baba’s feet, Tipoo Baba gave him such a hard kick that he was sore for three days. But Father knew that receiving a kick from such a spiritually advanced soul would wipe out some of his *sanskaras*, so he didn’t mind. Sometimes Tipoo Baba would wish to go to Haji Ali seashore, so Father would give the *mujawar* Rs 5 to pay the tonga fare to take them there.

Another advanced soul Father visited in Bombay was Swami Ramdas at Walkeshwar, but once when Father asked for his blessings, Ramdas seemed angry and answered impatiently, “I give you all my blessings.” His tone was so harsh that Father, a gentle,

softspoken man, did not return to see him ever again. However, Father did, by chance, come in contact with Gadge Maharaj, a well-known saint of Maharashtra. Meher Baba said that he was a spiritually advanced soul of very high caliber. Gadge Maharaj had a large following in Maharashtra, and his wealthy devotees helped him to establish several *dharamshalas* for the poor. He also took money from his well-to-do followers for helping the poor in other ways, distributing clothing and inexpensive blankets, and he was known throughout the state for his social work. He himself wore simple clothing, a coat and *dhoti* which were patched all over, as was his turban. He was a tall, impressive man with a magnetic personality. When he first met Gadge Maharaj on the road, Father asked if he could have the honor of feeding this saint. Gadge Maharaj refused food at that time, but he took down Father's name and address. He then boarded a local train and left. Later he began coming to our residence, Dhun Building in Lamington Road, for his lunch.

Mummy, knowing his spiritual status, would get up earlier than usual to have the lunch ready by 9:00 in the morning, when he arrived. I remember watching her as she hurried to cook the dal and rice, the only food he ate, usually served on newspaper. Mummy asked Father to buy plates made from large leaves held together with very thin twigs. When Gadge Maharaj ate his lunch from these plates, he appreciated Mummy's thoughtfulness. To give her the opportunity to serve him further, he would often come in a torn coat or shawl and ask Mummy to patch it up, which she did with great reverence. Saints and masts always let people serve them, and sometimes Gadge Maharaj would ask Father for money for his third-class compartment train fare, as he traveled extensively to serve the poor, or for blankets to distribute to those in

need. Father would give him Rs 50, which was a large sum in those days. This went on for quite some time, and one day Gadgé Maharaj told Mummy, “Take your cupboard key and keep it away from Savak. . . . Savak will finish up all your money.”

Then one day Father mentioned to Meher Baba that Gadgé Maharaj came frequently to our home for lunch and that, whenever asked, he gave money to Maharaj for the poor. Hearing this, Baba said to Father, “From today you will not give any money to any saint or sadhu. If anyone asks for money, you must say, ‘Meher Baba has given me orders not to give money to any saint or sadhu.’” Baba gave this order to Father because he was a novice in spiritual life; if a saint gave an order contradictory to one Baba had given, a novice follower could become very confused as to whom he should listen to. Hence, to avoid confusion, Baba gave such orders, even though He recognized Gadgé Maharaj to be a very advanced soul, a saint.

The following day Gadgé Maharaj came to our home and asked Father for money for travel. Father felt as though a knife were being held to his throat, but he said, “Meher Baba has ordered me not to give money to any saint or sadhu.”

Hearing this, Gadgé Maharaj very simply said, “All right, don’t worry, I understand.” And from that day Maharaj severed all contact with our family.

ONCE MUMMY HAD MET MEHER BABA, she cooperated with Father, generously giving him money to buy items for the mast ashram or the mad ashram at Ahmednagar. Father even brought Mummy a worn-out kafni of one of the masts to be used as a pattern so that she could purchase material and sew kafnis for

Father to take to 'Nagar whenever he went. Thus, almost from the beginning, Mummy also participated in Baba's work for the masts and the mad. I used to enjoy watching her stitch the kafnis, and I always tried to be quiet and well behaved so as not to disturb her work.

Whenever Baba came to Bombay, Father would take Mummy for His darshan, but for a long, long time she continued to keep secret her first visit to Baba, when she had told Him of the way Father was neglecting her. And although Father continued to yearn for Baba night and day, thinking always of his Beloved, he also continued to be very attentive to Mummy's needs as the family grew. On 29th August 1932 Mummy gave birth to a second child, another daughter. Whereas I had been frail at birth, Hiloo was a healthy, pretty baby. Now, in addition to her work sewing for Baba's ashram, Mummy was kept quite busy with the two of us.

Several times during these years Baba graced our home with His presence, once when Hiloo was only four or five months old. Baba took her in His lap and cuddled her, and later Hiloo loved to hear Mummy tell the story of how, on her first meeting with the Lord, He had played with her so tenderly. Another time, when we were living in Wasiamal Building in Lamington Road, Beloved Baba climbed several steep staircases with four of His men mandali to honor us by taking lunch at our home. Hiloo particularly remembers Pendu Kaka from that visit, as he was very loving with children. (The addition of "Kaka" to a man's name indicates that he is one's real or honorary paternal uncle or other close relative.) Another time, Baba came with some of His Western women mandali, including Princess Norina Matchabelli, and again had lunch at our home, this time in Dalal Estate, ground floor, in

Bombay Central. I was fascinated with Princess Norina, who was a most attractive lady. Sometimes Baba would pay just a flying visit to give us the opportunity to have His darshan. On one such visit Mummy complained to Him that I was becoming very disobedient, mischievous and difficult to control. Baba called me to Him, cuddled me, and said to Mummy, “Don’t worry. When she grows up, she will be a diamond. Her behavior is due to having to share you with her new sister. She also wants your love and attention.” We were a privileged family to have His sacred footsteps in our home.



Hilloo and me
around the time
of my navjote

WHEN I WAS SEVEN YEARS OLD, Mummy began planning for my *navjote*, or thread ceremony. Sometimes called the “New Light Ceremony,” this ritual officially brings a child into the Zoroastrian religion. Mummy, who always looked favorably upon those who were dignified and beautiful in appearance, decided to do something revolutionary and break with tradition. During the navjote ceremony, a *ses*, a silver tray containing jewels, a coconut, rosewater, vermilion powder and various other auspicious items, is to be carried by the chief guest, a married woman, with children, whose husband is still living. At the time of my navjote, Shireenmai, Meher Baba’s mother, was a widow, but Mummy, who adored Shireenmai, invited her to be the chief guest. She was beautiful and she bore herself with the dignity of a reigning queen—which indeed she was, being the one chosen to bring the God-Man, Avatar Meher Baba, into the world.

To my great good fortune, Shireenmai accepted the invitation, and Mummy sent her a beautiful white Chinese silk sari and a blouse with long sleeves to wear for the occasion, as it was the custom to honor the chief guest with these gifts. Shireenmai

looked so lovely that all eyes were watching her as she carried my silver tray with its auspicious items intended to bring me good luck. The best part was that Mummy's wealthy relatives, who were generally rather snobbish at such gatherings, were absolutely in awe of Shireenmai. They did not know she was the mother of Meher Baba. In those days most Zoroastrians did not speak well of Him, due to anti-Baba propaganda written by Zoroastrian writers in the newspapers, so when asked who the dignified lady was, Mummy simply answered, "My best friend." And Mummy's relatives, much to her amusement, were drawn to Shireenmai as though she were a magnet. Her grace, charm and beautiful smile undoubtedly won many hearts that day.

Mummy broke yet another rule on the occasion of my navjote. It was traditional that the meal following the ceremony include both meat and liquor. Our family had been strict vegetarians since soon after Mummy and Father were married, so Mummy planned a vegetarian luncheon without liquor for the more than three hundred guests, the cream of Bombay society, who had been invited to the occasion. By Baba's grace the food, served by sophisticated bearers, was so well presented, so attractive in appearance, and so tasty that Mummy's relatives appreciated everything and forgot to be snobbish. They genuinely praised the food and the way it was decorated and served, apparently not even missing the liquor.

I will never forget my lovely navjote—or my new pink dress. I was so grateful to Mummy and very proud that she chose Baba's own mother to carry the silver tray and grace the occasion. I have always thought of this event as a harbinger of the good fortune my sister, brother and I were to have on the golden soil of Meherabad with Beloved Baba, Shireenmai's favorite son.



Baba with His mother Shireenmai

PHOTOGRAPH BY PADRI

We received many presents at my navjote, but the best of all was an Adler sewing machine from Germany, given to Mummy by her maternal aunt, who knew that Mummy loved to sew and embroider. This machine could be operated by hand, treadle, or electric motor, and Mummy would use it well over the years to sew kafnis, shirts that Baba distributed to the military men stationed in Ahmednagar, clothing for the family and for Baba's closest women mandali, and, best of all, *sadras* for her Beloved Baba. If such an inanimate item could be considered blessed, this machine certainly has been. It would be there at the winding up of our home in Bombay in 1940, it was repeatedly in Baba's presence in Meherabad, and to this day it is with me in my home in Mahim. It has witnessed the joys and sorrows of our family, and it stands now as a favorite possession, a precious treasure.

ANOTHER IMPORTANT MEMORY from my early childhood is Tipoo Baba. After Father introduced Mummy to him, she began visiting him on her own, sometimes taking me along. Tipoo Baba was a short, bronze-colored man who dressed in a long white shirt and a sarong. He always lay in one position, like a lion about to pounce, and he used to scratch people with his inch-long nails, which looked like claws. At first I was frightened because he looked so ferocious with his fiery light brown eyes and his thick brown hair, knotted into a rope that hung to his knees. But as I grew used to him, I was no longer afraid. I would sit quite near him, and he did not drive me off, as he did many who visited him. His room, about twelve feet long and six feet wide, contained only the coir string bed on which he slept, nothing else. The room had only one window and one door, and his bed was placed away from the



Baba's birthday, 1938. I'm standing at His right

PHOTOGRAPH BY ELIZABETH C. PATTERSON

window because he did not like the rays of the sun falling on him. He would seldom get off his bed except to move his bowels. He was a chain smoker, and his mujawar, who looked after his physical needs, kept a pile of *bidis* near his bed.

Tipoo Baba was very fond of Mummy; he would say, “*Ye Meri Jaya hai*” (“She is my spiritual wife”) and treat her lovingly. Whenever Mummy visited Tipoo Baba, she always brought fruits for him. He would tell his attendant to serve him and then eat with love whatever she had brought. He often had a large crowd of mostly Muslim followers around him, and Mummy used to feel quite embarrassed when he asked her to sit beside his cot on the floor, put his arm around her shoulder, and referred to her as his spiritual wife. He shouted “*Ja! Ja!*” to others, telling them to leave, but he never sent Mummy away, to the astonishment of the rest of those in attendance. Once, when Mummy was about five months pregnant with her third child, she went to visit Tipoo Baba. He said cheerfully to her, “*Beta aayega Beta, Allah Ka pyara Beta Aayega.*” (“A son will be born, a son, the loved one of Allah.”) Mummy was very happy to hear this news, because she already had two daughters.

Shortly before she was due to deliver, however, Mummy began having difficulties. When Baba came to Bombay early in January of 1937 and Father went for His darshan, Baba told him, “A great calamity is going to befall you. Your wife will die after giving birth to a lovely son.”

Hearing this, Father pleaded, “Baba, You alone can save me from this catastrophe.”

Some coins were lying on the couch where Baba was seated. Baba told Father to pick up one rupee and instructed him to keep it separate from his other money and to feed lepers with it during

the following seven days, taking care not to mix this particular rupee with his other coins. He further instructed Father that in case it did get mixed with the rest of his money, He was to be notified immediately by telegram. And if Mummy had any difficulty during childbirth, Father was to go to Tipoo Baba and say, “The Emperor has sent me.”

Father very carefully kept this rupee in a separate wallet, and he went in search of lepers. Ordinarily, lepers are very easy to find in Bombay, but now he had a great deal of difficulty locating any. For days he rode around the city in a taxi, searching for them. One leper he tried to feed said, “You have come to throw your burden on me,” and he refused food. In those days it was possible to provide a meal for twenty-five *paise* or four *annas* (sixteen annas made one rupee). Finally, when time to complete the task was running short, Father went to Byculla. He bought food from a Hindu hotel and after searching hard and spending a lot more money on taxis, he managed finally to feed lepers with that one rupee given by Baba, completing his work on the seventh day. His diligence in the task resulted in an improvement in Mummy’s health, and she was able to carry the baby full term.

When the time came for Mummy to deliver, however, Dr. Masina, Bombay’s leading gynecologist, told Father that he expected only one of the two, mother or child, to survive. Mummy was severely anemic, and he feared she might bleed to death during the delivery. Also, because of her poor health, the child was expected to be frail. And when Mummy started having labor pains, the amniotic sac burst prematurely, making the delivery all the more difficult. As Mummy’s condition worsened, Dr. Masina told Father that his hopes for the child surviving were also dwindling.

Remembering Beloved Baba's words, Father informed Mummy that he was going to Tipoo Baba, as per Meher Baba's instructions, and she should keep thinking of Baba.

Father rushed to Tipoo Baba's place, but found that he had gone to stay with a Zoroastrian devotee in Thane, a suburb of Bombay, so Father took a taxi all the way out to Thane. He rushed into Tipoo Baba's room and said once again, "*Badshahne mujhe bheja hai*," that is, "The Emperor has sent me."

Tipoo Baba, who was just ready to take his lunch, left it, jumped out of his bed, and went straight to the window, through which the fiery midday January sunlight was streaming. Despite his aversion to being in sunlight, he stood there for half an hour, until his whole face and body had become red and he was sweating profusely. He then turned, went back to his coir string bed and said, "*Ja, fateh ho gaya hai*" ("Go, it has been made successful").

Father, with joy in his heart, bowed to Tipoo Baba and left, knowing that Nergiz and their son must be out of danger, due to the sweet compassion of Lord Meher. On reaching the hospital, Father found Nergiz looking pale and fragile, but recovering, with a very delicate baby boy beside her on the bed. Dr. Masina told Father, "It is a miracle that both are alive."

"Yes, sir," my father answered, "it is due to the blessings of Meher Baba." So it was that Adi, Savak and Nergiz's only son, who Tipoo Baba had said would be "the loved one of Allah," was born.

THROUGHOUT HIS EARLY CHILDHOOD Adi remained frail, suffering from repeated illnesses and requiring a lot of special attention. Once, when Baba visited our home in Dalal Estate, Adi was so ill that my parents were afraid he wouldn't survive. Mother informed

Baba about his almost constant illnesses, and Baba told her to request that Dr. Sahiar, the family physician, give him “three S.U.P. injections.” To this day I do not know what these injections were—and it must have been difficult for Mummy to make the request. Who would dare to tell a doctor what treatment to give? But that was Baba’s order and, as Baba said, “Obedience is greater than love.” So Mummy, wanting to obey Baba and desperate to get little Adi in good health, picked up her courage and, taking Baba’s name, approached Dr. Sahiar.

“Doctor,” she said, “Adi’s condition is worse today. Yesterday you told me that if the medicine he is now taking didn’t work, you would give him three S.U.P. injections instead to help him recover.”

To Mummy’s utter astonishment the doctor agreed. “Did I say that? Well, let us try this change of treatment.”

Mummy’s heart missed a beat as she heard his reply, for she was sure that since she had obeyed Baba, Adi’s health would improve. With the very first injection, Adi’s temperature, which had been shooting up to 104 degrees Fahrenheit and causing convulsions, dropped three degrees. And after the other two injections Adi gradually recovered completely. This is a simple example of the way Baba works in our lives. However difficult His orders may be, if we make up our minds to find the courage to obey Him, all obstacles are removed, and what seems impossible becomes possible.

AFTER ADI’S BIRTH Father continued working at the bank, but as the years passed, his craving to be with Baba became more and more intense. I cannot remember much about my father from my early years, as he would go to work early and come back late, almost as though he were living in a guest house. He and Mummy

had little occasion for laughter, and Father rarely played with us, bought us toys, or took us to parks. I saw that other children's fathers took them to toy shops and let them select toys, but in our house Father simply brought home his salary and gave it to Mummy. That was it. We hardly saw him. When he was at home, he was always reading books, and we were too young to grasp the importance of his search or the reason why he was too preoccupied to give us much attention.

Mummy, on the other hand, was as warm and attentive to us as Father was distant. She loved all three of us children so much that she could sense our wants and always tried to fulfill them to the best of her ability. When we were young, she felt that the vegetarian food we were eating was not giving us enough protein, and she supplemented our diet with expensive cheese from abroad. We, of course, loved it! It was she who took us to toy stores, or sometimes surprised us with a toy she knew we would like, but every month we received a new toy from her. We listened with awe to the wonderful stories she told us about her childhood. Mummy was quite proud of her "pedigree." Her great grandfather, Dosabhai Surti, was a famous philanthropist, known as the King of the Cotton Market. On Zoroastrian festival days he would sit in his reclining chair on the verandah of his bungalow, two bags of rupees hanging from each arm of the chair, and distribute a fistful to each poor man who approached him for a gift. Mummy vividly remembered that scene from when she was a child of about nine. Hearing these stories made us proud as well. She compensated for our father's neglect, and all three of us absolutely adored our dear Mummy, not only when we were children, but until the end of her life.

Father continued to grow more distant from us as his longing

for Baba increased to the point where it could no longer be contained. He had tried always to obey Baba's orders during the twelve long years that had rolled away since the beginning of his search for God. And in the tug of war between spiritual longing and obedience, spiritual longing finally took the upper hand. Working as a cashier in the bank had always been very stressful for Father, and he was finding it more and more difficult to concentrate on his job. He felt that he was going mad for Baba's love and could no longer bear to be separated from his Beloved. Finally, in March of 1939, he wrote to Baba, expressing his intense longing to be with Him. He received the following reply:

Jubbulpore
5th April 1939

Dear Savak—

Received your letter.

I know how you long for realising Me

I know how you feel

I know what you think, and I know what you
need.

You are in my Circle. You will surely realize Me.

Don't worry and leave everything to Me.

Love—self and all.

M. S. Irani

This letter, signed by the Master Himself, gave Father some peace of mind and heart for a while. But gradually he began to lose his patience and finally, influenced by these lines of Kabir, he became desperate:

You have achieved the highest form, O Man.
 Make the best of this opportunity!
 Surrender your all to a Sadguru
 And get rid of the cycle of births and deaths.

Father decided that since Baba had not asked him to join the ashram, he would go to the Himalayas to find God. His behavior during this time became erratic and fiery. Sometimes he would bang his head on the wall or the door in his frustration; other times he was so dejected and depressed that he would not speak to anyone at home or at work. He would not share with Mummy his agitated feelings of love for Baba, and he did not inform her that he planned to resign his position and leave his worldly life behind. He became more and more introverted, his heart and mind in revolt. Adi was still very young, but for Mummy, Hiloo and me, the atmosphere at home was extremely tense, and we girls had no way of comprehending what was happening.

Then on 31st December 1939, Father was called by his boss, the British officer in charge of the bank. He gave Father a letter of promotion, saying that Father would be taking his place from 1st January 1940, as he was returning to London. Father took the letter and put it in his pocket, then took out another letter and handed it to his boss. It was his letter of resignation. Looking over this letter, the British officer was dumbfounded. He told Father not to be hasty, to think about his decision. He refused to accept Father's resignation for one month, but Father had made up his mind.

A relative of ours who worked in the same bank informed Mummy that Father had resigned his job and refused to accept a promotion. Mummy sent a telegram to Baba, and Baba responded

immediately: “If you have not resigned, then do not, but come and see Me. If you find a guru greater than Me, then go to the Himalayas.”

Father had already resigned, but he went to Ahmednagar anyway and beseeched Baba to accept him into the ashram. Baba asked what Nergiz intended to do under the circumstances, and when Father had no answer to that question, Baba immediately sent him back to Bombay to find out Mummy’s wishes.

This sudden change in their lives came as both a great surprise and a great blow to Mummy. It meant that she would have to give up the beautiful home she had set up with such love and effort. She was cultured, intelligent, talented—used to a comfortable life. At the same time, she was very practical. In those times it was typical for an Indian wife to follow her husband wherever he wished to go. And besides, Mummy loved Meher Baba, and she knew that He would never let her or her children be harmed. She felt that she could trust Baba more than she could trust her husband. There was, therefore, no question of what her answer would be. “I go where you go,” Mummy told Father. She was willing to sacrifice all so that our futures would be secure with Baba, and no matter what suffering she endured from that time on, she did not complain, but bore it silently as Baba’s will.

When Father returned to Baba with that message, Baba agreed to keep not only Father in the ashram, but also Mummy, Hilloo, Adi and me, as well as Banufui, my mother’s retarded paternal aunt (this kinship term is indicated by the suffix *-fui*), who had come to live with us after the death of the sister who had been caring for her. How compassionate Baba was. For the sake of the love of His one lover, Savak, the Lord took upon Himself the burden of

an entire family. Years later, as an adult, I would come to realize why Baba had mostly unmarried individuals in His ashram, for it is much easier to lead a spiritual life if one does not have a partner and children. A child's mind cannot understand the reason for a parent's neglect, and it leaves scars on both the heart and mind. Baba gave great importance to one's duty toward his family, which is why he had stopped Father from coming to Ahmednagar before I was born. But Father's inattention upset me, and I was always comparing my life with the lives of other children. Little did I know how much Father was suffering as well. As I look back now, I understand fully what an invaluable gift he gave the three of us.

I remember vividly an incident which took place when I was eight, for it exemplifies my father's character. His aunt had been telling me stories about the way my grandfather's second wife had treated Father when he was a boy, and I later said to him, "Your stepmother is like Cinderella's stepmother." At this Father became very cross with me. "Don't ever repeat this," he told me. "I love her. It is due to her that I began seeking God. She was my first guru." Many people would have been bitter about such harsh treatment, but not Father. His stepmother's unkindness and neglect, along with his father's telling him that true love comes only from God, had led my father to seek God's love. And what a destiny for him, for in his search he found Meher Baba, the God-Man, who showered him with love, both human and divine, until the end of his worldly life.

After receiving Baba's permission to join His ashram, Father was instructed to return to Bombay, dispose of all our possessions, and come to Meherabad with cash and only the minimum necessities for each of us. When Baba asked Mummy how she felt about

giving up her whole way of life and all her possessions, she did not hesitate, although she did ask His permission to add her sewing machine to the basic necessities we were to bring with us. Baba, who was always practical, agreed, as she would be able to make good use of it in the ashram.

Of course, word that we were going to give up everything we owned to join Baba's ashram traveled quickly through Mummy's family, and the older ones were extremely disturbed by what they thought was a terrible mistake. They had heard through the newspapers and also word of mouth rumors that Meher Baba had collected a group of women and was moving around with them everywhere, and they looked upon His behavior with suspicion. They reminded Mummy that she had two daughters who needed to be looked after and protected. In fact, many of our relatives and friends became our enemies because of my father's decision to renounce the world. They were so shocked and perplexed that some of them, seeing us selling off all our expensive furniture, crockery and antiques, cried. But Father had made up his mind, and Mummy saw Beloved Baba as her mother, so she was content. Determined and steadfast in their decision, our parents wound up all matters pertaining to their former household, reduced now to four trunks, three bedrolls and the sewing machine.

After all those years of longing, Father was seeing his dream at last come true. As Sadguru Kabirji said,

You receive one fruit when you go on a pilgrimage;
You receive four fruits when you meet a saint;
You receive innumerable fruits when you meet
a Sadguru.

How much richer and sweeter is the fruit of love received from the Avatar! It cannot be described; it has to be experienced. Our family was blessed with such love from the Avatar of this age, no doubt the blessings of countless lifetimes, that we were allowed to walk with the Emperor, Meher Baba, while He was in the body and to be tested by His call to absolute obedience in renouncing our worldly all. Avatar Meher Baba ki Jai!



Baba as He looked when when we met Him in Bangalore

PHOTOGRAPH BY PADRI

LIFE ON MEHERABAD HILL



Our home on
Meherabad Hill, 1940

For the Kotwal family, 15th March 1940 was our D-Day. Beloved Baba asked us to meet Him on that day at Links Bungalow, Bangalore. Father was happy at last, but Mummy was having difficulties, both emotional and physical. She had put up a brave front before her relatives, but she was now in a state of shock as she faced the reality of what her beautiful home had been

reduced to. Even though she knew in her heart that Beloved Baba was a compassionate mother to her, she was suddenly struck with great anxiety about her children's future. And she was ill with a high fever. When we had to change trains at Guntakul, we had to walk a long way and climb up and down several staircases, an especially difficult effort for Mummy. But despite her fever, she rushed along the platform carrying Adi, too frail even at three to walk such a distance, and managed to reach the train that would take us to Bangalore.

I was twelve years old at that time, and my memory of our meeting with Beloved Baba at Links Bungalow is forever engraved on my heart, overpowering all my other childhood memories. I recall the scene as vividly as if it were being shown as a movie on a big screen: *Savak's Dream Comes True*. Our family waited for Baba in the sitting room. Mummy, still burning with fever, lay on a couch. Beside her, little Adi, "the loved one of Allah," as Tipoo Baba had called him, was fast asleep, unaware that he had entered not only Allah's empire, but also His home. In one chair Hilloo, my pretty, mischievous sister, sat beside me; she had no inkling what was going on, as she was only seven. Banufui sat in another chair, also oblivious to what was happening. And in a corner Father stood, calm and composed. He had, after all his searching and longing, finally reached his Master's feet.

Then Beloved Baba entered the room in all His beauty. He looked young and agile, his lovely golden brown ringlets falling down on His broad shoulders. He wore a flowing white sadra and pink coat, and his face had a rosy glow. Baba looked with great compassion at Mummy and tenderly helped her to sit up.

Father said, "Baba, everything in Bombay has been disposed

of.” And, taking an envelope from his coat pocket, he added, “Here, Baba, is the money packet.”

Beloved Baba opened the pocket of His pink coat and Father put the envelope in, since Baba never touched money except when giving it to the poor or to masts. Mummy then asked Father to open her trunk, which he did. He took out the box containing her inherited jewelry and handed it to her. Mummy took it to Baba and said, “Baba, this was mine and now it is all Yours. I beseech You to look after my children and me.”

Beloved Baba took the box in His hands and sat down. His searching eyes fell on Hilloo and me, and He gestured, “Is there anything else?”

Mummy said, “No, Baba.” But just as she spoke, she saw in Hilloo’s and my ears our little gold swastika earrings. (In India the swastika is an ancient symbol of good luck.) Hilloo’s were plain gold and mine had small rubies in the centers. Mummy then said to us, “Both of you take out your earrings and offer them to Baba, as your gift.” I very cheerfully did as I was told, proud and happy that I could give something of my own to Baba. Hilloo, being so young, was a little reluctant, but she knew she had to obey Mummy. The moment we offered Baba our earrings, His smile grew so radiant that my heart missed a beat. He embraced me and Hilloo gently and warmly, with great love, as if to say, “from this moment on, I am your Daddy.” And that is when I began to think of Him as my Big Daddy. How wonderful that the God-Man can play such different roles for different individuals. He was God-Man to Father, and Mother to Mummy, but He would always be Big Daddy to Hilloo, Adi and me.

At that time Baba was using an alphabet board, which Father,

having gone to see Him many times, could read—particularly since Baba pointed to the letters very slowly so that Father could understand what He was saying. But Baba also used gestures that even Mummy and I could understand. He lovingly told Father, with gestures, “From today, until the very end, I shall see to their littlest needs.” He pointed to Mummy, the three of us children, and Banufui. Then, pointing to Father, Baba said, “To you I will give the Ocean.” Baba’s gesture for Ocean was to point as if He were opening up His chest to show His Sacred Heart, which was indeed the Ocean of love and mercy. His gesture reminded me of a film I had seen in which Lord Krishna tore open His breast to show His disciple Arjun the Universe He controlled. We also had the opportunity to hear Baba’s voice, as in those early years He still sometimes made soft, melodious sounds in His throat as He conversed.



Mummy and Adi
at Panchgani

Baba embraced Mummy, then Hilloo, Adi and me, our aunt, and finally Father, who was responsible for all of us having the good fortune to live with God for this lifetime. Since Mummy was not well, Baba said He was sending all of us to Il Plazzo Hotel at Panchgani, a hill station, for a change of climate to improve her health and Adi’s. Baba gave us this time in Panchgani as a transitional period between our old life in the world and our new life in the ashram, and He lovingly reassured Mummy that she would be all right. Such mercy and compassion for those who had just surrendered all their worldly possessions at His feet could have come only from the Avatar.

AFTER OUR INITIAL INTERVIEW WITH BABA at Links Bungalow, we went on to Panchgani, while Baba left Bangalore to go on a tour. One day while we were staying in that lovely hill station,

Father explained to Hiloo and me that when the Lord takes, He takes everything. Baba had taken not only our earrings, but all our good and bad sanskaras of innumerable lifetimes, for He was the Infinite Ocean, always pure and clean. Father also told us that Mummy's maternal uncle had once come to Meherabad and offered Baba *lakhs* (hundreds of thousands) of rupees. Baba had very gently told him that He did not need the money just then, but He would ask for it as and when He needed it. Such is His divine play. He accepted lovingly our tiny gold earrings, but graciously declined the offer of huge sums of money from someone else, because our gift was pure and unconditional, filled with love. Father explained that Baba alone understood the divine game He played for those who love Him wholeheartedly.

Mummy had a good rest in Panchgani, and she was feeling much better when Baba picked us up on His return journey to Meherabad. We all went together to Ahmednagar. Baba kept us for a day in the Meher Nazar compound, the home of His secretary, Adi K. Irani, also known as Adi Sr. (to distinguish him from Baba's brother Adi, who was called Adi Jr.), while He made arrangements for our accommodations at Meher Retreat *gadi* with Mehera, His closest woman disciple, His sister Mani, and the other women mandali. Baba assigned to us the room that now accommodates the library on Meherabad Hill. Mother, we three children, Banufui and Silla (Goher and Katie Irani's cousin) all lived together there. Whenever Arnavaz Dadachanji or her sister Nargis came from Bombay, they also stayed with us.

While we were beginning our lives on the Hill with the women, Baba sent Father to Manmad, where for the first six months of his life in the ashram he was kept in seclusion in a room

near Ankai Hillock with three other men. Ankai is a place of pilgrimage of a Hindu saint, Agarsatya Muni. Father was directed not to read or write, and he had to keep complete silence. He was also ordered to repeat the name of Yezdan for two hours daily. We did not see Father again for nearly a year.

Life in the ashram was quite different from our old life. On her very first day on the Hill, Mummy was at the tap washing her face when Baba passed by on His way from His tin cabin to Mehera's room. He noticed that Mummy had left the tap on and was wasting water. He immediately stopped and, just as a mother would instruct a child, demonstrated to her how she could save water, which was scarce, and still wash her face well. It was in moments like this that the Lord of the Universe saw to the smallest details of our lives. Baba always treated us according to our needs. For example, soon after we arrived in Meherabad, He instructed everyone to observe a strict fast, taking water only. Mummy, who had never fasted before, felt very sick and weak, so giddy that it was difficult for her to look after Adi. Baba, passing by, saw her lying in bed with Adi sitting beside her. He went into Mehera's room and brought four biscuits, which He placed in Mummy's hand, closing it. Not a word was exchanged, and no one else noticed what had taken place.

One morning Mummy was standing in the tin shed, the roofed area outside the kitchen where we took our meals and where Baba's gadi is kept, and Baba spelled out to her in Gujarati, "*Toone mukti.*" ("To you I shall give *mukti*.") Mummy, who understood little about spirituality, did not realize the significance of what Baba was telling her. She just kept quiet, but she remembered His words. Many days later she came to learn the

meaning of the word *mukti*, which is liberation from births and deaths. Needless to say, on learning this she felt very fortunate!

Banufui, who was standing beside Mummy, said, “Baba, please give me *murti* as well.” Our aunt, who was retarded, thought Baba had offered Mummy a statue, and she wanted one too. Baba very sweetly nodded His head, and Banufui was pleased. Such was the kindness of Baba. What counted with the God-Man was not mental brilliance but purity of heart, and Banufui was a very pure soul. When Baba temporarily came out of seclusion, He usually would not allow the women to embrace Him, but if Banufui, who didn’t understand at all what was going on, went innocently to Baba, He would lovingly accept her embrace. Because of her lack of mental capacity, she would never be able to understand the true status of Baba, but she knew He was now her provider, and she loved Him dearly.

In the beginning Baba did not assign any specific duty to Mummy, as He felt she needed time to adjust to her new surroundings and also to look after Adi. But Mummy, who was filled with energy, became restless and upset as the days passed and she still had no particular duties. One day Baba said to Mummy, “Rano tells me you are crying all the time. What is the matter? Do you want to go back to Bombay? If so, I will give you back all your money and jewelry, and I will arrange for you to be resettled there.”

Mummy replied, “Baba, I don’t want money, I don’t want jewelry, and I don’t want to go anywhere else. I want to be with You only. Baba, put joy into my heart and give me peace of mind. Please assign to me some duty to perform, just as all the others have, and then I will be happy just like everyone else.”

And Beloved Baba, in His compassion, assigned her the work

she loved most: sewing. Mummy and Silla were given the task of sewing shirts by the dozens in three different sizes for the military men stationed in Ahmednagar during World War II. These shirts were sent by Baba through His disciple Khansahib Sarosh K. Irani, a colonel in the army, who was then considered the uncrowned king of Ahmednagar. Mummy enjoyed the sewing thoroughly and she was very happy. She was also put in charge of the room where the five of us stayed with Silla.

As soon as we had settled into life at the ashram, Mummy began worrying that Hilloo, Adi and I would have to go without education, as she noticed that Kaikobad's daughters, who also lived on the Hill, were not going to school. However, she soon learned that Baidul's daughter Sarwar had been placed in a very good boarding school. And then Baba called Mummy to Mehera's room and asked her if she would like to send Hilloo and me to boarding school in Secunderabad, near Hyderabad—the very one where Sarwar was studying. Mummy, both pleased and relieved, said, “Of course, Baba, I want them to be well educated so that they can be on their own feet in their future life.”

After this conversation Baba, through Sarosh, made all the arrangements for our education at St. Anne's European High School at Secunderabad, beginning in June of that year. It was both a convent and one of the best boarding schools in India, run by Italian nuns, and Baba enrolled us as first-class boarders. This school was affiliated with Cambridge University, U.K., and the Nizam of Hyderabad also had his children studying there. Baba gave generously to the children of His lovers who had surrendered everything to Him.

Although the prospect of boarding school was exciting to

me, I was pleased that Hilloo and I still had a little time to enjoy the wonderful new experience of life on the Hill before leaving for school, for we were gloriously happy. In addition to Baba, who showered us with His love and attention, both divine and human, we had many new aunts to love us. We also had playmates, as there were several children living in the ashram besides Adi, Hilloo and me: Meheru, Naggu and Jangu (Mehera's nieces and nephew); Sarwar; Meherwan Jessawala; and Kaikobad's three daughters, Mehroo, Jaloo and Guloo. Sometimes during vacations Adi Sr.'s niece Tehmi, who attended school with us at St. Anne's, also came to stay. We had lots of open space in which to play—and even a zoo with all sorts of exotic birds and animals. Hilloo particularly liked the zoo. We did not have toys, but we did play games, sometimes with one another and sometimes even with Baba and Mehera.

When He was with us children, Beloved Baba was like a child—playing cards, Ping-Pong and *gilli-danda* (an Indian outdoor game played with sticks). He always had a twinkle in His beautiful eyes, and of course He always won whatever game we were playing. One day when Hilloo and I were passing Baba's cabin, He called us and took out a pack of cards. Midway through the game Hilloo, who was sitting next to Him on His right, saw a card behind Baba's back. Being a child and having no inhibitions, she immediately said, "Baba, You are cheating!"

Baba looked at her with amazement in His eyes and said with gestures, "I am Master of the whole Universe, and you call me a cheat?" Hilloo said, "But Baba, there is a card behind Your back." Then suddenly, to her amazement, He pulled the card out from behind her ear. We all laughed at His magic trick. He then pinched

Hilloo's cheeks and made a kissing gesture with His lips. Beloved Baba was completely human with us, even though He was the Almighty.

Movies were another part of our entertainment. Baba loved Charlie Chaplin movies, and He occasionally made us all get up at 5:00 a.m. to go by bus to Sarosh Talkies at 6:00 a.m., where a special show would be screened for us only. We saw movies with Greta Garbo and Bette Davis, who were Mummy's favorite actresses, and Errol Flynn, who was her favorite actor. We children loved Laurel and Hardy and Charlie Chaplin, but during the more serious movies, we would usually be fast asleep on our seats.

Sometimes Baba took us children for walks on the path down the Hill, early in the morning when He was leaving to meet with the men mandali in Lower Meherabad. Baba walked quickly, and His strides were so long that we had to run to keep up with Him. One of the women was always there to accompany us back up the Hill, and one particular time it was Mummy, who was carrying Adi. Baba took Adi from Mummy's arms and carried him all the way down the path. When we reached the point where the road crosses the path, Baba handed Adi back to Mummy. She told us that reminded her of a time when Adi was about two years old and she and Father had come to Meherabad from Bombay for Baba's darshan. As they were leaving, Baba had carried Adi, just as He had on this morning walk, down to the crossroad before giving him back to our parents. On another of our walks on the Hill with Baba, Hilloo spied two tiny lambs and cuddled them in her arms. Mehera, who was with us, turned to Baba and said, "Don't they make a lovely picture, Hilloo and the lambs?" Baba smiled at Hilloo so sweetly, for she was His little lamb.

Once, before we left for school for the first time, Baba took all the ladies and children to the small structure that would become His Samadhi to see the murals that Helen Dahm had painted inside. Baba first spoke to us in the tin shed and told us that the murals were not only beautiful works of art, but also a meditation, an example of what love for Baba can do. Baba then stood on the right side of the door and asked us to go in twos and threes to see the paintings. First He let Mehera and Mani in, and they came out smiling. After that we trickled in a few at a time. Beloved Baba was pleased that we all appreciated the paintings. When I think of that occasion today, I realize that when Baba took us to view His Samadhi, none of us, even Mehera and Mani, thought for a second that our Beloved's beautiful body would one day be placed inside and covered up. Such are His merciful ways of handling us, never revealing more than we are ready to receive.

OUR DAYS ON THE HILL were filled with the loving attention of the ladies living in the ashram. Mehera, with her Persian beauty, was the Queen of Hearts. Mummy, Hiloo and I all adored her. I remember vividly how we children sat in a corner with her as she told us about Krishna and Radha or of Mirabai, the queen who gave away her material world for the love of Krishna. She told us stories of saints and Perfect Masters—Tukaram, Tulsidas, Dyaneshwar and others. We listened with rapt attention as she spoke so beautifully that it was as if the scenes were taking place right before our eyes. The stories we enjoyed most were about Lord Krishna, how mischievous He was with His Beloved Radha and the *gopis* (milkmaids) and how they danced the divine dance in ecstasy. Sometimes Mehera would giggle as she spoke, showing the childlike quality of her heart.



Mehera—the
personification
of purity

Mehera was, for us, the personification of purity in thoughts, words and deeds. I remember once standing beside her as she stroked a puppy she held in her arms. “What a sweet little she-dog,” she said. I, being young and ignorant, asked her how she knew it was a she-dog. Mehera replied so sweetly, “You see, Najoo, you will know this when you grow up like me.” She was so pure that she would have been embarrassed to explain.

Mehera was always kind and loving to us children. Once Hilloo was standing by her door, watching Mehera play *sagar gota* (a game like marbles played with seashells) with the older children. We didn’t want Hilloo to join us since she could not play the game skillfully enough. But when Mehera noticed Hilloo standing there, looking unhappy, she left the rest of us to continue the game and sat down to play with Hilloo.



Mani was one
of our favorites

Mani, Baba’s sister, was another favorite, delightful and pretty, with an infectious smile and a tremendous sense of humor. She was multitalented, a wonderful mimic and actress, a choreographer of dances and director of plays. She made puppets and put on extraordinary puppet shows for Baba. She could also perform shadow plays, sing beautifully, and play the sitar and the flute. Many times we heard her play the flute while sitting on the branch of a tree. Mani so enjoyed making everyone happy that she often played the role of the jester. Everyone loved her, especially the children, whom she loved in return. She was enchanting and adorable and always found time for us, even though she was very busy doing work for Baba. When we wanted to find Mani, we always went first to the tin shed, where she spent much of her time typing Baba’s Western correspondence. Her English was fluent and she could type with great speed. If Mani wasn’t there,

she was often with Mehera, planning some skit for which Mehera would design the costumes. The little plays they put on were to please Beloved Baba when He was exhausted from His spiritual work and wanted to relax and be entertained, but we children also enjoyed them immensely.

The other women in the ashram that Hilloo was particularly fond of were Meheru and Katie. She followed them around like a puppy until Katie started referring to Hilloo as her tail, but Katie always found time to talk to her, and Hilloo loved to listen to her singing. Katie's two younger sisters, Shehera and Roshan, were in school with us in the early years. They were older than we, and Baba knew they would keep an eye on us. We saw very little of their oldest sister, Goher, as she was busy studying medicine at that time.

Baba met with the women and children several times a week before or after meeting with the men in Lower Meherabad in the mornings. When He wanted us to gather, Kitty Davy would walk all around the compound ringing a little brass bell, calling, "Everybody! Everybody!" When we heard her, the women left whatever work they were doing and went usually to Mehera's room, where Baba would be waiting. Sometimes, though, Baba called us to come to the tin shed, where He would be seated on His gadi. Elizabeth Patterson had very thoughtfully provided for each of us a little teakwood stool, which we would carry to the place where Baba wanted us to gather. We still have one of these stools, probably Adi's, for it is very small, in our home in Mumbai (as Bombay is now called). I always looked forward to sitting with Baba, and I listened to His talks with rapt attention, as I was old enough to understand a bit. Hilloo, on the other hand, was in the

beginning too young to grasp what Baba was saying, and she would quickly become bored and restless. Her mind would drift and she would try to catch the eye of another child. When Baba saw her shifting around on her stool, He would suddenly ask her to sing. We all quickly learned to have a song ready in case Baba wanted us to sing, and I take great pride in saying that our entire family at different times took part in entertaining the King of Kings.

One morning when Kitty came around ringing her bell and calling “Everybody,” Hilloo decided nobody would miss her if she played hooky. She was only eight, after all, and she thought playing with the birds and animals in the little zoo would be more fun than listening to a talk. She went from one cage to another, thoroughly enjoying herself, until she came to the cage where Lucky, Norina’s monkey, was kept. When Hilloo picked up a little stick and started to tease Lucky with it, he became very angry, baring his teeth viciously at her. Then, somehow, he managed to free himself from the cage. Hilloo started to run, and he chased her. All was quiet around Baba—the ladies and the rest of us children listening attentively to Him—when suddenly the peace was shattered by Hilloo’s screams. Baba told the women to find out what was going on. Norina ran and grabbed her monkey as Hilloo fell to the ground, scraping her palms in the sand. She was petrified, barely able to pick herself up and dust off her clothes. She was brought before Baba, who looked at her anxiously and told Rano to get the first-aid kit. He had Hilloo sit on the gadi facing Him, and He looked at her bleeding palms, then took some cotton wool and antiseptic and gently cleaned her wounds and applied some medicine to them. He was so loving and understanding that Hilloo stopped crying. He took her face in His beautiful hands, made a



Baba and Lucky, the monkey

kissing gesture, and told her gently to sit beside Mummy and not to play truant again. As my sister says now, “I was deeply moved by Beloved Baba’s compassion toward me, and by His loving gestures. Instead of anger, His eyes showed such understanding and love that I was completely won over by Him. Of course I did not escape punishment from Mother, who promptly walloped me when we returned to our room.”

Despite this inauspicious beginning with the animals in the zoo, Hilloo continued to be fascinated with them, and she learned quickly how to treat them. She enjoyed patting the head of Baba’s peacock, Moti, a beautiful bird who loved performing his dance and showing off his feathers. Afterwards he would sit on a perch, lower his head and shake it from side to side, waiting for us to stroke it. Hilloo also enjoyed letting Baba’s parrot perch on her shoulder. If she chewed peanuts and held some out on her tongue, the parrot would eat gently from it.

I, TOO, WAS TO EXPERIENCE FROM BABA the kind of loving attention a mother would give her child when I awoke one morning in May of 1940, thinking I had dysentery. Around 8:00 a.m. I went to Mummy, who was busy sewing shirts for the military, and told her that I was having pain in my back and abdomen and that I must have dysentery, for I had changed my underpants twice after finding them stained. On hearing this, Mummy immediately realized that I must have come of age and was no longer a child. She confirmed her suspicions and became very agitated, telling me that because of the circumstances I should wear something for protection. She helped me to get dressed, all the while trembling and saying to herself, “What a big blow, at such a tender age.”

Hearing Mummy say this, I became very nervous and frightened, thinking I must have done something wrong. She then gripped my hand and rushed me into Mehera's room, knocking quickly at the open door before barging in, saying, "Oh Baba, You alone can help her! Najoo is only twelve, and I didn't come of age until I was fifteen years old. It is a great calamity, Baba, please help."

Baba, who was seated on the bed, made Mummy sit down. Mehera was getting Baba a glass of water, and Mani was standing at the foot of the bed with a file of papers and a pen. Baba told Mummy, "Go and get me a teaspoon of butter from the kitchen and also some sugar." Mani interpreted His gestures, as we were still quite new to the Meher Retreat. When Mummy had gone to the kitchen, Baba, showing me His human side, put His right arm around me just as a loving mother would. "Don't worry about this, Najoo," He said. "You know, this change in your body happens to all girls when they come of age. What has happened to you is a normal part of growing up. It means you are no longer a child now, so don't go near men. You are a big girl. When Adi becomes a big boy, he will get a beard and moustache. When Hilloo grows big, she will also have this normal change. So don't worry, okay?"

When Mummy returned, she found me looking cheerful, not frightened as before. Baba took the teaspoon of butter, sprinkled sugar on it, and put the spoon into my mouth. Despite Mummy's asking Him to let her wash the container and spoon, Baba washed them Himself and then told Mummy to bring me daily to Mehera's room for the following four days and also to bring butter and sugar. He gave me butter sprinkled with sugar and then washed the utensils Himself for the next four days, and each day He lovingly embraced me. During the next ten months, the entire school year,

I did not menstruate again, not until our school holidays, when I returned to Meher Retreat. Such mercy He showed those of us who grew up under His divine protective wings.

I feel there is an important reason for the way in which Baba treated me during this time. In our Indian culture, in all but one of our religious communities, a woman is considered to be unclean during her monthly period. Zoroastrians are not allowed to go to their fire temple or attend a funeral, even for a relative. Hindu women cannot go to their temples to pray, nor are Muslim women allowed to offer their *namaz*, their prayers to the Lord, in a mosque. The single exception is the Christian community, which has no practice of this kind. Beloved Baba, the Purest of the Pure, in making a point of embracing me daily during my first menstrual period, revealed clearly that this notion of a woman being “unclean” was not acceptable to Him. Women now and in the future may be assured that they are welcome to go for Baba’s darshan at His Tomb-Shrine during this phase, and that no one should challenge them on this issue. To recite the prayers and receive His darshan at any time is a woman’s birthright!

SHORTLY AFTER THIS INCIDENT, our new school uniforms ready, Hilloo and I for the first time parted from Mummy and Adi. We were given orders to write to Baba once a month, and from the beginning we always addressed Him as Big Daddy in our letters. We were accompanied by Pendu Kaka, who traveled with us by train to our new school in Secunderabad. We knew that we would be able to return to Mummy during our vacations, but leaving her was very difficult, especially for Hilloo. She cried off and on throughout the journey, so Pendu Kaka told us jokes to distract her from her

unhappiness. Pendu was a strong man, built like an ox, but he was ever so gentle, kind and funny with children, and he would soon have Hilloo laughing through her tears. He referred to her as his baby, and he called her that for the rest of his life.

We found life at St. Anne's to be a great contrast from life on the Hill. Nowhere was the difference greater than at meals. In the ashram we had eaten with our fingers in the usual Indian style, using enamel plates and mugs. But now bearers wearing white gloves placed heated china plates and pretty glasses along with napkins and silverware on the spotless white tablecloth covering our dining table, and we learned to eat in the style of Europeans. Our teachers were Italian and Indian nuns from St. Anne's Convent, and they were great disciplinarians, instructing us in good manners in all aspects of our lives, so we had many rules to follow. Hilloo, always an active bundle of mischief, enjoyed violating them, while I, like a martyr, frequently apologized on her behalf. She was extremely intelligent, while I was a mediocre student in comparison, but throughout our school career I was to act as a second mother to her.

MUMMY HAD BEEN SAD TO SEE US LEAVE, but in our absence life in the ashram continued, and she was kept busy with caring for Adi and performing her assigned tasks, sustained by the love of Baba and the women. During a certain phase beginning on 12th July 1940, the women all had to gather under the tin shed and sing for thirty minutes, from 5:30 to 6:00 a.m., the following names of God: "Hari, Paramatma, Allah, Ahuramazda, God, Yezdan, Hu!" Baba had specifically told them, "You must all sing from the heart." Katie, who had a sweet, resounding singing voice, both led them in

the singing and played the harmonium. On the first day even little Adi attended, but after that he was exempted and allowed to sleep.

Because many women lived together in one room, it was important that everyone cooperate in keeping order. Mummy was meticulous about cleanliness. However crowded her living quarters might be, she always saw that they were kept neat and tidy. She believed in making others happy and comfortable, even at her own expense, and she got along well with the others, as she was both resilient and strong-hearted. The ones Mummy was closest to were Mehera, Mani, Naja, Arnavaz, Silla and Arnavaz's sister Nargis.

WHILE MUMMY WAS BUSY WITH WORK IN THE ASHRAM, Father continued to stay at Ankai Hillock, where Baba had sent him soon after our arrival in Meherabad. Father was completely content with his life there, but some of the other men sent with him were not. Papa Jessawala was in charge of them, and Baba had ordered that all were to obey whatever Papa said. He gave everyone tea at 4:00 a.m., lunch at 7:00 a.m., afternoon tea at 10:00 a.m. and dinner at 2:00 p.m. It was an absurd regime, but since Father was a novice and his longing for God so intense, he later told us he could have continued living this way joyfully for years. However, for one senior disciple, Gustadji, the regimen was torture, and Gustadji made Father write a pleading letter to Baba on his behalf saying, "Free us from Papa's clutches." Father, wanting to help Gustadji, may have unintentionally broken Baba's order not to write—or the order may not have applied to letters written to Baba. I do not know. But Father's letter had the result Gustadji wanted. On 15th September 1940, Baba sent for these men, telling them to return to Meherabad, and for the next forty days He ordered Father to

assist Papa Jessawala with the cooking. After that Baba started sending Father on mast tours. He could converse while seeking masts, but as soon as he arrived back at the ashram, he had to keep silence.

Father was assigned the last room near Baba's tin cabin on Meherabad Hill. (These rooms have since been taken down.) Barbed wire surrounded the compound, and in it were kept four masts: Chatti Baba, a very advanced mast; Shariat Khan, Phulwalla Swami, and Bhaiya. Father had to see to all their needs. He lived as though he were in seclusion, for he attended to the masts night and day. He woke them up and gave them tea, lunch, afternoon tea and dinner in the evening. Sometimes he had to feed them the way one would feed little children. During this time Father had no contact with the outside world.

Baba came daily at 4:00 a.m. from His cabin, so Father had to get up at 3:00 a.m. to heat the water in two forty-gallon barrels for the masts' baths. The water had to be tepid. Two boys, Krishna and Narayan, were employed to assist Father, but as they were very young, it was hard to wake them. When they finally got up, they would first light the two big primus stoves. Then they poured the water into two large tins with a wooden rod between them to facilitate lifting them, put the tins on the stoves, and heated them. Once the water was boiling, the boys would pour it into the two barrels, which would already be three-fourths full of cold water, to make the temperature right for bathing the masts.

Phulwalla Swami was a *jalali* mast, and he was difficult to handle, but Baba had instilled some power into Father, so that this mast would listen to him. Baba would bathe Phulwalla Swami first, then Shariat Khan, then Bhaiya. Chatti Baba would be bathed last,

and Baidul would assist with him. He would lift a bucket of water and pour it over Chatti Baba; then Beloved Baba would sit with a bucket of water and a mug and pour water over Chatti Baba's feet and wash them, continuing to do so until Chatti Baba looked into His eyes. Only after about one hundred buckets of water would Chatti Baba look into Meher Baba's eyes, and then the bath would be over. Father would wipe Chatti Baba dry and clothe him in a kafni that Mummy had stitched on her machine. Even with the scarcity of water, Baba insisted on bathing Chatti Baba in this fashion. Once Baba stayed for twenty-one days in seclusion in a room in this mast ashram, but only He knew what spiritual work was being carried out with these masts.

One night Chatti Baba came rushing into Baba's room and started weeping, saying loudly, "Fire has started, fire has started!" Baba embraced him lovingly and calmed him down. Then Baba told Father, "France has fallen." This was during the Second World War, and the following day Father read the news in the early morning newspapers. From this incident he realized that Chatti Baba was the Chargeman of France and the war was being controlled spiritually by Baba Himself.

LATE IN 1940, while Father was still caring for the masts and we were away at school, Mummy and Adi set out on quite an adventure, traveling with the women on some of the Blue Bus tours. They left in December for Jaipur. In January 1941, while they were still there, Baba gave His message now referred to as "The Seven Realities of Meher Baba's Teachings." Thousands of copies of this pamphlet were distributed, and Baba specifically instructed that it be given to those in charge of all the temples, mosques, churches and ashrams.

On the next Blue Bus trip, to Quetta in late February, twenty-eight women were crowded into the bus, which was intended to hold only fourteen people. And to make matters more difficult, there were two rear wheels on one side and only one on the other, so the bus was wobbly, and there were numerous punctures due to the extra weight and the bad roads. On the way, Baba took them to Agra to see the Taj Mahal, the Red Fort, and other places of interest. At Delhi He took them to the Qutub Minar, the tomb of Humayun, and the famous Laxmi Narayan Temple. From Delhi they went to Ludhiana and Jallander and then on to Lahore, where they visited the Shalimar Gardens and the Anarkali Bazaar among other tourist attractions. From here they set out on the difficult journey to Quetta, going first to Montgomery and then to Multan. Here Mummy was struck by the fact that with Baba, things that ordinarily would bring pleasure sometimes turned out to be ways of doing penance. In Multan the women had to make do with camel's milk. It was extremely cold there, and the camel's milk made the tea stink, but the women all pinched their noses and drank it anyway, just to keep warm.

The bus left Multan for Khar at 2:00 a.m. That night it was pouring rain, and the roads were terrible. The bus rattled over a railway bridge consisting of wooden planks, then went on to cross five more dangerous bridges. The last one, the bridge at Muzaffarnagar, was the largest and most treacherous, as it crossed a tributary of the Indus River, which was by now swollen from the rain. This bridge was an improvised construction of floating boats with wooden planks tied to them. Everyone on the bus agreed that what happened next must have been a miracle.

At first the watchman said that the car carrying Baba could

pass, but he told Papa Jessawala's son Eruch, who was driving, that the bus could not go across, as the bridge had been built to hold only two and a half tons. The Blue Bus, with all its passengers, trunks and bedding rolls, weighed around five tons. However, Baba insisted that they must all cross the bridge immediately and continue on their journey. After much persuasion from Eruch, the watchman agreed that the bus could cross—but only after he had taken a statement from them in writing that they were doing so at their own risk and were responsible for whatever happened.

Baba's car went across about a furlong ahead of the bus. The rain was falling heavily and the water tossed mightily, but the Master's orders had to be obeyed at all costs. Eruch was at the wheel, and he drove bravely onward, leaving their safety entirely in Baba's hands. As the bus started forward, Mummy said she saw Baba turn in His seat so that His gaze was on the Blue Bus the entire time they were crossing the bridge. Because of the weight of the bus, the boats and planks were springing up behind them with terrific force and cracking noises, sometimes breaking into pieces. The ladies repeatedly cried out "Sadguru Meher Baba ki Jai!" with all their hearts, some of them thinking that they would definitely sink, all of them looking to Baba for help. Despite the cold, everyone was perspiring, knowing that only Baba's *nazar* could take the Blue Bus across that bridge to safety. When they finally arrived at the opposite shore, Baba told them their safe crossing was not a miracle, but rather the result of their faith in Him. Every person present, however—those in the Blue Bus, those in the car and even some onlookers—was convinced that the waters had beheld their Creator's gaze and obeyed implicitly. Only He could have led them safely across. Later everyone was also struck by the fact that

Eruch had never hesitated. He was absolutely lionhearted as he drove on, with 100 percent faith in Baba, who had told him to cross the river. Needless to say, this memory of the Blue Bus tour is one that stayed with Mummy always.

Other incidents along the way also seemed like miracles. Once a wheel on the left side got stuck in a ditch in such a position that only a crane could have lifted the bus with all the weight it was carrying. Despite the fact that it was raining heavily and all the ladies would get completely drenched, Baba asked everyone to get off the bus. Then He told Eruch to drive while He and Dr. Nilkanth pushed it. And with a push from Baba's hands, the wheel came out of the ditch.

Another such incident occurred in the village of Dera Ghazi Khan. Before leaving for Quetta, Baba had directed Kitty, who was in charge of stores, to buy all the grain they needed at Multan, because they were to break their journey for the night at a place called Dera Ghazi Khan. Kitty thought that surely the stopping place would be as large as its name, which sounded impressive, so she decided to wait to buy the grain, but on reaching the place she realized this was only a village with a few huts and a *dak* bungalow for travelers to stay overnight. She had only one pound of grain, four potatoes and four onions. She was upset that she hadn't obeyed Baba's instructions, and she rushed to Him, explained the food situation and asked to be forgiven for her disobedience.

Baba then called Katie, who was in charge of cooking. He asked her to take the grain and put with it the chopped potatoes and onions and whatever condiments Kitty gave her. Baba specifically instructed that the food was to be put into the usual large vessel. He then told Katie, "You are to close the lid, let it cook well, and then

call Me to serve it. Today I will serve food to all of you.” There were about thirty mouths to feed in all, and this was the only meal for the day.

Katie did exactly as Baba had told her. When the food was cooked, she called Baba and the merciful Lord served the meal with His own hands. To the astonishment of everyone, particularly Kitty, there was enough for all of them to have their fill, and some people even had a second helping because the dish was so tasty. This incident was certainly evidence for all those traveling on the Blue Bus of the way Beloved Baba forgives us and meets our human needs.

While they were traveling along the route to Quetta, various people warned the mandali that the road between Rakhmi and Loralai was very dangerous due to *dacoits* hiding in the mountains, waiting to attack travelers and rob them of all their belongings. For this reason the mandali hired military escorts at Rakhmi. Beloved Baba, the all-knowing, surprised everyone by selecting a boy to accompany them as well. Only later did everyone find out that the boy was the son of the great dacoit of that area, and because of him nobody even tried to attack them. On the last night before reaching Quetta, Baba and the group stayed in Jallander. Because they arrived at midnight, Baba instructed the women not to take their bedding from the roof of the Blue Bus, but to sleep on newspapers spread on the floor. It was freezing cold that night and because Adi was still in poor health, Mummy wrapped him up in her woolen coat. Taking Baba’s sweet name, she lay down on the newspaper covering the floor and fell fast asleep with just a cardigan sweater covering her. Mummy said that because Baba—her Sustainer on these long trips through India, Ceylon and what is now Pakistan

—had His nazar on her, she did not even catch a chill that night.

Because of the intense cold in Quetta, half the women became very ill there, so Baba decided they should move on. The whole group left for Lahore by train with Baba in April 1941. After descending into the desert and traveling for two sweltering nights and a day, they reached Lahore, where the Blue Bus had been driven from Quetta by two of the men mandali. From there Baba traveled to Dehra Dun by car, and the women followed in the Blue Bus.

They were all in Dehra Dun for Holi, a very popular festival in India that dates back to the time of Lord Krishna. During Holi, friends throw either dry or liquid colors on one another to commemorate the playful days of Krishna, whose gopis would dance nonstop for hours together, intoxicated with their love for Him. Mummy, who was well aware of this custom and determined to protect herself from mischief, had just taken a bath and dressed up decently. She was sitting in her room, and whenever any of the ladies asked her to open the door, she refused, because she suspected they were planning to bathe her in colors. Of all of them, Arnavaz was the only one she trusted not to do such a thing. So when Arnavaz finally asked her to open the door, she did so, and all the women rushed into her room and put a whole rainbow of colors on her face, body and clothes. They even put colors in her long, silky hair, and then they knotted it on top of her head to give her the appearance of a sadhu. After they had finished decorating her, they made her sit on a chair right in the middle of the front hall.

When Baba arrived from His work with the men mandali and saw Mummy seated in all her strange splendor, He laughed and laughed. He called for some *chana* (a variety of chickpea), took a

fistful, and put it into Mummy's mouth, so she had to chew an entire mouthful. In India chana represents future hardships, so ordinarily we do not give it to others, as it is considered a bad omen to accept it from anyone. When Mummy finished chewing, she said to Baba, "Have You given this to me as an indication of future hardships in my life to come, Baba, dear?" Such was the intimacy of this moment that she could have fun and at the same time speak in this manner to Baba. And in truth, Mummy was to face many future hardships, both physical and emotional. As she said many years later, "Only Baba's love helped me to survive."

After a month in Dehra Dun everyone left for Rishikesh, which Baba called the "best place for spiritual atmosphere." It was by now extremely hot in Rishikesh, and Mummy developed asthma due to the combination of the intense heat and an allergy. When Baba was informed about her condition, He immediately asked her roommates to take her baggage to the basement, where it was relatively cool, and instructed one person to stay there with her and Adi to look after both of them. During their stay Adi, who often walked in his sleep as a child, had a very narrow escape. One night the basement door was left open because of the heat. Mummy was fast asleep when somehow she sensed an invisible hand waking her up. She immediately felt for Adi, who had been sleeping next to her, but he was missing. Terrified, Mummy jumped up and ran out of the bungalow onto the sprawling grounds, where she knew the watchmen had been killing two or three snakes every day. There was no raised wall at the edge of the grounds, which overlooked a roaring river far below, and Mummy spotted Adi very near the edge. Taking Beloved Baba's name, she rushed to him and gently turned him around so as not to frighten

or wake him, since he was in a deep sleep. Adi walked all the way back with Mummy and climbed right into bed. Once again, Baba had saved his life.

BY JUNE everyone was in Ajmer with Baba, and He sent Father from Meherabad to fetch Hilloo and me, as we were now on vacation from school, and bring us to Ajmer. On our first meeting, Baba looked at me and gestured, “Why do you look so thin, while your sister is so plump?”

Hilloo was very fond of the Western food served at St. Anne’s. As for me, I just could not bear the sight of some dishes—for instance ox tongue, which was considered a delicacy. So while the supervising nun walked back and forth, I would quickly transfer the food I did not like into Hilloo’s plate, so that I would not be caught.

“Baba, I do not like the food they give, especially some dishes, so I give it to Hilloo and she enjoys it all, so she gets plump.”

Baba looked at Hilloo and pinched her fat cheeks. “You look nice,” He said, and we all giggled, even Mehera and Mani. Since I was weak, Baba told me that I should not be so fussy about food, but in His compassion He asked Mummy to get a *vati* and put a teaspoon of butter with sugar in it. Baba lovingly put that teaspoon into my mouth and then instructed Mummy that He would give me butter daily for seven days, and she should keep it ready. “Najoo must recover and improve in health,” He told her. Baba then washed the bowl and teaspoon, just as He had at the time I came of age. I was amazed that the Lord of the Universe would do this for a silly girl like me, and then I remembered that not only was He my Big Daddy, He was indeed the Ocean of Love.

After showing His concern for our health, Baba studied our progress reports in detail. We had been told to stand among the first five in the class. Hilloo, being very bright, stood first in her class. Baba pinched her cheeks, patted her on the back, and gave her a warm embrace to show His appreciation, just as a worldly father would do—or even better, as some fathers take very little interest in their children’s progress with their studies.

Then my turn came. I’m afraid I was very poor in Urdu, which was our second language at school, since St. Anne’s was in the Muslim state of Hyderabad. Baba looked at my report and tweaked my ear, a look of disappointment on His usually beautiful, serene face. I pleaded with Him, “Baba, this language is so difficult. The script is strange and we have to write it from right to left.”

He nodded and gestured, “So what shall we do?”

“Baba,” I said, “I feel ashamed, as You spend so much for our boarding school expenses, and I don’t want to burden You further, but if You will pay for special tuition in Urdu for just one term, I will definitely improve.”

Baba agreed and asked Mummy to tell Sarosh to write to the school that I should be given private tuition for the next term in Urdu, which He would pay for. I was very happy and decided I would concentrate hard on Urdu since Baba had agreed to pay for the extra tuition without any hesitation. Baba then embraced me and said, “Do not worry, but do well next time.” I was most grateful for His kindness.

We stayed in Ajmer until the middle of July, when Baba and all the ladies left by train to return to Meher Retreat at Meherabad. Mummy was happy to be traveling by train, as Hilloo was a poor bus traveler; when she traveled in the Blue Bus, she always threw up.

Being back in Meherabad was such joy for us. The Meher Retreat on the Hill had become my heaven on earth, right from the beginning of our stay there. All three of us children have always looked back on that time as one of the happiest of our lives. Beloved Baba was the glorious sun in whose warm, divine love we all basked. Mehera was the beautiful moon, whose cool, calm radiance pierced everyone's heart as she shared her love for her Beloved with us all. Mani was the greatest of the sparkling stars, twinkling into everyone's heart, spreading joy everywhere. And in that heaven Baba loved and cared for us children in all aspects of our lives. Sometimes He was like a mother to us, giving tender, loving care to the few children privileged to live with Him in Meherabad and experience the human side of the God-Man. And in playing the role of our Big Daddy, Beloved Baba put any worldly father to shame.



The way Baba looked in 1941 when we lived on Meherabad Hill

PHOTOGRAPH BY PADRI

B A B A , O U R B I G D A D D Y



Hiloo and I in our
school uniforms

O n our return from Ajmer, Hiloo and I fell easily back into the now-familiar pattern of life on the Hill, playing games, listening to stories, and gathering with all the others under the tin shed to be with Baba. I particularly enjoyed our early morning walks down the Hill with Him. Sometimes when I looked at Baba's feet, He seemed to be floating above the path, just as Jesus did when he walked on the water. Hiloo and I were often reminded of that story on these walks because at St. Anne's we were required to study the Catechism and the Bible, which we loved. When we read about Jesus, we thought of our Baba, and we always scored the highest

marks in those subjects. Baba would allow us children to walk with Him almost to the railroad tracks at the base of the Hill. He would then clap, and we would make a quick turn and run back up.

One day, just as the sun was rising, I thought I would try to get ahead of Baba so that I could look at His beautiful face in the early morning light. I ran quickly down the Hill, then turned toward Him. Baba's face was pinker than usual, and the first rays of sun streaked His long, thick nut-brown hair, making it glow golden in a kind of halo. He looked just like the paintings of Christ we saw daily in church at the convent. But this was no painting; Baba was absolutely real, and more beautiful than I had ever seen Him. I stood staring in awe until He asked, "What are you looking at?" I said, "Baba, you are indeed as beautiful as the rising sun. I have always wanted to see your face in this light." Baba smiled sweetly at me. I was thrilled, and for many days I sat and recalled the beauty I had beheld in our Big Daddy's face. Even today I can easily remember my glorious Sun, Meher Baba, smiling at me with such compassion, for I have always been emotional, sentimental, and highly imaginative. I love beauty and nature, both of which made me want to become a poet. Even when I was a young girl, Baba was, for me, beauty personified.

Another morning, while going down the Hill with Baba, I decided I would watch His footsteps so I could pick up the little stones on which His sacred feet had trod and put them into a tiny plastic box which I was carrying. These stones, I decided, would be my greatest treasures. I carefully watched the footprints left by my darling Big Daddy and then picked up the little stones from their surface. I still have that box, locked safely in my cupboard in a jewel case, for these are truly my jewels in this life.

Once while we were walking down the Hill, Baba ate a purple berry called a *jamoon*. I was watching Him closely, and I saw Him spit out the seed. To the surprise of the other children, I picked it up, brushed the earth from around it, and quickly put it in my mouth and chewed it up. I was most pleased with myself. Later I learned that both the berry and its seed are dried and pounded to be used in Ayurvedic medicine for the prevention and treatment of diabetes, a disease that occurs in my family. I firmly believe that I do not have diabetes today because I ate that seed thrown from the Lord's mouth.

When I remember our walks with Baba, I always appreciate the efforts of Valubai (–*bai* is a suffix indicating respect, added to a woman's name), who during our days on the Hill faithfully watered the trees along the path. I was told that Mehera, always aware of the needs of her Beloved, thought Baba should have shade when He walked up and down the Hill several times daily. Since water was scarce in Meherabad in those days, as it is today, most of the trees planted were neem and banyan. The banyan tree spreads itself by developing aerial roots from its branches, expanding its circumference all around, so it provides excellent shade. Both neem and banyan are sturdy and can withstand all kinds of weather with just a little water. Mehera asked Valubai to use our recycled bath and wash water for the trees.

The neem, in addition to providing shade, also has medicinal value. Its leaf is a good antiseptic, and it is also chewed raw to alleviate skin problems. Mummy once developed a strange skin disease which left black patches all over her neck and chest. She was most upset and went to Baba to tell Him what was happening to her. Beloved Baba, in His mercy, took her to a neem tree, where

He plucked some leaves, put them in Mummy's mouth, and told her to chew them up. Then He plucked more leaves and told her to eat seven every day for three more days. To her surprise, by the fourth day the black patches had completely disappeared. We children used to shake the branches of the neem so the berries would fall, as they are sweet and edible. Hiloo especially enjoyed eating them.

Today those neem and banyan trees on either side of the path have grown big enough to form arches, giving a canopy of shade to Baba's lovers coming for His darshan. As I climb up the Hill today, I remember vividly those lovely days when I was a young teenager walking with the King, Meher Baba, who walked this path thousands of times. What an opportunity it is for us to walk where He walked on our way to His Tomb-Shrine. Every old tree growing along the path has stood witness to that beautiful, agile God-Man who passed them as He walked up and down. I know every tree from those old days, and my heart missed a beat recently when I found that one of the *babul* trees had been cut down. That particular tree had always brought back to me sweet memories of our childhood, when Baba used to tell us, pointing to it, "Be careful. Keep away, as it has thorns on it." He watched over us children like a parent, and we thrived on the attention He gave us.

When we sang Arti to Baba under the tin shed, He would embrace each of us when we were finished. Mehera's turn was first, then Mani's. When Baba called Mehera, she would run into His arms with outstretched hands, the way a child runs for an embrace from her mother. That beautiful scene is always vividly before my eyes when I consider the meaning of pure thoughts, words, and deeds. Mehera loved Baba so much that whenever Baba told us He was leaving to go on a tour, within moments tears welled in her

eyes. It was painful for her to bear separation from her Beloved, but she never said a word. She accepted Baba's absence, knowing how much spiritual work He had to do. As a child I always felt sad when I noticed her tears, not for myself, but for Mehera, whose love for Baba was so intense. Her love was unconditional and without the slightest taint of selfishness. She wanted nothing except Baba's pleasure, happiness and comfort, and nothing could deter her from trying to fulfill His every need.

Once when Baba was on tour, Mehera made a little swing and placed a cutout photo of Baba's reclining figure in it. She covered Baba with a tiny maroon silk "sheet" edged with silver lace. Sometimes when she was feeling lonely, she would call us children into her room and allow us to swing Baba. She took such simple joy from watching us as she shared her love for Beloved Baba with us in His absence. Sometimes we would help Mehera to twine flowers together to make a little garland, which she would put around Baba on His swing, then move the swing gently back and forth. Other times we would put a garland around Mehera's wrist, and she would giggle with delight, making us giggle too.

Near the kitchen in the compound of Meher Retreat was a swing. Once when we were playing nearby, Baba sat on it and began swinging. He then saw Mehera and called her. Mehera, like a child, went running to Him. She waved at us and sat beside Baba with her head on His left shoulder and her right arm around Him. They continued to swing while we children watched this celestial scene. I knew a little about worldly love, when two individuals who said they loved one another would hide from others, always wanting to be alone together. People experiencing this kind of love didn't want to share it with anyone else. But Mehera loved to share Baba

with us. I, who had seen little of the world aside from the very disciplined and orthodox environment in Bombay, understood something of the unusual purity of Mehera's divine love for Baba, as is shown in a poem I wrote and sent to her while I was in school at St. Anne's in 1943:

To Mehera

O Mehera, thou Queen of Heaven,
We wish to sing thy praise.
Thou attentively must hearken
As our voices we do raise.

Thou art as pure as a lily
That blooms all spotless and bright,
Swaying in the breeze happily,
Indeed, what a pleasant sight!

As charming as a beautiful rose,
Is thy celestial beauty,
Enchanting every creature, close
to thy Divine Majesty.

Like a violet, tiny and modest,
Humble and simple thou art,
We revere thee, Mehera dearest,
O Beloved of Baba's heart.

O Goddess of all the virtues,
Thy goodness thou must impart
So that by all your graces
We may be drawn close to His heart!

One day Beloved Baba was standing near the Cage Room with some of us children. Mehera's lovely white horse was tied to a tree nearby, and Mehera came from her East Room, dressed in her riding outfit, a big smile on her face. One of the ladies untied the horse and brought it to her. Baba, with tender care, helped her to mount the horse. There was great joy in Mehera's beautiful, expressive brown eyes, and Baba looked proud to behold His own Beloved enjoying her favorite sport. We children looked on happily as Mehera rode in a circle not far from us, and as her horse galloped faster, her beautiful long golden brown braid blew behind her in the breeze. She looked so charming and confident as a rider, like the queen she truly was. Mehera came back to Baba with joy radiating from her childlike face as He held her hand and helped her down from the horse. Later Mehera told us the story of her childhood in Poona, when she had asked Babajan for a white horse. Babajan prophesied that she would have a stately white horse and its rider would be so beautiful that the whole world would look at Him in awe. Naja told us that one day Baba had sat on that horse, but Mehera was not present to witness this celestial scene of the Kali Yuga Avatar on His white steed.

It was Baba's order in Meherabad that Mehera was never to be left alone, not even for a second, except when she went to the toilet or for her bath. Even at those times one of the women, usually Mani, would sit outside the room. Mani, with whom she shared a bedroom, was her almost constant companion, like a shadow to Mehera during their entire life together. Mani would sit outside under a tree near the swing and practice playing her sitar while she waited for Mehera to return from the toilet or the bath stall. I remember one of the women mandali being present

whenever we visited her. This order was relaxed somewhat when Baba and the women moved to Meherazad, which was more secluded than Meherabad.

Every Avatar has two women who are closely associated with Him. One stands for love and the other for duty. For Baba, Mehera represented love and Mani duty. When I asked Father why Baba called Mehera His Beloved, why He loved her so immensely and tried always to please her, Father told me this: “By doing so, Baba teaches us at every step how we should please and love our God-Man as our Beloved.” Thus Baba played perfectly the role of the Divine Lover to His Divine Beloved, who was, according to Mani, also His child in the spiritual sense. Mani further explained, “Baba and Mehera’s relationship is like a pure mountain stream bubbling from the heart of the world. It is not only for Mehera, but for all to drink from.” We children became thoroughly drunk from that mountain stream, experiencing Perfect Love without really knowing all we were receiving. Only now, as adults, can we fully realize its incomparable value and beauty.

HILLOO’S EXPERIENCE OF LIFE ON THE HILL was somewhat different from mine. Not only was she younger than I, but she had a real talent for getting into mischief. One afternoon it rained heavily and everyone was most delighted, as rain was rare in Meherabad. Suddenly Hilloo decided she wanted to play in the rain, so she and some of the other younger children—Sarwar, Tehmi, Meherwan and Adi—all went out together. There was a line of young trees all along the front walk from the entrance gate onwards, about five or six of them. After the rain subsided, the children all ran under each tree and shook it until the water from the leaves drenched them.

They were soaking wet by the time someone spotted them and told their mothers, who all came running and took the children into their respective rooms to dry them. Mummy was very cross with Hilloo when she came to know that it had been her idea for all of them to get soaked. The news eventually reached Baba's ears, but despite the scoldings the children received from their parents, He was not at all upset with them. Whenever my sister visits Meherabad Hill and looks at those trees, which are now mature and strong, she remembers that day when the children had such fun, singing and shaking the rain out of them.

Of all the children, Meheru was the one Hilloo most looked up to. She wanted to be like Meheru and particularly admired her for her athletic ability. Meheru could outrun all the other children, win all the games they played, climb trees quicker and higher than the others, swing highest on the swing, and do handstands, somersaults and cartwheels, which none of the others could do. Hilloo loved swinging, and Meheru showed her how to make the swing go higher, but Hilloo could never reach the heights Meheru could. She taught Hilloo how to stand on her head and how to bend over backwards and touch the ground with her hands. Meheru performed all these stunts with ease, but Hilloo needed help. When we all went to see movies at Sarosh Cinema with Baba, the two always sat together. During *The Mummy's Curse*, Hilloo clung to Meheru's hand, fearful that the mummy might come out of the screen and get her. During the interval Meheru stood up and started walking like the mummy to scare Hilloo, who screamed in fright, while Baba looked on in amusement.

When we were all told to meditate, Hilloo found it very difficult to sit still and concentrate, but she could always sit still for

the beautiful stories that Mehera, Mani, Naja and Gaimai told about past saints and avatars. Gaimai used to have pain in her legs and sometimes she would ask Hilloo to walk up and down her legs to relieve the pain. We had so many aunties on the Hill that one or another was always giving Hilloo attention. Sometimes Kitty would call her over when she had free time in the afternoon and teach her a little French. Or Hilloo could watch Margaret Craske doing her ballet exercises and wonder at her grace. If she saw Margaret teaching Mani a few ballet steps, Hilloo would go to our room and try to do them when no one was about. Mehera and Naja taught us children how to make lovely brooches out of Beloved Baba's hair and nails that the women had saved. Both my sister and I still have one of these brooches among our most treasured possessions. Naja was particularly loving, and every time Mummy scolded Hilloo for being naughty, she would run to Naja's side and hug her. Naja would frown at Mummy and sometimes tell her off on Hilloo's behalf.

My sister had many favorite aunties, but a few of the women frightened her. Pilamai (Silla's mother) always made weird faces when she removed her false teeth at night, making Hilloo scream. The two ladies who frightened her the most, though, were Mansari and Rano. She felt they were not fond of her, as they looked at her very sternly. It seemed to Hilloo that whenever Baba wanted Mansari, He would ask Hilloo to call her for Him. Hilloo was so intimidated that she would go near the kitchen where Mansari was normally to be found rolling chapatis, but stand at a distance and call out to her that Baba wanted her. The minute Mansari appeared in the doorway and Hilloo saw those piercing and, what seemed to her, disapproving eyes, she would run as far away as possible. Years later, whenever Hilloo visited from England,

Mansari would laughingly remind her of how she had once run away in fear. Of course the look that my sister saw in her eyes by that time was gentle and loving.

It was the same with Rano. Somehow, whenever we went to the movies by bus, Hilloo always got a seat either beside Rano or opposite her. Rano looked so stern that Hilloo felt small and uncomfortable. She used to pray she wouldn't have to sit beside Rano. But after Hilloo was grown, Rano was so loving and kind to her that she wondered how she could ever have been so frightened of Rano in the past.

Despite her fears, though, Hilloo's childhood days on the Hill were tremendously happy ones, surrounded by love. When my sister returns to Meherabad now, she always makes a point of sitting beside Beloved Baba's gadi under the tin shed to remember those beautiful times with Baba and Mehera. She sings songs to Baba when no one else is around, taking in all the peace and beauty of that spiritually charged atmosphere. She describes the experience this way:

Each year when I return to Meherabad Hill, all these memories come rushing to my mind and I choke back the tears, for they move me so deeply, memories of all those wonderful days with Beloved Baba. I walk around the house on the Hill and stop by the library room which used to be our room. I then stop by dear Mehera's room and think of the days when I used to stand by the door and gaze at her innocent beauty. She always smiled so sweetly as I watched her combing her lovely hair. Sometimes she would say something funny and we would giggle

together like schoolgirls. All I have to do is sit still and close my eyes, and I am back in those glorious days, reliving precious moments with Baba, all the loving aunts, my darling mother, sister and brother, and the other children who lived there. My heart overflows with the beauty and love that surround me.

WHILE HILLOO AND I were enjoying all the simple pleasures of being children on the Hill, Mummy continued to work very hard. As soon as her sewing assignment was over, Baba gave her a new responsibility. He said, "You are the chief, and you have to be responsible for making 250 *chapatis* per day. Soltun (Baidul's wife), Silla and Mansari will all be under your leadership for this work." Mummy cheerfully agreed, as it was service for Baba. She would knead the dough the evening before it was to be used. It was the rule to wake up at 5:00 a.m., but Baba permitted Mummy to get up at 6:45 a.m. She would have a quick wash and tea, then go straight to the kitchen to make chapatis. Silla did not much like cooking, so Mummy discussed the issue with her and then suggested to Baba that if He would allow Silla to look after Adi, Mummy could take up Silla's work in the kitchen. Baba agreed and thus Mummy's anxiety about looking after Adi was over. Adi was taken care of very lovingly by Silla, who saw to his physical needs and later to his studies as well.

Because Mummy had to finish making the chapatis quickly so that they would be ready in time for the day's meal, she could no longer attend the morning gatherings that Baba held with the women, either in Mehera's room or under the tin shed. Those

helping her would leave their work and go, and she would not stop them, for all wished to be in Baba's presence. But because Mummy was the one in charge, she had to stay at her post. Beloved Baba did not ignore her steadfastness. In His thoughtful way He would sometimes look around and, seeing that Mummy was in the kitchen working all alone, tell the ladies to be seated. He would go to the kitchen and lovingly take her face between His soft palms, giving her the warmth of His love and appreciation before returning to the others. And while her hands rolled and baked the chapatis over the wood fire in an endless meditation, Mummy's heart and mind would be with her Beloved Baba.

During one of these morning calls, Mummy was seated in the kitchen working when Baba came in and watched her, then said, "You are beautiful." Mummy was all alone, just doing her assigned task, and she certainly did not expect these words from her Lord. Tears began to roll down her cheeks, as Baba had touched a most vulnerable place in her heart.

"Why are you crying?" Baba asked. "I mean it."

Mummy said, "Baba, people have said I was good-looking, but I did not think so, because in all these years of our married life, Savak has never once told me that. But today, You, my God, are saying this to me. My mother used to tell me this, too, and You are my Mother. Baba, from now on I will be happy. I do not need anyone else in this world to say these words to me." She sobbed as she said this, and Baba gently wiped the tears that trickled down her cheeks. Mummy then smiled at her compassionate Lord and Mother, who had just filled her heart with rapture. The God-Man knew our most sensitive heartstrings, and He played on them with divine tenderness.

But Baba was also exacting. Once He had ordered some chapatis for the masts early in the morning. Since that day's chapatis had not yet been rolled and baked, Mummy sent the previous day's stale chapatis for the masts. Baba was very upset and sent the chapatis back with a message: "I do not want my masts to get sick from your stale chapatis." Mummy was very disturbed about having displeased Baba, and she began to cry. When Baba came to the kitchen and saw her crying, He said, "Do you remember the Song of Mira— 'Make me Your slave, my Lord'?"

"Yes, Baba, but I want to be Mira the Princess," said Mummy.

Circling His temple with a finger, Baba gestured, "There is a loose screw in your brain," and He walked away in all His royal majesty. But as God-Man He understood her feelings. She had spoken her true thoughts, revealing a weakness and laying it at His feet. Mummy was immediately embarrassed, and she ran after Baba and asked His forgiveness.

"I forgave you the moment you said those words," Baba told her, embracing her and saying she was to forget what had happened and smile.

Mummy took her job of making chapatis so seriously that once when she was ill with a temperature of 103 degrees, she loyally continued her work. The following day her temperature had come down to 101 degrees, and again she did her work without letting others know, for her forbearance was great, and she did not like to complain and push her job off on someone else. On the third day her temperature had returned to normal, but she looked and felt weak. Baba entered the kitchen that day and said to Mummy, "Nergiz, you look very pale and dehydrated. Are you sick?" Mummy explained that she had been ill with a high fever for

two days. Baba promptly said, “Go to your room and take rest. Why did you not inform me?”

Mummy replied, “Baba, I was ill for two days, but now I feel quite well, so why should I give my work to someone else and thus burden them? Don’t worry about me, Baba, I do not need to take rest. I will do so after my work is over.”

Baba smiled at Mummy and said, “You are very headstrong!”

Indeed she was, but she was also courageous, and she had a strong sense of duty to her Lord, even when it came to the most unpleasant tasks. Once it was announced at dinner in the tin shed that some lady visitors were expected to come to Meherabad the following day for Baba’s darshan. We were told that these newcomers from Bombay belonged to the upper strata of society. Whenever such announcements were made, we would dress as presentably as we could, for we were representing Meher Baba’s ashram. Mummy instructed me not to wear a faded or patched dress.

The next morning I was still sleeping when around 5:00 a.m. Kitty entered our room on tiptoe and woke Mummy up, asking her to come out, all their conversation conveyed in whispers and gestures. I opened my eyes and watched Mummy leave, then went back to sleep. Only later I learned that the sweepers who emptied the excrement from the baskets in our latrines had not come for two days. The baskets were overflowing, so Kitty and Mummy lifted them by the tin handles on the sides, and carried them far out into the fields behind the compound to empty them into a pit. Mummy and Kitty washed the tin baskets, then scrubbed the toilets. When they were finished, Mummy returned to our room, where she went back to sleep. She didn’t mention a word of this incident to anyone.

The visitors came and had Baba’s darshan. They seemed to

appreciate the peaceful surroundings and the simplicity of our lives. Later that day, after they had left, Baba called a meeting. Kitty rang the bell, saying “Everybody,” and we sat in the tin shed on our wooden stools. Someone mentioned to Baba that the sweepers had been absent for two days and she did not know why. Baba said, “The baskets must be overflowing, especially with the visitors who came for My darshan.” Then someone else informed Baba that the toilets had mysteriously been cleaned, even better than usual. “Who cleaned the toilets?” Baba asked.

Kitty was at first hesitant, but when Baba asked again, she said in a soft voice, “Baba, Nergiz and I cleaned them at five this morning.” Baba summoned Mummy, who was busy making chapatis. When she asked why she was being called, the messenger said, “Something to do with the toilets.”

Mummy was scared at first because it was a rule in the ashram not to do anything except the duties Baba had assigned without first asking His permission, but she came quickly to Baba and stood in front of Him. Before He could say anything, she announced, “Baba, we are sorry we broke your order, but there are three things I must say. First, how could we have taken your permission at five in the morning when You were still in Your cabin? Two, how could Kitty have cleaned the toilets single-handedly when they were completely full? She could not have carried them by herself. And three, Baba, visitors were to come from Bombay. How could we not clean the toilets? What impression would they have had of our ashram if they had smelled the stink of overflowing toilets?” Mummy did not give Baba a chance to say anything, but went on and on with justifications for her and Kitty’s actions until Baba started laughing.

He gestured, “Nergiz, when will you stop? Give me a chance to say something! I am proud and happy that you both did it.” He gave them loving pats on their backs and said, “No work should ever be considered below one’s dignity. This is community living, so such occasions can arise. I used to empty the excrement of the masts and the mad in the mast ashram, too. Kitty and Nergiz have done what they thought was the right thing to do, and I am indeed proud of their attitude regarding community living.” With Baba all labor had dignity.

WHEN IT CAME TIME for Sarwar, Hilloo and me to return to school, Baba always lovingly embraced each of us and gave us a beautiful smile. His eyes twinkling, He would pinch our cheeks and tweak our ears and noses to give our parting a lighthearted feeling. Once He even surprised us by having Baidul fetch us from a railway station where we were stopped for two hours en route. Baba was on tour then, and someone had mentioned that we would be passing through on our way back to school. We had a few minutes of Baba’s loving attention before we were sent back to catch our train.

Despite Baba’s efforts to make our departures cheerful, though, Hilloo, who was very attached to Mummy and Adi, continued to be tearful when we left them. Whoever was accompanying us, usually Pendu Kaka or Kaka Baria, would work hard to pacify her, knowing that as soon as we reached the convent and Hilloo saw her friends, she would be happy again. One time all of us girls were put in the top berth on the train, where we chattered and giggled until we fell asleep. After all was finally quiet, Pendu Kaka, who was in the lower berth, noticed that Hilloo had fallen asleep at the edge of the upper berth, so he

decided to turn around, putting his head at the opposite end. It was fortunate that he did so, as Hilloo fell, and had he not changed his position, she would have landed on his face. He lifted her, still sleeping, back to the berth, much to his and our amusement. The next morning we were all laughing about the incident and telling her what had happened. She could not remember falling, and that made it even funnier.

Once we were settled at St. Anne's, Hilloo, ever the mischievous one, led the nuns in a merry chase. She was extremely energetic, always up to some prank, and she continued to be spanked because of her naughty behavior. Then, because she would not say she was sorry, she got even more punishment. She remembers me once with tears in my eyes, saying to a nun, "Please, Sister, don't beat her. I am saying sorry on her behalf." I was a quiet, well-behaved child who never got into any mischief. Hilloo said I was "born good," and she used to resent the nuns asking her how our mother could have given birth to an angel like me and a devil like her. Sometimes she would ask me in frustration why I was such a goody-goody. I did not at all like the nuns comparing us in this way, and I have always felt that they could have channeled Hilloo's excess energy into something more positive instead of just scolding and punishing her all the time. The way the nuns treated her made her increasingly naughty and stubborn and me more protective of her. If I pleaded long enough, the nuns, who were very fond of me, would eventually stop spanking Hilloo.

A good way to deal with Hilloo's energy was to challenge her with more difficult material than the lessons ordinarily given to students of her age. When I started my private tuition in Urdu, she insisted that she would also take part. She was such a pretty and

persuasive child that the teacher willingly allowed her to sit in and listen while he tutored me. And she was so quick in picking up the language that sometimes I would ask her to help me out. Later, when it came time for Hiloo to take this required subject, she had no trouble with it at all, as she had already studied it.

IN SEPTEMBER 1941 the women again left Meherabad, this time for Panchgani, in the Blue Bus. During their stay in Panchgani, Baba allowed them to go for walks in the hills, but He ordered them not to eat any fruit or wild roots they might find along the way. One of the women dug up a root, thinking it to be arrowroot, and Kharmanmasi ate some of it. She developed severe pain in her abdomen, a very high fever, puffiness, redness of the face, and intense vomiting. Everyone thought she was going to die. The root turned out to be a poisonous plant used by villagers to kill their animals quickly if they were badly injured or too old to give service and survive. Dr. Nilkanth attended to Kharmanmasi for an entire night. Beloved Baba came in the next day and put His healing hand on her forehead and she gradually recovered, but she had learned a hard lesson about implicit obedience.

This incident always brought to Mummy's mind another that had taught her about obedience. Once when some Baba lovers from Arangaon had come to pay their homage and take Baba's darshan, Bhagubai, a simple villager, was among them. On seeing her, Nadine said to Mummy, "A fine, spiritual woman with a big, beautiful body." To Mummy these words sounded very amusing, and after the Arangaon group had left, Mummy teased Baba and said, "Baba, I want you to unravel this riddle: 'a fine, spiritual woman with a big, beautiful body.' Now, just guess who that could

be, because that is how Nadine described her.” Nadine had already left to do her work by that time. Baba looked puzzled and asked Mehera and Mani whom she meant. Finally Baba told Mummy that He could not guess, and neither could the women, so Mummy said, “Bhagubai.”

“Nadine has described her correctly,” said Baba, much to Mummy’s surprise.

Mummy left to perform her duties, all the while wondering what was so spiritual about Bhagubai that Baba had agreed with Nadine. But to Baba, the all-knowing, we were all open books. And nearly three years later Mummy came to hear a touching story about Bhagubai and her implicit obedience to Meher Baba.

Bhagubai’s husband, Jamadar, was a watchman for many years in Lower Meherabad. During that time Baba gave orders that all His followers were to remain celibate during a particular period. Jamadar, who had just married Bhagubai, came for Baba’s darshan and was told by someone to abide by this order. One day many years later Jamadar came to meet Baba in Lower Meherabad. Baba asked him, “What is worrying you?” Jamadar said that Bhagubai was having migraine headaches and he didn’t know what to do to help her. Baba suggested to him that he should apply some balm to her forehead.

Jamadar said, “Baba, how could I? Ever since the day You gave me the order to be celibate, I have never ever touched her!”

Hearing Jamadar’s words, Baba spoke to those around Him. “This is called obedience. Even though Jamadar and Bhagubai did not know my order was only for a particular period, because of their love for Me, they have lived a life of celibacy since just after their marriage.” Baba then clarified to Jamadar that the order was

only for a short period. When she heard this story, Mummy finally realized that Bhagubai was indeed “a fine, spiritual woman” just as Nadine had described her.

Whenever Baba gave someone an order, He expected absolute obedience. It was the yoga of the day, for to Baba, yoga meant control of thoughts, words and actions. He wanted those living in His ashram to be unselfish, even self-sacrificing, as they related to others as if they were a biological family with Baba as the Father. Everyone was expected to get along well, accommodating one another’s needs. All were to respect and assist those who were ill or elderly, giving help wherever needed and performing duties cheerfully, just as Baba had dictated. Words were also important. If there was a quarrel, Baba would hear both parties out and then ask them to embrace each other and forget their differences. No one was to backbite or criticize others. In order to keep from doing this, one had to focus on Baba all the time.

One amusing incident that illustrates Baba’s insistence that we accommodate the needs of others concerned Banufui, Mummy’s aunt, who had a habit of inhaling snuff. When the women were gathered to hear Baba talk or to entertain Him, she would sometimes take a large, noisy whiff of snuff and then sneeze loudly. We children would laugh, but Norina was disgusted by this habit and showed great annoyance. Baba always looked surprised at Norina’s shudder. He never said anything to either Banufui or Norina, but one evening He gave Banufui a loving smile and handed her a large box of her favorite snuff in front of all the women—not to show His approval of snuff, but to teach everyone that in community living, people must tolerate the long-time habits of others, such as snoring, belching or sniffing, even though some

might find such behavior objectionable. From that day Norina stopped showing her disgust.

As gentle as Baba could be with Mummy, He could also act like a stern mother when He corrected her. It was extremely hot in Panchgani, and Mummy had to bake the chapatis on coal stoves, which increased the heat she had to endure. Thinking she had come up with a great idea, she went to her room and put on a blouse which had a tear at the back about three inches long. She thought it would allow the breeze to get to her back. But when Baba entered the kitchen and saw her wearing that blouse, He said angrily, “Aren’t you ashamed to wear such clothes?”

“But Baba, this was only to let the breeze cool me,” Mummy said.

Baba firmly replied, “You must never wear torn clothes. Patch them up or darn them and then use them. Let this not ever be repeated.” He then walked quickly away. But He also understood Mummy’s sensitivity to heat. While most of the women were told to wear blouses with sleeves, Baba later gave Mummy permission to wear sleeveless blouses as long as they covered her shoulders, as He was very particular about people dressing modestly.

In October the Blue Bus left Panchgani and headed for Dharwar, traveling via Satara, Belgaum and Kolhapur. Once when they were stopped somewhere between Panchgani and Mahabaleshwar, Mummy was sitting by a window, holding Adi on her lap. Both of them at that time were quite weak. It had been less than two years since we had left Bombay behind us and come to live in Baba’s ashram, and Mummy still had occasional moments of doubt. As she sat waiting for the bus to move again, a frightening thought



One of many stops on the Blue Bus Tour

came to her. She wondered what would happen to Adi, Hilloo and me if she were to die.

Beloved Baba, who was standing outside the bus near her window, read her thoughts, and in silence He gestured to her, “You will not die. I am with your children always, so don’t worry. You will grow to be an old woman.”

Mummy felt very embarrassed and ashamed that she had doubted His compassion, especially when He had promised Father on the first day that He would see to our littlest needs until the very end. She could not know it then, but the Lord’s prophecy would come true, as she lived to be eighty-nine years of age. Still, she realized fully from this incident that Baba is all-knowing, and from then on she did not dare think thoughts in front of Him that would displease Him.

During a stopover at Karwar the women enjoyed being on the beach, where Margaret taught them how to swim. Since some were just learning, they practiced their strokes only near the shore. From Karwar they went on to Belgaum and Dharwar. In Dharwar Mummy had a fall. She was not seriously injured, but she had several cuts and scratches. When Baba, who was passing by, noticed that she was injured, He sat down beside her and called for Rano to bring the first-aid kit. Then Baba, with His own hands, lovingly cleaned and dressed Mummy’s wounds, instructing Rano to change the dressings daily for three days until the cuts had healed.

The Blue Bus also traveled through the state of Gujarat, where Baba told the women about his father, Sheriarji. “You are traveling by bus and yet you are tired. My father walked all this way to find Me.” When they reached the desert called the Rann of Kutch, Baba said, “My father passed through this desert. He had no

water and no food, and He did all this to find Me.” Beloved Baba always spoke fondly about His father and the suffering Sheriarji had gone through in his search for God. Mani once told Mummy that the day Baba was born, Sheriarji knew His status as God-Man. While Baba was growing up, Sheriarji had so much reverence for Him as God that every time Merwan entered the house, Sheriarji, even if he were relaxing in his chair or bed, would stand up to show his respect for his son. It was only when Sheriarji was seriously ill that he stopped doing so.

When the women went to Calcutta in the Blue Bus, Baba took them to visit the Botanical Gardens, where they saw a banyan tree so large it was said to have sheltered fifteen thousand British soldiers. They also went to a Hindu temple honoring the goddess Kali, a Jain temple, and a large marketplace where they bought a pet bird and another monkey, this one without a tail. They named the monkey Jampu. Norina was given the job of looking after him, as she had taken care of Lucky, the monkey that chased Hilloo when we were new to Baba’s ashram.

Mummy, with Adi, also journeyed south with Baba to Ceylon, where they visited beautiful caves. While they were staying in Kandy, the capital city, Baba took the women around to the places connected with Lord Gautama Buddha, including a Bodhi tree grown from the one under which He attained God-realization. In Ceylon Baba instructed the women to sing “Hari Paramatma” at 8:00 every morning.

How fortunate our Mummy and Adi were to be able to travel all over India with Baba, east to west and north to south, as He carried out His spiritual work. His divine company was a feast to all those fortunate enough to be with Him on these tours, a nectar

that intoxicated everyone to the extent that it made them forget all the hardships the journeys entailed.

BELOVED BABA CONTINUED to take great interest in our progress at school. Whenever we reached Meherabad after traveling back from school for a vacation, we quickly washed and then reported immediately to Baba in Mehera's East Room, taking our study progress reports for Him to see. Mummy always went with us to make sure we behaved well. I remember anticipating my first glimpse of Baba seated on Mehera's bed, with pillows supporting His back. We would knock and go in, eager to be greeted by His million-dollar welcome smile. When Baba opened His arms, we would run to embrace Him first, and then Mehera and Mani and the other ladies present in the room.

Baba was never at all worried about Hilloo's behavior as long as she did well with her studies. I used to write long letters to Mummy about all the pranks Hilloo was playing and her attitude toward the nuns, and Mummy would take the letters to Baba and read them out to Him. Instead of looking angry, however, Baba always smiled and asked Mummy what rank Hilloo stood in her class. Mummy would say, "Well, she stood first as usual." Then Baba would say in gestures, "Why on earth are you complaining about Hilloo? She is just high spirited, as some children are." Mummy would go back to her room, still thinking about what a difficult child my sister was.

Whenever Hilloo returned to Meherabad, no matter what I had written about her behavior, Beloved Baba welcomed her lovingly. When He asked how things were with her at school, Hilloo always told Him about how unhappy she was with some

particularly nasty nun who spanked her for little reason. Baba would pinch her cheeks, make a kissing gesture with His lips and, just like a loving father, tell her not to worry, that everything would be fine. Immediately Hilloo would feel happy and carefree again. And when she returned to school, a classmate always told her, to her great delight, that the nun who had beaten her had been transferred. Soon, however, another nun was nasty to her or beat her when she was naughty, so again Hilloo would complain to Baba. And sure enough, when she returned to school, that nun, too, would have been transferred. This sequence of events happened three times, and of course Hilloo knew that her Big Daddy was helping her. Mummy agreed that all these nuns being transferred was certainly no coincidence, but she continued to believe that Hilloo was very spoiled.

Our Big Daddy made all us children feel special, but He absolutely showered Hilloo with love, and she wondered why He showed her more love than He did me. Years after our school days she said to Father, “Najoo was so good and ever so devoted to Baba, and I was so naughty and only wanted to laugh and play and enjoy myself, and yet Beloved Baba gave me such a lot of love, even more than He did Najoo.” Father explained to her, “You see, Hilloo, Baba knew that Najoo was totally devoted to Him and adored Him, but He had to attract you to love and adore Him. That’s why He showed you more love.” And today she says, “That really made sense at last, for it was His way of making me love Him more and more.”

I may have been well behaved, but my devotion to Baba needed some correction. Once while I was at school I wrote a letter to Him saying, “Beloved Big-Daddy, I want to confess to You

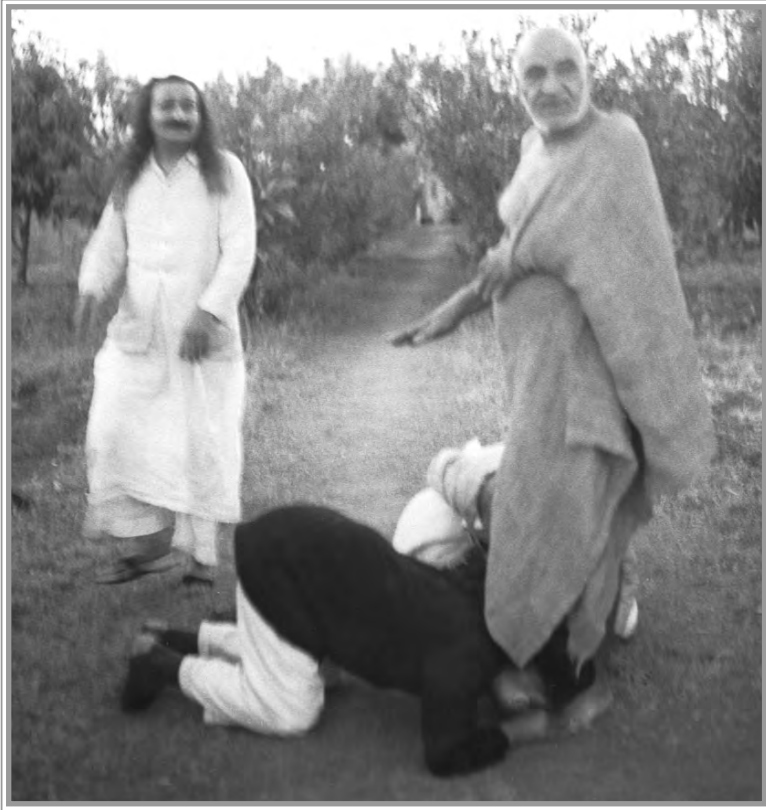
something very important. I want to let You know that first I love You as my Big-Daddy, and then I love You as God.” When I returned to the ashram on my vacation, Baba lovingly reminded me of my words. “What did you write in that letter?” He asked. “What you wrote was not correct. You must love me first as God-Man and then as Big Daddy.” Being very young and foolish, I had little knowledge of spirituality, and I said, “But Baba, what have I got to do with God?” Beloved Baba, in His infinite tolerance, made no further comment. It would be many years before I appreciated fully our great fortune in spending the days of our childhood under the watchful, loving eye of the living God.



Baba as He looked in 1941 when Savak met Upasni Maharaj

PHOTOGRAPH BY PADRI

THE NECTAR OF HIS COMPANY



Baba watching father
(in black coat) bowing
down with Kaka Baria
to Upasni Maharaj

PHOTOGRAPH BY PADRI

Although Father had surrendered his worldly all to Baba, and he was 99.99 percent certain that Baba was God, he still had about 0.01 percent conviction missing in his heart. This tiny bit of doubt bothered Father, but three incidents were soon to result in his 100 percent conviction that Beloved Baba was indeed the God-Man.

The first incident took place at Bhendi Bazaar, where Father had gone to meet Tipoo Baba. He took with him a small framed photograph of Meher Baba and asked Tipoo Baba if he could hang it in his room. “*Laga le, laga le, Meher Baba ka namse to khalkat khadi hai,*” said Tipoo Baba. (“Hang it, hang it! The entire universe stands on Meher Baba’s name.”)

Another time Father was taken by Baba to Jamnagar in Gujarat to contact a mast. After making detailed inquiries in the bazaar, Father learned from the driver of his tonga that a highly spiritual being was living in a forest near the town. His name was Coatwalla Baba because he wore several coats at the same time. He would come to the edge of the forest only at 9:00 p.m. On hearing this, Father asked the *tongawalla* (tonga driver) to take him to the forest at that time; Father wanted to make certain the man was a mast before taking Baba to him.

When they reached the edge of the forest exactly at 9:00 that evening, a man came out, and Father was immediately convinced that he was a mast. (Most of Baba’s mandali had the instinct bestowed upon them by Baba to tell the difference between a mast and a madman.) Father informed Baba and then took Him in a tonga to that exact spot at 9:00 the following evening. Except for the rustling of the trees, all was quiet.

Baba had given a standing instruction to His disciples that when He was contacting a mast, they were to be several yards away from Him. Father therefore stood at a distance and waited. When the mast appeared and saw Baba, he started dancing around and around in ecstasy, loudly proclaiming, “*Jungle mein khuda mil gaya,*” that is, “In the forest I have found God!” Seeing the mast dance and hearing his words ring out in the silence

of the forest, Father felt his belief in Baba strengthened.

In the third incident Father was again sent to find a mast, this time at Alwar, near Jaipur. He went to a tongawalla and asked whether there was a spiritually advanced person anywhere nearby. The tongawalla said such a person lived on a hilltop in a very small cottage, and he took Father there to confirm the man's identity. Father climbed about thirty steps that led up to the cottage, and when he saw the man, Father thought that he was a *mahatma*, a highly advanced person in the spiritual hierarchy. Father informed Baba, who wished to contact the man.

The next day Father accompanied Baba to the foothills, and then stood aside while Baba approached the steps leading to the cottage. The moment Baba put His foot on the first step, the mahatma came out and declared very loudly, to the joy of my father, "*Khuda aa gaya. Nacho, nacho!*" ("God has come. Dance, dance!") Father clearly heard this proclamation, and from that day he was 100 percent convinced that Meher Baba, his guru and master, was God in human form.

Besides contacting masts, another of Father's tasks while Baba was in Meherabad was to help with His tours. When Baba planned a tour program, He would send Father to the place in advance to seek separate accommodations for the men and women mandali. The place for their stay was to be not too near and not too far from the city Baba would be visiting. Also, when they were staying at Mahabaleshwar, Baba was dictating *God Speaks* to Eruch Jessawala, and He asked Father to help Eruch take notes.

Once when Baba told Father to go to Ranchi to find accommodations for the mandali, he was suffering from severe abdominal pain.

Father's stools contained both blood and mucus, and he was sure he had dysentery. Since he was feeling so ill, he went to Baba and asked if he could postpone his trip to Ranchi for a day or two. Baba heard his request, then asked Father to bring His potty, saying He felt the urge to evacuate His bowels. Father brought the potty, and when Baba was finished, Father observed that His stools contained both blood and mucus. Father's abdominal distress ceased immediately, and his excrement became normal. But Father was very upset and embarrassed because he immediately understood that Baba had taken upon Himself the illness of His lover so that He might proceed with His tour on schedule, as His spiritual work had to go on. Father realized that he should have gone to Ranchi after taking medication instead of proposing to postpone his work, which was so important to Baba. From this incident Father learned the lesson of a lifetime—and this is only one small example of the way Baba, our compassionate Father, took upon Himself the suffering of his devotees.

ON 17TH OCTOBER 1941, Beloved Baba went to meet Upasani Maharaj, together with Sarosh Irani, who drove the car; Adi Sr.'s mother Gulmai, who was to bring Upasani Maharaj from Sakori to Dahigaon; Kaka Baria and Father. They reached Dahigaon at 2:30 p.m. and, leaving Baba with Father, Sarosh, Gulmai and Kaka Baria traveled on by car to Sakori, where they met Upasani Maharaj and brought Him to Baba at Dahigaon. They arrived around 5:30 p.m.

Baba and Upasani Maharaj spent half an hour together in a hut. After their spiritual work was over, both came out and Baba ordered my father and Kaka Baria to bow to Upasani Maharaj and touch His feet with their foreheads. Padri Kaka had come to Dahigaon after the others to photograph this historic meeting. As

Father bowed down, Padri took several photographs, including one while Father's head was on Maharaj's feet. It showed not only the two Sadgurus together, but also Father's Lord and Master Meher Baba watching him as he bowed down to Baba's own Master. Father was most delighted to receive this photograph from Padri Kaka as a memento of that rare moment.

When the meeting ended, Sarosh and all the others took Upasani Maharaj back to Sakori. My father remained alone with Baba and, since there was nothing else to do, entertained Him, singing in a full, rich voice the Urdu *ghazals* of Ghalib and Jigar. He also sang several love songs from old movies in English—with a few changes here and there to make the words show his love for Baba—and songs from old Gujarati plays. Then Father told jokes in both English and Gujarati, enjoying this opportunity to entertain his King of Kings until the group came back.

BECAUSE OF HIS HUMOROUS NATURE and his beautiful singing voice, Father was often called upon to entertain Baba, who always enjoyed both humor and music. Once when Baba asked him to sing in Mandali Hall at Meherabad, Father chose two songs in English. The words to the first were as follows:

O Meher Baba, I love You,
 I am always dreaming of You.
 No matter what I do, I can't forget You.
 Sometimes I wish that I had never met You.
 But if someday I'd lose You,
 It would mean my very life to me.
 Of all the kings I ever met I chose You
 To rule me, my Meher Baba. . . .

At the fourth line of the song, Baba laughed silently and mischievously, gesturing, “Is that so? Why?” an innocent expression of surprise on His beautiful face. After that Baba frequently asked for this song, which was particularly meaningful to Father. When he was seeking a guru, he had met four of Baba’s five Sadgurus—but from the day his eyes fell on Beloved Baba and Baba’s eyes pierced his, he knew he had chosen Baba as his master forever.

Father also loved ghazals. In addition to the songs of Ghalib and Jigar, he often recited compositions of Kabir and Hafiz. And he loved *qawwali* singing as well, particularly the songs which had deep spiritual meanings. Baba was very fond of both ghazals and qawwali songs, and Baba’s devotees, knowing His love for this kind of music, sent the leading singers of the day to entertain Baba. It was wonderful to watch Him enjoying their singing, His body swaying and His facial expressions so animated and meaningful.

Mummy also had the opportunity to please Baba with her knowledge of devotional music. One day He called the women mandali to the tin shed at Meher Retreat. After He had conveyed to the women whatever He had to say, He asked, “How many of you know the hundred and one names of God as written in the Zoroastrian prayer book? And how many repeat them daily?”

Mummy put up her hand and said, “Baba, I think I know the hundred and one names of God. When I was in Bombay, before I knew You, I would go daily to the fire temple and repeat these sacred names. But now that I am here, I no longer do so.”

Baba asked her to speak out the names, and she did so, chanting them as a Zoroastrian priest would, in a singsong manner, as she always had. When she had chanted about twenty

names, Baba stopped her and said, “I want all of you to learn them and repeat them together with their meanings. The names are most powerful.”

After that day Mummy daily repeated these 101 names of God in Gujarati with their translations, chanting like a priest, until the end of her life. Mummy had a nasal voice due to her severe sinus problems, but she didn’t care how she sounded. Whenever Baba pointed to her to stand up and sing, she would do so without inhibition.

While Baba was demanding, requiring a great deal from His mandali, life in the ashram was not all work. Of all the Avatars, Baba was apparently the one with the greatest sense of humor—unless those who wrote about the others chose to reveal only their spiritual sides. The human side of the God-Man loved to be entertained, particularly by jokes or comical skits. And Mummy was a born comedienne. She could make everyone laugh, especially Beloved Baba. When He was exhausted after a day of heavy universal work or when He was coming out of seclusion, He would call Mani, who all of us thought must be the greatest comedienne of her generation, and ask her to arrange for some entertainment. Mani was an expert at writing humorous skits and plays, and in only an hour or two she could compose a skit and have it ready to perform, something to make Baba happy and relaxed. Mehera, who was very imaginative and talented when it came to dressing the characters, always assisted Mani with costumes for these dramas. She participated in any endeavor to please Baba, for to see Him cheerful, relaxed and happy was her only aim in life. His pleasure was always her pleasure.

A few of the women, including Mummy, were quite good

actresses. Mani gave Mummy roles in many plays, including one in which Silla performed the role of Mirabai, and Mummy was Prince Rana. Mehera had dressed Silla in simple clothes, but Mummy was dressed as an elegant and prosperous prince. The play was like an opera, with both of them singing their roles. Prince Rana kept beseeching his beautiful wife to leave the company of sadhus and forsake her Lord Krishna, whom she worshiped, and return to their palace. Mirabai, of course, refused, for all she wanted in life was her Beloved Lord Krishna. While the play dealt with a great spiritual figure, the highlight turned out to be Mummy's singing the role of Prince Rana in a nasal twang, which Baba found very funny. It was lovely to watch Him laugh. Because of His silence, He had to suppress His voice, but His cheeks would flush and His belly would rise and fall, and finally His whole face would become pink. He would point at some humorous scene as He laughed, and watching Him in such a joyous mood made us all scream with laughter.

One song that Mummy sang for Baba came from a comic Parsi drama which she had seen in Bombay, and she had picked up the words, something she did very easily. Knowing that Baba had a wonderful sense of humor and was a good sport, she sang this song, which no one else in the ashram would have dared to do. The words, translated into English, are as follows:

Merwanji, my Magician
 I give you all my love!
 Whose pockets have you snipped today?
 Whose purses have you emptied today?
 Let's go along and enjoy a treat
 From all that you have earned today.

Since Baba's name was in the first line, and He was called a magician, all those watching, particularly Baba, Mehera and Mani, were laughing uncontrollably.

I also remember Mani performing, in a perfect South Indian accent, a song that she had written. Here are the chorus and the two verses I recall:

O my name is Venkatrao
 The son of Subbarao,
 In two years time, I will be Yell Yell Bee
 [LLB—Bachelor of Laws]
 And pass-off anyhow.

I don't like going in the motor car,
 It's giving too much smell.
 I'd rather go in a *jhatka* [a hand-pulled cart]
 It's going just as well.

I don't like going to dancing,
 It's looking too much bad.
 One man taking another man's wife
 And acting very mad.

When Hilloo and I—and later Adi as well—were on vacation from school, we too participated in entertaining Baba, singing songs for Him in both Hindi and English, whenever He wanted us to do so. Afterwards He would embrace us, pinch our cheeks, and gaze at us lovingly. When we performed plays and dances for Baba, Mehera and Mani stitched our costumes, taking great pains to see that everything was perfect. They would dress us up and together with Mehera choreograph our dances. Hilloo was once taught to

dance as Radha, with Meheru's sister Naggu as Krishna. They performed the dance very well indeed, and Baba was pleased. Baba's mother Shireenmai was there for that performance, sitting beside Mummy, and after seeing Hiloo dance as Radha, she asked who the pretty little girl was. When Mummy told her it was Hiloo, Shireenmai was surprised. She said Hiloo had danced so beautifully she hadn't recognized her.

Another time, when Hiloo was older, Mani and Meheru taught her to do the hula, showing her how to sway to the music. Hiloo loved to dance, sing and act, and she was a quick learner. But someone noticed that she had a few hairs growing under her arms, and that wouldn't do. There were no razors about then, so Katie took Hiloo to her kitchen and sat her down. She applied some ashes under Hiloo's arms and started pulling out the hair. My sister squealed with pain, but Katie continued pulling, telling her that she would make a very poor spy. (This was during World War II, and several women from the West were staying on the Hill.) Hiloo told Katie it was torture for her, but Katie completed the job anyway, and everyone enjoyed the dance.

When my brother Adi and Meheru's brother Jangu were about five years old, Mehera and Mani dressed the two little boys up as Lord Shankar and his wife Parvati. Jangu, being physically sturdy, was given the role of Shankar and Adi, who was smaller, played Parvati. Jangu wore a scanty animal fur around his waist and loins, and Adi looked quite cute in his female dress as Parvati. While Jangu sat elegantly in a royal pose, Adi danced before him. Beloved Baba and the ladies were most amused by their performance. Another time Adi acted the role of our great aunt Banufui, in which he had to pretend to take a big sniff of snuff and then

sneeze loudly. Baba enjoyed this performance very much.

Adi was always humorous, even as a child. After he started school, he learned funny songs and read books of jokes so that he would always be ready to entertain Baba. Once he started singing a song that had a very deceptive beginning, going through the alphabet, *a, b, c, d*, etc. All the ladies at first thought it rather embarrassing that a boy of eight would be singing an alphabet song, but then it turned into a very funny song in Gujarati.

One day around that same time, Adi was seated with the women mandali under the tin shed, where Baba was relaxing on His gadi. Baba was very cheerful that day, and His mood was always contagious to those around Him. Our hearts were elevated with joy whenever Baba was happy. Jokingly Baba said to Adi, “Now we shall get Adi married. But what if we do not find a girl six or seven years old?” Adi responded, laughing, “Baba, then two four-year-old girls will do.” Everyone burst out laughing. Baba was so pleased with my brother’s spontaneous humor that He called Adi to His side and gave him a warm hug.

DURING ONE PERIOD OF OUR STAY ON THE HILL, Baba called us every evening to come to the tin shed, where He sat on His gadi like a King of Kings. Sometimes He gave spiritual talks; other times He joked with us or told interesting stories to illustrate some aspect of the spiritual path. We enjoyed spiritual discourses by Baba because He gave them in language that we could understand. It is no wonder that for us children, the tin shed and Baba’s gadi became our favorite places, and today they bring back memories of our happy days of being with Baba as He sat there, so regal and beautiful, His flashing, roving eyes like those of a lion. Sometimes

his eyes were so fiery that we dared not look up at Him, but at the next moment they would be so compassionate and loving that we would lose ourselves gazing into them. Baba's embrace made us feel as though we were dipping into a cool, fathomless ocean of love, peace and joy.

One evening when He called a meeting of the women in Mehera's room, Baba told them, "All of you who are here are very fortunate to be with Me. You did not just come here by chance. It is your long search for God and the blessings of many lifetimes that have brought you here to Me today. Yogis in the Himalayas do penance for many years at a time in order to find Me." Then, turning to Mummy, Baba said, "You think you are here because of Savak. But do you know that in one of your recent births you were a Yogi? For twelve years you stood in a river on one foot, doing penance in your search for God. This is how you have come so close to Me today."

Hiloo and I were away at school when this discussion occurred, but when Arnavaz told me about it years later, I remembered how we children had often laughed at Mummy, because when she was lying on her back, while napping and even sometimes at night when she was fast asleep, one leg would be stretched out straight, and the other would be balanced in the air. The old habits from her previous birth must have continued unconsciously with our dear Mummy, who had searched for God through penance and found Him at last.

During our time in the ashram Mummy became very close to both Mehera and Mani, and they spent a good deal of time together. Once the three of them were having a conversation just outside the East Room. Mummy said to them, "Our Baba is a Perfect Mother. If we forget how He wants us to behave, He creates a situation that

makes us immediately aware of what we are doing, and then we get back on the right track.” At that time Mummy was not aware that Baba was standing just behind her, and Mehera and Mani gave no indication that He was there, but simply listened to what she was saying. When Mummy finished, both Mehera and Mani looked behind her and smiled. Mummy turned to find Baba standing there, and it was obvious from His smile that He had heard her. Mummy was embarrassed, but she had described exactly what she had experienced, and it was nothing but the truth that she had disclosed. With her it was only truth, whether the Master was physically present or not, and she always spoke her mind quickly.

Another time Baba was in Mehera’s room with the three of them, and Baba asked Mummy, “Nergiz, tell me the truth. Whom do you love most?”

Mummy didn’t hesitate a second. “Baba,” she said, “I love You first, then I love my children, and finally I love Savak.” Hearing this, Beloved Baba gave her an enchanting smile. He knew Mummy had expressed the truth to Him, the all-knowing, from the very depths of her heart.

Once when all the women had congregated in the tin shed to hear Baba give a discourse, Mummy was making chapatis and Baba called her. She left her work and came immediately, afraid that Baba had summoned her because she had made a mistake. Baba pointed to a spot and asked her to stand there. He then said, “Nergiz, give a lecture on Meher Baba.”

Mummy was, for an instant, puzzled as to what to say, but then she was inspired and spoke loudly and firmly. “Ladies and children, Meher Baba has come not to teach but to awaken. Remember this always, through all your life. Thank you.”

Beloved Baba, pleased by her obedience and also by the emphatic way she spoke, smiled and gave her a warm embrace before directing her to go back to her work.

All this is not to say that Mummy was without weaknesses. The greatest was her extreme sensitivity. She was easily hurt, and because she was so absolutely honest, if someone in the ashram misjudged her actions, she felt great pain and sorrow and often cried. Mehera loved Mummy so dearly that if she came to know Mummy was upset, Mehera would also be upset and try to soothe her. Baba wanted Mehera always to be happy, and when Mummy's sensitivity caused Mehera distress, Baba would say to Mummy, "You are pure gold, but by crying you spoil everything. Keep happy. You are very fortunate to be with Me. To those who live in my ashram and suffer silently I give a great reward." Learning to bear pain silently when misjudged was a real challenge for all those living in the ashram.

Another of her weaknesses was snuff, which Mummy started using when someone in the ashram advised her to inhale it for her chronic sinusitis. In a way it did benefit her, as her sinuses would temporarily be less congested. But the snuff she inhaled filled her lungs and caused her to have chronic bronchitis. No matter how ill she was, though, she still continued to do the duties assigned to her with all her heart, because they were for her Lord.

ON BELOVED BABA'S BIRTHDAY, 25th February 1943, His mother, Shireenmai, dropped her body. Only one day earlier all the women mandali had been with Baba in Panchgani, enjoying the beautiful, peaceful environs of that little hill station. As they were walking with Baba along leafy paths under the trees, they came across a

thick branch that had fallen. Baba ordered Mummy and Mansari to lift the branch and then carry it, each with an end on her shoulder, all the way back to the place where they were staying. Mummy, who knew that Shireenmai was seriously ill, had an intuition that she might be in her last moments on earth. The branch seemed to Mummy to symbolize a body on a bier, carried the way the Zoroastrians carry their dead to the Tower of Silence. Mummy told Mansari what she thought the incident might mean, and the next day her intuition proved to be true. Baba's own mother was now eternally in His Ocean of Love.

After Shireenmai's going to Baba, life on the Hill began to change rather quickly. Just a few months later Baba asked Mummy to move from our quarters there into a beautiful little cottage located where the Meher Health Centre stands today, near Arangaon village. The cottage was enclosed on three sides by eight-foot walls, and the fourth side was open to the other family quarters occupied by Baba's followers and workers, including some of Baba's early disciples: Jangale Master and his family, Chhagan and his family, and Sidhu and his wife. This move was made in preparation for Baba's move to Meherazad the following year, accompanied by some of the women from the ashram on the Hill.

From June of 1943 for the next several years, our home was this roomy cottage consisting of three bedrooms, a sitting room, and two bathrooms, with steps leading to an outside kitchen, where food was cooked on sticks over cow dung fires or on kerosene stoves. There was no electricity, so we used kerosene lanterns for light. Mummy, Hiloo, Adi and I shared the largest bedroom, and Banufui stayed in the smallest until she died of cancer in 1949 at the age of seventy. Initially Father stayed on in Lower

Meherabad, but later Baba ordered him to live in the cottage with us, and he occupied the third bedroom.

For the cottage Mummy bought a very elegant secondhand cane sofa set, for which she stitched new cushions, and a cupboard as well. She even improvised a small refrigerator, using a large earthen pot containing water and sand. In it she put a smaller earthen pot with a lid, and she kept our leftover food in a steel box inside that lidded pot. Here our leftovers stayed cool and fresh so we could have them for breakfast. Mummy was very creative in her housekeeping, and whoever came into our home appreciated its simplicity and beauty. Adi Sr. once came to tea, and he found our cottage to be so pretty and cozy, nestled there near the village, that he said to Mummy, “You seem to have made a pretty little Taj Mahal here.”

Adi told us lovely stories of Beloved Baba whenever we were with him. We could listen to him for hours and never tire. He was a handsome, well-dressed, pleasant-mannered man with a beautiful singing voice. His mother, Gulmai (whom Baba called His “spiritual mother”), and Mummy were very good friends, and when we lived in the cottage we used to visit the present Trust Office, where Gulmai’s daughter Piroja and her husband stayed. They had a snappy little dog that once bit Hilloo’s ankle. Hilloo didn’t seek medical attention because it was a house dog, but we heard later that it had died of rabies. Beloved Baba must have saved Hilloo, though our brother Adi always used to laugh and say that the poor dog died because it had bitten Hilloo.

One of Hilloo’s favorite memories of life at the cottage is the time Baba ordered everyone to keep silence for three months. Though being silent for that long was not exactly easy for a talkative

girl like her, she did quite well with Baba's order. Once during that period a group of Westerners came in a van to show the people of Arangaon village some documentary films. They saw Hilloo standing by and invited her to sit with them in the van. Silently she did so, and then she heard one of them say softly, "Pity she is deaf, she's so pretty." Hilloo told us about the incident, writing it down on paper, and we all laughed silently.

My sister also still vividly remembers all the snakes and scorpions around the Meherabad area when we were living there. Our toilet was situated about twenty feet away from our cottage, which was customary in those days, and Hilloo was afraid to go there alone, so Mummy always went with her. If she saw a snake hanging from the roof, she would scream with fright and Father would come promptly and kill it. Once she spotted a cobra under Father's bed. After Father had killed it, someone told him he should be careful, for if one killed a cobra, the mate of the dead snake would search out and kill that person for sure. Father was never frightened, though. "Meher Baba is with me, so I have nothing to fear," he said, and of course nothing happened to him.

It was while we were at the cottage that we became better acquainted with some of the men mandali. Of course, we already loved Pendu Kaka, who used to accompany us to and from St. Anne's during our early school days, and we always enjoyed joking with him when he visited us. One time when Adi was at school in Poona, I was in college, and Hilloo was alone at the cottage with our parents, Pendu Kaka came to tell everyone he had to go on tour with Baba. He knew Hilloo was bored at home, so he sent her comics from wherever he was. To this day, she cannot imagine how he managed to spare the time to buy comics and post them

when he led such a busy life with Baba. Hilloo enjoyed comics at that time, and she was grateful for the kindness and love he gave her. She once said to him, “Pendur Kaka, when you one day become a Sadguru and I am back on earth, please make me into a very beautiful princess, so beautiful that people will swoon at the sight of me.” He answered, laughing, “Of course, I will do so, but there will have to be streams of ambulances following you and picking up all the people swooning at the sight of you.” Hilloo called Pendur Kaka her cuddly bear, for he was quite hairy.

Padri Kaka was a quiet man, tall, strong and very intelligent. A lot of people feared his temper, yet he was very gentle with children, telling us wonderful tales. He was like a lion with a faraway look in his eyes. He, too, endeared himself to us, and we admired him. Padri Kaka was, in addition to all his other duties, both the homeopathic doctor and the judge for the village. The people of Arangaon, who respected him highly, came to him with their illnesses, which he treated with great success, and their disputes and problems, which he sorted out fairly. Being a man of fiery temper, Padri Kaka sometimes punished someone who had made a grave mistake. One day Hilloo saw him hit a man and, being soft-hearted, she started crying. When Padri Kaka saw her, he put his arm around her gently while she dried her tears and told her that the man deserved the punishment, explaining to Hilloo why it was sometimes necessary. Then Padri Kaka picked her up and carried her on his shoulders and told her he would hit her as well for crying like a baby. He gave her a few gentle taps, and they laughed together as he put her down. He rarely smiled, but when he did, his whole face would light up. He loved cats and was gentle and affectionate with those he kept as pets.

Along with Pendu Kaka and Padri Kaka, Vishnu Master and Dr. Nilu used to visit us when the men were not on tour with Baba. Dr. Nilu came only if one of us was unwell, but all of us children, particularly Hilloo, grew close to Vishnu Master. Baba once said that he was Napoleon Bonaparte in one of his previous births, and believe me, his profile was just like Napoleon's. Vishnu was very fond of Hilloo, who will always be grateful to him because he gave her a pair of Beloved Baba's *chappals* (sandals), her most treasured possession. To this day she keeps them on her bedside table in London.

At the time we moved into the cottage, Sarosh Irani had just opened a cinema at Arangaon village for the Australian military living in camps near Arangaon. Sarosh needed a reliable cashier and manager for this cinema, and Baba ordered Father to do the job. He worked there from January of 1943 until December of 1947. Shortly after he started, he received the following letter, dictated by Baba:

Dear Savak,

Reference your signature to obey me implicitly in my work of spiritualizing the world, the following are my definite instructions to be carried out by you at any risk, even at the cost of life:

Join me physically for an indefinite period to take part with me in my work of spiritualizing the world from 28th Feb. 1943 onwards. Be prepared to sever all worldly ties accordingly.

Even though he now lived with us, Father had a one-track mind where Baba was concerned. Nobody and nothing mattered to

him except Baba. Mummy used to tell him that he was selfish not to care for his children or her, but Father remained devoted only to Baba. Mummy used to say that if Baba told him to throw his children into a well, Father would do so without hesitation. He would seriously nod his head and say, "Of course I would," and then smile at us. Still, during our vacations Father used to take us to see movies, the ones we now call the golden oldies. We thoroughly enjoyed them and learned all the old love songs, changing some of the words to make them refer specifically to Baba.

Father was ordinarily a soft-spoken man, but he could get fiery too, if aggravated. When we lived in the cottage he always returned very late, after the cinema closed at midnight, to start counting the money collected. It had to tally up to the paisa. If it didn't, he would harass Mummy and make her count and recount. Mummy sometimes told him just to add the missing amount from our household expenses, and he would reluctantly agree to do so. On these nights they would eat their dinner around 1:00 and not get to sleep until 2:00 a.m. In Father's way of thinking, every penny of Baba's money had to be accounted for. He was a fanatic about that, and Mummy suffered in silence because she understood that he was a man of principle.

Near our cottage was a wheat-grinding shop, and the shopkeeper would grind wheat into flour until 2:00 or 3:00 a.m. in order to earn more money. The noise disturbed my parents, who were getting very little sleep as it was. Three times Father went to the owner, appealing to him to stop grinding at 11:00 p.m., as he was disturbing the entire neighborhood, but the man ignored him. One night when he was still grinding at 3:00 a.m., Father went to him in extreme agitation and shouted, "Your grinding machine will

break into seven pieces for your selfishness. I say so!” Father then walked away.

Within fifteen minutes the shop owner came running to Father to apologize, saying, “You left me with those words and now my machine has actually broken into seven pieces. I harassed a saintly man and am punished for all these years of selfishness.” He promised Father that he would never again grind wheat after 10:00 p.m.

Other similar incidents occurred three times, and because of them Mummy and we children were afraid of Father’s words. We asked him not to say things in excitement because what he described would occur, as though prophesied by him, and the results would harm others. Baba did not approve of this behavior, either, so Father was very embarrassed by such events.

During our early days in the cottage, in 1944, Father for a time suffered from such severe arthritis in both legs that he was completely bedridden, and his pain was so intense that he would sometimes weep. He was being nursed by Mummy and Hilloo, and he would not let anyone touch his legs except Hilloo. Even when he was shifting positions, he would call for her, as she was very sensitive to his feelings and gentle in handling him. He often said, “She would make a good nurse.” Baba was on tour at that time, and there was an order not to communicate with Him, but Father would say, “I will be able to walk only if Baba comes and helps me.” Father wanted so desperately to please Baba that he sometimes endured great pain in order to obey His orders. But somehow Baba came to know about the severity of Father’s illness, and soon Father heard that He was to come to Meherabad. Father had complete faith that he would be able to walk and the pain would subside once he saw His Lord.

When Baba, the true slave of the love of His lovers, arrived in Meherabad, He astonished everyone by walking with Pendu Kaka in the midday heat all the way from Mandali Hall to the cottage without the umbrella that He always used as protection from the sun. Baba's car followed behind Him as He walked. He entered the cottage and embraced Father, who was weeping to see such mercy from his Master. "Now that You have come, I will be able to walk again," he said.

Looking at Father with benevolent eyes, Baba said, "Yes, Nergiz, now he will be able to walk again." Baba told Mummy that He was taking Savak with Him in the car to Lower Meherabad for some days, since it was Mehera's birthday and there was to be a celebration there. Pendu Kaka lifted Father and put him into the car, and at Meherabad Eruch was assigned to look after him. After a few days he was sent back to us, and again Pendu Kaka lifted him out of the car and onto our porch. To our astonishment, Father was able to stand erect, and very slowly, with the help of Pendu Kaka, he walked into our home. He was completely back to normal only ten days after Baba's arrival. His faith had "made him whole," as was the expression during Jesus' advent; Beloved Baba's compassion had motivated him to walk again. By walking in the sun, Baba, the Ocean of Mercy, must have taken Savak's suffering upon Himself.

A year later my father was strong enough to participate in a volleyball match held at Meherabad on 4th December 1945. The winners were given a prize of Rs 28 by Baba, and everyone had a wonderful time. That same month, on 25th December, Mehera's birthday was again celebrated in Meherabad. A qawwali program was held, and most of the singers chose songs that had deep

spiritual meaning. It was a real pleasure to behold Baba as he enjoyed such programs, and we all enjoyed them too.

ONCE WHEN BABA WAS ON TOUR He returned to Meherabad for four days, and during that time He came often to our cottage. He even gave Mummy the privilege of combing His hair. Mummy was very touched, as she had never dreamed of doing so. For four heavenly days she enjoyed the nectar of His company while she combed His silky hair. Mummy felt that to be the opportunity of her lifetime, and she used to speak to us with great joy about those days, her love for Baba glowing in her eyes.

On another occasion, when Mummy heard that Baba was to come to Meherabad during a tour, she went to the women in the other family quarters and asked them to help her clean up the whole area in case Beloved Baba came to visit them. Two of them willingly assisted, but the third said there was no need, since Baba had not sent any message that He would come. So Mummy, our maid and the two other ladies started cleaning up. They removed all the small stones, twigs and leaves and threw them into a pit a long way from the quarters, carrying all the weight on their shoulders. Mummy also cleaned the toilets.

When the entire compound was clean, and water had been sprinkled on it to settle the dust, Baba sent a slight drizzle as well, so the entire area looked perfect for the arrival of the Lord. Mummy said to the ladies, “Even if He does not stop here, when we see His car coming we will run near the road and wave to Him, and thus we will have His darshan from afar at least, for we would be fortunate even to have a glimpse of Him.” The ladies rushed to have a quick bath and put on clean clothes before going out to wait for Baba’s car.

At 10:00 a.m. the car came into view and drove right into the compound instead of first going up the Hill. Seeing His car coming toward the cottage, Mummy was overjoyed. Beloved Baba got out of the car and with long, majestic strides He walked all around the compound, remarking on its appearance. “Whose idea was this to clean up the compound?” He asked.

One of the ladies said, “Nergiz’s.”

Baba then asked, “Who among you did not help her?”

The lady who had not helped put up her hand and said, “Baba, You did not send a message that You would visit us, so I did not participate.”

“Even though you knew I had to pass by, you did not think of honoring Me with a clean environment? I, God, have come to you, and yet you did not realize how important it is to welcome Me with love?” Baba then lovingly embraced Mummy and the women who had helped, including our maid. Last He turned to the lady who had not helped and embraced her too, saying, “I forgive you this time. But such golden opportunities do not come your way often. Remember!” Then Baba entered our cottage. Once again He gave Mummy the privilege of combing His beautiful hair, and then He had a cup of tea before He departed. Mummy, overjoyed, stood and watched His car disappear up the Hill.

WITHIN THE OPEN SPACE AROUND OUR COTTAGE Mummy, being very fond of gardening, had put her green thumb to work and planted a lovely garden with flowers, fruits and vegetables. There was already a berry tree with edible berries growing there, and she planted more trees and, in the kitchen garden, vegetables such as tomatoes, okra and pumpkin. She used our bath water for the

garden, collecting it in a large underground container, as fresh water was very precious and we had to conserve as much as possible. Our fresh water was delivered in a large barrel on a bullock cart. Mummy also made a spacious wire cage like those in farm yards, and she kept cocks and hens. All three of us children enjoyed helping Mummy in the garden or on her little farm, and we loved our quiet, simple life in this rural setting, with plenty of fresh air and Baba's omnipotent presence always around us.

Mummy was so intelligent and practical that she could make use of nearly anything. When her clothing wore out, she would take our old school uniforms and make them into new outfits for herself or Adi. When her sandals were no longer wearable, she would take our old shoes and cut new sandals from them, using her old ones for a pattern. She also loved to embroider blouses, sari borders and saris. My sister and I still have some of these beautiful pieces today, sweet treasures to remind us of our darling Mummy. She enjoyed helping the other residents of the family quarters, who were always coming to her to shorten or lengthen their children's clothes. One lady, whose husband was an employee in Baba's ashram, was particularly resourceful. Mummy taught her how to sew, and she began stitching clothing for people in the village, bringing in some extra income. Eventually she became quite prosperous with this business.

Mummy was always happier when giving than when receiving. Despite the frugal amount she received to run her household, she gave money to buy books for the poor children in the village. She also taught English to the children living in the family quarters, a skill that became very useful to them in their later studies. She was a good listener; people opened their hearts to her, telling

her their problems, and she was always pleasant to everyone.

One day Father came to Mummy and said, “Nergiz, Baba wants Masaji to prepare *dhan-dal-patya* today because it is a special occasion, and Masaji does not have tomatoes to make patya.” Hearing this, Mummy promptly went into her kitchen garden, plucked all the tomatoes, and gave them to Father. Masaji was very grateful to Mummy for her help in pleasing Baba by obeying His order. Masaji was an excellent cook, and he never complained, whether he had to cook for four people or four hundred, even on short notice. As children, we were very fond of him because he teased us and made us laugh. Even though we now lived in the cottage, we visited Upper Meherabad frequently to be with Beloved Baba and all our dear aunties, and Masaji used to keep watch on a stool by the railway track. As we children approached the path up Meherabad Hill, he would jokingly ask us for a ticket to go up.

ON 10TH APRIL 1944, Beloved Baba had His residence moved from Meherabad to Meherazad. Meherazad bungalow was a rest house bought in 1940 and then renovated. Initially Mehera, Mani, Meheru, Margaret and Valubai were taken to reside there, but gradually others, including Naja, Rano and Kitty, were called as well. Baba had ordered Mansari to continue staying at Upper Meherabad and to be responsible for activities on the Hill. Kaikobad Dastur's family were also asked to stay where they had been living from the beginning, near Baba's cage room, and Mummy continued to live in the cottage.

The rest of Upper Meherabad was vacated and the kitchen unit was assigned to Mansari as her residence, where this brave lady stayed all alone until she was united with Baba in 1996. Baba

told her He would always be with her and she should never be afraid. Those who did night watch at Upper Meherabad would sometimes see a form moving around Mansari's room at night, but once the night watchman approached, the form would disappear. Baba always looked after His lovers who had given up their all to be with Him.

After Baba moved His residence to Meherazad, He called us there for certain celebrations, the most important of which were Mehera's birthdays. Those days were joyous, with Mehera, our Persian beauty, looking radiant in a gorgeous sari. We were fed the best of snacks, and sometimes Baba served us one snack Himself as prasad. When we returned home, the happiness of these occasions would keep us going for many days. Baba still came to visit Upper Meherabad, and when Father found out the time of each visit, he would tell us when Baba's car would be passing the railway crossing. As soon as we spotted His car in the distance, we children and Mummy would run toward it. Baba would wave to us and sometimes clasp our hands through the window, His beautiful face beaming. Those moments filled our hearts with joy, as we did not see Him often then, and we would excitedly talk about seeing Baba for days afterwards.

IN 1945, Baba needed to spend some time in Hyderabad for His work, and He sent Dr. Donkin to look for accommodations for Him and the mandali. Donkin was able to find a lovely new bungalow with a swimming pool in Jubilee Hills, not too far from where Hilloo and I were in school in Secunderabad. Mummy was staying there with the other women when word came that Hilloo was ill with smallpox. Hilloo had always been an exceptionally beautiful

child, and she had become rather vain about her looks, proud that Baba and the women talked about how pretty she was. Now her pride had taken a bad fall. Baba sent Vishnu Master to Secundarabad to bring her from the hospital isolation ward to Jubilee Hills as soon as the quarantine period was over so that Mummy and Rano could look after her.

Although Hilloo was happy to get out of the hospital and be with Baba and Mummy, she refused to look into a mirror, and she cried frequently, as she knew she was now disfigured by deep scars. Someone told Baba about Hilloo's sadness, and He called her to Him. As she stood before Him with her face covered, weeping softly, Baba asked her what was wrong. She told Him she was miserable because of the ugly scars on her face and body. Beloved Baba took Hilloo's face lovingly in His hands and said, "Is that all that is making you so unhappy?" He then told Rano, who was in charge of the medicines, to get Hilloo a bottle of calamine lotion. He instructed her to apply it each day to her scars, then made His sweet kissing gesture and told her to go. Hilloo religiously applied the lotion each day, and to everyone's amazement the scars gradually disappeared. It is well known that smallpox scars are unaffected by calamine lotion; plastic surgery can help some, but the scars are usually permanent. Baba, in His infinite mercy, pampered Hilloo after teaching her a great lesson about vanity. She was eventually left with only two spots to remind her of this ordeal. While Baba said often that He never performed miracles, He did many times, in many ways. When Hilloo's scars had vanished and Baba once again commented on her beauty, she was overjoyed. But she was never again vain.

I was also able to stay with Baba at Jubilee Hills during long

weekends or school holidays, and I had a wonderful time with Mehera, Mani, Mummy and all the others. It was there that I presented Baba with this poem, which I had composed at school:

Ode to Meher Baba

Who is He
who speaks not,
yet rules the whole wide Universe?

Who is He
who teaches not,
yet every heart hears?

Who is He
who helps the helpless,
kindles hope in every heart?

Who is He
who is so fearless,
instills courage to play your part?

Who is He
who offers love
to every creature on this Earth?

He is Meher Baba,
whom we must Love.
He is the Way, the Life, the Truth!

Once Hiloo had recovered from her illness, Baba and Mani decided to play a trick on her. They knew from Hiloo's behavior at scary movies that she was afraid of ghosts, mummies and the dark,

so one evening when we were all gathered on the verandah around Baba, He asked Hilloo to fetch a stool from the dark dining room. All the lights in the house were off, and she was scared, but whenever Baba asked us to do something, we always did so immediately. Very slowly Hilloo crept toward the dining room, and just as she reached for a stool, she saw a tall white figure with no face standing over her, waving its arms in a creepy way and making weird sounds. She dropped the stool and ran out screaming toward Baba. He innocently asked her what was wrong and, shaking with fright, she told Him there was a ghost in the dining room. Baba took her hand and marched her to the dining room with all of us following. He put on the light and there was Mani, standing on a stool on top of the dining table, covered in a white sheet. She was laughing, and Baba and everyone else joined in. Baba told Hilloo, “There is nothing to be afraid of—it’s only Mani trying to scare you.” His face was pink with amusement, and Hilloo, feeling foolish, laughed too.

After a few days everyone was again gathered on the verandah in the evening, and Baba asked Hilloo to go to Mehera’s room and fetch her scarf. Again Hilloo felt frightened because the house was dark and there were shadows everywhere. She crept into Mehera’s room and immediately shrieked, but this time, still screaming, she grabbed the figure that had frightened her. Baba and the rest of us had followed her to watch the fun, and suddenly someone put on the light. Everyone laughed as Hilloo looked up at the figure she had grabbed and saw that it was Meheru, covered in a white sheet, shining a torch on her protruding tongue. Baba, once again pink with laughter, said, “I cannot understand why you grabbed the ghost instead of running away. Suppose it had been a real one?” Through these pranks Baba was trying to show Hilloo

there was nothing to be afraid of, but to this day she is frightened of ghosts and the dark.

Besides trying to deal with her fears during her stay at Jubilee Hills, Baba also delighted Hilloo by telling Meheru to teach her how to swim. And He cured her of the severe tummy aches she suffered from. Various medicines had been prescribed, but nothing worked. Baba poured some medicine into a cup, stirred it up with His finger, and told her to drink it all. After she did so, He took the cup from her and washed it with His own hands, just as He had washed the bowl and spoon from which He had given me the butter and sugar when I came of age. Hilloo tried to take the cup from Him, but He told her lovingly not to do so, and she was overwhelmed with feeling, watching the Almighty wash her cup with such loving tenderness.

Soon after that time, when Hilloo heard that Baba was going to perform Naggu's navjote, she asked Him to do hers as well. Baba happily agreed, and with His own hands He performed the ceremony. Later, when the time came for Hilloo to wear a sari for the first time, Baba asked Mehera to put one of her own saris on Hilloo. Mehera chose a beautiful green Benares silk sari with a lovely border, and both she and Mani helped to wrap it around Hilloo, to her great delight. When Baba saw her He told her she looked lovely and embraced her.

SOMETIMES THE LESSONS BABA TAUGHT US as we were growing up were painful, showing us our human weaknesses. Once when Baba was visiting Mummy at our cottage, a Hindu man who had followed Him there presented Him with a silver impression of Lord Zoroaster in a beautiful silver frame. The greatest Avatar of

this cycle accepted His own impression of the first Avataric form of the cycle very graciously, and He bowed to it reverently. After taking Baba's darshan, the Hindu gentleman left the cottage. Baba then gave the impression of Zoroaster to Mummy as a present. Delighted, I imagined this treasure being handed down in our family from generation to generation, a priceless gift from Lord Meher.

At this time Adi was in boarding school, the Dastur School in Poona, which Baba Himself had attended. The house warden, Miss Chappgar, was very loving to all the children, but especially to Adi, whose health was still quite delicate. Adi was Mummy's favorite, and one day while Hilloo and I were away at school, Mummy asked Baba if she could present the silver impression of Zoroaster to Miss Chappgar. Baba agreed, so Mummy sent it with Adi to give to her without ever stopping to think what value it might have for our family. When Hilloo and I next returned from Secunderabad for our vacation, we discovered immediately what Mummy had done. Being young, at an age when I would not have criticized our parents for any reason, I said nothing to Mummy, but I was deeply wounded.

When Adi returned from Poona for his vacation, he told Mummy with pride that Miss Chappgar loved the silver Zoroaster and had put it in the office in her cottage. When she called roll, it was her order that every student had to touch and then bow to the image before going to classes. This became a routine in the school for many years. Little did Miss Chappgar know that the Living Zoroaster had agreed that she should have it. And little did the children, who were from different religious communities, realize that this framed image, which they were touching and bowing to daily,

had been touched by the Living Zoroaster, who had also reverently bowed to it.

I still feel a pinch in my heart when I think of Mummy giving away what could have been our family's most treasured heirloom. However, when I consider the many thousands of children of all religions who have had the opportunity to experience this precious touch of God daily for year after year, my pain is eased. God is universal, and in this way His love has been shared by many. Not a leaf moves without His will, and as this was His will, I know I must bow to it to please Him, counting my blessings instead of yearning for a possession, however precious.



How Baba looked when Najoo and Hilloo were in school in 1949

PHOTOGRAPH BY PADRI

A LESSON IN OBEDIENCE



Photo taken by Padri at the cottage at the time of Adi's navjote, 1948.
(L-R) Hilloo, Father, Adi, Mummy and me.

I n the spring of 1947 I was nearing the completion of my studies at St. Anne's European High School and beginning to think about what to do after appearing for my Senior Cambridge exams. In response to a letter from Mummy, I wrote my parents about my plans to study medicine. I still treasure this letter, as Mummy gave it to Beloved Baba to read, and He underlined the word "medicine" in the second paragraph twice and also drew an

abstract design at the top of the first page in pencil, although in those days He did not write.

St. Anne's Convent
Secundarabad
8th March 1947

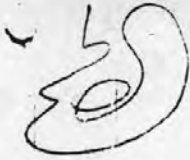
My darling Mummy, Daddy,

I received your three letters this week and was extremely happy to hear that I shall be seeing dearest Baba, Mehera, and Mani after eighteen months. We three [Sarwar, Hilloo and I] feel most happy about it.

Well, Mummy, you wished to know what I should like to do after Senior Cambridge. I intend taking up Medical Course, for I think that a Doctor's job is very noble, and by taking up medicine I would wish to serve Baba in every way possible. I had asked my dear Sister Adriana for advice and she has thought over it and has also agreed to what I intend doing. Now it is only left for you and Dad to decide.

If Shree Baba wills it so, then I will be definitely successful. So ask Shree Baba, for if He wills it so, then nothing ever can go wrong, for if He says yes, and gives me good health, I am ready for further studies. Therefore I leave the decision to His and your will, for I know that all that you do is always for my best. So I hope I have explained myself in the best way possible.

I have read mostly all the library books which



St. Ann's Convent,
Secunderabad.

8th March. 1917.

My darling Mummy, Daddy,

I received your 3 letters this week and was extremely happy to hear that I shall be seeing dearest Baba, Nehra, and Hari after eighteen months. We three feel most happy about it.

Well, mummy; you ^{like} wished to know what I should do after Senior Cambridge. I intend taking up Medical Course, for I think that a Doctor's job is very noble, and by taking up medicine I would wish to serve Baba in every way possible. I had asked my dear Sister Antonia for advice and she has thought over it and has also agreed to what

The first page of my letter to Mummy and Daddy.
The abstract design on the top left corner was done by Baba.

Mehera had kindly lent, so return them to her with many thanks and give her and Mani three tight embraces from their three ardent admirers. . . .

Last Thursday all the girls from seventh standard onwards went to see “Caesar and Cleopatra.” It was a lovely picture in glorious technicolor. Our Principal and Sr. Adriana came with us, and they also appreciated this lovely picture.

My little Hilloo stood first in class after reading all the story books. What can I infer from this but that my Hilloo is most intelligent. I can’t expect anything more than first from her. All that I hope is that she must retain her place through this year. . . .

Tehmi is quite good to Hilloo. Sarwar is of course very sweet to me. Another thing is that you must not stitch any more blouses for us, for we have a pile of more than enough to satisfy our wants.

Hilloo and I are in good health but due to the intense heat in this place my head aches every afternoon, but that cannot be helped.

Once more I tell you that I want to be a Doctor, but this will be so only if Baba wishes it. I would love it but I must be healthy. Please convey our *namaskars* to Baba.

Give our fond love and best wishes to dearest Mehera, Mani and you two accept the same from your loving daughter,

Najoo

In the left-hand margin on the third page I wrote, “If you do not agree about me taking up medicine, then I shall do some light work as sewing, cooking and other such stuff.” Although I had

repeated in the letter that everything was up to Baba, I was soon to learn that our ideas of a career in medicine were quite different.

LATER THAT YEAR, in September, while our family was still living in the cottage, Baba was to go to Surat and Father was to accompany Him. Adi, who was then nearly nine years old, had come from school in Poona for his vacation, and while in Meherabad he became ill with both typhoid and pneumonia. Soon his temperature reached 105 degrees, and his condition was critical. Dr. Nilkanth (Nilu) and Dr. Donkin were both treating him, as per Baba's instructions. Like a true Big Daddy, Baba came to visit Adi and embraced him lovingly. Then He went into the sitting room with both doctors and our parents and asked Father whether he still wished to go to Surat.

"Yes, Baba," said Father.

Baba then asked Mummy whether He could take Savak with Him. Mummy agreed with Father, saying, "Baba, whatever has to happen will happen. You take Savak on tour."

At this point Dr. Nilu intervened, saying, "Baba, Adi is dying. Don't You feel Nergiz needs someone for moral support? Baba, I plead with You not to take Savak with You." Dr. Donkin, like a true Britisher with a tight lip, did not say a word. But Baba decided not to take Father on His tour. Instead Baba informed him of the stops the train would make between Ahmednagar and Surat and ordered him to send a telegram when Adi died, in care of the station master of whichever town the train was due to reach next. Baba then left for Surat with His mandali.

Mummy, assuming that her only son would indeed die, sat beside him and began sewing a sadra for his last rites. This sadra had to be hand stitched only by a Zoroastrian, who was supposed to pray continually during the stitching of the sadra and the weaving of the



Adi at the cottage when he had typhoid

kusti. While Mummy was stitching and praying to Baba, her heart heavy with grief, Adi asked what she was doing. Not wanting to say what she was thinking, she told him, “I am stitching a sadra for your navjote because you have nearly completed nine years. When Baba comes from Surat, He will perform your navjote.”

Hearing this, Adi, overjoyed, said, “Mummy, am I not lucky that Baba will do my navjote?”

Dear Mummy, with tears in her eyes which she could not let Adi see, said, “Of course, you are Baba’s favorite boy, so He will do your navjote.” She assumed that the embrace Baba had given Adi was His parting gift of compassion to her beloved and dying son.

Since there were no medicines at that time for typhoid fever, Dr. Donkin and Dr. Nilu concentrated on treating Adi’s pneumonia with penicillin injections and his typhoid with diet therapy. A penicillin factory had just started in Poona, but only a doctor could get the medication, and it had to be kept refrigerated. Since we did not have a real refrigerator, Dr. Donkin made several trips on his motorbike to Poona, where he would buy two ampules at a time and immediately bring them back to the cottage. This trip took many hours. He would give Adi one injection when he returned, and the second he kept in Mummy’s improvised refrigerator made from earthen pots until it was needed.

To Mummy’s surprise and delight—and the doctors’—Adi’s chest condition improved, and his temperature came down to 101 degrees. For his typhoid he was given fruit juice with the white of an egg beaten into it and hourly doses of lemon juice alternating with milk. As Adi began to recover, he continued to take the prescribed diet. Dear Mummy would have made a perfect nurse, as she followed all the doctors’ orders.

In the meantime, Baba, on the train to Surat, gave Baidul the

order to get off at every railway station and inquire of the station master whether a telegram had arrived for Meher Baba. When Baidul returned, Baba would say, “Any telegram to inform us that Adi is dead?” At every station Baba repeated the same words as soon as Baidul ran back to the train. Poor Baidul was exhausted because at some stations the train stopped for a very short while. But Baba’s orders had to be obeyed, no matter how inconvenient, so Baidul ran at great speed to find the station master and get back into the overcrowded compartment before the train pulled out of the station. Finally, to Baidul’s relief, the train arrived in Surat with no telegram from Savak.

This was a way in which Baba often dealt with adversities, constantly remembering and keeping His sweet nazar on the one in danger—all while doing His work for the entire universe. As Baba was on the train, remembering Adi, my brother was simultaneously improving and the fever was coming down. On His return from Surat to Meherazad, Baba paid a visit to Adi once again. Dr. Nilu was taking the credit for curing Adi with his treatment and Baba, with His usual humor, thanked Dr. Nilu, who then realized what he was doing and laughed at his having momentarily forgotten the infinite power of Baba’s nazar and His will. When Baba embraced him, Adi asked, “When will You do my navjote?” After consultation with the women mandali, Baba fixed 1st June 1948 for the sacred thread ceremony for Adi.

About three days later Baba arranged for the women to attend a movie at Sarosh Talkies, and He ordered Mummy to be present. Adi still had a mild fever, but she left him in Father’s care and attended the movie. Afterwards Baba asked her, “What would you have done if Adi had died?”

Mummy said, “Baba, the day I surrendered to You my

worldly all, I also surrendered my three children to You. From that day to the very end, it is up to You to do with them as You please. I am only their caretaker.” Baba was happy with Mummy’s unhesitant reply. He always appreciated her absolute trust and devotion.

DURING MY FINAL YEAR AT ST. ANNE’S I had composed a song for Baba called “The King of Kings,” to be sung to the tune of “Come Back to Sorrento.” When I sent it to Baba, He corrected the last line of my song and returned it, telling me that our yearning for Him is never in vain, for He is God in human form. My last line had read, “Singing songs of Love and pain, / Yearning for Thee but in vain.” Baba changed the last line to read “Yearning for Thee *not* in vain.” When I was next with Baba, He allowed me to sing this song to Him with His correction, and He embraced me.

The King of Kings

King of Kings, Thou art to me,
Close to Thee I long to be,
Safely there my soul shall rest,
Closer to Thy loving breast.

Night and day, I dream of Thee,
Come O Come, my Lord to me.
Let me live for Thee alone,
In this world, so woebegone.

Music hath no charm for me,
Life hath no desire for me.
Heart is pleading just for Thee,
Sighing, weeping, all for Thee.

Living in Thy memory
Shall I wait here patiently,
Singing songs of Love and pain,
Yearning for Thee, not in vain.

I often sing this song at His Samadhi, and it always brings back memories of singing to my King of Kings while He was with us in the body.

JUST BEFORE THE TIME I WAS TO APPEAR for my Senior Cambridge exams in December, I suddenly fell ill with a temperature that soared to 105 degrees. The nuns were very upset, as I was one of their best students in the final year. They called an excellent physician, but he found it difficult to confirm a diagnosis. He said, however, that given the condition I was in, he could not allow me to appear for the exams, as I was too weak and might faint.

I pleaded with the nuns to send a telegram to Baba, saying that I would do only what my Big Daddy decided. A telegram was sent and an answer appeared promptly: “Najoo must appear for exams.” I also received a telegram saying, “Love and Blessings from Baba to Najoo. . . . Don’t worry. All will be well.” I then told the nuns that I would write my exams, no matter what my condition. They were quite kind, and they asked for and received special permission from the examination supervisors for one nun to stay outside the examination hall and take care of my medical needs. They wrapped me up in a woolen shawl, gave me cold sweet-lime juice hourly, and put one ice bag on my head and another on the nape of my neck, as my temperature was still 103. I appeared for the exams and, strange to say, on the second day my temperature dropped to

normal and remained there, so Beloved Baba pumped into me plenty of energy and mental capacity to do a good job in writing all the examination papers. I was also most grateful to the nuns for making such an effort to look after me.

After completing my Senior Cambridge, I returned with Hiloo to the cottage. She, too, was leaving St. Anne's to attend school at the Convent of Jesus and Mary in Poona. While I was awaiting the results of my exams, Baba called me and asked what I would like to do next. I replied, "Baba, I would like to be a doctor." Baba told me, through His gestures, that He already had three doctors in His ashram, Dr. Nilkanth, Dr. Donkin and Dr. Goher. He said, "I want you to be a nurse." Disappointed, I told Baba I didn't want to be a nurse. I explained to Him that there was no prestige in that profession and the salaries were very low; besides, I was such a good student that I would definitely do well in my college studies. Baba gave no reply. I think this was the first time in my life that I had argued with Him instead of immediately obeying Him.

When my final exam results came, I had received a First Class, and I must have thought myself to be very clever. I knew that because Mehera was Baba's Beloved, He would always agree to anything she asked, as He wanted to please her at all costs. Mehera was very fond of me, and I of her. So I decided on a plan to get what I wanted. I went to Mehera with my results and pleaded with her to tell Baba to send me to college to do inter-science, in order to get into medical college. Mehera went to Baba and said, "Baba, Najoo has got a First Class. She is a clever student, so why do You want to send her for nursing? Baba, let her go to college to do her inter-science." Baba, not wanting to displease Mehera, agreed to send me to Wadia College in Poona.

ON 28TH DECEMBER 1947, Baba and the women mandali had come to Meherabad for the last celebration of Mehera's birthday to be held there during Baba's time. Our hearts were full as we enjoyed their company after a long period during which we had not seen any of them. The celebration itself took place on 31st December, with a qawwali program held under the tin shed. A large, thick curtain separated the men and women mandali, but it was arranged so that all could see Baba on His gadi as He enjoyed the lovely songs. This was a particularly important night for all of us, as it was the last time that Baba ever spent the night at Meherabad.

Only a month later, on 30th January 1948, Mahatma Gandhi, the political leader of India, was assassinated. Gandhi was, for some Indians in those days, also a spiritual leader. On the occasion of Gandhi's assassination, Baba questioned each of His mandali as to whom they took Baba to be. He asked them whether they were "confused, fused or diffused." Each one had to reply in writing. The following reply was given by my father:

As You [Baba] say that Divine Love is given and not created, in the same manner I experience the Divine Faith, which is bestowed by You. Why should I then get confused, fused or, diffused?

I believe in this saying of Kabirji:

*Tara mandal baithke,
chandrama badhai kare;
jab Suryaka uday hua
sub tare chhup gaye . . .*

(Heading the conference of the stars,
 The moon exhibited its brightness;
 Once the Sun arose in its splendor
 All the stars went into hiding.)

Father's heartfelt answer showed the depth of his faith and conviction in his Master's infinite greatness.

On 13th February 1948, Baba's birthday was celebrated in Meherazad, and Baba called all the women from Upper Meherabad, Lower Meherabad and the family quarters to come. We left Meherabad at 5:00 a.m. to attend a movie at 6:00 a.m. at Sarosh Talkies in Ahmednagar with Baba and the ladies from Meherazad. It was a joyous occasion. Mehera had given Beloved Baba a pink coat, and with His rosy complexion He looked radiant in it. His spotless white sadra flowed out around him as He walked like a graceful deer. Mehera, Mani and all the other women were dressed in their best clothing, as were we. Everyone was served tea and snacks, and of course Baba gave, from His beautiful hands, a sweet to each of us as His prasad as we rejoiced in celebrating the birth of the God-Man.

I ENJOYED WRITING POEMS AND SONGS FOR BABA, and during the time between completing my work at St. Anne's and starting at Wadia College, I had time to do so, as my classes would not begin until June. This is one I wrote about Baba, Mehera and Mani:

The King, His Queen and the Princess

One night I saw a lovely dream,
 I am sure you would like to know.
 It is about my Heavenly King,
 For whose love all hearts do glow!

I saw my Lord and Master
Coming close by me,
I did not utter a sound,
For I wondered who He may be.

He wore a crown upon His head,
Which sparkled above His nut-brown hair,
He had the sweetest smile on His lips,
And He was young and fair.

He said, "I am Meher Baba,
The King of the earth and sky,"
Then He took me by the hand,
And I breathed a little sigh.

He led me into a celestial Palace,
Where dwelt His heavenly Queen.
I gazed at her with admiration
For such beauty I had never seen!

Beside her sat His sister
Who smiled with a twinkle in her eye,
She bade me to sit beside her,
And caressed me, though I felt a little shy.

He told me that He would take me one day
To dwell in His celestial Palace,
To live with Him forever,
In heavenly bliss and grace!

(20/5/48)

In sorting through papers from my days at Wadia College in Poona I also found the following verse:

I sank, sank low in the Maya around
And forgot the Master, to whom I was bound
He loved me still and guided me on,
though I tried to heed Him not thereon.

He came and His beloved face made me weep
For my love seemed so frail and His so deep;
I begged to be forgiven, as my heart just bled,
For Him, my Master, from whom I had fled.

Weak is the flesh, though the spirit is willing,
I am ready forever, to do Thy bidding;
O Baba, come now and dwell in my heart,
From there, dear Lord, Thou must never depart.

Let me not go astray, but keep me at bay,
At Thy feet, my heart and head shall I lay;
Be my Lord, my life, my light, my love,
And bless me, Baba dear, from Thy throne
above.

In a footnote to the verse I wrote, “Beloved Baba was angry with me, and I was deeply wounded, so I sat and wrote this poetry at night.” I have tried hard to recollect what instance of Maya could have made Baba angry with me, but I cannot remember it; it is wiped out. I find this strange, because I have an excellent memory. But Baba said that once a person repents from her heart, He dissolves those negative impressions completely, so I guess this is an example of His doing just that.

ON 1ST JUNE 1948, the day chosen by the women mandali for Adi's navjote, Baba greeted us under the tin shed, where we had gathered. Mummy brought out a tray containing Adi's sadra, the one which she had been sewing beside his bed to use for his last rites when we all thought he was dying. The sadra represents the armor to protect us from violating the three principles of Zoroaster: good thoughts, good words and good deeds. The tray also contained the kusti, to be tied over the sadra around the waist in three circles, again to represent the three principles which are followed throughout the life of a Zoroastrian, as we are bound by them from initiation day.

Adi, dressed in new clothing for his initiation into the life of a true Zoroastrian, was excited, proud and happy as Baba put the sadra on him and then, with His sacred hands, tied the kusti around his waist. It was wonderful to observe Baba as He carried out the ritual of the navjote. Perhaps He did it to make us realize the real meaning behind the ritual, which many people follow only mechanically. After embracing Adi, Baba performed the same ceremony for Meher Desai and Jangu Irani. Then, as He sat on His gadi, we sang the Bujaave Arti before the Highest of the High Priests. Beloved Baba looked like His own first Avataric form of Zoroaster, so handsome and divine, with His hair falling over His shoulders.

This was a great day for Adi as well as for our whole Baba family. After the ceremony we all gave presents to him, and his face lit up with joy, as he was the center of attention. I think the fact that Baba performed Adi's navjote greatly influenced my brother's lifelong practice of good thoughts, good words and good deeds, along with obedience, in his everyday life. Adi always tried to live up to Baba's words—"Let principle in work and honesty in life prevail"—to please his Lord Meher.

One day soon after the navjote, when Baba was going up the

Hill, He stopped and honored those living in the family quarters with a visit. He first went around and met all the residents, inquiring about their welfare. Beloved Baba then graced our little cottage with His Divine Presence. We were in bliss as, in His usual way, He lovingly embraced each of us. We children were all on vacation at that time, and He inquired in detail about the progress of Hilloo and Adi's studies. Mummy's heart was overflowing with love for Baba, her "first" love ever since she had joined the ashram, because, except for the navjote, she had not seen Him for such a long time. Mummy said, "We have been waiting for You, day after day, month after month, starving for just a glance of You."

Baba answered, "It is your good luck to wait for Me, and also it is a great penance. You are fortunate to wait like that for the Lord of the Universe."

Less than a year later, when Adi was staying with Mummy, Baba was on tour and on 22nd February was in Aurangabad. Adi was upset that during his vacation he would not see his Beloved Baba, but he went on his usual walk down the path to Lower Meherabad to greet Padri Kaka and look for someone to play with him. As he was walking past the Meherabad well, he suddenly saw Baba standing before the tomb of Gilori Shah Baba, a Muslim saint who is buried next to the path that now leads from the Pilgrim Centre to the path up the Hill. Adi knew that Baba was on tour, but he clearly saw Baba standing in His white sadra under the neem tree near the tomb. Feeling both joyful and frightened, Adi ran back to tell Mummy what had happened. Mummy told Adi that he was fortunate to have had Baba's darshan that day even though Baba was in Aurangabad. In this manner Baba sometimes gave darshan to His lovers even if He was thousands of miles away, just to satisfy their craving for Him.

RIGHT AFTER ADI'S NAVJOTE I had prepared to leave for Wadia College, as my studies began that June. Just a day before I was to go, I came down with a severe infection and high fever. The following morning we were to go first to see a film at Sarosh Talkies at 6:00 a.m., and then Adi Sr. was to take me to Poona to be admitted to the college. Although I was burning with fever, Mummy took me to 'Nagar and told me to lie down in Meher Nazar, Adi Sr.'s house. During the film when Baba asked Mummy where I was, she told Him what was wrong with me. I must confess that neither Mummy nor Father knew anything of either my conversation with Baba or the one with Mehera that had led to Baba's allowing me to go to college in Poona. After the film Baba came to see me at Adi's house, where I was lying in bed. He asked Mummy whether I should be sent to Poona with this illness. Mummy said that was up to Him. Whatever His will, she would obey Him. Baba asked Mummy three times, and she kept giving the same answer. Baba then decided that I should go to Poona with all my baggage and that Adi Sr. would take me as planned. Since I was feeling so weak and sick, He told me to lie down in the car. Baba embraced me lovingly and we left.

I was lying in the front seat with my head on Adi Uncle's knee when, after about fifteen minutes had passed, I asked him to stop the car. I got out and vomited beside the road. After that my fever came down and I started feeling better, so I sat up. When we reached Poona, Adi Uncle handed me over to Papa Jessawala, Eruch's father. Adi told him that I had not been too well since the day before, but that had no effect on Papaji. He took me shopping to buy items I needed in order to be a boarding student. We went up and down, into one shop after another, and then he took me to Wadia College, where I was admitted. I was provided with all

textbooks, notebooks and other necessities. In addition, Baba had very generously sanctioned Rs 50 pocket money per month for me. Late in September I received a copy of a letter that Baba had Eruch send to Papa regarding his responsibilities in my regard:

Pimpalgaon
24th Sept. 1949

My Dear Papa,

Baba wants you to note that as long as Najoo Kotwal remains in Poona for her college studies and as long as you remain in Poona, you should look after her needs by paying your usual visits to college and paying the usual college and messing fees.

You will receive from Ramjubhai Rs 150 per month as already arranged against expenses for Najoo Kotwal from 1st January 1950.

In case of Najoo Kotwal's illness you have to inform Savak Kotwal and try to do the needful by arranging with the college authorities. . . .

By Order of Baba
Yours lovingly,
Eruch

I was surprised to discover very soon that Papaji's idea of how much money I should have for daily expenses was far less than Baba had specified. Papaji was orthodox and old-fashioned, and he believed that if girls were given money, they would get spoiled and spend it on films and other unnecessary things. So instead of giving me an average of Rs 1 per day, he would give me

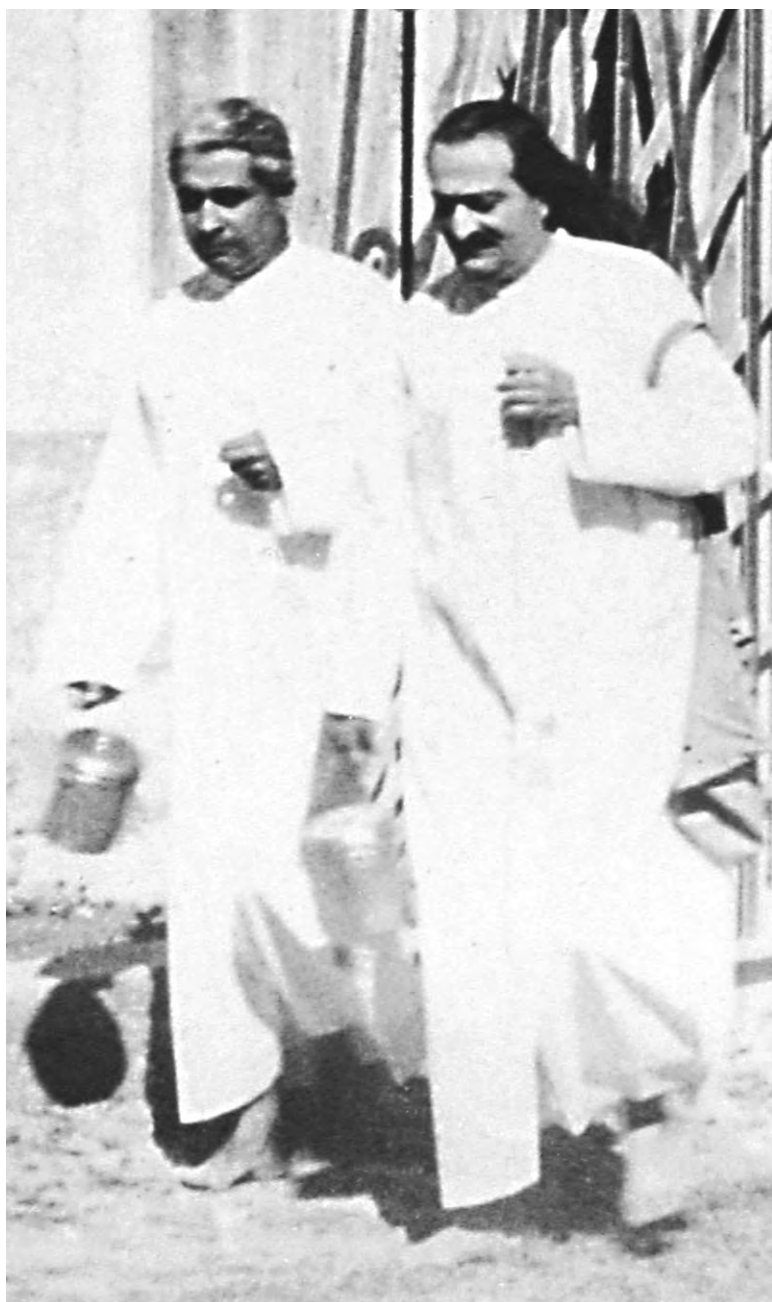
only ½ rupee or 8 annas per day, a very stingy amount. And my brother Adi, who was also in school in Poona, was always asking me for half a rupee to see a film or buy something to eat. I ended up with about four annas per day, as I would give the rest to Adi a couple of times a week. I wasn't happy about the way Papaji handled this matter, but now that I look back on his behavior, I think he was right to do as he did regarding my pocket money. If I had been given more money, I might have been distracted by wanting to spend it on entertainment and outings with friends, and my studies would have suffered.

It was very difficult for me at the time, though. One daughter of a Baba-lover knew about my predicament, and she taunted me in front of others, saying, "Here comes Najoo with only four annas, only enough for her cup of tea." I felt sad, lonely and ashamed because I could not entertain any friends, so I usually kept to myself, my books and my Baba. And later on I stopped going to the cafeteria completely and simply gave the money to Adi to enjoy. Whatever Papaji saved from my pocket money He gave back to Baba every year, saying, in front of me, "Baba, girls get spoiled if you give them more money to spend." On hearing this Baba would give a mischievous silent chuckle, that was all. I never complained to Baba about my predicament, considering it to be His will. I did have several friends who would take my notebooks to copy them, both boys and girls. But although they invited me for treats, I always refused because Baba did not like girls to mix with boys. I kept to myself, wanting to please Baba.

FROM 22ND JUNE 1949 Baba was in seclusion in the Blue Bus at Meherazad for forty long, lonely days—lonely for us, that is—during which we didn't have even a glimpse of Him. Then, on 1st August

Hilloo and I, who were on holidays, were asked to be in Meherazad with Mummy and Father by 7:00 a.m. All the men and women mandali had been observing silence for one month, and they were to break their silence by saying “Amen,” after a prayer was read when Baba stepped out of seclusion. It was specifically ordered that no one was to take tea or breakfast before arriving. When Baba came out of the Blue Bus, His great seclusion was over. It had prepared the way for His New Life, which was to begin from 16th October 1949. But we were not thinking about that as we gazed on Him. All we knew was how much we had longed to see His beautiful form. He embraced Hiloo and me so lovingly that for a moment we forgot He was God in human form, simply basking in our joy that He was our one and only Big Daddy, beautiful, radiant and perfect!

The New Life was, however, to bring changes for the Kotwals. We had lived in the family quarters for over six years, but from 16th October Baba ordered us to stay in Mandali Hall in Lower Meherabad for the duration of the New Life. We had to move all our belongings and furniture, and Mummy shared the kitchen with Padri Kaka, whose room was next to ours. Baba also informed Mummy that whenever Dr. Donkin came to Meherabad, she was to be in charge of his food. Mummy carried out Baba's orders religiously, taking great pains to cook three different items for each of Dr. Donkin's meals. But to Mummy's dismay, he would mix everything together in the plate before starting to eat. In those days he had a fiery temper, and I particularly remember one day when Mummy was five minutes late in sending his evening tea. When Hiloo and I delivered it to him, he took the mug, looked at his watch, and then flung the tea, mug and all, out the door. Frightened, we ran to tell Mummy what had happened. Mummy did not seem disturbed; she just started to make more



Baba and Adi K. Irani, New Life

PHOTOGRAPH BY DR. NATA

tea. And ten minutes later, when Dr. Donkin came to her, she calmly said, “Donkin, I have made your tea again, so please have it.” He started to sit, then gave a roaring laugh and hugged first Mummy and then Hilloo and me before drinking his tea and going back to his cottage. It must have been very difficult for an English gentleman who had lived near Buckingham Palace to come live in a little thatched hut with a tin roof in the heat of Meherabad and drink his tea out of an old enamel mug. Baba had kept him there during the New Life to work on his book *The Wayfarers* and to attend to the medical needs of the mandali and the masts, and sometimes he must have been very frustrated because we used to hear him kicking the doors and furniture. But Donkin chose the discomforts of the life he was leading over the luxury from which he had come just to stay near his Beloved Baba and serve Him. Despite Donkin’s temper, we found him very pleasant to talk to. Hilloo used to sit next to him when he had his meals and listen to all he said attentively, as he was very intelligent and interesting and often very amusing, laughing and talking as if nothing were bothering him.

Father lived with us at Mandali Hall during this time, though we saw little of him, as he left early in the morning and would not return until around 8:00 p.m., just in time to have his dinner, complete any office work he had brought home, and get news of Baba from the mandali before going to bed. In 1948 Baba had moved him from his job at the cinema and ordered him to take over the job of cashier for the Sarosh Motor Works in Ahmednagar, as Sarosh wanted someone from the Baba family to be in charge of the money. Sarosh provided Father with a car and paid for the petrol so he could commute between ’Nagar and Arangaon. Baba

clearly wanted Father to work for Sarosh, as He indicated in the following letter, dictated to Mani, sent in 1950:

Dear Savak,

Did I embrace you today? If I did it's all right. If I did not, then consider this note as a special embrace from Me to you. Stick to Sarosh and do not worry about anything. Show this note to Sarosh.

Baba

Father stayed in this position and lived with us until the end of September 1952.

While we were living in the cottage, Hiloo and I had grown fond of Masaji. Now, staying in Mandali Hall, we came to know the other men mandali much better. We developed closer attachments to Pendu Kaka and Padri Kaka, two of the “Pillars of Meherabad,” as well as Vishnu and Dr. Donkin. Although we still missed the women, having grown so close to all our aunties—especially Mehera and Mani—having our uncles and the masts close by, we were given a great deal of loving attention and understanding.

Lion-hearted Padri Kaka was in charge of all the Meherabad construction work, plumbing and engineering, and he was constantly tinkering with the machinery required in this work. But above all he was in charge of the two masts; he deeply respected and took excellent care of them. We also became very fond of the masts—Mohammed, or Tukya, as we called him, and Ali Shah, or Bapji—both of whom became our playmates and companions during the time we spent living in Mandali Hall. Even if we did not talk to them when they were busy, still we loved to

be with them, and they must have enjoyed us as well, as they never sent us away.

In the corner room of the old dharamshala, where Mohammed lived, was a library containing both nonfiction and fiction, from humorous detective novels to some of the English classics. Hilloo spent a great deal of time in the library, as she was fascinated with Mohammed and also loved to read. Mohammed would walk about the whole day picking up little stones from the ground, his back bent most of the time. Sometimes he would wander around the back of the dharamshala, digging out stones with his fingers. When Hilloo asked him what he was doing, he would say "*Deesh pahto*," meaning "looking for *deesh*." What he meant is still a mystery to us. Hilloo read nearly all the books in the library while we were living in Mandali Hall, as she was a fast reader and could finish most books in a couple of days. After breakfast she usually went to the library. Mohammed, a fiery man, often became angry when people approached him, and he would tell them to go away. Hilloo was one of the very few he welcomed with a sweet smile. If she stood at the door and asked his permission to read a book, he invited her in. After picking a book, she would sit on his stool and start reading while Mohammed went about digging out stones with his fingers, turning his head around at times to look at her. His eyes were like two burning coals, flashing at intervals. When Hilloo felt his eyes on her, she would look up from her book, smile, and return to her reading. She used to sit there for hours until Mummy called her for lunch. Mummy was amazed that Mohammed did not throw Hilloo out. Instead, when she arrived at his room in the mornings, he would sweetly wipe the stool with his kafni before telling her to sit down. Our parents were both happy that Hilloo spent so many hours

with Mohammed, who was very advanced spiritually, as they felt the contact would benefit her.

We also used to visit Bapji, who lived in the Rahuri Cabin at the back between Mandali Hall and the old dharamshala. He was very regal, with a noble bearing like that of a king. He smiled often but rarely spoke. Whenever Hilloo and I passed by, he would wave and call us in. One day when we entered the Rahuri Cabin, Bapji pointed to his leg. We were shocked to see a big bleeding ulcer on it, so we ran home to get our first-aid kit. After cleaning and dressing his wound, we bandaged it. Then we went to Dr. Donkin and asked him to look at Bapji's leg, which we thought was in a very bad way. Don came with us to Bapji's cabin and we carefully removed the bandages. Hilloo and I felt both foolish and astonished when we looked at his leg; nothing was wrong with it. Don just smiled at us and said, "I understand," cryptically and went away. Hilloo and I looked at each other, not knowing what to make of this. We were certain we hadn't imagined what we had seen. We told our parents about it and Father also smiled. He told us that Bapji wanted to give us a chance to serve him; therefore, we saw his ulcerated leg and cleaned, dressed and bandaged it, when really there was nothing wrong with it. We felt a lot better knowing this, and we continued to visit Bapji, who would sit quietly and smile benevolently at us.

One day Mohammed saw us going to visit Bapji; later, when Hilloo went to his room, Mohammed got very cross with her. He said, "*Ata tuja Bapji*," meaning "now only Bapji is yours." Hilla was extremely sad that he said this, and she explained that Bapji had called us to his cabin. She asked him how we could ignore this elderly saint and walk away from him, pleading with Mohammed to understand the situation she was in. He finally

forgave her and wiped his stool with his kafni and made Hilloo sit there. She always felt honored when, like a good friend, he performed this endearing action.

IN 1949, while I was still working on my inter-science, Hilloo graduated from the Convent of Jesus and Mary. Baba wanted her to become a nurse, but this time it was Mummy who protested. "It is better not to send her for nursing, Baba. Hilloo is so good-looking that it will cause complications, since students of all religions come to take medical courses." Mummy, of course, assumed that Hilloo would marry a Parsi, as it was most unusual in those days for people of different religions to marry, and she did not think it wise for Hilloo to meet men of other faiths.

Baba answered, "Do you know better or do I know better what is good for her?"

Mummy asked His forgiveness for her arguments and her short-sighted remarks. Since she had surrendered her three children to Baba, they were His. So Mummy said, "Yes, Baba, do as You think best."

Shortly thereafter, Hilloo began training as a pediatric nurse at Jerbai Wadia Hospital for women, a maternity hospital in Bombay. Sarosh Uncle drove her to Bombay and introduced her to his good friend Dr. Adenwala, who was in charge of the hospital. Being in a hospital was a big change for Hilloo, and she was not entirely prepared for what she would have to learn. The first time she saw a baby being born she fainted, and the nurses had to put her on a bed to revive her. When she came around, everyone was laughing at her, including the mother who had just given birth in the next bed. Needless to say, she was most embarrassed, and she soon got over her difficulties.

Several years later, perhaps to give her a chance to practice her skills, Baba asked Hilloo to spend the night in a hospital with Rano, who had just had surgery. By then Rano had mellowed and Hilloo, no longer the frightened child, had grown up and become quite fond of her. In the evening Hilloo attended to Rano, taking care of her, tucking her into bed, and seeing to it that she was comfortable. Hilloo's bed was a couple of feet away from Rano's. After both of them were settled and Hilloo had put out the light, she heard a rustling sound and sat up. Timidly she asked Rano about the sound. Rano promptly said, "Oh, Hilloo, go back to bed—it's only a ghost." Hilloo immediately jumped up and dragged her bed as close to Rano's as she could, shaking with fright. She lay back down and tried to go to sleep, but suddenly she heard a creak and a white figure appeared in the doorway. Hilloo screamed. The light came on and the night nurse, a nun, looked at her with amazement. She had simply come in to check on Rano, who was laughing. "Oh, Hilloo," she said, "I didn't mean to scare you when I said the rustling sound was a ghost. It must have been a mouse." The sister, who had jumped when Hilloo screamed, also laughed and went away shaking her head.

For a while all was quiet, but then the door suddenly opened again in a creepy way and a tall figure loomed in the doorway. Again Hilloo jumped up screaming, burying her face in the mosquito net draped over Rano's bed. And again the light came on. This time they saw Dr. Donkin, who had come for a visit. He certainly did not know what to make of it all, and he stared at Hilloo in disbelief before he finally started laughing. By then Hilloo was a wreck, and Rano gave her a glass of water and told her to put her pillow beside Rano's pillow and for both their sakes to try to get some sleep. The night passed without further incident, much to everyone's relief.

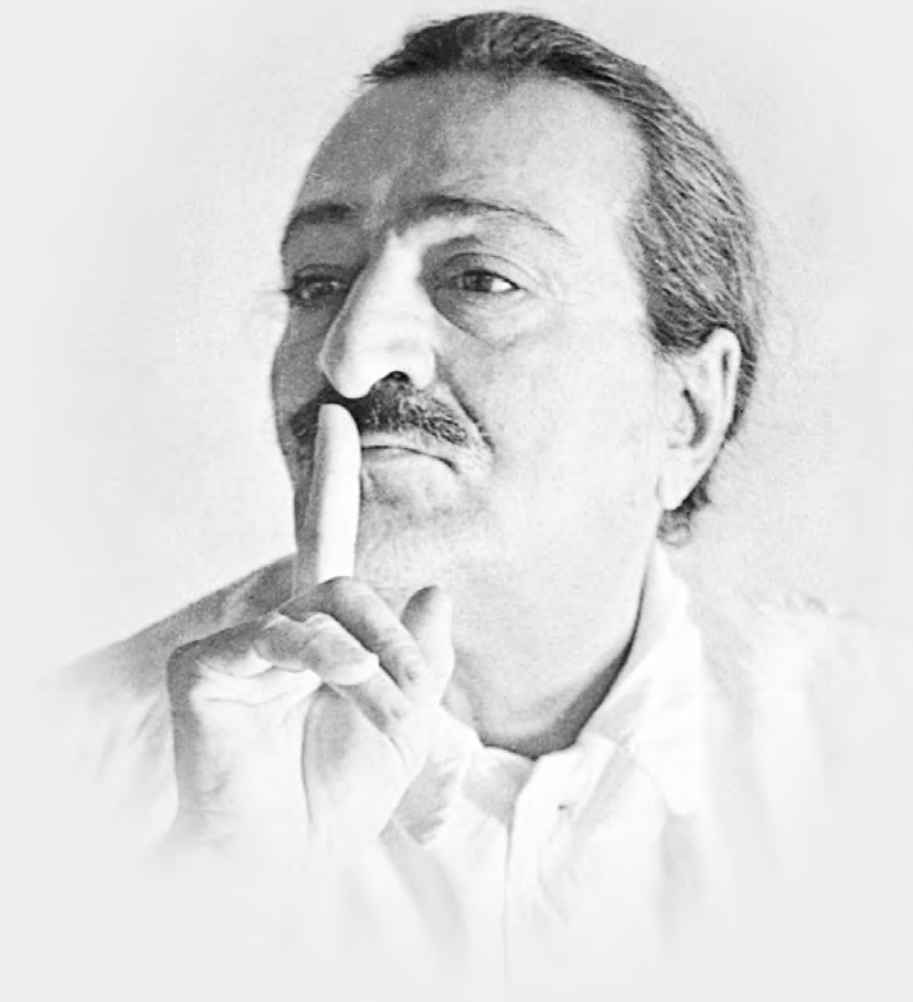
The next morning Baba came to visit and asked Rano if Hilloo was a good nurse and if she had spent a pleasant night. Rano laughingly described the whole incident, telling Baba how eventually she had to care for Hilloo. Baba, a mischievous look on His face, relieved Hilloo of her night duty. He knew, of course, that despite His efforts at Jubilee Hills to convince Hilloo not to be afraid of ghosts, she was still frightened when the lights were turned off at night. Rano, with great amusement, told this story to Baba-lovers for years afterwards, laughing about how she took care of Hilloo when Hilloo was supposed to be taking care of her.

Hilloo still wonders what the nurses and patients must have thought about the screams coming from Rano's room that night. But the incident did not interfere with her nursing career: six months after she began her training, she was accepted as a student nurse in general nursing training at King Edward Memorial Hospital, one of the largest hospitals in Bombay. The cream of Bombay society sent their sons and daughters to the medical college there, which was excellent. Here Hilloo proved to be very popular with doctors, nurses and patients alike. She was intelligent, friendly, gentle and soft-spoken with everyone, and she had tremendous empathy with her patients.

WHILE HILLOO WAS IN BOMBAY, I was finishing up my inter-science degree at Wadia College in Poona. Since I was bright and I had studied hard, I was certain I would score good marks and gain entrance into medical college. All the other students thought so too, for I used to tutor them. In May of 1950 the newspapers finally published the aggregate marks required for admission to medical college. I was stunned to discover that I had fallen short by

one tenth of a percent on my final exams. My dream of becoming a doctor was shattered.

I knew right away that this had happened because I had disobeyed Baba and persisted in fulfilling my own wishes—and had even enlisted the help of our innocent, sweet Mehera who loved me so much and whose pure heart never suspected that I was being crafty. And I had, while studying for my inter-science degree, wasted Baba's money for two years. Now I had to face the consequences of disobeying Baba, even though for two years I had thought I'd won that game. This experience was a particularly painful lesson in the importance of obedience. Once Baba gave an order, one had to carry it out, come what might, and try to honor His words, leaving the result to Him. Because I disobeyed His orders, I suffered. All of us blessed to be in the physical presence of our Lord Meher sometimes forgot that He was God in human form, as He appeared to be like us. And all of us no doubt fell many times, but His ever-helping hand raised us up and He forgave us.



Baba, Mahabeleshwar 1950

PHOTOGRAPH BY PADRI

ACCEPTING HIS WILL



My graduation from
Dehli University:
Baccalaureate in
Nursing (Honours),
1954

When I returned to Meherabad, defeated after receiving the results of my exams, I did not go to Mummy to open my heart. I never wanted her to be unhappy for my sake, so before her I put up a brave front. Instead I went to Pendu Kaka and cried and cried. He was so fatherly, trying to comfort me with hugs. Then he made me special hot fritters from potatoes and onions, because he knew

how much I liked them. He put them on a piece of newspaper and invited me to eat.

Instead of eating the fritters immediately, I told Pendu Kaka that I was going to take them to the railroad tracks, the place Hilloo and I most liked to sit and talk. (At that time there were hardly any trains going through, so it was a safe spot—not at all the way it is today.) I sat on the tracks and cried some more before eating the delicious fritters made by my favorite uncle. When I had finished, as I started to wipe my hands with the newspaper, an advertisement in the corner of the page caught my eye:

Applications are invited by Government of Bombay for a course in B.Sc. (Honours) Nursing at University of Delhi. . . . Those having First Class in Senior Cambridge and/or a high second class in interscience only can apply. The student will be given a free scholarship as per her merit, and she will be called for interview at Bombay. . . .

Baba was on tour at this time. Mehera and Mani were in Meherazad, and we were not allowed to contact them. I decided by myself that a degree course in nursing would be good, so without discussing the matter with anybody, I went back to Pendu Kaka and asked him for an inland postal letter form, telling him I wanted to write to a friend. He gave me one, and I returned to the railroad tracks and wrote a letter of application. Eagerly I awaited a reply, and seven days later a letter addressed to me came from the Government of Bombay, Nursing Department, informing me that I had been selected for the course without an interview in

Bombay, and that I was to proceed straight to the College of Nursing in New Delhi for my Baccalaureate Course. The letter gave pertinent dates and a list of items I would need.

Just at that time Baba returned from His tour. When I met Him, I happily told Him about having been accepted at Delhi University. Baba beamed and embraced me, then started making arrangements for everything I needed. Using the pocket money which Papa Jessawala had returned to Him during my time at Wadia College, Baba bought me a good trunk and a very fine West End Swiss medical watch costing Rs 250, which in 1950 was a lot of money. He lovingly put the watch on my wrist for the first time. I still have both gifts, and the watch continues to work well after more than fifty long years, a symbol of Baba's sweet love.

When I was ready to leave for Delhi in July, I went to Beloved Baba to tell him goodbye. In His infinite humor, He said, "I asked you to hold your left ear like this. (He demonstrated by holding His left ear with His right hand crossing over His chest.) "But you held it like this." (He put His right hand behind His neck, reaching for His left ear.) He then laughed, and I laughed too, though I regretted my folly and disobedience.

WHEN I STARTED MY STUDIES IN DELHI, Hiloo was already working at King Edward Memorial Hospital. Her patients—mostly poor people, as it was a free hospital—were very fond of her. Sarwar was at King Edward with Hiloo, and both of them became quite close to the Baba community in Bombay, visiting Arnavaz and her sisters Nergis and Roda on their days off. They also enjoyed the company of Dina Talati and her children. Everyone was kind and loving to the young nurses.

The one great fault Hilloo had as a nurse was that she became too emotionally involved with her patients (just as I did later with mine) and eventually, when she was put into the children's ward, she was so upset by seeing young ones suffer that she broke down and became ill. The doctor who treated her said she was too emotional to be a good nurse. Eventually she went on medical leave to stay with our parents in Meherabad—but not before a Resident Medical Officer at King Edward Memorial Nursing Home, Dr. Devraj Talwar, had fallen in love with her. His family had come from Burma, where they had been very wealthy. My sister has always thought that although Baba sent us for nursing because He considered it the noblest of professions, it was also a way for her to meet Devraj, whom she was destined to marry. In fact, Baba had sent a telegram addressed to Sarwar, Hiloo and me concerning His orders for the three of us before He went into the New Life:

Mahabaleshwar
5th October 1950

SARVAR-NAJU-HILLU

As I have always told you, you must live a pure life; and all previous instructions given by me on this subject in the Old Life, stand good for all time. The only exception is, that any time any of you three wish to marry, you have my whole-hearted permission to do so.

BABA

In those days there was so much orthodoxy in all the religions, Zoroastrian, Hindu, Muslim and Christian, that marrying

outside one's religion was considered almost a blasphemy. Devraj was not a Zoroastrian, but a Hindu. When Mummy came to know about Hilloo and Devraj's friendship, Baba was in the New Life and we were not allowed to correspond with Him. Mummy was initially so upset that she wrote Him anyway. Baba replied to Mummy in a telegram, telling her not to worry, that all would be well. Devraj visited Meherabad twice, once when we were living in Mandali Hall and again after we had returned to the cottage near Arangaon. On his first visit Dr. Donkin picked him up in Ahmednagar when he arrived, and they chatted happily about medicine on the way to Meherabad. Both Mummy and Daddy liked Devraj straightaway when they met him, and of course Hilloo was delighted. But that first visit marked the beginning of a long period of waiting for Hilloo and Devraj before a marriage was finally agreed on, as his parents were quite concerned about his marrying outside his religious community.

When Baba went to Delhi in 1950, Father, who knew that Devraj was there at the time, wrote to him and asked him to meet Baba. Devraj did so, and he was called in to see Baba after a long wait. Baba did not mention marriage, but spoke of other things. Then He put His hand on Devraj's head, we presume as a gesture of approval or blessing. Devraj must have felt something special, for he went to meet Baba again. This time Baba gave him a *laddoo*, an Indian sweet given on auspicious occasions, perhaps indicating that He accepted Devraj for His daughter Hilloo. Later on, back in Bombay, Devraj went again for Baba's darshan at Ashiana, Nariman and Arnavaz Dadachanji's home, where he had to stand in a long queue before entering the house. As he was leaving, Baba called him back and again put His hand on Devraj's head. When

Father wrote later to Beloved Baba in Mahabaleshwar, formally asking permission for Hilloo to marry Devraj, he received this response:

M'war
1st August 1951

Dear Savak,

- 1) Baba received your letter.
- 2) He had His ears pinched for having read your letter which was contrary to His New Life.
- 3) Baba has given freedom for the three girls to marry and therefore no need to ask His further permission.
- 4) The three girls can marry of their own choice and with their parents' permission if necessary; because as far as I understand God always approves of genuine love, without any obstacle of caste and creed.
- 5) Baba wants you to read the New Life Song seven times.
- 6) Baba forgives you and sends His love.

By order of Baba,
Eruch

ON 16TH OCTOBER 1950, Baba called a four-hour meeting of all His men disciples at Mahabaleshwar, beginning at 7:00 a.m. Father went with Baba from Meherabad to meet with men who came from all over India. Baba called each man to Him for a loving embrace.

The doors to the wine shop had opened, and every heart was overflowing with love and joy to behold Baba after such a long time, as nobody had been able to contact or see Him during the New Life. Dr. Donkin read out Baba's Sermon, and Baba distributed a copy to each of those present. He also accepted their monetary contributions for His work with masts and the poor, which was to start from 21st October 1950. To end the program He bathed the mast Ali Shah, with most of the lovers present witnessing. Baba embraced each of His lovers again before they left for their destinations, filled with divine nectar served by the Lord Himself.

Five days later Baba ordered Mummy to return to the cottage near the family quarters, where she was to live for nearly four more years, helping the villagers in Arangaon in a variety of ways. During the time of our stay in Mandali Hall, Padri Kaka had taught Mummy about homeopathic medicine, and she had begun to treat some of the villagers, particularly at times when Padri Kaka was away from Meherabad with Baba. From her monthly family maintenance amount, she kept aside enough to buy medicines for giving free treatment to those in need of it. She had, by that time, worn out most of her clothing, so she sometimes wore patched old pants and shirts of Father's, and the villagers called her Madaminbai, or Madam lady, a form of address usually used for foreigners. Because she wore pants and a shirt and for them she was a doctor, they also called her Doctorinebai or Madaminbai Doctor. It was funny hearing them refer to her in this way.

Her specialties were burns and scorpion bites, and sometimes people arrived in the middle of the night in bullock carts with their patients. Without hesitation, whatever the time, Mummy would treat them cheerfully. Thus she became a very

popular doctor, considered to have a healer's touch. To reward her, the villagers who were treated free would come with vegetables they had grown. But Mummy would accept them only if she were told how much they were worth, for she believed not in earning, but in service to the poor. She was fearless, staying in the cottage alone when we were at school and Father was away with Baba. In those days dacoits were common, but Beloved Baba's nazar was always on Mummy when she was alone.

The villagers spread the word about the doctor of Meher Baba's ashram, and soon people from surrounding areas began to come for treatment. As a loyal follower of Baba, Mummy always told them that they must first take Meher Baba's name and then take their medicine, and in this way Mummy helped to spread the name of her Beloved Baba. The more people came, the greater her joy, because she knew they would continue to spread Baba's name.

Another example of Mother's loving attitude toward the underprivileged is the help she gave to Raju, a boy from a very poor family whom she met after returning to the cottage. Raju worked as a cowherd, taking the cows wherever there was grass for them to eat, and he was paid a very small sum for this hard work in the blazing heat. He lived on one frugal meal a day. After his work he would often hover around our compound wall, and one day Mummy called him in and said, "Why do you not go to school?"

"Aunty, I have no money for books, pens or uniforms," he said, "but I would love to study."

Mummy went to Father and requested that he speak to Naosherwanji Sattha, Eruch's uncle. This gentleman was a philanthropist, and he ran a free school in Ahmednagar for poor children and orphans. He was a congressman and, above all, a

staunch follower of Meher Baba. When Father told Naosherwanji about Raju, he agreed to take the boy in the school as a boarder. Mummy then called Raju's parents, who were very pleased with this suggestion. Father, who was still driving daily to Sarosh Motor Works, took Raju with him one day and dropped him off at the school.

After six months Raju came back to Arangaon during his vacation. He was smartly dressed in his school uniform, and he came happily to meet Mummy. He sat on a chair and told her with excitement all about his life at school and how well he was studying. For the first time Mummy saw real joy on his face. After that time Raju came to see Mummy during every vacation. He completed his schooling and, because he was educated, he found a good job. He worked hard for many years supporting himself and his dependent parents. Mummy, who always followed Baba's example of helping the poor, believed that if every educated person would take an interest in one village child, a whole village would gradually be uplifted.

ON 1ST SEPTEMBER 1952, Father accompanied Baba to Saoner. They went from the railway station to Darshan Pavilion, where for the first time Bhau Kalchuri and his wife, Rama, came for darshan. Bhau came from a princely family, and he and Rama were cultured and soft-spoken. They fell in love with Beloved Baba at first sight. Bhauji's heart longed for Baba with such intensity that when Baba gave him a banana as prasad without looking at him, Bhauji became so distracted that he ate the entire banana, peel and all! He wanted to speak with Baba, but some of the mandali told him rather tersely that an interview with Baba was not possible. Father,

however, was more helpful, advising Bhauji to write Adi Sr. in Ahmednagar. Father remembered his own early yearning to be with Baba, so he fully understood the love overflowing in Bhauji's heart. He also knew that Baba would, on many occasions, arouse the love of His lover by ignoring him, thus increasing the craving of the lover for the Beloved.

Little did anyone realize that Bhauji, this gentle young man, would one day write the twenty-volume *Lord Meher*, the story of our Beloved Baba's life on earth, so that the song of His divine life might be sung in our hearts forever—or that he would one day serve as Chairman of the Avatar Meher Baba Perpetual Public Charitable Trust. Though there was a big difference in their ages, from the first day Father had a special corner in his heart for this young man, who became his closest friend. Our family remains very close to Bhauji to this day.

FROM 4TH NOVEMBER TO 9TH NOVEMBER of that year, more than three hundred men from all over India were invited by Baba to Meherabad to make plans for a mass darshan program, the individual gatherings to be held in the places where they lived. Father was called for this important meeting early, along with about fifty close devotees, who arrived on 1st November and stayed for fifteen days. Out of these men eleven, including Father, were chosen by Baba to repeat God's name on behalf of the Lord of the Universe, Meher Baba, from 2nd November until the morning of 14th November. The repetition was to take place in Baba's Jhopdi hut in Lower Meherabad, and it was to continue nonstop for a full twenty-four hours each day during the entire twelve days. My father was assigned to repeat “Ya Yezdan” from 1:00 a.m. until 3:00 a.m.

Baba then selected twenty-five men to go with Him for a two-month tour as part of His Fiery Free Life. Baba said, "Implicit obedience is what I expect and want," and He assigned duties. Sadashiv was to arrange their food and shelter, and Father was to be Sadashiv's assistant. Eight men, including Father, were to remain with Baba continuously until the end of April. On 14th November Baba went with Father from Meherazad to Meherabad to begin the journey. Those selected to accompany Baba were asked to proceed by state transport bus directly to Sakori. All instructions that were to be followed during this very important journey were given in meticulous detail.

When they reached Sakori, Baba and the group went to Upasani Maharaj's Samadhi, which Baba touched with his forehead. Baba then pointed to His own heart and said, "Maharaj is here, not there." Father found this a very touching remark for the Avatar to make about His own Guru. From Sakori, Baba and the group went on to Shirdi, where they bowed down to Sai Baba's marble tomb. They then visited Khandoba Temple, where Upasani Maharaj had done four years of severe penance, during which time the temple was filled with snakes and scorpions. Although Maharaj had sat there completely naked, the bites of the snakes and scorpions did not affect his body. He had started to fast for a full year, drinking only water, but he became a skeleton, and Sai Baba ordered him to break his fast by taking first coffee and then food.

From here they traveled to Poona. It was 2:00 a.m. when they arrived at Babajan's tomb, so it was specially opened for Baba and the mandali. Baba laid His head on the tomb and then instructed the mandali to do the same. The day following these

visits, Baba started His Fiery Free Life, going to Bombay, where He contacted a number of masts and then gave darshan to about five hundred people at Ashiana, Nariman and Arnavaz's home.

On 16th November Baba and the mandali went first to Kanpur by third-class coach on the train, then traversed sixty miles of rough roads to Hamirpur, where from 18th to 27th November Baba gave darshan to the masses. Pukarji told Father he saw Beloved Baba as Ram in the same pose at the exact spot where Baba was at one moment, and Pukarji was overjoyed at this sight. At Meherastana, Keshav Nigamji read “Meher Chalisa,” forty verses he had composed two years earlier describing the attributes of Baba, summarizing His life and singing His praises. This was the first opportunity he had to present it to his Lord. Baba liked “Meher Chalisa” very much, and He made Keshavji repeat it, saying, “These verses have deeply touched my heart.” Father always remembered the way the words played on his own heartstrings as Keshavji first presented them to Baba.

BEING A STUDENT IN DELHI presented me with new challenges. In the convent and also in the ashram, I had led a cloistered life, and I was always timid. Now, even though I was afraid to go cycling unaccompanied, I was required to go alone to visit my assigned families for public health work. Whenever I went on home visits, I always took Baba's name repeatedly en route. Another problem was that I was often scolded by both the teachers and the nuns at the hospital because if my patient was very ill or dying, I would sit nearby and, depending on the patient's religion, take the name of the appropriate *avatar*—Ram, Krishna, Jesus, etc. At the ashram I had heard people say that those who took the name of God while

dying would get liberation. So I was always missing tea or lunch in order to take God's name with my patients. My teachers, unhappy about my missing meals, were always admonishing me. "In nursing you must nurse, and not get involved with a patient's suffering or dying or taking their last breath," they would tell me. My views were different, so I did what I thought was right. In spite of all their scolding and advice, however, they well understood that I could not change my basic character.

The Baba family in Delhi helped greatly to make my stay there pleasant. Dhun and Keki Desai and their cousin Burjor Gai were particularly good to me, and on long weekends I used to stay with them in Old Delhi. And when Beloved Baba came to Delhi during a tour, He would stay at their place with two or three of the men mandali, sometimes including Pendu Kaka. A true Big Daddy, Baba would send for me, and Burjor would come to pick me up. The first time I saw Baba in Delhi, He asked me how I liked the course in nursing. I told Him I was trying to like it, but I had one handicap; as a student nurse I could not bear to see my patients suffering. I asked Him to give me the strength to face these situations. How fortunate I was that in spite of His enormous work, He had a little time to spare for me too. He was so compassionate, and I wonder how I could have deserved such love from Him all my life, as I have always felt unworthy of it. A letter I received in Eruch's handwriting from Mussoorie, when I was doing a rotation in a T.B. sanatorium in Kasauli, near Simla, shows the compassion Beloved Baba had for His children:

Happy Valley
Mussoorie (U.P.)
9th May 1953

My dear Najoo,

Shri Baba received your very loving letter along with your letter to Mehera and Mani.

In reply to yours Baba wants me to inform you that Baba, Mehera, Mani and all other ladies felt very happy to go through your letters.

As Mehera Mani are ordered not to write any letters Baba says that you should not feel anything if you do not receive any reply through their hand. Baba says that Mehera Mani send their fond love to you.

Baba also sends His love to you and wants you to make the best of your stay in Kasauli —especially during these summer days. Baba wants that you should eat well and take greater care of your health and take more rest when time permits. You should never worry for anything. Baba's nazar is on you. Baba wants you to only worry for His love and be worried to remember Him constantly. The rest leave it to Him being rest assured that the rest is only achieved by His grace and will.

Baba is pleased and satisfied with your progress in studies. Do your best and leave the result to Baba.

Now, Baba wants you to note that He has

ordered all to stop correspondence from 15th of May till end of September 1953 and as such Baba wants you to stop writing to Him.

Baba wants you to know and note that He is always with those who love Him and constantly remember Him. Distance and time never come in His way or in the way of those who love Him with a pure heart and selflessly.

Baba sends His Love and Blessings to you.

By order of Baba
Yours lovingly,
Eruch

P.S. Baba is pleased with you, and be happy in the knowledge that He loves you.

By order of Baba,
Eruch

My teachers may have scolded me, but it was clear that they appreciated the quality of my nursing care. I completed my university course and acquired the degree of Baccalaureate in Nursing (Honours), by Beloved Baba's grace, in 1954. Baba had wanted me to be a nurse, and at last I was. He had both satisfied my wish to have a university education and in His own manner taught me the importance of obeying Him. When I next saw Baba, I proudly took my degree to show Him. I remembered what He had told me just before I left for Delhi: "I asked you to hold your ear like this" (holding His left ear with his right hand crossing His

chest), “and you held it like this” (reaching for His ear from behind his neck). Now, laughing sweetly, He opened His arms and gave me His loving, forgiving embrace.

WHEN HILLOO RETURNED TO MEHERABAD on medical leave from King Edward Memorial Hospital, she again began spending time with the masts, particularly Mohammed. I, too, returned to Meherabad for a vacation after finishing my nursing degree in Delhi, so we had a chance to be together during the final part of the long wait for her marriage date to be fixed. It was around this time that she began to be called Hilla, the name Devraj called her by, though to the women mandali she would always be “little Hiloo.”

Mohammed often teased Hilla, whom he called Lilloobai, about marrying him instead of Dev, whose parents were still wishing he would not marry outside of his religion. Hilla sometimes asked Mohammed if she would ever marry. He always smiled sweetly but said nothing, for Baba was the decision maker. Needless to say, Hilla became restless with all the waiting, and twice she was admonished by Baba.

First she started to put on weight, and Baba noticed and told her to do exercises to slim down. She immediately began doing the exercises, not wanting to see a look of disapproval in His eyes. It was also during this time that Hilla's school friend Tehmi, Adi Sr.'s niece, and her husband were staying at the army camp in Ahmednagar, and Tehmi invited Hilla to her home for a few days. People in the army are quite social. There were parties and dances, and Hilla, being a young girl, enjoyed the time she stayed with her old friend. She was flattered by the attention she

received from the officers in the camp. Of course, news of her visit got to Baba, and when she returned to Meherabad, He asked her if she had been dancing. She confessed to Him that she had. He was not at all pleased, and Hilla felt miserable. Baba's mood soon changed, for He knew that it was just innocent fun, but Hilla never again accepted Tehmi's invitations. She describes her feelings about the incident:

Baba had the most beautiful eyes in the world. I could never gaze into them for more than a few seconds, for they flashed like lightning. One cannot look at the sun, can one? When Baba was pleased and happy, His eyes would twinkle and He had a mischievous sparkling look then, and the whole world looked beautiful and the sun shone on everyone. But if Beloved Baba was displeased, you would wish the ground would open up and swallow you, for the atmosphere would totally change and you felt dark clouds of thunder surround you, and the world seemed full of gloom and doom. You prayed for the sun to shine once more, and you instantly repented for your mistakes.

It turned out that Hilla's long wait to be married was nearly over. One day when she asked Mohammed about her marriage, he told her it would be during the monsoon. He was right. The date was soon fixed for 6th June 1954. Before the marriage took place, Father signed and sent a letter dictated by Baba and typed by Eruch to Devraj, showing clearly the extent that Baba cared for us

as our Big Daddy. It contains guidance from Lord Meher that would apply to all intercaste or interfaith marriages:

My Dear Son,

It is time you realize the seriousness of the step you are about to take. You ought to realize by this time that you as Devraj Talwar are to have a lifelong partner who will stay with you only for you as your legal wife whose social and cultural characteristics are bound to differ and the difference you are bound to reconcile to by your deep love for your life partner Hilla Kotwal.

This problem of caste and creed and distinction will ever remain a thorn in the happiness of the proposed married life till the views of the party concerned and till the views of the relatives concerned are improved, stabilized and based on the principle of broadmindedness. I am sure, if your love for Hilla is as genuine as is shown by you, you can easily overcome all shortcomings of your life partner and I am also certain that the sincerity of your love will be reciprocated by the intensity of Hilla's love for you. To preserve peace and harmony at home depends on mutual considerations without being influenced by those who surround you and your would-be wife. You must realize the sacrifice that my daughter Hilla makes at the altar of love for you. You must know that this sacrifice can never be motivated by any considerations other than genuine love of my daughter for you. Because I

know that when you two first met more intimately, there was neither the question of money, dowry, or of family interferences. You both met, you both loved, and you both decided without any other motives than to live happily together as man and wife. I wish the same understanding lasts forever in the case of you both even after your marriage; if not, do take it from me that your married life can never be happy with Hilla, and both you and Hilla will then have to lead a life of restraint.

Hilla's sensitive nature, where you are concerned, will never tolerate any remarks which would deem to hurt her dignity, culture and social status in society. I know my daughter very well. Though she may grace your house if and when she marries you, with hands bare, yet she will bring grace, dignity and culture with a heart full of love and honour which no amount of riches could ever buy. It will be your bounden duty to see that she is safeguarded with your own dignity and culture and grace. If you treat her and preserve her as a treasure, which you ought to do if she marries you, she in return will reciprocate this treatment with her refined attitude and behaviour full of respect for elders and love for the dear ones.

Hilla is tender in heart as a flower and fragrant in love as the fragrance of a flower. If you handle the flower delicately and lovingly, you will beautify your own home and spread fragrance. If not, the flower will perish through neglect or mishandling and then there are others

who are responsible to question you for such an attitude. Therefore, I again repeat that you must think twice before you decide for the marriage with Hilla in June 1954.

Devraj and Hilla made their decision to marry. As Hilla finally left Ahmednagar for Bombay to prepare for her wedding, her train passed by Meherabad, so Mummy, Father, Padri Kaka and various others stood beside the tracks to wave goodbye to her. And, wonder of wonders, she spotted Mohammed, who had also come to the front of the dharamshala to wave goodbye. He had never come to the front courtyard, so everyone must have been surprised. Hilla wept, feeling that she was saying goodbye to a dear friend. She had grown so close to him and had enjoyed his company every day while she was in Meherabad, and she knew she would not be seeing him for a long, long time.

The wedding took place on the appointed date and, true to Mohammed's prophecy, just as the cars carrying the wedding party were going to the Cricket Club of India for the ceremony, the monsoon broke. Hilla was delighted, certain that the heavens had opened to shower her and Devraj with Beloved Baba's blessings.



Adi, Nergiz, Dev Ray, Hilla, Savak, Najoo on Hilla's wedding day

Our whole family was present, as were Arnavaz and Nariman Dadachanji. Baba sent Vishnu Master, who signed the marriage contract as a witness, as His representative. He also sent a telegram saying, “My love blessings,” signed Meher Baba. After the wedding, Hilla and Devraj began their life together in Bombay.

MUMMY WAS LIVING HER LIFE AT THE COTTAGE as usual, continuing to give medical treatment to the villagers, when suddenly, just a month after Hilla's wedding, Baba gave an order that devastated her: on 4th July 1954, Baba instructed her to leave the cottage and Meherabad and return to Bombay. Mummy was to settle there and continue to look after us children. Mummy was aghast at Baba's order, but implicit obedience was all that He wanted. He was the Master, so how could she, the slave, question Him? This was a fact of life for all those who lived with Baba and loved Him. St. Tukaram once said, “The ways of the Master stand in contradiction to those of the world,” and here was the perfect example. But for Mummy there was no questioning why—her obligation was to follow Baba's orders, and she knew she had to walk this double-edged sword without hesitation. So silently, with tears running down her cheeks, she wound up her little home in the cottage, which she had set up with such ingenuity. Father was ordered to accompany Mummy to help her settle anywhere in Bombay that circumstances permitted. He went with her back to the city, taking what was left of her worldly possessions: one steel trunk, one small bedroll, one steel cot, her sewing machine, and less than Rs 100 in cash. All the rest of the items with which she had set up her pretty little home in the cottage at the outskirts of Meherabad—the *almirah* (cupboard), the cane sofa set, the draperies—were left behind for the next occupants. As a devoted slave she obeyed Baba. She wept as she waited with Father

at the railway platform in Ahmednagar for the train to Bombay, but she understood that Baba alone knows the past, the present and the future; we are just His puppets, dancing to His divine tune.

In 1940, when Mummy gave up her beautiful home with all its lovely furnishings, she had turned over all her worldly goods to Baba before going to Meherabad to live in the ashram. Now, fourteen years later, she had to start her life anew in the city she had long since left behind, where finding accommodations was nearly impossible—and she had no money even if something had been available. Father first approached two Zoroastrian Baba lovers who had large homes. He explained that the arrangements would be only temporary, until she found her own accommodations, but both families said they were unable to take her in.

Father then approached Beherammama and Dosimami Bharucha, his maternal uncle and aunt. Beherammama had cared for Father for a time after his mother died. The couple were staunch followers of a Muslim saint, Maulana Baba of Bandra. Beherammama worked at his job during the day and then did night duty for Maulana Baba for many years until he grew frail and incapacitated. At one time he had been a wealthy stevedore, but his partner had cheated him. Beherammama won the court case, but the partner declared himself insolvent, so Beherammama lost his prosperous business forever. He took a small job to maintain his own family and those of his two widowed sisters, totaling ten members. Yet when Father requested that they keep Mummy temporarily, Beherammama, Dosimami and their whole family welcomed her with open arms. Mummy had to make do with a spare bed in a common passage in their humble home, but their love and willingness to shelter her was compensation in itself for

the discomforts she had to face in a large joint family of ten people.

When Mummy had been with Beherammama and Dosimami for only two months, a letter came for her from Baba:

These are my last instructions to you. I have sent you to Bombay with a specific purpose of looking after your children, so do not go wandering and visiting people's homes . . . but continue to lead a simple life as before, and remember Me constantly. You have to look after the children and search for a house. These are my last orders to you which I send you lovingly.

From the day that letter arrived until the day when Mummy was immersed in Baba's Infinite Ocean, she followed His orders. She looked after us, His children, led a simple life, and remembered Baba constantly. She did not go to films or plays or outings, only for Baba's darshan, continuing to live a loving life of sacrifice for her children and, later, for her grandchildren and great-grandchildren as well.

The first time Meherjee Karkaria, a prosperous disciple of Baba's, came to meet Mummy at Beherammama and Dosimami's flat, he was greatly concerned about her living in such crowded conditions. When he asked her how much rent she could pay, Mummy replied, "Baba has said not more than forty rupees."

Meherjee was astonished. "Frankly," he said, "I tell you it is impossible to get a flat for this much rent, Nergiz."

Dosimami told Mummy not to be disheartened, so she went around inquiring. And in September she also received this telegram from Savak: "Baba writes from Poona will Nergiz have patience till October when all will be well." And eventually



Father and Mummy around the time she moved into her new flat in Bombay

Mummy came to know that a new building was being constructed at Mahim by a Zoroastrian philanthropist, especially for worthy Zoroastrians in financial distress and homeless. She approached Lady Jehangir, who was assigning the flats. With persistent follow-up visits and with Baba's sweet nazar on her, Mummy was finally assigned a small flat in Mahim for a rent of Rs 34 only, well within the budget Baba had given her.

In December of 1956 Mummy moved into this new mini-flat, and with her meager savings she bought minimal furniture. With her usual creative flair, she turned this little flat into a cozy, pretty home for us, and when we lived with her, we lived there very happily because Baba had turned the key for Mummy, who had obeyed Him implicitly.

AFTER MY POST-GRADUATION VACATION IN MEHERABAD, I had returned to Delhi for two more months to complete my Practical Experience at Delhi College before settling in Bombay—less than a month after Baba sent Mummy to live there. As Hilla was also living in Bombay, the three of us were at least in the same city if not the same living quarters. And Adi, who in June of that year had

been admitted to Wadia College in Poona, came to Bombay for holidays. Of the six of us who had arrived in Meherabad in 1940, only Father continued to live in Baba's ashram. Baba had told Mummy to look after us children, even though we were all now adults, and it was much easier for her to do so living in Bombay.

At the time I was given my scholarship by the Government of Bombay to study for my nursing degree in Delhi, I had signed a formal agreement that on completing the degree I would serve the Government of Bombay, wherever they posted me, for five years. In those days the salaries of Government Services nurses were very meager, much lower than those of other professions, even if one had a university degree. For a year I was posted at the lowest rung of my career as a staff nurse at J.J. Hospital. As soon as I received my appointment, I wrote to Baba, committing myself to nursing as my life's work.

J.J. Hospital
Nurses' Quarters
Byculla, Bombay
15th December 1955

Beloved Baba,

I am writing this letter to inform You that by Your grace I have been appointed as a “sister” from today. It is 5 o'clock. I have just received my letter of appointment and so I am writing to You first before letting anyone else know. The scale of pay is Rs 125 Basic and with allowances it comes up to about Rs 160.

Dear Baba, from today I promise You that I

will be a good nurse and spend my life in service. Help me to serve You well and obey You well and to lead a pure life. You know that as human beings we are prone to temptations and You are merciful, dear Baba, so help me to live well and in Your service. Forgive me all my shortcomings and lead me towards the shore, dear Lord, for You are my only guide and protector.

Once more I beseech You to help me to lead a life of service and purity in thought, word, and deed. You understand me dear Baba so I am opening my heart to You. I know how weak I am and how strong You are, so lead me on forever and let your constant nazar be on me.

My fond love and kisses to You.

Your loving child,

Najoo

P.S. I shall write to Daddy next.

Before long I was promoted to Night Supervisor at Maternity Hospital, then to Hospital Ward Sister-in-Charge for a short while, and for several months I was a clinical instructor on a surgical ward. My work was difficult, but I appreciated being closer to my family after four years in Delhi.

So many changes had occurred during those few months in 1954—my graduation, Hilla's marriage, Mummy's move to Bombay and Adi's beginning college. Our little Adi, who had been so frail as a child, was now a strong young man. During his years at Dastur School, he had been active in Boy Scouts and the National

Cadet Corps. Like Father, he was athletic, the inter-school champion in both hockey and volleyball for three consecutive years. A good boxer, he entered an inter-collegiate boxing tournament while at Wadia College. When the names of those participating in it were announced in the Poona newspaper, a Baba-lover in Poona saw the article and, noticing the opponent Adi would be facing—a seasoned boxer known for knocking people out in the first round and injuring them badly—sent a message to Baba through someone leaving for Meherabad. Immediately Baba sent orders to Adi to cancel his appearance in the tournament. Adi was embarrassed, as the notice had been published, but he knew he had to obey Baba's orders. I have no doubt that Baba saved Adi from severe brain damage, the kind of injury his opponent typically inflicted on others.

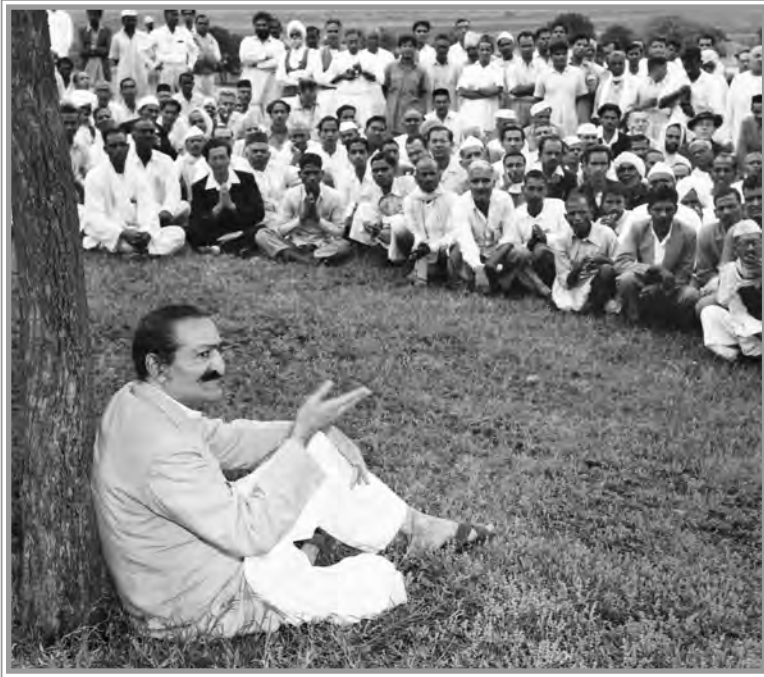
Beloved Baba came to Bombay from time to time and we were able to see Him. When Hilla first met Him after her wedding, more than a year had passed and she was pregnant. Baba seemed concerned about her health, but He told her not to worry, that He had His nazar on her. Mummy, Hilla and I all went to see Baba off at the railway station, and that memory of Him is one of Hilla's most vivid. As she describes it, "He was standing in the doorway of His compartment and again looked at me and told me not to worry and not to be afraid about having the baby, for His nazar was on me. To this day His image in the doorway of the train is in my mind, for He kept gesturing these words until I could see Him no more. His beautiful eyes had shown the love and concern of a mother, for He was both Mother and Father to us." On 7th August 1956, the son Mohammed had prophesied was born to Hilla and Devraj. They named him Deepak, meaning "the light," and he was, and still is, the light of joy to his parents.



Baba in Meherabad, 1955, during the time when Savak was doing night duty

PHOTOGRAPH BY BHAIYA PANDAY

NIGHT DUTY — FATHER'S IMPOSSIBLE TASK



Baba with many of
the men who came
for the Three Incredible
Weeks at Meherabad

PHOTOGRAPH BY BHAIYA PANDAY

During the years that I was beginning my nursing career, Hilla was starting her new life as a wife and mother, and Adi was studying at Wadia College, Father stayed with Baba in Meherabad, accompanying Him on tours. From 1953 until 1958, six strenuous years, Baba ordered him to do night duty. Every night Father would first put his head on Beloved Baba's lotus feet and say, "You are the Ocean of Mercy" three times. Then he would start his night

duty. The timing varied according to where they were staying. In Mahabaleshwar Father's shift was short, only five hours, from 9:00 p.m. until 2:00 a.m. In Satara it was usually seven hours, from 7:00 p.m. until 2:00 a.m., though sometimes Baba called him earlier and he would start at 3:00 p.m. and be on duty for eleven hours. At Guruprasad it was always eleven hours, 3:00 p.m. until 2:00 a.m., and at Meherazad, for two and a half continuous years, he was on duty for seven hours, 11:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. During Father's first years of night duty, he was always stationed just outside Baba's room.

Night duty was an impossible task made possible by Baba in His compassion, for He wanted to give His lovers the opportunity to serve Him. The smallest noise, such as swallowing, coughing or sneezing—or the slightest shift in the watchman's position—would disturb Baba. Still, performing this duty was considered a great privilege because it allowed for constant contact with the Divine Beloved, and only a select few were allowed to perform it. I think it must have been the blessings of many lifetimes that Baba bestowed upon Father when He allowed this priceless privilege for so many years. One can only imagine the benefit to an individual who spent so much time in close proximity to the Lord while He was doing His Universal work during the night. This privilege was also bestowed upon Bhauji, who, among the mandali performing this duty, did so for the most years, sometimes for twelve hours at a time. Baba once said to Bhauji, "Just remember that I can never sleep like an ordinary man. I am always awake. I am always conscious, doing My universal work." Father said that while doing night watch, he remembered Baba's words to Bhau all the time in order to give comfort to his Master.

Before He retired, Baba would ask Father to give Him the latest important news from the newspaper, anything out of the ordinary, whether local or worldwide. Father prepared for these sessions carefully. When he was off duty, he wrote down all items from the newspapers he thought to be worth reporting, especially those having to do with wars and natural calamities. After the news Father always placed a particular white handkerchief on Baba's bed and stood with his right foot on the handkerchief. The Lord of the Universe would then place His divine forehead one hundred times on the foot of the one He had created. Being the slave of his Master, Father never asked Baba why He did this. In the beginning he felt awkward, but as time went by, it became part of an unquestioned routine of obeying the Lord's wishes. Father left the following note, written in Gujarati, regarding that handkerchief, which is with me today. The English translation reads:

Carefully preserve this. I have kept this
handkerchief carefully.

Savak Kotwal

This is a particular handkerchief preserved by me. Before sleeping Shree Baba would make me place my right foot on His bed. In order that His sheet would not get soiled by my foot, I have kept this particular handkerchief which I placed on His bed. Baba Shreeji would place His forehead on my foot daily, one hundred times. I do not know to whom he is paying obeisance. Baba alone knows what Baba does. I do not know what spiritual working is involved in this, His divine act.

After taking care of anything further that Baba needed, Father would see that He was made comfortable. Baba would then cover Himself with a sheet from head to toe so that no one could see any part of His body. All the windows in Baba's room had to be completely closed, as well as the door, and the ceiling fan had to be off. The weather was often quite hot, even at night, and Father usually wore a thin muslin vest or sadra and shorts.

AN INCIDENT THAT SHOWS perhaps better than any other Father's absolute obedience to his Lord took place in February of 1954 in Kovvur, on the Godavri River. Baba, who had been in Mahabaleshwar, met Father and several other disciples in Poona, and they went to Kovvur together, where arrangements had been made for them to stay in three launches. Baba's launch, the best of the three, had electricity, and it was anchored in a position so there would be no noise from either Kovvur or the other two launches. All these facilities were provided by a man named Koduri Krishna Rao, who, despite the fact that he did not know Baba was the God-Man, had offered all this to make Baba, His mandali, and others accompanying them comfortable. Father was given the job of distributing the food.

The morning after they arrived, a small boat brought containers with tea and South Indian delicacies for breakfast. Father distributed the food to those in the two launches that were together, assuming that food had also been taken to Baba's launch. Everyone enjoyed a generous meal. After breakfast those two launches were taken to the place where Baba's launch was anchored. Baba, looking very disturbed, was walking on the beach with some of the mandali. Baba impatiently said, "It is getting

late. We haven't yet had our breakfast, and My lovers are waiting for Me."

Just then Koduri Krishna Rao arrived to make sure that Baba was pleased with the arrangements and the food supplied. Baba greeted him in a serious manner and gestured, "Why didn't you send breakfast for us early?"

Koduri Krishna Rao replied that he had. Baba then called Father. He asked, "Did you and those in the two launches have breakfast?"

Father replied, "Yes, Baba, we had our fill. The quantity was very generous."

Baba was stern. "You and all in the two launches had your share, but My launch was not provided with anything. Do you know this?"

Father, shocked and repentant, begged forgiveness of Baba, who then called Krishna Rao and explained what had happened. Then He said, "Will you obey me if I ask you to do something?"

Krishna Rao said, "Yes, Baba."

Baba gestured, "Get a strong rope and a big stone. Tie the rope around Savak's neck and throw him in the middle of this river." Then He walked away.

On seeing that Krishna Rao was hesitant to obey Baba, Father pleaded with him. "Hurry up and carry out His orders." Krishna Rao was astonished that this man was not worried about dying, but instead was coaxing him to obey Baba's words. He had never before come across a person willing to die just to carry out his Master's orders. This kind of obedience was unfathomable to him—though part of his hesitation was due to the fact that there were no large stones lying around.

Krishna Rao approached Baba trembling and expressed his inability to obey His order, as there were no stones large enough nearby—and also asked how he could possibly do what Baba had instructed him to do. Baba told him not to worry, then called Father and said He had forgiven him for his negligence. Krishna Rao, whose heart had been pierced with love for Baba when he saw that Father was willing to die for the mistake he had made, realized instantly that Baba was none other than God.

Years later Krishna Rao asked Baba for permission to have a bronze and stone statue of Him erected at Mehersthana, a Baba center that Krishna Rao had founded on the banks of the Godavri River. “A statue will serve as a medium to keep You in my heart,” he told Baba. “Besides, it is not for me alone. For others as well it will be a remembrance of You. From it we will get inspiration to love You more and more.”

Baba replied, “If you want to put up a statue with this thought in mind, I have no objection, but your hearts should find me in it. I will reside therein, but if your hearts are not eager to seek Me there, the statue will be merely a resemblance in stone or metal.”

IN SEPTEMBER OF 1954 a meeting of male Baba-lovers above the age of sixteen, later to be known as the Three Incredible Weeks, was held in Meherabad. Padri Kaka was given overall charge of the nine hundred Easterners who came from India and Pakistan, and Pendu Kaka took care of their accommodations in Lower Meherabad. The Western group of twenty men stayed at the Meher Retreat, with Sarosh and his wife, Villoo, in charge. Baba ordered Father to stay up on the Hill during the entire time of the gathering

to see to the Western lovers' comfort. Dr. Donkin was in attendance to cover their health needs. Villoo brought their food from her home, and it was Father's duty to serve it.

Baba's instructions to all the sahavasis, in order that they enjoy His divine company 100 percent, were as follows:

1. Take proper care of your health.
2. Think of Me only.
3. Feel at home.
4. Forget everything—family, home, jobs, status—and be with Me as much as possible.
5. Forget all difficulties and worries completely.
6. Don't think about your home when you are here.

From 9:00 a.m. to 9:30 a.m. from 18th to 25th September, the Westerners were asked to sit at a spot of their choice, close their eyes, and try to bring Baba's figure before their mind's eye. It was Father's duty to ensure that the men were not disturbed during this half-hour period.

On 12th September a mass darshan program took place at Wadia Park in Ahmednagar. The Westerners were taken in two station wagons to the park, where they joined about one hundred thousand people attending this public darshan. Baba was giving prasad with both hands. Sarosh read first "Meher Baba's Call," then a message explaining Baba's silence, and finally "How to Love God."

The program was in full swing, with thousands of devotees lined up to take Baba's darshan and thousands more seated under

the *shamiana*, beholding His radiant countenance and weeping unashamedly as their hearts overflowed with love for the God-Man. Then Eruch suddenly announced on the microphone, “Baba wants Savak Kotwal to come to the stage.” Hearing this, Father, who was standing in a remote corner drinking in the wine of His Beloved as he watched the program, rushed over to the stage. Baba ordered Father to dance and, without a second’s hesitation, he began dancing, oblivious of the thousands of Eastern and Western lovers who were watching him. Some of the pilgrims, at first visibly taken aback by such obedience, slowly appeared to begin to understand what it really means to obey a Master. Here Baba’s words “Obedience is greater than love” were played out in action by my father for the multitudes.

Baba passed out prasad until 6:00 p.m. By then the crowd had increased so much that it was becoming uncontrollable, so Baba touched the remaining prasad, offered His salutations to the public, and climbed up onto the roof of Adi Sr.’s Chevrolet. The police and the mandali formed a cordon around the car, and as Baba acknowledged the love of the people with folded hands, the car was slowly driven out of Wadia Park. This was the only mass darshan Baba ever gave in Ahmednagar. The Westerners were tremendously impressed by the expression of love and reverence for Baba shown by the thousands who attended this unforgettable spectacle.

Baba also led the Westerners on a tour of Meherabad Hill, showing them the Tomb and His tin cabin, narrating incidents as He walked with them. At Lower Meherabad He showed them the Jhopdi hut, the Table Cabin and the Dhuni pit. At Meherazad they saw the Blue Bus, the New Life Caravan, and the Manonash Cabin, the garden on the women’s side and Baba’s room upstairs. Then

Baba took them to Seclusion Hill. They also saw his patched *kamli* coat, and they were taken to Happy Valley. And on the last day, before everyone left, Baba had His Final Declaration read out in several languages. The tears flowed as the men departed—all except for Darwin Shaw and my father, both of whom were at first too overwhelmed to move even one step. Then each left in pensive silence, for as Kabir said, “Where is the need for words when love has intoxicated the heart?”

Baba said to His Western lovers, “I want you to go home as quickly and directly as possible, so that you can carry with you the love you have received to share with your family and friends.” All left on 30th September, as Baba wished, each one carrying His love home to the West, the amount depending on the size of the cup he had held before that ever-flowing fountain of divine love. Father later received a beautiful letter from Alexander Markey, one of the Westerners, who described his experience in this way: “My three unforgettable days at the Ashram made me wish I could have stayed with you the whole of the three weeks. You, the dear Saroshes [Sarosh and Villoo] and Don had transformed the Ashram into the most gracious abode in the whole of India. I shall forever remember it with thanksgiving.”

As soon as the Westerners had departed, Baba ordered the mandali to get everything in order so they could leave for Satara on 5th October. On 7th October, at 2:00 p.m., Baba came from Grafton Hall in Satara, where He was staying with the women, to see the men at Rosewood Cottage, a short distance away. He began spinning His cardboard alphabet board, as He used to do from time to time, saying that it would be best for the world if the three-fourths of the zero on the board, which had come loose but was



Baba on Meherabad Hill at the time He gave the Final Declaration. Savak is in background, September 1954



Baba with alphabet board just before He gave it up

PHOTOGRAPH BY POOPAL NARSOO

still attached, were separated from it. Baba twirled the board very fast and then suddenly threw it to Father. When He did so, three-fourths of the zero broke off in one piece. “Only God knows the value of this zero and that which it signifies,” He added, giving the broken piece to Father, saying, “Keep this most carefully until your last breath.” Then Baba handed the alphabet board to Eruch.

Later, at around 5:30, when Baba asked Father where the broken piece of the zero was, Father said he had put it in his trunk.

“Had I been in your place,” Baba said, “I would have cut a piece out of my flesh and kept the piece there! Do you really want it? That piece of the zero will create great havoc.”

Father, frightened, immediately returned the piece of the zero, and Baba gave it to Eruch, saying that it should be kept with the board.

At 6:00 Baba instructed the twenty mandali present to go and wash their hands. When they returned after washing, the doors and windows of Rosewood Cottage were shut, and guards were posted outside to prevent anyone from coming in and disturbing them. Baba said, “I have to discard the alphabet board today. But before doing so, I will pay obeisance to the five Sadgurus.”

At 6:30 p.m. the obeisance ceremony began. Baba had, the day before, dictated the prayer to be recited. Eruch read it out in English, and Bhau translated it into Hindi. A white sheet was spread on the floor and a stool placed on it. Baba instructed each of the twenty to come one by one and stand on the stool. He told the men, “When My forehead touches your feet, you utter, ‘O Sai Baba, Upasani Maharaj, Babajan, Tajuddin Baba, Narayan Maharaj! Baba is offering you His last obeisance.’” He told them to say the names in the exact order He had given.

After all had finished, Baba saluted Himself by bowing down to Himself, touching His hand to His forehead and then to His feet. Then Baba again bowed to each of the mandali, this time telling them to repeat “*Parabrahma, Paramatma, Ya Yezdan, Ahuramazda, Allah hu Akbar*” as He touched their feet. Baba then washed His hands and sprinkled water four times. There was, Father said, a divine glow on His face and a strange luster in His eyes. Baba stood with folded hands as the prayer was repeated in both Hindi and English.

Then, at 7:00 p.m. exactly, Baba placed the alphabet board with the broken zero on the stool before handing the board to Eruch, to be given to Padri for safekeeping in Meherabad, along with the white sheet used during the ceremony. Baba sat quietly for a few minutes, then gestured, “How happy I am!” He then listened to records of *bhajans* and qawwalis until 11:30 p.m.

At 11:45 the Parvardigar Prayer was said in both English and Hindi. The prayers were over at midnight, and all the mandali walked with Baba back to Grafton Hall. From that day on, Baba used different methods to convey His thoughts and instructions. At first He tied handkerchiefs around His hands so that He wouldn’t use them to gesture. For a while He had one of the mandali repeat the English alphabet and Baba would indicate the letter He wanted. He sometimes wrote in the air with His fingers. But none of these methods was very successful, and after a few months He began making signs with His fingers and thus started a new language composed of gestures.

BABA’S SIXTY-FIRST BIRTHDAY was celebrated privately at Satara on 11th February 1955, according to the Zoroastrian calendar, and

again on 25th February. During their stay in Satara the mandali were not allowed to leave Rosewood Cottage. Only Father and Bhau were permitted to go to the post office to collect or send mail, and Vishnu could shop for food. At one point Baba relaxed this order and said they could all go out for walks in the evening, but later even this privilege was canceled. During the next few months Father accompanied Baba on many short trips. In Mahabaleshwar they stayed in a place with only three beds: one for Baba, a second for Eruch, and the third to be shared by Bhauji and Father, as they shared night duty. Living with Baba involved constant adjustment to the environment in which one was placed, and all circumstances had to be accepted cheerfully.

Baba told Father to accompany Him to Bombay on 13th March, probably to find out how Mummy was doing with her life there. On 18th March, back in Satara, Baba began signing approximately five hundred title pages of *God Speaks*, the book written by God Himself, which was soon to be published in the United States. On Good Friday the mandali, both men and women, observed a partial fast. The next day Baba Himself prepared *dhansak*, rice and dal, and a vegetable. Father said it was the tastiest dhansak he had ever eaten in his life. On the following day Father accompanied Baba to Ganeshkhind in Poona, and a bhajan program was held on 20th March at the Poona Centre.

On 21st March Baba celebrated Jamshed-e-Navroz, a Zoroastrian New Year festival to commemorate the beginning of spring in Persia. On that day it is the custom to prepare a sweet, pink-colored drink called *falooda*, made with milk and rosewater. Baba came from Grafton Hall to Rosewood to have falooda with the mandali and here, observing Bhauji's obedience to Him, He

gave a beautiful discourse on that subject. Baba told the mandali, “Learn to live like a stone. People trample on it and, in the form of an idol, also worship it, but is the stone affected either way? Not in the least. Whether it is kicked, spat upon, or worshiped, it remains unaffected. All of you should consciously be like a stone. If you can become like a stone, you will attain the goal of life.” Such pearls Baba gave the mandali to instill in them the courage to obey Him.

While they were still in Satara, Eruch read out general orders for everyone for three months, from 1st May to 31st July 1955, and for the men mandali staying with Baba, specific duties were assigned for this period. Father was to do night duty for nine hours, from 8:30 p.m. to 5:30 a.m. Baba gave the men Rs 30 each per month with instructions that they were to arrange for their own food, although later Baidul took over the task of food preparation and was relieved of his duties as a watchman.

It was at this time that Baba also decided how the bodies of the mandali were to be disposed of after their deaths. Baba gave a list, naming each of the mandali by number, and said, “In case no particular desires are expressed by those concerned, then, circumstances permitting, the first preference for the disposal is as follows”:

- A) No. 1—through Tower of Silence, Ahmednagar
- B) Nos. 2–6—through cremation in Meherabad
- C) Nos. 7–14—through burial in Meherabad

Father’s number was 12, indicating that he was to be buried in Meherabad.

DURING THE LAST MONTHS OF 1955 Baba held a series of *sahavas* programs in Meherabad, each program addressing a specific language group: Gujarati, Telegu, Hindi, and Marathi.

Lovers came from all parts of India and from Pakistan as well, with around nine hundred people participating. Baba-lovers always looked forward to a *sahavas*, a stay with God, because that meant being physically very close to Baba. During such times He would embrace every person there, the embrace of God to man, allowing all to enjoy this intimacy. For those attending, the *sahavasis*, it was a wonderful time in Baba's company. But for Baba, constantly meeting people was quite exhausting. With the fountain of His love overflowing, Baba was taking upon Himself the *sanskaras* of all those who came into His proximity. Hence, such programs created great suffering for Him. Father was doing night duty at that time, and he told us that during the nights of the *Sahavas* Baba was always restless due to this intense suffering. Only those close to Him knew this. When He appeared before His lovers, He looked radiant, beautiful and jovial. This extended *sahavas* was a true example of God's love for humanity.

At one point during the Telegu *Sahavas* Baba introduced each of the *mandali* to the group. About Father, Baba said, "Savak Kotwal: since 1940 he and his family have dedicated themselves to Me. They all love Me. Savak obeys Me literally. For some time he has served as My night watchman."

Only a short time later Baba left for Satara from Meherabad with the women *mandali* and some of the men. Father and the remaining men *mandali* followed, leaving from Meherabad. That year Baba declared that from then on, His birthday would be celebrated only on 25th February, and not according to the

Zoroastrian calendar, in order not to confuse His lovers in the future. In Satara He made preparations for His next seclusion, assigning duties to the mandali. Father, as usual, did night duty until Baba left for His tour of Europe, America and Australia in July 1956. Upon arriving back in Bombay in August, Baba returned immediately to Satara to resume His seclusion work.

BECAUSE OF THE INJURIES Baba had sustained in two automobile accidents—the first near Prague, Oklahoma, in May of 1952 and the second near Satara in December of 1956—Baba began to suffer from severe spasms in His legs at night. After the second accident He kept His night watchman inside the room, near Him. Father would push a chair as close to Baba's bed as possible so that he could massage Baba's legs to improve the circulation and prevent cramping. He was not allowed to pause, even for a second, because if he did, Baba would clap to ask why he had stopped. It was heart-wrenching for the watchmen to see Baba suffering in this way, but Baba once said regarding suffering, "Nobody suffers in vain, for true freedom is spiritual freedom, and suffering is a ladder toward it. Man unknowingly suffers to attain God and God knowingly suffers for man." Baba made it clear to His followers that these two "accidents" had been maneuvered by Him in order to take on the suffering of the world.

The night watchmen had orders never to leave the room without Baba's permission. Even if he had to urinate, Father said he had to hold on until he noticed Baba making some movements from under His sheet. Only then would he ask for permission to leave the room. On one occasion when Baba was on tour and they were staying in a dak bungalow near a dense forest, Father needed

to empty his bladder, and he eagerly watched Baba's sheet. As soon as he saw Baba move, he asked permission to relieve himself. Baba delayed giving Father permission to leave the room, but Father did not question Him. Finally He told Father to go, but He said, "Be careful. Look around and observe well. Relieve yourself quickly and come back." Father had to obey, so he hurried from the room, and just before he entered it again, he saw in the distance the glistening eyes of a tiger between the trees. He was grateful that Baba had delayed his departure from the safety of the room until the tiger had moved some distance away.

Father frequently heard strange sounds coming from outside the room where Baba was sleeping—crying, wailing, screaming or moaning. At other times he would think he heard rocks rolling down a hill, furniture being moved, doors and windows rattling, or something falling and crashing. But come what might, Father was ordered never to open the door without Baba's permission. These instructions were to be obeyed at all cost. Later on, Father understood the reason. Whenever the God-Man was busy with His spiritual work, the spirits of those who had committed suicide would try to draw the attention of the merciful Lord, to touch or appeal to His human form in order to get bodies instead of wandering as spirits for years until their normal life-spans for their previous lives were over. However, if a human being was near the God-Man, or even outside His room, these spirits would not be free to approach Him. The night watchman had to stay awake at all times so that these spirits would not take advantage. Sometimes Baba would release spirits and give them bodies, telling His night watchman that He had done so. Father decided that one reason Baba made His watchmen press His legs continuously was to keep

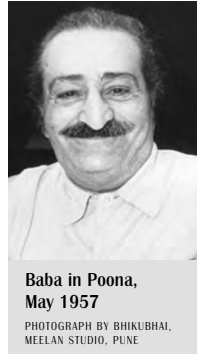
them from dozing, because if Father drifted off and stopped the pressing, Baba knew immediately. If Father, hearing Him snore, stopped even for a moment, Baba would clap to draw Father's attention. This is why He always had someone attending Him at night, even though He rarely ever slept for even a few moments, as He was always doing His universal work.

ON 25TH FEBRUARY 1957, Baba's sixty-third birthday was celebrated with much joy at different places. Two days earlier Baba had sent telegrams through the world saying, "Convey My love to all My lovers." Since Beloved Baba was born at 5:00 a.m., He was dressed before that time in new clothes, and at exactly 5:00 all the men and women, from their respective sides of Meherazad, heartily proclaimed God's name seven times. Father repeated the name "Yezdan," as usual, as that was his favorite name for God. (It was also the favorite of Sheriarji, the God-Man's father.) Baba then called the men mandali into His room. This year His Beloved Mehera had chosen a light blue coat for Him to wear, and He was sitting on the bed, resting against a back-rest, looking like an emperor with a garland around His neck. Father said Baba's face was as radiant as the rising sun. He graciously extended His hand for each of the men to kiss. Father later told us, "This was indeed a rare privilege and our good fortune, as our hearts fell at His feet."

On 4th March Baba took His first steps, gradually continuing with His recovery from the accident the previous December. Despite His obvious pain, He kept increasing His movements, even though the doctors had advised that He not hurry the process. Baba practiced walking, increasing the distance every day, and by even the fourth day His strides were longer and faster.

On 18th April Baba went to stay at Dadi Kerawala's cottage in Ganeshkhind, Poona with the women and four of the men mandali, Eruch, Dr. Donkin, Bhau and Father. One day when Baba was playing checkers with the men, an important government official came to meet Him. Baba, however, continued the game. The official looked confused, as he could see nothing around him indicating any kind of "spiritual behavior," and naturally he did not understand Baba's actions. Baba then remarked, "When I was Krishna, I played this game. Though to you I seem to be absorbed in the game, you do not know what work I am doing in this universe. My universal work continues every moment—while I eat, drink, sleep, play—constantly." The official received Baba's answer without question and continued to watch the game. Occasionally Baba reached out and patted him. Later the official revealed to the men present that with every pat Baba gave him, he received an answer to a question that had just arisen in his mind. He told them, "This has been the most memorable experience of my life."

Baba was looking for a spacious bungalow for His stay in Poona during that summer, and Gadekar, one of the Poona lovers, was able to procure Maharani Shantadevi's summer palace, Guruprasad. Gadekar had, six years earlier, arranged for Baba to use Guruprasad for a short time, but this stay, from 18th April to 1st June, was the first of a succession of summers during which the Maharani made the palace available to Him. During this period night duty was divided so that Bhau did his duty from 3:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. and Father from 11:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. One night Bhau made a slight noise and Baba was very cross with him. Baba then lovingly embraced him and caressed his face, saying, "Because I love you so much, I harass you so much. This harassment is my prasad for you."



Baba in Poona,
May 1957

PHOTOGRAPH BY BHIKUBHAI,
MEELAN STUDIO, PUNE

During their stay in Poona Father got a lesson in never amusing himself at the expense of others. Together, he and Aloba encouraged Pukar to eat too many mangoes, *puris* (small deep-fried chapattis) and other delicacies. Pukar developed terrible indigestion and was uneasy the entire night. When Baba came to know, He called Father and Aloba and scolded them for taking advantage of Pukar's weakness for good food. As a punishment Baba made them walk to the bus stand and back to help Pukar digest his dinner.

FATHER ACCOMPANIED BABA when He came to Bombay for medical treatment in October of 1957, but Baba sent him to stay with Mummy, as he was not well. On 20th December Baba came to Bombay again, this time bringing the women mandali with Him. Eruch, Baidul, Bhauji and Father came by another car. Baba and the women stayed at Ashiana with Arnavaz and Nariman, and the men stayed at another Baba-lover's home. On 22nd December a darshan program was held at Sundrabai Hall. The hall was packed with more than a thousand men and women who filed past Baba from separate lines, while the rest stood outside. The program ended with the Gujarati Arti and then the Hindi Arti, followed by heartfelt shouts of "Avatar Meher Baba ki Jai!" More than three thousand people had joyfully taken Baba's darshan. Baba and the mandali then returned to Meherazad on 26th December, after spending Christmas at Ashiana.

During this time Father's health was rapidly declining. He became increasingly shaky, weak and unsteady, and he found it more and more difficult to keep awake while on night duty. In order to do so, he had been taking stimulant tablets daily for

about a year and a half. Not sleeping took a heavy toll on his health. It wasn't just the night duty that made him so tired. During the day he had to read the newspapers and make notes to report to Baba at night. He also had to go to the post office to send and receive mail, and when Baba was in Meherazad, Father slept in the Blue Bus. It was extremely hot inside, with no fan or proper ventilation, and there was constant noise from the men mandali who were busy with their daily activities, conversing with one another. Some of the paid workers had very loud voices that irritated Father. And he had to disturb what little sleep he got under these conditions in order to eat lunch. By the end of 1957, he had become a bundle of nerves.

Still, he accompanied Baba the following summer to Mahabaleshwar in order to be away from the heat. Shapoor Hall, a villa on top of one of the highest hills, was rented for Baba and the women mandali. The men mandali who accompanied them were Eruch, Bhau and Father. While they were there, Baba would occasionally go for a drive with either the women or the men. He always took them separately. On 4th April Baba and the men visited Udtara, the site of His second accident. Kohiyar Satarawala was driving, and Eruch, Bhauji, Father and Baba's brother Jal were in the car. Baba instructed Kohiyar to stop a few feet before the spot, and then told everyone to get out of the car. Baba limped along and crossed the road to and fro three times, as if drawing an imaginary borderline, before returning to Mahabaleshwar.

The local residents of Mahabaleshwar approached Kohiyar to beseech Baba on their behalf to give them His darshan. So on the last day of His stay there, 29th April, Baba gave darshan in Shapoor Hall. About three hundred people attended, including the

Maharaja of Bhore and some Maharanis who were visiting Mahabaleshwar. On 30th April Baba left for Poona by car and stayed at Guruprasad for two weeks, where on 4th May He gave darshan on the verandah. At this time Maharani Shantadevi of Baroda, who owned Guruprasad, first had Baba's darshan. She was very impressed with Baba, and from that time on she showed much devotion to Him and was always ready to serve Him. During darshan programs she always sat at Baba's feet.

In May of 1958 Baba with some of His men mandali left for a visit to America and Australia for about a month. Father was sent to Bombay on 15th May, where he was to stay until Baba returned. Since he was to be in the city for almost a month, he carried his steel trunk and his bedding—his only possessions. When Baba returned in June, He stayed at Ashiana, and on 7th June He called Father to come there. He asked Father whether he was going to return to Meherazad to resume night duty. Father confessed that he was not in good health. He was frail and weak, and he no longer felt capable of performing his duties. He said, "If You, Baba, would allow me to continue to stay with my wife and children in Bombay, I will do so."

Beloved Baba, Father's Ocean of Mercy, was pleased with his truthful statement. In His compassion Baba said, "If anyone asks you why you continue to stay in Bombay, say, '*Babaae mane chootoe kidhoj, tethi hoon ahinya chevu.*'" ("Baba, my Master, has released me, and so I am here.") He further clarified, "Remember always, Savak, that you do not have the strength to stay away from Me unless I will it so." Baba gave Father a big smile and a warm embrace.

Father returned home with conflict in his heart and mind because of what he felt was his incapacity to serve his Master as Baba

willed him to serve. And when he explained to Mummy what had happened, she was aghast. She said, “You, who surrendered our all to find God, how can you stay away from Him, especially when you have found Baba to be the God-Man that He is?” Father suddenly remembered an agreement Baba had dictated to him and made him write, adding his signature to it, on 28th March 1954. Father did not understand the meaning of Baba’s words, but one never questioned Baba; that was the way of life of the mandali. So Father simply did as Baba told him. This is the agreement Father signed:

I hereby confirm—

If Najoo and Hilloo do not listen to me, if they
insult me, if they do not give me even one penny,
I will still be happy because they are managing
their own lives.

Savak D. Kotwal

28/3/54

Father showed Mummy a rough copy of what Baba had made him sign and told her that on that date Baba had carved out his destiny—to leave Meherabad—for as long as Father was living in Baba’s ashram, there was no question of his needing financial assistance from his children. Baba, Father believed, had then given him the bonus of allowing him to serve for four more years. It was what had to happen and what had to be faced and suffered in silence because it was the will of the God-Man. Mummy was deeply pained, but she understood, because Baba had always said, “Everything happens exactly according to My wish.” This event showed all of us once again, just as Baba’s sending Mummy to live in Bombay had,

that the world is indeed a stage, and we insignificant human beings are God's players, struggling to love and serve Him according to our capacities and His will.

From the time he returned to Bombay until his death, Father spoke very little about his life with His Beloved. I asked him once why I never saw him in any of the films of Baba that were taken in Poona or Meherazad, and he simply said that when the films were being made, he was trying to sleep. It was more important to him to do night duty for Baba to the best of his human capacity than stay awake to be in the films and displease his Master by dozing during the night. If any of the family asked Father to talk about his experiences with Baba, he would say, "If we cannot love Him as He wants us to love Him, it is best not to speak to the world about Him." I do not know whether the above words are Baba's or his own, but they certainly had to do with the pain Father experienced because of his inability to continue doing night duty. We could sense how deeply what he saw as his failure had pierced his heart, but he never expressed that pain to us because it was Baba's will to release him. Still, he felt himself unworthy of Baba's love because, unlike the other mandali, he could not serve Baba until the end of his worldly life. Although he did not talk of Baba with us, when Hilla asked Father to tape his stories, he agreed to do so.

Father constantly repeated "Yezdan" and remembered his Lord Meher. He remembered Baba the first thing in the morning and the last moment before going to sleep. He called out to Baba loudly, saying, "Baba Parvardigar" at 12:00 noon and at 5:00 p.m., wherever he happened to be at those times. Father told us Baba had once said, "If you remember Me these four times, I will be

always with you, and you will feel My company. Do it for just four seconds every day; then you will be in the world, yet Baba will be with you all the time.”

My father was an extremely fortunate man. Although he was not able to give us worldly comforts and prosperity in life, which meant many struggles for our family, what we received was worth far more than what we had to give up. We had the God-Man as our Big Daddy. What greater gift could a parent bestow upon his children than this? All the gold and diamonds in the world seem like trash when we think of having had Baba's divine and compassionate love to guide us throughout our lives.



Baba as He looked in 1961 when I was studying in America

PHOTOGRAPH BY BHIKUBHAI, MEELAN STUDIO, PUNE

MY BABA FAMILY IN THE WEST



On a visit to Brookgreen
Gardens in Myrtle Beach
with Darwin, Leatrice and
Jean Shaw, 1961

As difficult as it was for Father to return to Bombay, there were some wonderful moments, too. When he came to stay for the month while Baba was on tour in America and Australia, bringing his steel trunk with him, Mummy helped him unpack and put his clothing in the cupboard. When they opened the trunk they found, right on top, a beautiful black and white photo of Baba and

Mehera in a four by three-inch steel frame, Savak's God and Goddess looking young and gorgeous. To this day the one who put it there remains a mystery, but every time I take it out of my cupboard, I can smell roses. I have a feeling that this much sensitivity could have come only from a woman. So perhaps on behalf of Baba and Mehera, our sweet Mani placed the photo in Father's trunk—either that or, knowing how much the Kotwal family loved Baba and Mehera, Mani may have put it in on her own. It's even possible that Baba, on His return from the West, hinted to her that He was going to release Savak, and that was what led to this loving thought. We have never tried to solve the mystery. We placed the photograph in the bookcase, facing Father's bed.

As it turned out, May of 1958 was a month of many significant changes for the Kotwal family. Devraj, Hilla's husband, had left India a year earlier for higher studies in anesthesiology in London, and now that Deepak was nearly two, Hilla was anxious to join him there. She sent Baba a most loving letter before departing:

Bombay
14th May 1958

My very dearest Baba,

Believe me, I was so anxious to have Your darshan before I left for U.K. that I came away early from Delhi. But when I arrived here, You had left for Pimpalgaon on the very same day.

How unfortunate that my Deepak couldn't have his first darshan, and I was so terribly disappointed for myself too. Well anyway, "Thy will be done."



Deepak before
Hilloo left with
him to join Devraj
in England

My sonny is such a mischievous child that I am worried as to how I shall be able to manage him all alone on the ship, for he doesn't sit still for even a single minute.

I was so eager that he should meet You because I felt that maybe he would grow a little quiet after being in Your divine presence. Deepak and I are sending You a very tiny gift which I hope You will accept as a token of our love. How I wish I could offer You much more, but unfortunately nothing is in my hands. I feel so upset that You have done so much for me, and I can do nothing in return, but I know that a day will come when I can also do what I wish to.

I remember You always the first in the morning and last at night, and the whole day also whenever I get spare time, I whisper Your sweet name. I know that I shall always love You all my life and hope the last name I breathe will be Yours.

Please keep Your constant nazar on us,
Baba dear.

My love to dear Mehera and Mani and all.
My *namaskaras* and fondest love to You.

Your ever-loving child,
Hilla

P.S. Deepak sends his namaskaras and love and kisses too.

Soon after Hilla and Deepak had sailed for England, Father wrote her that when Baba heard about her intention to go to London with Deepak, He had looked quite worried. And although the family has lived since then in the United Kingdom, the English climate has never suited Hilla. Within two years of her arrival there she had developed asthma, which has grown progressively worse with age. She has also battled severe bronchitis and various allergies. Baba, all-knowing, saw what was going to happen. For years Hilla felt the pain of physical separation from Beloved Baba and from our family. It became more and more important to her that Deepak meet Baba, but many years would go by before she was able to return to India.

By the time Hilla left for England, I too had left Bombay, as the Government of Bombay had put my services on loan to the Government of Gujarat, with headquarters at Rajkot, where I was to stay for three years. Mummy had sweetly gone with me to Rajkot to help me get settled there. At that time Gujarat State was one of the most backward in terms of nursing, so I was posted there specifically to supervise and improve the nursing services in the hospitals as well as help to establish public health services. As I was still under a government bond because of my scholarship, I had no choice but to work there until the five years following my training were complete. The job was particularly demanding because I had to travel from place to place. The directors, however, were excellent and they appreciated my services, for which I thank Baba, though I still found nursing to be a difficult career.

For a while it had looked as though Mummy might once again be alone, her children scattered here and there, but just before Hilla left for London, Adi completed his B.Sc. degree in

Poona and came to Bombay to stay with Mummy. And then Father, though he didn't know he would be staying permanently, had arrived right after Hilla's departure, so Mummy's little flat was quite full. Adi had intended to serve in the military, as he had joined the National Cadet Corps and had been promoted to Squadron Leader, in charge of five other young men. But again our merciful Lord turned the key, and the Chief Officer who had appointed Adi was replaced. The new Chief Officer altered his predecessor's decisions, and the son of someone highly influential was given Adi's place. Adi, always sensitive to injustice, was extremely upset and he resigned from the National Cadet Corps. As it turned out, the squadron was assigned to a border post during the Indo-China war, where in 1962 all six men were killed in the fighting. I have always felt that Beloved Baba once again saved Adi for the sake of Mummy, who had served Him with such unflinching faith.

Since I was away in Rajkot, often traveling from village to village, it was some time before I learned that both Adi and Father were in Bombay. At first I was shocked to hear of Father's appeal to Baba to leave the ashram, but now I understand that this decision was finalized by Baba in March of 1954 and that Father's request was maneuvered by His divine wish and will. This incident also reminded me that when Father resigned his job in 1940 and Mummy sent the telegram to Baba, His response had been, "Do not resign if you have not." Baba must have wanted Father to complete the sanskaras of his family life then, before joining the ashram, but it was too late, for Father had resigned without allowing Baba to make the decision on his behalf.

Up until this time Baba had been sending a frugal amount for Mummy's maintenance and also for Adi's education. As soon as Adi



Adi, Squadron Leader
in National Cadet
Core, 1956

had finished college, however, Baba stopped sending money for his expenses and ordered me to begin sending from my meager salary the amount that He had been sending for Mummy's maintenance. Every month from that time on, as per Baba's instructions, I had sent a money order, still unaware that Adi and Father were both living with Mummy. There was literally not enough money for food, and Baba was at this time in strict seclusion and had given an order that no one was to correspond with Him.

Although the situation grew desperate, Father somehow felt this to be a final test that he and Mummy had to go through bravely and patiently, without a word to me or Hilla because of the agreement he had signed by Baba's order saying that even if we were not sending him money, he would be happy because we were managing our own expenses. I still cannot understand why Father interpreted the agreement to mean that he was not even to tell Hilla and me about their difficulties. Had we known the straits our parents were in, both of us would have willingly and lovingly sent whatever they needed. But somehow Father must have misunderstood Baba's words to mean that he was not even to ask us for financial assistance. Nor would our parents extend their empty hands to either of their families, as all their relatives would simply have said that Meher Baba had let Mummy and Father down. The last thing our parents wanted to hear was any criticism of Beloved Baba.

During this time Adi was looking hard for a job, but due to a lack of influential contacts, he was having difficulty finding one. Father was also looking, but at his age he was finding nothing. Mummy's maintenance amount simply would not stretch to cover the cost of rent, gas and electricity as well as food for three mouths.

During this time Mummy served Adi two simple meals each day, but she and Father ate only enough to survive. Because they ate at different times from Adi, even he was unaware of their sacrifice. This regimen continued for six months, during which our parents both grew very thin and weak, almost to the point of starvation. Father was 100 percent sure that Beloved Baba would help them out of this calamity, but Mummy, in desperation, came up with the idea of a suicide pact with Father. This part of the story is also puzzling to me because such an idea is altogether uncharacteristic of Mummy, who had so wholeheartedly given her life to Baba. It was not hers to take. I think the extreme hunger must have left her unable to think clearly. She told Father that because Baba was in strict seclusion and to write Him would mean disobedience, because Father could not ask me or Hilla for help, and because they could never ask their relatives, she saw only one solution. Assuring Father that if Adi were alone, he would be able to pay for his food and rent from the amount I was sending until he found a job, she suggested one Sunday that Father go with her at dawn to Juhu Beach. He could take her out into the deep part of the ocean and they could drown themselves. Since he was a good swimmer, everyone, even Adi, Hilla and I, would think he had drowned trying to save her.

Just to pacify her and keep her from further agitation, Father acted as though he agreed with her, and she fixed the day for the following Thursday. Father, however, was absolutely certain that Beloved Baba, the all-knowing, would never let them carry out this plan. He remembered Baba's words to Rano during the New Life, when Rano could not bear her separation from Baba: "Treat your condition like a lifebuoy and stick to it and I will not let you sink."

He also remembered what Baba told Chhagan when he was going to commit suicide: “What right have you to take your life? Have you not surrendered it to Me?” But in spite of Father’s repeatedly telling her about Rano and Chaggan, Mummy was persistent. She did not want to see her only son suffer for their sake. So Father, pretending to go along with her, continued praying every waking moment and even into the night for Baba to intervene.

And Father’s complete faith in his Master was heard in the form of his heartfelt prayers to Baba to bring about a solution to their problems. Within three days a letter came from Adi Sr. asking about their welfare. Father was most relieved, as his prayers had been heard. Mummy, certain that Adi Sr. had written the letter at Baba’s order, filled two complete pages telling all that they were going through but had not been able to convey to Baba due to His seclusion. After giving all the details of their financial crisis, she then mentioned the suicide pact which she had planned in desperation. She said she was weeping as she wrote, and she asked, “Why should the children suffer because their Father wanted to seek God?”

By return post a telegraphic money order arrived, which must have been sent under instructions from Beloved Baba, as it brought with it Baba’s blessings for good luck. By November Adi had become a sales representative for Hindustan Lever, a job that took him all over Gujarat State, and later Father even found work. Our parents, slaves of the God-Man, never revealed anything of this incident to Adi, Hilla or me. It was only late in Mummy’s life, after a letter came from Bal Natu asking me to write about the suicide pact, that I found out about it. Hilla and I knew nothing, so we asked Mummy what Bal meant, and only then did she tell us, leaving both of us in

tears. We have always admired our parents for so fully obeying Baba, who said, “Obedience is greater than love,” for they did obey Him to the best of their understanding and ability.

In the early years, when talking about Baba, Mummy would often say, “The Lord, like a true blacksmith, tests the mettle of His lovers to make sure they are well molded. Baba has treated His lovers so they felt they were drowning, but when the water reached their noses, He pulled them up by their hair in the nick of time.” This is certainly what had happened to Mummy and Father. No doubt, Mummy faltered, but she never mentioned her suicide plan to anyone except Adi Sr. Baba says, “It is out of My love that I break up family happiness, to draw My lovers to Me. It will be Baba’s real miracle if I deprive you of everything and still you go on loving Me.”

DURING THE ENTIRE TIME I was in Gujarat, I worked hard, trying to improve the quality of the nursing services offered there, despite my salary having been cut by Rs 40 a month as per Gujarat State rules. After I first arrived, I had written a letter spilling out all my frustration to Baba. Mani responded, “Your letter was read to Baba—He wants you NOT to feel despondent but to have more patience. . . .” Included was a sweet birthday message. Embarrassed, I wrote back an apology:

My Beloved Baba,

I hope You will forgive me for the horrible tone in which I wrote my last letter. I ask for Your forgiveness, Baba dear, for being so crude in spite of all my education. I didn’t even have the

decency to ask after Your health; instead I poured out all my woes. It was very sweet of You not to have noticed that. . . .

Anyway, Baba dear, do not worry because I am not going to worry much, only I will keep courage with the thought that according to Your words all happens for the best, and with Your blessings to go along with me, I need nothing else. . . .

Eruch replied with the following message:

. . . Baba wants you NOT to feel despondent. If you were to feel 100% convinced that Baba is God and that without His wish not a leaf moves, worries have no place. You love Baba and you would always want to seek His wish. Isn't it so, Najoo? Then whatever happens is as per His wish. Thus, you, who desire to uphold His wish, have NO right to feel worried and get despondent!!

Baba says that the miseries of the world frown at you . . . because you do not want to lose your grip over them. These miseries are the outcome of the NOTHING and, as such, are nothing whatever. Yet they frown in your face just because you want them and want them more while you are bent upon digging out happiness buried in them. Real joy is had when one crosses the hurdles of both misery and happiness. This can be done through intense love for God.

Now that God has deemed fit to be with you in human form, you should be aware of your blessedness; and this awareness—if it is distinct—is enough to drown all your miseries and consequent despondency.

Baba wants you to be brave in His Love; and love your Beloved Baba the more for giving you all the unique opportunity of His blessed contacts—time and again.

Baba sends His LOVE to you. All the girls send warmth of their love and fond remembrances. Baba wants you to take better care of your health and face all situations with the strength of one who has the backbone of the Beloved's LOVE. . . .

I was sustained during those three years by the few occasions when I was able to be with Baba. One incident was particularly moving for me. It was a day of celebration in Meherazad. I no longer remember the specific occasion, but Beloved Baba was still suffering from the injuries He had received in His second accident. He was to be taken from His room to Mandali Hall, and I was one of those chosen by Mani to carry Him in the chair. Baba was first shifted from the chair in His room to the carrying chair with the four handles, which is still in Mandali Hall today. Four of us women took hold of the handles. I had the front handle to the right of Baba. In my heart I was quite nervous because I was not very strong, and the wooden chair, even without the weight of a passenger, is quite heavy. Wondering if I could carry Him safely, I picked up courage and, taking His name, I, along with the three others,

lifted Him and carried Him across the garden and into Mandali Hall. Once we arrived, I was stunned by the experience, as the chair had not felt heavy, nor had I felt Baba's weight. It was as though we had been carrying a child! I realized then that in His compassion Baba had made the chair and His own divine body light so that I and the others, in great excitement, had been able to carry Him easily and safely to His destination. My conviction that this was a miracle performed to give us this precious opportunity was reinforced on a recent visit to Meherazad, when I tried to lift just one handle and found the empty chair to be terribly heavy.

Another visit I will always remember came during a one-month vacation I had in 1959. When Baba asked me why I was looking so thin and worn out, I told Him, "Baba, I am not fit to be a nurse. I have become a nurse only to fulfill Your order." I then told Him how at the hospital I had cried with my patients and refused to go for meals or breaks if someone was dying. In my public health work I could not bear to see the poverty of the villagers I worked with, and I would weep with them. I said, "Baba, please make me hard."

Baba turned to Eruch and said, "Eruch, now tell me, what shall we do with her, since she says she is not fit to be a nurse? Shall we make her great?"

Eruch said, "Yes, Baba, let us make her great." Baba, Eruch and I all had a good laugh. I returned to my post in Gujarat without another thought about what Baba had asked Eruch, until after the Director of Nursing Services for the Government of India, Miss T. K. Adranwalla, had been to Gujarat for a visit a few weeks later.

I was asked to show Miss Adranwalla the improvements made in the hospitals and in the public health nursing services

throughout Gujarat, so I toured with her extensively, taking her around to all the hospitals and several villages. She was very much impressed with the work I had done, and when she returned to Delhi, she posted to me a form for a scholarship from the Government of India for a Master's Program in Public Health in the United States. I started to fill out the required form, and only at that time did I remember my conversation with Baba and Eruch. I had mentioned in a letter to Mehera and Mani dated 28th April 1958, wishing I could get a scholarship to go for my master's degree in Canada or the U.S. I had added, "I seem to be too ambitious, is it not so? Well, anyway, life progresses fast, so we must progress with it, you know." At the same time, I had come to view my job in a much different light: "You will not believe, but I find this work of mine terribly interesting now. It is simply wonderful, because there was once a time when I hated it all. How one can grow to like something which they did not like before is an astonishing fact. . . ." In the same letter I complained playfully about not hearing from them often enough, and a month later I received a delightful, chatty letter from Mani, a surprise, since she usually didn't attend to the Indian correspondence, but only the Western. She described how radiant Baba had looked when He returned from His trip to the West, how she, Mehera and Goher spent their time while Baba was away in catching up with sewing, and how very hot the summer had been:

. . . This year with the delayed monsoon you can imagine what chance poor Nagar's had yet for any. The relentless clouds float by with no thought for the miles of bare fields, and deaf to the *koyal's* [rainbird's] call. . . .When it's hot I

envy Peter [Baba's cocker spaniel], who jumps into the duck's pond as often as he pleases—but I am not pleased, as it means rubbing him dry before he has a mud bath on top; but I can't help laughing when he emerges from the pond every time, looking much less handsome but oh much more happy. . . .

And remember, Najoo, don't ever feel that by your going to that forsaken place anything has been wasted; even just the experience you have gained will be worth it. And remember that we cannot see further than our noses, but He, HE sees far out into infinity and beyond. . . .

AFTER I HAD SENT OFF MY APPLICATION for a scholarship to study in the United States, I had another opportunity to be with Baba. I told Him that I had applied, but I was also due for a promotion at work, so I asked Him what I should do. He said, "Do under the circumstances what you think is best for your future." When He asked me which university I wished to attend, I said, "Baba, any university as long as I am close to Kitty and Elizabeth." After a few days I received a reply to my application. I was the only nurse in India that year to be offered a scholarship for a Master's in Public Health in the United States. While I was waiting to hear which school I would be attending, I received a telegram from Mehera and Mani saying, "Baba sends love blessings." Then a letter arrived from Mani assuring me that Baba said no matter what the Government told me, I would be returning to Maharashtra when I had completed my degree. In another letter, dated 24th July 1960, Mani speculated about where I might be sent, wanting to hear as

soon as I knew so she could contact people in the U.S. about my coming there. She had written to Kitty about my scholarship, but as Mani said, “Myrtle Beach is rather quite out of the way and I don’t suppose you will be going there.”

Finally, only two weeks before I was to depart, I was informed that I would be a student in what was then considered the best program in Public Health, at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, quite near the Center in Myrtle Beach! Beloved Baba, in His love and compassion, had turned the key to “make me great.”

I wrote immediately to Baba the details of my itinerary. I would leave from Delhi and arrive in Washington, D.C., for a week of orientation for foreign students before departing again for Chapel Hill. A very loving letter had come earlier from Mani with instructions that I could accept hospitality and entertainment, food and parties from Baba’s lovers in the U.S., but I was not to accept any gifts of cash or other items except for those to be used for educational purposes. Then, just a few days before my departure, I received another letter from her, dated 5th August:

Dear Najoo,

We gather from your letter of 1st that you are leaving for U.S. in a few days! These people seem like Bette Davis’s song “Either too slow or too fast. . . .” We have noted the itinerary and am sure by Baba’s dear grace you’ve got the passport by now, or soon will have. I know you’re now in touch with Kitty (she also mentioned about you in her recent letter to me), and everything will work out fine; besides, the Americans are on the

whole a heartwarming friendly people, so you'll never feel a stranger there at any time. . . .

Am addressing this to Bombay, as I don't know what exact date you are leaving for Delhi (on second thoughts, I haven't got your Delhi address anyway). How's Mummy, give her much love and tell her from this eternal teaser that now she is "mother of two daughters in the West" [written in Gujarati], having one daughter in England and one in U.S.A. Tell her not to worry about you, your Big Daddy will take care of everything. Give our fond regards to your smaller daddy too, and to Adi when you write.

And here's a special slice of love to you in proportion to your diet and present weight, it's quite a big slice nevertheless, being from both Mehera and myself,

Mani

Mani sent one other letter to me in Bombay that missed me, so Mummy forwarded it to me in Chapel Hill. It contained addresses of Baba-lovers in the U.S.

ON 15TH AUGUST 1960, I left by TWA on a 707 jet as a first-class passenger. What royal treatment! But was I not the daughter of the Lord of the Universe? When I landed in Washington, D.C., I got down from the plane and touched the earth of the United States for the first time. I said, "Beloved Baba, be with me always!" I was nervous and worried about what my life would be like, living alone

with no Baba, Mehera, Mani nearby and no Mummy to run to. I had been advised to wear a sari, so I had written to Mani that for the first time I would again be wearing a sari which I had worn when I embraced Baba.

As I was walking toward the terminal, the door opened automatically, and I was quite amused. I walked a few steps further and saw a tall, fair, handsome middle-aged gentleman looking around. He approached me and asked, “Are you Najoo?” I told him I was, and he said, “Jai Baba!” Spontaneously I went into his outstretched arms and embraced him as if I had just found a long-lost brother. It was such a lovely welcome. As a rule I am rather shy, calm and composed, but hearing “Jai Baba” made me feel that I was home, in the West this time, but here was someone to care for me because he also loved Baba. I cannot adequately express the feeling I had, except to say that I was very happy.

Before the gentleman could even tell me who he was, a university representative came up and asked me if I was Najoo. He told me they had arranged for accommodations for the foreign students during the week we would be in Washington, D.C. The gentle Baba-lover simply said that I would be staying with him and his wife, and he asked for the address and the time I was to report for my orientation. He then told me his name was Ned Foote, his wife’s name was Dorothea, and they were Sufis. I had no hesitation at all in going with him. He brought his car and I settled in it feeling like Alice in Wonderland. He pressed one button and the door locked. He pressed another and the window went up. And then we reached his home. What a mansion that was, a beautiful two-story with many rooms. On one side was a lovely hillock which hid the house from the outside road. There was even a



Ned Foote, Andy Muir, me, Peggy Muir and unknown woman

swimming pool with beautiful clear blue water. Later I found out that Ned owned race horses.

Dorothea came to the door to welcome me, then took me upstairs to my bedroom so that I could change and freshen up. I realized then why Beloved Baba had placed Hilla and me in such a posh European boarding school, for now I had to behave as the nuns had trained us. I jumped into the bed, and it was so soft and springy that I felt like a princess. Then I sat up, had a wash, changed my clothes and went for lunch.

When I entered the dining room I saw a beautifully polished table with several chairs. Dorothea and I sat at one end and Ned at the other end. The dining table was about fifteen feet long, and I was amused at their seating arrangement. A maid came in and served us a first dish, and after some time the next dish arrived.

Then Dorothea asked which dish I would like a second helping of, and the maid suddenly reappeared with the very dish I wanted. Since it was my first meeting with Ned and Dorothea, I didn't ask, but I was so curious that on the third day, when I knew her better, I asked Dorothea how the maid knew exactly which dish to bring for a second helping. She laughed and told me that below the carpet where she was seated there was a bell, and depending on which dish she wanted, she would ring once, twice or three times, and the maid would hear the bell in the kitchen.

Ned and Dorothea had many maids who did different types of work, all of them dressed in uniforms. Seeing all this, I began thinking about how, because of Love, people can change their lifestyles completely without complaining. Our dearest Elizabeth, Nadine, Norina, Kitty, Margaret, Rano and the other Western women, because of their intense love for Baba, did not for a moment expect what they were accustomed to. Only love for God could have made them live as they did in the ashram, with just a bed or a bedroll and their suitcases, sacrificing material comforts just to please the Beloved. From then on I have loved and respected the Western women mandali all the more for their great sacrifices.

Even though I continued to feel like Alice in Wonderland, I think I behaved quite well in this sophisticated household, and I practiced all the table manners I had learned from the nuns. There was a meeting of Baba-lovers at Ned and Dorothea's home, where I met other members of the Sufi group, including Peggy and Andy Muir. Like my host and hostess, they were dear people who loved Baba immensely.

When my orientation was over and my lovely time in Washington, D.C., came to an end, I went to New York, where I

stayed with Fred and Ella Winterfeldt, who then arranged for my transportation to Chapel Hill. Ella took me sightseeing in New York, something I enjoyed very much. Our Beloved Big Daddy, like a true father, had informed all these Baba-lovers in advance through Mani that Najoo, a child from the ashram, was coming for higher studies, and asked them to look after her.

In Chapel Hill I stayed in a women's dormitory on the campus. My scholarship allowed me five dollars per day for meals and spending money, a very small allowance, but this restriction was placed on my scholarship by the Government of India. Somehow, Baba always helped me out. I ate at the campus cafeteria, budgeting for each meal so that money remained for the next one. Initially I went by taxi to the School of Public Health, as it was some distance from my dorm, but as soon as I knew the way, I walked.

About a week or so after arriving, I suddenly became terribly homesick and wanted to contact Kitty and Elizabeth, but I didn't have their telephone number. I had also found out that Chapel Hill was actually quite far from Myrtle Beach, and I had no money to spare for a bus ticket, so I was quite depressed. One afternoon I took a walk on the outskirts of the campus, trying to cheer myself up. Finding a small café at around four o'clock, I realized I was very thirsty and wanted tea. I discovered that a cup of tea would cost one dollar. Although my budget allowed for only fifty cents, I sat down and ordered tea anyway. As I was sipping it, thinking all the while of Baba and Kitty and Elizabeth, I noticed a short gentleman with crutches under both arms entering the café. He came straight toward me and asked, "May I sit at your table, young lady?" Seeing that he was handicapped, I said, "Sure you can."

"You look upset," he said. "What is worrying you?" I told him

I was an Indian student recently arrived in Chapel Hill, and I wanted very much to visit two friends who lived in Myrtle Beach. But I didn't know their telephone number, and I was afraid of how much it would cost to get there on a Greyhound bus. "I'm Claude Dunnagan," he said, "and as you can see, I have lost the use of both my legs, so I get around in a specially made car." He laughed and asked, "What are the names of your friends?"

"Mrs. Elizabeth Patterson and Miss Kitty Davy," I told him.

"I think God has sent me to help you," he said. He told me he knew where Youpon Dunes, Elizabeth's home in Myrtle Beach, was. "I live in Chapel Hill, but every weekend I go to Myrtle Beach on business. So God has solved your problem. You don't need to take a Greyhound. Any time you want to go there, you give me a ring, and I'll pick you up and drop you off at Youpon Dunes. It's on the way to my work in Myrtle Beach."

Hearing him say all this, I knew that Beloved Baba had turned another key and sent Claude to help me out. He looked in a telephone directory and gave me Elizabeth's phone number. I was filled with joy. "You really are God-sent," I told him. "I believe in One called Meher Baba, who is my God and lives in India."

Later I rang up Elizabeth and Kitty and told them that I had a long weekend off and a gentleman would bring me to their home. Elizabeth knew of Claude, so she did not object to my traveling with him.

On my arrival at Youpon Dunes, Elizabeth gave me a beautiful, secluded room on the first floor. Kitty had arranged it so that I was very comfortable. The room faced the sea, and it was lovely watching the waves lash the shore while I studied. I was very conscientious about my classes, and I always took my books along

with me to Myrtle Beach, often studying until late into the night. I had to complete the two-year course in a year, as my scholarship was for only one year.



Kitty about the time Najoo was in the U.S.

Kitty, who lived with Elizabeth, was very service-minded and self-sacrificing, just as she had been in Baba's ashram. I remember the first morning when she knocked at my door and entered with my early morning tea at 7:30 a.m. I felt both shocked and embarrassed to have her waiting on me. I told her that I would come to the dining room, but she insisted, saying, "No, you must stay in your room and I will bring your breakfast, and you must sit and study until ten-thirty." She told me I should be ready at that time to go on rounds with Elizabeth as she supervised construction work, roads to be cleared and trees to be removed to make space for the cabins being built at the Meher Spiritual Center, Baba's Home in the West. This was my first outing there. It was wonderful the way Elizabeth saw to each minor detail of construction, just as Padri Kaka did in Meherabad. Baba selected gems to establish His homes.



Elizabeth in the 1960s in Myrtle Beach

The dear "aunties" who had been so kind to Hilla, Adi and me when we were children in the ashram continued to treat me as one of their own. On the second day of my stay, my visitor at noon was Margaret Craske, the ballet teacher and dancer, who was also on a holiday and visiting there. When Margaret asked me what woolen clothing I had brought from India, and I told her one sweater with long sleeves and one blazer, she was shocked. "Do you want to freeze in the cold during the winter?" she asked. "You be ready in the evening and I will take you to Chapin's Department Store and buy some woolies for you, and some sensible shoes, too."

"But Margaret," I told her, "Baba has said I am not to

accept gifts from anyone in the West except for hospitality and educational materials.”

Margaret became very cross with me. “Najoo,” she said, “how dare you think I am ‘anyone.’ I am like your aunt from the ashram, so just stop thinking you are breaking Baba’s order!” That evening she took me shopping and bought me from her own money some warm pants, shirts, snow boots, woolen sweaters, and a long woolen coat, treating me as though I were still a child in Beloved Baba’s ashram.

I became a frequent visitor at Elizabeth’s home, as whenever I had a long weekend off, I would telephone Claude and he would give me a ride to Myrtle Beach. Baba has said, “I will give a hundred-fold to anyone who gives even a glass of water to My lover.” So I am certain that, in His Infinite Mercy, Baba must have rewarded dear Claude for his kindness to me, giving me free rides to Myrtle Beach in his specially made car. If I returned to Chapel Hill by bus, Elizabeth always bought my ticket.

Mani wrote me a sweet letter in November, delighted that I’d been to Myrtle Beach and seen the Center and all the old friends. She encouraged me to eat and sleep well, “and to keep strong enough to stand the super-size pats” she was sending from everyone. “And if you ever feel lonely for a letter from here,” she wrote, “just remember to switch on the Baba-phones to catch our loving thoughts. . . .”

When Christmas came, it was so lovely to be a member of Elizabeth’s family rather than a guest, since I considered myself a part of the Baba family in the West. Many guests were there for Christmas dinner, and I enjoyed seeing the large turkey sitting on the table together with other delicacies, with Beloved Baba watching

us from a photograph. After dinner we sang Christmas carols. I stayed until after the New Year before returning to the University.

I found that all the Americans I met were very good to me, and their kindness helped me not to miss my home and loved ones too much. Also, darling Mani was so loving and thoughtful, writing regularly to boost my joy in life, often giving me news about Beloved Baba and Mehera. As Mani said in a birthday card to me, she couldn't read my letters out to Baba while He was in seclusion, but "He is always 'eavesdropping' at the doors of His lovers' hearts and hears everything you feel. Of course, as He is the Ancient One, He cannot hear too well, and therefore a superficial shout never reaches Him, but even a whisper from the bottom of one's heart is heard."

My time in the United States simply flew by. On 5th June 1961, I graduated as a Master of Public Health, the first Zoroastrian and the second woman from India ever to acquire this degree. I had sent a graduation announcement to Baba, and Mani responded:

Guruprasad, Poona
6th June 1961



Master of Public
Health, University
of North Carolina,
Chapel Hill

Ahoy Najoo dear! 3158 calling—3158 calling
(that's Guruprasad phone number by the way).
When your invitation arrived to Beloved Baba
and His court at Guruprasad for yesterday's
Convocation, your dear Mum (& later your Dad)
was here and shared it. . . .

Your dear letter to Beloved Baba was read to
Him, and made Him very happy. Keep feeling His
Love always, for He is always with you. Our very
fond wishes and thoughts are with you too Najoo;

and I'm really happy you had this change and experience, even apart from your professional diploma that shines brightly like the star you have achieved with hard work and His grace—or should I say “comet” as you have now acquired a long bright tail after your name! We too are proud, Najoo dear, and share in your happiness and welfare. . . . The London group seems to already know of your coming—there is a record (I mean gramophone record) you will have to fetch from them to carefully carry to us—a favorite of Baba which is now non-available but was somehow found by Fred Marks. There's also one record Margaret Craske will give you for Baba in New York—and some things that Ella will hand over to you to please carry over to us. So it looks, Najoo, as tho you are assigned to be the royal postman for us—do not spend your money on buying anything for us, you will be doing a priceless job as postman. . . .

Much love,
Mani

During my stopover in London on my return trip, I stayed for a week with Hilla and Devraj, and Hilla took me all around the city. In addition to Fred Marks, Mani had asked me to contact Baba's “archangels,” Will and Mary Backett. It's difficult to describe them. They invited Hilla, me, and Hilla's son Deepak for tea, and they seemed overjoyed to meet us. We were certainly overjoyed as well.



Will Backett, me, Mary Backett, Hilla and Deepak, 1961

They really were like two little angels, gentle, soft-spoken, loving and fragile. Everyone who met them felt their deep spirituality.

The record Mani had referred to in her letter was the original recording of Baba's favorite song, "Begin the Beguine." Fred had searched in many antique shops throughout the U.K., and his labor of love for Baba was rewarded when, after a long time, he found a copy of the original recording in perfect condition. He was fortunate, for Beloved Baba had given standing instructions to His disciples that when He dropped His physical body, He should be placed in the crypt and this particular record should be played in the Samadhi seven times. I was so conscious of the value of that record that I carried it all the way from London to Delhi and then on to Bombay in my lap, never leaving it even for a moment anywhere else, for I felt honored to play a part in bringing it for Baba. I arrived back in

India on 15th August, the same day I had departed a year earlier.

A letter soon arrived from Elizabeth, a response to a letter and birthday card I had sent her, right after I reached Bombay. After speaking of life on the Center and the small party that was planned for her, she wrote beautifully of my year there:

. . . knowing you, dear Najoo, has been a real link between the East and West. While Baba is the Universal Magnet for us all, there probably have to be His “links” on the lower levels of everyday life such as ours. Kitty and I and other Westerners have lived in India among Baba’s people; but you are the first Eastern woman to stay with any of us—other than those who came with Baba on His first trip. So I am glad that you did not find America as bad as it is sometimes painted and could feel Baba’s atmosphere here at the Center and wherever He had you staying in this country. . . .

Let us hope we meet again soon—who knows in India or where—but it will be somewhere that Baba will draw us together again, that is sure. Best to your sister, whom I remember, and your mother and father whom I cannot forget.

Love to you,
Elizabeth

ON 17TH AUGUST 1961 I was able to see Baba for the first time in more than a year. Physically He seemed frail to me, but my

heart was joyous at seeing Him, Mehera and Mani. Despite how well I was treated in the West, I had yearned to be with them, and I was craving an embrace from Baba. He still looked cheerful and glorious as the sun, and His smile was as magnetic as ever. I was eager to thank Him for informing His Western lovers about my arrival, helping me to feel that I was in a second home there. But as soon as Baba had called me to Him and given me His warm embrace, He immediately followed with gestures, giving me these instructions: “Now, you are to forget entirely all about your visit to the West, and all about whomever you met, and all that you did and all the places you visited. You simply go back to take up your job and keep on remembering Me all the time.”

I had been like a balloon, filled with lovely memories of the past year and the people who had loved and cared for me, and I was so excited to tell Mehera and Mani all about my experiences. But with Beloved Baba’s orders my balloon had burst, and I came down to reality once again. I guess Baba gave me this order so that I would not feel attached to the lovely, advanced, materialistic West or upset to be back home in my simple, frugal world. I was, of course, taken aback by His words, but Baba’s orders had to be obeyed, so I wasn’t affected much later on. Surprisingly, once you desire to obey Baba, He helps you to do so. This had been my life-long experience with the God-Man. Also, I found that I was not to be stationed in Maharashtra, but was instead returning to Ahmedabad as State Public Health Nursing Supervisor for the state of Gujarat.

One of the women Baba followers from the West had given me a beautiful amethyst ring with pearls around it for Mehera. I gave the ring to Baba with her message. A week later the ring was delivered back to me by someone who had just returned to

Bombay after seeing Baba. Mani sent with it the message that Baba wanted me to keep the ring as a gift from Him. I was so happy to receive it from Baba, as the amethyst is my birthstone. This ring is my most valued possession from my Big Daddy.

Before I left Bombay, I had asked for a locket touched by Baba. Mani had one sent to me in care of Mummy's address, but I left before it arrived, and in October she sent a letter to me in Ahmedabad asking about it: "In the note inside I had asked you to be sure to drop me a line of acknowledgement . . . as the precious locket has been touched by Him from Seclusion especially for you." She also asked about my job and, in a rather lighthearted way, asked, "When will things be as we want them to be—or perhaps I should say when will man want things as he finds them to be? I don't think this sounds quite what I want to say, but I think you'll figure out, you clever girl." The letter was signed, "Your Big Daddy's Love to you and from your pal-gals at Meherazad."

My response must have been anything but lighthearted, as I didn't understand why Baba had promised that I would be working in Maharashtra rather than Gujarat when I returned from the U.S. I soon received a very serious letter from Mani dated 16th October:

. . . Well now, coming to your own personal "bug" of worry that is bothering you—first of all, I appreciate your trust and confidence in me as your own sister. Thank you, Najoo, and so as a sister I shall speak, keeping your welfare before my mind and answering honestly.

About His “promise “(which I very well remember), you first express surprise and uncertainty as to how such a thing can be—you ask yourself (which in itself is doubting), “Can He break it?”—and on the very next page you write, “I still have faith.” Don’t you see, my dear, that that is a contradiction? You cannot have one eye on doubt and one eye on faith—you have to close both your eyes and have full faith and trust or not at all. There is no other compromise. You cannot cover even an atom of doubt with however thick a layer of trust you might spread on it. You trust and never give it another thought, or you don’t. It’s as simple (and as difficult) as that. There are no categories to faith, no conditions.

He tells us that He never breaks a promise—it is only lack of our own understanding of it that makes us think so. He says, “My Glory is from here to Eternity—let me see how far you can see My Glory.” He knows His own business and He knows ours—we see nothing beyond our little noses. We focus on the little wish that we want Him to fulfill and miss the stream of blessings that flows by from Him. Look at the number of promises He did NOT make to you and yet granted—at every step while you were abroad, guiding you over every hurdle that loomed up, hearing every prayer that your heart asked but that He did not promise! You say you don’t understand—that is just what you should not do. He says, “I can never be understood—just love Me.” And if, in gaining

an iota of understanding we lose an atom of love, what a great loss is ours! So count your blessings and lay your little “promise” at His feet—He will keep it, exactly on which day or month or year is for Him to decide, who knows best and who has seen to your best from first to last. Let Him worry about His part of it, let us only worry about our own part as Baba-lovers and see that we never fail. And now, Najoo dear, that is the frank and honest opinion and advice from your sister. When we must ask for something from Him, then let that only be LOVE—nothing else is worth our receiving from Him who holds us so close to Him. . . .

Well, Najoo dear . . . I do hope this letter will help you—it comes from the heart, and with much love to you. You may acknowledge this, though I shall only write an occasional hello from now on—but I will say it very often in thought, for you are often in my thoughts and not unoften in our conversation. Several letters from the U.S. have said they miss you and they would love to have you back some day—I’m not surprised. Once again with my love, and Baba’s Love which is with you always,

Mani

Mani’s letter affected me profoundly, and while I would for the next few years make attempts, with Baba’s permission, to secure work in Maharashtra, I also understood that the timing was not mine to determine, and I left it in the hands of Beloved Baba, who I knew would continue to see to my every need.



Baba as He looked when Mummy and I spent time with Him
in Guruprasad, and when He corresponded with Adi

PHOTOGRAPH BY BHIKUBHAI, MEELAN STUDIO, PUNE

“YOU ALONE
ARE MY GOD”



East-West Gathering,
Guruprasad

PHOTOGRAPH BY BHIKUBHAI, MEELAN STUDIO, PUNE

I n the early sixties Baba was going regularly to Guruprasad, the beautiful holiday residence in Poona that Maharani Shantadevi had offered Him for His exclusive use during the summer months, March through June. The extensive grounds held flowers, a fountain and a statue. A marble balustrade completely surrounded Guruprasad, enclosing an eight-foot-wide balcony with marble

floors and more statues. Walking up the steps and entering the hall where Beloved Baba gave darshan, I felt almost like royalty in all that spaciousness; more importantly, I always felt a spiritual charge.

It was on the grounds of Guruprasad, behind the house, that Baba held the East-West Gathering, a public darshan program, in November of 1962. On the first morning, seven thousand Easterners queued up outside the gates, which were to open at 9:00 a.m. Mummy, Kharmanmasi and I came very early; we had not seen Baba for quite a long time, and we wanted to be as close as possible to the platform on which He would be seated, for our hearts were overflowing with love and our eyes hungry for the sight of Him. In those days we were financially hard up, so Mummy and I could afford only a cheap hotel for our lodging, and it was quite some distance from Guruprasad. We had to get up before dawn in order to have a chance at sitting under the *pandal* close to Baba, as there were only eight hundred seats.

When it was time for the gates to open, an inexperienced old follower of Baba arrived to let us in, and he ordered a servant to open only one side of the double gate. Mummy, Kharmanmasi and I were the first ones waiting on the side that remained closed. The people behind us did not realize what had happened, and everyone rushed for the gate, almost causing a stampede. We were told later that Baba kept repeating to Eruch, “I hope some young people are at the gate to control the masses, because my lovers should not be hurt in any way when they come for My darshan.” I was right behind Kharmanmasi, so I put my arms around her and held on to the bars of the gate, which was still closed, to protect her from getting crushed, as she was heavy and old and had little strength. Mummy also held on to the bars firmly to avoid being crushed. We

kept calling out, "Baba, Baba, Baba, help us," for Baba had once said that if we were in great trouble, we should repeat His name three times loudly, and He would help us. He heard our cries. Some young men came rushing along and told those behind us not to push forward, and then they opened the gate. It was only Baba's nazar on us that saved us from a major stampede. We could easily have been crushed to death.

By the time the second gate opened, we were late enough in getting to the pandal that we had to sit in the thirteenth row, far behind the Westerners, who occupied the first six or seven rows. I was deeply upset because we had gotten up so early and had been right at the front of the line, but now we were too far back to see Baba as clearly as we wanted to. In my frustration I started crying and said, "We are so far away that Beloved Baba cannot see us." Mummy said, "Najoo, Baba is God. How can you say such a silly thing?" I continued to cry.

I later asked a friend who had been seated in the front row to describe fully our Beloved's entrance onto the stage, and she told me Baba was helped by two of His disciples as He walked over to be seated on the pavilion. Eruch removed His chappals, and Baba placed His sacred feet on a cushion so that His lovers could touch them as they received His darshan. This part I had not been able to see, but even from the thirteenth row the scene was absolutely breathtaking. Baba looked glorious. Around His neck was a thickly woven garland of red roses. It looked quite heavy, and Eruch had thoughtfully placed it so that the weight fell on the edges of His shoulders. Baba wore a thin muslin sadra, open at the neck, and loose white cotton pants. His arms rested on two maroon cushions. His sparse hair had been plaited, no doubt by

the loving hands of Mehera. A pedestal fan in a corner to His left kept a breeze circulating on the stage. On Baba's right, near His feet, sat Yogi Shuddhanand Bharati, and on His left sat Maharani Shantadevi, unconcerned with her worldly status. Madhusudan, in a melodious voice filled with love, was singing one of the many songs he had composed for Baba over the years, "Meher Ekum" ("Meher the One and Only"), a masterpiece describing the attributes of our Beloved. I always got gooseflesh when I heard it sung before Baba. The atmosphere felt charged with divinity.

As the multitudes queued up and passed by Baba for His darshan, He questioned, with humor, those who knew Him, thus making them even more joyful. He asked about their wives, children, jobs, health—just as any family member would—touching every heart. Some smiled; others, like me, shed tears of joy as they beheld Him at last after a long time. As people moved past Baba, Eruch gently wiped the perspiration from His face. One could feel how very close Eruch was to Him—but what else would we expect of the one Baba said played the role Peter had played for Jesus?

Baba was particularly attentive to the Westerners, who must have been allowed to arrive ahead of us. He showered them with love, as they had traveled thousands of miles to be with Him on this special occasion. Off and on Baba gestured to the Westerners, noting how hot and stuffy it was. Several times He said, "Maybe it will rain," though that seemed unlikely, as it was not the time of year for rain and the morning was sunny and bright.

We continued to watch Baba as His lovers passed quickly by Him, bowing at His feet. He folded His hands and bowed His head to them before prasad was given by volunteers, and His radiance seemed to penetrate each one. As some lovers from Andhra began

to take darshan, my heart was yearning for just a look from Baba. I had not seen Him for almost a year. I watched as a very poor man came up with a garland of pink and white silk thread about a foot long. He placed it on Baba's knee with reverence, took his prasada, and moved away. Baba took the garland from His knee and began twining it around His left index finger with His right hand, simultaneously folding His hands and bowing to the next passing devotee, until He had made the garland into a ball about an inch in diameter. Then He looked out at the crowd and threw the ball—right into my lap! I was so overjoyed that I grabbed it, stood up, folded my hands, and said, "Thank you, Baba," throwing Him a flying kiss. Baba lifted both His hands in a gesture as if to say, "Now are you satisfied?" Mummy was pleased at my joy, but she said to me, "Now do you realize that Baba is God and He knows all our yearnings?"

I felt guilty for my momentary forgetfulness—it was really quite foolish. But how can we ever truly fathom His love and mercy? After all, we are only human beings, and He is the God-Man. Mummy and I continued to lose ourselves in watching Baba until sometime around noon we noticed that the sky had begun to darken. Suddenly torrential rains broke, just like those of the monsoon season. Nobody seated under the pandal moved an inch. We were already so drenched in Baba's Infinite Ocean of Love that none of us were bothered by the rain that was coming right through the cloth meant to protect us only from the sun. We Easterners were quite used to getting drenched during the monsoons, so it made little difference to us whether or not we got wet. But Baba soon gestured to the Western women, who were dressed in their best clothes, calling them all up to the canopied stage, where He gave instructions to Mani to arrange for them to

change their clothes lest they get a chill. Baba was always most concerned about the health of His lovers when they visited Him.

All the Western women went with Mani into Guruprasad, where the women mandali were staying, and each searched through the clothing offered, looking for something that would fit. Most of the women chose simple saris and blouses. The Westerners, whom we knew to be very conscious of their appearance, always having many changes of clothing and other items with them when they traveled, were delighted. They seemed not to care at all about what they were given to wear, not even Princess Norina, who was always most particular as to how she presented herself in public.

Everyone selected some suitable outfit except for Elizabeth Patterson, who could find nothing that fit her. However, years earlier she had presented to Rano her own new maroon Japanese silk kimono. Suddenly Rano remembered she had, by chance, brought it, and she gave it to Elizabeth to wear. Elizabeth happily accepted it, and as she was walking from the stage back to her seat, Baba called her and made her sit in the place of Maharani Shantadevi, who had left after the rain started. I will never forget what Baba then publicly announced, through Eruch. Pointing at Elizabeth, Baba said, “This is my Western Yogi, Elizabeth,” and then, pointing to Yogi Shuddhanand Bharati, He said, “and he is my Yogi from the East.” What an honor that was for Elizabeth—and how true. She could have led a life of luxury, but what was most precious to her was love for Meher Baba, and her aim in life was to serve Him, the one who serves the universe. So she surrendered her worldly riches at the sacred feet of Baba, and her service to Him was indeed her yoga. The Center in Myrtle Beach stands today as an

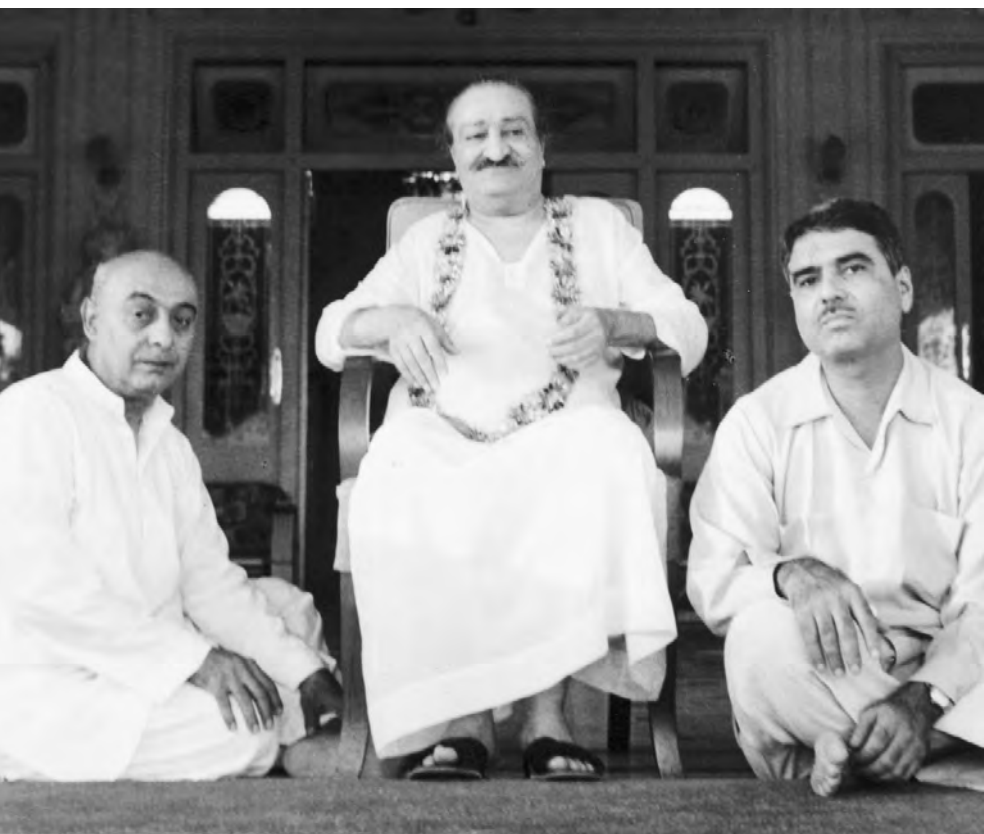
example of real spiritual love, and Elizabeth will be an inspiration for generations to come.

Later on we came to know that while the women mandali were packing their clothing before leaving for Guruprasad for the East-West Gathering, Baba had given them instructions that they should pack all their best clothing, as much as they could carry. Baba gave them no reason for doing this, and the women protested that they had no possible use for so many items of clothing, especially saris and blouses, for the short time they would be at Guruprasad. But Baba, the knower of the past, present and future, was already preparing for the rain.

WHENEVER BABA WAS IN GURUPRASAD, I tried to take leave from my job and go to Poona to be with Him, as my work in Gujarat continued to affect my health and the conditions remained unsatisfactory. In June of 1963 I asked Baba's permission to apply for a position as lecturer at a college in Bombay. Mehera informed me by telegram that Baba had no objection to my applying, but in July I learned that my application was not considered. Another telegram arrived, this one from Baba, saying, "Be resigned to My will and do not worry. It will end well in its proper time." In June of 1964 I was encouraged by Baba and Mehera to try again. Mehera wrote, "Soon after reading your urgent letter, I took the first opportunity to ask Baba's advice on your applying for allocation to Maharashtra. Yes, Baba wants you to try, so go ahead and put in your application. Keep your fingers crossed, say 'Baba, Baba, and *Inshallah* [God willing], it may come to pass." Mani wrote a month later, "Hello dear 'Bulbul' [nightingale], Heard your sweet 'peep-cheep' after a long time . . . and I pray within a month you will be a Bombay girl again. . . . I sing

hip-hip-hooray with you at the termination of your bond period with Gujarat—Beloved Baba teaches you the sweetness of the fruit of patience!” But again I was turned down. I was desperate to leave Gujarat, and my visits to Baba in Guruprasad became my lifeline.

On one occasion I went to Poona alone. After getting settled, I rang up Mehera and asked her to ask Baba’s permission for me to come to Guruprasad. Baba agreed, so I went immediately. I asked



Baba with Pendu and Eruch in Guruprasad

PHOTOGRAPH BY BHIKUBHAI, MEELAN STUDIO, PUNE

first for Mehera, as I had purchased two photographs of Baba in His sadra, one for Hilla and one for me, and I wanted Baba to touch them. Mehera took them into the room where Baba was, and I watched through a crack in the open door as Baba sweetly touched them. After she returned them to me, I picked up my courage and peeped in so that Baba could see me and, with gestures, asked if I could come into the room. Baba smiled and agreed. I asked Him if I could lay my head at His feet, and Baba allowed me to do so. When I lifted my head again, I felt light—as if I had been cleansed of all my impurities and weaknesses. I cannot find adequate words to express this feeling; it is something that one must experience, this feeling of purification from dipping oneself into that Ocean.

On another visit I was shown the importance of staying focused on Baba. After again asking permission from Mehera, I arrived at the gates of Guruprasad, where Bal Natu and Nana Kher were acting as watchmen. I asked Bal where Baba was and he pointed to a room where Baba and the men mandali were playing cards. I opened the door slightly and met Beloved Baba’s gaze. When He saw me, He gestured that I could enter, and then pointed to a corner at a distance and I went and sat there, delighted to be with Him. I had eyes only for Him. I didn’t even notice which men were seated with Him, as they were not my concern—which is the reason Baba allowed me to be in the room with the men.

After a while the game was over, and most of the men mandali walked out. Some ladies from Bombay were waiting outside to meet Baba. Some were in saris, but others were wearing dresses or skirts and blouses. One of them had worn a tight skirt, so she was sitting with discomfort on the floor, as the skirt kept creeping up and exposing her knees, very much to her embarrassment. Beloved

Baba noticed, of course, and immediately gestured to her to get a scarf. The lady went out and borrowed a scarf, which she draped over her knees. Beloved Baba was very particular about the way we were dressed while sitting in His presence. He didn't want women wearing any kind of clothing that might divert the attention of men away from Him. I always wore a blouse, preferably with sleeves, and a sari when I came for His darshan so that I could sit freely on the ground. To be before the God-Man was a rare opportunity, and there were to be no distractions. As Baba said, "I alone exist."

Mummy also took every opportunity to go to Guruprasad to be with Baba. Her move from the ashram in no way diminished the intimacy of her relationship with Him or with the women mandali. In fact, it continued to grow, and Mummy was able to spend more time with Baba and the women as soon as He started going to Guruprasad. Included among our Baba treasures are many telegrams from Baba, Mehera and Mani responding to urgent messages or simply sending birthday greetings to one or another of us. A letter I received from Mani late in 1962 covered a number of subjects, from expressing concern for Mummy's problems with her eyes (she eventually had to have cataract surgery) and delight over news of Hilla, to a discussion of some jam we had sent:

As for the jam that makes us regularly smack our lips every morning in enjoyment, you ask which was tastier—well, we all think Dr. Writer's gets priority. . . . We will happily send the empty jam bottles (but I only hope it is not a "trick" to find out when our jam supply is over, so as to send more! I cannot help this suspicion, knowing

the contents of your heart to be as sweet as the
contents of those bottles—only yours will
always be full, with Baba’s grace). . . .

Mummy always stayed in a cheap hotel, as that was all she could afford, but she never complained. Whenever she was in Poona, Mehera instructed her to come to Guruprasad every morning. Mehera and Mani gave her their clothes to mend or alter, and she also stitched new ones. Mummy made clothes so quickly that Mehera, astonished, would tell her, “Nergiz, you have electricity in your hands.” Mummy’s favorite sewing job was making sadras for Baba, and she was always delighted when Mehera gave her material for them.

Once Mummy made a plastic hanging wardrobe for Mehera to keep her clothes in. Mehera was so happy that she showed it to Baba, who was always pleased if she was happy. He greatly appreciated Mummy’s talents, and He often invited Mummy and me into the inner room where the ladies were. Mummy sewed while we sat enjoying Beloved Baba’s company. She did not like to sit and gaze at Baba as I did. She always wanted to be performing some service for Him and His dearest ones. One day during lunch Naja asked Mummy what she did at her home in Bombay. Mummy said, “I have much work to do.”

Baba said, “Nergiz will never sit and relax. She has a lot of work to do, even though she lives in a one-room/kitchen flat.”

In the early afternoon, after the Arti, Mummy always asked Baba for permission to go out for lunch. Baba, knowing she could not afford to eat out in Poona, would say, “No, you are not going out. You are fortunate that I am inviting you to stay for lunch with

Me. So don't hesitate to stay." Mehera would put food in a plate for Mummy, and then Baba would have Mummy sit near Him. When Mehera served mangoes to Baba, He would take two handfuls from His own plate and put them into Mummy's plate, knowing that good mangoes were a delicacy Mummy could never afford. Sometimes Baba took half the food from His own plate and put it into Mummy's. As Mummy said, "In Guruprasad Baba poured a lot of love on me. He was always feeding me the way a mother would feed her child. Those memories are engraved on my heart."

DURING THIS TIME Adi was still working for Hindustan Lever in Gujarat. He was fanatically honest in his work and in his dealings with others. While his more worldly colleagues grew wealthy, as they had no qualms about achieving prosperity by any means, Adi struggled to save money. Determined to follow Baba's teaching and serve Him loyally, Adi suffered silently, not complaining about the treatment he received from others in his company. But when after six years he had received no promotion, with Baba's permission he applied for a job as District Sales Representative with Burmah-Shell. A letter from Eruch late in February of 1964 notes that Adi was to appear for a written test on 7th March, and another, dated 26th May 1964, is a response to the news that Adi was successful in securing the job. Adi left Hindustan Lever in May and immediately went to work for Burmah-Shell, now called Bharat Petroleum. A third letter from Eruch, this one sent at the end of December of that year, is a response to some difficulties that Adi was having in his new job: ". . . Beloved Baba wants you to note that His nazar is on you and He wants you NOT to worry. He wants you to put in your best efforts and let your bosses feel that you are

worthy of being retained for the job. Baba wants you to do your best and leave the rest to His Divine Will.”

At a later time when Adi was again not being treated well at work because of his uncompromising honesty, he confided in Mummy and me. We both wrote to Baba, since Adi refused to do so, saying, “He is God. He knows everything.” Eruch’s response to me affirmed Adi’s statement: “Baba wants you to know that His Adi is right in thinking and in advising as he did on the point of Baba being God in human form and knowing everything. Baba says that He is proud of Adi and sends His love and blessing to Adi.” Another letter, dated 4th November 1966, responded to Mummy’s letter: “Baba wants you all, and particularly Adi, to note that God is the Ocean of Mercy. God will do everything that is good. Hence there is nothing to fear, Baba’s nazar is on His Adi and will always remain.” Adi left all his troubles to Baba, knowing He would turn the key if He willed it so. And He did. Eruch’s letter of 18th December of that year refers to Baba’s happiness in hearing “of the happy turn of events in the service prospects of His dear Adi.”

Adi’s wonderful sense of humor followed him into adulthood, and he continued to make it his special assignment to study jokes so he could entertain Baba, making the Master Humorist, as well as those in His company, happy. Because Adi’s employment took him so far from Meherabad and his schedule, particularly in his first job, required that he travel a great deal, he was often not able to come for darshan on the specific occasions when Baba called His lovers to be with Him. Baba sweetly gave standing orders that Adi could visit any time he was able to make the journey, even when He was in seclusion. And whenever Adi went for Baba’s darshan, as soon as he had entered the door of Mandali Hall and Baba had given him a

quick embrace, Baba would ask him to start telling jokes, one after another. Not only Baba, but all the men mandali would soon be laughing hilariously. I remember Mani telling me years later, “Najoo, whenever I heard much laughter in Mandali Hall at Meherazad, it was a signal that Adi had come to meet Baba.”

HILLA, ON THE OTHER HAND, was going through a very long physical separation from Baba. She had not been able to see Him between the birth of her son Deepak and her departure for England, and as the years went by, her longing increased. She was particularly sad that Deepak had not yet met Baba. She was also missing the family, but when she wrote to Father that she would like to come, Father wrote back that Baba was in seclusion, so seeing Him would not be possible, though he promised to convey her plea to Baba somehow. Finally, in 1965, when Deepak was nine years old, Hilla wrote our parents saying she was bringing him to Bombay for a visit.

I, too, was now in Bombay, as on 30th April 1965, I had finally fulfilled my duties as State Public Health Supervisor in Gujarat and was able to come home. Again I had applied for a teaching job at the College of Nursing in Bombay, and Mehera had written a sweet and encouraging letter to me just before my interview: “I hope that you do well in your forthcoming interview and that you get the permanent job of Tutor at the college as you so much desire. I have mentioned this to Baba and His nazar is on you, so don’t be nervous and do your best and come out with flying colours. . . .” This time I succeeded, and for the next four years I was employed as a Government Gazetted Officer and Lecturer in Public Health at the College of Nursing in Bombay.

Not long after Hilla told Father of her plans, she received a lovely letter from Dr. Goher saying that Mehera wanted her to bring a hair dryer to dry Baba's hair. As soon as Hilla read the request, her heart did a somersault and she began hoping that maybe her dream would come true and Deepak would be able to meet Beloved Baba after all. When she reached Bombay, she and Father sent a telegram to Baba, saying that she, Adi, and Deepak were coming to Meherazad. Along the way she prayed that Baba would grant her wish—and Deepak's wish as well, as he was very eager to meet Baba, looking forward to the moment when he would be face to face with God.

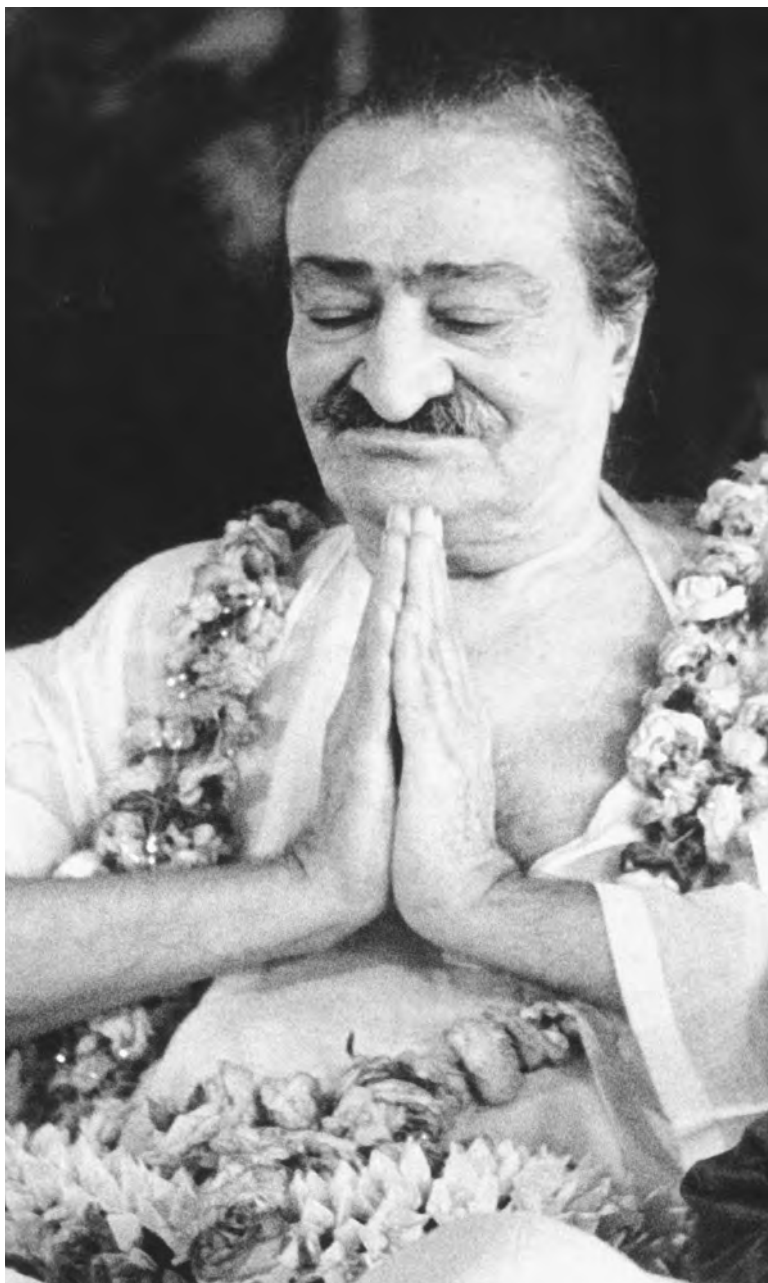
When they arrived at Ahmednagar station early in the morning, a man came toward my sister and asked if she were Hilla Talwar. Hilla nodded, and he said that Baba had sent His car to take them to Meherazad. Hilla, choked with emotion, repeated Baba's name all the way to Meherazad, wondering what to expect next and squeezing Adi's and Deepak's hands, reassuring herself that what was happening was not just a beautiful dream from which she would suddenly awaken.

They finally reached Meherazad, where all the men mandali greeted them lovingly, their faces beaming. Then Dr. Goher appeared and embraced all of them. Hilla handed her the hair dryer which, like a treasured possession, she had carried from England to dry Beloved Baba's hair. Dr. Goher told the three of them to wait in Mandali Hall, where Baba was going to give them His darshan. Hilla's heart was beating hard as the three of them, filled with anticipation, sat down in the hall with the men mandali. Then Hilla saw Baba coming in a sedan chair, carried by some of the men. She was not at all prepared for this sight, for when she

had said goodbye to Him nine years earlier, Baba had been strong and healthy. She had never imagined that He was so frail He would have to be carried. His face was very beautiful, but His suffering was written all over it. Hilla, who always empathized with the pain of others, began weeping uncontrollably. Later she described the scene in detail.

I thought of the time in Hyderabad in the afternoons, when He used to tell us to sleep, and I would lie down on a mat beside Meheru and then peep at Him. His face was like the sun and He looked so powerful and ever so strong as He paced up and down, His long hair flowing. He would see that I was peeping and come tell me again to close my eyes. But I was so fascinated by the power emanating from His being and the beauty of His face and all that strength in His body. Now I couldn't believe my eyes. . . .

I was, all the same, overjoyed to see Him again. How starved I had been all these years of not seeing Him, and how I had longed to have His darshan. I used to hate being away from India and most of all being away from our Beloved Baba. I was so envious of all the Baba-lovers who regularly had His darshan at Guruprasad while I could not afford to go and do the same. I felt so alienated in the U.K. all those years away from His close proximity. Even now I carry this pain that I missed all those wonderful darshans and the opportunity of laying my head on His



Baba as He looked in 1965 when Hilla and Deepak visited

PHOTOGRAPH BY BEHERAM S. IRANI

beautiful lotus feet and seeing that divine form and countenance that I so longed to see. I know we all have to resign ourselves to His will, and He alone knows why I had to go so far away from Him to the U.K.

Now when I gazed upon His beautiful countenance again, I was so full of emotion, I just could not hold back my tears for a minute, even though I tried. Beloved Baba sat on His chair and He then asked the mandali why I was sitting on the floor, so someone brought a stool for me and I perched on it, feeling rather embarrassed and self-conscious, since everyone else was sitting on the floor. He then called Deepak to Him and gave him a very warm embrace. Baba's eyes twinkled and He told Deepak to sit on a stool by His feet. Deepak was overwhelmed by Baba and His beauty, and he looked up at Baba and said with awe, "No wonder they call you God because you are so beautiful." The truth from the words of a nine-year-old child.

Baba embraced him again and again. I will cherish that sight throughout my life, because it was most important to me that Deepak should have Beloved Baba's darshan. At long last my most cherished dream had come true. Baba then called me to Him and gave me a very warm embrace too, the moment I had been longing for for a decade. I was so overwhelmed with love and joy that I continued to weep tears of both joy and sadness mingled together. . . . I can still see that

beautiful, gently benevolent face, so full of love and compassion, before me. Baba then embraced dear Adi, who was also beaming with joy. He had not seen Beloved Baba for quite some time either. . . .

Baba looked at me and gestured, “I am seeing you after so many years and all you are doing is crying? Tell me all about yourself.” I was still choked. The glorious sight of Beloved Baba before me, His eyes full of love and compassion, and the miracle of again being in His presence after all those years, overwhelmed me and left me speechless. I am a highly emotional person; laughter and tears come easily to me, and all I could do was fill my eyes, my heart and soul with that beautiful vision before me and continue softly to cry my heart out.

Finally I pulled myself together and told him about my life and about my problems, too. He looked at me with such love and understanding and said that I was not to worry because those problems would not bother me again. Beloved Baba always took care of everything for us, since He had told our parents when they surrendered to Him, that from then on, we were His children and He would take care of our tiniest needs until eternity. He has always kept His word.

Baba then told Hilla and Deepak to go visit Mehera, Mani and the women mandali, as He wanted to talk to Adi. So Deepak

and Hilla happily trotted off to see all those dear ones. How overjoyed Hilla was at the feeling of being home once more. Mehera, Mani, Meheru and all the other “aunties” were so happy to see them, and they couldn’t get over the fact that “Little Hiloo,” as they had always thought of her, now had a son as big and strapping as Deepak. But Meheru said she was still very childlike, and Lord knew whether she would ever grow up. They all laughed and talked until Beloved Baba was carried back to His room.

Baba then sent for Deepak and Hilla, and they entered His room, where Baba again embraced Deepak several times. Whenever Deepak returned His embrace, Hilla told him to be gentle, not to crush Baba. Baba told Deepak not to worry, though Hilla looked on nervously, hoping Deepak wouldn’t hurt Baba with his bear hugs. Deepak was delighted with Mastan, the beautiful dog lying near Baba’s bed, and Baba’s eyes twinkled as He watched them play. He then told Hilla and Deepak to join Him and the ladies for lunch. Baba put His arm around Deepak and asked to lean on him for support as they walked to the dining room. When they arrived at the table, Baba sat on His chair and told Deepak to sit on His left, Hilla next to him. Mehera was on Baba’s right, and Baba asked her to serve lunch to them. Hilla was so excited about seeing Baba again that she was not at all hungry, and she watched with dismay as Mehera piled their plates with food. Mummy had always told us to eat every grain on our plates when we lived in the ashram, so Hilla was worried that she wouldn’t be able to consume it all. Deepak, of course, dug into it happily. Hilla ate some of her food, struggling to eat more from the plate that was still half full, when Baba said, “Don’t worry if you cannot finish. Leave it on the

plate." Hilla was ever so grateful. During the meal Beloved Baba took some food from His plate and put it on Deepak's plate, just as He had done for us when we were children. Hilla was overjoyed by that gesture, and Deepak ate all of it, Baba watching him fondly. Baba told the ladies that Deepak was one of His own men. He then looked at Hilla and said, "You know, she loves me very much." Again Hilla's eyes started to pour out all the love for Him that welled up in her heart.

"Please, Baba," she said, "I have one request to make. Could you make me hard? I am so soft at heart that I get trampled on very easily, and that hurts a great deal." Meheru scolded her, saying she was a very silly girl to make such a request, that it is a blessing to be soft when there are so many hard-hearted people in this world. Baba smiled lovingly and said, "You stay just the way you are. Don't ever change." Turning to the ladies, He said, "She is as beautiful on the inside as she is on the outside." Again Hilla could not stop her tears from flowing as she gazed at Him adoringly. Baba then told her not to scold Deepak about overeating, something she did, as he was certainly overweight, but He also told Deepak to eat moderately and to eat fewer sweets and chocolates. Deepak readily agreed, and to Hilla's surprise he continued to be careful with sweets for a long time after.

Baba was most concerned about Hilla's health. Due to severe asthma, she had been taking cortisone for nearly eight years, and He was not happy about that. Dr. Goher said that a new drug called Intal had just come on the market, so Baba told her to take that and slowly go off the cortisone. He told Hilla to write him about her health when she returned to Bombay, after she had visited her in-laws in New Delhi, and again when she returned to

England. He sent several messages inquiring about her health. As soon as she returned to the U.K., her doctor prescribed Intal and weaned her off cortisone.

Hilla was particularly happy that Deepak could embrace Mehera, as he was only nine years old. Mani joked and laughed with him a lot, as did Naja and Meheru. One of them said, “Just imagine, only a short while ago, Hiloo was a child in the ashram like Deepak. To think she has married and has a child seems unbelievable. To us she will always be little Hiloo.”

Before they left Meherazad, Baba gave Deepak and Hilla some lovely photographs of Him and a diary, which is now among her most treasured possessions. He embraced them lovingly and asked Deepak how he was doing in school. Deepak said he did not like math, and Baba said, “I was also poor at arithmetic.” Although Hilla could not know that this was the last time she would see her Beloved Baba in His physical form, she again began to weep as she embraced Him for the last time. As she said, “He looked at us with such divine love flowing from His beautiful eyes that I found myself wishing I would turn into a tree in Baba’s garden so I could stay there forever and see Him every day as He brushed past me. How I hated to leave Him, yet I was so grateful that even though He was in seclusion, He had allowed us to visit Him. . . . I was so happy that Deepak had met Him at long last and had received such a lot of love and so many warm embraces from Beloved Baba. That meant the world to me.”

Hilla, Adi and Deepak left for the train station, carrying something very special with them—Beloved Baba’s overflowing love, enough to last them for the rest of their lives. Hilla continues to cherish the beautiful vision of Almighty God Himself as He

waved goodbye to them. She kept her face turned toward Meherazad as the car drove off and wept all the way to the station, having left her heart behind with her Beloved. As she said, "Those last moments with Baba left a permanent impression on my mind, and whenever I want to lose myself in thoughts of Him, I close my eyes and I am back at Meherazad with Him. All my cares and worries disappear for a while as I relive the beauty and joy of those precious moments when His divine love enfolded me, and I feel whole again."

Mehera wrote Hilla the following in response to a letter Hilla sent after their visit:

Your letter to Baba so filled with love has just arrived—it made Beloved Baba very happy. Baba is happy to know that Deepak thinks of Him so often. Baba sends His dear love to him.

We were all so happy to have met you again and seen Deepak. He is a lovable child but rather shy. Your experiences in England were very interesting and amusing, and I can still hear your joyous laughter, for you were so happy to be with Beloved Baba.

Remember, dear Hiloo, the instructions Baba has given you about your health and not worrying, for everything is in His hands. Take Beloved Baba with you for He is with you. . . . Baba's dear love to you and Deepak and also to Nergiz, Adi and Najoo.

Remind Deepak at times that Beloved Baba loves him and that it is a great thing to be loved

by One like Baba. This will make him feel happy in his heart.

Later Mehera said in another letter, “Deepak is a very loving child and Baba loves him dearly. Remind him now and then about his going slow on chocolates, etc., as Baba told him. This will benefit him generally.”

Back in the U.K., Deepak told all his school friends that he had eaten lunch with God. They never knew how true that statement was—or how very lucky Deepak is.

A year after her visit Hilla wrote this letter to Mummy, Father, Adi and me:

London

21st December 1967

My darling M. D. N. A.

Thank you for your loving letter. Deepak and I both went to Baba’s meeting at Earl’s Court. And they showed dear Baba’s films, and as usual, I cried all through the films. I just don’t know why I am so emotional, especially where He is concerned. Maybe it’s because I love Him so much, and my childhood with Him is so vivid in my mind. I am and have always been so close to Him—I can’t explain, even though I’m far away. I just didn’t want the film to end. I wanted it to go on and on, and I wanted to sit there and watch forever. I felt like that when I saw Him at Meherazad; I didn’t want to move from His

presence. Oh Daddy! Thank you so much with all my heart and soul for giving us our Baba. Without Him I can never imagine how futile a lifetime would have been. There I go, crying again. Why I feel so intensely only He can tell; I cannot explain.

Deepak had a very bad report from school about his studies. He is so inattentive and disinterested altogether. Never mind, I will sit every day with him and see that he takes interest in his studies. He is not a stupid child, just very playful. But I feel sure with Baba Darling's nazar he will improve. I pray to Him always. Deepak says, "Mummy, I've been praying to Baba about not being good at studies, but He doesn't listen."

I hope you are well and happy. I hope you feel better dear Mummy. Love and kisses to you all and a Happy New Year with Baba's blessing,

Your Loving Hilla

We were so touched by Hilla's letter that we sent it to Meherazad so that Baba, Mehera and Mani could read it. Mehera returned it, thanking us, saying that they were very happy about her love for Baba, and telling Deepak to study hard so that he would be successful in his exams.

OUR LIVES CONTINUED TO BE BUSY—Hilla's in England, Adi's in Gujarat and mine in Bombay. I was happy to be back, close to

Mummy and Father, and finally coming to know Father better. During so much of our childhood we were away at school and he was living apart from the family with the mandali, so none of us had spent much time with him.

Due to Father's training from Baba, he was very exacting about everything he did. "Everything in its place and a place for everything," he would say to us. He was most particular about cleanliness, and he always dressed immaculately wherever he went, even though his clothes were never expensive. He was punctual as a clock and almost fanatical about honesty. One funny habit that developed after he returned to Bombay was that he went almost daily to the bank near us. All he needed was the smallest excuse. I suppose these visits brought back memories of his early life. But he also felt detached from the life he had left behind when he joined Baba's ashram. The only family he remained in contact with from his earlier life was that of Beheramji Bharucha, his uncle who had taken Mummy in when she first returned to the city. Once on a road in Bombay someone said to him, "Hello, Savaksha, do you remember me?" (The suffix *-sha* or *-shaw* added to a name indicates respect.) Father didn't, and the man said, "I am your half-brother." Even in the ashram Father had made friends with very few men, though he was particularly fond of Pendu, Padri, Vishnu, Dr. Nilu and Bhauji.

One of Father's other activities was to search Bombay for masts. He would feed them and then ask them to take the name of Meher Baba. If he saw a hungry man, he would share his food. If he had no food with him, he would go into a hotel and buy food. He never gave money, however, because money could be used for

inappropriate purposes, and then he would have to share the sanskaras of the one who had used it unwisely.

With us he was gentle and soft-spoken. Sometimes he went with one of us to see a film. He was quite sensitive, and if anyone in a film was suffering, he would cry. Although I remembered him sometimes telling us jokes when we were children, after he returned to Bombay he rarely did so.

Despite living a life with Baba where only the bare necessities were available, Father came to enjoy certain of life's pleasures. His doctor advised him to take half a peg of whiskey before dinner at night because of his heart condition, and Father would sit with his drink before Baba's photograph in the dining room and give a toast, raising his glass to Baba, saying, "Cheers, Baba, to my health and happiness."

Mummy, hearing him, would scold him, saying, "How selfish you are, just saying the word *my* all the time."

Father would lovingly tell her, "Nergiz, you don't understand. I would only be healthy and happy if my wife and children are healthy and happy too. This is how I say it with a short-cut." Father loved Mummy, his Nergiz. He even called her his Layla, referring to the well-known Persian love story of Majnun and Layla. She would respond by getting cross and telling him to stop his sentimental nonsense. I found these little squabbles quite amusing.

MUMMY, ANXIOUS TO SEE HER GRANDSON AGAIN and in need of some medical attention, was the second of our family to visit Hilla, Devraj and Deepak in England, leaving in September of 1968. Mehera wrote her a letter regarding her upcoming visit:

Meherazad
14th August 1968

My dearest Nergiz,

Beloved Baba and all of us are very happy that you are going to U.K. You, my dear sister, take proper medical treatment and return healthy to us. Dear Hilloo and Deepak will be very happy to have you. Explain to Deepak to be attentive to his studies . . . and that with hard work he should pass in all his exams, for this will please Beloved Baba, and Baba will be proud of him.

Dear Nergiz, do take sufficient warm clothes, because in aeroplane after take-off from Bombay, it will go very fast on high altitude and you will feel very cold. Take a warm shawl to cover your head. Above you will be air ventilators, so keep it away from you and shut it. Be very attentive to this or else cold chilly air will be around your head. Inside you will get blanket and pillow and socks. This is the right season to visit England. Over there for sightseeing you must go to Madame Toussaud's.

Dear Nergiz, the skirts and jackets you have stitched so well and for that accept my loving thanks. Up to now you have stitched many of my clothes.

Dear Hilloo sent us a hair dryer which we use for Beloved Baba and we also use it in Poona. To dear Hilloo and Deepak give our love. Love to

dear Najoo and to your dear self, Bon Voyage.
Beloved Baba's love to you, His dear family.

Lovingly,
Mehera

In December Baba invited a select few of His lovers to attend Mehera's birthday and also the marriage ceremony of Dara, Baba's brother Adi's son, to Amrit, the daughter of Shatrughan Kumar, a close Baba-lover from Dehra Dun. The birthday celebration was fixed for 21st December, with the wedding to take place the following day. I received an invitation saying, “You are invited to represent Nergiz, your mother, who is presently in U.K.” I was overjoyed to be able, on behalf of my dear mother, to enjoy this privilege, as Baba was constantly in seclusion and I had not seen Him for a very long time.

I went to ‘Nagar, and on 21st December those of us who had come for the celebrations left for Meherazad. As I entered the women mandali's area, I saw chairs for the women arranged near Mehera's porch. Seating for the men was further off. Beloved Baba was on the porch, seated on the sedan chair, which was draped with fabric. My heart bled as I saw Him looking so frail, more like a lamb than a lion. I was shocked by His appearance, as at the public darshan programs in the past Baba had always looked gorgeous, naturally radiating His Godhood. But this small, intimate group was allowed to see Him in His weakened condition.

Baba gestured to us, “You all are very fortunate to have My darshan today. It will not be the same again.” None of us understood the depth of that statement—we had no inkling of what He meant. We were then instructed to queue up, ladies first, and

were allowed to place garlands or flowers at His feet. We were not to touch Baba, perhaps because His health was so delicate. When my turn came, I put a garland at His feet and then looked up at Him with my hands folded. To my dismay, He was looking at and talking to someone else. My turn was over, and I had to move forward. Just as I had many times in the past, I felt that Baba had overlooked me. I was so upset that all sorts of ideas regarding my shortcomings began to torture me. I went back to my seat, my tears beginning to flow.

I certainly did not want others to see me cry, so I placed my hand in such a way that the elderly friends who were sitting beside me would not see me, all the while searching my heart, looking for the weaknesses I might be paying for today. The thoughts kept coming, and I felt I must deserve what had happened. Finally I draped the end of my sari around my head so that no one could see my face.

I watched the men begin to queue up to take darshan. A somber mood prevailed, as everyone must have thought about what suffering Beloved Baba had taken upon Himself for all our weaknesses in order to purify us. I kept my eyes on Him, as usual, and watched as Roda Mistry's husband Jim put flowers at His feet and folded his hands. And Baba not only looked at Jim; He bent forward from His chair and extended His right hand for Jim to kiss. That was the most painful blow of all to my aching heart, and I began to sob. Baba had not even looked at me, but now He had given His divine hand to be kissed. Thoughts of self-hatred had been gnawing at me for at least ten minutes when I suddenly heard Mani announce, "Baba wishes to be entertained. Who will entertain Him?"

Spontaneously I put up my hand, and then stood so Mani would notice me. Beloved Baba saw me and lovingly gestured, calling me up to the porch. In that moment I was brought from despair to ecstasy, and a beautiful ghazal that I had adapted for Baba flashed in my mind:

My God

The One before whom I am is my God!
 At His lotus feet I pay obeisance with devotion—
 The one before whom I am,
 He is my Allah Bashir here!
 In public He is Meher Baba.
 In reality He is the God-Man!
 If Thou will it so, slay me,
 If Thou will it so, bury me alive—
 This is my purification,
 You alone are my God!
 Proclaim Meher Baba as God!
 Meher Baba is God!
 However, from Meher Baba's Divinity
 We are not ever separate.

I stood before Him with folded hands and, with my eyes closed, I sang to Him with all my heart and soul. When the song ended, I opened my eyes and what did I see? The Lord of Compassion was holding His frail right hand out to me. I threw my spectacles down, took His hand gently in mine, touched it to my eyes, and kissed it. "Thank you, Baba," I said, and with rapture in my heart, I stepped down from the porch, smiling, to take my seat again.



Last photo taken of Baba, December 1968.
Eruch at microphone, Arnavaz in background.

PHOTOGRAPH BY RAYMOND DADACHANJI

The elderly Zoroastrian ladies sitting next to me—all of them Baba-lovers for many, many years—scolded me and said, “Is that the ghazal to sing today, when it is a day of celebration? You made us all cry as we looked at Baba. We felt a twist in our hearts.” I could not at that time understand their sad feelings, but later I realized that they must have had some intuition of what was soon to come. As for me, though, I was filled with Baba’s infinite love, compassion and forgiveness for my weaknesses.

Later I realized why Beloved Baba had inspired me to sing that particular ghazal for my God in human form as I beheld His divine countenance, not knowing that it would be my last opportunity to do so in my present life. I thought of the foolish little girl in the ashram, who had once written to Baba that she loved Him first as Big Daddy and secondly as God. On this occasion I spent those few minutes singing and proclaiming before all that Baba is God-Man first. But I didn’t for a moment forget that He was also my Big Daddy.



Mani and Mehera in the Tomb before Baba's interment

PHOTOGRAPH BY BHIKUBHAI, MEELAN STUDIO, PUNE

GOD NEVER DIES



Baba's Chair in
Guruprasad during
the 1969 Darshan

PHOTOGRAPH BY M.S. MOORTHY

Almost immediately after I returned to Bombay from being with Baba in Meherazad, Adi sent a letter to Father and me from Bhavnagar, Gujarat, where he had recently been transferred. He wrote a similar letter to Mummy, Hilla and Raj in London, saying that at the Bhavnagar Club he had met a nice girl, Freny Sethna, who was intelligent, soft-spoken and good-looking.

Although her cultured Zoroastrian family were not Baba followers, Adi told us that he wished to propose to Freny, provided her parents were agreeable to giving him her hand in marriage.

After reading Adi's letter, Father and I immediately posted it to Baba, and Mummy also sent Him the letter they received in London. None of us took major steps without seeking Baba's approval or waiting for Him to give His blessings to whatever we proposed. A reply came from Eruch, dated 21st January 1969, Adi's birthday:

My dear Najoo,

This is to wish our dear Adi a very Happy Birthday. . . . When I read your letter of 19-1-69, I was happy to get the glad tidings of Adi's proposal to Freny Sethna. May Beloved Baba's love for Adi help Adi to bring about this match of a life partner for himself! May Beloved Baba's will be done!!!

As per attached Circular, Beloved Baba has stopped attending to any correspondence of personal nature. Moreover, His health is not good and it is not advisable to disturb Him at this stage. You all very well know that His love and blessings flow continually towards all His loved ones. So, dear Najoo, don't feel disheartened. Know well that your Beloved Big-Daddy knows all about Adi, who is so very dear to Him. He also knows what is the right choice for Adi, so feel resigned to His will and remember Him

wholeheartedly. Have that rock-like faith and deep love for Beloved Baba as that of your dear brother Adi, who knows fully well that his Beloved Baba knows all! He is blessed and fortunate!

Beloved Baba also knows well about dear Raj and his exams. You must be calm and keep happy and be a witness to all that happens—which will be eventually for the good of all concerned.

This is to wish you, almost a month in advance, a very Happy Birthday on 16th Feb. . . . May Beloved Baba's choicest blessings be on you, dear Najoo. Your singing at Meherazad was superb and it touched many a loving heart, I am sure!

Please convey my love to your dear Daddy. I hope you and Daddy are in health. . . .

Yours lovingly,
Eruch

As soon as I had read Eruch's letter, I sent a copy to Adi and another to Mummy and Hilla. Father and I were content, knowing that whatever happened would be Baba's will.

The letter also mentioned the exams that Devraj had taken. He had just made a second attempt for his advanced degree in anesthesiology, as he had not succeeded on his first try, and he and Hilla were anxiously awaiting his examination results, which were to be released on 29th January. Mummy fasted that whole day, taking

only water, waiting to hear if he had passed. Raj felt he had not performed satisfactorily on the exams but, by Baba's grace, on 29th January he found that he had indeed succeeded. Hilla was elated. Again Beloved Baba, true to His promise, was seeing to our littlest needs. Here were two great reasons for the family to celebrate: Raj had passed his exams and Adi had met the girl he wanted to marry.

Two days later, on 31st January, our happiness was shattered. We all knew Baba was very frail, but we were not at all prepared for the devastating news that came to Father and me in Bombay, and to Mummy and Hilla in London. Our Beloved Baba had dropped His body.

Baba's youngest brother, Adi Jr., and his wife Franey, who lived in London, telephoned Hilla and Mummy to tell them. Mummy, stunned, at first refused to believe the news, saying that someone who was against Baba must be spreading rumors. But she was very anxious and asked Hilla and Raj to take her to Adi Jr. and Franey's home. When she arrived, she found that Adi Jr. had telephoned Adi Sr., who had confirmed the news. Then came a telegram from Franey's mother in Ahmednagar, saying that overnight Meherabad had become a place of pilgrimage, with Baba-lovers from all over India coming for Baba's darshan, and it had been decided that Baba would be buried after two days. Then another message came from Sarosh that telegrams had arrived from lovers in America, Europe and Australia, asking that the interment not take place until they could arrive, so he had made arrangements to pack Baba's body in blocks of ice.

Both Mummy and Hilla wept uncontrollably, Mummy repeating, "I have lost my mother. He was like a mother to me," until thirteen-year-old Deepak told them to stop crying because,

he said, “God never dies.” Hilla and Mummy felt humbled by the truth of his words. But the thought of never again seeing Beloved Baba’s physical form tugged at their heartstrings. Mummy, shattered, simultaneously cried for her loss and for Mehera’s, wondering how Mehera would be able to bear the separation from her Beloved and begging Baba to give her courage. She wanted to be near Mehera to comfort her, but India was far away.

Three days before they received Adi Jr. and Franey’s phone call, Hilla had dreamt that Beloved Baba had passed away and was lying in state in His shrine with flowers all around Him. His face, she said, looked just as it did in photos we saw later that were taken in the Samadhi after He had dropped His body. Hilla was sobbing in her sleep, and Devraj woke her and asked what was wrong. When she described her nightmare, he told her to go back to sleep, that it was only a bad dream. But when Hilla told Mummy about her dream the following morning, Mummy said that during the previous few days she had been feeling very depressed for no reason at all and wondered if a close disciple of Baba’s might be about to die. Hilla later told me that somehow she had always thought Baba would be there physically throughout her life. It had never even occurred to her that for Him to live that long would have been impossible. It sounds strange that logic would have so eluded us, but that’s how it was. I believe that Baba sent Hilla’s dream to her to help prepare her and Mummy for the news, so that the shock would be lessened.

Father and I were, of course, able to go to Meherabad and be with all our dear ones there, and during this time I was witness to Father living up to words he had said to Baba one night in 1955, when Baba had abruptly asked him, “Savak, if I were to die, would

you cry?" Father was always completely honest with Baba, and although he was aghast at hearing this question, he was so firm in his conviction that Baba was God that he replied without hesitation, "No, Baba, I will not cry. You were never born, and You never die. You are Eternal and all this is Your Divine Play, so Baba, why should I cry?" Pleased at hearing these spontaneous, courageous words, Baba had given Father a loving pat.

The sacred body of our Beloved Baba lay in the crypt of the Samadhi from 31st January until 7th February, the date of His interment. As Father stood near the Samadhi, watching me weep like all the other spectators, he had no tears. To Father, Baba was God, immortal. But I had lost my Big Daddy, who had nurtured Hilla, Adi and me so lovingly as we grew up under the protection of His divine wings. It was the most difficult time of my worldly life, and I wept unashamedly, as I do today when I remember that sorrowful occasion.

As the days went by, Beloved Baba continued to look fresh and radiant as ever, a gentle smile on His face, as though He were taking a long sleep. But finally, on 7th February, His birthday according to the Zoroastrian calendar, Mehera placed a pink sheet over the God-Man's beautiful body. After Eruch had covered Baba's face with a handkerchief given by Mehera, the men mandali placed an inverted coffin over our Beloved as pilgrims all around the Samadhi proclaimed, "Avatar Meher Baba ki Jai!" A sweet rava (wheat porridge) was given to all those present as prasad. Father and I were there throughout that entire week, seven painful days, but seeing Baba's Glory, our hearts felt moments of joy as well.

I wrote a long air letter to Jeannie and Marvin Campen, whom I had met in New York, the first letter I had ever written

from Meherabad Hill to American lovers. I knew they would be anxious to hear about Baba, as His leaving this earth must have been as great a shock to them as it had been for us.

My darling Jeannie and Marvin,

I am writing this letter to you in our Baba's love, to give you bits and pieces of details about our Master, and how He alone knows what He is doing. . . . Knowing that you will be anxious to know about our Master, so you are the first ones I am writing to, even before writing to my mother and brother. . . .

There is a saying of Hafiz which is framed in Baba's Meherazad. . . . Just a few days before 31st, He said to the mandali to keep reading this and He got this saying shifted to His room where He was resting:

Befitting a fortunate slave, carry out every command of the Master, without any question of why and what.

About what you hear from the Master, never say it is wrong, because, my dear, the fault lies in your own incapacity to understand Him.

I am the slave of the Master, who has released me from ignorance; whatever my Master does is of the highest benefit to all concerned.

So you see, dears, off and on He was giving these hints, but we failed to understand Him and His sayings we simply could not interpret. And now just as desired and said by the Beloved, we have kept His sacred body in the tomb He had built for Himself. On that first day, when I beheld His face . . . He was looking pale, but from then on as each day passes by He has become so beautiful and fresh and blooming, like a light pink rose. His face glistens with the same lustre that He had before. . . . The expression is absolutely peaceful, as if He is simply in a deep sleep. . . .

. . . I feel I have lost something very very dear to me, that I can NEVER replace by anyone, for He was my very dear Big-Daddy whom I used to worry all the time for all my petty troubles, which seemed so great to me, but were very small for Him. It is a great blow, a great depression in my life, but there is no choice but to face everything bravely! I wish you could see Him! How fresh and beautiful is His look! If only He would arise and come back and embrace us!

. . . Also in one of the recent circulars He had said, "The next darshan will be My last darshan in silence." So we thought that after April darshan He will speak, but Baba alone knew what He was talking about. He has tried to tell us in so many ways, but we have not understood Him. How can we, when He is Divine and we are human! It is our "incapacity to understand Him," as the poet Hafiz says.

I write in red ink to signify that Baba is with us in our hearts though not in flesh, so we must rejoice that now will be His time of Glorification so that the world will know Him. For all good tidings we write in red ink, and hence I am doing so.

Well, dears, that is all. Do write when you can. Baba, our great link, in flesh is no more, but in Spirit He is always there—with us—so let us love Him more and more. . . .

About two months later the Campens sent me a copy of this letter as a sweet but painful remembrance of that time.

I also wrote a detailed letter to Mummy, Hilla, Devraj and Deepak over a period of several days, parts of which follow:

. . . Now to speak about our Beloved Big-Daddy, who is giving darshan with His lovely glistening eyes closed. Well, on 31st the mandali came to know that Beloved Baba had dropped His physical body at 12:15 p.m.

That morning Baba told Dr. Donkin, “Today is the day of My crucifixion.” You see, Beloved Baba was off and on giving hints that He will be no more to the male mandali but NOT to the ladies because I guess it would involve Mehera.

On 22nd December, i.e., Mehera’s Birthday, when we all collected, Baba said to us 200 people . . . “You are all very lucky to see Me like this, at such close quarters, and you can talk to Me and see Me before you like this. In My next darshan

there will be crowds; you will not be able to speak to Me. You will simply have to bow and go ahead." So hearing this, we all thought of the April darshan and we thought that at that time there will be crowds and we will not be able to talk to Baba.

One day, after 22 December, some mandali member asked Baba as to how He would give His darshan, when He seemed so frail and weak. So Baba asked Eruch. He said, "Will anyone mind if I give My darshan lying down?" So Eruch said, "O.K. Baba, we will do accordingly." So then Baba asked Francis Brabazon, "Will the Western lovers mind if I gave My darshan lying down?" So Francis said, "Baba, we will put your head up six inches . . . so that everyone can see Your face properly." So Beloved Baba said, "It is a good idea, and we will do it that way."

So you see, this time He gave His darshan lying down and His head was raised six inches higher. Little did anyone understand the significance of Baba's words. . . .

Padri Kaka was called by Baba on 31st January, so when Sidhuji, who used to attend on Mohammed the Mast, went to be with Mohammed, he asked Sidhuji, "Where is that spectacle-dada?" That was the name given to Padri by Mohammed. So Sidhuji said, "He has gone to meet Baba." Mohammed said, "Yes, just as Gustadji was brought here, similarly he has gone to bring Baba here. Baba will come here,

now.” [When Gustadji had died, he was brought to Meherabad and buried.]

. . . On 31st we got the news—this horrifying news. Daddy came to know at home and came rushing to the college to inform me. He told me about Baba and I was terrified, horrified. . . . It was just like a nightmare. Daddy and I packed up and left for ‘Nagar and Meherabad. We stayed there only, Daddy down-hill and I up-hill.

Thousands of people have flocked together from all over India. Don Stevens and Delia and Adi Jr. and four others came from London. Twelve Americans including Harry Kenmore arrived from the U.S.A. . . . All twenty-four hours darshan programme is continuing ever since 31st at 4:00 p.m.

Baba’s body was brought from Meherazad to Meherabad and placed in the tomb. On 1st February, at noon, Baba’s body was to be covered up as per the doctors’ advice. But our lion-hearted Khan Sahib Sarosh K. Irani did not agree. He said that Baba lovers from all over want to see Baba and so it cannot be done. He took responsibility of keeping Baba’s body fresh as ever by placing ice slabs on both sides of Baba in the tomb.

You will hardly believe . . . Baba’s complexion, which was pale, became pink by 4th February and He looked as if He was in a deep sleep. The whole atmosphere of the Tomb was filled with a lovely fragrance of roses and even though the door was

kept open all the time, up to now Beloved
Baba's body is as fresh as a light pink rose,
just blossoming. . . .

On the seventh day Beloved Baba so arranged
that we could go down the steps and touch His
feet. It was a privilege for a few intimate ones,
including me, in the very early hours of the
morning around 5:00 a.m. I
remembered you, dear Mummy, and Hilla and
her family, and Adi too, who could not attend. . . .
I had taken with me three new handkerchiefs,
so I placed them on His feet. Those are our family
heirlooms for the three of us children forever.

. . . At 12:15 p.m. they cleaned up the Tomb
and then at 1:00 p.m. Mehera went into the
Tomb and garlanded Baba. She then put a pink
sheet over Baba's body up to His neck, keeping
His face in view. Then they placed a sheet woven
of flowers on the top.

Then the men mandali and Baba's male rela-
tives went into the tomb with an inverted coffin of
wood, which they carried in, and Beloved Baba's
body was covered up. They came out and then
Mehera went in. She put the first fistful of earth,
followed by the rest of us, and this is how the last
ceremony ended. Then we were given prasad of
rava, because the 7th happened to be Baba's birth-
day as per the Parsi calendar. On that day all the
ladies wore colored saris, NOT white saris, because
Baba is Eternal and also it was Our Beloved Baba's
birthday, and thus Interment Day ended. . . .

Now, dears, to talk about Beloved Mehera. None of us could ever imagine that Baba would go, leaving Mehera amidst us. Looking at her is a heart-rending scene. Every little while she cries and says, “O Baba, why have You left me and gone away? Why did You not tell me that You were going away?” She says like this and weeps and weeps. She sobs and sobs and it tears our hearts to see her suffer like this, she who is Baba’s beloved. She goes around with a small framed photograph of Baba and fondles it all the while and cries as she remembers Him.

The ladies encircling her pacify her by saying, “Mehera, Baba is now within you. He has not left you.” When they say this, she cries and says, “Why is it that I cannot see Him?” She yearns with so much grief that our hearts shed tears at her state. She was so much enveloped with Love Divine that now it is difficult for her to bear this physical separation from her Beloved. Even in her room she sits with Baba’s sadra or His coat, such is her plight. I wonder how she will be able to survive. . . .

Beloved Mehera gave me some rose petals which were touched at Baba’s feet, for you separately. She, in spite of all her heartache, remembered you, Hilloo and Mummy, and she told me to give you her message. She said, write and tell them, “Baba is eternal. Baba is with us only. Baba is in our hearts and so now we must endeavor to find Him within us. We must not think

or worry over this. Beloved Baba's delicate body has suffered much for our sakes. We should now feel happy that Beloved Baba will no longer have to suffer for us. Baba is now always with us. . . ."

I asked Mehera whether I could embrace her and she said "yes," so I embraced her and said, "Mehera, from now on we shall see Baba, our Baba, in you. . . ."

Our darling Mani and Meheru were sitting beside her, and they said to Mehera, "Yes, Mehera, now we see Baba in you alone. Baba has purposely left you for us, Mehera, because now you have to spread Beloved Baba's message, so that every moment we can feel His presence around you, and with you. This is why Beloved Baba has kept you for us, dear Mehera."

Hearing these words, Mehera said, "Amen." Then she said, "Beloved Baba, give me strength, so that I may be able to serve You as per Your will."

After the above conversation, Mehera asked me to sing some devotional songs, so I sang for her. She was no more upset and depressed. She was absolutely calm and composed, as if Beloved Baba had come and hidden into her, and He had bestowed upon Mehera His love and peace and made us realize that He was now within Mehera.

It was so true, that shortly after one devotee from Andhra came to me and asked, "Who is that lady there who looks like Baba?" I said, "Mehera." He bowed to her from a distance and said to other Andhra Baba-lovers, "There is

seated the Divine Power of Baba,” pointing to our Mehera. . . .

Dear ones, remember Mehera’s message, and keep happy in His love and care.

At His Feet,
Your ever-loving daughter
Najoo

P.S. It is decided that Mehera will continue to stay at Meherazad with other ladies mandali. She will only come to the Tomb-Shrine when she yearns to do so. Mehera says “Baba is for all.”

Soon after I returned to Bombay, I heard that Mehera was so grief-stricken at the loss of her Beloved that she would not sleep at night, preferring to sit in Baba’s room, and she had to be coaxed to take food. This news was terribly upsetting to me, and I wrote a loving letter to Mehera, saying that Beloved Baba had kept her for us, and the world, as His representative to carry on His work. We looked to her after Baba dropped His body.

In spite of her intense grief, she, like her Beloved, was compassionate and loving, and she sent a sweet reply:

Jai Baba
Meherazad

My dearest Najoo,

I received your dear letter and was touched by the love it brought.

Meherazad is filled with sweet memories of our Beloved Baba, and though I cannot see Him with these eyes and so miss His physical presence, I know that He is near me and I feel His Beloved Presence very close. He so loved us and gave of Himself for humanity. Now it is for us to do what He asks of us and abide by His Will. We must love Him more and more as He ought to be loved. I bow down and pray to Beloved Baba that I be worthy of His dear love.

Dear Najoo, I do not want you to be worried about me. Baba is our Beloved God and He sees to everything and watches over all of us. Keep well in His love and do your daily duties. You and dear Nergiz have done much for me with so much love. Even when her eyes were troubling her, she has sewn for me, which I will always remember. . . .

Love to you in our Beloved Baba,
Mehera

Hilla also wrote Mehera and Mani from England:

My dearest Mehera, Mani,

Every morning since the last eight days I have opened this air letter to write to you, but words fail me, and then I shut it again. Even at the best of times, I am but a poor writer, and at a

time like this, I feel more at a loss than ever. Mere words cannot comfort you both who have been so . . . close to the Beloved. In fact, no one or nothing on earth could bring comfort to you at a time like this, except the strength that the Beloved Himself would give you, to bear it somehow, in some way.

We were all stunned, shocked and disbelieving at the news. It was paralyzing, and the effect still remains. One feels like a mechanical robot doing the everyday chores. The joy of life has taken flight as well. If we, who all love Him, felt this way, then I can just imagine what you are going through, you, the Beloved of the Beloved. . . .

The first four days were intolerable, and then somehow I felt peace, and I feel my Beloved Baba has settled in my heart closer than ever before and will remain till Eternity. My love for Him will ever grow more and more each day till the very end. How lucky I am to have known our Beloved Baba since my very childhood, and to have stayed with Him all those beautiful years in the ashram, to have filled my eyes with the wonderful sight of His beautiful countenance, to have been embraced by Him so many glorious times, to have laughed with Him, played with Him, cried on His shoulder, memories to relive a million times or more in my mind. And you, most beloved ones of the Beloved, have so many many more to bring you some comfort . . . for only He alone can comfort you in His own Divine way, you who built

your entire world around the Beloved and existed for Him alone. I try to take comfort from these words my Deepak said to me when I was weeping bitter tears. “Mummy, if you really believe Baba is God, how can God die?” . . .

I had sent Hilla the rose petals Mehera had given me, along with some dust from the Samadhi and the handkerchief that I had placed on Beloved Baba’s feet. Hilla wrote to thank me, saying that the handkerchief still smelled like fresh roses.

In the early years in Meherazad, Beloved Baba had once called Mani and asked her, “Will you do what I say?” She replied, “Yes, Baba, with pleasure.” Baba said, “If something should happen and I drop my body, I want you to look after Mehera.” Mani was stunned. She said, “Baba, I will do anything You say, but don’t ever say this to me. How can I do this?” Baba smiled and said, “OK, forget about this,” and He changed the subject. But, as Mani told me later, “The day Baba dropped His precious body, I suddenly remembered these words He had said long ago. Hence, from that moment until the day Mehera dropped her body, I did all within my capacity to look after her.” Mani played her supporting role to Mehera beautifully and faithfully in this Kali Yuga, when true, unselfish love and support are rare.

DURING THE WEEK THAT BABA’S BODY LAY IN THE SAMADHI, Adi had to stay in Junagadh, Gujarat. He asked for a leave, but the office could not grant it, as the person who had previously worked there was in the process of handing over his charge to Adi. Although he longed to be with us in Meherabad, Adi understood that Baba

always expected us to do our duty first, and, like our father, Adi always obeyed Baba. To pacify his bleeding heart, he went to Dwarka, which was close by, where Lord Krishna had dropped His body. A beautiful temple is built by the seaside at that spot.

Adi wrote to us on 11th February that he sat there and reminisced about our lives with Beloved Baba. He left at sunset, having subdued his longing to get a last glimpse of Lord Meher in the crypt:

My dear Daddy, Najoo,

Hope this finds you two in the best of health. I am at a loss of words to express my feelings at the passing away of Shree Baba. To me, Shree Baba is always there. Even today I pray to Him as I have done so for all these years and He will always be a source of inspiration and strength to me all my life. To pray to Him and to be inspired by Him even after His passing away remains a matter of understanding only to those who have loved Baba all their life and have understood Him and for what He stood during His stay on our earth. For me, I have no two thoughts, as He will always be there in happiness and trouble and in this life forever wherever I am. To shed tears will be a great mistake, but to follow His teachings even to a small extent will take care of us. Even today Baba is as much with us as He was when He was present on this earth. To have known Him in His manly form and have loved Him mattered, and now what really matters is to act

as per His wishes, which I am sure only one percent among us will be able to do! As Baba had said, there is no one before or after Him; He is the One and only and we must try and merge our soul with His so as to achieve ultimate Happiness and Salvation.

Be happy and love Baba more. . . . Baba in His infinite love and happiness Bless you all.

Yours,
Adi

I also received a lovely response to the letter I had sent Jeannie and Marvin Campen:

Dearest Najoo:

Your letter was so beautiful and so important, Marvin made copies of it to send to Fred and Ella and Andy and Peg. A copy was also sent to Mrs. Duce in San Francisco with the request to share it with Dorothy and Ned, for they are living in San Francisco. . . . Thank you from the bottom of our hearts, Najoo dear, for writing to us so soon and while the full impact of your deep experience was still so strong in your mind and heart. It fills in the unanswered thoughts in our minds that the communications from Meherazad could not answer in cables, etc. . . .

Mrs. Duce phoned us on Saturday evening from San Francisco (Saturday, Feb. 1) to tell us

that Don Stevens had phoned from London. . . .
 We were stunned by the news and that night
 could only sleep fitfully. Next morning I felt like
 I was recovering from a grave illness. I felt so
 limp, and, as Baba once said, as if I had been put
 through a wringer. There is a beautiful church
 across the street from us and we went to
 church that morning, still numb, still trying
 to understand Baba's will and wishes, telling
 ourselves that Baba was in our hearts. Our hearts
 were heavy, not for ourselves as much as for all
 those dear ones at Meherazad who, having been
 so close to Baba, would miss His physical
 presence so much. Our comfort was in believing
 that Baba was in charge; it was His will. . . .

Baba's lovers, Eastern and Western, found themselves looking to
 their Beloved alone for comfort.

WHEN MUMMY RETURNED FROM LONDON, she asked Adi to take
 her by car to Meherabad and Meherazad, and I accompanied them.
 On the way there Mummy was very depressed, and at the Samadhi
 she wept bitterly. Adi and I stayed out and let her give vent to her
 feelings in the presence of her Lord and Master. Her heartache, it
 seemed, could not be contained.

After taking Baba's darshan, we left for Meherazad. Before
 arriving, Mummy said, "Our darling Mehera's grief must be so
 intense that we must suppress our sorrow and allow her to release
 her heartache for her Beloved." When we arrived, we were let in
 by the entrance to the women's quarters.

Seeing Mummy get out of the car, Mehera came down the stairs of Baba's bungalow. She ran into Mummy's arms and began to sob on her shoulder, saying, "How will I live without Baba? What will I do without Him?"

Mummy at first let her cry as much as she wanted, all the while embracing her. Finally Mummy said, "You know, Mehera, Baba has kept you alive for us, so that you may continue His mission of spreading love for God among His lovers, East and West." Mehera gradually calmed down. She held Mummy's hand as they climbed the stairs to the porch and at tea time, she had Mummy sit beside her and asked about London and what Mummy had seen there.

IN THE TWO MONTHS BEFORE BABA DROPPED HIS BODY, two circulars were sent out regarding what later came to be known as the Last Darshan. On 1st November 1968, Life Circular No. 70 was issued. In it Baba said the following:

I would like to fulfill immediately the longing
of My lovers.

I have decided to give My Darshan only to My
lovers, but not to the general public.

On 15th January 1969, Life Circular No. 71 was issued by Adi K. Irani:

His three years of intense work have shattered
His health.

In spite of this, Baba has invited His lovers from
all over the world . . . for it is the time for them to

com to Him and receive His love. But with the present condition of His health, how Baba will give His Darshan . . . yet remains to be determined, but it will be.

He will give His Darshan.

This Darshan Baba says “will be the Last given in Silence.”

Accordingly, the heads of Baba groups everywhere had made preparations as per a list that was given covering all the different locales and the dates and times each group was to come. Some of the Western followers had already chartered airplanes for attending the darshan in Guruprasad.

After the initial wave of shock had swept the Baba community throughout the world, His lovers, assured by the mandali that the darshan would still take place, came from East and West alike to honor the invitation to their Master’s Last Darshan, which was to be “given in Silence.” Many of His lovers had been able to read between the lines given in the Life Circulars, knowing that Baba is Eternal. He had clearly told Bhauji three times during his night duty on the last night, 30th January 1969, “I am not this body.” All those lovers who were able to make the journey arrived from far and near, a mixture of sorrow and joy in their hearts, knowing that He *would be* present.

The Westerners, because of the length of their journey, were to take darshan four times in the week they were to stay in Poona, and the Easterners were to attend just once in the three days that they stayed. The large hall in Guruprasad had the capacity to hold



Eruch in Guruprasad at the Great Darshan, meeting many new Westerners for the first time. Adi K. Irani in the background.

only five hundred lovers at a time, so arrangements were made accordingly. The same chair that was used for the East-West Gathering was draped in the same manner as before, and a beautiful framed photograph of Baba was kept on it showing Him sitting there like a glorious emperor during that event. The entire hall was charged with His Divine presence. Each person attending bowed to Baba as if He were seated on that chair, and He *was* there, for we all felt His presence. Some bowed in reverence, others sobbed as they missed His physical form, yet others had silent tears of joy as they took His darshan, many for the first time. Thus the Last Darshan in Silence continued on schedule, the last event of this kind in our lifetime. The Avatar of the Age had kept His promise, and we were all grateful for this opportunity.

Among those Westerners present for the Last Darshan were Jeannie and Marvin Campen, whom I saw, and Ned and Dorothea Foote, whom I somehow missed. A letter from Dorothea came in May describing an experience that was true of so many who were there in Poona for this wondrous occasion:

. . . It was a little worrisome to go to Guruprasad, knowing that we would not see Him there, and receive His wonderful all-knowing, all-understanding glance. But Baba was there, I know, even if I couldn't see Him, and so many of us felt Him in different ways. Many of the new young people were overcome with tears and they obviously felt something very moving, close and dear. I myself got only the strange feeling that nothing had changed—that the empty chair was an illusion, and Baba's presence still cast His

electric spell over everything and everyone.
 Presently I realized I was receiving proof of
 this—all my health and physical problems were
 suspended as if they didn't exist—just as in
 1962.

During the program the mandali had arranged for Baba's lovers to provide entertainment, just as we had when He was physically present. I had composed seven songs specifically for this Last Darshan: "Baba the Avatar," "Baba My Big Daddy," "I Love You, Baba," "Hold on to His Daaman," "Prasad in Guruprasad," "To Meherabad-Meherazad for Pilgrimage," and the departing song, "Let's Carry Baba's Love Home." I sang these songs with the permission of Mehera and Mani and with the help of Baba's Western lovers, as we practiced together to entertain the Lord of the Universe. The departing song, given below, I sang from my heart as we parted from Him at the end of the darshan. I composed it especially for Baba-lovers to carry His love to their homes as they left the shores of India. It is sung to the tune of "Show Me the Way to Go Home."

Let's Carry Baba's Love Home

Let's carry Baba's love home,
 'Tis one thing we all own;
 Be we rich or poor or colored or white,
 To Him we are all alike;

Let's carry Baba's love home,
 Through air or sea or storm
 No matter where we roam, my dear,
 Let's carry Baba's love home.

Let's carry Baba's love home,
 'Tis precious to us all
 'Twill keep us going on and on
 Through winter spring or fall;

Let's carry Baba's love home,
 There's plenty for us all;
 In our hearts He has chosen to live, my dear,
 Let's carry Baba's love home.

Let's carry Baba's love home,
 Keep His memories in our minds,
 Follow His teachings in our daily lives,
 In this world of might and strife;

Let's spread His message of love
 Awaken others' hearts and minds,
 To the One and Only Avatar of this Age,
 Meher Baba, our God Divine!

NOT LONG AFTER THE LAST DARSHAN, Adi was asked to give a speech at the Baba Centre in Bombay. This speech, which I have in his handwriting, is about who Baba was to Adi. In it he spoke of the many ways in which Baba's lovers, with all their human limitations, have tried to describe Him—much as the twelve blind men who had never seen an elephant were asked to describe one, and each was able to talk only about the part he had touched. Certain passages of Adi's talk particularly stand out:

If one really wants to understand Baba, one

should be like a small child, as a child accepts whatever is given to him by his mother, without questioning. We should also . . . accept Baba without any question or doubt in our minds; then only we will, over a period of time, go on gaining more and more knowledge and understanding of Baba. As Baba has said, our attitude should be one of “holding on to His daaman” with 100 percent faith. It is only when we start questioning without any understanding of what we want to know, or what we want to understand or experience or gain, [that] we fail Baba. One should open up one’s heart and properly coordinate the activity of heart and head in order to fall fully in love with Baba and derive benefit from Baba. Baba is not an instant formula to bring you all sorts of prosperity or improve your financial position in life. . . .

Many times we feel defeated and frustrated when we are not able to solve a particular problem in our life and feel that Baba has not helped us, only to find that, thank Baba, we were not able to do what we wanted to because we would have landed in a still worse position. So not only does Baba help us in achieving success, but he also turns our defeats into success. Now when I come to think about all that He does for us, I feel ashamed to say that Baba is more devoted to me than I am to Him. . . . Baba is not only a silent partner, but a guiding star in my life, and . . . He does things without telling me or asking for a

reward. The only thing which I give Him is my love and devotion, and that too in a very limited way. I always wonder if I could increase my love and devotion what higher peaks He can take me to, but I am helpless and He fully understands my limitations. As I said earlier, it is up to us to receive Baba, and it is our limited approach which fails us in quenching our thirst from this Ocean of love.

The idea that Baba is more devoted to us than we are to Him is one I have thought about often, a reminder to ask Him to help me love Him more and more.

MUMMY, FATHER AND I were all looking forward to Adi's wedding, which was to take place on 23rd November 1969, at Bhavnagar, the home of his bride, Freny. We were to fly there in the early morning of 22nd November. The previous morning, when I saw that Mummy was saying her prayers, I had my breakfast alone, as I was hungry. I later approached Mummy to get her to eat something. To my astonishment, tears were rolling down her cheeks.

"Mummy," I said to her, "on such a happy occasion, you should not cry."

She began to sob. "If Baba, my Mother, were in human form, He would have sent me greetings for Adi's marriage. On such important occasions I miss Him a lot, for no one in my life loved me as He loved me. He would have sent His blessings!" Hearing this and thinking of Baba's love for us, I too cried.

Then about noon a neighbor came to greet Mummy since



Adi and Freny at their wedding

the next day was an auspicious day according to the Zoroastrian calendar, and we were to leave very early to catch our plane. Zoroastrians have a custom of greeting a dear one on such occasions by applying a red powder called *kum-kum* to the feet and forehead of the person being greeted. Finally we give a gift after placing kum-kum on it as well. The neighbor, the first person to come that day, performed this ritual and left.

A short while later her nine-year-old son, who was very fond of Mummy, arrived. The little boy saw the kum-kum on Mummy's

right foot, which was up on the divan where she was seated, and he screamed in excitement. “Aunty, look! Meher Baba’s face is on your right foot!”

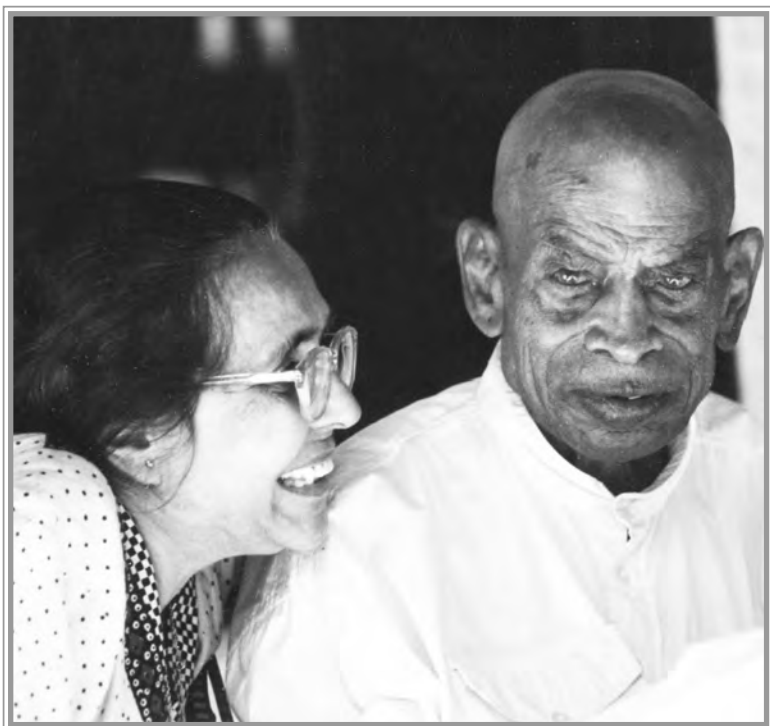
I was in the kitchen serving Father, and I ran to see. To my great joy it was indeed a clear profile of Baba’s lovely face in the kum-kum. Father, who followed me, was also excited and happy. Mummy was thrilled that Beloved Baba was the first to bless and greet her, Adi and the family on the occasion of Adi’s wedding. I rushed to a photographer and brought him home to take a picture of Mummy’s right foot, as this was a moment to remember forever, this sign of Baba’s blessing Adi’s marriage in such a humorous way.

Eruch had written Adi at the end of October, after the mandali had received the invitation to the wedding, “We all wish Beloved Baba’s love and blessings be forever on dear Adi/Freny, and may their happy, long and healthy married life give joy to all who know them! Please convey our fond love to dear Adi/Freny and convey to them good wishes and ‘all the best’ from all their uncles and aunts at Meherazad!” Mummy and Father also received a telegram before we left for the wedding: “We wish Beloved Avatar Meher Baba’s love blessings on dear Adi/Freny on their wedding day and always may their married lives be happy in loving remembrance of Beloved Baba’s love to you all. [signed] Meheramani, Meherazad mandali.” Mummy was delighted with the telegram, but the sight of Baba’s face appearing in the kum-kum on her right foot was what she always thought of first when she later remembered the time of Adi’s wedding.



Mehera and Meherwan on his first visit to Meherazad

MEHERA'S REUNION WITH HER BELOVED



Mohammed and me

Not long after Adi and Freny's wedding, I made a trip to Meherabad for Baba's darshan. I had hardly put my handbag down before Heather Nadel, one of the Western residents, told me that Mohammed had been on a fast without water for several days and was very weak. I went into Mandali Hall where he was lying on his bed. He could not even sit up, and he was so thin that

his abdomen had become concave. I was shocked to see him in this condition. Heather said whenever Padri Kaka tried to give him water, he turned his face away. They kept a cupful of sweet lime juice near him, hoping he would break his fast, but he refused to do so.

Since Mohammed was my childhood friend, I hoped he might respond to my plea. Heather gave me the cup of sweet lime juice and a teaspoon, and I sat on his bed beside him and took Beloved Baba's name. I tried humoring him, repeating in a singsong manner, "Baba's child, Mohammed; Baba loves Mohammed" in Urdu, coaxing him as I would have coaxed a toddler, repeating these words for more than half an hour.

Then, to my amazement, he opened his lips just a slit, and I put a teaspoon of juice in his mouth. Both Heather and I were delighted. She ran to tell Padri Kaka that Mohammed had broken his fast, and we all said "Avatar Meher Baba ki Jai!" We were still concerned, though, and the next day I asked permission of Padri Kaka to give Mohammed a sponge bath, saying that I could do so without exposing him in the least. My father, who had looked after the masts in his early days in the ashram, had once told us that when we performed any activity for them, such as bathing or feeding them, we should have no thought in our minds except remembering and repeating Baba's name. If we had other thoughts, he said, these spiritually advanced souls would not like that because removing the sanskaras created by such thoughts meant added work for them. I remembered my father's words and whenever sponging or feeding Mohammed, I repeated "Baba's child Mohammed; Baba loves Mohammed" and thought of nothing else.

Mohammed was most cooperative. He did not drive me away

as he did others in those days. When I was able to give this kind of service, I was grateful to Beloved Baba for making me a nurse. Caring for Mohammed was a tremendous blessing. It was almost as though he was the reason I had journeyed to Meherabad that time.

A few months later, Mummy, Father, Adi and I made a trip to Meherabad for darshan at Baba's Samadhi and then on to Meherazad. Mummy and I sat on the porch with Mehera and the women, while Father stood below the porch and, with folded hands, said "Jai Baba" to Mehera. On seeing him, Mehera stood and said "Jai Baba" to Father with such appreciation that Mummy and I were deeply touched. She told the others on the porch, "This is Savak, Najoo's father. Savak has served Baba sincerely with all his heart. He did long hours of night duty for Baba all alone, sometimes even for eleven hours at a stretch. After him, Baba assigned the same duty to three men mandali and one woman, Rano, and they all did night duty in four shifts." All this had happened starting in August of 1959, but Mehera still remembered. She was Father's Goddess, and he always referred to her that way with reverence.

IN FEBRUARY OF 1971 our family was shocked to receive word from Hilla that Deepak, at the age of only twenty-one, had suffered a heart attack. Mani wrote that both she and Mehera had written to Hilla, and Mehera sent Deepak a get-well card with a picture of Baba. Mani said, "Beloved Baba has made a big thing into a small one, and the timely detection of the ailment is by His grace—it is easier to control and cure, and by Beloved Baba's grace will in time become stronger than ever."

Mummy wrote immediately to Hilla, asking her to send a donation so we could request that Pukar, the one Baba called His

Hanuman, arrange for a program to feed poor children in Hamirpur, where he lived. Mummy felt this would help Deepak's recovery. Hilla sent the donation, which we forwarded to Pukar, and the program took place on 21st August. Gulabdas Panchal, who had helped Pukar with the program, wrote to Father, and Pukar wrote to me. Both described that day with amazement. Besides the children who had been invited, many additional people came, hoping to get something special to eat. At first it seemed there wouldn't be sufficient food, but as it was distributed it seemed to multiply, until around a thousand poor children and their families had been fed. Everyone prayed to Baba for the health of Deepak. Gulabdas said the program had awakened new interest in Baba among the people of Hamirpur. When Deepak was later reexamined, his EKG revealed no trace of damage from the heart attack.

ADI AND FRENY HAD SETTLED INTO MARRIED LIFE EASILY, as they shared many interests, particularly reading and music, though Freny did not in the beginning share Adi's love for Baba. My brother, knowing my almost fanatic love for our Beloved, had firmly warned me after his marriage that I should not push Baba at Freny. If her sanskaras were spiritual, he told me, she would automatically be drawn to Him, even though He was no longer in human form. Adi was very wise in this regard, and Mummy and I did manage not to speak directly to Freny about Baba—though we frequently discussed Him with one another in her presence, as He was in our every drop of blood. Nor could we resist talking of Him with visitors who were Baba-lovers. Of course we hoped and prayed that Freny would eventually come to love Him too.

While Adi and Freny were living in Manmad, Gujarat, I

visited them and saw how like Mummy Adi was, depriving himself to help the poor. Freny had complained to me that she couldn't send Adi to the bazaar for vegetables and fruit because he usually returned emptyhanded, but I thought she was exaggerating. Then one day Adi decided to go to the bazaar and I rode with him on his scooter. As soon as we arrived, an old, sick man approached Adi saying he needed Rs 5 to go to a doctor and Rs 10 for his medicines. I observed, as a nurse, that the man was indeed very ill. Adi put his hand in his pocket and gave the man Rs 15. Freny had given him Rs 20 total, so now he had only Rs 5 left. Adi bought the cheapest vegetable there, a squash, for Rs 5. We were approaching the scooter when his office attendant greeted us and told Adi that his family was going to have to fast that day because he had no money left for the last two days of the month. Adi took the squash from the shopping bag and gave it to the attendant and we started home with nothing—minus Rs 20. I was shocked by Adi's behavior. As we reached home, Freny heard the scooter approaching and came to the door of their bungalow to find Adi with nothing. She was not surprised.

Adi laughed. "Darling," he said, "I am sure if you had been with me, you would have asked me to help a very sick old man with Rs 15 for his visit to a doctor and his medicines. And I bought a squash with the other Rs 5, but I gave it to my attendant since his family would have had nothing to eat, this being the end of the month. Freny, we have stored dal and rice, so we will have that." Freny was such an excellent cook that Adi knew she would manage to make something delicious out of what she had on hand. "Also," he said, "Baba will be happy that we were generous. Don't you think so?" Adi embraced Freny, and she just laughed. She

knew her husband would never be wealthy, but he had a heart of pure gold, and Freny shared this quality.

Although they were very happy with one another, both Adi and Freny wanted a child. Freny had conceived several times, but thus far she had been unable to carry a baby full term. Once while she and Adi were still in Gujarat, she was expecting a baby and was reading to fill the time. One day she asked Adi to recommend a Baba book. Adi gave her, in my opinion, the most difficult book of all for a newcomer to digest: *God Speaks*. Freny conscientiously read every word of this book as if it were a text for a subject she was studying. And *God Speaks* was, ultimately, what drew her to Baba.

The next time Freny came with Adi to Bombay, she asked him to take her to Baba's Bombay Centre, and I accompanied them. Then she asked Adi to take her to Baba's Samadhi. She said Meherabad had a soothing effect on her, and as she sat in the Samadhi, she felt completely relaxed and at peace with the world. When she reached Meherazad, she fell immediately in love with Mehera and Mani. On her first visit to Meherazad in 1970, soon after her wedding, Freny had been impressed with Mehera's ethereal beauty, her gentle voice, her childlike giggle as she told stories of her life with Baba, and her dignified bearing. I still remember how lovingly Mehera embraced her at that time, saying, "We welcome you, our dear Adi's pretty wife," and complimenting her on the Punjabi outfit she wore, which had silver stars on it. Mani wrote to me later, "What a sweet girl Baba has chosen for His dear Adi!" Now, on this visit, Freny, like so many young Western lovers of Baba, began to see Him through the pure, divine eyes of Mehera and through Mani's bubbling personality. Although many of Baba's lovers never met Him in person, they have been drawn to Him through these two magnets

of His love, who revealed Him in all their words and actions.

When Hilla next visited from London and we spoke of our beautiful childhood at Meher Retreat with Baba and our dear companions Mohammed and Bapji, Freny joined the conversation, explaining to us how to identify different types of masts. She spoke as if she were a scholar, while we felt ignorant, lacking theoretical understanding of this subject. Freny's knowledge of masts came from the mind, whereas for Hilla and me it was all from the heart. Freny told us, "You have no idea what you must have gained spiritually by being with them for hours at a time." She also told us about reincarnation and other spiritual ideas which didn't much interest Hilla and me. All we knew was that Baba was our Big Daddy, we loved Him, and we tried to obey and please Him through good thoughts, good words and good deeds.

IN ALL HIS TIME LIVING IN THE ASHRAM WITH BABA, Father had never accompanied Him on His travels away from India. Father had long wanted to go abroad, though, and in August 1973 Baba granted his wish. Father needed to have an operation, so Hiloo and Devraj sent him a round-trip ticket to London, where he had the surgery. He then stayed at their home in Kent while he recovered. This visit gave Hilla and her family an opportunity to know Father better, particularly Hilla, who for the first time was able to enjoy a close relationship with him. In her words, "I really got to know him as a tender, loving father . . . an aspect of his character that I had never enjoyed even in childhood." She said that while they were watching television, Father would weep over scenes in which children were neglected, perhaps because he had unintentionally neglected his own children in his quest for God. Also,

although he had initially been reticent about talking of his days with Baba, while he was in Kent he told Hilla, Devraj and Deepak many stories of his life in the ashram, always impressing upon them that in all the years he served his Beloved, it was only because of Baba's love, encouragement and tolerance that he was able to perform this service.



Father in London

Father also endeared himself to Raj and Hilla's friends, several of whom said he reminded them of Harold Wilson, the former English Prime Minister. He completely surprised Hilla on one occasion by dancing after he was pulled onto a dance floor at a reception following a navjote. He hopped on buses to go sight-seeing on his own, and because as a senior citizen he could go to the cinema without paying, he often went to a matinee at a local theatre. Hilla thought it must have reminded him of his days at the Arangaon cinema where he had served Baba. The highlight of his trip, though, was the talk he gave at the London Baba Centre on how he came to Baba. Everyone who attended expressed their appreciation. When he was leaving London, he offered his heartfelt thanks to Baba for making his dream come true.

AFTER SEVERAL YEARS OF MARRIAGE, Adi and Freny were still childless, and finally I decided to speak to Mehera about Freny's difficulty. At that time Adi was posted in Kandla, a backward place with inadequate medical care. Mehera instructed me to take Freny to the best gynecologist in Bombay the next time she visited us, and to get written standing orders as to what medical treatment should be given from the beginning of a pregnancy. I carried out Mehera's instructions when Freny was next in Bombay.

Not long after that visit Freny decided to attend Amartithi

and to perform a dance for the occasion. While she and Adi were living in Ahmedabad, she had fulfilled a childhood dream, studying with one of India's greatest classical dancers. Freny was a natural dancer, and she amazed her teacher as, despite her age and lack of previous training, she learned the difficult movements. She had choreographed a Kuchipudi dance to music she had audio-taped on the theme of the Master's Prayer of Beloved Baba, and on 31st January 1980, Freny performed it on the stage of the Sabha Mandap, directly across from Baba's Samadhi. Her interpretation of the Master's Prayer was her most unforgettable performance at Meherabad. Everyone watched in silence, the atmosphere charged with Baba's love and presence, as Freny moved barefoot over the rough stone floor, dancing for love of her Lord. Dazzled by her performance, everyone applauded loudly.

Mehera, in her usual loving way, gestured for Freny to come down from the stage to where she was seated in the first row, near the cabin beside the Sabha Mandap. Mehera took Freny in her warm embrace and turned so that she could see the Samadhi. Still holding Freny tightly, Mehera closed her eyes and prayed to Baba before releasing her and giving her a Baba locket.

After Amartithi Freny returned to Kandla, in the Kutch district of Gujarat, the very desert area in which Baba's father Sheriarji had roamed in search of God. And there she conceived the child Mehera had prayed for, the one she would be able to carry full term. Mehera took great interest in this pregnancy, sending instructions for Freny to follow. A letter from Freny, written just after Amartithi of 1981, expressed her regret at not being able to accompany Adi to Meherabad but mostly reassured Mehera that everything was going well:



Freny performing Kuchipudi dance based on the Master's Prayer, Amartithi 1980

. . . I follow the instructions regularly as far as possible and I'm sure if Beloved Baba wishes and that if I have His blessings there won't be any difficulty and everything will turn out well.

I'm much better now and move around in the house a little bit, take ample rest and medicines daily. At present I don't have any complications as such but feel a bit weak and can't do any household work. My dear parents are with me and look after myself as well as the house though they themselves are not keeping too well, poor things. . . .

The gynecologist in Bombay had instructed that for the entire pregnancy Freny must do no strenuous work and, preferably, should remain in bed. For the first three months Adi looked after her with the help of her parents. For the next three months I took special leave from my employer in order to be with Freny and attend to household chores. Dr. Goher instructed me to write her about every detail of Freny's pregnancy, and I did so. Late in May, when we were making preparations to leave for Bombay, Dr. Goher wrote a letter for Mehera expressing her concern that we might be coming too soon:

Meherazad
13th May 1981

Jai Meher Baba
Dearest Najoo,

Mehera just received your letter of 6th May and she wants me to reply before the mail goes.

Mehera says you have to take great care of Freny and the baby to come. Be very careful. It will be better if Freny completes at least seven months and two or three weeks before going to Bombay . . . but if your obstetrician thinks it's too late and the monsoon will give her trouble, then do as your doctor says. . . . Mehera has prayed to Beloved Baba to keep His sweet nazar on dear Freny and give her a full-term bonny baby. Amen! Mehera says don't give her any papaya to eat. Give her complete rest. Tell Freny to keep on repeating Baba's dear name. Mehera sends her love to you and dear Freny.

Lovingly in Baba,
Goher

In June, as per the doctor's advice, we took a flight to Bombay, where Mummy took care of all of Freny's needs until the baby was born. As soon as we returned, I made a short trip for Baba's darshan, and I was able to go afterwards to Meherazad and fill Mehera and the women in on the latest news of Freny's condition. Freny herself wrote Mehera on 22nd June:

. . . With grace of Beloved Baba I am keeping good health and there is no problem at all. As you know from Najoo, I arrived very comfortably and safely to Bombay from Kutch, and that was all because of your prayers and good feelings towards us and I'm indeed very grateful to you. . . .

I'm very eager to visit Meherabad for our Baba's darshan, which I can do only after my delivery. Meanwhile when you receive this letter, kiss the feet of His photograph in your room on my behalf. Convey my fond love to Mani, Dr. Goher, Meheru and all Meherazad family.

Thank you very much for the prasad which you sent through dear Najoo. I have eaten it with lots of pleasure. We'll certainly distribute *penda* and put a *jali* and garland on Beloved Baba's Samadhi as per your instructions when the time comes. I'm most anxiously looking forward to the day when our little one will put its little head on Beloved Baba's Samadhi and also meet you and our very dear Baba family. . . .

In a letter dated 31st July I informed Mehera that Freny had entered her ninth month and was now told to move around because the doctor had assured her that everything was normal. I said I would let them know as soon as little Merwan or Mehera was born, and I thanked Mehera, certain that Freny had come this far because of her prayers to Beloved Baba.

As soon as Freny began having labor pains, she was moved to St. Elizabeth's Nursing Home, one of the best in Bombay. Her gynecologist believed in natural childbirth, but Freny seemed to make no progress with her labor. I was in the labor room with her, and we were both exhausted. Finally I called out loudly to Baba three times. (Fortunately none of the nursing staff was nearby.) Immediately I saw a vision of a child being strangled, and I rushed to find the doctor. "I request you to do a Cesarean," I told her, "as

I have had a vision of the baby being strangled.” By Baba’s grace, she agreed and performed the Cesarean immediately, bringing into the world on 17th August 1981, Adi and Freny’s only child, a son. To her astonishment, the thick umbilical cord was wrapped three times around the baby’s neck. The doctor said she was glad she had believed me, as otherwise he would have died.

A letter from Dr. Goher had come before the birth, expressing Mehera’s wish that if the child was a boy, he would be named Merwan. Freny liked the name Meherwan, but I also wanted to respect Mehera’s wishes. So both names, Merwan and Meherwan, are on his birth certificate—and, curiously, Mehera’s letter to welcome him used both names:

... We were all so happy to receive the joyous news of little Merwan’s birth—Baba’s very special gift to Adi and Freny. Very openly Beloved Baba has shown you that it is through His Love and Grace that Meherwan had a safe delivery. Baba has showered His love on all of you.

We hope dear Freny and little Merwan are doing well. May this precious Baba baby grow healthy and strong—a beautiful Baba-lover in His service to bring joy to all who know him.

Special love to dear Freny—much love to you all dear ones and Hiloo from your Meherazad family. . . .

Mani and Goher sent a lovely card with a little horse pulling a sleigh with three women in it. Around the picture Mani had written, “A right royal welcome to Baba-Baby Meherwan, the Beloved’s

gift to Adi-Freny Kotwal.” Inside were three wishes for the new arrival: “Always wisdom and good health; and over and far above, Beloved Baba’s Love, which is the greatest wealth!”

We all felt from the beginning that Meherwan was a special child. Instead of mother’s milk or water, he first tasted Baba’s prasad. Mansari had given me small orange sweets that had touched Baba’s Samadhi, and I had them in my pocket so I could moisten my mouth whenever I was thirsty during Freny’s labor and delivery. While the doctor and other nurses were completing the Cesarean, they had placed Meherwan in an incubator in the same room. I took an orange sweet from my pocket, opened the lid of the incubator, and held it for Meherwan to taste. I realize that I am indeed a fanatic, but I was most pleased with what I had done.

Five days later Freny was discharged from the nursing home. We drove straight to Avatar Meher Baba Bombay Centre and placed His very special gift to us at Baba’s feet. Our centre has a beautiful photograph of Baba in Darbar pose, looking like the Emperor of Emperors. Mummy, Freny, Adi and I said the Master’s Prayer, the Prayer of Repentance, and the Beloved God prayer, then sang the Bujaave Arti. We touched Meherwan’s forehead to Baba’s feet and then took him home.

When Meherwan was six months old, we took him to Meherabad for darshan in Beloved Baba’s Samadhi for the first time. Meherwan was joyful, smiling as if he had reached his real home. Just a few months after that visit, in September of 1982, Adi was posted to Bombay, where he was eventually made a senior manager. Mummy, Father and I were thrilled to have them with us so that we could watch Meherwan grow up.

On his first birthday, Mehera and Mani sent a telegram:

“Darling Meherwan is gift of Beloved Meherbaba to his parents and to you all Meherazad menwomen mandali wish Meherwan very happy first birthday with many happy returns.” I wrote a letter to Mehera describing the birthday party we had for him—even drawing a picture of the square cake with a heart in the center, saying “Baba Bless Dear Merwan.”

When Meherwan was a year and nine months old, I wrote to Mehera about what a joy—and what a handful—he was for all of us. Already he knew the alphabet, A to Z, could count from one to ten, and loved to sing, especially Baba songs.

. . . Another very cute thing is that nearby to our home we have a mosque and the priest calls for prayer . . . and just once Mummy had told him that the priest is taking Baba’s name, so every time he gives the call, Merwan rushes to Mummy and says, “He is saying ‘Baba,’” and then he will rush to the picture of Baba whether he is eating or playing; he will still rush and put his head on the floor and he will say, “Baba Parvardigar,” and then he will fold his hands and stand and touch his hands to his forehead about three or four times, with his eyes closed, imitating Daddy or Hilla, as they do like that.

I also told Mehera that he recognized her picture and could say her name. And just three months after that, Mani sent a card in response to another of my letters: “I have just been reading your letter of 14th and my smile of delight at little Merwan’s sweet showing-off by so confidently singing Baba bhajans before a packed audience

at the Beloved's Centre was like a watermelon slice—I mean my smile. A chorus of claps from us all.”

Adi, Freny and I took Meherwan again to Meherabad, and this time also to Meherazad, when he was two and a half years old. Meherwan and I went to the porch, where Mehera was talking to some women, while Freny and Adi went first to Baba's room. Mehera took Meherwan on her lap and lovingly cuddled him, then put him down. “I will tell you a nice Baba story,” she said to the group sitting on the porch. “You know, when you want something from Baba, you have to remind Him. I will tell you how this little Meherwan was born. At the 1980 Amartithi, his mother gave a beautiful performance on the Sabha Mandap of a dance she had choreographed herself. When the dance was over, I called her down from the stage and took her in my embrace, facing Baba's Samadhi. I then said, ‘Baba, dear, our Nergiz made chapatis for us at Meher Retreat in all seasons. Even in summer she would sit by the wood fire or coal fire and still bake the chapatis for all the ladies, with not a word of complaint. Beloved Baba, give to this girl, Freny, the fruit of Nergiz's selfless service.’ And this is how Freny, Meherwan's Mummy, then conceived in a desert area in Gujarat where Sheriarji went looking for God. And this is how this little boy Meherwan was born.” Mehera then turned to me and said, “Najoo, this Meherwan is a very close one of Baba. Look after him with a lot of love and caring.”

“Yes, Mehera,” I replied, assuming this message was for his parents, so I went and told them what she had said. Freny and Adi were very pleased.

Not long after that visit we put Meherwan in nursery school. Since the school was some distance from our home, we took him

in a baby carriage so as not to exhaust ourselves or him. One day when I was taking him, we passed a building under construction. He said, "This is Meherwan's house. Baba has given it for Meherwan." He was pointing at a first floor flat. We had applied for a larger flat in order to better accommodate Adi, Freny and Meherwan with us, and I had requested an exchange for a flat in that building, but the person I talked to told me all those flats had already been assigned. On our way to the nursery a few days later, Meherwan pointed to the same flat and said again that it was his. When I said, "No, Meherwan, all these flats are already given away," he started crying loudly, "No, this one is Meherwan's home and Baba has given it to Meherwan." And to my surprise, when we returned home that day, we found a letter allotting us that very flat!

When Meherwan was three, he told us of another experience he had with Baba. One morning he was looking at a photo that hung on the wall when suddenly Baba came down from the picture and lovingly pinched his cheek. When Meherwan looked again at the frame, Baba was not there; it was empty. Baba, he told us, was standing beside him smiling, and he felt very happy. Then the servant arrived to sweep the floor, and he turned his attention to her just for a moment before turning back to Baba. But He had disappeared. And when Meherwan looked up at the picture frame, He was in it again. Under the picture were Baba's words "Real Happiness lies in making others happy." Meherwan said, "Baba came down from His picture frame to make me happy."

Our home was small, but Meherwan was growing up in a loving atmosphere with a doting aunt and grandparents as well as his parents. Adi adored his son and even when money was tight, he tried to buy Meherwan whatever he wanted. If Meherwan got

tired of walking, Adi would carry him on his shoulders or piggy-back. Freny put her artistic talent to use in creating wonderful costumes for Meherwan, everything from Lord Krishna to Spider Man. Freny was multitalented; we have a painting she did of her home with Baba in one window, and she made lovely batiks of Baba for both Hilla and me.

MEHERA AND MANI'S LETTERS to our family were always a source of delight. In 1982, when Mummy had made a second trip to England to be with Hilla while Devraj had bypass surgery, Mani wrote him just before the operation:

Dear brother Raj,

Now that I have met you in person (at last), writing to you has become doubly pleasant for me. The occasion for this letter is the news of your approaching operation bypassing the heart. So this is to send you very special greetings and wishes from all Meherazad family. By Beloved Baba's Grace the operation will be quite successful, and after it you will feel better and stronger than ever before!

Just keep remembering Baba, leaving yourself to Him who is all compassion and will take perfect care of you. Most able fellow surgeons will do the job admirably, but as you know, the patient plays the biggest part by having complete faith and keeping cheerful. Beloved Baba will be with you, all the more—He never bypasses the

heart that calls out to Him! Again, with heartfelt wishes and greetings in Beloved Baba's love from us all—And our love to dear Hiloo and dear Nergiz,

Yours sisterly,
Mani S. Irani

Mani's clever, heartfelt words proved to be true, and the operation was successful, although Raj had a difficult recovery from it, and Mummy ended up staying in England to help Hilla for an entire year.

A couple of years later, when Mummy fell and fractured her femur, I immediately wrote Mehera and Mani, telling them about her fall and the surgery she was scheduled to have. Mummy suffered a lot after the operation; the bone had been difficult to set, as she had severe osteoporosis. Yet she was very brave, saying, "If Baba, the God-Man, suffered so much, has He not the right to give to His dear ones a little suffering to share?"

Mehera's sweet response to my letter cheered both Mummy and me.

. . . With much concern and great sympathy we read the news of dear Nergiz's fall and fracture. With her frail health and age we know she must have gone through a lot of suffering and pain, poor dear. Tell dear Nergiz she must be brave and cheerful and not worry about anything except getting better. She should remember Beloved Baba all the time and repeat His dear name and know that Beloved Baba is with her, watching over her.

On May 7, the day of the operation, without knowing it we had visited Meherabad for darshan and offered flowers at our Beloved Baba's Samadhi.

We pray that the operation was successful and dear Nergiz is relieved from pain and is now more comfortable. By Beloved Baba's grace we hope the bone sets well and Nergiz will be up and able to walk again well. . . .

P.S. We realize how much you, dear Najoo, have done—unselfishly giving of yourself for all the family. May Baba always give you the strength to be of service to others.

By Baba's grace Mummy recovered well from the surgery, and a year later, when I was ready to retire after fifteen years as a Professor in Public Health, I decided that I wanted to spend the rest of my life serving Beloved Baba. After consulting with Mummy, Adi and Freny, I began correspondence in October of 1985 with Mani and the trustees, offering to serve voluntarily at the hospital then being constructed in Meherabad. I mentioned in my first letter that it was Baba, in 1947, who had chosen the nursing profession for me.

At the November 1985 meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Avatar Meher Baba Trust, a resolution was passed: "It is unanimously decided that the voluntary service of Miss Najoo Savak Kotwal will be utilized in Lower Meherabad at the Hospital which is under construction, when she is free to serve after retirement from her job." Then, on 16th June 1986, I was

appointed by Mani as a “Representative of the Trust in Bombay for investigating and making inquiries for medical and allied equipment” for the hospital. It was further stated that a room would be given for my use at Meherabad in the old staff quarters. The architect for the hospital, Ted Judson, who also designed the Pilgrim Centre in Meherabad, consulted with me on certain technical aspects of the facilities. The hospital was to be completely ready by January of 1987.

I was then given responsibility for actually equipping and furnishing the hospital. After completing my shopping, I sent a truckload of hospital equipment and linens, along with stainless steel dishes donated by Adi and Freny for the patients to use, to Meherabad. I was waiting at Meher Hospital when everything arrived, having moved my possessions from my home in Bombay to Meherabad. I felt happy that at last Beloved Baba had granted me my life's desire, to serve at His feet. My childhood dream seemed to have come true.

WHILE I WAS PREPARING FOR MY NEW WORK IN MEHERABAD, Hilla's son Deepak became engaged to Armaity, the daughter of Dr. Phiroz Antia, a prominent pathologist in Bombay, and his wife, Amy. Baba had wholeheartedly approved of Hilla's marriage to Devraj, a Hindu, and now Deepak, a Hindu (as a son takes his father's religion), was marrying a Parsi. The wedding took place on 18th February 1988. The reception, at the Princess Mary Gymkhana in North Bombay, was a grand affair for about eight hundred guests, the atmosphere joyful with Baba's all-pervading presence. On a silver platter, along with a coconut Freny had decorated with gold braid, was the framed photo of Baba and



Deepak and Armaity's wedding picture

Mehera that had been in Father's trunk when he came back to Bombay.

Bhau sent a telegram: "May Beloved Baba touch the hearts of dear Deepak and Armaity with His Love on the occasion of their wedding, and may they be blessed by the lamp of His Love so that they may be able to proceed towards the destination while leading a married life. With all love and Jai Baba to you, dear Hilla, Devraj, Savak, Nargis, Najoo, Adi and all dear ones, Bhau." Mani wrote that everyone in Meherazad had listened to accounts of the reception with great happiness, especially the description of the food. On 1st March the bride and groom were blessed by having Baba's darshan in the Samadhi followed by loving attention from Mehera and Mani.

FOR MANY YEARS MEHERA'S BIRTHDAY had been celebrated in December with a play performed on the outdoor stage just below Baba's Samadhi. In 1988, on the day the performance was to take place, certain events occurred that many people took as signs that Mehera would not be with us for much longer. First, soon after morning Arti, a short in the electrical wiring installed at the theatre sparked a fire that burned the stage curtain as well as the pandal covering the area where the audience was to sit. By Baba's grace, nobody was in that area at the time, so there were no injuries, but nothing was left of the pandal or the curtain except for a few burned scraps of fabric. On that same morning, in Poona, an oil lamp in Baba's room that was always kept burning fell from the shelf that held it and went out. And after the play, which had taken place with an improvised curtain and pandal, Mani told people seated near her that in the future Mehera's birthday would not be celebrated publicly.

In April of 1989 Mehera, Mani, Goher and Meheru went to Poona for their annual vacation. When they returned three weeks later, Mehera was having difficulty with her speech, often forgetting the names of familiar objects, and with her coordination. When it became obvious that her condition was serious, Dr. Goher and Mani called me to Meherazad to help care for Mehera. I hadn't been there long when on 1st May a phone call came from Adi in Bombay telling me Father had suffered a stroke, affecting his right side. I wanted to hide this news from Mehera, but since she asked me directly who had phoned and why, I had to tell her the truth. Mehera immediately instructed me to leave for Bombay to be with Father, saying, "Savak has served Baba with all his heart. You must go and look after him." With a heavy heart I left her and went to Bombay.

On arriving home, I found that Father's right side was completely paralyzed. I nursed him at home, with instructions from our family physician, until 15th May, when I received a call saying that dearest Mehera's condition was critical. A CT scan, done in Poona the day before, had revealed an inoperable brain tumor. I informed Father, whose devotion to Beloved Mehera was most evident in his reaction to her final illness. He was having difficulty speaking by this time, but he said, using gestures as well, "Go immediately. Nergiz will look after me. Baba's Mehera is more precious, for she is for the whole world, while I am important only to our family." He added, "After Mehera drops her body, I have to go too, to do my duty." As Mummy helped me pack my clothes, we wondered what Father had meant.

For five days I had the good fortune to nurse Mehera. I had been happy to be a nurse while caring for Mohammed a few years earlier, but now I realized how truly fortunate I was to have

become a nurse and not a doctor, for nursing allows for so much love and intimacy in the relationship with a patient. Taking care of Mehera was the 100 percent reward I received by having accepted Baba's wish that I go into that profession.

On 20th May Beloved Mehera dropped her body. She looked young and beautiful, like a sleeping princess. On 21st May, a day I will never forget, she was laid to rest on the right side of her Beloved Lord's tomb. Mani had first placed flowers on Mehera's grave and then, while everyone else was still engrossed in offering more flowers, I saw her quietly walk away toward Baba's Samadhi. I was drawn to follow her inside, and the two of us were all alone there with Baba. I stood behind Mani as she said in Gujarati, "Baba, ever since the day You dropped Your body, I have remembered your precious assignment which You once placed on my shoulders, to look after Mehera if and when You dropped Your body. Ever since that day I have tried to look after Mehera as best I could. If, Beloved Baba, I have ever failed in my duty or slipped in a small way, I ask Your forgiveness. Today I offer back to You Your precious treasure, which I have cared for with all my heart. Mehera is now forever happy in Your Infinite Ocean of Love. Jai Baba."

As Bal Natu rightly said, "When love fills the heart to the brim, it overflows through the eyes." When I heard Mani's words, tears rolled down my cheeks. I bowed to Baba, feeling happy in our darling Mehera's happiness, for she was finally reunited with her Lord after years of spreading His love by telling stories of Baba to those gathered on the porch. In spite of the torment of her separation from Him, she carried out her role as Beloved of the Beloved. And while she did so, Mani was her pillar of strength, encouraging her to be brave for twenty long, lonely years.

As I thought of Mehera in the days following her reunion with her Beloved, I was reminded of something she had told me during the first Amartithi, in January of 1970. For a number of years after Baba dropped His body, the Dhuni was lighted at 7:00 a.m. on 31st January with a flaming torch that had been carried through the night from Beloved Baba's room in Meherazad by a team of seven runners. The sight of the final runner coming down the road toward Meherabad, holding the torch high, always moved me, as if Baba Himself were coming from Meherazad to Meherabad in His car.

On the day I remember so well, I had walked down the Hill with Mehera, Mani and the women to await the arrival of the torch bearer. After Mehera had lighted the Dhuni from the torch and Arti was over, the women returned to the top of the Hill, and it happened that I was walking beside Mehera. When we reached the site of the old post office, where she and the other women had lived in the earliest days of Meherabad, she stopped and told me that once, at about 5:00 in the morning, she had heard Baba singing. Not wanting to be seen, she peeked through a small chink in the wall and saw Him dancing in ecstasy as with great feeling He sang the first line of a bhajan that Mirabai sang to her Lord Krishna, "I Have Become a Slave to My Lord."

"You know this song, Najoo," Mehera said. "I want you to sing it to me." We went up the Hill with Mani to the East Room, and I sang the bhajan facing a swing that Mehera had made with a cut-out photo of Baba reclining on it. Even though this translation does not capture the beauty of the words in Hindi, they give an idea of the power of the song:

My Lord's devoted slave have I become!
 I have become His slave, renouncing my all!
 I wandered the forest,
 I searched amongst crowds,
 I looked through mosques and temples,
 I roamed the entire world, seeking Him.
 I found Him, deep in my heart. . . .

In Thy love I donned simple clothes,
 I renounced worldly glitter and jewels.
 Whatever pleaseth Thee, my Beloved,
 Shall be my pleasure always, my Lord.

These words will always be for me a reminder of the pure, unselfish love Mehera had for her Beloved, and I treasure the memory of that Amartithi morning so long ago.

I was the only one of our family present for Mehera's interment, as Mummy was caring for Father, and Freny was away caring for her mother, who had just had surgery. Freny was very sad not to be able to come, but she sent me a long letter:

. . . It is indeed very hard to learn that our beautiful Mehera has gone to Beloved Baba forever. I understand that she should be very happy reuniting with her Lord, but I feel very very sad, cut up and lost. . . . It is Baba's wish, but Meherazad won't be the same without Mehera and I am going to miss her forever. . . .

I'm really grateful to you, Najoo dear, for writing to me with so much detail, and I'm

contented that at least one flower of remembrance was placed by you for us, but you have done the greatest job of your lifetime nursing and caring for Mehera in her last moments. . . . When we were in Manmad you always used to say that you couldn't serve Baba when He was in person and couldn't utilize your knowledge of nursing; now your wish has been fulfilled in looking after Mehera, who was never disunited with Baba in a real sense. . . . I hope her last smile made you all feel peaceful. . . .

As soon as Mehera's interment had taken place, I left for Bombay to resume nursing Father, who seemed sad that his Goddess was no longer on earth. On 7th June, only seventeen days after Mehera was immersed in Baba's Ocean, I gave Father his usual sponge bath, and Mummy and I said the Master's Prayer, the Prayer of Repentance, and the Beloved God Prayer with Father participating silently. Then, just from sheer intuition, I touched Father's forehead and right side with a little water that Baba's feet had been washed in and put some dhuni ash in his mouth. And, just to please him, I sang his favorite English songs, the ones he had sung for Baba. Finally Mummy and I sang Baba's Gujarati Arti. All the while Father was concentrating; although he could not speak clearly, he was enjoying it all.

By 10:30 a.m. Father was having difficulty breathing and needed oxygen. I told him, "You say 'Baba' in your mind while I put this catheter in, okay?" and he nodded. As I put the catheter in his nostrils, saying "Avatar Meher Baba ki Jai," Father took one deep breath, then a shallow one. Then he smiled, looking young, fresh

and free from physical pain, as he slipped into the Ocean's serene waves. Beloved Baba had said to Father, "To you I will give the Ocean" on the day Father surrendered to Him, and now the bubble that was Savak had been immersed.

Father had never mentioned to any of us that he was number twelve on the list Baba had made in 1955, designating where the remains of His men mandali were to be buried. Possibly he felt unworthy to be buried in Meherabad since he had been unable to serve his Master as he felt he ought to have served Him, until his end. Since we knew nothing about the list, we arranged for a traditional Zoroastrian ceremony. Baba had said that burial of His disciples' bodies in Meherabad was subject to "circumstances permitting," and in this case, even had we known, they were not. We were living in a building that had been built and was subsidized by staunch Zoroastrians, who expected us to abide by the traditions of that religion, so what happened was surely Baba's will.

At the Zoroastrian Tower of Silence, Baba-lovers from many communities gathered for Father's last rites. We sang the Gujarati Arti and said the Master's Prayer and the Prayer of Repentance. The Zoroastrian priests chanted their prayers in front of his body, though we knew that his soul was already with Lord Meher. Then the pallbearers lifted Father's body and carried it down a path carpeted with white flowers.

As they started walking, a peacock suddenly appeared behind them. It spread its magnificent plumage and performed an ethereal dance, following Father's body all the way down the path. When the pall bearers reached the gate of the Tower of Silence, the peacock stood aside in an elegant pose, its tail feathers still spread like a fan, and let Father's body pass by; then it again followed,

dancing all the way, until we could see no more. All those present were surprised, as this kind of event is very rare. We are certain that Baba sent the peacock—considered a royal bird, one that lives in the palaces of emperors or near fakirs who have renounced their all to God—to welcome Father into His celestial kingdom. So Father, a fakir of the Lord of the Universe, received the last rites he well deserved for all his years of devoted service.

Once in Mandali Hall at Meherazad, Baba had expressed his appreciation for each of the men mandali. Of Father, Baba said, “Savak Kotwal has dedicated all his life to Me. His *seva* [service] has been tremendous. What yoga, concentration or *dnyan* [meditation] can be compared with this great service?” These encouraging and compassionate words used by the Ocean of Mercy had helped Father to accept his inability to continue to serve his Master.

In my letter to Goher informing the mandali that Father had gone to Baba, I had included a copy of his favorite prayer, written by St. Ignatius, a Christian. Father repeated it daily.

Take, O Lord, and receive
all my liberty, my memory,
my understanding, and my will,
all I have and possess.
Thou hast given all to me;
To Thee, O Lord, I return all.
All is Thine—
Dispose of it entirely
according to Thy Will.
Give me Thy love and Thy grace
and then I am rich indeed
and need no more.

Our Meherazad-Meherabad family responded lovingly as soon as they heard the news. Mani's letter gave us strength to bear the separation:

. . . The main reason I am writing in person is because of your letter to Goher concerning dear Savak—which she shared with me. You have no idea how the contents of your letter touched our hearts! Every incident reflects Savak's and dear Nergiz's love for Beloved Baba and His Love for them and their children! What a very specially blessed family you are, His dear Kotwal family. Dear Savak's prayer to Baba is indeed an Arti—I specially love the last verse. . . .

I still recall your description of the joyous welcome from the dancing peacock arranged by the Beloved for Savak on his last journey—just a glimpse of the rewards of Baba's grace. We are so well aware of Nergiz's pain of parting from her beloved companion of long years, but we also know how brave she is in accepting Baba's will happily in Savak's happiness with Baba. . . .

Eruch sent a telegram on behalf of all the men and women mandali: "Meherabad Meherazad Menwomen mandali share in our dear Savakshaw's joy to be with his Beloved Lord Avatar Meherbaba, whom he has loved and served with all his heart. Savakshaw passing on to His Eternal Beloved is his gain and our loss. . . ." Several of the Eastern and Western residents wrote as well, bringing peace to our turbulent hearts as we dealt with our loss.

Although Father had rarely talked about Baba with us, he did tape many of his stories, and he wrote extensively in Gujarati of his search for God and his life with Baba in Meherabad. He said that despite all his human weaknesses, Baba always treated him lovingly and gave him protection whenever he slipped. Father ended his memoir by giving a touching tribute to his Lord in these words of Kabir:

*Dharti ka kaagaz karun
Kalam karu vanrai
Saat samandarki sahi karoon
Hari goon na likha jai!*

If I made the whole Earth into paper,
The trees of the forest my pen
And the seven seas my ink,
Still I could not write all the praises
due Beloved God.



Adi, Freny and Meherwan in London, 1991

THE GIFT OF INNER STRENGTH



In November of 1989, when Meherwan was eight, we sent out invitations for his navjote. Meherwan wrote the first one, addressed to Meher Baba and Mehera, and the accompanying reply cards himself. I took that invitation to Baba's Samadhi and placed it on the marble. At the top of the card he wrote "Jai Mehera-Baba," for this is what the world will proclaim in the

future, in the Indian style. Just as we say “Jai Radha-Krishna” and “Jai Sita-Ram,” so shall we say “Jai Mehera-Baba.”

The navjote took place on 5th January 1990. We started the day with the Gujarati Arti, and then placed our precious photograph of Baba and Mehera on the platter that would hold the items used in the ceremony. At the fire temple Meherwan said the prayers beautifully and forcefully, pronouncing the words in the Avasta language from memory. We ended the ceremony with the Master’s Prayer. That evening two hundred fifty guests came to dinner at the West-End Hotel at Churchgate. Before being seated, all the guests passed the stage, where we had placed a large photograph of Baba with the words “‘Real happiness lies in making others happy’ —Avatar Meher Baba” written at the bottom, so everyone saw our Beloved’s face and name. The Bombay Centre bhajan group sang lovely Baba bhajans, and the room was filled with His omnipotent presence.

A few months later Adi, Freny, Meherwan and I were all able to be in Meherabad for the first anniversary of Mehera’s union with Baba. On the way we stopped to buy garlands, and Meherwan selected the best one, saying, “Mehera Aunty’s shrine will look lovely with my garland.” Freny and Adi had bought a lovely sari with twinkling silver stars, reminiscent of what Freny had worn when she first met Mehera, to spread on her shrine. Hilla was not able to be with us, but she came for Amartithi the following year, and she was asked to stand guard at Mehera’s shrine to ensure that people took darshan in an orderly fashion. For years Hilla had served during Amartithi with a group of women who maintained positions near Mehera to assure that no man touched her—Mehera called them her bodyguards—and the opportunity to do duty at Mehera’s side once again helped Hilla to overcome her grief.

ON 17TH JANUARY 1990 I returned from Bombay for work at Meher Hospital to find that Mohammed was very, very ill. He could not take food, and he had been given an IV drip. I was one of several people who took care of him in shifts. We worked in pairs, night and day, alternating night duty with day duty, depending on our other work. It pained me to see tigerlike Mohammed lying curled up in the bed, his body so thin. His condition continued to deteriorate until the medical personnel lost all hope. A coffin was ordered from Ahmednagar and a grave dug for him in Lower Meherabad. The coffin turned out to be too narrow, as Mohammed had developed a large hump in his back. However, as soon as it arrived, Mohammed, to our great relief and amazement, began to recover. The drip was discontinued and slowly he began taking liquids until he could again eat solid food. I wondered if Beloved Baba had given all of us a little bit of service as a gift. Those who helped care for Mohammed were most fortunate to have been able to serve such a great spiritual soul. What happened to that too-small coffin, I don't know, but the grave was refilled, and Mohammed, I am happy to say, continued for many more years to live the life assigned him by his Master.

MUMMY, FATHER AND I HAD ALL BEEN TO VISIT HILLA, but Adi, who loved to travel, had not yet gone. Finally, in May of 1991, Adi, Freny and Meherwan spent three weeks in England with Hilla and Devraj at their gracious home in Kent. Hilla had a beautiful garden, which Freny particularly enjoyed. Adi, who had always been interested in London, knew all the places he wanted to visit, and they also enjoyed shopping in the supermarkets and window shopping in the antique stores. While Adi and Freny toured

other parts of Europe, Meherwan stayed in Kent with Devraj and Hilla, deepening a relationship that has flourished over the years. Hilla often thanks Beloved Baba for those wonderful days they all had together in England and for all she was able to do to make them happy before they returned to Bombay.

At this time I was working as Administrator of the Meher Hospital, assuming that I would live out my days in service there. However, as I was too soon to discover, Najoo proposes, but Baba disposes. My obedience to His will was about to undergo a real test, when late in October of 1991 Adi phoned me in Meherabad and asked me to come to Bombay to look after our ailing Mummy while he, Freny and Meherwan made a pilgrimage to Meherabad for Baba's darshan.

Early on the morning of 2nd November, the three of them said "Jai Baba" to Mummy and me and left for Meherabad. At 9:00 that night we were informed by the police that at 12:30 p.m., at Shikrapur, between Poona and Ahmednagar, their car had been hit head on by a truck loaded with sugar cane. Meherwan, who had been thrown from the car, was alive, but both Adi and Freny had been killed instantly.

All three had been taken to Poona Government Hospital. Stunned, I immediately phoned Jal and Dolly Dastur in Ahmednagar, as they were closer to Poona than we were, and then left with two neighbors and a friend of Adi's who offered to drive us to the hospital. After telephoning Dr. Arvind Chopra (son-in-law of Baba's niece Gulnar and her husband, Jehangir Sukhadwalla) about the accident, Jal left for Poona. The news spread like wildfire there, and Roshan Kerawalla came to know. When Jal arrived, she, Arvind and Jal went in search of Meherwan in the Government Hospital,

but no one knew which ward he was in or even if he was still there. The three were in great distress, going from ward to ward, until Roshan, exhausted, sat down for a moment on the steps. Jal and Arvind were standing beside her when a villager going down the stairs noticed their anxiety and asked what was wrong. When they told him, he said he had seen a child in one ward lying unconscious with no one around, and he took them there immediately. They found Meherwan unattended; no treatment had been given during the nine hours he had been there.

Dr. Arvind was most distressed that a CT scan had not yet been done. Jal was so upset that he went to the authority in charge and signed an “Against Medical Advice” form. They took Meherwan to K.E.M. Nursing Home, where a CT scan was immediately done, and his treatment was started. Thanks to the grace of Beloved Baba and the help of these three Baba-lovers, Meherwan’s life was spared. He had both a supra-orbital fracture and a compound fracture of the lower left leg, which was put in a cast. Fluid had collected in his skull cavity, and his face, hands, and legs were terribly bruised.

While we were on our way to Poona, the words Mehera had spoken to me on the porch in Meherazad flashed back to me like lightning. I realized that her message—“He is a close one of Baba. Look after him with a lot of love and caring”—had been for me rather than for his parents. When we arrived at the hospital, the first task was to identify Adi’s and Freny’s bodies and their belongings. It was nearly 3:00 a.m. when I left to go to Meherwan. Seeing him so badly hurt pained me terribly, and I was grateful that Jal was there to give me courage, as I knew I would be staying in Poona to care for Meherwan for a long time.

The following day Eruch sent a telegram to me in care of Jehangu Sukhadwalla:

Please inform Najoo Kotwal that news of demise of dear Adi Freny in car accident has shocked us all at Meherazad Meherabad. Our words of comfort fail to give dear Najoo Nergizmai any strength at this juncture. Only their deep faith and Beloved Baba's love is their strength and comfort. Beloved Baba will give courage to our dear Najoo and to our dear Nergizmai to withstand this shock by His grace with total resignation to His divine will. Our prayers and best wishes for dear little Meherwan's health and welfare. Jai Meher Baba.

—Eruch for Meherazad men women mandali

THE NEWS OF THE ACCIDENT devastated Hilla, who wanted desperately to come to us. But only one day earlier she had brought Devraj home from the hospital to recover from major spinal surgery, without which he would have had to live with crippling pain. The surgery had been risky due to his previous triple bypass operation, and he needed a lot of postoperative care. Hilla saw no way to leave Devraj in the condition he was in, but Beloved Baba, in His infinite mercy, does take care of us. Deepak's in-laws, Dr. and Mrs. Antia, had come for a holiday to visit Armaity in England, and they immediately arrived at Hilla's home, bringing their suitcases, and told her they would care for Devraj so that she could fly home. They also offered to bring him to Bombay with them when they

returned from their trip. They sacrificed most of their vacation to help our family, as Deepak and Armaity lived twenty miles from Hilla and they would be unable to see their daughter often. A very grateful Hilla phoned the airlines, found that a single seat was available on the following day, and prepared to leave.

About a month earlier, Hilla had noticed Beloved Baba's smiling face on a conifer tree in her garden. Day after day she saw it, wondering why He was looking at her. And the night before the tragic news reached her, she had dreamt of Baba lying in the Samadhi, just as He had after He dropped His body. Thousands of people were lined up outside the Samadhi, and she was waiting tearfully in the queue for her turn to pay her last respects, thinking it couldn't be true that Beloved Baba was no more. Surely He would show her that He was still alive. She entered the shrine and walked up the step on the left, then around to His head on His right side, all the while gazing at him. Suddenly He sat up and placed His right hand in her right hand, looking lovingly into her eyes. Hilla was ecstatic to hold His hand and know that He was alive. Then she woke up, but the dream was so vivid that she still felt His hand in hers and knew He was with her and always would be. She knew He was telling her to hold on to Him tightly, no matter what life brought. The moment she heard of the accident, she went to the mantelpiece where she had a photograph of Baba and held it tightly. Her faith in Him never wavered.

Hilla has little memory of the flight home, except that she apologized repeatedly to the young English girl sitting next to her for crying so much. The girl tried to distract her after she explained her tears, but Hilla was in a state of shock and continued to weep, clutching her Baba locket to her heart. At the airport

in Bombay she caught a cab and went home, running up the stairs, sobbing as if her heart would break. She was quite unprepared for Mummy's reaction:

Mother held me in her arms dry-eyed and said, gently, "Hilla, dear daughter, do you realize that by crying this way you are insulting Baba? Whatever has happened was His divine will and you must accept it as such." I was so taken aback by my dear mother's words and seeing her standing tall and strong, I felt ashamed at my tears, but still, I could not stop them. . . . I am such an emotional person and was so close to my brother and his wife and their adorable son Meherwan that I was finding it difficult to get a hold on myself. I am not implying here that my dear mother loved them less, for I know she adored her only son. . . . He had a gentle, noble nature and was loved by all who knew him. . . . But I was shattered that two people I cared for so much had gone away forever, leaving behind their little son, who was still not out of danger. My faith in Beloved Baba continued steadfast, but I was angry at what had happened, and I told my mother so. My mother again very gently said, "Calm down, Hilla dear, and be grateful to Beloved Baba that you had your darling brother for fifty-four years, because if it was not for His divine mercy, Adi would have died as a child. Baba saved his life several times in the past.

How many times do you want Him to go on saving Adi? Adi and Freny are with Beloved Baba now, and far, far happier than they have ever been on this earth, so for their sake please try not to be so unhappy, my dear. Instead, be grateful to Baba for those lovely years you spent with them. Also remember that Beloved Baba would not be pleased to see you crying this way.”

NEITHER HILLA NOR I COULD BE PRESENT for Adi and Freny’s funeral. I was at Meherwan’s bedside in Poona and she had not yet arrived from England, so Mummy went by herself. We heard later from people who attended that they were impressed by her poise and dignity, amazed at the brave face she put before them in spite of her aching heart. Our dear Mummy was only five feet tall, and quite fragile at eighty-three, but she emanated such inner strength that others looked weak beside her.

Mummy later told Hilla and me that Sukhdevsinghji, the Chairman of Bharat Petroleum, had greeted her with folded hands and said, “Mother, today you have lost your dear son, and as for us, we have lost laughter from our establishment, for Adi was an embodiment of humor.” Mummy said tears were welling in his eyes. Several people spoke to Mummy about how kind and generous Adi had been to them. We were not aware of how many people Adi had helped. Because he never spoke ill of others and followed Baba’s teachings as best as he could, he was trusted by his colleagues, who were comfortable discussing problems with him.

Although Mummy had selected a large *bangli* at the Tower of

Silence for the last rites, the huge crowd, many of them Adi's colleagues from work, overflowed the building. When she told us this, I was reminded of a time when Adi had been asked to sing at a company function. Everyone who knew him for his wonderful sense of humor was stunned when he sang a beautiful bhajan that Madhusudan had composed for Baba, as they had not seen this side of Adi before. Mummy said to us, "Although it was a painful day, I was so proud of my son, for even though he was not wealthy, he was rich in his good deeds and he departed from this world with the respect that would be given to a great man." Mummy's words were reminiscent of Kabir's: "When you depart, the scene should be such that the world cries, and you joyfully leave for your destination, for all the good you have done toward your fellow beings."

During Adi's last visit to Meherazad, he had sung a song with a chorus that starts, "Those were the days, my friend, we thought they'd never end. . . ." But Beloved Baba had willed it that they should end for Adi and Freny, for He had work for them somewhere else. The day after the accident Adi's colleagues found his favorite song, "Their Way to Paradise," written in his handwriting, sitting on his desk.

AFTER HILLA HAD SPENT A WEEK IN BOMBAY, Mummy insisted she come to Poona to help me care for Meherwan, who was out of the coma but would hardly talk. Mummy hoped she would be able to cheer him up, and she had neighbors to help her if she needed them. Hilla's face registered shock when she first saw Meherwan, for he was black and blue all over, and his eyes were closed. When she kissed him and spoke to him, he opened his eyes, said, "Aunty Hilla," and smiled. She had brought some board games and we

promptly started to play ludo with him. That seemed to please him. I was happy that Meherwan had started to smile and talk a little, but much of the time he still kept his eyes closed because of the headache from his fracture. I could see that Hilla was choking back her tears, but she was determined to be brave for the sake of this child we loved so dearly. He did not yet know that he had lost his parents.

Hilla and I would have completely collapsed were it not for the moral support of Baba-lovers, the mandali and Adi's friends. Dearest Mani requested that Gulnar Sukhadwalla or her husband Jehangir visit Meherwan daily and then telephone her in Meherazad to give her an update on his health. Old friends and Baba-lovers in Poona visited us, and their presence was like a soothing balm to our turbulent hearts and minds. Some friends of Adi's brought a VCR to Meherwan's room at the nursing home so he could enjoy cartoons, and Meheru's brother Beheram, Adi's dear friend from childhood through college, brought biscuits for Meherwan every day. Baba-lovers in Bombay also gave us wonderful support, as did Freny's relatives in Poona. Beloved Baba helped us to overcome this nightmare fairly smoothly, due to the kindness of so many people.

During our first days together in Poona, Meheru sent a lovely letter to Hilla and me:

What can we say—what consolation or comfort can we give you dear ones and dear Nergiz in the depth of suffering? When we heard the news we were absolutely stunned and thought, “Oh no, this is not true—we've heard

wrong. There must be some mistake.” And already we were thinking of you and what you must be going through and especially of little Meherwan whose loss is the greatest.

A picture of Adi and Freny youthful and happy, joyful in Baba’s love—they are beyond suffering, gathered into Beloved Baba’s loving arms—came to mind. They are absolutely in Baba’s care; remember them that way. Think of their gain and not your loss.

We heard the news on Sunday morning just after morning Arti and we were planning to go to Meherabad for darshan this very day. At Beloved Baba’s Samadhi and dear Mehera’s shrine love garlands were offered on behalf of Adi, Freny and all of you dear ones. You were all so poignantly remembered. Your presence [is] very strong in our midst. . . .

Dear Najoo, you must be strong in spirit not only just now, but henceforward for the role you must play and have always played to help your family, especially little Meherwan. Our hearts go out to him. Remember that Beloved Baba is with you all every moment and every step of the way—without Him no one can exist. . . .

Other letters followed in the coming days, and I was especially touched by Mani’s:

My dearest Najoo and Hilloo,

You will be surprised to receive a letter from me—I am surprised myself that I have picked up a pen to convey thoughts and feelings too deep for words. But on this quiet Friday morning they have surfaced from the depths of my heart—I can only pray my words will carry to you what I hope to put into them by Baba's grace.

First, to repeat what I said over the phone, we have shared and felt the immensity of your pain to such a degree that I could not trust myself to talk to you earlier or to write sooner. For your dear sakes, the tragedy you had to face rocked the core of our hearts: Oh Baba, Baba, how can they bear this sudden calamity which has shattered their peace to pieces; how can little Merwan come through his terrible experience without breaking up? And He answered within me: "What had to be had to be. Grieve not for My loved ones who come to Me—their gain and joy are immeasurable. And My loved ones who suffer separation in ignorance are equipped with the strength of My love for them, and their deep faith in Me sustains them. I will pick up the pieces of their life and help them reconstruct it at the altar of their resignation to My Will. I allow nothing to happen which is not absolutely necessary to happen. I look after My own even after they 'pass away' from your sight, and I hold your hands and walk with you through this terrible pain which

will pass away. I hold My child Merwan in My arms and My Love and Light will heal him.”

I well understand your present sorrow and what you dear dear ones are going through! What melts me to tears is the strength of His love which you reflect, the courage which deeply touches everyone who is witness to it. Above all, look at our dearest Nergiz—we say *aafrin* to her adamant faith and trust in Baba, to the strength of her love for Him which upholds and supports you dear ones too. Like a true silver coin which rings only when it falls down, our Nergiz is pure sterling. How often, when beloved Mehera and I have spoken of Nergiz, our much loved sister of Ashram years, Mehera has said to Baba, “Nergiz has served You so well, Baba, for years she was making chapatis before a wood fire, even in the worst summers.” She repeated this before Baba’s picture after Nergiz broke her leg in the new home in Bombay. Baba knows, Baba knows more than any of us—and Baba gives what none of us can ever give.

I don’t blame you for thinking that with His sword Baba has slaughtered the family in general. But if so, remember He has been given the right to do so if He wishes—the right given by Savak and Nergiz when they surrendered themselves to Him long ago. And also remember that He is truly compassionate, feeling your pain more than you do but doing what He (the All-Knowing One) knows is best. Don’t doubt for a moment that

Beloved Baba will heal, will help—He is already doing so.

As for His darling little Merwan, he is and always has been a very special child, who was chosen to be born to Freny-Adi after much reluctance, it seems. With Mehera's prayer Baba presented to the family this very special child who . . . has a most significant place in Baba's love and work in time—he is already proving such a precious "soldier," having to bear so much suffering. But Beloved Baba has many dear gifts awaiting His child and all will be well by His Love.

An embrace to you each, and a kiss for Merwan and some Oodi which Beloved Baba blessed with a special touch of His beautiful Hand.

Reading Mani's letter, I felt grateful that this accident had not occurred during Mehera's lifetime, for she had loved Meherwan dearly.

When he had first asked for his parents, we told Meherwan they were in a hospital in Bombay, for the doctor advised us not to tell him about the tragedy until some of his head injuries had healed. For nearly a month this burden weighed heavily on us as we put on brave faces and laughed and joked with Meherwan, pretending that all was well, when our hearts were shattered. We took turns crying outside the room when the pain was unbearable, and then returning dry-eyed and cheerful to him. Fearing his reaction, we wondered how we would be able to break the news of the loss of both his dear parents to this sweet child who was so devoted to them.

Adi and Freny had been wonderful parents. After Meherwan

had started school and Freny took him to visit her parents during vacations, Adi always missed his son terribly. He told Mummy, Hilla and me that once he retired, he would concentrate all his effort toward Meherwan's education and future. And Freny was always attentive, helping him with his studies and playing games with him. Sometimes early in the morning she would go to the garden and play Ping-Pong with him before the school bus arrived. Once I suggested that Meherwan could play with the other children, but she said, "You know, Najoo, I somehow feel I will not live very long, so while I can, I want to be with my son, so he will be happy that his Mummy found time to play with him." And sometimes she told Mummy, "Mumma, you know I will not live very long, but I am not worried, because if I am gone, my Meherwan will still have three more Mummies to love him and care for him—that is you, Mumma, Najoo and Hilla." We couldn't at the time understand why she would talk like this, but she must have had some strong premonition.

Finally, Hilla decided we should move Meherwan to Bombay, to the Hinduja Hospital, and have a good orthopedic surgeon operate on his fractured leg and set it properly so he would not be left with a limp. It was now safe to take him home, but the doctors advised us that he should be told about his parents before he was released from the hospital. The day before he was to be discharged, Hilla and I, after praying to Baba for guidance and strength, told Meherwan that his dear parents had gone to Beloved Baba. Neither of us will ever forget the expression of disbelief on his sweet little face. "Both?" he asked, then took the sheet between his teeth and buried his head in the pillow and sobbed quietly. Hilla and I were sitting on either side of him, embracing him, and neither of us could

contain our tears. At last we could weep with Meherwan after the weeks of holding back, all the while taking Baba's name and asking that he be given the strength to bear this terrible blow.

Soon after we brought Meherwan home, Armaity's parents arrived from London with Devraj, who was a great source of emotional strength for all of us. Meherwan is very fond of his Uncle Dev, and it was important for him to have a man to talk to. We continued to have wonderful support from Mani, who wrote and telephoned with words of love, comfort and encouragement. When she phoned, we felt as though Beloved Baba were talking to us. Arnavaz also phoned and spoke lovingly with us. Meherwan was inundated with get-well cards and gifts from Baba-lovers, friends and his teachers at school. The Vice Principal, The Rev. Father Joe Vaz, came nearly every day to visit, with little gifts for Meherwan and sweet words of comfort. Adi's bosses, colleagues and friends were wonderful to us, and we were grateful to all of them. For a long time Meherwan had difficulty sleeping, staying awake until 2:00 a.m., restless and sometimes crying. Difficult as those days were, Mummy was a pillar of strength. She was his favorite person, and she would talk to him for hours to keep his mind occupied.

With Christmas approaching, a card with a picture of a beautiful white horse arrived from Mani, Goher and Meheru, who told us they had found it among Mehera's things. While it was addressed to all of us, most of what they said was to Meherwan: "This is to wish you all a Merry Mehermas and Happy Babaful New Year. Meherwan, more than the others you will be most remembered at Christmastime in Meherazad because of the lovely Christmas carols you have sung for Mehera and all of us, especially for Beloved Baba. We all pray that Beloved Baba gives

you all good health and strength to face bravely and cheerfully the future ahead.”

Christmas Eve was the worst point. Meherwan missed his parents very much that night; he kept seeing them everywhere, saying they were standing here or there, and he cried until very late. We all grieved with him and for him, wanting so much to make his Christmas enjoyable, with lots of presents and all our love. Then, after that uncontrollable bout of tears the night before, Meherwan woke up on Christmas morning and said that from then on he was going to be very brave and cry no more. Perhaps the card from the mandali helped, or perhaps Baba heard our prayers and brought about a change on that morning, but he kept his word. There were times when tears welled up in his eyes, but he didn't let them fall; he composed himself and showed great strength of character, especially for a ten-year-old. He has a lot of our dear Mummy in him, and his love for Baba is wonderful to behold.

We were all longing to go to Meherabad, and at the end of February we were able to take Meherwan for Baba's birthday celebration. There was not a dry eye when he sang “Count Your Blessings” in the big theatre in Lower Meherabad in front of a large crowd, including all the mandali, and he received resounding applause. We all felt a great deal stronger after being able to lay our heads on Beloved Baba's Samadhi. Each of us had a beautiful experience of love, warmth and healing and felt the gift of inner strength to get us through our great sorrow. We felt resigned to His divine will, determined to hold tight to His daaman no matter how many thorns there might be on the path ahead.

The accident that took the lives of Adi and Freny had been like an earthquake in our Baba community as well as the

Zoroastrian community at large. We were terribly upset to hear that people were asking how Baba could have allowed this to happen when Adi and Freny were on their way to His shrine. Some, critical of Baba, came to give their condolences to Mother and then made disparaging comments. “You are constantly taking Meher Baba’s name, and your husband was one of Baba’s close ones. Now what has your Meher Baba done?” one said.

Even though Mummy was in a state of shock, she immediately confronted them with great presence of mind, saying, “People go to Kashi and Benares on pilgrimage and are drowned—or they are stampeded to death in Mecca or Medina. This has happened to people of all religions. My son and his wife were on pilgrimage. While traveling, their thoughts were of Meher Baba, so they have gone straight into the open arms of God, where they are enjoying eternal bliss. They are fortunate, for they have gone from this world of turmoil and suffering, while we who are living are still struggling to make our pilgrimages.”

The comments of those outside the Baba community came as no surprise, but the reaction of a few Baba-lovers who started questioning their faith came as a shock. Mummy said, “It is Baba’s way of sifting the strong, devoted lovers from the weak ones who fall by the wayside.” But she was anguished to learn that some newcomers to the Baba community were in emotional turmoil, not knowing what to think. When I returned to Bombay with Meherwan, she asked me to go to the Bombay Baba Centre the following Sunday and speak at the meeting. She wanted to convince people of Baba’s love and mercy with her words, which she asked me to convey to them.

She said, “My compassionate Meher Baba has saved Adi’s life six times since the day he was born. Baba kept Adi alive for fifty-four

years. Was that not enough mercy shown to me?" Then she listed all the times Baba had saved Adi: at birth, when he wasn't expected to live; when he was critically ill as a baby in Bombay and Baba ordered injections; when he walked in his sleep in Rishikesh over a snake-infested area to the edge of a precipice; when he had typhoid and pneumonia in Meherabad and Mummy made a sadra for his last rites which he later wore for his navjote; when Baba ordered him not to box with a dangerous opponent in a tournament during his college days; when he lost command of his squadron and resigned from the National Cadet Corps, only to learn later that the entire squadron had been killed in the Indo-China War.

"And," Mummy added, "that accident was so grave that our Adi and Freny could have become lifelong paraplegics or even vegetables. Savak, my husband, would daily bow to Baba before starting his night duty and say three times, 'You are the Ocean of Mercy.' Beloved Baba, the Ocean of Mercy, has taken Adi and Freny, but spared Meherwan to sing His praises."

When the Bombay group heard her passionate words, many of those who had felt confusion were able to see Beloved Baba's compassion, and they left the meeting with renewed faith in Baba. As He once said, "If anyone among you remains uninfluenced and calm while facing any adverse circumstances and goes on speaking about My love without caring about disturbing news, then thousands will begin loving Baba. Make your very life itself the message of My love to others. One sincere lover can produce thousands of lovers." He also said, "I love most those whose hearts I pierce and who, though their hearts are wounded, stay with Me and stick to Me through thick and thin."

During this time, Eruch wrote, "We are proud of our dear

Nergizmai. There is no doubt that Beloved Baba is giving you the courage to carry on bravely with undaunted faith and love for Him.” And Bhau wrote us also: “What an example Mummy is! She’s just like a rock in her faith in Beloved Baba.” Strong as she was, though, I knew that Mummy could not take on the responsibility of raising Meherwan by herself, so, having taken permission from Mani, I returned to Mummy’s flat in Bombay to care for him. I was determined to continue to work at Meher Hospital for certain projects, but I needed to support Mummy and help Meherwan adjust to a life without his parents—with continued support from the mandali.

Mani, who was always so good with children, was especially wonderful. In May of 1993 she wrote Meherwan after sending him a copy of Tolkein’s *The Hobbit*: “Here is Mani aunty sending you a special greeting in Beloved Baba’s love. I was happy to receive your letters, and we all admired your handwriting. I have just been talking to Najoo aunty by phone. It pleases me much to know that you are enjoying *The Hobbit* so much. I read out the book to Baba and He was very fond of the little hobbits.” In another card, sent when the office phone was out of order, Mani “decided that the old bullock cart (card) was sure to be quicker.” She added, “Of course fastest is the Baba-phone carrying silent heart-messages which reach you, I know.”

After a time Hilla returned to England, where she spent four or five hours each day working in her beautiful garden, continuously taking Baba’s name. She has always said that it was Beloved Baba and her love for gardening that helped her to overcome her grief. Our lives finally settled into a good routine, with occasional happy surprises. On 13th July 1993, we were delighted to learn that Mummy had been blessed with not one but two great-grandsons.

Deepak and Armaity were the parents of twins, Danesh and Cyrus, and Mummy looked forward to the day when she could meet them in person.

BY 1994 I HAD BECOME MORE INVOLVED in the Avatar Meher Baba Bombay Centre, where I was able to help with the huge procession held to commemorate Beloved Baba's centenary birthday. That year turned out to be a particularly busy one for both Hilla and me. Not only were we together to celebrate Baba's hundredth birthday, but in July we were honored to be guests of the twentieth annual Silence Day Sahavas of the Avatar Meher Baba Center of Southern California, in Los Angeles. The Sahavas was held at Pilgrim Pines Camp, and in this lovely setting we told the stories of our lives with our "Big Daddy" and sang the songs we used to sing for Him. Hilla returned to England directly after the Sahavas, but I was able to travel to Northern California, Chapel Hill and Myrtle Beach to meet with more of Baba's lovers in the West, repeating the stories I had told at the Sahavas. I spent Silence Day at the Meher Spiritual Center, and I was given Mehera's room in the Guest House where the women had stayed. My Indian mind immediately began playing havoc. How could I sleep on that bed, sanctified by the Beloved of the Beloved? I decided to sleep on the floor, but that didn't work, so finally at 2:00 a.m. I went to a photo of Baba, asked His forgiveness, and then slept on Mehera's bed until 7:00 the next morning. Westerners will probably think I am crazy, but I look at things from a different perspective. This is life!

Just before I left Bombay to join Hilla in London before going on to the California Sahavas, Mani had sent a lovely card with a picture of two little birds sitting in a tree. Above the birds she had



Hilla and me at California Sahavas, 1994

pasted a photo of Baba. The card read, “Happy Bon Voyage to our very dear Baba-chicks, Najoo and Hiloo, flying with Him across the seas to be with Him among His lovers in the West.” Inside Mani had added, “Here are two lines (readjusted) from an old favorite song of darling Mehera . . . as they express the feeling of your Meherazad family: ‘Wherever you go, whatever you do, Baba wants you to know He is always with you.’ And we can clearly see how, wherever you go, Beloved Baba’s love will blossom in the many hearts ever awaiting His showers of grace.” She enclosed two Baba lockets, which we wore all the time we were in the West.

Mani continued to send sweet messages, telephoning from time to time, and giving us her loving attention whenever we were in Meherazad. One day, while she was still healthy and chirpy, I hugged her and said, “Mani, dear, daily I pray to Baba to keep you alive and hale and hearty for all of us who love you, especially Mummy and our whole Kotwal family, and especially me.”

Mani said to me, “Najoo, you must not pray as you say. You must pray to Baba and say, ‘Baba, if You want to take us in Your Divine Ocean, take all of us together at the same time.’ It would then be wonderful. Don’t you think so?” It was such a lovely thought, for if it happened that way, there would be no pain of separation for any of us. The best characteristic Mani possessed was that she allowed all of us Baba-lovers to pour our joys and sorrows out to her, as though she were our universal sister, and she made all of us feel that we were dear to her, that we occupied a special corner of her heart. Her duty was to guide all hearts toward Baba, and somehow she found time to spare for everyone, despite her many duties as Chairman of Baba’s Trust.

Whenever Hilla was in Meherabad, she visited Mani at her desk at Meher Nazar. Mani talked with her and teased her as though she were still little Hiloo in the ashram. On one visit she was called to have lunch at Meher Nazar with Mani and the girls who worked there. Just as Baba had once put food on our plates, Mani took food from her plate and put it on Hilla’s. She then spent an hour with Hilla, asking about the family and looking at photographs of her twin grandsons, whom Mani called “special prasad from Baba’s pockets.” Hilla wrote us later:

I am so glad that I had lunch with her on my last day. . . . Mani was truly magnificent. . . . She talked and laughed and sang and mimed to the music which one girl was playing on the accordion. I will remember that particular day always. Mani was so vibrant talking about her life with Beloved Baba and the skits and concerts she

performed with the other ladies before Him. Then Mani gave prasado to everyone who was present, and literally piled my lap with chocolates for you all and for my family over here, especially for the twins whom she loves so much. . . .

We were all devastated to learn in 1996 that Mani was seriously ill. She had been such a source of strength for us, especially for Mummy. Every time Mummy was ill in her later years, Mani had called her and somehow boosted her will to live for Meherwan's sake. Mani would crack jokes with Mummy and the rest of us and give us such happiness that we anxiously awaited her calls. Hilla was with us and remembers clearly their last conversation:

The last time I spoke to her . . . she was ill and in a great deal of pain, for I could hear it in her sweet voice. She said, "You know, Hiloo, when Beloved Baba was present, we used to dance to His tune. . . . The pain in my head is excruciating, but it is all His will. He, too, suffered a great deal in His physical form, and He gives us the right to share in His suffering." I felt so very sad to hear the pain in her voice, for I loved her so much. After a while she phoned again and said, "Hiloo, my dear, don't worry about me. I am fine really, and should not have said that I am in pain, for I am better now." She was so sensitive about how pained I would be at hearing about her suffering that she tried to reassure me that she was all right.

DURING THE TIME OUR DARLING MANI WAS IN THE HOSPITAL in Poona, I decided to go there. If I was not allowed to see her, I would return disappointed, but if I was permitted to visit, I would be overjoyed. It was worth taking a chance. When I peeped into her hospital room, she saw me and, despite the fact that she was very ill, called me in. Dr. Goher and Meheru asked me to entertain her with some happy stories of life with Beloved Baba. I began to recount all the funny skits which Mani and Mummy had performed before Baba, and how He laughed until His cheeks became rosy and His stomach shook, then entertained her with several songs I had sung for Baba, hoping to give her even a tenth of a percent of the joy she had given our family. Looking at Mani, I was deeply moved, for she had always been so happy, vivacious and humorous. That day she was delicate and helpless, yet so brave, bearing her illness as a gift from Baba. I will never forget the sight of her lying in her hospital bed—it still brings tears to my eyes. I had thought somehow that Mani would live to be a hundred years old. But when I saw her suffering, I realized how foolish I had been.

When Mani became aware that she had only a short time to live, she thought not of herself, but of those who loved her. She compiled, with help, a list of names and telephone numbers of those families to be informed immediately when she went to Baba. On 3rd August 1996 I received a letter from Goher, expressing concern over Mummy's recent hospitalization for pneumonia and telling us that Mani's condition was deteriorating. Hilla, who has continued to have beautiful dreams about Baba all her life, had one about Mani just before she was reunited with her Beloved. Baba, Mehera, Mani and Meheru were surrounded by pink clouds,

smiling and happy, looking young and beautiful. A bed was there, and Meheru asked Hilla to help her make it with a soft sheet, like nothing in the world we know. Then Mani came skipping toward them, dancing and smiling. Hilla woke feeling she'd had a glimpse of heaven.

On 19th August 1996 I received word that our darling Mani had been united with Baba and her cremation would be that evening. Sobbing, I broke the news to Mummy and prayed to Baba to help me get to Meherabad. An hour later one of the Bombay Baba-lovers offered me a ride. We arrived about 3:30 p.m. and queued up along with many others at the Sabha Mandap, where Mani lay dressed in pink and mauve, a pink scarf around her head. On her forehead was a tiny twinkling *tilak*, which made her look like a sleeping princess, and her body was covered with flowers offered by those paying their respects to her. At 5:30 she was taken by car to the cremation pyre next to the Pilgrim Centre, where we placed sandalwood sticks around her before her close relatives lit the pyre. The flames leapt up as we proclaimed "Avatar Meher Baba ki Jai." As the smoke rose higher and higher, two passing ascetics saw it and came to Eruch. "Who is this saint being cremated?" one asked. When Eruch told them it was the sister of Meher Baba, they understood. They said the smoke from most cremations was almost black, but the smoke from a cremated saint is greyish blue. The ascetics bowed to the pyre before leaving. Most cremations are over in about twenty-four hours, but Mani's pyre burned for three days. Music continued until late into the night, and resident Baba-lovers stayed with the pyre throughout the day and night to protect it.

After three days I returned to Bombay to look after Mummy and Meherwan. All three of us had heavy hearts as I told them the details of those three days, but Mummy reminded us that we should be happy for Mani in her reunion with her God-Brother. I thought of a song Mani had written, “Open Up the Door,” a couple of years before her final illness. Baba had finally opened that door for His devoted younger sister. Mani’s ashes were interred on Meherabad Hill to the left side of Beloved Baba’s shrine on 8th September.

In my sorrow I wrote a letter to Eruch and the Meherazad family. Eruch wrote this in response: “Dear Mani’s presence is sorely missed by all of us, but we bow to His Wish and remain resigned to His Will. Beloved Baba has told us time and again that the show must go on . . . so, dear Najoo, you are an old trooper and, like us, you must just continue to do your best, relying on Him for your comfort and support, and let the show go on until such time as He brings the curtain down!”

Eruch’s words came back to me just a few months later, when I was in Meherabad and saw how frail Mansari, the tiny but powerful woman who in our early days in the ashram had so frightened Hilla, had become. I asked Mansari to let me stay with her at night, but she was stubborn and at first refused my offer, although she clearly needed help. Later she relented, and I spent several nights in the room adjoining hers. When I returned to Bombay, several residents and pilgrims took over, staying with her at night. Hilla was visiting India at that time, and she was with Mansari the afternoon before she left us to be with her Beloved. Mansari completed her earthly journey the morning of 12th January 1997, the anniversary of the day in 1941 when

Baba had asked that the Dhuni be lighted on the 12th of every month from that time on. That evening Mansari's pyre was lighted at the same time as the Dhuni. Her ashes were collected after three days and later interred between Baba's Samadhi and His cabin.

MUMMY CONTINUED TO LIVE IN THE LITTLE FLAT in Bombay where Meherwan and I still live until she was eighty-nine years old, though in ways she always seemed younger. It was only Beloved Baba's mercy to Father and to us that kept her alive for so many years, as she had nearly died when Adi was born. Our sweet Mummy loved all her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren—whom she was finally able to meet when they visited Bombay. She enjoyed teaching them about Baba. When they were six, if the twins saw a serious picture of Baba, they would ask Mummy, "Why is Jai Baba so serious, Great-Grandma?" and she would say, "You must have been naughty." Then she would show them a happy picture of Baba and say, "See, now Jai Baba is happy," and they would laugh and hug her. She grew very old in the loving companionship of her family. Of all of us, though, she loved Meherwan the most—this child Mehera had called "the fruit of Nergiz's selfless service to Baba"—and she enjoyed seventeen rewarding years of watching him grow up under our care.

In 1998 her health began to fail rapidly. She had told us her last wish, that when it was time for her to be taken into Baba's Infinite Ocean, she wanted her closest family—Hilla, Devraj, Meherwan and me—to be with her. Beloved Baba, in His compassion, granted her wish. On 23rd February all four of us were there

beside her, when suddenly she said clearly, “Meherwan, where is my Meherwan? Come quickly and embrace me. . . . Our Baba is waiting for me!” Hearing this, Meherwan rushed to her. She embraced him and then drifted quietly away, the four of us looking on in silence. In that last moment she must have seen Baba, and I imagined Him taking her hand and leading her to His celestial kingdom, where she was at last happy and free from all the pain she had endured, both physical and emotional, during her time on earth. Her beautiful face showed real joy and peace, but despite our feeling happy for her, a large part of our hearts went with her.

Mehera said Nergiz had “served Baba well”; Mani had called her “pure sterling”; Eruch spoke of her “undaunted faith and love” for Baba; Father had called her “my Layla”; and Baba had said her heart was “pure gold” and He would grant her mukti. To Hilla, Adi and me, she was simply the best Mummy in the world, and we adored her. To Meherwan, Mummy was his everything. His loss was greatest, and for a long time it was difficult to console him. As we had so often in the past, we found both strength and solace in the beautiful words of the mandali, such as these from Meheru:

From Meherazad, our warmest love and deepest sympathy goes out to you and Baba’s Merwan for the loss to you of dear Nergiz. She was a brave soul and a true soldier in the real sense of the word, with that inner courage and with such love for her Beloved God Baba that nothing could shake. In fact, what pain and

suffering she went through only strengthened her love and brought Baba closer to her and to you all. Whatever else she had given you in her life, so selflessly lived, her and Savak's example of their unshakable love for Baba has become the greatest gift to you dear ones. And following her example and living a life of courage and strength in your desire to please Baba will be most pleasing to her.

I know for Nergiz it was a blessed relief to have been released, for she never wanted to be disabled or helpless. So you must not mourn her going but be happy for [she] has gone to her Beloved.

Eruch's inspiring letter said, "May His Love Blessings be on her soul evermore and may you dear ones keep her memory fresh and vibrant through your own undying faith in and love for our Beloved Lord Avatar Meher Baba. Surely, her life will continue to inspire you all, and those who knew dear Nergiz, with courage . . . to ever be resigned to the will of the Beloved." Eruch included a paragraph specifically for Meherwan:

Dear Meherwan, we, your aunties and uncles of Meherazad, know how difficult it must be at this juncture for you, brave one that you are; yet rejoice in your dear grandmother's release, for she is experiencing unfathomable joy in the Presence of her Beloved Lord, who is and ever will be your

Real Father and Mother in one. Transform this sad experience of the loss of your dear grandma into an opportunity to love your Lord even more, trusting that His love for you, His dear Meherwan Kotwal, will sustain you and support you as you lean on Him and make Him your pillar of strength. He will never let you down.

Such letters from Beloved Baba's close ones helped us to bear the loss more easily. Then, exactly a month after Mummy went to Baba, Meherwan, Hilla and I were sitting in the bedroom reminiscing about her saying that Baba was waiting for her and asking Meherwan for a last embrace. Meherwan went into the sitting room to fetch something, and there he saw Mummy in a white dress, smiling at him. Then she went toward the front door and disappeared. He rushed to tell us what had happened, and Hilla and I ran to the sitting room. All we found was the scent of jasmine, permeating the room.

It took us more than two lonely years to get used to living without our sweet, self-sacrificing Mummy and Grandmother. I have remembered over and over that scene in Bangalore, our first meeting with Baba after leaving our lives in Bombay behind—Mummy, physically frail but spiritually mighty, handing over to Baba not only her material wealth, her family jewelry, but the lives of her precious children as well, trusting Baba more than she had ever trusted anyone. I thank Baba for having given us this most precious gem.

The era of Baba's greatest and closest disciples is rapidly

drawing to an end. I feel honored to have been a witness to this “Greatest Show on Earth,” whose main actors are irreplaceable. But the show must go on until He “brings the curtain down.” All I can say about this show is that I thank Mehera-Baba for the roles bestowed upon me and all the other members of the Kotwal family. I pray that we may continue to love and serve Beloved Baba faithfully, hanging tightly to His damaan as did our dear parents, until He sweeps us at last from the shore.



Meher Retreat at Meherabad 2002

AFTERWORD. A LIFELONG SAHAVAS



At an Eye Camp
at Meher Hospital,
Meherabad

I n the six years following Mummy's reunion with Beloved Baba, a number of His closest ones have also left us to join Him. The first, in July of 1998, was Nana Kher, the sweet, soft-spoken man who for years served as both watchman and caretaker of Baba's Samadhi, embracing visitors and giving them prasad with his repeated "Welcome Home."

The next heart-wrenching loss, on 1st August 2001, was



Eruch and me,
1999

Eruch, Baba's devoted and obedient slave, the one who interpreted Baba's gestures and acted as His "Voice." All those who ever sat in Mandali Hall in Meherazad, listening to the stories of his life with the Beloved, have missed his presence, as he was a true friend to all Baba-lovers, young and old, East and West. No wonder Baba said of him, "If at all I enjoy the company of anyone, it is Eruch." I was fortunate to be able to arrive in Meherabad before his body was brought to be buried beside the other men disciples. There was an expression of perfect peace on Eruch's face. At the funeral I sang a song I had composed: "I have left the world at His sacred feet; I have surrendered my heart at His divine feet. . . ."

A year later, in August 2002, it was Aloba's turn to be united with his Beloved. This intense and devoted Persian disciple was with Baba from childhood, one of the few remaining from the Prem Ashram days, and nobody who visited Meherazad could ever forget his effusive greetings to Baba's lovers or his whistle and commanding voice telling pilgrims to board the bus when it was time to leave. In 2003 two more dear ones left us, Mohammed the mast, Hilla's and my dear friend from our younger days in Meherabad, and four months later the quiet, unassuming Bal Natu, whose many books about Baba inspired His lovers. I regretted not being able to be present for Mohammed's funeral, but I consoled myself with the memory of our last meeting. Nor could I be there for Bal's cremation, but I was later able to scatter some of his ashes around a *gulmohr* tree at the entrance to the tin shed, where we had sat together earlier that year during Amartithi, drinking in the wine of our Beloved.

And in June of 2004 Dr. Goher, my heroine of the medical profession, was taken into the waiting arms of the Lord after all her years of service to Him—traveling with Him in the New Life,

tending to him as His personal physician, and founding and running the Meher Free Dispensary, where people from nearby villages could receive free and excellent medical attention. She was cremated in Meherabad, her ashes interred on the Hill near Baba's Samadhi. Soon all those in Baba's intimate circle will be gone. We will miss their presence, their stories, and the inspiration of their company, but as they leave, they remind those of us who are still here that He is the One we must rely on.

As for the Kotwal family, Hilla and Devraj continue to live in England, but after twenty-eight years in Kent, they have moved to an apartment in London. While it was heart-wrenching for her to give up her lovely home, visited by Bhau, Katie and Meheru during their various travels to the West, and the exquisite garden from which she used to send dahlia bulbs for the Meherazad garden, as Hilla says, "that Maya also had to be severed." Since the time of Adi and Freny's accident, Hilla and Raj have come to India for several months each year to be with Meherwan and help with his upbringing. They also have taken him to London many times for his summer vacations, where he has spent many weekends in nearby Berkshire, with Deepak, Armaity, the twins Danesh and Cyrus, and their younger brother, Kiran. Deepak, who is now the director of a company, has been like an older brother to Meherwan. Hilla, whose dreams of Baba sustained her during long periods of separation from Him prior to 1969, continues to dream of Him regularly.

Meherwan and I still live in Mummy's little flat in Bombay, now called Mumbai. Meherwan is no longer a child, but a handsome, intelligent young man. His physical wounds have long since healed and today he cherishes as his own family all of Hilla's family, the mandali, and many Meherabad residents as well as members of



Meherwan, 2001

the Bombay Baba Centre. His academic achievements have been encouraged by letters from Dr. Goher and others, and He has completed his undergraduate degree as well as his M.B.A. At present he is happily working as an equity research analyst in a leading brokerage firm in Mumbai. In his bedroom is a half-finished portrait of Baba, painted by his mother. Several years ago I asked him to write about what Baba means to him; these are his words:

I have always believed in a powerful force that cannot be seen but whose existence cannot be denied. There is an unbelievable harmony in nature and things always seem to follow a particular pattern. It becomes difficult to create a mental picture of such a force that has a marked effect on life. A physical and more tangible form is required to be attributed to this force, so that one can relate to it.

My entire family believes this form to be Meher Baba and I have accepted His form to be this powerful force.

Somewhere along the line things always seem to fall into place; coincidences happen way too often to accept them as coincidences. Incidents happen that make you respect the marvellous and subtle manner in which this force operates. Above all this powerful force makes me realize that I am not alone; someone is always there looking over me—it is that force that I know as Meher Baba.

I have, by Baba's grace, been able to continue to participate in the cataract camps in Meherabad, where several times each

year twenty-four low-income patients receive cataract surgery. I still stay in the room assigned to me in the old staff quarters when I came to live there as the administrator of the hospital. The only sessions I have missed were early in 1999, when I fell and fractured my hip. For the first time I missed not only a few cataract camps, but Amartithi as well. My disappointment was eased by the beautiful letters I received from the mandali to boost my spirits, and I recovered well, though today I walk with a cane.

Just recently two incidents have happened to clarify moments from my past with Baba, the first during Amartithi of 2003. I had always wondered about a statement my father had made during the first Amartithi, as we were crossing the railroad track. He told me, “Beloved Baba said that one day a serpentine line will form on this hill, top to bottom, and it will take people days to reach His Tomb-Shrine. Some devotees will bow to the Samadhi from this railroad track.” I always wondered if Father had misinterpreted Baba’s gestures until I went into the Trust Office for some work and saw there a model of a possible superstructure to be built over the present Samadhi. Perhaps I will not live to see a superstructure built, but I feel joy in my heart that Baba’s name will continue to spread throughout the world until Meherabad becomes a great place of pilgrimage, known everywhere.

Just two months later, during cataract camp, another incident happened that explained something Baba had told Mehera. Back when I was a child, living in the Meher Retreat, Mummy and I were talking about Mehera’s deep love for the beauty of nature and how she had asked Baba why most of the Avatars had selected such barren and desolate areas in which to live and do their work. She wanted Baba to promise that next time He came, he would choose a

more beautiful spot. Baba told her that someday Meherabad and Arangaon and the surrounding countryside would be green and beautiful, with lots of water, trees and birds. I was walking toward the Hill, exhausted from my work, when one of the Meherabad residents offered me a ride on his motorcycle. I accepted gratefully, and we started on the road. Unfortunately, when we reached the railroad tracks in Arangaon, which all vehicles going up the Hill must cross, a train was expected and the gates were down. Without even stopping, we took a different route, one I didn't know about, that led us through a sandy river bed I'd never seen before. I have since learned that it is called the Meghini (Shepherdess) River. Perhaps the next generation of Baba-lovers will see it flowing freely, and all of Meherabad will be covered with trees to shelter those coming on pilgrimage.

To this day I make the journey from Mumbai to Meherabad by train, then State Transport Bus, then rickshaw almost monthly, a tiring journey, but as soon as I reach Meherabad my exhaustion vanishes in Baba's sacred atmosphere. I pray that He will grant that I continue to make this journey until the end of my days. As I look back over our lives with Beloved Baba, I cherish the interaction the Kotwal family has had with Beloved Baba, Mehera, Mani and all the mandali. Baba transformed our lives, forever enriching them, infusing them with His divine love, and giving us what seems like a lifelong sahavas with Him. There are no adequate words to sing His praises, but every Baba-lover tries, because every Baba-lover has a story of His love to tell. This one, by His grace, is ours.

JAI MEHERA-BABA!

Najoo Kotwal

9th November 2005

G L O S S A R Y

aafrin. “Hail to thee!” in Gujarati.

Ahuramazda. The Zoroastrian name for Almighty God in the ancient Avestan language.

Amartithi. Literally, Eternal Date. The anniversary of the dropping of Meher Baba’s body on 31st January 1969.

anna. A coin used during British rule in India. Sixteen annas were equal to one rupee.

Arti. Devotional song or prayer. In the Hindu tradition, arti involves waving a plate with lighted camphor (or lamps of oil or ghee) before the Master or an image of a deity. Among Baba-lovers, *Arti* refers either to a song in praise of Meher Baba or to the performance of the prayers dictated by Baba as well as songs dedicated to Him.

Ashiana. The name (meaning “nest”) for the home of Arnavaz and Nariman Dadachanji, where Meher Baba often stayed in Bombay.

ashram. The abode of a spiritual master, where he lives with his disciples. Meher Baba

established His main ashram at Meherabad. He had several other ashrams at various times, including the Prem Ashram for boys and special ashrams for the masts and the mad.

Avatar. Literally, descent. God in human form. In Hinduism, the word *avatar* refers to an incarnation of any deity on earth. Meher Baba revealed that the Avatar is that same Ancient One—known by such names as the Avatar, Rasul, Christ, Messiah, or Buddha—who descends into human form repeatedly throughout history. His advents in the present cycle of time have been Zoroaster, Rama, Krishna, Buddha, Muhammad, Jesus and Meher Baba.

Avatar Meher Baba ki Jai. An exclamation or salute meaning “Hail to Avatar Meher Baba!”

Babajan. See Perfect Master.

bangli. A small cottage at a Tower of Silence where people gather to pay their respects to the body of the deceased.

bhajan. A Hindu devotional song in praise of God.

bidi (or beedi). A simple cigarette made from tobacco rolled in a leaf and tied with a thread.

Bujaave Arti. Also known as the Bujaave Naar or the Gujarati Arti. A song of praise to Avatar Meher Baba, composed by Baba Himself in the 1920s.

Cage Room. A room encaged with bamboo bars where Meher Baba stayed in seclusion, often with masts He was working with. The room is in a small building in Upper Meherabad, behind the Samadhi.

chargeman. A saint or *mast* assigned by a Perfect Master to carry out specific spiritual work in a specific place.

coir. The outer husk of a coconut, woven into string to make Indian-style string beds.

daaman. Literally, the hem of a garment. Just as a child holds on to the hem of its mother's skirt as they make their way through a crowded marketplace, Baba wants His lovers to figuratively hold on to His daaman by depending only on His guidance as we make our way along the spiritual journey. That way, we won't get lost among the many

distractions and will arrive safely at the Goal.

dacoits. Roving bands of dangerous highway bandits.

dak bungalow. A simple building where facilities are available for overnight stays.

dal. A dish prepared from split lentils.

Darbar pose. *Darbar* is the Persian word for a court where a king—or a Perfect Master—grants audience to visitors. “Darbar pose” refers to a photograph of Meher Baba, taken by D. D. Rege of Pune, that is a favorite among His lovers. See *Lord Meher*, vol. 16, p. 5583.

darshan. Literally, sight. In India, darshan refers to the act of seeing a holy person or an image of a deity, and the blessing derived from this sight. During His lifetime, Meher Baba granted His darshan to large masses of people. Typically, those taking His darshan would fold their hands in adoration and bow at His feet. Today, people take darshan by bowing down at Meher Baba's Samadhi or other places intimately associated with Him, such as His bedroom in Meherazad or Myrtle Beach.

dhansak. A Parsi dish of cooked dal

with spices and vegetables,
eaten with sweetened rice.

dharamshala. A free rest house for
travelers.

dhoti. A garment worn by Hindu
men, consisting of a long cloth
passed between the legs and
tucked into the waist at the
back.

Dhuni. Saints and Masters in
India often keep a dhuni, or fire,
usually in a small pit, which
symbolizes the purifying inner
fire of Divine Love. Meher Baba
lit a dhuni at a particular spot at
Lower Meherabad on a number
of occasions, and invited His
lovers to throw into it sandal-
wood sticks dipped in ghee,
symbolizing attachments that
they wished to give up. He
instructed that the Dhuni at
Lower Meherabad should
continue to be lit on the twelfth
day of each month at sunset.

East Room, the. Originally a water
tank, converted into a room at
the east end of the Meher
Retreat. Baba used it as a place
of meditation before it became a
residence for women disciples.
Mehera and Mani lived in this
room at one time.

fakir (or faqir). A wandering ascetic
who subsists on alms; a person

who renounces all comforts in
devotion to God. The fakir rep-
resents the ideal of true poverty
in the spiritual sense.

gadi. Literally, throne. A long
reclining seat in the tin shed on
Meherabad Hill, upon which
Meher Baba used to relax. Even
in these simple surroundings,
Baba's divine presence made
this humble seat seem like a real
throne.

Ghalib. A famous nineteenth-
century Urdu poet of India.
Ghalib is one of the great
masters of the poetic form
known as the ghazal.

ghazal. A type of poetry, often sung,
describing the devotion between
lover and beloved. The ghazal
has a specific rhyme scheme
and number of verses, and is
traditionally written in either
Urdu or Persian, although
versions have been composed
for Meher Baba in Hindi and
English as well.

gopis. Literally, milkmaids. The
female devotees of Lord Krishna,
who was a cowherd in His
youth.

Guruprasad. Literally, grace of the
guru. The name of a palace in
Poona (now Pune) belonging to
Maharani Shantadevi of Baroda,

given to Meher Baba exclusively for His use during the summer months in the 1950s and 1960s. The Great Darshan of 1969 was held there. It has since been torn down, but one small room, made from materials saved from the bedroom used by Baba, and a part of the verandah were preserved on the site as a memorial to Meher Baba.

gymkhana. A public place for physical exercise and recreation.

Hafiz, Shamsuddin Muhammad. (c. 1320–1389). Persia's greatest mystic poet, a master of the ghazal who was Meher Baba's favorite poet. Baba identified Hafiz as a Perfect Master.

Hanuman. A monkey king who was a disciple of Lord Ram. His heroic feats are told in the Hindu epic *Ramayana*. Hanuman embodies the attitude of a devoted servant of the Master.

Hari. One of the many names for Vishnu or Krishna; Lord.

hill station. A town in the mountains, favored by the British for long holidays during India's hot summer months.

Hu. Literally, He, a Sufi name for God.

Inshallah. "God willing," a common Islamic expression.

Jai Baba. A common greeting or salute among Baba-lovers, which literally means "Victory to Baba." *See also* Avatar Meher Baba ki Jai.

jalali. Referring to the fiery nature possessed by certain God-intoxicated masts. The word is derived from one of two divine qualities described in Sufi literature: Jalal (Majesty) and Jamal (Beauty). In contrast to the jalali mast, a jamali mast has a docile nature.

jali. A net of flowers woven to form a floral sheet to offer to the Lord. For special occasions, a jali is often placed on the marble slab over the crypt in Meher Baba's Samadhi.

Jigar. The poetic pen name of Ali Sikander Muradabadi (1890–1961), an Urdu poet of India known for his ghazals. Jigar was Meher Baba's favorite contemporary poet. According to an endnote in *Lord Meher* by Bhau Kalchuri, "when Jigar was on his deathbed in 1961, Baba sent a devotee named Baghel (from Hamirpur) to him with a copy of *God Speaks*, as a gift from Baba. Baghel presented the book to him, and Jigar touched his forehead with the book."

Kabir (1440–1518). A Perfect Master and poet of India whose followers included both Hindus and Muslims.

kafni. An ankle-length men's garment like a long shirt, made of lightweight cotton, usually white. Meher Baba and His companions wore kafnis during the New Life.

Kali Yuga. A dark age of suffering. In traditional Hindu cosmology, the creation moves through four cyclic periods called yugas in Sanskrit, during which conditions progressively deteriorate. We are said now to be in the fourth period, the Kali Yuga. Hinduism teaches that after this dark age ends in dissolution, the world will continue in a new cycle. Meher Baba said that His appearance as Avatar is the last advent in a cycle of cycles, and that when the Avatar returns in seven hundred years, happiness will be at its zenith.

kamli coat. A black coat made from a rough woolen cloth called kamli, patched numerous times, that Meher Baba wore almost continuously over several years. Comments by Baba indicated that the coat was somehow connected with

His Universal Work; He told the mandali: "You won't be able to understand the significance of the taking off and putting on of this coat." The kamli coat is on display in the Museum Room on Meherabad Hill.

khadi. Handwoven cotton cloth.

Krishna, Lord. One of the major advents of the Avatar, worshiped by Hindus as an incarnation of Vishnu. Hindu literature tells of Krishna's life as a village cow-herd whose divine personality attracted the devotion of the gopis, or milkmaids. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna presents teachings to His disciple Arjun.

Kuchipudi. A style of Indian classical dance from South India.

kusti. A handwoven flat woolen string worn around the waist by orthodox Zoroastrians. A child receives a kusti to wear over the sadra at his or her navjote.

Layla. The beloved of Majnun in a Persian tale that is one of the great love stories of world literature. Majnun's love for Layla, from whom he was separated, was so one-pointed that eventually it led him to love for God.

Mahatma. Literally, great soul.

A term indicating a saint or advanced spiritual being. As an honorific title, “Mahatma” was appended to the name of Gandhi by his admirers and followers.

mandali. The intimate circle of disciples around the Avatar or a Perfect Master. In the early days, the term was used only for Meher Baba’s men mandali; later it came to include the women mandali as well.

Mandali Hall. A hall where Baba met with His disciples and devotees. There is a Mandali Hall in both Meherazad and Meherabad.

Manonash Cabin. A small cabin constructed on Seclusion Hill, near Meherazad, where Baba spent time in seclusion doing His special manonash work in 1951. It was afterwards moved to Meherazad. *Manonash* means “annihilation of the mind,” or passing out of the separative ego-mind to abide in God.

mast. A word Meher Baba used to indicate a God-intoxicated person on the spiritual path.

Maya. Illusion; the divine power that causes the illusory world of duality to appear real.

Meher Nazar compound.

Originally the home of Adi K.

Irani (when it was known as Khushru Quarters); now the offices of the Avatar Meher Baba Trust and home for some residents.

Meher Retreat. Originally a stone water tank used by the British in World War I, this building in Upper Meherabad has been used in several ways, among them as living quarters for many of the Eastern and Western women disciples who lived in Meher Baba’s ashram. Today the building holds a museum, study hall and library.

Meherastana. Literally, Meher Threshold. The name that Meher Baba gave to Mahewa village in Hamirpur District, Uttar Pradesh. It was in Meherastana that Baba first publicly declared His Avatarhood, on 10th February 1954, spelling out on His alphabet board during a gathering: “Avatar Meher Baba ki Jai.”

Mirabai. A sixteenth-century princess of North India who renounced her wealth and husband to lead a simple life of devotion to Lord Krishna. The devotional songs composed by Mirabai are still sung today throughout India.

mujawar. The attendant of a spiritual master.

’Nagar. Short for Ahmednagar.

namaskara (or namaskar). A greeting or salutation, usually accompanied by a bow of respect with folded hands. Traditionally, it conveys, “I salute the Divine in you.”

Narayan Maharaj. *See* Perfect Master.

navjote. Initiation into the Zoroastrian faith (similar to confirmation for Christians), performed when a child is between seven and nine years of age. During this ceremony, the child is invested with a sadra and kusti.

nazar. Literally, glance. Figuratively, the protective watch that a Master keeps over His disciples.

New Life. A special phase of Meher Baba’s work (1949–1952), during which He traveled throughout India on foot with a number of His close disciples. During this period He did not allow His disciples to identify Him as the Avatar, traveling incognito as one of their companions, sleeping wherever they found shelter and eating whatever people offered them with love.

Nizam. Hereditary title of the king

of Hyderabad, a Muslim state in India during British rule.

oodi. Ashes from a dhuni.

Paramatma. The Supreme Self, or Oversoul. One of the Hindu names of God.

paise. A coin equal to one-quarter of an anna. It is longer in use in India.

pandal. A colorful, ruffled tent erected temporarily, for a special occasion such as a darshan.

Parsi. A descendent of Zoroastrians who emigrated from Persia to India around the eighth-century to avoid religious persecution by Muslim invaders of their homeland, settling originally in Gujarat State.

Parvardigar Prayer, the. A prayer given by Meher Baba, also known as the Master’s Prayer. It is recited at morning and evening Arti at His Samadhi, along with the Prayer of Repentance and the Beloved God prayer, also given by Him.

penda. An Indian sweet made with milk, wheat flour and sugar.

Perfect Master. A God-realized man or woman who retains God-consciousness and creation consciousness simultaneously and who works in creation to help other souls toward

God-realization. Also called a Sadguru. The five Perfect Masters who unveiled Meher Baba as the Avatar were Sai Baba of Shirdi, Upasani (or Upasni) Maharaj, Babajan, Tajuddin Baba and Narayan Maharaj.

prasad. Literally, divine grace or favor. A gift from the Master to a seeker. In Hinduism, the term *prasad* refers to offerings to a deity at a temple, which are shared with the devotees afterward as a blessing. Among Baba-lovers, *prasad* refers to gifts distributed by Meher Baba, whether at mass darshan programs or more intimate meetings, often in the form of something edible. Prasad bestows the gift of inner contact with the Master and conveys His love blessing. Today, sweets kept in Meher Baba's Tomb-Shrine are distributed as His prasad to pilgrims who come for darshan.

primus stove. A paraffin stove used before gas stoves became popular in India.

puri. A small wheat chapati that swells up like a pillow when it is deep-fried.

qawwali. A type of spiritual song based on a verse from the Koran

or a mystical poem, sung in Urdu to improvised music.

Radha. The beloved of Lord Krishna. She was one of the gopis, or cowherding girls.

Rahuri Cabin. Baba's cabin at the Rahuri mast ashram of 1936–1938. It was moved to Lower Meherabad when the ashram was closed, and there the mast Ali Shah lived in it.

Ram, Lord. One of the major advents of the Avatar, Lord Ram (or Rama) was a princely ruler in ancient India and the celebrated hero of the epic *Ramayana*. Hindus worship Him as an incarnation of Vishnu.

Sabha Mandap. A platform covered with a tin roof, situated across from the Samadhi, used as a place of congregation or, during Amartithi, as a performance space.

Sadguru. See Perfect Master.

sadhu. A Hindu ascetic or holy man who has renounced the world. A sadhu typically wanders from place to place and begs for his food.

sadra. A thin muslin shirt traditionally worn by Zoroastrians. Meher Baba adapted the sadra into an

ankle-length garment that He regularly wore.

sahavas. The company of the Master. Also, a gathering held by a Master so that His devotees may enjoy and benefit from intimate companionship.

Sai Baba of Shirdi. *See* Perfect Master.

Samadhi, the. Meher Baba's Tomb-Shrine on Meherabad Hill. In India, the site of the burial of a holy person is often referred to as a *samadhi*, the Sanskrit word for the highest state of meditation.

sanskaras. In Hindu philosophy, mental impressions or accumulated imprints of past experiences, which determine one's desires and actions. Meher Baba identified the binding of sanskaras as the primary obstacle to spiritual freedom.

Tajuddin Baba. *See* Perfect Master.

tilak. A mark made on the forehead by a fingertip dipped into kum-kum, a moist red powder. Tilak is a custom of the Hindus which has been adopted by Parsis for good luck.

Tipoo Baba. Baba's spiritual chargeman for Bombay, a sixth plane mast.

tonga. A two-wheeled, one-horse carriage, driven by a tongawalla.

Tower of Silence. A circular tower used by Zoroastrians for disposal of the dead.

Upasani Maharaj. *See* Perfect Master.

Work, Baba's. The Universal Work accomplished by Meher Baba during His advent as the Avatar. Although He said that ordinary people could not understand His work, Baba indicated that it included giving a spiritual push to all of creation as well as specific help to individuals and particular groups of humanity, such as masts and the mentally or physically ill.

Yezdan (or Yazdan). The Persian name for Almighty God.

yogi. One who has renounced worldly life to follow the spiritual path; one who practices physical or mental disciplines (yogas) for spiritual reasons.

Zoroaster. Considered the founder of the ancient Zoroastrian religion that the Parsis brought with them from Persia to India. Zoroaster was identified by Meher Baba as the earliest known Avatar in the present cycle of time. Also called Zarathustra.

SELECTION OF BOOKS BY AND ABOUT MEHER BABA

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