

## **BABA GIVES SAHAVAS TO THE WESTERN GROUP 1954 ~ PART XVII**

### *Western Men's Sahavas Begins*

In response to the invitation from Meher Baba, twenty of His dear Western men arrived in Ahmednagar in September. Among them were Will Backett and Charles Purdom from England, Darwin Shaw and Malcolm Schloss from America, and Francis Brabazon from Australia. They had come to spend several weeks in Baba's company, a brief visit with the Timeless One, which they came to remember fondly as "Three Incredible Weeks." In His ever-thoughtful manner, Baba had arranged every detail concerning their health and comfort.

An upper story and a tower had been added to the water tank at Meherabad in 1938. The building was now converted into a dormitory for the Westerners. Sarosh Irani was in charge of the overall arrangements; his wife, Villoo, was responsible for planning and preparing their meals; and Dr. Donkin looked after their health. Savak Kotwal stayed at the retreat, and would get up very early in the morning to make sure that everything ran smoothly.

Most of the men had arrived in time to attend the large darshan program in Wadia Park on September 12. Two days later, on the morning of the 14th, they eagerly awaited Baba's arrival on Meherabad Hill. It was in such a surcharged atmosphere of love that their real *sahavas* with Baba began.

When Baba arrived, He lovingly embraced each of the men, and then spelled out on His alphabet board, "I want you to be completely natural and absolutely frank." The men were sent to fetch their sun hats, and then Baba led them on a tour of Meherabad. He took them first to the place which He had prepared to be His future Tomb, the "Final Resting Place," as He sometimes referred to it. He told them about His seclusion in the crypt in 1927-28. Then He showed them the beautiful

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murals that had been painted on the interior walls of the Tomb by Helen Dahm of Switzerland.

Will Backett, the oldest of the group, whom Baba used to call one of His "archangels," described his impression of the Tomb as follows:

At each of the four corners of the domed roof is a symbol of a great world religion — a cross for Christianity, a crescent for Mohammedanism, a flame for Zoroastrianism, and a temple-dome for Hinduism; Baba has come to put new life into each religion. Under the wonderful Indian sky this beautiful snow-white building, bearing the inscription over the door, "Mastery in Servitude," might seem to have descended from Heaven itself to witness the triumph of Divine Love on earth.

Then, setting off with His brisk and graceful stride, Baba led them down the hill to Lower Meherabad, where some of His men disciples stayed. As they reached there, a private bus arrived, bringing fourteen women disciples of Upasni Maharaj from his Ashram in Sakori. With them was Godavri Mai, who, until her death in 1990, was in charge of Upasni's Ashram. One by one, Godavri and the other women paid their homage to Beloved Baba by placing their foreheads on His feet. Speaking to all of the group through Eruch, Baba stated, "I am the One Reality."<sup>1</sup>

With this combined group of Western men and Eastern women, Baba continued the tour of Meherabad. He showed them the small, low wooden cabin known as the Table House, where, during months of seclusion beginning in 1925, He started writing the still unpublished "Book." He also pointed out the site of the *dhuni* (sacred fire), which was in front of the cabin. The *dhuni* had been lit there for the first time under Baba's order in 1927. Leading the entire group back up the hill, Baba showed the women His future Tomb and a few other places of interest. After this, He sent them back to Sakori, saying that He would come there one day soon with the Western men.

Below the dormitory where the Western men were staying,

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<sup>1</sup> *Three Incredible Weeks with Meher Baba*, p. 20.

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a lounge had been prepared in the room that is now the museum. Baba led the men inside, reminding them again to be perfectly natural and frank with Him. He gestured, "I am your Master, but I am also your Friend. I am one of you, and one with you." Thus, Baba gave them His assurance that the Infinite One is also the most Intimate One. With reference to His Divine status of Oneness with everyone and everything, Baba continued, "I am one with you on every level, but you know this only when the ego and intellect do not interfere. I am what I am, whether the world bows down to Me, or whether it turns against Me; it does not matter. It is no one's fault."<sup>2</sup>

Baba wanted the men to be with Him every day from nine in the morning until midday. He told them that He would explain some spiritual points in the coming days. He concluded: "Before I met My Beloved in Union, I lost everything — ego, mind, and lower consciousness, but thank God, I did not lose My sense of humor. That is why I appear amongst you ... on your level ... When I am with *sadhus*, no one is more serious than I am. When I am with children, I play marbles with them. I am in all, and one with all. That is why I can automatically adapt Myself to all kinds of people and meet them where they are."<sup>3</sup>

Baba devoted the following day to having personal interviews with the men at Meherabad. Thursday, the 16th, brought the men to Meherazad. Baba looked happy upon meeting His dear ones, and introduced them to some of His men *mandali*: Kaikobad, Kaka Baria, and Gustadji. Then He showed them around the grounds of Meherazad, taking them first to a room that had been constructed out of two asbestos cabins used by Baba during the Manonash period of the New Life. From there, He led them through the beautiful garden, where they met Rano and Dr. Goher. In the main house, Baba guided them through the various rooms, including His own bedroom on the upper floor, which He used until some days after His second auto accident in 1956.

Leaving the Meherazad compound, Baba took them across the open countryside and up the slope of Seclusion Hill. Reaching the top, He pointed out where the two asbestos cabins had

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 23

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 25-26, 27.

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originally stood. When they returned below, a refreshment of fruit juice was served on the veranda of the house. Then came what was perhaps the most moving event of the day: one of the women *mandali* emerged from the house with a bundle carefully wrapped in a shawl. On opening the bundle, the men viewed the old patched coat, the *kamli* coat, that Baba had worn so often for about eight years, from 1921. Baba told them that this was a sacred possession to Him. He also showed them the *sadra* and sandals He had worn with that coat. Before embracing the men and sending them back to Meherabad, He conveyed to them: "So what would be best would be for you to play with Baba's Love from now on ... What I would like, in short, is for you to take Me with you when you go back." This message — to carry Baba in one's heart, which is His home — applies even to this day for any pilgrim visiting Meherabad or Meherazad.

By the way, on the same day, September 16, Kalemama, one of the early Meherabad *mandali*, passed away peacefully at Meherabad. He was born into a well-educated and wealthy family with seemingly everything that life could offer. However, he was drawn into Baba's orbit through his contacts with Narayan Maharaj and Sai Baba. He had at first felt reluctant to follow a guru, fearing his inability to render total obedience. But when he met Baba at Meherabad in 1926, he was transformed by the divine, forgiving Love that shone from Baba's eyes, and he surrendered to Him. By the late '20s, Kalemama and his wife and son were part of the Meherabad family. In his capacity as a civil engineer, he designed and supervised the construction of various buildings at Meherabad, including Mandali Hall. His life was dedicated to the service of his Beloved Master, Meher Baba, until his last breath.

On the following day, the 17th, Baba arrived twenty minutes after nine. He apologized for being late, then conveyed: "On very special occasions, I hold prayer meetings with a few of My most intimate disciples. Today I shall hold one of these meetings so that you all may be included."

All went down the hill to Mandali Hall. Baba ordered that the doors and windows be closed. Then Zoroastrian, Moslem,

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Hindu, and Christian prayers were offered. After this was done, Donkin stood beside Baba, facing Baba's portrait. He read the following prelude:

O the Eternally Benevolent Paramatma! O All-Merciful Allah! O the Most Merciful God Almighty! O Giver of all boons, Yazdan! Being fully aware of Your absolute Independence and Your absolute Indifference, Baba, with all humbleness, implores You, O Merciful God, to accept the Prayer of Repentance from Him on behalf of all His lovers and on behalf of all who are worthy of being forgiven.<sup>4</sup>

The Prayer of Repentance, which Baba had given in 1952, was recited. This prayer, along with the Parvardigar Prayer, was specially dictated by Baba, and they are two of His gifts to humanity. At the conclusion of the prayers, Baba gestured for the doors and windows to be opened. The men seated themselves on the floor, and He spelled out on the alphabet board, "Today, you have joined God praying to God. I and God are One."

After this, the group went back up the hill to the lounge, and Baba showed them the paintings done by Rano. He asked them to think exclusively of Him for half an hour every day, for seven days. He added, "If you find you cannot do that, then just look at My picture and mentally repeat "Ba-ba." If your thoughts bother you, don't be concerned; let them come and go, but try your best to keep Baba's figure clearly in your mind's eye."

These instructions may also be pointers for those today who wish to feel His presence. Repeating His name, or reading some of His words on a daily basis, should not be considered rituals. In fact, such remembrance of the Awakened One awakens in our hearts a delightful and close companionship with Him. It seems ironic that some people express concern that their regular remembrance of God might become a ritual, and yet they blindly accept without complaint their regular remembrance of worldly pleasures and routines as most natural.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

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The day ended with Baba conveying: "A form of Zoroastrian prayer is called *Kusti*. All the four prayers say the same thing. Since Babajan kissed Me on the forehead, I bow down to My own Self. Why?"

Someone responded, "Because there is nothing else to bow down to."

Baba continued: "That is My actual, continual experience. What is needed is to become, not only to see. You have to become what you already are. You are God, but you have to know how to become God; and Christ humiliated Himself, God Himself crucified Himself, to teach this; through love, become what you already are."<sup>5</sup>

Baba had stated earlier that day, "Christ and His inner circle and the Christian mystics all stressed purity of heart. Mohammed and His *imams* also stressed purity of heart."<sup>6</sup>

Thus ended Friday the 17th.

On Saturday morning, as Baba arrived on Meherabad Hill from Meherazad, He greeted each of His dear ones with a warm handshake. Meherjee and Eruch were accompanying Him. Meherjee carried a phonograph and some records. The group assembled in the lounge. Baba was in a mood to give a discourse. Using His board, He explained the different types of *samadhis*, including *Sahaj Samadhi*, which is experienced by the Sadgurus. He concluded, "Tomorrow, if you remind Me — I don't promise — I will tell you how, when thinking of Me, you can still do everything you need to do in the world. This is not *Sahaj Samadhi*, but *Sahaj Dhyana*."<sup>7</sup>

Baba also told the group that on the following day they would listen to Indian music, but for now they were to listen to English recordings. Records of Marian Anderson, Fritz Kreisler, Richard Crooks, and Yma Sumac were played. One of Yma Sumac's songs had the verse (translated): "I love only Thee; I worship only Thee; to Thee alone I surrender the key of my treasure." Baba responded to this, "He who could do this would know Me."

While the music session was in progress, Baba was handed a small card that read: "If I could see You only for a moment, I would be eternally grateful." The card had come from a

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

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Japanese gentleman named K. Hitaker of Tokyo. He was ushered in, and very devotedly prostrated himself before Baba. Baba bade him to rise and conveyed through gestures, "Generally I don't allow people to come up on the Hill." But gazing at Hitaker with love, Baba offered him His own grapefruit juice to drink, and conveyed, "You have come far, drink it all."

Later Baba asked him, "Why did you come such a long distance? Baba is everywhere."

Hitaker replied, "I would like to invite You to Japan."

Baba replied with a smile, "After seven hundred years!"

I would like to mention here that, from the early '50s onward, whenever any of His lovers requested Him to visit their town, village, or house, Baba would usually reply, with a charming gesture, "After seven hundred years!"

Baba instructed Hitaker to return to Meherabad on the 28th to attend the special meeting, and he left that same day for Calcutta to get his visa extended.

On the following day, Sunday, September 19, Baba explained to his Western lovers about the planes of consciousness, and then stated, "I am with you all the time, but you do not pay attention [to Me]. How to pay attention, I may explain another time."

This may have been a hint to the Westerners to remind Baba about the topic of *sahaj dbyan*, but, being absorbed in His presence, no one seemed to remember. So they listened to Indian music. Baba translated some of the Urdu lines from the *ghazals*:

Remember, one who really loves God,  
God annihilates him,  
God mixes him with the dust.

O lover, beware.  
God tests you by being cruel,  
by giving you false hopes,  
even by cutting you to pieces.

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God says,  
O lover of mine,  
if you want to enter My lane  
first let your head roll under My feet  
and be kicked by Me as a ball!

What an astoundingly concealed expression of God's compassion! Some refer to this aspect of God's love as *shamma-e-jalal* (the flame of God's glorification). All listened to Baba with rapt attention.

After lunch, Baba called some of the group to Him to discuss certain things in connection with His work in the West. Then He left for Meherazad, a little earlier than usual.

### *Sakori and Sahaj Dhyān*

During Baba's darshan on September 12, He had mentioned to Godavri Mai that He would visit Sakori soon, and later fixed the date for September 20. On that day He went there accompanied by His Western followers who were staying at Meherabad, as well as some of His men *mandali*. They reached Sakori around ten in the morning. Baba received a royal welcome. A brass band escorted Him from the outskirts of the village to the Ashram. Godavri Mai and the *kanyas* garlanded Him and performed His *arti*. Baba later conveyed to the group, "How Godavri loves Me, and what a virgin she is! I call her Yashoda — the foster mother of Krishna. She is one of the most lovable beings."

The group then moved on to Upasni Maharaj's *Samadhi*. Baba took His seat and, pointing to the statue of Maharaj in the *pinjra*, dictated from His alphabet board, "This old man was God-incarnate. During My last visit here [March 1954], I had told the gathering that I would not again step in Sakori. But later I remembered that Maharaj had once mentioned, 'Merwan will bring the Westerners here,' so to fulfill his wish I have come today."

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Baba then asked all the Westerners and the *mandali* to bow down to Maharaj's *Samadhi*, bowing first Himself. Darwin Shaw later related his recollection about this at a gathering in the United States. The gist of it, as I have gathered, is as follows: "My turn was coming up, and some of the Westerners were bowing down. I felt a bit uncomfortable bowing at the tomb. Instantly, with a smile, Baba responded to my dilemma by walking over to me. He put one of His hands on my forehead and the other on my back. As I bent down, I felt that I was bowing down to His hand, to which I could not object. How readily He jumped in and took care of my dilemma. He did the same thing to two or three others, so it was not conspicuous."

Ludwig Dimpfl narrated his impression of the event in a different way. He wrote: "As we lined up in a queue, Baba had the first one in line kneel down and then place his forehead on the ground in front of Upasni Maharaj's grave. I could not help but wonder what my father would think if he could witness the scene. All his suspicions were justified. Here his son got mixed up with some heathen religion, and was now going through their pagan rites! My father's views were not, of course, my views. But it crossed my mind that I could take comfort that there was no way that my father could witness that scene. I came to the head of the line. Baba bade me kneel. He then held me gently by the back of the head as I lowered it to touch my forehead at the base of Maharaj's grave. Just as my forehead touched the ground, one of the westerners [and also a photographer from Ahmednagar] took a flash photo of that pose!"<sup>8</sup> Baba's joke!

After a short private interview with Godavri Mai, Baba proceeded outside and seated Himself under a pipal tree, where He gave darshan to a gathering of men and women. Then refreshments were served to the visitors. Baba went to the quarters of the *kanyas* and visited a sick girl. He gave her rose petals to eat, assuring her that she need not feel disheartened — in fact, her illness gave her the opportunity to remember Maharaj and Baba. If she thought of them wholeheartedly, one day she would feel their intimate presence.

Baba and the party left Sakori by midday as the band

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<sup>8</sup> *How a Master Works*, p. 191.

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played again. Villagers lined the road paying homage to Baba as He departed.

The next morning, Tuesday, Baba appeared in a happy mood when He arrived at Meherabad. He wished to show His dear ones how to play marbles. But before this, He opened the subject of the previous day's visit to Sakori and told the group about His long stay at Sakori years before and His relationship with Maharaj. Then, very casually, He made a succinct but very profound statement about the "miracle of God":

When Jesus said, "I and My Father are One," He meant He was God ... That is God's miracle and the miracle of Jesus. It meant that innumerable beings were created by Jesus who died according to His Will. Yet, it is supposed that Jesus' greatness is that He raised some few dead to life. How ridiculous that is unless given some hidden meaning!

Many miracles are attributed to Me, but I do not perform miracles; I do not attach importance to miracles ... One miracle I will perform, and for that miracle time is nigh. I have said that My miracle will be not to raise the dead, but to make one dead to himself to live in God. I have repeatedly said I will not give sight to the blind, but I will make them [people] blind to the world in order to see God.<sup>9</sup>

Nowadays, whenever I hear anyone say, "It's a miracle," it brings to my mind Baba's profound statement about the one Miracle of God, manifesting through the life of the Ancient One. Previously, I had not thought that the word "miracle," in its highest sense, meant what Baba has explained. It seems that the Whim (*Lila*) of God, which poured forth this infinite creation and which ultimately resulted in His assuming a perfect human form as the Avatar, is the only incomprehensible miracle! This is His divine triumph, as well as His crucifixion.

Baba talked about the Master of Jesus, John the Baptist, and also about Upasni Maharaj. He then continued with His explanation about the higher planes of consciousness — the fifth through the seventh. After clarifying the various stages

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<sup>9</sup> *Three Incredible Weeks with Meher Baba*, p. 71.

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and states in these planes of consciousness, Baba remembered that He had promised to tell the group about *sahaj dhyan*.

*Dhyan* means "meditation," or the one-pointed focusing of mind and/or heart. But it is difficult to give a literal translation of *sahaj dhyan*. In a way, *sahaj dhyan* is a natural, ongoing divine awareness, moving towards one's innate nature.

Baba explained:

When you remember Me, you are in *sahaj dhyan*. The question is how to remember Me. The easiest and surest way is to do as I tell you. It will be somewhat of a task at first, as when you start to run you feel it too much; but when you are in training, you feel it *sahaj* [natural]. At first you will have to do it deliberately, then it will be natural ...

The first thing in the morning, as soon as you get up, before doing anything, think of Me for one second. Baba is then worn by your soul; early in the morning dress your soul with Baba. Do it honestly and you will feel He is with you.

At 12 noon, for one second, think of Baba.

Thirdly, at about 5 o'clock, for one second, think of Baba, then you can do what you have to.

Fourthly, when you retire, think of Baba for a second.

If you do it, I will be always with you, and you will feel My company. Do it for four seconds every day; then you will be in the world, yet Baba will be with you all the time. This is the beginning of *sahaj dhyan*.

Spiritual treasures are revealed in one's heart when anyone wholeheartedly follows the guidelines given by a Perfect Master. However, on this particular day, the Avatar Himself, in one of His most lively moods, offered a most simple way to establish a link with Him. The seeker needs no special merit to take advantage of this benevolent Avataric offer. Try it, and you will know its worth.

Baba ended the day's *sahavas* with the following words: "To sum up, we have to feel in our hearts that only God is real; that

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He alone exists, that He is in us all, that He alone is to be loved; God and God alone."<sup>10</sup>

And how fortunate was this small group, for Meher Baba the Avatar was explaining spiritual truths to them in a very appealing way. No wonder that these days were such a memorable period in the lives of those who stayed on Meherabad Hill.

### *"The Last Drink"*

Baba looked tired when He arrived at Meherabad to be with the Western men on Wednesday. Still, He made loving inquiries about each one's health. When Will Backett said, "I am better today," Baba smiled and remarked, "Dear Will, I call you My Archangel, and you are very dear to Me, I love you too, but I cannot understand your saying every day, 'I am better today.'" Everyone had a hearty laugh.

Baba gave a brief discourse on false identification through the mind, and the reality of God. He concluded:

When you say "Self," "God," "Infinity," they mean nothing. To attempt to understand [God] by reading or hearing explanations is an insult to our Beloved God, Who is beyond all under-standing. The only answer is Love."

Without going further into the subject, Baba added:

Today, I wish to play marbles with you! I am so full of humor and so human that it is difficult even for the *rishis* and saints to know Me as I am ... It is My nature to be absolutely natural, even with Beloved God, Who is one with Me and I with Him.

Before the group left for lunch, Baba declared:

If you understand what I have just said, the solution to everything is in your hands. God is infinite honesty, and unless we love Him honestly, we cannot know Him. Though beyond understanding, the heart full of love can

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 78.

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understand the un-understandable. If you love God you become one with Him: that's the only thing. And you *can* love God.<sup>11</sup>

On the 23rd, all of the Westerners had a nice, intimate visit with Baba. The following day, Friday the 24th, was especially important for each of them, because, as Baba conveyed, "This is the last day of My coming here. Today, we will drink together. This is not the Last Supper, but the Last Drink; and I am happy that at least from among you there is no one who will sell Me, though someone will have to do that job . . . I am the Ancient One, and you will all love Me more and more after My body is dropped . . . My ways are so unfathomable that sometimes I too cannot fathom them."

By this time fruit drinks were brought to the lounge and the doors were closed, so that only the Westerners and Eruch remained with Baba in the room. There was a profound silence. Before the last drink was served, Baba told the group something most meaningful, signifying how the life of Christ, the Avatar, represents in each of His Advents the perfect blending and unfolding of God as God and God as man simultaneously. And "The Last Supper" seems to be the symbolic event revealing this truth.

Baba began:

Jesus, being God and omnipotent, allowed Himself to be helpless, humiliated, and crucified. He knew it all, because He had planned it all long ago, and He did it for all. But to have the right result He had to experience the helplessness and the suffering. Do not think that because He was All-powerful, He did not suffer the humiliation and crucifixion, or it would not then have had the desired effect. Some people think that because I am one with God, My body is not affected by anything. At times, so as not to hurt their feelings, I have to behave as though I do not feel cold or the sun . . . Now I feel fit, but I think I shall catch cold from you all!<sup>12</sup>

Baba conveyed through the board and gestures, with Eruch

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp. 89-90.

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interpreting, "For one minute close your eyes and ask God, Who is the innermost Self of us all, to help us to love Him honestly."

Baba sipped from each of the glasses, which were then handed to every Westerner present in the lounge. In the end, He lovingly looked at them and gestured, "Drink slowly." When everyone had finished his drink, the doors were opened. What a blessed benediction was dispensed that day!

Baba then moved the group to Lower Meherabad. For some time He sat in the hall where some Indian Baba lovers gathered around Him. They had come to help Pendu with the various arrangements to be made for the ensuing Meeting at the end of the month. Baba gestured for all to sit down. Then He asked one of His lovers from Andhra to recite some lines from the *Bhagavad Gita*. Baba had nicknamed this person "Baba Shastri" (a *shastri* is a Sanskrit scholar). After the recitation, Baba looked at him and commented, "While hearing you, I felt as if you were swimming in mid-ocean and attacked by sharks!" Looking at the others, He added, "Isn't it funny — I am in everyone, but I don't know Sanskrit; I was just nodding My head as if I knew!"

Baba Shastri reverently folded his hands to Baba and mumbled, "Baba knows everything," as he sat down.

Baba asked one of the *mandali*, Sidhu, to sing some *ghazals*. Baba explained a couplet which meant: "O Beloved, when I was drawn by the beauty of Your locks, I thought You were very near. But now I have walked all my life, until my feet are full of blisters, and the locks are yet far away." Baba concluded, "I am ever so near and yet so far!"

Who could ever fathom the game of the Avatar's love, the game of the Divine Beloved? However, because of His compassion, the blisters are but the forerunners of the divine bliss with which He intends to fill the hearts of His dear ones.

After half an hour or so, Baba left for the *dhuni* platform. He wound a white scarf over His forehead, and looked very fiery. The atmosphere was charged with His radiant presence. The *dhuni* was solemnly lit, and *arti* was also sung. Then a villager blew on an elephant horn. This signified that it was time for

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all, including the Westerners, to start for a visit to the village. Baba was led in a procession through the small lanes and bylanes with a group of villagers playing *lezims* (hand instruments) in the front. Women and children sneaked through the crowd to touch Baba's feet. By six o'clock, Baba returned to Lower Meherabad. He gathered all the Westerners around Him in the hall and instructed them to take two Anacin pills as a precaution against malaria. Whenever there was any gathering, Baba's solicitude and care for the participants was most loving. He then embraced each of them and asked them to go up the hill to Meher Retreat and rest well.

After a quick visit to the patients in the T.B. Sanatorium, Baba left for Meherazad. He did not visit Meherabad on the 25th, as He had some work connected with the darshan program in Ahmednagar to be held on the following day.

### *The Little Darshan*

On September 12, at Wadia Park, Meher Baba had given His darshan to thousands of people from the villages and towns of Ahmednagar district. This was indeed a great and glorious event. However, a few days later, a number of local groups entreated Baba to give one more opportunity to the people of the city who had missed His darshan, owing to the size of the crowds. Beloved Baba lovingly granted their request. The day fixed was September 26, and this program came to be known as "The Little Darshan."

Sarosh and Adi made arrangements for the function to be held in Khushroo Quarters, which has a large compound and a wide driveway that made it possible for people to come in for darshan and go out again in an orderly way. The house belonged to Adi K. Irani, Baba's secretary; his residence and office were both there. A low platform was set up on the patio in front of Adi's office, an awning was erected above it, and a sofa was placed there for Baba. The arrangement was simple yet elegant.

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On this day Baba arrived from Meherazad before 3:00 P.M.; the Westerners came early also, from Meherabad. Ben Hayman and Frank Hendricks had not been present on the 12th, so Baba asked them to sit on the platform by His side. As Baba was led to His chair, His eyes shone with quiet compassion. During any darshan His physical presence seemed to emanate a tender radiance. On this occasion, some individuals also noticed an expression of intense concern for those who were about to meet Him; sometimes the Avatar's impatience is obvious.

People had already gathered outside the compound. At the scheduled time, 3:30 P.M., the gate was opened and the first batch of women was let in for darshan. A basket of *prasad* was kept near Baba, and He began to distribute it. Some people offered small packets of sweets or a piece of fruit to Baba before receiving *prasad* from Him. Some had flowers in their hands; a few held long garlands. It is an ancient custom in India that one should not visit the Master empty-handed.

As people passed before Him, Baba patted or caressed some of the children who were among them. It was a moving and marvelous sight to see the smile of a child intermingled with that of the God-Man.

Baba's Indian and Western followers were sitting on the ground to His left. At one point, He dictated to them, "No explanations or discourses can compare with this personal contact. I feel that I am in all, so it is Baba bowing down to Baba."

People from various walks of life, belonging to different religions, were seen in the queue. Baba accepted the regards and love of each, and in return gave His love. During this program, Baba dictated a sentence which can serve as a key to anyone's relationship with Him: "Whatever anyone takes Me for, I am that." This assurance has been the compass guiding my life and relationship with the Ancient One. A little later Baba added, "I love all." This was a comforting corollary to His earlier statement.

One poor woman who could not afford to purchase sweets or a fruit placed one *paise* (a coin of the lowest denomination) on

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Baba's foot. For whatever spiritual reasons known to Him alone, Baba had stopped touching money, unless He was giving it to the *masts* (God-intoxicated souls) or the poor. With this outwardly insignificant offering of a coin, Baba became extremely serious. He stood up with a distant look in His eyes. The darshan queue stopped temporarily. Some people sitting close by got up to see what had happened. For a time, Baba hardly moved. Then He slowly turned His foot so that the coin slid off. He covered it with gravel with His toes, and then continued to look at the spot in deep absorption. Then, very calmly, He brushed back His hair with His long, sensitive fingers, and gestured for the darshan to continue. The expression on His face was now as though nothing had happened.

Incidents of this type in the life of Meher Baba, outwardly trivial, yet inwardly holding great significance, have bewildered many people. But for His followers, it is best not to try to guess the possible significance but to keep a discreet silence about such matters. Baba once enjoined, "Don't try to understand Me; My depth is unfathomable. Just love Me."

The memory of this "Little Darshan" brings to my mind the lives of two people — one a well-educated person, the other a poor, illiterate woman. Both reaped the benefit of the Avatar's blessed darshan, but in two entirely different ways. Coincidentally, it is interesting that the results of their darshan were both disclosed to me after the passage of two decades, in the '70s. And it occurred to me that even though a person may be fortunate enough to have the Avatar's contact, the fructification of that contact takes place according to the Avatar's timing. His patience is immense, and the moment He chooses always has deep personal meaning for the individual concerned.

The first incident: On this day, K. Narayana had Beloved Baba's darshan, when he was just a schoolboy. Afterwards, being intent on his studies, he forgot all about that blessed contact. Eventually he obtained a good job with the Indian railways, and, during his early service, completed his master's degree in Hindi. He came from a religious family and had

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studied the *Bhagavad Gita* extensively. He was especially fond of the commentary on the *Gita* by Dnyaneshwar. Dnyaneshwar (1275-1296) was a unique Master, for he realized God before his teens. When he was twenty-one he expressed a wish to be buried alive by his elder brother, who was his Sadguru. In the short span of his life, he made a contribution to Marathi spiritual literature that remains unsurpassed to this day. In Maharashtra he is regarded as the "King of Masters."

Because of his interest in the spiritual life, Narayana often visited one of his friends who happened to be a Baba lover. Together, they would read aloud the writings of the saints and Sadgurus of Maharashtra, and share their views.

It was not until twenty years after Narayana's first darshan with Meher Baba that he noticed Baba's picture in his friend's house. I met him about this time. He was eager to hear more about the Avatar. I shared stories with him from Beloved Baba's life, and he felt very drawn to Him. Our discussions brought vividly before him the memory of his darshan of Baba when he was a child. His heart opened to Baba's love, and he felt intensely that he had missed a great opportunity by not remembering and following Baba after having had His darshan.

He began to write poems and songs about Baba. One night, his feeling of having missed the divine opportunity was so poignant that he was hardly able to sleep. The following morning, a fellow worker (who was not a Baba lover but had seen Baba's picture) approached him in his office, and exclaimed, "You are so lucky!"

"How is that?"

"You had Meher Baba's darshan last night!"

"What do you mean?"

"I had a dream last night where I saw you placing your forehead on Meher Baba's feet. You are really fortunate. That's why I have come looking for you, to give you this auspicious news." Indeed, what a marvelous confirmation of his yearning.

Baba's contacts in dreams have their own significance. In

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Narayana's case, if he himself had had this dream, he might have persuaded himself that it was only a projection of his wish. But by having another person experience the dream, Baba made it possible for Narayana to accept it as totally valid, and as a special gift from Him. And this conveyed to Narayana that Baba was fully aware of his yearning and had responded to it by giving him His darshan. From that time, Narayana glorified Meher Baba as the Avatar through his poems and songs with even greater conviction.

The second incident: One day, in the mid '70s, a man visited the Avatar Meher Baba Trust Office. During his conversation with Eruch and Mani (I was also present), he related quite a fascinating story about receiving *prasad* from Meher Baba in the present Trust compound. It was ascertained that the episode occurred during the Little Darshan.

The man explained that, when he was a child, his family was extremely poor, with his mother working hard at menial jobs. The money earned by his father was spent on liquor, as he was a chronic alcoholic. "When my mother heard about the chance of having Baba's darshan, she was hesitant to forgo the wages for that day. However, in the end, as wished by her neighbors, she decided to avail herself of the opportunity of Baba's darshan. In her simple-heartedness she felt that the darshan of a spiritually great personage like Meher Baba should help her improve her family life and even her financial condition.

"So on that afternoon she got in the queue with her earnest prayers to Baba. After a long time she reached the platform. Baba was giving either fruit or some kind of sweets to the people as His *prasad*. My mother also received something. In the hurry of the moving queue and crowd she was pushed forward. Pressing the precious *prasad* in her hand, she passed through the compound gate. When she opened her hand, she was dumbfounded to find a roll of currency notes. She thought that everyone had been given money. With great joy she returned home, and with the financial help, she was able to provide the necessities for our family.

"Not only that," the man concluded, "it was with this money that I later opened a new footwear shop which I still own here

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in Ahmednagar."

All who were present were greatly amazed to hear this story, especially Eruch. Eruch had been standing next to Baba during the entire darshan, and he knew that Baba had not distributed money on that day.

As Eruch relates, "Then how could this strange *prasad* get into the woman's hand? I knew Baba did not give out money; that was not His way. I say I knew this, but then the thought struck me, 'How presumptuous it was for me, even after all these years, to say I knew Baba.' Baba was silent. He did His work in silence, and this silence was so great that even we who were physically next to Him were not aware of the work He was doing. So what was to prevent Baba's infinite compassion from transmuting the sweet He had given this woman into money? With God anything is possible. It is only our finite minds, our limited understanding that attempts to limit God's greatness."<sup>13</sup>

Going back to the darshan, it continued up to 6:00 P.M., yet the queue seemed unending. By this time over two thousand people had had the chance to have Baba's touch and receive His *prasad*. Baba was outwardly giving His love and inwardly forgiving them for the failures in their journey to the One residing in their hearts. Sarosh asked Baba if He would like to remain for half an hour or more. Baba looked amused, but did not agree. He asked the Western group to leave for Meherabad.

Baba was in a happy mood, and rode out through the compound gate on the roof of the car. As He passed through the crowds, He folded His hands to them, and they, in return, cheered, "Avatar Meher Baba Ki Jai!" When the car reached the main road, Baba took His seat inside, and sped on to His residence at Meherazad. The Little Darshan was over.

On the 27th, Baba was not scheduled to visit Meherabad. However, Mehera and some of the other women disciples suggested that it would be nice if Baba were to distribute some special presents, blessed with His own hand, to the Western group. Baba liked the idea, and drove to Meherabad in the morning. When He reached the Hill, not all of the Westerners were present to greet Him, as they had no idea of the surprise

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<sup>13</sup> *The Ancient One*, p. 231

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awaiting them.

Baba went to the lounge, and in a short time the entire group gathered there. They were very happy to learn the reason for Baba's visit. He distributed the presents and also some photographs of Himself with His signature. Everyone was thrilled by these unexpected gifts.

Addressing the group, Baba dictated from the board, "To all you meet and see, give My love — the only thing worth receiving." To one individual He conveyed, "You must first absorb Me and feel that you love Me. To tell others what you don't feel yourself is hypocrisy. So feel, then speak with conviction."

Baba embraced everyone from the group, filling each one's heart with joy. Thus ended the incredible *sahavas* on the Hill for the Westerners, with their Beloved Master, Meher Baba. Now they looked forward to the Meeting to be held on the 29th and 30th of September.

### *Some Memories, Sublime and Sweet*

After this intimate *sahavas*, the Western group soon returned home. However, the significant and sweet memories of their close companionship with Meher Baba remained fresh in their minds and hearts. Later, some of these were shared with Baba's followers through talks and articles.

Before I proceed to narrate the events of the momentous Meeting in which Meher Baba gave to the world His message entitled, "Final Declaration," I would like to digress momentarily to reproduce some of the heart-warming accounts from some of the Western group.

With regard to Meher Baba's advent as the Avatar, Fred Marks from England wrote:

"There is a general expectancy of a great happening. The end of the Age brings again the urge and longing for the One who will bring Redemption and save humanity from the abyss into which it has fallen. To find this One is to knowingly feel that there is nothing more to be desired. It is the end of the quest. His name today is MEHER BABA. He offers Himself to us.

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Joseph Harb expressed his conviction in Baba's divine status, revealing a different facet of the same diamond. He wrote: "Divine consciousness is ever flowing through Him [Meher Baba], but with such delightful simplicity that it would not overwhelm a child, and yet it is beyond the deepest mind to fathom it. The vastness of His Divine Mind and Love are so scientific, with such intricate laws, and serious and great as He is, yet He couples all this with such humor that it produces joy in the heart and a perfect picture to the mind. The heart becomes the mind's eye to observe the perfect actions of the Perfect Master, which are subtle, silent, and yet so forceful.

"The living Avatar is Self-Realized from Unconscious Divinity to Conscious Divinity; functioning in all planes of existence, with all the directness and accuracy in full harmony of Divine Law and Love: manifesting a dynamic force in all His activities: having the power of Eternal Truth. He is a complete blending of God and man states. This is Baba, "The Highest of the High."

With reference to the delightful human side of the God-Man, Will Backett, one of Baba's early English disciples, recorded his impressions: "While at Meherabad, He [Baba] would sometimes give us fruit, one by one, or Himself serve each plate, as His *prasad*. On another occasion, He walked round the table to place both hands on our shoulders, and the gentle firmness of His touch gave deep significance to that simple gesture. There was much laughter when He circumnavigated the long table to find where He could best tickle each one, joining in the fun Himself, for He likes us to be bright and happy always.

"At the ping-pong table provided for our relaxation, He was a doughty opponent, with unique grace and speed. He also showed us a different game of marbles, awarding a prize to the winner and applauding his skill or luck, as part of the deeper game of Divine Love, which is the Master's real sport."

Darwin Shaw, one of Meher Baba's American disciples who met Him for the first time in 1934 at the Shelton Hotel in New York City, was among the Western group who stayed on Meherabad Hill. In a talk he later gave at the Sufi Center in

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San Francisco in 1967, he began, “This happened in 1954 when some seventeen Western men had the great privilege of being Baba’s guests at Meherabad ‘on the hill’ for three incredible weeks.

“One day, as we were walking up the hill with Baba, from ‘Lower Meherabad’ to Meherabad ‘on the hill,’ I was deeply impressed with how similar this was to what it must have been like walking over the hills with Jesus. This is quite a statement to make. This is the twentieth century. You say, ‘This can’t happen!’ But when you are with Baba you see that it is happening. One of the passages from the New Testament crossed my mind. ‘You all say “Yes, Lord,” but you do not do the things I tell you.’ (This was my remembrance of Luke 6:46.) Baba, who was a few feet ahead and to the left of me, gave me a quick glance. I had also been greatly concerned about Baba dropping His body – He had told us that this might happen very soon – and I wondered what our relationship to Him would be after he did drop His body.

“In a few minutes we were seated in the room where we gathered almost daily to spend a couple of hours with Baba. Baba was seated on a small sofa; I sat on the opposite side of the room. About sixteen other Western men were there too, in a large circle around Baba. Baba didn’t look at me as He began to ‘talk,’ by means of the alphabet board, about His physical end. He concluded by saying, ‘ . . . I am the Ancient One, and you will all love Me more and more after My body is dropped, and you will see Me as I really am . . . ’ Then, out of the blue, He said, ‘You all say, “Yes, Baba,” but do not do.’ I was astonished, and thought, ‘How can you fathom this Being?’ Just as I thought this, Baba said, ‘My ways are so unfathomable that sometimes I too cannot fathom them’”<sup>14</sup>

To illustrate how intimately Beloved Baba was present with each one of the group of Westerners staying at Meherabad, I would like to quote a section from *How a Master Works*, concerning the experience of Lud Dimpfl. This incident shows the humorous way that Baba let His lovers know that He knows their minds and hearts.

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<sup>14</sup> Talk at Sufism Reoriented Center, San Francisco 1967.

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Ludwig Dimpfl related that the former quarters of the women's *ashram* at Meherabad had been converted to a dormitory and the western men were staying there, with only a sheet between the beds which could be drawn when necessary. The bed across the aisle from his had been assigned to Joseph Harb.

When he needed to get something out of his suitcase, Joseph had the habit of placing it on Lud's bed to open it, and not taking it back when he was through. Lud became so frustrated with this that on coming upstairs, he took the suitcase off of his bed and dumped its contents on Joseph's bed. At that very moment, Baba's car arrived and all the men hurried quickly to the downstairs hall for the daily meeting. Lud started down, but then bethought himself that probably he should not have been so provoked and rushed back for an instant to throw Joseph's things back into the bag and put it under the bed. Seconds later as he descended the stairs and entered, he heard Baba conversing with Francis Brabazon (conveyed by board) to the effect:

“Now Francis, if you get provoked at anyone, don't empty their suitcase out on their bed.”

Francis gazed blankly at the Master and replied, “Well, of course not, Baba.”

Lud did not need anything more at that moment.<sup>15</sup>

Another episode related by Ludwig is equally interesting:

Baba sat on a couch opposite the doorway, and chairs were placed around the walls to make a sort of circle. We all sat down. The *mandali* had cigarettes and ashtrays set all around ...

Baba said, “Now, I want you all to be relaxed and comfortable. I want you to feel at home. If you feel like smoking, smoke. If you are thirsty, there is water here.”

I had been trying to quit smoking, but right then, I wanted a cigarette. So I pulled my feet up under me and sat on my ankles on the upholstered chair. And I took a cigarette from a flat of fifty and lit up.

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<sup>15</sup> *How a Master Works*, p. 184-85.

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Baba pointed to me. "I like that," He said. "You look really comfortable."

The meeting lasted about two hours. Thereafter we adjourned for lunch and Baba left.

After lunch Meherjee came up to me. He looked very worried and said, "I know Baba told you you could smoke, but you mustn't! Baba hates smoking. He never lets us smoke in His presence."

I was very troubled by this. But the next day was devoted to private interviews. I had fifteen minutes to myself with Baba (and Eruch to read the alphabet board). So I asked Baba about this.

"Baba, if you really don't like smoking, it's not so important to me that I wouldn't gladly give it up," I said.

"Who told you not to smoke?"

"Meherjee."

"Why do you pay attention to what Meherjee says instead of to what I say?"

This was, of course, the real answer to the question. But I still didn't realize that I was talking to God. I was mildly disappointed that Baba said to me, "If you want to smoke, smoke," instead of solving my problem for me. So I made another try.

"Baba, I know you want us to feel at home, but there's lots of other ways that I can feel at home. I really could stop smoking if it bothers you."

Baba looked at Eruch.

Eruch looked at Baba.

They dissolved in laughter.<sup>16</sup>

Perhaps Lud wanted Baba to give him an order not to smoke so the decision would not be his to make. This is only natural, but for the most part Baba prefers us to make such decisions on our own.

The above incidents took place in Baba's physical presence. Even today many heart-warming experiences continue to happen to those who love Meher Baba, for they continue to feel Baba's unconditional love and compassion laced with His

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., pp. 189-90.

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sense of humor. These sparks of Baba's omnipresence and omniscience touch the hearts of His dear ones and assure them through various incredible ways — funny, sublime, simple, and complex — of His help in their everyday lives. Baba's *sahavas* is now ever available when we make Him our constant companion.

Baba once lovingly conveyed to His dear ones, "Remember Me; I am always with you."

## **"THE FINAL DECLARATION" MEETING AT MEHERABAD 1954 ~ PART XVIII**

*Rains Withheld, Rains Released*

Whenever God assumes a human form as the Avatar, the universality of His life presents countless facets of His Love. Some of His actions are totally human, while others are completely divine. Both of these aspects touch the hearts of the people, awakening some of them "to live for God and die for God." But there are also some facets which present enormous contrasts, and hence appear paradoxical. These continue to puzzle humanity at large. Some portions of Meher Baba's message entitled "The Final Declaration," given at the Meeting held in September at Meherabad, might be viewed as being in the "incomprehensible" category. But before I narrate the various events that took place in regards to "The Final Declaration Meeting," a certain amount of background information seems necessary. On June 10, 1954, a Circular was mailed to Meher Baba's followers in India, informing them of a special Meeting that Baba had decided to hold at Meherabad on September 29-30, 1954.<sup>1</sup> This Meeting was only for men. Women and boys under sixteen were not allowed to attend. Baba had also mentioned that this Meeting would be the last *sahavas* before He dropped His physical body. Anyone who wished to attend this Meeting was asked to send an advance payment of twenty-two rupees as *dakshana* to Adi K. Irani, Meher Baba's secretary. This was to ensure lodging and boarding facilities during the Meeting.

Owing to Baba's recent visits to Hamirpur and Andhra, a large number of Baba lovers wished to attend this Meeting. Many of His followers were from the working class and some were farmers and villagers. In those days it was not easy for them to obtain a week's leave of absence from work or to easily finance such a journey.

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<sup>1</sup> *Life Circular*, No. 18, June 10, 1954.

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After learning the contents of the Circular, some of the women followers of Baba wondered amongst themselves why there had been the condition that only men were to attend the Meeting. Why should there be this distinction between men and women in attending the last *sahas*? However, they also felt that whatever Baba decides is based on His own divine reasons. So some of the women chose to participate in the Meeting indirectly, by selling their jewelry to help their male family members and relatives to attend.

In the poor district of Hamirpur, a tug-of-war was going on in the minds and hearts of Baba lovers trying to balance the financial and devotional aspects of their lives. Witnessing this struggle, Keshav Nigam was reminded of a message given by Baba at the beginning of the year, on January 26. This message reflected, to him, the predicament that Baba's dear ones were going through:

Reality pulls you towards Itself,  
and illusion pulls you towards itself.  
If you let go the pull of Reality,  
you get drowned in the ocean of illusion.  
If you lean towards both,  
you get crushed.  
So, let go the pull of illusion, through Love,  
and become one with Reality.

Baba's followers in the different states of India did their best to respond to His call, and about nine hundred men filled in the acceptance form, expressing their willingness to attend the Meeting. From the Hamirpur area nearly two hundred and fifty lovers decided to come.

The arrangements for this great Meeting at Meherabad began in July. Pendu and Padri were in charge of the various departments. It was the rainy season, and July and August were quite wet. In the first week of September, on the 6th, Baba left Satara with his *mandali* for Meherabad. The following day, He visited Meherabad to check on the arrangements being made for His followers who were to arrive during the last week of the month.

Pendu brought to Baba's notice that the rains were

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threatening the work of erecting the necessary structures — the Meeting *pandal* (awning), the Lodging Tent, the toilets, baths, dining hall, etc. Nearly a thousand Indian Baba lovers were expected to attend the two-day Meeting on the 29th and 30th of September. Pendu put forth his concerns very forcefully, concluding, "If it continues to rain like this, especially at the time of the Meeting, the rainwater will drip, even pour, through the cloth roof of the large Lodging Tent. This will cause great inconvenience to the pilgrims, and where can we shift them?" He was not prepared to take any risks, and suggested that the Lodging Tent should have a roof of corrugated tin sheets. The site for the Tent and the Meeting *pandal* was located between the present public road and the railway tracks.

Pendu's suggestion was going to cost considerably more money than had been budgeted: it was not possible for him to adjust this expenditure with the amount allocated to him by Baba. Some of the *mandali* were opposed to Pendu's proposal, but he was adamant. Pendu was a lovable but strong-willed individual. In view of his past experience and knowledge of such matters, Baba sanctioned the extra funding, and Pendu's eyes shone with delight.

However, Baba also asked Pendu and those staying at Meherabad to offer sincere prayers to God for "no rains." They were asked to stand before Baba's picture in Mandali Hall at lower Meherabad and invoke God every day as directed by Baba, through September 26. On the first day, Baba Himself joined the group in imploring God for "no rains." At the end of this brief invocation, Baba, with a soft smile on His lips, conveyed to Pendu and Padri, "Maybe God will listen to your prayers."

Pendu was also allowed to rent about a thousand wooden beds (*charpais*), creak-crossed with thin ropes in the Indian style. The large Lodging Tent, in which these hundreds of cots were placed, had long corridors for the over nine hundred pilgrims to move about. It had the appearance of an enormous dormitory.

Whenever Baba called a meeting, He was very particular

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and specific about the allotment of duties. He would personally supervise things to ensure that the instructions given by Him were carried out to the last detail. He was also a gracious Host in providing adequate facilities for His dear ones visiting Him during darshan programs or *sahavas*. However, to work for Baba was not always easy. Those who worked for Baba had to be in readiness to face unexpected difficulties and changes of plans, dates, and sites. But all this helped His dear ones in seeing the work as a spiritual adventure to efface their "selves" in order to accept His will with unreserved faith. With such acceptance, their lives, thoughts, and feelings became "His work" in their endeavor to work for Him.

Miraculously, it did not rain from September 8 through the 27th. The weather was clear and pleasant. With a group of dedicated workers, Pendu managed to complete the construction of the temporary structures. The offering of prayers ended on the 26th, and — what a divine joke! — after one day the rains began, and continued from the early morning of the 28th into the afternoon, when there was an even heavier downpour.

Baba's followers from Andhra and Hamirpur had reserved special railway carriages. In the train they were enthusiastic in glorifying Avatar Meher Baba through singing *bhajans* and songs on Baba's divinity. Some also took this opportunity to distribute literature about Baba to those interested.

On the afternoon of September 28, all the groups of Baba's lovers from Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Andhra, and other states had arrived at the Ahmednagar railway station by 4:00 P.M. In spite of the rains, everyone seemed in a happy mood. They greeted each other in Baba's love, and there was a wonderful reunion of hearts in spite of the different languages spoken. Baba's love had wiped away the differences of caste, color, and social position. All were eager to reach Meherabad, but by now there was a considerable downpour. Transport of pilgrims and luggage was difficult. There were puddles of water everywhere at Lower Meherabad. The dirt roads and improvised pathways connecting the various tents and facilities were sodden and muddy.

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It was next to impossible for Pendu to do anything to improve the situation. Some of the poles for the *pandal* had collapsed, and rainwater gushed into the Lodging Tent and collected on the ground beneath the cots. Cold winds began to blow, and on the Hill, where the Westerners were staying, the northwest portion of the wall gave way, and water leaked into the dormitory and refectory. By the afternoon of the 28th, hundreds of pilgrims were anxiously waiting on the Ahmednagar railway platform to go to Meherabad. In those days, the roof over the railway platform was small. Some of the men were soaked to the skin, but their hearts were drenched with Baba's love. For a number of them, it was the first visit to Meherabad, and this first visit has its own wonder, charm and profundity, which is felt even to this day.

With the help of buses and lorries, which had been arranged for earlier, everyone reached Meherabad safely with their luggage by early evening. The rain continued to fall, the mud was thick ... but who cared!

Upon their arrival, everyone was informed about the facilities offered to them, and also about the inconveniences caused by the rain. No one seemed to complain about anything. In fact, there was a feeling of brotherliness and friendly cooperation among the pilgrims and the volunteers working at Meherabad. They experienced a sort of "togetherness," owing to the bond of Baba's love. In spite of the rains and winds, the electrical connections worked well, and that was a saving grace, as it facilitated the movements of the pilgrims in Lower Meherabad. Otherwise the situation would have been disastrous!

Every man was given an entry token for the Meeting when he arrived. He was also presented with a copy of the booklets "The Truth of Religion" and "Meher Baba's Call." Because of Baba's loving concern for the health of His dear ones who were exposed to such inclement weather, He sent instructions for everyone to be given two tablets of Anacin, to be taken after supper. The few who were ill were immediately given medical treatment.

This was the only *sahavas* at Meherabad when over nine

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hundred lovers stayed under a single roof, to be in the physical presence of their Beloved Lord, Meher Baba. That night, in spite of the exhausting journey and the rains, some of the men were intently reading the booklet "Meher Baba's Call," and Baba's statements touched their hearts. They felt beholden to the Avatar for His inner response to their longing to heed His "call," especially to attend this Meeting. In view of the timing of the September rains, and, considering Baba's earlier instruction to pray for "no rains," and now this subsequent downpour, it occurred to me that Baba as the Parvardigar (the Sustainer) had withheld and also released the forces of nature in accordance with His spiritual work. And perhaps He uses this technique in His relationship with the minds and hearts of His dear ones, sometimes causing dry spells, other times drenching them with His presence, all as part of His game of love and compassion.

### *Preparing to Greet the Radiant One*

The early hours of September 29 were chilly and windy. However, for those who had gathered there, the very fact of their being at Meherabad, which they regarded as the Jerusalem, Mecca, or Kashi of this age, made them happy in their hearts and rested in their minds. Love transcends the laws of health and psychology. By four o'clock in the early hours of the morning, most of the men were up and moving. Because of the sudden fall in temperature, the teeth of some of the older men were chattering, and even some of the younger ones slipped and lost their balance as they tried to walk the muddy pathways to the bathing area. But it was all fun to them.

Meherabad Management had kept hot water ready for the hundreds of men who wished to take baths before meeting Baba. This was in keeping with Indian custom. Luckily, by 5:00 A.M. the rain had totally stopped and the breeze was not too stiff. After refreshing themselves with hot cups of tea and light snacks in the dining hall, everyone eagerly waited to welcome Baba. They all loved Baba dearly, and, since their

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arrival at Meherabad, felt that Baba also loved them in a special way.

Baba arrived a little earlier than expected. His car stopped near Meherabad Mandali Hall. Sensitive to Pendu's feelings and worries, Baba embraced him before he could say a word. As Baba sat down on a small chair, He called on Dr. K. Suryanarayana of Andhra to check His pulse. The doctor held Baba's wrist and said with a smile, "Baba, it is really good!" Baba looked happy and relieved. Perhaps this symbolically indicated that every program during the Meeting would go well.

Baba then visited the kitchen and dining hall, which were near the old Ashram building. Chhagan, one of the *mandali*, was in charge of cooking. Baba expressed His satisfaction that His dear lovers had been given a good breakfast of tea and sweets. Now He wished to go straight to the Meeting *pandal*.

As Baba began to walk, His sandals got stuck in the mud, so He simply left them and continued to walk briskly, barefooted, towards the Meeting *pandal*. Some of His lovers eyed His footprints intently. Through this simple act, Baba was participating in the inconveniences that the pilgrims were going through.

This seemingly insignificant incident had a profound effect on a young Baba lover from Dehra Dun, the youngest of the pilgrims; he was only sixteen. On his arrival on the previous evening, he had abhorred the muddy pathways. At one point his feet had gotten stuck, and he had thought, "Does Baba even know the discomfort that walking in this mud causes us? He will come in His car wearing comfortable sandals!"

This boy happened to be near the kitchen when Baba visited the dining hall. As he looked at Baba, his thought from the previous evening came back to him. At that moment, he saw Baba's sandals get stuck in the mud, and observed how Baba left them immediately and continued on His way with bare feet. He immediately felt sorry for his thoughts, and later confessed his mistake tearfully to Baba. Those who come into the love orbit of the Avatar receive timely and significant responses to their doubts and worries through His external

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actions or His casual remarks. There are many such instances, but it isn't possible to recount them all here.

Baba reached the *pandal* a little past eight o'clock. Some of the workmen were still trying to straighten and strengthen the poles that had collapsed in the strong, stormy winds. Near the Meeting *pandal*, arrangements had been made for all to wash their muddy feet before entering. Baba washed His feet but still remained barefooted for a while, freely moving about among His lovers. On the first day there were no chairs, and it was not possible to spread carpets. Baba walked five or six times across the *pandal* as His lovers silently watched Him, standing in small groups.

Baba, the Radiant One, then gracefully moved to the stage, a kind of low platform. He had a Meeting token pinned to His coat; He'd had it put on while standing before the assembly. Now, pointing to it, He smiled and gestured that He was the first one to pay *dakshana* of twenty-two rupees to Himself. Baba looked resplendent. There was a glimmering of celestial radiance emanating from His divine form which seemed to touch the hearts of everyone present. He was in His usual white trousers and long muslin *sadra*, over which He wore a yellowish silken coat. His eyes were a steady core of light, sometimes dazzling, sometimes soothing, and held a look of eternity in them. He took His seat in the chair, His expression silently reassuring His dear ones that He knew their hearts.

Now He wished to communicate with His dear ones who had gathered there. Most of Baba's words were conveyed from the alphabet board in English (and occasionally in Hindi or Gujarati). These were interspersed with His simple gestures. The sound system rendered clear service, and Baba's statements were translated into all the major languages of those in attendance. And so, the profound, dignified occasion of the momentous Meeting began.

*"Yes, I Am the Ancient One . . . "*

At the beginning of the Meeting, addressing the assembly,

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Eruch announced that there were three main items on the morning program: Baba's embracing of everyone who had come for the Meeting, the offering Prayers glorifying God, and Baba's participating in the Prayer of Repentance. Baba had also agreed to meet separately with the different Baba groups after lunch. Everyone gazed adoringly at Baba as these announcements were made, and some felt that a blessed eternity had opened before them.

Baba commenced: "I called you all, dear ones, for this Meeting, which has immense importance. 'Meeting,' in a general sense, is a gathering of people. But this Meeting is not like that. By 'Meeting' I mean I personally meet each one of you; everyone will meet Baba. So before we begin anything else, we meet and embrace, for the last time." With a twinkle in His eyes, Baba gestured, "But don't embrace Me so very tightly as to break My ribs!"

However, the next moment was all seriousness, as Baba began to convey some profound statements about Himself from His alphabet board. Eruch read the statements through the microphone. Baba conveyed to the assembly:

Last night all the time I was thinking: why had the rains started, especially on September 28, when you all were to arrive here; because all these days through September 28th morning there was sunshine. All the earlier programs went off very well: the darshan program at Ahmednagar on September 12; the explanations given on the different days to the Western group that is here; the visit to Sakori on the 20th, where I went along with the Westerners to place My head on the feet of My Master, Upasni Maharaj, in his shrine; and another "small darshan" program at Ahmednagar on September 26 near the Sarosh Motor Works. All these events were carried out to My satisfaction.

But particularly from the late morning of September 28, when the lovers of God were expected to arrive here, why did it begin to rain heavily, causing great inconvenience to them? I asked God His reason behind this. He

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replied, "The real lovers of God come to meet the Beloved with their heads on their palms; so this inconvenience would be a joy to them."

Then for the first time, I asked Myself whether I was the Avatar. And the clear and definite answer was, "Yes, I am the Ancient One, the Highest of the High." Then I asked Avatar Meher Baba, "Why this inconvenience to the lovers who have come all the way to meet You?" Avatar Meher Baba replied, "Lovers go to the shrines of the departed Avatars and undergo difficulties, sometimes journeying long distances on foot; many die on the way from illness, but this does not deter them from their objective." If the lovers, when visiting the living Avatar Meher Baba, do not cheerfully bear such insignificant inconvenience, their love for Me would be a farce.

After this introduction, Baba continued, "Now after embracing you all, one after another, for the last time, we will pray and confess our weaknesses. Be brave in your repentance. Soon, I am going to destroy all the bindings of religious ceremonies. Religion will remain; its farce will vanish."

Baba began embracing His lovers one by one as they lined up in a queue before the stage. After a short time, He stopped, and looked around lovingly, conveying, "I am going to drop My body soon. So, this is your last opportunity to embrace Me. All who have come for this Meeting at Meherabad must meet and embrace Baba. May you all be worthy of My love; may you not let Me down. Don't sell Me!" Baba's reference to dropping His body was most unexpected and had a strong impact. It brought tears to some eyes; mountains began to move in the men's minds, and a variety of sentiments overwhelmed their hearts. A number of men stood sobbing.

However, on the stage Baba continued to embrace His dear ones with a warm smile, touching each one's heart on his own personal level. Dr. Daulat Singh, who had been one of Baba's New Life companions, approached Baba with tears coursing down his cheeks. By the time Baba embraced him, his internal turmoil caused his knees to give way. Baba allowed him to sit

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for some time on the stage. Deshmukh, a professor of philosophy and one of Baba's dear disciples, embraced Him on both sides, forgetting Baba's earlier instruction to embrace on one side only. Baba held him by his shoulder and expressed His displeasure. However, Baba forgave him for this violation of the rule, and gestured that He had canceled Deshmukh's earlier two embraces, and asked him to embrace Him again, only on one side. In this little act, one can see Baba's forgiveness and compassion linked by His divine humor.

Before embracing one of His lovers from Andhra, a scholar of the *Bhagavad Gita*, Baba asked him to recite two *shlokas* from the *Gita's* Fourth Discourse. In these lines, Krishna states: "Age after age, whenever righteousness declines and evil flourishes, I assume a human form, to destroy the wickedness of the vicious and to establish the real *dharma* — the way of life." This assurance in the *Gita* reminded some in the *pandal* that Krishna had come once again in their midst, as Meher Baba.

Before embracing another of His lovers, Janak Singh, Baba inquired if he had had a proper bath that morning. Then, as though emphasizing this, Baba gestured to ask specifically if he had gotten hot water, a towel, soap case, etc. Janak nodded yes. Baba then embraced him, and Janak was so overwhelmed that for some moments he became totally oblivious to his surroundings. Baba's questioning about his bath, in itself not remarkable, had answered a question that had perplexed Janak since early that morning, when an unidentified man had helped him with those various bathing preparations. Even though he was only in his twenties and possessed a strong constitution, Janak had been afraid to bathe that morning because of the cold, muddy, rainy conditions. However, when one man thoughtfully offered to help, Janak gratefully accepted. Later, he could not make out who this man had been. Baba's gestures to him on the stage revealed to him that it was Baba who had directed that unknown person to help him on that chilly morning. And he marveled at Baba's interest in such an insignificant thing as his bath. This opened a new dimension in his life with Baba, showing how Baba's

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omnipresence was always lovingly watching and helping him in all matters, big and small.

A lover who had come from Nauranga was greatly distressed because of some "spirits" who used to harass him often. But as soon as he received Baba's embrace, he felt that the harassing "spirits" left him, and he had no such difficulty from that time forth. During this Meeting, Baba lovers shared amongst themselves a variety of such personal experiences revealing Baba's timely help in their individual lives.

To make this most sublime occasion of the "last embrace" a bit brighter and more lighthearted, Baba continued to joke with His lovers from Andhra and Hamirpur. After enfolding His lovers in His arms, He signaled that the second item of the morning program, the Prayers, should begin.

Hearing this, those who were crowding around the stage or standing in groups slowly spread out through the *pandal*. In spite of the large number of men, there was no rush or disorder. Everyone stood facing Baba. While Baba had been meeting His dear ones, He had allowed some to film Him or take photos. But after embracing His lovers, He ordered that the filming be stopped until lunchtime. The assembly was also instructed not to call out "Avatar Meher Baba Ki Jai" until the Prayers were over.

Eruch removed a garland from Baba's neck. Baba gracefully smoothed the strands of His hair and straightened His coat. He washed His hands, with a serious expression, and then stood facing Kaikobad, who was on the stage. The first Zoroastrian prayer began with all solemnity, and, as it ended, one of the participants, apparently out of habit, pronounced aloud Baba's "Jai." Everyone was taken aback by this. It was as though an unwanted cloud had burst out of the blue. Baba asked, "Who said that?" The man confessed meekly and asked Baba's pardon for this mistake. Baba looked exceedingly somber, but then made a gesture which signified, "Forgiven."

Baba reiterated that everyone should be careful and vigilant about His instructions, as they always have deep meaning. During the Meeting, He once mentioned that conscious or purposeful disobedience of His personal orders may result in a

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suffering which can be compared to an incurable sore that continually pains but does not heal.

Baba again washed His hands and stood before Kaikobad, facing south. He looked resplendent and serene. The prayer session began afresh. Kaikobad, Ali Akbar (Aloba), Dr. Nilu with Vishnu, and Dr. Donkin offered the Zoroastrian, Islamic, Hindu, and Christian prayers, respectively. Baba also asked Dr. Daulat Singh to recite a passage from the *Guru Granthsahab*, the holy book of the Sikhs. It may be of interest to some that the Christian prayer that was compiled by Dr. Donkin from different sources had Baba's special approval. At the end of each prayer, the person who had recited it would put his right foot on the arm of a chair kept near Baba. Then Baba would bow to that person, placing His forehead on his foot. Simultaneously, the man would invoke God by uttering aloud, and with deep respect and love, one of the divine names of God representing that particular religion — Ahuramazda, Allah-hu-Akbar, Om Parabrahma Paramatma, God Almighty. Dr. Daulat Singh spoke aloud, "Sat Shri Akal."

After the prayers, Baba asked the men if they felt tired from having to stand for such a long time. If they wished, He was ready to give them a short break before beginning the third item of the meeting. Most of the lovers said, "Please continue." Baba gestured, "I don't feel tired, so let us go on."

Eruch read from Baba's board, "Baba will offer the Prayer of Repentance for all present and also for the world. Pay full attention and put your heart into it. God is deaf to the dictates of the mind but listens to the language of the heart. So if you wholeheartedly participate in My confession, God will definitely make you love Me." Kaikobad initiated the "confession" by repeating "Bane me Yezdan" from the *Avesta*. Then the Prayer of Repentance was recited in the Indian languages — Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati, and Telugu.<sup>2</sup> Dr. Donkin read the Prayer in English. The recitation and participation by the assembly with Avatar Meher Baba concluded the main part of the morning session. At Baba's signal, Francis Brabazon of Australia came to the microphone and called out, "Avatar Meher Baba Ki Jai." All joined him in chorus.

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<sup>2</sup> See *Three Incredible Weeks with Meher Baba*, pp. 43-44

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Before the gathering dispersed, it was announced that Baba would be seeing and meeting His lovers in the groups they had come with from the different parts of India. This would begin at 2:00 P.M. in Mandali Hall. Before this He also wished to see some people in the small cabin facing the Hall in connection with His work. As He got up to leave, Baba told the gathering, "Tomorrow, rain or no rain, the Meeting will be held in the *pandal* from nine in the morning to eleven o'clock. And it will resume again from half past three in the afternoon up to six in the evening. All of you should be present here. In that Meeting, I will precisely 'say' what I have to 'say.'" With this message the morning session was over, and Baba walked back barefooted to the cabin with some of the *mandali* accompanying Him. As the pilgrims streamed out of the *pandal*, there was no trace of a cloud trailing in the sky. The men made their way slowly to the lodging tent, absorbed in their thoughts, Baba's words, "Yes, I am the Ancient One ... ," ringing in their hearts.

### *Andhra and Hamirpur Groups Meet Baba*

After lunch, Baba called His dear ones from Andhra into the Hall at Lower Meherabad. This was a large group. Baba lovingly inquired about the health of some, and even teased a few for being fat. He then told them about His recent visit to Sakori. At the end He conveyed to them, "Upasni Maharaj was 'Perfection Personified,' and I am the Avatar. I am the One who exists in Eternity, from Eternity. If you love Me, even a little, I assure and promise you with My divine authority that you will be free, eternally. But remember, however small that love you have for Me may be, you must be honest about it; don't make a show of it."

In the general conversation, the name of M. Annapurnaiah, who loved Baba intensely, came up. He was the editor of a Telugu periodical in which he would boldly express his views about Meher Baba being the Avatar of the Age. At the beginning of September he prepared a special article to be shared during the Meeting in Meherabad. However, upon completing

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it, he got a fever, and in spite of extensive treatment, his temperature remained high. For a week, he continually repeated Baba's name in a steady rhythm. Perhaps his body could no longer contain the love within him. He passed away on September 11. The article he had prepared for the Meherabad meeting was found by one of his close friends in his room.<sup>3</sup> A copy of it was brought to Meherabad to be read out to Baba. In expressing his love for and trust in Avatar Meher Baba, M. Annapurnaiah wrote the following:

### An Outpouring of a Lover's Agony

Is my heart filled with love for Baba completely and constantly? If so, every thought I think should be pure, every word I speak should be true, and every action I perform should be unselfish. Love for Baba means love for every fellow being, irrespective of caste or creed, clime or country, race or religion. He alone serves Baba who serves the lowliest of the low without the least expectation of any return. Renunciation is the cornerstone, the rock bottom of Love. It is complete when even the thought of renunciation vanishes. Should I not therefore surrender, not merely all earthly possessions, but even the mental ego which stands in the way of true renunciation? The total annihilation of the ego is possible only when the heart becomes a perennial fountain of Love and Truth for the Lord. Blessed is he who is born at a time when God becomes Man for redeeming the sins of humanity. More blessed is he who understands and recognizes the particular form that God has assumed for that purpose. Still more blessed is he who has a chance to know Him at close quarters and tries to follow Him. Much more blessed is he who enters His inner circle and becomes a willing instrument in fulfillment of His mission. Completely blessed is he that becomes the chosen of the Chosen One.

On this sacred day, the red letter day of my life, the 29th

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<sup>3</sup>. *The Glow*, May 1975, pp. 8-9.

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of September, 1954, having the rare good fortune of being in the immediate physical presence of the Ancient One, the One without a second, the Lord of Lords, the Highest of the High, I bow to Him and pay my homage. Lucky am I to stand before Him, enjoying His loving look, enchanting smile, and hallowed touch, the envy of saints and rishis for ages.

Let it not be said of me that I have eyes to see and do not see, ears to hear and do not hear, heart to understand and do not understand Him who has descended to my level to lift me from the bottomless pit of perdition to the most sublime heights of His level. Verily, He has stooped to conquer.

May my whole soul ring with the one and only prayer at this moment, the eve of His Revelation: Oh! Lord of Lords! I have no temples to build for Thee. Thou art enshrined in the temple of my heart. I have no flowers to worship Thee. I place the wreath of my heart at Thy lotus feet . . .

Oh, Ancient One! Give me the courage and strength to love Thee forever and ever and to follow Thee with unfaltering steps and undying faith to the heaven of eternal bliss.

I have reproduced a large part of this article to give some idea of the intensity of love and the depth of conviction in Baba's divinity of many of those who attended this Meeting.

In Meherabad Hall, before the introductions began, Baba conveyed, "I know you all, I know the whole world. But now I want to hear the dear names of My lovers from themselves, for the last time. Know well that even those who do not consciously love Me are also Mine." Baba then asked those gathered in the Hall to stand up one by one and introduce themselves.

One of His lovers asked Baba for His permission to publish the messages given by Him in September 1954. Baba told him, "If you are convinced that Baba is the Avatar, say so [in the printed material]. If you feel that Baba is not the Avatar, say so. Remember to be honest in your heart, and whatever you do, do it with all your heart. My blessings." To someone who

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introduced himself as a newcomer, Baba gestured, "But I have been seeing you for ages. So don't worry about your seeing Me for the first time." To another who began to present information of a personal nature, Baba remarked, "I am omniscient; there is no need to tell Me more than what is asked."

A number of persons apprised Baba of the work they were doing through their centers to spread His message. Baba appreciated their love for Him, and, with a wink, conveyed to the group, "My heart, if I have one, is overflowing with love for you all." With a warm smile, He continued, "Andhra has a special place in My heart, and I feel very happy that you all managed to come here. However, even those who, for one reason or another, were unable to come, they are also here with Me."

Baba was with the Andhra group for over an hour, and then asked them to leave the Hall in order to make room for the group from Hamirpur. As they departed, Baba rose to His feet and folded His hands in response to their love for Him. Some of them approached Him and extended their hands for Him to touch.

Baba had a very lively, intimate time with His dear ones from Hamirpur. Lovers from other parts of Uttar Pradesh were also called in at this time. Baba was in a mood to give some spiritual explanations, some of which were spiced with His sense of humor. To expedite introductions, He asked Keshav Nigam to introduce each person to Him. The first man to be introduced was a young man who had participated in Baba's Andhra tour. Since that time, he had been so overpowered by Baba's love that he had been unable to attend adequately to his worldly duties.

In reference to this, Baba conveyed to the gathering, "The flame of love within should not give out even smoke for others to see. When you love Me, you begin to burn within, but you should appear cheerful and smiling. Bear the pangs of separation calmly and quietly. Any outward expression can be an insult to love. While attending to all your duties, you can still love Baba, by dedicating all your actions, good and bad, to Me. Just as you dress your body with clothes, and then forget about

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it, similarly you should dress your soul with thoughts of Baba; Baba will then be with you, even without your knowing it."

To someone else, Baba remarked, "I am 'Ustad' [the Unparalleled One]. No one tells a lie like Me, and no one speaks the truth like Me! No one can get a grip on Me. I am so unfathomable that even I am unable to fathom My own Self. But I know I am the Ancient One, and I can be yours by love, honest love."

One individual asked Baba to bestow on him such grace that he would see Baba as He truly is. Baba answered, "My Grace flows spontaneously of My own accord. Try to think of Me, and leave the rest to Me." And then He went on, "Only love takes you to God, while lust binds you to illusion. Lust wants everything. The sign of love is that one never asks for anything."

There was a schoolboy present at the gathering who had come against his father's wishes. Baba directed the boy to apologize to his father on Baba's behalf for the love that caused him to come. What divine humility! Another student was introduced to Baba who had been allowed by Baba to attend the Meeting on the condition that he be granted permission by his school. While describing the difficulties he had encountered in gaining permission, he related that he had lost his temper with his principal. Baba asked him why he was unable to control his anger. The boy admitted, "This is a problem for me." "Whenever you are about to get angry with someone," Baba gestured, "remember that I am in that person. This will help you to get over your anger."

A lover who was meeting Him for the first time asked Baba to help him control his mind. Baba gave him a simple method, similar to what He had shared earlier with the Westerners. "Take My name once at seven o'clock in the morning, then again at midday, at five in the evening, and finally just before going to bed." Baba emphasized that this should be done as a daily practice, and assured the man of His help.

A barber was introduced to Baba, and Baba remarked, "I am the Universal Barber; I shave and shape the heads of all!" A man with a potbelly approached Baba, and Baba told him, "I like you because you have a round heart, a round body, and your love is also round!" Everyone had a good laugh. An

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herbalist was introduced, and Baba asked him to examine His pulse. He did so, and reported that Baba's pulse was strong enough to sustain the whole world. This amused Baba very much. Addressing the entire group, Baba declared, "It is I who love you, and it is My love that is reflected through you all."

In the morning session Baba had stated that the time was drawing near for Him to drop His physical body, so many of His loved ones looked downcast. As though to raise their spirits, He conveyed, "Although physically Baba will depart soon, yet Baba is eternally everywhere. So stay where you are and love Me. And wherever you are, I will be with you."

After meeting with the men from Hamirpur, Baba called in the rest of the groups — from Bombay, Gujarat, and the remaining parts of India. This group talk ended at 4:30 P.M. In one way or another, Baba had spoken a few personal words to almost everyone, and thereby quickened His inner relationship with each of them. Baba's love began to echo from heart to heart. The interplay between a lover and the Beloved, with its diversity of playfulness and profundity, can be savored only by one who has the sincerity of a seeker, the simplicity of a child, and, just as important, a sense of humor.

Retiring to His cottage at lower Meherabad, Baba met with the Meherabad management and several of the *mandali* to discuss the arrangements made at Meherabad for His dear ones and also some other aspects of His pending work. He left for Meherabad after sunset, waving to His lovers who had gathered by the road to see Him off.

### *September 30: The Morning Session*

On His arrival at Meherabad on the morning of September 30, Baba went to His cottage. It was about eight o'clock. He began the day by giving a brief interview to some disciples of Upasni Maharaj who had come from Sakori.

After this, others were summoned, among them Niranjan Singh, who was an illustrious research scholar in chemistry

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and the principal of a renowned college in Delhi. Although Baba intended to deliver one of His most serious messages that afternoon, He seemed to be in quite a jovial mood that morning. Baba told Niranjana that He had called him specially because He remembered that earlier He had conveyed to him the possibility of his having a ten-day stay with Baba. "But now," Baba smiled, "I offer you an interview of only ten minutes, which will be tantamount to your staying with Me for ten days!" Baba appreciated Niranjana's love for Him and continued, "I know your longing; don't worry. I will definitely help you to know Me as God." Teasingly, Baba inquired, "Have I given you any other promise?" "Yes, Baba," Niranjana replied. "You agreed to visit my home in Delhi." Baba smiled again and conveyed, "Even if I drop My body soon, I will keep My promise to visit your house, but in My own way and time!" Baba's words often indicated something beyond their literal meaning. And before Niranjana could say anything more, the ten minutes were over. Niranjana offered his salutations to Baba and left.

After meeting with several more people, Baba came out of the cottage and crossed the Nagar-Arangaon road and walked on towards the railway tracks. According to the previous day's instructions, groups of people were eagerly waiting for Baba's arrival, in order to go with Him to Upper Meherabad. As Baba approached, the crowd parted, and He led the assembly up the road which He Himself had trod countless times over the years.

Having reached the top of the Hill, Baba stopped and seated Himself under the shade of a *neem* tree near the old water tank in front of the gate to Meher Retreat. He looked withdrawn and stretched out one leg, as can be seen in the pictures which He allowed to be taken at that time. Meanwhile, it took some of the crowd who had straggled behind, including those who were old and ill, time to catch up. When everyone was together again, Baba led the entire group as a body through a small gate to His future Tomb (now known as the Samadhi).<sup>4</sup>

Baba did not enter the Tomb, however, but stood on the platform beside it.<sup>5</sup> "This is the place of My earlier prolonged

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<sup>4</sup> The small gate and a compound of barbed wire enclosing the Tomb were removed after Meher Baba put aside His physical form.

<sup>5</sup> This platform was to the right as one faced the Tomb, and there were small meditation cells standing on it. The construction was dismantled in the early '70s, and the Sabha Mandap was erected, which presently stands adjacent to Baba's cabin.

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seclusion and fasting," He conveyed, indicating the Tomb, which is a small rectangular building made of stone. "Inside you will see a crypt. It was there I mostly stayed during the day and night, throughout that seclusion. When I drop My body, it will be interred here for the final rest." Sometimes Baba used to refer to this crypt as His "Final Resting Place."

Baba asked one of His Western disciples to open the door to the Tomb, and everyone was told to look inside. There were steps leading to the crypt, and the interior of the Tomb was glowing with the lively murals painted by Helen Dahm. The men bowed down at the threshold, and some offered flowers. The group was then asked to return to the Meeting *pandal* and take their seats.

Incidentally, the small *neem* tree beneath which Baba rested still stands to this day. It reminds me of the Ancient One who waits for all, to lead each of us personally to the "final resting place" that everyone has in the Avatar's Abode.

By half past nine, Baba returned from the hill to the Meeting *pandal*. The men were instructed to stay in their chairs and not stand when Baba entered. Accompanied by several *mandali*, Baba went to the platform and seated Himself on the couch. Then He conveyed to His lovers, "Before I give My Final Declaration in the afternoon Meeting, I want to say a few words regarding other matters. The afternoon session will begin at 3:00 P.M. When it ends, I shall leave promptly for Meherazad. All who want to get the full benefit of this Meeting, and wish to return home with the atmosphere of this place, should go directly to their homes. Now I will tell you a few words about My Masters." Baba then called the five men from Sakori to come and sit on the platform. Baba continued:

What I am, what I was, and what I will be as the Ancient One is always due to the five Perfect Masters of the Age. Sai Baba, Upasni Maharaj, Babajan, Tajuddin Baba, and Narayan Maharaj — these are the five Perfect Masters of this Age for Me. I bow down to them. However, only Babajan and Maharaj directly played the main roles. Babajan, in less than a millionth of a second, made Me

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realize that I am God; and in a period of about seven years, Upasni Maharaj gave Me the Divine Knowledge that I am the Avatar.

At present, Godavri Mai is the head of Sakori Ashram. She is a unique female personality and loves Me beyond words, and to Me she is the dearest of the dear.

Baba introduced Maharaj's five disciples to the assembly. He told His lovers that after lunch they would be shown pictures taken during His last visit to Sakori. He went on:

Now please pay attention, be wide awake, not drowsy. Since I stopped speaking, and also stopped writing, except for My signature, when essential, I carried on My communication with the help of the alphabet board for all these years of My Silence. From October 7, 1954, I will give up this board too. So, from then on, I shall not be speaking, writing, or using the board, or making signs with My fingers. I shall be as if withdrawing within Myself. This is because now the long promised and repeatedly promised time of breaking My Silence is very near. From October 7, I shall completely retire from My present activities. There will be no mass darshan, no programs, no meetings, no messages, no correspondence. Take this seriously and do not write to Me from October 7, as I shall pay no attention to letters. However, as promised earlier, I shall go with Gadge Maharaj when he takes Me to Pandharpur, if he has the fortune to do so.

Baba called Dr. Donkin to the dais and explained to him, through a figure of speech, about the breaking of His silence and its effect. Donkin then spoke to the audience through the microphone: "Just as an atom bomb, which in itself is so small, when exploded, causes tremendous havoc, so, when Baba breaks His Silence, the universal spiritual upheaval that will take place will be something that no one can describe. It will happen at a time when nobody expects it. Just as when an earthquake takes place, no one can do anything, but everyone in the affected area feels it, so the breaking of Baba's Silence

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will create a spiritual upheaval, and everyone will feel it in his heart."

Baba then told His lovers, "I never die. I am always the Ancient One. Remember, God alone is real, and all else is illusion. Your attending this Meeting will be worth it if all of you, or if some of you, or at least a few of you, spread the message of My love to others."

Baba concluded, "Be here at three o'clock to listen to My Final Declaration. It will be read in four different languages — English, Hindi, Telugu, and Marathi. After that you are free to depart, and you must depart by tomorrow noon. Today, after lunch, you will have the opportunity to see the pictures of My recent visit to Sakori, but no one should try to garland Me, or embrace Me, or ask Me for anything." He paused, then added, "However, I may play marbles with some of you after lunch."

Baba looked radiant and cheerful throughout the morning session. Despite His levity, however, a somber mood prevailed over the assembly. As the men dispersed, some were obviously deeply affected by the thought that they would soon be missing any opportunity of being in the physical presence of the Avatar.

### *The Afternoon Session: "The Final Declaration"*

During the lunch period, Baba visited the dining hall. As he entered, he asked someone to follow Him with a basket of *puris* (fried bread made from wheat flour). He distributed these to His dear ones as they were eating. His presence delighted the hearts of those whom He served in this manner, and they felt especially blessed by this special, unexpected *prasad*.

Baba also visited the kitchen and showed His interest in the food preparation. In a playful mood, He engaged in a puri-rolling competition with one of the cooks. To His own amusement, Baba lost.

As He was leaving the kitchen for Mandali Hall, Dr. Deshmukh followed Him, pleading, "Baba, for the sake of

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humanity, please do not drop Your physical body so soon. We need You." In spite of Dr. Deshmukh's persistence, Baba would only smile at him, without giving any reply.

In the Hall, Baba met with some of the members of His old cricket team. He tossed oranges to them, perhaps in a mood reminiscent of old times. After that, various other groups were called into the Hall to look at the photos taken at Sakori during Baba's recent visit to Maharaj's Ashram.

Baba then strolled onto the veranda and played marbles with some of His lovers. *Bhajans* were being sung, and Baba seemed to enjoy them a great deal, clapping His hands or slapping His knee in time to the music.

As the time approached for the afternoon session when "The Final Declaration" was to be read, Baba moved towards the Meeting *pandal*, stopping on the way to give darshan to a group of villagers who were waiting near the *dhuni*.

The assembly was instructed not to rise as Baba entered the *pandal*. Straightaway, He went to the platform and took His seat. His face shone with a rare glow. As it was still ten minutes before three, Baba permitted a group of His lovers from Andhra to sing some *bhajans* which they had composed. Baba expressed His appreciation for their love and faith in Him. The atmosphere was suffused with Baba's divine presence.

At precisely three o'clock, without any introduction from Baba, Eruch began to read the "The Final Declaration" in English. Baba had dictated this message before the Meeting, and its contents had been typed and kept confidential.

Eruch's voice deepened as he read the message into the microphone. The audience listened intently, with many eyes riveted on Baba. A number of individuals later remarked that they felt, at that moment, as though Baba had no body, and that the Formless God was expressing Himself through Baba's words.

Avatar Meher Baba's Final Declaration is given below. For the reader's convenience, I have taken the liberty of dividing the text into four parts.

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### "Every Heart Is My House"

I am very happy to have you all here. I know that very many of you have come to Meherabad under greatly difficult circumstances. Some of you have covered thousands of miles, and even crossed continents to be at Meherabad today. It is your deep love for Me that has braved all obstacles and prompted you to sacrifice your comforts and convenience to honor My Call and to be near Me today.

I am deeply touched by your devotion, and I am proud of the hearts that contain such love and loyalty.

There are many more devoted hearts like yours, yearning to be present here, but these are not to be seen in your midst today. I know that in spite of their intense desire to be near Me, they could not possibly come for one reason or another. Therefore, they depend upon you to convey to them, in vivid detail, all that you see and hear during these two days of unique opportunity that has fallen to your lot. I trust you will not fail them.

Although you are present here with all love and faith in Me, and though you feel blessed to have My personal contact, yet I know that you will not realize today, as you ought to, the true significance of My Call and your presence here at this juncture. Time alone will make most of you realize, not many months from now, the significant importance of this assembly.

The time is fast approaching when all that I have repeatedly stressed, from time to time, will definitely come to pass. Most of you will witness those events, and will recall very vividly all that transpires during these two days of your stay at Meherabad.

I have come not to establish anything new — I have come to put life into the old. I have not come to establish retreats or ashrams. I create them for the purpose of My universal work, only to repeatedly dissolve them once that purpose has been served.

The Universe is My Ashram, and every heart is My house; but I manifest only in those hearts in which all, other than Me, ceases to live.

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### "The Universal Religion of Love"

When My Universal Religion of Love is on the verge of fading into insignificance, I come to breathe life into it and to do away with the farce of dogmas that defile it in the name of religions and stifle it with ceremonies and rituals.

The present universal confusion and unrest has filled the heart of man with greater lust for power and a greed for wealth and fame, bringing in its wake untold misery, hatred, jealousy, frustration, and fear. Suffering in the world is at its height in spite of all the striving to spread peace and prosperity to bring about lasting happiness.

For man to have a glimpse of lasting happiness he has first to realize that God, being in all, knows all; that God alone acts and reacts through all; that God, in the guise of countless animate and inanimate entities, experiences the innumerable varied phenomena of suffering and happiness, and that God Himself undergoes all these illusory happenings. Thus it is God Who will efface this illusory suffering and bring the illusory happiness to its height.

Whether it manifests as Creation or disappears into the Oneness of Reality, whether it is experienced as existing and real, or is perceived to be false and nonexistent, illusion throughout is illusion. There is no end to it, just as there is no end to imagination.

There are two aspects experienced in illusion — manyness and oneness. While manyness multiplies manyness, oneness goes on magnifying itself. Manyness is the "religion" of illusion on which illusion thrives.

In the illusory beginning of Time, there was no such state of mess in illusion as there is today. When the evolution of consciousness began, there was oneness in spite of the diversity in illusion. With the growth of consciousness, manyness also went on increasing, until now it is about to overlap the limit. Like the wave that reaches its crest, this will dissolve itself and bring about the beginning of oneness in illusion. Suffering at its height will cause the destruction of this climax of manyness in illusion.

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The time has come for the preordained destruction of multiple separateness which keeps man from experiencing the feeling of unity and brotherhood. This destruction which will take place very soon will cause three-fourths of the world to be destroyed. The remaining one fourth will be brought together to live a life of concord and mutual understanding, thus establishing a feeling of oneness in all fellow beings, leading them towards lasting happiness.

"When I Speak the Word . . ."

Before I break My silence, or immediately after it, three-fourths of the world will be destroyed. I shall speak soon to fulfill all that is shortly to come to pass.

To affirm religious faiths, to establish societies, or to hold conferences will never bring about the feeling of unity and oneness in the life of mankind now completely absorbed in the manyness of illusion. Unity in the midst of diversity can be made to be felt only by touching the very core of the heart. That is the work for which I have come.

I have come to sow the seed of love in your hearts so that, in spite of all superficial diversity which your life in illusion must experience and endure, the feeling of oneness, through love, is brought about amongst all the nations, creeds, sects, and castes of the world.

In order to bring this about, I am preparing to break My silence. When I break My silence it will not be to fill your ears with spiritual lectures. I shall speak only One Word, and this Word will penetrate the hearts of all men and make even the sinner feel that he is meant to be a saint, while the saint will know that God is in the sinner as much as He is in himself.

When I speak that Word, I shall lay the foundation for that which is to take place during the next seven hundred years. When I come again after seven hundred years, the evolution of consciousness will have reached such an apex that materialistic tendencies will be automatically

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transmuted into spiritual longing, and the feeling of equality in universal brotherhood will prevail. This means that opulence and poverty, literacy and illiteracy, jealousy and hatred, which are in evidence today in their full measure, will then be dissolved through the feeling of the oneness of all men. Prosperity and happiness will then be at its zenith.

This does not mean that oneness in illusion shall remain so eternally. That is because all this that is, is illusion, and the consciousness of oneness, as well as of manyness in illusion, is part of the process of evolution. The time is bound to recur when there will be again the same beginning, growth and culmination of the heights of manyness and oneness in illusion.

### "A Cycle of Cycles"

My next advent, after I drop this body, will be after seven hundred years, and that will mark the end and the beginning of a Cycle of Cycles. All cycles of time in illusion end and begin after 700 to 1,400 years, and there have been, and will be, millions and billions of such cycles in a Cycle of Cycles; thus, there is no end to illusion, which always remains illusion.

Age after age, I come amidst mankind to maintain My own Creation of illusion, thereby also awakening humanity to become aware of it. The framework of illusion is always one and the same, but the designs in illusion are innumerable and ever-changing. My advent is not to destroy illusion, because illusion, as it is, is absolutely nothing. I come to make you become aware of the nothingness of illusion. Through you I automatically maintain illusion, which is nothing but the shadow of My Infinite Self, and through Me you automatically discard illusion when you are made aware of its falseness.

My manifestation as the Avatar of the time will be of short duration. This short period will, in quick succession,

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cover My humiliation, the breaking of My silence, My glorification and My violent physical end. Everlastingly with all the Divine Bliss within Me, I eternally suffer for one and all — thus I am crucified eternally and continually for all. During this short period, My Word of Words will touch the hearts of all mankind, and spontaneously this Divine touch will instill in man the feeling of the oneness of all fellow beings. Gradually, in the course of the next seven hundred years, this feeling will supersede the tendency of separateness and rule over the hearts of all, driving away hatred, jealousy, and greed that breed suffering, and happiness will reign.

For the benefit of those who did not understand English, translations of the "Declaration" in Telugu, Hindi, and Marathi were read out. As Dr. Deshmukh started to read the Marathi translation, it began to rain. I found myself wondering whether water might soon seep through the cloth roof of the *pandal*. However, to my surprise, the rain totally stopped within a few minutes, and there was sunshine. Baba remained undisturbed, and appeared to be listening intently to the reading. He did not explain or comment on anything. When the last translation had been read, He rose from the couch. A little later I was able to see Him at the edge of the platform.

It was now announced that all of those in attendance were to form a queue to receive *prasad* from Baba's hand. They were asked to leave the *pandal* after receiving the *prasad*. The Message had left the hearts of many numb; some of the men looked confused and dazed. Baba distributed the *prasad* with a nonchalant air. When the Westerners reached Him, He extended His hand for them to kiss. They were told to pack their belongings and prepare to leave that evening. Baba went to His car, which was surrounded by a large crowd of His lovers, many of whom wept. One individual, a youth, rushed at the car as it began to move away, sobbing terribly. Baba gestured for the car to stop just as the young man was on the verge of striking his head against the windshield. Very lovingly, Baba asked him to compose himself, and then the car left for Meherazad.

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### *Only Self Effaced Is Self Offered*

The great Meeting was over. The participants left Meherabad by noon of October 1. The sun was shining brightly; in India, October is considered a second summer. The contractors were pulling down the *pandal*, tents, and dining hall. Bullock carts loaded with wooden posts and cloth began making their way back to Ahmednagar on the following day. Compared to the length of time required for setting up all of these structures, how quickly they were dismantled!

From the 1st through the 3rd of October, Baba visited Meherabad twice a day. For the most part, He was busy with the *mandali*, giving them instructions and explanations about His future activities and their own responsibilities in regard to them. Being a "businessman," Baba inquired about all of the expenses incurred during the Meeting, and made certain that no bill was left unpaid.

I wasn't required to return to my school until October 4, and was allowed to extend my stay by three days. During the time of the Meeting, a few people briefly shared some incidents from their lives with Baba. Each of the nine hundred hearts at Meherabad would have revealed a different facet of His love, reflecting their conviction in Baba's divinity and their relationship with Him. I was greatly touched and impressed by the variety and richness of the stories I was fortunate to hear. It isn't practical to try and share those here, but I would like to conclude this section by sharing several personal incidents which continue to serve as beacons in my life with Meher Baba.

The *dhuni* is lit at Meherabad on the 12th of each month. However, in order to give an opportunity to His Western lovers to participate in the *dhuni*, Baba had permitted a special lighting on September 24. A little after lunch on that day, Baba sat in the hall at Lower Meherabad with the Western group. Then, after conversing for a time with His Western and Indian followers, Baba led the entire group to the *dhuni* platform. Many villagers had already gathered there. The *dhuni* was lit. A number of those present felt as though the

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divine fire burning in the pit on the platform was fueled by the divine fire in Baba's eyes.

At the close of this function, while the fire was still burning, Baba gave word that all the *mandali* and Indian volunteers working at Meherabad should come to the platform. I answered the summons, and, upon reaching the platform, was instructed to throw a sandalwood chip dipped in ghee (clarified butter) into the fire. I was informed that this would symbolize my desire to get rid of "something" that I wished to be free of.

The queue was quite short, and there was really no time for me to think about this. As far as I recall, the following words came to my mind without any premeditation: "Baba, I offer my 'self' in Your Light." All of this happened in such a natural way that I forgot what I had silently spoken and prayed. Later, when these words came back to me, I felt greatly indebted to Baba for His inner guidance and timely prompting. This turned out to be the first and only time I ever attended the lighting of the *dhuni*. But even if I were to attend again, what else would I have to drop into Baba's all-consuming Fire of Love!

It was late in the afternoon, and Baba left the platform to visit Arangaon village. I followed along with the crowd. It was a wonderful walk, with Baba in our midst. Passing down one of the very narrow lanes of the village, I found myself unexpectedly by Baba's side. I noticed that one strand of His long flowing hair was out of place, and, in my enthusiasm, or madness, or whatever, I couldn't restrain myself from brushing it back. The moment I touched His hair, Baba gave me a look of such intensity that I immediately understood that I had gone beyond the bounds of my apportioned service to Him. I felt as though I had touched a live wire, and through the jolt I received, Baba made me see that attending to His personal needs was not in my lot — that if I were to insist on this, I would be transgressing the limits of my relationship with Him. After that time, I never tried to touch Baba's physical form unless He expressed a wish for me to do so. I learned from this small incident that while I could admire the service rendered to

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Baba by His personal attendants, I should not presume to serve Him in the same way. In our relationship with the God-Man, each of us has to walk single file, as compassionately ordained by Him. But it is not easy to give up trying to imitate others!

On the morning of the opening day of the Meeting, September 29, Baba called me to His cabin. Adi was present there, and he handed me a long, sealed envelope, saying, "These are the typed pages of 'The Final Declaration' which will be read out tomorrow. Baba wants you to translate this message into Marathi and give me that copy, along with the typed English pages, tomorrow morning. Don't disclose the contents to anyone else; keep them confidential. I will give your version to Dr. Deshmukh for his final editing." I was only with Baba for a few minutes, and He signaled for me to leave. He looked preoccupied and didn't say anything to me. However, the simple fact of having been in His physical presence enlivened my spirit. I also felt honored by the confidence Baba had reposed in me.

I was busy at the time with other duties entrusted to me by Pendu, but nevertheless I looked for a quiet corner and hurriedly read through Baba's words; I could not delay. I quickly realized that this was not a short message. As I began the third page, the text began to weigh heavily on my mind. And by the time I'd finished, I realized that, without Baba's inner guidance, I would never be able to complete the translation. I was forgetting, however, that Baba never, on His own, asks anyone to do anything without providing the necessary help.

That night, at around ten o'clock, I sneaked into Pendu's room with the necessary writing materials. To my surprise, I found that Keshav Nigam, a great scholar of English and Hindi, was already there, working on the Hindi translation of the same message. I requested Keshav to allow me to read his Hindi translation, which he agreed to, as this was not in conflict with Baba's order.

Hindi and Marathi are kindred languages, so Keshav's translation helped. Even though the work was exhausting, I was able to finish the translation by the early hours of the

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morning. I felt satisfied, and even proud of myself, when I turned the translation and the English typed pages over to Adi, in Baba's presence. I was expecting some appreciative words from Baba. Instead, He ignored me totally, and I felt upset. I did not know that this was the beginning of a "spiritual surgery" that was to culminate shortly after the Meeting.

Three days later, on Sunday, October 3, I went into Mandali Hall to offer my parting salutations to Baba, as I was leaving on the afternoon train. Baba gave me neither a loving look nor even a smile. I stood quietly by the wall as He continued His conversation with the others. Pendu interrupted, praising me to Baba for being so conscientious in attending to my Meherabad duties. Vishnu put in, "Baba, in spite of Bal's frail health, he worked day and night. On the night he finished the Marathi translation of 'The Final Declaration' he hardly got any sleep at all!" Baba showed no interest in what was being reported to Him. This was highly unusual, especially in light of the fact that I was just about to leave for Kurduwadi.

Trying to catch Baba's attention, Vishnu repeated what he had said earlier. At this Baba shot a glance at me and gestured, "So what? What's the big deal about it? Whatever Bal has done, he has done for his own 'self.'" Baba's words punctured my self-esteem. I had been hoping for an embrace or a pat on the shoulder. But Baba's face showed only an expression of indifference, or possibly even disapproval. There had been a scorching flash in His eyes when He had glanced at me. I do not remember whether I had a parting embrace from Him or not; I tend to think I did not.

However, as time passed by, Baba's apparent indifference, and especially that flash in His eyes, revealed a deeper meaning to me. That glance of "fire" was a divine sign conveying to me that He had accepted what I had thrown into the *dhuni!* — my "self." That "self" was now being consumed in the flames of His light. What a glorious moment it would be when it is finally consumed entirely, swallowed up by Baba's purifying fire, the real *dhuni!*

I left for home, and for days afterwards that outwardly callous expression of Baba's came back to me, unfolding the

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intimate concern that it had concealed. In spite of the pain of these recollections, they help me a great deal to get closer to the Real Self — Baba within. And they continue to direct me to make sincere efforts to efface my "self" in His sanctifying, blazing remembrance. During the Final Declaration Meeting, Meher Baba, as the Ancient One, announced to the world at large that soon, in His own time, He would incinerate the selfish values dominating the present age. This was also an occasion when, in a special way, He lit the *dhuni* in the hearts of His dear ones in order to purify their hearts. A most memorable and momentous Meeting indeed!

## DISCARDING THE BOARD, AND VISIT TO PANDHARPUR 1954 ~ PART XIX

### *Stay at Satara Resumed*

On October 5, Meher Baba left Meherazad for Satara in Sarosh's car with His women disciples. Eruch drove the men *mandali*, including Nilu and Kumar, in Adi's car, which had been used many times on *mast* tours. Baba was apparently thinking of contacting some *masts* in the near future, and for this reason wanted the car to be at His disposal in Satara. Adi had given Eruch five hundred rupees to have the car repaired and overhauled. When he learned that the bill exceeded that amount by approximately twenty rupees, he sent the balance to Eruch immediately by money order. This may seem an insignificant thing, but I have noted it here to show how very particular Baba, and those who stayed with Him, were about the smallest details. With the Omnipresent One, how can anything be insignificant?

Baba stayed in Grafton with Mehera, Mani, Meheru, Dr. Goher, Naja, and Rano. The house was still under lease to Him from their stay during the first week of June. The men *mandali* resided at Rosewood, another bungalow about three furlongs away. Baba often walked the distance from Grafton accompanied by one of His men disciples holding an umbrella to shield Him, if necessary, from the sun.

After reaching Satara on October 6, Baba received a communication from the managing trustee of the Shri Sai Baba Sansthan, Shirdi. It was an invitation to attend the installation of a large statue of Sai Baba in the Samadhi Mandir on the next day, October 7. According to the Hindu almanac, the 7th of October that year was the festival day known as *dasehra*, and it was also the thirty-sixth anniversary of Sai Baba's physical passing away.<sup>1</sup> In response to the invitation, Baba directed Adi to send the following telegram to the Trustees of

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<sup>1</sup> According to the English calendar, the day on which Sai Baba dropped his body was October 15, 1918. The same day was the *dasehra* of the Hindus.

## DISCARDING THE BOARD AND VISIT TO PANDHARPUR

Shirdi Sansthan:

The Ancient One, Avatar Meher Baba, sends homage to Sai Baba, His guru, the God Incarnate Sai Baba.

(Signed "Adi" by order of Baba)

On the 6th, Baba also received a telegram from Dr. Donkin concerning Nana Kher. Nana had fallen ill during the Meeting and had been admitted to the Ayurvedic Hospital in Ahmednagar. He had been diagnosed as having a mild case of typhoid, but his temperature, which had been feverish, had not returned to normal. Donkin added that if he was sent back home to Nagpur, he should be excused, on medical grounds, from Baba's two orders about fasting on Sundays and feeding beggars, which Baba had given Nana earlier.

Baba agreed to Donkin's suggestions, postponing His orders to Nana until the end of December. Such incidents illustrate the personal attention Baba paid to His close ones in the midst of His busy schedule. It also shows how particular the *mandali* were about carrying out Baba's orders. Baba's solicitude and concern continues to this day, in different ways, for those who sincerely try to follow Him and work for Him.

October 6 turned out to be a very busy day for Baba, because this was the last date on which it was permissible for people to write letters to Him. Consequently, a lot of mail was received. Yet, in the midst of attending to various matters, Baba reminded His *mandali* that, beginning the following day, He would give up the use of His alphabet board, as He had announced at Meherabad. The board had been His chief means of communication for a period extending back to just after the beginning of His silence in 1925. He did not reveal, at this time, how he intended to communicate in the future. Thus, the great limitation which Baba had already placed on Himself by observing silence was now to become even more restrictive! In connection with this special event, Baba told the *mandali* to remain awake until midnight on October 7.

Before describing the eventful meeting of the next day, in which Baba gave up the use of the alphabet board, I would like to share an interesting incident.

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Adi and Rhoda Dubash were, at that time, Pakistani citizens living in Karachi. They had been recently staying in Panchgani, and, on the 6th, had come to Satara to inquire about their passports, which had been sent there for official endorsement. They had planned to return to Karachi soon. On that day, within an hour, they were out of the office, their work completed.

They both knew that Baba was staying in Satara, and they looked at each other, an unspoken question in their minds. Adi shook his head, "No." Rhoda burst out, "But we have no orders from Baba not to visit Him. Only the correspondence with Him is stopped from the seventh of October! It's all right for you to shake your head. You were with Him every day for three weeks last month!" Adi agreed, reluctantly. They went to Grafton where Baba was staying. To their delight, they were told to be at Rosewood by 2:00 P.M., when Baba would see them. They both felt extremely happy and reached Rosewood some minutes before the given time.

The moment Baba reached Rosewood and got out of the car, Adi and Rhoda could see that He was not pleased that they had come. His eyes flashing, He gestured, "These two people are here as though to sit on my chest!" Then He turned to Adi and gave him a light slap on the back. "You recently had the chance to be in My physical presence for three weeks. Weren't you satisfied, that you should come again now? Tell Me, it was Rhoda who brought you, wasn't it?"

"Yes, Baba," Adi admitted.

Baba turned to Rhoda. "Today, after three months, I had My hair washed, so I don't want you to embrace Me. If you do so, I will have to take a bath again, and I'm already feverish!" Rhoda, feeling guilty, assured Baba that she would not ask Him for an embrace. Baba instructed them further not to ask Him any question nor disturb Him, as He had much to see to. He had to give a number of last-minute instructions to the men *mandali* before He discarded the alphabet board the next day. "And finally," Baba added, "you will stay here only for an hour and then leave. It's two o'clock now, so you will leave at three." They both promised Baba that they would willingly do as He

## DISCARDING THE BOARD AND VISIT TO PANDHARPUR

wished, and then followed Him into the big hall. They sat on the floor in front of Him after He had taken His seat.

In spite of all the intense activity and the giving of last-minute instructions to the *mandali*, Baba found time occasionally to joke with them, or ask questions, or cast a loving glance in their direction. During that hour, Eruch read out a letter from Shri Dixit of Kolhapur inviting Baba to inaugurate a new school for girls there. If Baba was unable to come, Shri Dixit requested that He send a message and His blessings for the occasion. Baba started dictating a message to Eruch, with special emphasis on educating the girls to become good citizens, good wives, good mothers, and, above all, lovers of God. To achieve this, they should try to be absolutely honest with themselves, others, and God.

Then, with a twinkle in His eyes, Baba suddenly turned to Adi and asked, "What do you think of Rhoda? Is she a good wife?" Adi answered spontaneously, "A-one, Baba." Baba's face lit up with pleasure, and He turned to Rhoda and asked, "Is Adi a good husband?" "A-one, Baba," Rhoda said.

With a look of relief, Baba turned to Eruch. "Why are you bothering Me with sending this message to the principal of the school when we have here these two living examples of what I want to convey? Why don't you just send these two people as examples of how a man and woman should be in life?"

By now, the hour that had been allotted to Adi and Rhoda had almost elapsed. They were both conscious of it, but neither of them made any attempt to leave. Rhoda thought, "Baba is not saying anything; it must mean He doesn't mind our staying." Five minutes past three, ten minutes past three, fifteen past, twenty past ... and suddenly Baba turned to Adi and asked, "Are you a true Zoroastrian?" Adi was taken aback. He didn't know what Baba meant exactly. "Baba, do you mean, do I wear the *sadra* and *kusti*?"

"No, I mean, do you practice good thoughts, good words, and good deeds, as laid down by Zoroaster?" Then Baba asked, "What's the time?"

Adi answered, "Twenty past three, Baba."

"You gave Me your word that you would leave at three."

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Where is your word as a true Zoroastrian?"

Rhoda interrupted, "But Baba, You didn't mind our staying."

Baba shot back, "You gave Me your word that you would leave at three o'clock, and when the clock struck three, because you had given Me your word, it was for you to have stuck to it and to have gotten up. Then if I had wanted you to stay longer, I would have told you so. A Zoroastrian, once he gives his word, is honor bound to keep his *jaban* [word] at any cost. This is what I mean by a true Zoroastrian."

Adi and Rhoda felt so ashamed that they literally hung their heads and, with one accord, got up to leave. Baba held up his hand, gesturing for them to sit again. "Now you will leave when I tell you." Later, when Baba finally did ask them to leave, He told Adi to come back on the following day before noon. Rhoda chimed in, "Baba, I will come too."

Baba shook His head and said, "If you insist, I will tell Adi not to come!"

Rhoda did not know that Baba was giving Adi an undisclosed invitation to attend the next day's meeting. Of course, she withdrew her request.

After Rhoda and Adi had left, Baba continued with His correspondence and giving instructions for a while. He left Rosewood in Adi's car before sundown.

### *Goodbye to the Board*

Thursday, October 7, was *dasehra*, a Hindu festival. It is one of the most auspicious days to begin any new activity. The Hindus honor different animals on specific days. *Dasehra* is the day for honoring horses. In keeping with the spirit of this day, Sheba, the filly, received special loving attentions from Baba and the women *mandali* at Grafton.

During Baba's stay in Dehra Dun in 1953, Kumar had presented a smart three-month-old filly to Baba. Mehera looked after her. All of the women *mandali* were fond of her, and she was Mehera's favorite mare. When Baba moved from Dehra

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Dun to Mahabaleshwar, and later to Satara, Sheba accompanied Him. She became one of Baba's "four-footed *mandali*" like Peter, Baba's dog. In fact, Sheba was the first occupant of the present *mandali* Hall at Meherazad, and stayed there until the mid-fifties.

Sheba was a thoroughbred racehorse. She had a chestnut-colored coat, a white star on her forehead, and a good mane. On the morning of *dasehra*, the women *mandali* decorated her with colorful silk and yellow flower garlands and anklets, and a net of flowers was draped over her back. Baba stroked her mane and patted her sides with great affection. He and Mehera fed her carrots, while Peter, Baba's dear cocker spaniel, took full advantage of the fun to enjoy himself as well. Baba's love for animals stands out as a special phase in His life and work.

Because *dasehra* is a festive occasion, the women *mandali* had put on their best saris, and Rano, the only Western woman present, wore an attractive dress. Baba, as He caught sight of her walking about in the compound, remarked that she looked like the "Queen of Sheba." It was a delightful morning for everyone.

The previous day, Baba had instructed the men *mandali* to have a good bath on the following morning, and to wear clean clothes. *Dasehra* is ordinarily a feast day, but Baba ordered everyone to fast from midday to midnight. For the *mandali*, observing Baba's orders meant pleasing Him, whether through fast or feast.

At about 2:00 P.M., Baba came to the men *mandali's* residence at Rosewood. He was in a happy mood and gave them a description of Sheba's festive appearance. He had brought with Him three alphabet boards in a small bag, one made of plywood, one of plastic, and the third of cardboard. When everyone had gathered around Him, Baba explained that He wished to give two of the boards to two of the men — one to Kumar and the other to Dhake. They were told to preserve them carefully.

He offered Kumar the first choice. Kumar selected the board made of plywood. Dhake chose the plastic one. The

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remaining alphabet board, made of cardboard, had one small corner piece that was almost broken off and was clinging by means of a little adhesive tape. The crack had gone directly through the zero on the board, cutting it in half.

Baba conveyed to the *mandali* that He had been using that particular board very roughly, yet the cracked piece had somehow managed to stay connected with it. Then He tossed the board to Savak Kotwal. As Savak caught it, the loose corner piece flew off. Baba took the board back and gave it to Eruch with the instruction that it should be given to Padri at Meherabad, to be kept with the other things used by Him. Then He offered the broken piece to Savak, asking him to keep it safe until his death.

After that, Baba began attending to the remaining correspondence. Eruch read out some letters, and Baba dictated replies to His dear ones. He also stated that from the next day, October 8, there would be no more letters read to Him, and no more replies. He modified this a little later, however, suggesting that He might hear the contents of certain letters, but that He would not reply. And He also reiterated that He would under no circumstances be using the board. Baba left Rosewood by four o'clock, informing the *mandali* that He would return by five-thirty.

Baba came back to Rosewood a little earlier than expected and, as soon as He arrived, asked Savak where he had put the piece of the board that had been given to him. Savak answered that he had placed it safely in his trunk. Baba declared to him that if He had been in Savak's place, He would have made an incision in His own flesh and inserted it there. Then Baba demanded of him, "Do you really want it?" Savak replied that he would like to know the significance or importance of keeping it with him. If it was beneficial for him to retain it, he would surely keep it.

Hearing this, Baba responded that keeping it would create great havoc! Savak said, "If that is the case, it means that it is harmful for me to have it." He was on the point of expressing his wish to return the little piece when Baba cut him off, "You were a fool to have asked Me such a question!" Baba then

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ordered Savak to bring it from his trunk and then handed it to Eruch with instructions that it also be given to Padri, along with the alphabet board.

Baba asked all present to wash their faces, hands, and feet. As the *mandali* were leaving the hall, He also told Pendu and Eruch to post the servants and workers on the premises as watchmen on the bungalow's four sides. They were to be very strict in following Baba's order not to allow anyone to come inside. Soon everyone had regathered in Baba's presence, and the doors were closed. During special meetings, Baba often ordered the doors and windows to be closed to indicate that the event had started. There were, in all, twenty men present in addition to Baba. They were Gustadji, Kaikobad, Baidul, Pendu, Eruch, Kumar, Savak, Nilu, Vishnu, Bhau, Meherjee, Krishna Nair, Aloba, Kohiyar, Dhake, Adi Dubash, Sam Kerawala, and three other *mandali*.

Baba's brother Jal had come in the morning. Baba had given him the option of attending this special program, but Jal had decided to leave Rosewood early that same day. Noting his absence, Baba commented that it was not in Jal's lot to be present at this important meeting. On the other hand, two unexpected participants — Adi Dubash and Sam Kerawala — were present on the occasion. Both of them had known nothing about this meeting. By chance, they visited Baba at Rosewood on October 6, and He had graciously extended them the invitation. The expected becomes impossible, and the unexpected, possible! Incomprehensible are the ways of the Avatar!

At the start of the meeting, Baba wished to offer homage to His five Perfect Masters by way of bowing down to everyone present. Each man was to come forward and put his foot on a small stool. Baba would then bow to him and touch His forehead to his foot as the man repeated the names of Baba's five Perfect Masters. The names were to be repeated in a specific order: O Sai Baba, Upasni Maharaj, Babajan, Tajuddin Baba, Narayan Maharaj!

Gustadji was the first in line, and Kaikobad the last. At Baba's signal, the men came forward and placed a foot on the stool, over which a white sheet had been spread. It was

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stressed that the order of the names of Baba's Masters was not to be altered, and that if anyone made a mistake, he should begin again. Krishna Nair had some difficulty in this respect, being so awestruck that his memory repeatedly failed him. Baba had to place His forehead on his foot, with great gravity, more than twice.

Then He placed His forehead on the bare stool, and indicated that the men should say loudly, in chorus, each Master's name when He raised His finger. This had to be done twice, as the first time the names were not recited in unison or in the proper order. The atmosphere in the hall was extremely solemn and charged with Baba's divinity. Baba washed His hands and asked Gustadji and Kaikobad to stand on either side of Him. He asked them to hold His arms, and He folded His palms (in *namaskar*) to offer a prayer. It was now a quarter to seven. As Baba had previously instructed, Eruch read aloud the following prayer, which had been dictated by Baba. The other men stood in silence.

On behalf of Beloved Baba, Eruch read:

O Sai Baba, Upasni Maharaj, Babajan, Tajuddin Baba, and Narayan Maharaj, you, the five in One and the One in five, the Divine Beings, representing the Absolute One, I bow to you in Perfect Homage. It is due to you, five Men-God, that I am what I am — the Ancient One, the Everlasting One.

May the Beloved God with Whom you five are One, and for Whom you five are working universally, give Me, in your names, the strength, power, and wisdom to fulfill all that I have taken this form for; and to see that all I have declared at the last Meherabad Meeting comes to pass.

I now give up using the alphabet board, it being My gesture before God for the breaking of My silence soon.

Baba looked intensely radiant while the prayer was being read. At times He moved His folded palms as though addressing and invoking God the Almighty through His five Perfect Masters. Though He seemed pleased with the first reading, He asked Eruch to read the prayer a second time. Then He

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asked each man present to say aloud, "Parabrahma," "Paramatma," "Ya Yezdan," "Ahuramazda," "Allah-hu-Akbar," or "God Almighty," each according to his religion. At the end of this invocation to God, Baba placed His alphabet board on the little stool. It was now 7:00 P.M.; Baba gestured that from that moment He had permanently discarded the use of the board and would not use it again.

Baba appeared satisfied at the close of the meeting and, through His gestures, which the *mandali* had already learned to interpret, conveyed, "All has gone well, and everything will also be well." It was Baba's day of farewell to His longtime companion. Some had compared Baba's use of the board to Lord Krishna's playing of His flute.

According to Baba's earlier instructions, some recordings of His favorite *ghazals* were now played. Baba tried to explain some of the lines through gestures, but this proved to be difficult, both for Him and for the others. From time to time he asked someone in the group to tell Him a joke. There was a short break at 10:00 P.M., and then the record playing continued. Baba left Rosewood for Grafton at about midnight.

The next day, when Baba came to Rosewood, the familiar board was not at His side.

### *Internal Link with Baba — the Eternally Existent*

This narration of the events of October 7 will remain incomplete if I fail to mention an incident that occurred, not in Satara, but on the other side of the world, in the United States. This was the unexpected passing away of one of Baba's dear ones, Malcolm Schloss. He belonged to the first group of Baba's American disciples who met Him in 1931. Malcolm and Jean Adriel had been Baba's hosts at the fine, cozy summer house in Harmon-on-Hudson, forty miles from New York City.

In September of 1954, Malcolm had stayed at Meherabad on the Hill with some of Baba's American, English, and Australian followers. At the beginning of this period, Baba instructed

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Charles Purdom, a renowned British author, and Malcolm, a noted mystical poet, to keep a diary of Baba's daily visits to them, including a brief description of the "Final Declaration" Meeting. Both men followed Baba's instruction diligently. On his way back to the West Coast of America, Malcolm stopped to visit Charles in France to put the final touches on this written account.

On his way to California from Europe, Malcolm made an additional stop on the East Coast, in New York. It was here, on October 7, while staying in a friend's vacant apartment, that he died, apparently from a slip and fall. Baba was informed about his death by the New York group, and, from Satara, He directed Meherjee to send the following cable:

Inform all concerned that most fortunate Malcolm passed away from you all on most important day of seventh [October] in unique circumstances, after embracing Baba and completing Baba's work.

Meherjee (by order of Meher Baba)

Ivy Duce, one of Meher Baba's American disciples, described her last visit with Malcolm Schloss on the evening before he passed away. She had felt a strong inner prompting to go to New York, and felt it must be a prodding from Baba. She rushed to the airport in Washington, D.C., which was her residence at that time, and flew to New York, where she called Fred and Ella Winterfeldt to see if there was any Baba news. They were just leaving for the airport to pick up Malcolm Schloss. They mentioned to her that Malcolm had been in France with Charles Purdom completing their account of the "Three Incredible Weeks." And they informed her that Malcolm was going to stay in a friend's vacant apartment.

Hearing this, Mrs. Duce felt an impulse to contact Malcolm and managed to reach him by telephone several hours later. She invited him to have dinner with her and her daughter, Charmian, who was living in New York at that time. Malcolm accepted the invitation happily. When they met, he told them, "It's strange that you should be here, for it has saved me a trip

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to Washington. The last thing that Baba told me was to be sure to go to Ivy Duce's and give her and Charmian each a message."<sup>2</sup> He delivered Baba's personal messages to them during their dinner, and then returned to the apartment. Mrs. Duce flew back to Washington the following day. That evening she was surprised by a phone call from the Winterfeldts, informing her that Malcolm had been found dead in his friend's apartment. She felt grieved, but also understood why she had felt such a prompting to go to New York. Beloved Baba's messages had to be received by her and Charmian, and, at the same time, Malcolm had to obey Baba's last order to him. In His own ways, Baba had helped them all to fulfill His wish.

It is also worth noting that after Ivy left, Malcolm met with Filis Frederick, the editor of *The Awakener*. At that time Malcolm gave her the manuscript for *Three Incredible Weeks with Meher Baba*. This heartwarming, profound account was published in a special issue of *The Awakener* (Vol. II, No. 3).

By the time Baba returned to Satara, there was a large amount of mail waiting for Him. Many lovers expressed their dire concern over Baba's "Final Declaration," which alluded to the "imminent dropping" of His body. Baba did not reply to these letters individually, but rather decided to send a letter on October 8, in Hindi, to be circulated among His dear ones in the Hamirpur area. The letter was sent through Bhau Kalchuri, one of the resident *mandali*. It was mailed to Keshav Nigam, who was instructed to circulate the letter to Baba lovers in the Hindi-speaking areas of India.

A copy of this letter was also sent to Dr. Deshmukh to be translated into English. The English version was read out to Baba and, upon receiving His approval, was given to Adi K. Irani to be mailed out to Andhra and other states where Hindi is not spoken. This particular letter became especially vital and significant to His lovers all over the world when, in 1969, the Avatar — the infinitely conscious, active Consciousness — put aside the physical form known to us as Meher Baba.

The letter is addressed by Meher Baba to all His dear ones,

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<sup>2</sup> *How a Master Works*, p. 197.

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and the relevant text is given below:

Dear Lovers, ...

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

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

Oh My lovers! I love you all. It is only because of My Love for My creation that I have descended on earth. Let not your hearts be torn asunder by My declaration concerning the dropping of My body. On the contrary, accept My Divine Will cheerfully. You can never escape from Me. Even if you try to escape from Me, it is not possible to get rid of Me. Therefore, have courage and be brave.

If you thus lose heart, how will it be possible for you to fulfill the great task which I have entrusted to you? Be brave and spread My message of Love far and wide to all quarters, in order to fulfill My Divine Will. Let the words "Baba-Baba" come forth from every nook and corner of the world and from the mouth of every child, and let their ignorance be reduced to ashes by the burning flame of My Love. Come together in order to fulfill My Will by taking your stand on Truth, Love and Honesty, and be worthy of participating in My Task. I give you all My blessings for spreading My Message of Love.<sup>3</sup>

Meher Baba

There was no detailed report circulated at the time about

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<sup>3</sup> *Letters from the Mandali of Avatar Meher Baba*, pp. 139-40.

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Baba's permanently discarding the alphabet board. Instead, under Baba's instructions, Adi printed and mailed the following short circular for the information of His followers:

On and from October 7, 1954, onwards, no one should correspond with Baba. On and from the same day Baba will not give, when asked for, darshan or interview to anyone.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, from October 8, a new phase in Baba's external activities and inner spiritual work commenced. As mentioned earlier, in the letter addressed to His dear ones, Meher Baba had indicated that any of His lovers can establish an internal link with the Eternal One — the Avatar — by leading a normal life in which all thoughts, words, and deeds are dedicated to Him.

### *Gadge Maharaj Invites Meher Baba*

In Marathi, *gadge* is a type of earthen pot. Gadge Maharaj, a well-known saint of Maharashtra, used to wear one half of such a pot as his headgear, hence the name. Before taking his meals, he would remove this hat and have buttermilk poured into it. Then pieces of *jowar* (millet) bread would be added. Being an old man for whom chewing was difficult, he would wait for some time for the bits of bread to become soggy and soft before eating. Following his meal, he would wash the pot with his own hands and place it back on his head. He was clad in a coarse cloak stitched together from old rags which he had collected on the road.

Gadge Maharaj had a radiant face and fiery eyes. He wore an earring in each ear, one made from a copper coin of the lowest denomination, and the other from a cowrie, a small shell. Once one of my friends asked him about their significance. Touching the coin, he replied in a serious voice, "The world goes after this," meaning worldly riches. Then, touching the other earring, he added, "But the worth of all such worldly possessions is much less than a cowrie." And with the innocence of a child, he laughed wholeheartedly.

Gadge Maharaj's way of life reminds me, to some extent, of

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<sup>4</sup> *Life Circular*, No. 21, October 7, 1954.

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Saint Francis of Assisi, "the non-plaster saint." Gadge loved poor villagers. He danced and sang the glories of God with them. When he would visit a village for a program of *kirtan*, the first thing he would do was to sweep the entire area clean with the help of his devotees, silently repeating the name of God. He would not take food in a village where he had performed *kirtan*. He would not allow people to touch his feet in expression of their respect for him, and would keep anyone at bay who tried to do so with a stick which he carried with him. Gadge's devotees had established an institution in his name to spread his message of loving God by leading a pure life of selfless service. They had constructed a number of large buildings in Nasik and Pandharpur to provide accommodations for pilgrims. Gadge Maharaj was one of the most revered saints of Maharashtra.

On September 12, 1954, during Baba's glorious darshan, Gadge sat near Baba's feet, helping Him to give *prasad* to the thousands who had gathered in Wadia Park. The next day, September 13, Gadge Maharaj came to Meherazad for a private visit. Baba gave him an audience happily. Gadge declared, "Baba, great is Your glory! You are like the resplendent Sun, while I am like the dimly lighted wick of a chimney [small tin lamp]." Baba had disclosed to His disciples earlier that Gadge Maharaj was a real saint, so his humility in the presence of the Avatar had a touching charm. He continued, "Baba, now I am old; I feel very tired. Please allow me to stay with You. I will do whatever household work You give me. My needs are few, and I shall not be a burden to You. My diet is mostly *bhakri* [millet bread] and any kind of *dhal* [lentil] or buttermilk."

This brought a smile to Baba's face, and His eyes sparkled with deep vitality; He seemed greatly amused, and also pleased, with Gadge's proposition. Nevertheless, Baba asked him to continue with his work of enlightening people through his *kirtans*. In response to this, the saint put forth another request, that Baba pay a visit to Pandharpur, where thousands of pilgrims assemble twice a year for the darshan of Lord Krishna in the form of Vithoba (also known as Vithhal or Pandurang). Baba agreed to this willingly, leaving the exact

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date for the visit to be fixed at a later time.

I have only recorded the external aspect of this conversation between the Avatar — the infinitely conscious One — and a saint who was feeling God's presence everywhere. Baba alone knew the deeper spiritual significance of this contact. Baba had always expressed a special interest in Gadge. Even while still a student at Deccan College in 1912, he had attended Gadge's *kirtan*, and was deeply impressed by his love for God and the moving simplicity of his language.

On September 13, 1954, Baba did not visit Meherabad. *Sahavas* for the Westerners commenced from the 14th. The "Final Declaration" Meeting ended on the last day of September. In the first week of October, Baba left Meherazad for Satara, which had been His headquarters since June 1954. Two weeks later, on October 16, Baba left on a *mast* tour in the Chevrolet which Adi kept at His disposal for this purpose. He was accompanied by three disciples, with Eruch serving as driver.

The first stop was in Belgaum, in the state of Karnataka. Baba had stayed here in October of 1949 during the New Life. From there He journeyed to Kolhapur, in Maharashtra, and then returned to Satara on October 22. Baba expressed His satisfaction about His contacts with these highly evolved souls, the *masts*, who, in their boundless trust in God, were oblivious to the gross realities. I recollect Baba saying on one occasion, "They, the *masts*, are my dear children. I am drawn to them, and I help them in their spiritual journey to God, and these contacts help Me in My universal spiritual work."

During Baba's stay in Satara, two of His disciples, Adi and Sarosh, kept track of Gadge Maharaj's itinerary. On November 1, they went to visit him in Bombay. Gadge happily extended an invitation to Baba to visit Pandharpur on the afternoon of November 6 (Kartiki Ekadashi, the eleventh day of the Hindu month of Kartik) and the morning of the 7th. Adi immediately sent word to Baba about this, and by the time he had returned to Ahmednagar he had already received Baba's confirmation on the dates along with some instructions.

There was no time to inform Baba lovers in other states

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about Baba's visit to Pandharpur, and, in fact, Baba had wished to keep this visit to Pandharpur only for the mass of pilgrims who annually gather to glorify Lord Vithoba through *bhajans* and *kirtans*. However, under Baba's general instructions, Adi sent me a telegram informing me that I was allowed to be in Baba's *sahavas* during His visit to Pandharpur. Pandharpur was only thirty miles from my hometown. This permission came to me like an unexpected shower of Baba's loving grace, drenching my heart. To be with Him was to witness Divine Love in action.

On the morning of November 6, Sarosh drove Baba from Satara to Pandharpur. Gustadji, Eruch, Pendu, Bhau, Meherjee, and Nariman accompanied Him in two cars. A group of Baba lovers from Ahmednagar (Rangole, L. B. Thade, Bhagirath, and a few others), not wishing to miss this opportunity to be in Baba's company, arranged for a jeep and drove to Pandharpur. Baba arrived by 3:30 P.M., and agreed to stop briefly at Aradhye Patil's bungalow on the outskirts of town. It was here that the Ahmednagar party met and greeted Baba, the Beloved of their hearts.

Baba appeared to be in an excellent mood, and He allowed each of them to embrace Him. But as Thade approached, Baba gestured, "Why did you come? Have you taken leave from your job?" Thade was not prepared for these questions. "Your coming has bothered Me," Baba continued. The group was mystified by this. Thade alone understood the meaning of Baba's words, and he was on the verge of weeping. A year or two earlier Baba had casually instructed Thade not to come for His darshan without obtaining official leave. At this time, Thade was working as a social welfare officer in Ahmednagar. On this particular day, on the spur of the moment, he joined the group and left Ahmednagar without seeking official permission. This was against Baba's order, and with Baba, the Avatar, there are no distinctions between small orders and big ones; a small order, as much as a big one, expresses the wish of the Infinite One intended for the ultimate good of the individual concerned.

Seeing Thade's dejection, a look of compassion came over

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Baba's face, and He gestured, "Don't worry now; forget what has happened; I have forgiven you. Don't do such a thing again." No one else understood what was happening. Later, Thade related that, upon his return to Ahmednagar, he found an important letter on his desk awaiting special attention. It was from the Regional Head Office, Nasik. The assistant director had planned to visit Ahmednagar on November 6, and expressly wished that Thade be present. However, for some reason he had been forced to cancel his visit.

When Thade learned this, he understood what Baba had meant: "Your coming has bothered Me." After accepting Baba as the Perfect Master, even if His lovers were to disobey Him unknowingly, Baba took the harmful effects and the resultant suffering upon Himself. He referred to this as an "additional botheration." This incident provided Thade with a lesson that lasted for the rest of his life. After that, he never came for Baba's darshan or *sahavas* without obtaining official permission from his superior officer.

To continue, Eruch relates:

He [Baba] then sent word to Gadge Maharaj that Vithoba, in person, had reached Pandharpur and was completely at his disposal for the full period of His stay of twenty-four hours; and that Vithoba would do exactly as Maharaj desired Him to do, on condition, of course, that Maharaj did not ask Him to break His silence or use the alphabet board, which He had stopped using since the 7th of October, 1954. Also that Maharaj must not request Him to take food or to sleep that night because He had decided to take neither food nor rest, but to make Himself available, as much as possible, to the pilgrims there.

On hearing that Baba had arrived, Gadge Maharaj at once prepared to receive Baba at his own *dharamshala* — a spacious building built to accommodate and give shelter and comfort to the thousands of pilgrims who come to Pandharpur.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *The Awakener*, Vol. II, No. 4 (Spring 1985), p. 2.

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### *Baba, the Living Vithoba, in Pandharpur*

The lodging and boarding arrangements for Baba, the *mandali*, and His devotees from Poona and Ahmednagar were made near the railway station in a hostel built for the children of those in the Indian military service. The schools were closed for two weeks, due to the Kartiki Fair, so some of the rooms were available for Baba and His group.

Those who were to help in the darshan arrangements had arrived in Pandharpur by midday. While we were milling around Gadge Maharaj's *dharamshala*, we got the news from one of the *mandali* about Baba's special message to Gadge and the time of His expected arrival in the city. Thousands of people from different parts of Maharashtra had already come, and the roads of the city were teeming with pilgrims bearing ocher-colored triangular flags. The three-story building of Gadge's *dharamshala* was full to bursting. Baba arrived at 5:00 P.M. and was warmly received by Gadge Maharaj. Gadge led Baba into the large, open courtyard. There was a small shrine to Lord Vithoba on one of the interior verandas of the courtyard, and Gadge had placed a chair near the entrance to it for Baba. With folded hands, Gadge asked Baba to take His seat. When Baba sat down, the statue of Vithoba was concealed from the view of the pilgrims sitting in front of Him. Was this an indirect, divine indication to them that the living Vithoba was in their midst?

Gadge told the pilgrims that Meher Baba was the Jagat Guru (Master of the World) in the true sense, for He was spiritually serving the whole world. He continued, "People journey thousands of miles to have Meher Baba's darshan. But you are really fortunate, for He came here from Satara to offer you a unique chance of being in His personal presence. Make the most of this opportunity offered to you by wholeheartedly taking His darshan." He ended his speech by calling out, "Meher Baba Ki Jai!" Then followed Gadge's favorite and popular chanting of God's name, with the pilgrims joining him in the chorus: "*Gopala, Gopala Devaki Nandan Gopala*" (All glory to Krishna, the son of Devaki). Darshan continued for

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over an hour. Baba looked humanly happy and divinely radiant. Gadge stood near Baba throughout the program, telling people not to rush, but to offer their respects wholeheartedly to the Jagat Guru.

Before leaving the *dharamshala*, Baba asked Gadge about the next program. "As you please, Baba," Gadge answered. With a look of surprise Baba gestured, "Did you not receive My message? In Pandharpur, I am at your disposal; take Me wherever you want." Gadge repeated, "Baba, it shall be done as You wish." Baba responded with a smile, "Then I want to leave Pandharpur for Satara by midnight!" Startled, the saint replied, "No, no! We will go to the sands of Chandrabhaga at 10:00 P.M. It is there that I shall request You to bless the thousands of pilgrims — the devotees of Vithoba. The next morning, I will take You to a *dharamshala* for the Harijans and also to visit an asylum for the lepers whom You dearly love." Baba conveyed, "Good! Granted!" And He lovingly caressed Gadge's face.

It was about 6:00 P.M. when Baba left the place with His people for the Military Hostel. Reaching there, He took His seat in the open under a flagpost and asked the Poona party to sing *bhajans*. Madhusudan was inspired to compose a new song in Marathi — *Aaho aala peha deo ala, Avatar aala ... (Lo and behold, here comes God in human form as the Avatar. Let us hasten to have His darshan)*. The tune and meaning of the song touched the hearts of those present, and Baba also liked the composition, remarking, "What is mentioned in the song is true." This became a favorite song, which Baba sometimes requested Madhusudan to sing on other occasions. But one of the most prominent impressions of that evening was the absence of Baba's longtime companion, the alphabet board, which we all missed. Baba conversed with people using only His descriptive hand gestures and lovely facial expressions.

Given below is an account based on my unedited notes, taken thirty-five years ago. The conversations mentioned here were carried on informally, mostly in Marathi and Gujarati, though sometimes in English as well. The text is not verbatim, and reflects my own understanding, then and now. Baba's

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resplendence and artistic gestures have etched themselves on my heart, and have become my wings to fly back in time. Incidentally, this was the second time (the first being in Kakinada, Andhra) that I spent an entire night with Baba.

As it was November, the night quickly grew chilly. Baba moved inside to a large room, where He sat on a mattress covered with a white bedsheet. His dear ones, too, went inside. A person casually opening the conversation said, "Baba, from now on, You have stopped giving darshan. Will you please guide us today as to how to lead a spiritual life?" Baba gestured, "Simple: forget yourself, remember Me, love Me. This will help not only you, but anyone, to lead a spiritual life." Another in the group said, "Baba, we try to do this, but often we fail in our attempts." At this point Baba asked Eruch to relate the answer that Baba had given when someone asked Him a similar question in the Hamirpur District. The gist of this was: "I [Baba] tell you to love Me because I am the Ocean of Love; I am everywhere, in each drop. So it is given to every drop to participate in My divine sport and to find its way of loving Me. Honest and wholehearted efforts will help you to find your personal path leading to Me."

Another person opened his heart: "Intellectually we understand what You have conveyed, but our attachments are so compelling that we are stuck in worldly things."

Baba consoled him: "My loving remembrance will gradually awaken discrimination in you which will give you the required strength. Just think how many times you have assumed male and female forms, how many children you have had, how much you have worried over this and that; it was all self-created. If you think you are bound, bound you are. With trust in Me, if you think you are free, free you are. Don't lose heart. Remember Me and love Me more and more." And then He added, "But loving Me is not as easy as eating sweets [*laddoos*]."

After answering a few more questions, Baba conveyed, "On October 7, when I discarded the board, I declared that I would not give any spiritual discourses or explanations, so what I just conveyed to you was against My statement. So I order Gustadji

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to slap Me on both cheeks." Gustadji obeyed Baba literally. Some felt shocked, some were startled, but Baba gestured, "Now I feel all right." At this point He ordered everyone to leave for supper.

When they returned from their meal, tea was served, and everyone was informed of Baba's instruction to stay awake the whole night. "No sleep!" When everyone had gathered again back in Baba's room, He asked that the singing be continued. Shortly before 10:00 P.M. a message came from Gadge that Baba should come to the *dharamshala* on His way to visit the great gathering of pilgrims assembled on the sands of the Chandrabhaga.

When the car reached the *dharamshala*, Gadge Maharaj got in and, in a very reverential manner, sat next to Baba. By the time Baba reached the banks of the river, over fifty thousand pilgrims were listening to the *kirtan* and eagerly awaiting His arrival. On that moonlit night of Ekadashi, Gadge led Baba to the improvised platform, and a profound silence prevailed over the multitude. Standing hand in hand with Baba, Gadge addressed the crowd over the microphone: "You have no idea how fortunate you are at this moment to be in the physical presence of the Jagat Guru. Meher Baba is the living Vithoba. ... Also you cannot imagine how happy I am to have Meher Baba near me!"

Baba raised His two hands and joined His palms in *namaskar*, saluting His own Self in the thousands who were seated before Him. This was a unique darshan in the sense that Baba looked at the people and they gazed at Him in silence. No one from the crowd was allowed to come close for Baba's touch. Two of Baba's disciples gave a brief talk on the life and work of Avatar Meher Baba. Then two of Gadge's disciples performed *kirtan*. After midnight, Gadge led Baba carefully through the crowd to His car. At Baba's invitation he got in with Him. To quote from Eruch's account of what happened:

As the car moved on towards the *dharamshala*, Gadge Maharaj joined his hands and, turning to Baba, said that he was too old now to do any more work; if Baba would

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keep him with Him, he would not be a burden to Him, and a piece of bread and a garment would be all he would require. On hearing this Baba felt touched and amused. He smiled lovingly and embraced Gadge Maharaj warmly. Later Baba told the *mandali* that the real meaning of Gadge Maharaj's words could not be understood by any other than Baba. He said that Gadge Maharaj was indeed a perfect saint in the real sense of the word.<sup>6</sup>

Gadge got out of the car at the big door of the *dharamshala*, and Sarosh drove Baba to the Hostel. Reaching there, Baba again asked everyone to have a cup of tea; He took just a sip. As wished by Him, the whole group soon reassembled in the large room. Baba was in a very informal, relaxed mood. On such occasions His radiance seemed to burst out of Him. Everyone present felt very close to Him. He conveyed, "I like Gadge Maharaj, I am very happy today!" Baba also mentioned casually that Gadge would soon drop His body and come to Him to enjoy eternal bliss, and, in fact, he died in 1956.

It was about 2:00 A.M., and the group, under Baba's instruction, was staying awake for the entire night. Baba was pleased to relate something about His own experience following His contact with Hazrat Babajan. Through His gestures Baba reminisced that after the first embrace from Babajan something like an electric current passed through His body from head to foot. He experienced thrills of indescribable bliss for a period of nine months. Then one day Babajan looked deep into His eyes and kissed Him on the forehead between the two eyebrows. This awakened Baba to His "Ancient One State" of being infinitely conscious of Himself as God. Nothing else existed for Him.

However, for His work as the Avatar of the Age, He had to regain His normal human consciousness — for God to function as the God-Man. This precipitated another period of nine months when he endured excruciating infinite agonies — the beginning of the process of "coming down." From this time, He began to hit His head hard on the stone floor of His room, causing blood to flow, but nevertheless bringing Him some

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

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relief. This painful process of coming down continued for nearly seven years until Upasni Maharaj established Him in full normal consciousness.

During this period, Baba once witnessed many universes coming out of Him, universes within universes. He had many astounding experiences of this kind. In conclusion, Baba related, "Well, after the 7th of October, I was not supposed to say anything about the spiritual states, but I have conveyed this." And with a smile He gestured, "Take it as 'Baba's soliloquy,' and that I did not tell you anything."

Baba was still in a mood for communication, and He continued, "For every individual there is no other way but to come to Me. Once you realize God, you experience Him as Eternal Existence; there, time does not exist. Until that moment you feel bound. My one look of grace is enough to free you from all such bindings. But I have that 'bad habit' of casting that glance very rarely! Once you experience Self-realization [God-realization], it is perennial: first *anand* [bliss] and then follows *dnyan* [knowledge] and power. *Anand*, *dnyan*, and power [three-in-one] are within everyone."

Baba now changed the subject and told the gathering that whatever He had to say to His followers and to the world had been stated by Him in the Final Declaration. He asked some of those present whether they believed in what He had declared. Some told Him frankly that it was difficult for them to accept the message literally. Concerning the destruction, some alluded to such visible signs as floods and earthquakes that were mentioned in the newspapers. Baba remarked, both cryptically and casually, "It will be different in nature and kind." He also cautioned His followers to tell others only what they themselves honestly felt.

Throughout the night Baba seemed to be in a lively mood. In the early hours of the morning He asked Rustom Kaka, Madhusudan, and Dattu to sing *bhajans*, and soon the room began to reverberate with the rapturous melodies of devotional songs. Adi sang some *ghazals*, accompanying himself on the harmonium. In one of these the poet warns the lover: "O Lover, before Union with the Beloved, one has to swim

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through seas of fire. Beware!"

At about five in the morning Baba ordered a break so that people could wash and use the toilet. Baba Himself, however, did not leave the room, and Eruch began to carefully comb His hair. This done, the hair was braided into a plait. Eruch then assisted Baba in washing His face. During part of this recess I was standing near the door so that I could observe this scene and Baba's graceful movements. To me, Baba looked resplendent. The brilliance of His forehead had always been the focal point of my attention. His eyes sparkled, and whenever He closed them, it was as though He had withdrawn Himself from the world. Baba smoothed back His combed hair with His palms and seemed satisfied with His appearance. The uplifting feeling of bliss in Baba's physical presence, and the peace that permeated His surroundings, cannot be adequately described. Whenever the Avatar puts on the cloak of the physical body, His beauty is the reflection of the Divine Beauty of which He is the source.

Tea was served at six o'clock. Everyone felt refreshed, and we were ready for the morning program. At about seven o'clock, Baba put on a pink jacket over His white *sadra* and left in the car with Sarosh. Gadge joined Him on the station road and led the car to the Harijan *dharamshala* (a place where free residence was offered to the so-called "low caste" people). The saints of Maharashtra have been exhorting the masses to eradicate the caste system since the sixteenth century, and Gadge continued in this tradition. Gadge taught that all are equal in the eyes of God. Because of his special love for the Harijans, he showed great concern for their comfort during their pilgrimage to Pandharpur.

Upon reaching the *dharamshala*, Baba sat down on the open ground in a central area. As He leaned back against a low parapet, someone placed an ocher-colored flag (of the type that is carried by devotees of Vithoba on pilgrimage) next to Baba so that its staff rested on His shoulder. Baba looked like the perfect *warkari* (devotee of Vithoba) and Vithoba Himself in one. Baba gave Gadge a look, showing that he was happy to have been brought there. Because time was short, Gadge

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requested the pilgrims to greet Baba collectively from a distance. Baba blessed them all by folding His hands.

On the way to the leper colony, Baba got out of the car and stood for a while watching the hundreds of people bathing in the Chandrabhaga (also called Bhima). Unbeknownst to them, they were thus sanctified and bathed by the blessed *nazar* of the Avatar. As the cars reached the leper colony, it was noticed that the place was practically deserted. The lepers had gone out to the various parts of the city to collect alms from the pilgrims. However, one leper who was very ill and had been unable to move about became the luckiest of them all, for he was bathed that day by the Avatar. After bathing him, Baba dried his body and offered him new clothes. Baba loved serving lepers, and this was one of the conditions He had made for agreeing to visit Pandharpur. On that day, one "beautiful bird" in an "ugly cage" got new wings to soar high in his journey to God.

This concluded Baba's program. However, on His way back to Satara He agreed to visit the two *ashrams* of Gadge's disciples. In the car, Baba told Gadge that soon He intended to give His real darshan to the world, but that the saint should not try to see Baba again. A group of Baba's followers was waiting for Him at the hostel on the station road. Baba gave a farewell pat to each of them and lovingly gestured, "Keep happy; I am with you." Then, responding to His signal, the car sped off to Satara.

I reached my hometown by noon. Almost four decades have now flown by since that time. But the charm of Baba's movements and expressions, which He allowed me to behold on the morning of November 7, as Eruch was attending Him, blossoms in my memory whenever I think of them. These glimpses of the "Living Vithoba" are Baba's unfading Pandharpur gifts to me.

**CLARIFICATION AND CONFIRMATION**  
**1954 ~ PART XX**  
**1955 ~ PART I**

*Declaration Clarified*

Meher Baba reached Satara by the evening of November 7. The next morning He visited Rosewood, the residence of the men *mandali*. During the general conversation, the subject of the Pandharpur visit came up. Baba greatly appreciated Gadge's love for Him. Then, moving on to another topic, He referred to His dear ones who had openly expressed their inability to understand His Declaration. Some had been shocked by the unexpected events mentioned at the end of the Declaration; others were worried that if things didn't happen precisely as Baba had outlined, people would begin to doubt His Divinity.

During the previous night at Pandharpur, Baba had conveyed, as far as I remember, "Don't worry about people criticizing Me or doubting Me or My status as the Avatar ... I experience Myself as being in everyone and everything, and beyond them too. I am what I am. So forget others; I want you to find out for yourselves where you stand in accepting Me and My Words." Baba's words bring to my mind an Urdu couplet which He used to quote sometimes in small gatherings. When freely translated it reads, "The Master says, 'My effulgence emanates from every point in creation towards My real abode. And I keenly watch for any who, overcoming complacency and self-sufficiency, dare to come close to the Fire of My being.'"

During this visit to the *mandali* on the morning of November 8, Baba used hand gestures to explain certain points mentioned in His Declaration. For the benefit of His lovers, this explanation was later circulated to them under the title "Clarification." The major part is given below:

It is really very difficult for anyone to believe and

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understand what I say, because none can grasp the meaning underlying My words. It is natural even for My intimate *mandali* not to understand My Final Declaration; but I want you to take everything that I said in Meherabad during the meetings very seriously, because all that I said was the Truth, they were the words of God, and all the things said must come to pass exactly in the manner described by Me. From the day I declared in Meherabad that there will be the destruction of three-fourths of the world, that a strange disease will attack My body, that I will suffer humiliation, that I will break My silence and speak one word, the Word of words, that there will be My Glorification, and that finally I will drop My body when I shall be stabbed in the back, My lovers and others have been unnecessarily confused, and they all have been trying to interpret My words in different ways.

Everyone is free to interpret My words in any way they think and feel. But one thing I tell you, that whenever I say a thing, I naturally use My own language, and whatsoever is said by Me is Truth. But My language is such that none can understand or grasp the underlying meaning of what I say; therefore, when I want to say a thing, I have simultaneously to make use of your language also, knowing well that you would understand nothing whatsoever if I were to make use of My language alone.

In order to help you to understand My Final Declaration, and to put an end to your confusion and worry, I want all of you to know that when you saw Me dictate on My alphabet board during the meetings at Meherabad, and heard about:

- 1) A strange disease attacking My body: It was said in your language.
- 2) The humiliation that I will suffer: It was said in your language.
- 3) The breaking of My silence and My uttering the one Word of words: It was said in My own language and simultaneously in yours, because when I utter that

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Word it will be an audible word to you.

- 4) My Glorification: It was said simultaneously in My language and yours.
- 5) The destruction of three-fourths of the world: It was said in My own language alone.
- 6) The stab in My back: It was said in My own language alone.
- 7) The dropping of My body: It was said in My own language and simultaneously in yours.

Consequently, whatever is said by Me in your language, you are able to understand and know what is said, but that which is said in My own language is impossible for you to understand, however much you all may try to interpret and grasp the underlying meaning behind the words. Only the fulfillment of events can unfold to you, in due course, the meaning of what is said in My own language . . .<sup>1</sup>

In the above Clarification, points 5 and 6 pertain to the destruction of three-fourths of the world and the stab in the back. Herein, it should be carefully noted that Baba has stated clearly that these points were conveyed in His language alone — the language of the Universal Mind. Hence, there is no possibility of the limited intellect comprehending their import, and so it is of no use trying to speculate about their significance.

Points 3, 4, and 7 — the breaking of Baba's silence, the glorification, and the dropping of His body — were stated simultaneously in Baba's language and in ours. Therefore, everyone is free to have his or her own interpretation of them. Such interpretations, however, will only have personal value and will be practically negligible compared with the real meaning, which only the Avatar knows.

Points 1 and 2, concerning the strange disease and the Avatar's humiliation, are expressed in our language, meaning, presumably, that they are understandable in ordinary terms, but in a variety of ways. Those who know of Baba's extraordinary physical suffering, especially in the last days, know that

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<sup>1</sup> *Life Circular*, No. 22, November 20, 1954.

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it was indeed a strange, undiagnosed disease from which He suffered. And Baba once conveyed to those near Him that while they should try to do their best to alleviate His condition, He alone knew the true cause of the disease — it was due to His universal suffering, which was to release the tide of His grace. Did not Jesus drink the cup of suffering and say, "Now is the Son of man glorified"?

Humiliation is the tax that Infinite Consciousness pays for assuming a finite human form. The Avatar, in spite of living amongst mankind as Man and showering His unconditional love and compassion on humanity, is never accepted the way He should be. That is His humiliation. Scholars sit in judgment over statements made by Him in Divine Honesty, and people, judging Him by their limited motives, criticize and scoff at Him. Yet, in His compassion for one and all, He uses even these strong reactions as one of His ways of drawing people to Him in His own time.

For me, "language" was not the real issue in understanding Baba's statements. After all, what is language but the verbal communication of nonverbal thoughts and feelings? There is always a great deal that language is incapable of communicating. This is infinitely true about communication between the God-Man and His lovers. To use a simile, we may know a great deal about an illustrious scientist as a man from his likes and dislikes, and understand him as a human personality. But when he begins to explain his abstract theories based on his research, it may all go over our heads. How infinitely more true this must be about the life of the God-Man.

Here I am reminded of one of Baba's favorite couplets of Hafiz, wherein he says:

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.

Trying to understand the words of the God-Man through mind alone is like trying to look through the wrong end of the telescope. With reference to some simple-hearted

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lovers of Jesus, a great Christian mystic once said, "They may not understand His words, but they understand Him as their Savior."

The followers of Meher Baba who had experienced His selfless, unfettered love in their hearts, after listening to His Declaration had to face honestly the challenge of renewing more deeply their conviction in Him as the Avatar.

### *A Film Project and a Qawwali Program*

Meher Baba continued His stay in Satara for the entire month of November. Although outwardly Baba's stay was relatively uneventful, Baba was, as always, directing and guiding much activity elsewhere. One example of this was the work Adi K. Irani was doing in Ahmednagar at Baba's behest to assist Bal Dhawale in completing a film on Baba.

The first film footage of Baba was shot in 1932 in London for a newsreel by Paramount. Later, in 1937, an Indian newsreel was made of Baba's forty-third birthday celebration in Nasik. Aside from one brief film taken in 1948, any films shot of Baba in the '40s do not seem to have survived. The '50s, however, ushered in a sudden abundance of films. Several were shot of Baba during His long stay at Dehra Dun in 1953. Gabriel Pascal had intended to film Baba's birthday celebration in February 1954 during Baba's Andhra tour. Pascal's ill health made him cancel this trip at the last minute. Pascal next scheduled a visit to India for August of '54 but again he could not come. In September, however, Baba gave permission for an Indian film crew, possibly headed by Bal Dhawale, to shoot scenes of three special gatherings — the mass darshan in Wadia Park on September 12, the little darshan in Khushroo Quarters on September 26, and the Meherabad Meeting on the 29th. Lud Dimpfl, one of His dear ones from the West who had come for the "three incredible weeks," brought a movie camera with him and also took considerable footage.

In early October, Baba agreed to see Bal Dhawale to discuss the completion of the film on Baba. Baba wanted Bal not only

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to include the footage recently taken, but to go to Sakori and film there as well as various places in Meherabad and Meherazad associated with Baba. On October 8, Dr. Nilu, who was good friends with Bal, wrote to Adi to inform him that Bal was coming to see Baba on the 11th. Nilu conveyed, "Baba wants you to discuss with Bal all possible points in connection with the making and producing of a film ... on Baba." Nilu went on to add that Baba had also conveyed to him that people who had never seen Baba before in person would be helped spiritually if they saw Baba in a film. As gathered by him from Baba's gestures, "It will help them in the process of liberating themselves from the bondage of Maya."

Adi had spent much of October working out the details for Baba's visit to Pandharpur. Now, in November, in addition to his usual heavy schedule of correspondence, he and Padri worked to assist Bal in filming Meherabad and Meherazad. In late November, Adi even went to a screening of some of the footage at the Sarosh Cinema in Ahmednagar. What has happened to that footage in the intervening years I personally do not know.

With Baba's encouragement, the work on the film continued over the next several months. However, for all the interest Baba took, it seems no finished product was ever produced. This is true of the film projects Baba initiated or encouraged back in the '30s as well. It seems Baba was more concerned with the inner work He was doing through this involvement with film than with having a specific film produced. Possibly this inner work was to help make film a concealed channel to reach the hearts of His lovers.

Baba's assurance that seeing His Avataric form in films would help people spiritually has been borne out by the experience of some who came to Him after He had put aside His physical form. Although it is a digression, I cannot forbear relating a few such incidents, as they seem to verify what Baba had Nilu write back in 1954.

One person in the United States had heard of Meher Baba and been invited to attend a Baba gathering. Somewhat reluctantly he did so, but he was put off by the other people there

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and decided to leave. Each time he got up to go, however, something would happen which would result in his staying a little longer. As he recounts:

Finally they showed a film of Meher Baba's visit to Andhra in February 1954. And that's when I started to become interested in Baba, because I saw Him walking and thousands of people following Him around. I said to myself, "This Meher Baba must be a very, very special person for these people to follow Him around like that. It's almost as if He's the Christ." And with that thought I started really paying attention to the film.

Baba was sitting in a chair giving darshan when suddenly His face came out of the film and looked at me. He showered me with a big ray of love ... Internally I exclaimed, "That's God!" I knew that instantly. I knew that Baba was God the very second He gave me that glance.

In a slightly more humorous vein, a young woman who is currently living at Meherabad once told me that she was watching, for the first time, a film taken of Baba at Meherabad and, as she did so, the thought came to her, "Baba, did you know that one day I would be staying here?" As soon as this thought occurred to her, Baba, at that very moment, in the film, stepped back and looked inside the room where she now stays and then turned to the camera and smiled. Baba had responded to her unspoken thought as clearly as if He had physically been there.

Lastly, and most recently, in 1991 a film of Baba was shown in Argentina. The person who showed the film wrote, " ... people were so moved by the images, because no one understood English, but it didn't matter. Baba spoke personally to each one in their hearts. The room was silent, you could hear an ant walk. I must ask your forgiveness for my English. I'm not a good writer."

As November '54 drew to a close, I was blessed with an opportunity to visit Baba at Satara. This was just prior to forty days of special work in seclusion which Baba intended to begin

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from December 1. After returning to my hometown from Pandharpur on November 7, I had written an account of Baba's visit and mailed it to Him. Perhaps it was something in connection with this, or something else that I don't remember, which provided the excuse for my being called. I lost no time in going. While I was there I learned of the account Eruch had prepared of Baba's visit to Pandharpur which later appeared in *The Awakener*.<sup>2</sup>

During my brief stay at Rosewood, Baba arranged for an all-night *qawwali* program. A *qawwal*, Raganath Jadhav, was brought all the way from Bombay (paid for by one of Baba's devotees, as Baba said, "I have no money for this entertainment"). Baba instructed Adi to see that a special *biryani* dish to feed eighteen people was prepared in Nagar and brought along with plates and mugs which he was to rent. Perhaps Baba was giving the *mandali* a special treat because He knew that for the forty days following the program, they would be subsisting on only one plain meal a day. It also gave those who prepared the food the blessed opportunity to indirectly serve the God-Man and His close disciples.

Adi was asked to bring Padri, Sidhu, Adi Jr., and a few others whom Baba had specifically named, but Adi was warned that if he brought anyone else he would have to face severe suffering in the form of incurable fissures! Such dire warnings from Baba about the consequences of not following His orders to the letter were reminders of the importance of obeying Him literally.

Sam Kerawala and Merwan Jessawala also came from Poona to attend this program. It was to be held at Grafton, where Baba spent the nights. This was my first (and, as it turned out, my only) visit to Grafton. It was a memorable experience. I was drowned in a rare delight as Baba entered the hall, and my attention was immediately captivated by His majestic presence.

Baba had had tea prepared and was going to serve it Himself to all those who were present. Somehow Baba quickly found out that a few of the resident *mandali* had already been served tea by Aloba in Rosewood. Baba became annoyed and

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<sup>2</sup> *The Awakener*, Vol. II, No. 4 (Spring 1955), pp. 58-59.

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said this was a breach of His orders and that now the whole program should be canceled and all should go home. Eruch, as he often did, stepped forward and tried to speak up for Aloba. I don't recall exactly what "arguments" he used, but eventually Baba relented and forgave Aloba and agreed to hold the program after all.

Baba then gave us all tea and a pill to help us keep awake and then the program began. Somehow one couplet has stayed with me to this day as a kind of souvenir of that night. Baba stopped the *qawwal* after he had sung it and asked him to repeat the lines again slowly. They were in Urdu, and translated loosely they mean:

Whenever I find myself totally hemmed in by the circle of  
my worldly circumstances,

I am compelled to turn inward to find the real Center of life  
within me.

Thus, a crisis in one's life can become a blessing if it brings a fundamental change in one's outlook.

One cannot adequately express the atmosphere of loving intimacy that surrounded Baba on such occasions. About this night, Adi, on his return to Ahmednagar, wrote a letter to Francis Brabazon in Australia, a part of which is given below:

Baba gave up using alphabet board from 7 October. He gave up the use of fingers to express thoughts from 1st December. Before doing the latter, he called a few of the *mandali* at Satara on 30 Nov., and with those who stay with him kept us awake the whole night. By the courtesy of a ... devotee from Bombay, a Qawwali singer ... was sent to Satara. He gave us whole night lovely singing on Sufistic and Vedantic thoughts and about Masters and kept the *mandali* deeply interested and pleasantly awake. Baba was also very pleased with his songs.

Twice during the night Baba ordered breaks in the singing, perhaps to give the singer a chance to refresh himself and ease his throat. By four o'clock in the morning, the program was over. Before that Baba had announced to all that no one should

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come to Him for an embrace or to say goodbye when it was time to depart.

Sam Kerawala was scheduled to leave soon to take up his duties as a radio officer aboard ship. He felt especially deprived of Baba's last embrace, as he knew he would be at sea for many months to come. On returning to Poona the next day, he was surprised and overjoyed to see that there was a letter from Baba telling him that he shouldn't worry, that he should feel that he had already received Baba's parting embrace long before and he should carry it with him wherever he sailed. So it is that Baba outwardly seems to withdraw from His lovers, only to reassure them that inwardly He is in constant contact with them.

### *Real Love Implies Obeying the Beloved*

While at Rosewood, I copied out a list of instructions to be followed by the *mandali* during Baba's forty days of seclusion which were to start December 1. Baba had given these directions to Eruch and Eruch then had me write out a copy for Adi. The orders Baba gave were to be strictly observed during His seclusion period from December 1 to January 9.

Baba detailed specific hours for the various members of the *mandali* to take part in a round-the-clock repetition of God's name — *jap*. In addition to this, each of the *mandali* was also given certain duties, though sometimes of a general nature. Thus Aloba was deputed as general manager for the household in Rosewood and was also to see to the needs of Grafton. Further, he was to escort Baba whenever He walked from the one compound to the other. Bhau was to see to the laundry and the cleaning of bicycles and to attend to Dr. Donkin's outdoor work. Savak Kotwal was to be on night watch with Baba from seven in the evening until two o'clock in the morning. Then Krishna Nair was to take over until 5 A.M. Along with such duties, all the *mandali* were required to wash their own clothes, clean their rooms, and wash their own dining utensils.

Simultaneously, Baba outlined a very strict diet for all.

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There was to be only one meal each day, at 4 P.M. This meal was to consist of rice and *dhal*, or rice and *dhansak* (made with potatoes, squash, and eggplant). Tomatoes could also be used in the *dhansak* but could not be served separately. Pickle was permitted with the meal, but it, and the potatoes, could only be used as long as the current stock lasted. On the other hand, there was no restriction regarding green chillies, onions, and chutney. For breakfast there was tea and a maximum of two *chapatis*, at noon only tea with no *chapatis*. Baidul was allowed an extra cup of tea at night to help him stay awake during his long period of *jap* (from midnight until 5 A.M.), and Dr. Nilu was allowed a little extra milk. These were the only exceptions, unless Dr. Donkin, on medical grounds, were to decide to give someone extra milk. If any went out on an errand, they were even forbidden to accept tea or *paan* if offered to them by others. These orders and the schedule for the *jap* were displayed on a small board in Rosewood for the information of the residents.

I have recorded these instructions at such length to give readers an idea as to how particular Baba was about the duties for each of the *mandali* and how meticulous He was in giving instructions so that no confusion or questions would arise during the forty days He was to be in seclusion. Baba Himself followed an even stricter regimen.

Quoting a letter written from Satara by one of the women disciples after the forty-day seclusion:

Baba and a few close disciples observed an all-night vigil, listening to a Qawwali singer, on the night preceding the special phase of work which began on December 1st.

The first ten days Baba fasted on one meal a day; the next ten on liquids only; the last twenty on coffee and fruit juice (He had twice of each daily). We were particularly anxious about this last phase of fasting because darling Baba cares little for fruit in any form — He must have been fed up with it!

Although Baba has undergone severe and very long

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fasts in the old days, of late years we've noticed His body cannot stand it with the same indifference. Despite our anxiety, however, He stood the fast very well. The last few days He was looking wan and tired, but He said that was because of the intensive work He was putting in, and not the fast. The *mandali* and we were allowed to share comparatively very little — as usual Baba took on Himself by far the greater burden ... During the forty days the *mandali* observed in non-stop relays, day and night, a repetition of God's Name.

According to Baba's orders, on the ninth, fifty-six poor people were given a free meal, all the girls of the little orphanage here received new clothes, and the fifty-odd leper patients of the Leper Clinic near here were provided with a new garment each. Could we but see the inner wealth He imparts with these outward acts of compassion!

At midnight on the ninth, at the stroke of twelve, when Baba clapped, we loudly called out God's Name. Those few moments, while we stood in readiness, straining for Baba's clap, were so wonderfully tense!

On the tenth, Baba broke His fast with a light meal . . .<sup>3</sup>

Baba did not reveal the nature of the work He wanted to do while in seclusion. From comments He made later, it seemed that it was connected in some way with His Final Declaration, but this is only a guess on my part and was not a concern for the *mandali*. The daily routine for them consisted of simply responding to Baba's wishes. Although their outward duties and activities varied tremendously, depending on the phase of Baba's work, their everyday focus was the same — an ongoing process of resigning more and more to His will. And this was not easy. Although outwardly the orders given for the forty-day seclusion period may appear to have been quite simple, paradoxically it was often more difficult to obey wholeheartedly when there was little outward activity to engage in than when one was given plenty of work, or when the work posed a "spiritual challenge."

Baba's orders, while always meaningful, had, I feel, a

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 58-59.

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deeper significance when they were related to His inner spiritual work such as during this seclusion period. During such periods I take it that Baba's orders for the *mandali* acted as a kind of fine tuning of His "transmitting set" for releasing spiritual energy. They did not require the understanding of the mechanics of this fine tuning, for their only wish was to obey and please Baba. Perhaps this is why Chanji, Baba's intimate disciple and secretary, used to refer to Baba's resident disciples as His "spiritual baggage."

If Baba's orders were not followed literally, He would become upset. Although this disobedience made His work a little more difficult, Baba was more concerned with what would befall the person as the natural result of spiritual laws operating automatically in His physical presence.

Perhaps this was why Baba was so particular about His orders being obeyed properly, and why He was so quick to point out a lapse if one occurred. Yet, in His infinite compassion, invariably Baba would forgive the erring person, thus protecting him or her from harm. Nevertheless, in submission to His own law, Baba would have to suffer Himself because of that person's disobedience.

I feel this is also why Baba did not permit visitors during such seclusion periods. Baba's inner work was for the benefit of all, but individuals could be adversely affected by visiting Him without His consent during such times. Here, I recount an incident from one of Baba's seclusion periods at Satara that illustrates this point. One day, after leaving Baba at His place of seclusion, Aloba was returning to Rosewood. He was surprised to find one of Baba's lovers from Dehra Dun on the road. This was a man who had come very close to Baba during His stay in Dehra Dun the previous year. Baba took an interest in the man's family and even visited his home once. The intimacy of Baba's presence encouraged this man to take Baba as his Guide whom he could approach any time. Being so new to Baba, however, he did not properly understand that observing Baba's wishes and trying to please Him through obedience were more important than the outward expression of love.

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Thus, even though he knew Baba was in seclusion and did not want to see any of His lovers, he felt he had to see Baba anyway, as he was suddenly overcome with problems. He did not explain this to Aloba, but simply said that it was his love for Baba which had brought him there. Aloba explained that Baba was in seclusion and he should leave. The man pleaded with Aloba to somehow just let him have a glimpse of Baba, as this was what his heart cried out for. Eventually the man's earnest pleading touched a soft spot in Aloba's heart, as he could sympathize with someone whose love was so overpowering. Aloba told the man to wait at a particular spot on the road the next morning at a certain time to get a glimpse of Baba as He walked by. The man was delighted, and the next morning he was at his designated spot at the appointed time.

As Aloba and Baba came walking briskly up the road, Baba spotted the man standing some distance away and asked Aloba who he was and why he was there. Aloba quickly confessed that he had told the man he could stand there because the man's love was so great that he couldn't resist permitting him to have just a glimpse from a distance of his Beloved.

Baba told Aloba to call the man and when he came forward Baba gestured, "Did you not receive the Circular? Don't you know that I am engaged in seclusion work and do not wish to see anyone?" The man admitted that he knew this, but justified his presence by saying, "Baba, Your love has brought me here. I just wanted one glimpse of Your divine form." Baba replied, "Well, you have seen Me, now leave immediately for Dehra Dun."

The man did not go. Instead, to Aloba's astonishment, he began to pour out his problems to Baba. "Great misfortune has befallen me," he complained. "I have several court cases lodged against me; my wife has fallen very ill, and I cannot find a suitable match for my dear daughter."

As the man related one problem after another, Baba looked at Aloba in such a way that he understood that he had completely miscalculated the man's intentions. Baba was pointing this out to him. Aloba had believed the man had come just for love, but he had really come to ask for Baba's blessings to

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relieve him of his predicaments. Aloba felt embarrassed and was also chagrined because he knew that this would disturb Baba in His inner spiritual work.

When the man had finished pouring out his heart, Baba assured him, "Don't worry about your problems and difficulties. What has a beginning also has an end. I am with you. You have My love and that is the most important thing. Now take My love and return." This did not satisfy the man, who went on, "Baba, please bless me so that I shall be relieved of all my difficulties."

"Better than My blessings is to face your difficulties with My love."

"No, Baba, please, I want your blessings."

"If you insist on My blessings now, you will forget Me; you will end up losing Me," Baba warned him. "How is that possible?" the man argued. "How can I forget my Baba who is so dear to me? I will never forget you, but I need your blessings."

Baba continued to try to persuade the man simply to return with His love. When the man could not be convinced, Baba became very serious, and right there on the road He bowed down and put His forehead on the man's feet, pleading with him not to ask for His blessings during this phase of seclusion. It is really astonishing to see to what lengths the Avatar will go to try to preserve His love connection once it is consciously established with His lovers. What striking humility, what humbling compassion He has for any of His wayward lovers.

Despite Baba's bowing down to his feet, the man remained adamant and insisted that Baba bless him. Finally Baba gestured, "All right. I give you My blessings," and He moved on.

The man was delighted with what he thought was his good fortune and returned to Dehra Dun in a completely different frame of mind. And, sure enough, soon his whole situation began to change. One court case after another was settled in his favor, his wife recovered her health, his daughter was happily married, and he himself started a business and became very prosperous. Yet, simultaneously, he began to "lose" Baba. That loving remembrance began to wane and, as time passed, he seemed to slowly fall out of Baba's orbit, never

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again coming to see Him, even once. He got what he wanted, but he lost what the Avatar wanted to give him — the real treasure of His precious remembrance.

In retrospect, perhaps this is why during His earlier stay in Dehra Dun, Baba had given this person a Hindi nickname which means "a loser." In this lifetime the man had indeed lost. Yet even a moment's contact with the Avatar never goes in vain, and because of this experience, who knows how much stronger this man's resolve to obey the Avatar will be in his next life?

### *Declaration Confirmed*

Baba's forty days of seclusion ended on January 10, 1955. Earlier in September, Baba had declared that He would stop using the alphabet board after October 7 and thereafter no more correspondence would be allowed with Him. Baba also had Bhau, one of the resident *mandali*, write a letter in Hindi to His lovers in Hamirpur in which He explained that it was now time for being bound to Him in the chain of internal connections. He also added that His lovers should not let their hearts be torn asunder by His Declaration that He would drop His body, but on the contrary, they should accept this cheerfully as His divine will.

Despite this assurance, Baba's lovers continued to be upset by the idea of His dropping His body. Lud Dimpfl, one of the Westerners who had attended Baba's Declaration Meeting, on his return to the States, broke down and wept while trying to give an account of what had transpired at the Meherabad Meeting.

Similarly, many in India were deeply affected by Baba's statements, and despite the ban on correspondence, they wrote to Adi for guidance. On emerging from His seclusion, Adi apprised Baba of the gist of the letters. In one of them, Keshav Nigam, Baba's stalwart from the Hamirpur area, mentioned the turmoil in many hearts caused by confusion concerning Baba's statements made in the Final Declaration, despite His

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ensuing Clarification. He also requested Baba to send one of the *mandali* there to lay the cornerstone of a temple which they wanted to build in Nauranga on February 5 to commemorate Baba's visit to that spot exactly one year earlier. In His compassion, Baba asked Bhau to go to Hamirpur as His representative. It was arranged that Bhau would go not only to Nauranga to lay the cornerstone, but would leave two weeks earlier, on January 17, to visit different towns throughout the Hamirpur district. Bhau agreed but humbly expressed his inability to comfort the despairing hearts of those lovers. He also felt he wasn't competent to answer any questions people would naturally put to him concerning Baba's Declaration.

Baba told him not to worry and gave him a "message" for His lovers. But it turned out to be only five words long: *Sat-Chit-Anand, Paramanand, Meher Baba, Vidyanand.*" As requested by His lovers, Baba also arranged for Bhau to take a pair of His sandals with him for the temple at Nauranga. (This temple, incidentally, was originally called Meher Mandir and was later renamed Meher Dham, meaning Meher's Abode.)

Bhau left for Hamirpur on the 17th as planned. Besides feeling inadequate to speak about Baba's Declaration, he wondered how Baba's very brief "message" would assuage people's questioning minds. On arriving at Ichhaura, Bhau shared Baba's words with R. S. Singh Baghel, a local Baba lover, who was inspired to put the words to music in the form of a chant. At the first public meeting, this message was then sung by a few Baba lovers and was quickly taken up by the whole crowd. The rhythmic repetition of this Avataric "mantra" kindled Baba's presence and surcharged the atmosphere with His love. (I feel I should add that ever since January 31, 1969, when Baba put aside His physical form, these words have been sung by His chief women disciples whenever they visit His Tomb-Shrine at Meherabad. Even the repetition of this Baba-mantra, releasing the divine energy, continues to inspire the hearts of those present on such occasions.)

Contrary to his earlier apprehensions, Bhau's tour went off very well. On February 5, at Nauranga, he laid the cornerstone

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of Meher Dham and, three days later, he left for Satara.

After Bhau's departure for Hamirpur on January 17, Baba wished to visit Khuldabad with a few of His *mandali*. Baidul was sent in advance with the luggage to prepare things. Chhagan, who was staying in Ahmednagar, was asked to join the party, specially so he could cook for Baba and the party. Kumar, at Dehra Dun, was informed that he could come, but only if he could bring Nilkanthwala, one of Baba's favorite *masts*, from Rishikesh. As it turned out, despite his best efforts, Kumar was not able to persuade the *mast* to come and so Kumar missed the opportunity to be with his beloved Baba at this time.

On January 20, Eruch drove Baba, Pendu, and Gustadji to Khuldabad, which is about eighty miles west of Ahmednagar. Khuldabad is near the famous caves at Ellora, but it is not a big town. According to the Hindus, in the hoary past, it had been a center where great *rishis* (sages) had stayed. Muslims believe that a few centuries earlier many *walis* (friends of God) had descended there in heavenly palanquins. Whatever the legend, it is undoubtedly true that over the centuries some saints and even a few Perfect Masters had been there, and there are to this day a great number of tombs scattered around the village. Among these, the most famous is the *dargah* of Zarzarizarbaksh (Giver of the Wealth of wealths), who was a Perfect Master in the thirteenth century. In his honor, each year a large fair is held. Not too far from this *dargah* there is a mosque. Underneath the mosque is a room where Baba and the *mandali* would stay during their visits.

On this occasion, after a stay of five days, Baba announced that His inner work, whatever it had been, was complete and so, on the 25th, He decided to return to Satara. On the way, the car stopped briefly at a gas station in Ahmednagar. Here, Adi was permitted to see Baba for a few minutes. Baba asked Adi about the film project he was working on. Adi reported the latest developments, including his visit to Sakori on January 3, to get some film footage of Upasni Nagar. In the course of this conversation, Baba told Adi to ask Padri, who was staying

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at Meherabad, to try to trace the whereabouts of the film taken of Baba's birthday in Nasik, in 1937. In conclusion, Baba instructed Adi to take good care of Gulmai — His spiritual mother — and to visit Satara by the end of the month to discuss some other important matters.

On returning to Satara, perhaps because Kumar had been unable to bring Nilkanthwala Mast to Khuldabad, Baba had a *mast* brought from Kolhapur. In a letter to the West, Mani, Baba's sister, gives a very beautiful description of this *mast*:

After Baba's return from Khuldabad, where He stayed less than a week, a *mast* was brought over from Kolhapur for a day or two and Baba was in a very happy mood, as He always is when working with a good *mast*. He told us how the *mast* was very advanced, quite oblivious of his body, which was healthy and sweet-smelling in spite of the fact that he hadn't had a bath for years! Baba said it was the *masts'* all-consuming love for God which sustained them ...

This *mast* lives in Kolhapur, is tallish, and his habitual place is a little stone alcove, in which he curls up uncomfortably, for he scarcely fits in. In the hot summer months the stone gets too hot to touch, but he lies in there oblivious to the discomfort and feels happy. As is characteristic of many *masts*, he has a bundle which he always keeps with him and in which he puts anything and everything that is given him.

The first time, Baba contacted him in his native place, sending one of the *mandali* to call him out of his niche, but the *mast* wouldn't budge. Then Baidul, the *mandali* concerned, had a brainstorm; he went there and brought the bundle out, walking swiftly towards Baba. The *mast* came out at once and followed after the bundle. Now since that first contact he is always very happy and willing to come to Baba.

One of the important matters Baba wanted Adi to look after was the issuing of Life Circular 23. During January, Eruch would send Adi bits of explanations given by Baba about His Final Declaration. These were compiled, printed, and ready for mailing by February 3, 1955. The major part of this circular,

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which was entitled "Confirmation," is given below:

Baba desires all concerned to know that:

Each and all things as intimated, declared, and clarified by Me are all fixed and ordained facts, and God will see that everything happens and is done as foreordained by Him.

All this that is destined to take place is unavoidable, yet the resultant effects can be modified in two different ways according to relative circumstances. The modification of the effects of a destined plan can on the one hand either affect the intensity, scope, shape, or size of the chain of events, or on the other hand bring about a considerable change in the factor of time.

In either case the effects can be modified as much in relation to Me and those closely connected with Me, as to the world at large. For example, the world can absorb fully a simultaneous spiritual and material shock, either by a modification in the quality and quantity of events or by a considerable change in the time factor.

If the time limit (April 1955 as mentioned at the Meherabad Meeting) remains unchanged, then in order to enable the world to fully absorb the shock of shocks, the chain of events may be modified both in degree and in kind. But if the time limit is changed considerably, the events will take place without any modification whatsoever. In the latter case the most important and significant point is that definitely and emphatically the link between My physical body and all My external activities as carried on up to now, will be dropped by April 1955, and there will take place an immeasurable change in the external relations between Me and those who are closely connected with Me. So that if I do not drop My physical body, I will yet, so to say, "die," for I will then become actually dead to the world up to the end of the modified period of time.

During the indefinite period of the modified time, I will completely stop one and all of My external activities as carried out and carried on by Me in the course of My different

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phases of My physical life so far, including the present life of retirement amongst those who live with Me permanently.

- 1) I will then, throughout this modified period of time, live a life of complete physical detachment from everything and everybody except a few as will be absolutely necessary for My requirements of nature in the barest sense of living the life of a man alive.
- 2) I wish all My lovers to observe a fast and remain only on water (which can be taken any number of times during the fast) for twenty-four hours, from 8 P.M. on Saturday, February 12, to 8 P.M. on Sunday, February 13; and to devote all available time during the 24 hours, in praying to God in the way each likes best to pray to Him.
- 3) Honesty is the keynote to Divinity. He who can love God honestly can lose himself in God and find himself as God.<sup>4</sup>

I personally feel that this Confirmation was given more in Baba's language than ours. I could only follow the last two points: that I had to observe a fast for twenty-four hours and that I should wholeheartedly try to be honest — with myself, with others, and with God residing in the hearts of all.

On my own, I totally lack the depth to understand the meaning of Baba's Humiliation, Glorification, the dropping of His body, and the consequent breaking of His Silence as mentioned in the Declaration. So sometimes I ask myself, "What is more important, more significant: the Declaration or the One Who declared, the Confirmation or the One Who confirmed?" And readily my heart responds, "Of course, the One Who declares, the One Who confirms." And this One is Avatar Meher Baba — the active, functioning Infinite Consciousness that has assumed a human form. Out of His infinite compassion, He makes use of His form to take us beyond words. As an ordinary person, in my case it was natural that some of His statements confused me — even confounded me deeply. But the gift of conviction that He is the Word made flesh and blood

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<sup>4</sup> *Life Circular*, No. 23, February 3, 1955.

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amongst humanity uplifts me out of the intriguing and fascinating interpretations of others. The feeling that "Baba loves me" gives me real strength of heart. Simultaneously, I feel deeply within me that whenever my longing is sincere and the spiritual need urgent, Baba will disclose in "my limited language" the secret behind His words and that shall quicken my journey to Him.

## DECISION: THE DIE IS CAST 1955 ~ PART II

### *Birthday Celebrations and a "Vacation"*

Meher Baba stayed in Satara for the remainder of February in semi-seclusion. No one was supposed to visit Him. He had severed all outward contact with His lovers, as He had intimated He would do during the Meeting on September 30. He was, at this time, leading a "retired" life. However, this did not prevent His lovers from celebrating His birthday on a grand scale on February 25.

Twice during the previous two years, Baba had traveled through the district of Hamirpur (U.P.) and the state of Andhra Pradesh. Both of these areas were still ringing with Baba's loving remembrance. Celebrations were held in many cities all through Uttar Pradesh and Andhra, and also throughout the rest of India in cities such as Delhi, Bombay Calcutta, Madras, Bilaspur, Nasik, Sholapur, and others. Naturally, these celebrations varied from place to place, but many of them were marked by similar features. On this auspicious day, the Baba lovers woke up early in the morning and paraded through the streets of their cities or villages, chanting Meher Baba's sacred name. Then there were programs which included talks on Baba's life and messages, and the singing of *bhajans*. In many places, free meals were served to the poor and the sick, and literature and colored photographs of Baba were distributed to the public on request. These celebrations also gave the Baba lovers an occasion to come together and relive their times with Baba and to glorify His life of compassion and love.

Meanwhile, in Satara, Baba's birthday was celebrated with simple festivity by the women *mandali* on February 11, which was the date of Baba's birthday according to the Zoroastrian calendar. Everyone got up early in the morning, and, exactly at five o'clock, called out "Avatar Meher Baba Ki Jai!" Seven

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firecrackers were set off, and then "Happy Birthday" was played on the gramophone. Baba was wearing a new pink coat and a green and gold turban that Mehera had made for Him. The women *mandali* had decorated the house with flowers and had drawn colorful *rangooli* (chalk designs) on the floor. Mani prepared a delicious cake, and Naja cooked *rava*, a favorite sweet dish. That evening an amusing performance was presented. Everyone had a wonderful time, especially since Baba seemed to relax a bit from the strain of His work; this gave them a chance to express their love for Him in this wholehearted and natural way.

At the end of February, Adi went to Poona to see Bal Dhawale about the film work. The following day he and Sarosh visited Baba in Satara. Baba was interested to hear about what they had been doing. But in the course of the conversation, on a seemingly minor point, Baba expressed annoyance with the way Sarosh was handling certain work. Sarosh made no attempt to explain that some of the information previously conveyed to Baba was incorrect. Nor did he try to justify himself. He simply sat there and absorbed Baba's remarks. This attitude of submission pleased Baba, and the other *mandali* could see Baba's appreciation. A little later, however, Sarosh suddenly broke down, unable to bear the thought that he had displeased Baba.

Those who knew Sarosh were surprised to witness this scene, as he was a very strong and commanding figure. Physically imposing because of his great height, he stood out in any crowd. His fearless dedication to Baba's cause was most striking, and in carrying out Baba's work, he was lion-hearted, never hesitating to take risks in his sincere determination to please Baba. Yet now the thought of having inadvertently caused Baba a few moments of unhappiness made him weep like a child.

Baba's physical presence was so overwhelming and intense that thoughts and feelings lying deep in an individual's consciousness would sometimes be brought to the surface. Though this was a painful process for the *mandali*, it also gave them an opportunity to unlearn and unburden their minds and hearts

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so as to resign more and more to Baba's divine Will. Baba used these incidents for His spiritual work on the inner planes of consciousness.

Seeing Sarosh so filled with remorse, Baba's mood changed, and He lovingly consoled him, telling him how happy his obedience had made Him. Gradually the conversation turned to other subjects. After thoroughly reviewing their work with Baba, Adi and Sarosh left Satara in a happy mood.

Baba continued His semi-seclusion through the month of March. Although this period was devoid of outward drama, inwardly this was not the case for those who were staying with Baba. Baba did not like His disciples to be moody or bored. He expected those who stayed near Him to remain bright and cheerful at all times, perhaps as a sign of their resignation to His will. Being in close physical proximity to Baba and the other *mandali* required constant adjustments on the part of each individual. This was one of Baba's main methods of training them. Now, small quirks and weaknesses, which could ordinarily be overlooked or easily suppressed in the hustle bustle of Baba's "normal" activity, were more pronounced and obvious, with the men being kept together in close quarters with little to do. Confined, for the most part, to the house, they were allowed to leave the premises only during specific times of day, and only in order to take walks for exercise.

Once, during an informal discussion in Baba's presence, the subject came up as to whether a certain resident had broken Baba's order. Baba said nothing, but the comments of the others upset the individual so much that he remained in a bad mood for several days. Seeing this, Baba suggested that it would be good for this *mandali* member to take a "vacation" for a few days from Baba's atmosphere (His close physical presence) in order to recover his spirits. Baba asked for someone to accompany this man. As it so happened, Eruch had also been feeling a need for a break. He had been at Baba's side for years and was looking for an opportunity, even for just a day, to be away from Him and the other *mandali*. So he readily volunteered. It seems that he had reached a point of being so absorbed in Baba's personal attendance and work that he

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longed to have some time when he wasn't "on call."

It was decided that they would take a bus to Mahabaleshwar, which is about thirty-five miles from Satara. However, they had no sooner reached the bus station than the ticket clerk asked, "What? Are you leaving? Does this mean that Meher Baba will also be going to Mahabaleshwar?" Eruch informed the man that they were simply going on an outing on their own. On the bus, the same scene repeated itself, with people asking Eruch about Meher Baba. After all, Satara was a small town, and almost everyone had come to know of Baba, and, naturally, they recognized Eruch.

In Mahabaleshwar Eruch and his companion had intended to stay at a guest house. But after the experience on the bus, Eruch realized that there would be no quiet time for them if they ate in the common dining hall. So he and the other *mandali* member had food sent to their room where they could have some privacy. The only problem was that the owner of the guest house knew Baba and had great respect for Him. He wanted to hear all the latest news about Baba, and so he sat down with them.

The next day they decided to take a packed lunch and go far away into the woods to have a picnic by themselves. They hiked down the main road a good distance until they found a nice spot. They had just sat down to enjoy the beautiful view of the surrounding hills with their canopies of trees, when, to their great surprise, a car stopped on the road. Several people got out and hailed them. They knew Baba, and one of them had recognized Eruch.

"Is Meher Baba here in Mahabaleshwar? Can we see Him?"

Eruch pretended not to hear, but the people began walking towards them, so he realized he had to answer. He said that Baba was not with them, that they were only trying to enjoy a quiet picnic. The people persisted in trying to get some definite news about Baba, so Eruch briefly, and perhaps a bit curtly, answered their queries, and eventually they left. Eruch looked at his companion, who, assessing the situation, suggested that it would be better if they returned to Satara. It

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seemed to them that Baba was following them wherever they went. There was no escape.

They left Mahabaleshwar after lunch, having given up all hope of a "Baba-free" vacation!

### *Descent of Reality into Illusion*

Shortly after Eruch's return from Mahabaleshwar to Rosewood, Baba announced His intention of visiting Khuldabad again to spend three weeks in seclusion. On March 21, with Eruch driving, Baba set out in a car for Khuldabad with three other *mandali*. They did not stop in Ahmednagar. In the Life Circular entitled "Confirmation," Baba had referred to a "modification" of effects, in regard to His Declaration, either in the time factor or in the intensity of future events. Before leaving Khuldabad, He gave a hint to His disciples that the work in seclusion would determine the way in which events would unfold in the future. After a stay of a week or so, Baba conveyed that His special work was completed. On March 28, He and His *mandali* returned to Satara.

In the second week of April, as the culminating part of the Declaration, Baba communicated some basic spiritual facts about the life led by the Avatar and Sadgurus in relation to Creation, which is the outcome of Illusion. The explanation was entitled "Decision." Adi was asked to mail the printed text to Meher Baba's lovers in India and abroad. It is given below:

The universe has come out of God. God has not come out of the universe. Illusion has come out of Reality; Reality has not come out of Illusion. God alone is Real; the universe by itself is Illusion.

God's life lived in Illusion, as the Avatar and Perfect Masters, is not illusory, whereas God's life lived in creation as all animate and inanimate beings, is both real and illusory. Illusion, illusory life, and God's life in Illusion are not and cannot be one and the same. Illusion has no life and can have no life. Illusion is Illusion and is nothing by itself.

## DECISION: THE DIE IS CAST

Illusory life means life in Illusion, with Illusion, surrounded by Illusion, and though it is life (as experienced by a soul in creation) it is illusory life. But God's life lived in Illusion is not illusory because in spite of living the illusory life, God remains Conscious of His own Reality.

God is absolutely Independent, and the universe is entirely dependent upon God. Yet when the Perfect Masters effect the Descent of God on earth as the Avatar, they make Reality and Illusion interdependent, each upon the other. And thus it is that His Infinite Mercy and Unbounded Love are eternally drawn up by those who are immersed in Illusion.

Between God and the universe, Infinite Mercy and Unbounded Love act as a prominent link which is eternally made use of by Men who become God (Sadgurus, Perfect Masters, or Qutubs), and by God Who becomes Man (Avatar, Christ, or Rasool), and so the universe becomes the eternal playmate of God. Through this prominent link the Avatar not only establishes life in His Divine Play, but also establishes Law in Illusion. And this Law, being established by the God-Man or Avatar, is the Law of the lawless Infinite, and it is eternally Real and at the same time illusory. It is this Law that governs the universe; all its "ups and downs," construction, and devastation are guided by this Law.

At the Cyclic period, God's independent Absoluteness is made to work upon the Law by the God-Man as God's Will, and this means that anything and everything that the Avatar wills is ordained by God. Consequently, all that I stated in the Final Declaration and Confirmation is ordained by God, and must and will happen.

I was in Khuldabad for nearly a week from the 22nd of March. There, day and night, I did My work most intensively. The intensity of My spiritual work caused great pressure on My physical body and mind, and it was there that I decided that all that I had declared in My Final Declaration must come to pass exactly in the same sequence and with the same intensity of effect but with

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modification in the time factor. Therefore, with the change in the time limit, the intensity, scope, shape, and size of the chain of events will take place without any moderation whatsoever, to bring into effect the destined Plan.

In the meanwhile, mankind must await, as it must according to My final Decision, the witnessing of all that is to come to Pass as ordained by God.

This is the time when man must love God more and more. Let him live for God and let him die for God. In all his thoughts, in all his words, and in all his actions, love for God alone must prevail."<sup>1</sup>

To me this message is a sort of compact, mini *God Speaks* which one may dedicate to "The God-Man Who sustains Illusion" through His periodic Advents. The import of the Decision is so condensed that not only is real understanding of its meaning well nigh impossible, but to follow it intellectually is very difficult. Yet I am tempted to share what I gather from it.

God as God is the only Reality, and His is the infinitely Real Life. Illusion (*Maya*), projected out of God as His apparent shadow, is totally false and illusory. *Maya* is a Sanskrit word. Its etymology indicates and incorporates the subtlety and depth of its meaning. *Ma* in Sanskrit means "not" and *ya* means "which," so one of the Perfect Masters of India in his commentaries defined *Maya* as "that which is not" — that which does not really exist. Meher Baba refers to *Maya* as the root or principle of Ignorance. It is that which makes Illusion appear as real.

The creation has come out of Illusion; it has no existence in the Absolute Reality. In this sense, the life of every soul in creation is false and illusory. But the life of every soul as a spark of Spirit (God) is real; it is the soul's identification with anything other than God that is false and illusory. The subtle distinction of this "real and illusory" life in creation, as contrasted with Reality, may be clarified by Baba's concise statement once given to Dr. Harry Kenmore, "Everything in *Maya* is a fact, and none of it is the Truth."

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<sup>1</sup> *Life Circular*, No. 24, April 10, 1955.

## DECISION: THE DIE IS CAST

The purpose of creation in Illusion is that each soul should realize its Union with God. This has been made possible only by the Advent of God in human form. As soon as God, the Ancient One, descends into the midst of Illusion, He, as the Avatar, becomes the active focal point of God's work in creation. The real life of God's Reality is established in the midst of Illusion. Through the Avatar, God gives out a call for all to come unto Him. Thus the infinite number of illusory selves receive the impact of the real life of the Avatar that shakes their clinging to anything that is false. Baba once conveyed with divine Authority to one of His dear ones, "Nothing is as it happens, for I am the One True Light." So all of the events in creation that seem to happen are nothing but the shadows in Illusion.

God is Love; it is Love that is the link between God and Illusion. Out of His compassion, God periodically comes and lives in creation as Man. To remember Him, adore Him, and love Him is to wipe out the falseness attached to one's self. The Advent of the Avatar thus quickens the life of every soul in creation. Those souls who accept the Avatar as God in human form imbibe His Love directly, and others receive it indirectly.

During the Avatar's Advent, the Law of the universe becomes embodied in Him and is actuated through Him as God's Will. So, in this Age, whatever Avatar Meher Baba has said and done is the direct manifestation of God's Will in creation. The ongoing life of all souls as they move towards God, the "Reality" (the center within each soul), is governed by this Law, which is also renewed by His presence on earth.

In one of the messages given by Meher Baba during His visit to the United States in 1956, He explained the beauty and meaning of God's Descent into Illusion, as Avatar, the Eternal Perfect Master:

The act of a Perfect Master [or the Avatar] is not repetitive . . . It is a creation of the utterly new, a descent of the Truth into the false . . . The redeeming act of a Perfect Master [or Avatar] is a flash of the Eternal in the midst of what is otherwise nothing but rigidly determined causation.

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This is the mystery of divine grace bestowed by the Perfect Master [or Avatar].<sup>2</sup>

### *Baba Calls Homi to Him*

Meher Baba, at the large, momentous Meherabad Meeting held in September 1954, had intimated the possibility that He would drop His physical body by April 1955. In response to the deep concern amongst His lovers over this unexpected disclosure, Baba gave the special message about "Internal Links." In it He stated that His physical presence was no longer necessary for His close ones to grow in His love. The people of Hamirpur, in the intensity of their faith and love, were inspired to deepen their remembrance of their Beloved Lord while He was still in their midst. In their longing, they discussed a plan to repeat Baba's name continuously around the clock until April 1955.

Keshav Nigam, one of Baba's staunch lovers and the group head in this district, wrote to Adi explaining the plan to see whether Baba would approve of it. This was towards the end of 1954. Adi shared the contents of the letter with Baba, who appreciated the plan. However, He expressed a wish that instead of His name, they repeat any name of God of their choice (preferably from the religion in which they were born). This was communicated to them in a letter through Adi. The Hamirpur lovers were overjoyed at Baba's support for their continuous jap. A time schedule was arranged, which included most of the Baba Centers in the district, so that God's name would be recited every minute of the day.

By Baba's Birthday in February, news of *the jap* in Hamirpur reached many parts of India through the Baba periodicals. In Madhya Pradesh and a few other states, Baba lovers eagerly took up the repetition., Baba later asked His lovers at all the different places in India to end this *jap* at midnight on April 30.

As this activity was spreading in India, one of the *mandali* under Baba's instructions wrote a letter to Minoo Kharas in

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<sup>2</sup> *Life at Its Best*, pp. 21-22.

## DECISION: THE DIE IS CAST

Karachi, asking him to arrange a *jap* of God's name there, if possible. It was to be carried on until the end of July. This extension in time, I presume, was due to be Baba's plan to go into seclusion from May to July at Satara, in a bungalow not far from Rosewood. This is a little of the background, as I have gathered, of the repetition of God's name that was undertaken with so much enthusiasm by Baba's lovers in India and Pakistan during the period following His Declaration.

A poignant incident occurred during the period of *jap* in Karachi. In life there are times when one has to pass through situations which are beyond one's control; it may be an experience of excruciating suffering, an unexpected calamity, or the death of a close one. Meher Baba once stated, " ... people should look upon physical and mental suffering as gifts from God ... When accepted with grace and understood in their very root cause, they chasten the soul and introduce it to the abiding happiness of Truth." On another occasion, He conveyed to a group of His lovers, "Whatever I have said must and will come to pass. My words can never be in vain." The incident I am going to relate illustrates how a casual remark of Baba came to pass, but in His own way and in His own time. Rhoda Dubash of Karachi had met Baba at Satara in August 1954. After inquiring about her family, Baba said, "If I were to ask you to give Me one of your sons, would you willingly give him to Me?" Rhoda was overjoyed, interpreting this to mean that Baba wanted one of her sons, when older, to stay with Him as one of the *mandali*. Spontaneously she said, "Yes, Baba."

In February or March 1955, as wished by Baba, His lovers in Karachi had arranged for a continuous round-the-clock *jap* of God's name. It was carried out in different homes, keeping to a fixed time schedule. The turn of Adi, Rhoda's husband, was from 4:30 to 5:00 P.M., and she did the next half hour. A tragedy occurred unexpectedly when this *jap* was being carried out in Karachi. It was on April 16, 1955. About 3:00 P.M. Adi and Rhoda's youngest son, Homi, who was just four and a half, fell from their second-floor window. Immediately, he was rushed to the hospital, where within half an hour he passed away without regaining consciousness.

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The moment the doctor pronounced the child dead, Baba's words flashed in Rhoda's mind, "If I were to ask you to give Me your son ..." She now understood what Baba had meant. She said later, "After the doctor told us of Homi's demise, I was completely dazed. But for Baba, I would have lost my equilibrium." By the time Adi and Rhoda reached home from the hospital, it was nearing four o'clock. The news of Homi's death had spread, and family and friends began pouring in. As it was almost 4:30 P.M., Adi told Rhoda that he was going upstairs to their small Baba room to do the *jap* as wished by Baba and not to let anyone attend to Homi's body until he finished. Just before five, Rhoda went upstairs to relieve him. Minoo Kharas, one of Baba's stalwarts in Karachi, finding them both missing downstairs, went up and induced Rhoda to let him do the *jap* in her place. She told him that she wished to go in the room for five minutes and begin *the jap*. As she bowed down to Baba's picture, a flood of tears flowed from her eyes, and spontaneously the words "Thy will be done" came to her lips. Instantly she felt immense relief.

According to tradition, Homi's body could not be taken to the Tower of Silence (Parsi cemetery) that evening. So Rhoda, during a night vigil, sat beside Homi, silently imploring him, "Homi, go to our Beloved Baba. He is at Satara. Homi, find your way there; find your way to our Beloved and tell Him, 'I have come to Thee!'" The next morning, as the time for Homi's funeral drew near, the smile which was already on his face appeared radiant to her eyes, and she knew that Homi had met his Maker, Beloved Baba. A few days later came a letter from Satara wherein Dr. Goher wrote, "Baba says little Homi has come to Him and is with Him." Adi later related that when the people started for the funeral, he was remembering Baba all along the way; and when the gate of the Tower of Silence was opened, Adi visualized that he was leading Homi by the finger, and at the gate Adi felt he handed him over to Baba.

After the funeral, in grief yet with loving resignation, they wrote to Baba, " ... We loved him [Homi], but he has gone back to his Father Who loved him far, far better than we did or ever would have. He was an angel, but now he is with 'The King of

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Angels! Beloved Baba, take him 'Unto Thee' so that he too may dedicate his life, his all, to Thee through eternities. Not ours, but Thy will be done, Baba ... When the tragedy struck us, fully knowing it was Your work, it still found us unprepared. Forgive us, dear Baba, our weaknesses. Call us near You and discipline us as You have disciplined so many of Your disciples so that we too may be worthy to serve and love Thee . . ."

And, as always, the Compassionate Father heard their heartfelt prayers. When Baba received their letter, which also contained little Homi's photograph, Eruch wrote, "Baba very lovingly took Homi in His august hands." Baba then asked for a flashlight; He focused it on Homi, looked at him for a few seconds, and then handed the photo to Eruch to be sent to Adi and Rhoda with the following instructions:

- 1) Baba with His hands touched Homi.
- 2) You two frame the enclosed photo and keep it near you.
- 3) When you say that Homi has come to Baba, then you two must feel great relief; and with this knowledge Baba wants you both to feel happy.

Baba also added in the letter how happy He was that in spite of the great loss Adi and Rhoda felt, they did not hesitate to carry out the *jap* entrusted to them.

Today Adi and Rhoda look back with happiness to the years they enjoyed of dear Homi's company, and they both thank Baba from the bottom of their hearts for giving them this beautiful gift — their son, Homi, whose custodians they were destined to be for four and a half years. Baba gave them the lesson early in life that everything — father, mother, husband, wife, and children — is a passing phase, and the only real One is Baba. His is to give, His is to take; ours is to accept His Will with grace. In His compassion, He gives us the courage and strength to face the so-called tragedies and calamities of this world.

Every one of us has to pass through suffering of some kind, both physical and mental, benignly guided by the divinely established law of *karma* bringing in the result of our own past actions and *sanskaras*. Yet no suffering is without

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meaning. The purpose of pain and agony is to awaken us from our ignorant identification with our certain specific forms of life. However, for those who have the good fortune to come into the love orbit of the Avatar, suffering brings with it maximum spiritual results. His compassion also helps us to face and pass through these critical periods. And the loving remembrance of the Avatar cushions the blows of grief and sorrow while upholding and sustaining our trust in Him.

It is only natural and human that sometimes in the midst of our sorrow and pain we cry out to Baba, "Why has this happened to me? Why didn't You protect me from this tragedy, from this suffering?" Here I am reminded of the story of Saint Teresa of Avila as it was told to me. Once Teresa was traveling by cart to another convent with some of her fellow nuns. On the way a violent storm arose; it began pouring rain, and the cart became stuck in the muddy road. It was bitter cold, and the nuns, now thoroughly drenched, were freezing. No help came. Finally Teresa went off at a distance and in her heart spoke out to Jesus, "Why has this suffering befallen us? We are only serving You in setting out on this journey, and yet we meet with such inconvenience and suffering!" And Jesus replied, "This is the way I treat My friends." Being natural and only human, Teresa said, "It's no wonder You have so few of them!"

### *A Meeting at Rosewood in Satara*

While Baba was staying in Satara, I was working as a teacher in Kurduwadi. The academic year in my school was to end by the last week of April. The school would then be closed for a period of six weeks, the summer vacation. Naturally I was thinking about whether I would have the opportunity to see Baba during this time. Baba was leading a retired, secluded life at Satara, but I was allowed to write letters to Eruch. Once again I experienced that Baba knew the longing of my heart. About this time I received a letter from Eruch in which he wrote, "Baba wants you to be in Satara on 23rd April evening if it is absolutely convenient to and if you can safely and easily get leave."

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I was overjoyed to get this call, but there was a slight "catch" to it. Eruch had underlined the word "if" each time he used it, and to reach Satara by the evening of the 23rd I would have to leave my home that same morning, which happened to be the last working day of the school year. According to school regulations, anyone absent on the last day forfeited all of his vacation pay, all six weeks' worth. Although I very much wanted to see Baba, the petty thought of losing six weeks' salary weighed on my mind. Was it "absolutely convenient" for me to forgo such a sum of money given my meager finances? I wasn't sure what to do. Naturally, I turned to Baba internally and called on Him for the right decision. But I never imagined that Baba would arrange the situation so that I would see Him, without losing "mammon" in the bargain!

I made up my mind to leave on the 23rd and went to see my principal to explain the situation. To my utter astonishment, he told me that a few schools in our district were going to be on a special schedule. The staff of our particular school had been assigned the job by the government of collecting certain data, and consequently our vacation period had been postponed for one week. This meant that the 23rd was no longer the last working day. The principal granted me leave for that day, graciously excusing me from having to work on the government project. Isn't it true that sometimes when Baba gives, He gives with both hands!

In his letter, Eruch informed me that Baba was going to hold a meeting on the 24th about His Decision. He also added, "Baba wants you to come ALONE and if you bring anyone else with you, then both of you will be driven out of Baba's premises." This humorous warning made me chuckle, for it conveyed Baba's most loving intimacy and made me all the more eager for the days to pass quickly so I could be once more in His presence. Eruch wrote further that I was not to talk about my personal matters with Baba nor should I tell anyone else about the meeting. And in closing, I was to confirm whether or not I would be coming. Immediately, I mailed a letter to Satara that I was coming and conveyed my special salutations to Beloved Baba.

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I reached Satara on the afternoon of the 23rd and went to the Travelers' Bungalow where arrangements had been made for our lodging. Dr. Deshmukh, Keshav Nigam, and Kishan Singh had also arrived. After washing up, we went to Rosewood. Baba was there with the men *mandali*. After Baba greeted us, He asked us to sit in a row before Him. He looked very splendid and regal. As usual, He asked solicitous questions about our welfare, about our trip to Satara, and then, in His customary casual way, He asked, "Is there anything worrying you?"

I don't remember what the others said, or what Baba conveyed to them, but when it was my turn to answer, I hesitated. Baba gestured, "Speak out." Emboldened, I managed to stammer, "The one worry that plagues me is whether I will be able to hold on to Your *damaan* to the very end." Baba looked surprised and gestured, "Why?" I replied, "Baba, You are so infinite, so unfathomable and immeasurable; how can a most finite ordinary mind such as mine, with all its weaknesses, hold on to the *damaan* of the Infinite One?"

Baba made a face that seemed to say that if ever in the world there had been a foolish question asked of Him, this was it. Then, without answering me, He turned to someone else and inquired whether they had any worries. After Baba had finished asking the others this question, He turned again to me and asked me to repeat my worry. I felt rather shy of doing this, but Baba's face glowed with compassion and so I managed to repeat my worry. Baba then made expansive gestures, indicating, "Yes, I am Infinite, I am Immeasurable." And He added, "I am the Highest of the High, I am the Greatest of the Great."

Baba looked at me pointedly and continued, "But you missed one thing. I am simultaneously the lowest of the low and the smallest of the small." While expressing this, He clicked His fingernails, making a barely audible tick. This "tick" represented how infinitesimally small, while at the same time how infinitely Great, He is. And then He concluded, "Whatever little love you have for Me, if you hold on to it wholeheartedly and honestly, you will naturally be holding on to the *damaan*

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of the Greatest of the Great, the Highest of the High." Baba's answer was so convincing and fulfilling for me, that its impact remains undiminished for me to this very day.

Before sunset, Baba left for Grafton, and the four of us went back to the Travelers' Bungalow, our hearts full and our thoughts transported to that special realm where they effortlessly revolved around Beloved Baba.

The next morning, by about 7:30, all thirty-six men attending the meeting were present at Rosewood. Some of us were seated in the front room while Baba chatted informally with us. His brother Beheram had come from Poona and brought with him copies of Baba's "cricket photo." It was an enlargement of Baba, as Merwan, taken from a team picture, showing Him seated on the ground in His uniform, wearing a medal. Beheram presented Baba with one of the photographs, and He was very pleased. With a humorous twinkle in His eyes, Baba turned to us and remarked, "I was in search of a perfect boy for years, and today I have found him." There was an appreciative laughter at Baba's quip, and in that mood of good-natured pleasantries, someone piped up, "Does this mean You will now give up the search for the perfect boy?" Baba quickly replied, "This is only a picture." Baba handed the photograph back to Beheram. I had no idea that by the end of the day this picture would acquire dramatic significance for me.

After a few preliminary greetings and inquiries, Baba moved to the large adjacent room which could accommodate comfortably the entire group around His chair. He asked Pendu whether all had come and, receiving the reply, "Yes, Baba," He looked pleased. It was a great joy for all just to be in His company. Baba was in a lively, communicative mood. Although He had discontinued the use of the alphabet board, this did not seem to limit Him much in His personal conversations now with His dear ones, or later while He was discussing profound spiritual subjects. His facial expressions and hand gestures seemed to have become more eloquent and expressive.

At the outset Baba expressed His happiness with the continuous *jap* that was being carried out in different parts of India. While mentioning Pakistan, He asked Eruch to relate

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the incident of little Homi's accidental death. He expressed His appreciation of the firm conviction of Adi and Rhoda Dubash in Him as the Avatar of the Age. He also brought to the notice of all the importance of *jap*. For many of the *mandali* members, reciting Baba's name inwardly had become an intimate part of their lives, and on certain occasions, to give His dear ones the opportunity to participate in His spiritual work, Baba would ask them to repeat certain names of God for periods of time. For one who recites any of the divine names of God, whether audibly or silently, the repetition in time is transformed into a melody that rings in one's entire being, purifying thoughts and feelings. It often becomes like a springboard from which to dive deep into the profound levels of God's presence within. The rhythm of the name begins to resonate with the natural rhythm of the heart and becomes as vital as breathing. The name of the Ancient One strikes chords in the heart and sets them resounding to its natural tone. For the lovers of Meher Baba, His name is like a lighthouse that illumines and guides their sailing "selves" across the infinitely timeless ocean of Illusion to their shoreless Self — Baba, the Avatar.

At one point, early in the meeting, casting a glance at the men gathered there, Baba conveyed, "Worries over personal and family affairs are always there, but don't let worries worry you for the day ... Remain cheerful and attentive ... don't yawn; those who appear drowsy will be expelled from the hall ..."<sup>3</sup> Baba smiled broadly.

Although the meeting was originally scheduled from eight to eleven o'clock in the morning and three to five o'clock in the afternoon, it continued straight through from morning until 3:30 P.M. During the first hour, Baba referred briefly to His recent messages, from His Declaration to the Decision. With reference to the serious contents mentioned therein, Baba wished to give His followers the opportunity to choose whether to continue to follow Him or leave Him. He did not like His followers to sit on the fence, but rather to be wholehearted in their commitment. He conveyed:

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<sup>3</sup> "The Die Is Cast," *The Awakener*, Vol. III, No. 2 (Fall 1955), p. 13.

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Each is free to think of Me and interpret My work as he feels or understands best. Either My words must be presented as they stand, or if interpreted by you, you must not fail to state it is your own interpretation ... I never denied being Perfect and being the Avatar, but you do not know that yet. I know I am the One without a second, alone, and matchless. You would be quite right to assert and proclaim whatever you truly believe Me to be — never hesitate to own your faith and belief in Me and about Me. But do not claim to know or feel what you actually do not.<sup>4</sup>

A little later, Baba gave an important message on what has lasting value in life. He told us:

The things of lasting value for the Path are: (1) Divine Love, (2) obedience to a Perfect Master, (3) absolutely sincere and wholehearted service to others, (4) true renunciation of all worldly things, leaving no room for thoughts other than that of God, the only Reality.

Divine love is purely a gift from God to man ... Contact with a Perfect Master is never equally available to all men at all times . . . Selfless service and true renunciation are open to all, but possible only to the true heroes amongst men ...

The best thing for the *mandali* [and for Baba lovers] is to obey Me and go on obeying Me to the last ... I know how difficult that is . . . but even if a few amongst you succeed in really obeying your Baba, you will indeed make Him truly great.<sup>5</sup>

At this point, Baba, as He would often do, expressed categorically and yet in a very natural way the truth about His state and status as the Avatar. He declared:

If I am what I am, it is all the more natural for you not to be able to understand all that I wish to express, and why I say all that I say . . . It has been going on like this for thousands and thousands of years . . . If I am the Highest of the High I know best why Jesus was crucified and why

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp. 16-17.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., pp. 18-19.

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Mohammed was stoned . . . For all the so-called good and bad things said about Them by the so-called good and bad world, people understand next to nothing about Christ and Mohammed, about Ram and Krishna, Zoroaster and Buddha, about all the things They said and did.

Those who believe in Me yet feel like questioning My words and actions are weak in their conviction and belief in Me ... To stick to Me means to keep Me pleased at the cost of your own comforts and pleasures. It means to remain resigned to My will whether you keep good health or bad, whether you make money or lose it, and whether you gain name and fame or become the laughing stock of others.<sup>6</sup>

As Baba finished this statement, those who were there felt the power of Baba's divine radiance emanating from Him. At around noon, Baba asked Eruch to read out the general guidelines and instructions for His disciples and followers. In this prepared text entitled "Satara-Message," Baba very succinctly encapsulated His earlier four messages. As Eruch was about to begin, there was a patter of raindrops on the tin roof overhead. Baba gestured, "This is symbolic of the fact that all this you now hear has come right from My heart." The message was then read:

According to My Final Decision, except for the time factor, everything will happen in every detail and sequence as declared, clarified, and confirmed by Me.

There is now no limitation to any point in time, no contact with any point in time. Things may happen after one month or three months, after three years or twenty years. In short, I may speak tomorrow or My silence may be broken after ten years.

I am free from all promises, bindings, undertakings, and arrangements. None should therefore ask for anything material or spiritual from Me, at any time or on any account. I will do what I think to be the best for one and all and when I deem it fit.

It is only on the above basis that all concerned must now

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., pp. 20-21.

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decide whether to give up or hold on to My *damaan*: to believe in Me, revere Me, and remain devoted to Me, by following My orders and instructions.

The period of three months from May 1 to July 31, 1955, is a period of crisis for Me. I must go into retirement for three reasons: for Myself, for those who love Me, and for all.

During the period of My stay in Jal Villa at Satara, I will not step out of the central rooms of the bungalow. I may or may not eat and sleep regularly for the duration of the crisis. I am not bound to remain in any one place during or after the first month of My retirement. I may change My plans at any moment and might undertake to go on foot from place to place or go into even greater solitude.

No one should under any circumstances come to see Me or communicate with Me directly or indirectly for any reason whatsoever up to the end of July 1955.

All those closely connected with Me, all those who love Me, and all those who care to follow My instructions, must be scrupulously honest; must strictly abstain from sexual actions; and must try to spread My message of Love and Truth as far and wide as possible during the period of crisis for the three months from May 1 to July 31, 1955.<sup>7</sup>

After a little break for tea, Baba was in the mood to explain further about certain subjects which had come up earlier. These messages have been printed in a special booklet entitled "The Die Is Cast." Baba concluded the explanation with these words:

Whatever I have said and have been saying, I was made to say by God. When I say a thing, God makes Me say so. All I want to say now is that whatever I have declared and decided will be so and all things shall accordingly happen.<sup>8</sup>

By 3:00 P.M., the main part of the meeting came to a close.

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<sup>7</sup> *Life Circular*, No. 25, May 1, 1955.

<sup>8</sup> *The Awakener*, Vol. III, No. 2, p. 24.

## GLIMPSES OF THE GOD-MAN

### *Omniscience Spiced with Humor*

At the close of the meeting, Baba turned to other subjects, the duties entrusted and instructions given to the *mandali*. He asked Adi to print and mail to all the Baba centers in India the special "Satara-Message" that had been read out during the meeting. Those who were especially invited for the day were told to share what they had witnessed and heard to the Baba lovers in their areas.

During the course of conversation, Baba asked the resident *mandali* to decide whether they would like to be buried or cremated at Meherabad. The place of interment was to be at Lower Meherabad. This choice was offered only to those (with a few exceptions) who were staying with Baba.

One of Baba's close lovers who was present at the meeting asked Baba if this privilege could be granted to him. Baba looked surprised and gestured, "The place allocated for the cemetery at Lower Meherabad is owned by Meherjee [Karkaria, Baba's disciple]. So you have to ask him about this." Meherjee, who was shrewd enough to understand Baba's wish in this matter, rejoined that the burial lot would cost a very large sum. This answer silenced the individual, who was known in Baba's circle not only for his scholarship but also for his stinginess. Promptly he responded, "All right, Baba, I don't wish to bother Meherjee; and I willingly withdraw my proposal." Baba looked amused and made a gesture with His hand meaning, "What can I do now?" And there was a visible smile on many faces.

Maybe owing to this minor episode, Baba once again reminded the gathering that no one should ask Him any personal questions, as He had yet to attend to some other things. At this moment, I somehow remembered my friend Mauni Buwa, whom I had met just before leaving my hometown. Coincidentally, Mauni had first met Baba in Satara in 1947. A number of times since then, Baba had given him some instructions to follow. So as I was leaving for the meeting, he requested me to convey his salutations to Baba and also ask

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whether Baba wanted him to observe any further instructions. I thought that telling Mauni's wish to Baba would not be considered a personal question. And now that the main part of the meeting was over, I thought of casually bringing up his request.

So I raised my hand to attract Baba's attention and to indicate that I had something to say. Kaka Baria, who was standing near Baba's chair, felt much disturbed by my gesture. Kaka was one of Baba's dearest disciples. In the '30s, he accompanied Baba during His visits to the West as a personal attendant. Baba would often tell His Western disciples about Kaka's exemplary obedience to Him. Kaka had a kind and loving heart and was a very outspoken person. I had no personal contact with him, but I knew him as one of the senior members among the *mandali* and had great regard for him. But as he now looked at me and scowled, and began to berate me in front of all, I became upset. He was saying something excitedly, half in English and half in Gujarati, and this confused me all the more. The gist of what I gathered from his talk was: Bal thinks that he is wise, but in fact he knows very little about spirituality and even less about literal obedience to the Master. Kaka stopped for a few seconds, and I wanted to explain myself. But Kaka again started up and blamed me for disturbing Baba's mood. Later I learned that anything that would displease or inconvenience Baba would make Kaka lose his temper. But on that day, in my case, he was mistaken. So I began to feel that I was being treated unfairly by not having a chance to express what I had to say. Really, I had no intention of asking any personal question of Baba. And to top it all, Baba looked straight at me and conveyed, "What Kaka has said is right. You should not have raised your hand." I was astounded to hear this from Baba — the All-knowing One! That very moment a fleeting doubt crept into my mind, "Does He really know what I have in mind?"

Baba went on to say that I had disobeyed Him, and there must be some atonement for it. Without letting me say anything, He continued, "You know, this morning Beheram has brought plenty of copies of My photo — the 'Cricket Picture.' I

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want you to buy a hundred copies from him." The cost of each picture was two rupees. At that time my salary was meager, and spending two hundred rupees for this purchase was financially difficult. Fortunately, the next moment, the thought came to me, "If this purchase is going to please Baba, I should not hesitate but willingly go in for it." So I replied, though in a low tone, "Yes, Baba." But Baba was not through with me yet. He added one more thing. "Not only must you purchase these copies, but you must sell them to others."

Now my spirits really sank. I thought, "There are so many beautiful pictures of Baba that are available to His followers. Who would prefer to buy this photo? It would really be difficult for me to fulfill this order." Being distraught, I was now not attentive to the other subjects that were being discussed in the meeting. I was absorbed in my own predicament. There were only a few Baba lovers in my town, and hardly five would be likely to purchase the copy after hearing my story. I sat there, deep in thought, with my eyes closed. Baba suddenly brought me back to attention by snapping His fingers.

I looked up at Him, and He gestured in a concessionary way, "All right, you only have to buy and sell fifty." This made my problem a little more manageable, but I was still troubled because I felt myself being wrongly accused. Without being given a chance to explain, I was humiliated in front of others. In the next few moments many thoughts and feelings surfaced within me which were hard to face. By this time, I had already decided not to mention Mauni's request to Baba. Just then I again heard Baba snap His fingers.

With a smile on His face He held up His ten fingers, "All right, purchase only ten copies. Happy?" This really cheered me and I was able to begin paying attention again to what was going on in Baba's presence. But soon came the Masterstroke from the Master of masters! Again looking at me, Baba raised the five fingers of His right hand and with a smile conveyed, "Purchase only five." The next moment, He gave a look to Sarosh and added, "Sarosh, I have now asked Bal to purchase five copies of My 'Cricket Picture' from Beheram, and I order

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you to buy them all from him." What a compassion seasoned with humor!

I was overjoyed and felt totally relieved. Grinning happily, I took out a ten-rupee currency note, went to Beheram, got five copies of Baba's picture from him, took them to Sarosh, and put the ten rupees that he gave me back into my pocket. I had to spend nothing, but what an immense gain this transaction brought me! I had at last pleased Baba.

I deeply felt that Baba really is the All-knowing One, and that it had only been the slightest doubt of mine about Him that put me through all the mental turmoil. I also lacked the sportsman's spirit. But what a marvelous sense of humor the Avatar has! Matchless! Through this whole experience Baba's presence reached deep within me to regain my lost trust in Him as the Omniscient One.

It is funny that even to this day I do not own a copy of the "Cricket Picture." However, the experience that Baba gave me that day continues to help me in seeing and feeling that He really knows everything. That lesson has not left me since, and so I am still discovering the truth of it, in spite of my failures, many a time with Baba's humorous sighs and sometimes with His tender reprimands.

At night, I stayed at Travelers' Bungalow. Early next morning, luckily (I call it "Babaly"), I got a lift in Meherjee's car up to Poona, and then I proceeded by train to my home town. As I look back, every meeting with Baba has offered me a treasure trove, and each time it was of a different variety. Every meeting has also helped me to feel more intimate with Him. With the passage of time, these "Meher-moments" have become aglow with greater, delightful radiance. Although the spiritual significance of each episode remained beyond my comprehension, the heart readily confirmed its direct, inspiring effects on my relationship with Baba; that was not just a figment of my imagination. The Meher-moments often silently perform such "miracles." However, during this present visit, as the game was played too close, I failed to enjoy it thoroughly. The awareness that Baba was all the time smiling behind the scenes came much later. But that is fun too.

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### *"Free from All Promises"*

On May 1, 1955, Meher Baba retired in seclusion at Jal Villa for three months for His inner spiritual work. Correspondence with Him was stopped until the end of July; however, as in the past, I continued to write, when necessary, to Adi or Eruch. Then some now-forgotten reason took me to Satara for a few hours. Baba graciously permitted me to see Him at Jal Villa, just for darshan, no questions. He was sitting alone, looking radiant as ever, in a tiny room that couldn't have been more than six by eight feet. This was the place in the bungalow He had chosen for His seclusion work. I entered the room with a garland in my hands. Baba smiled at me and pointed to a small frame with a printed message displayed on the wall facing His seat, gesturing that I should offer the garland there, rather than to Him. I was surprised by this, but didn't ask Him why. As I was fitting the string around the frame, I chanced to read a few of the words: "I AM FREE FROM ALL PROMISES . . ." — MEHER BABA. I didn't try to read the whole text, nor did Baba explain anything.

He allowed me to sit for a while and asked me some informal questions that conveyed His intimacy with me. At the end, He raised His right hand, palm facing me, in a gesture meaning, "Don't worry; go happily." Then He beamed a smile, and I left Jal Villa with a rare joy flowing into my heart.

I totally forgot about this brief meeting with Baba until recently, when the whole scene was vividly brought back to me in an unexpected way. When the work on this volume was nearing completion, I happened to go to Meherabad. While there, I visited the large Mandali Hall in Lower Meherabad where Baba used to meet His disciples and groups of lovers during *sahavas*. Many memories in my life with Baba are connected with this place. One of the chairs that was used by Baba is still there. Reverently, I stood before the chair with my eyes closed. Then I glanced up at the colored portrait of Baba, which rests on a ledge between two smaller pictures of His parents. These photos have been there since the opening of the Hall. For the first time, I noticed a small framed message

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hanging there above Baba's chair, with Baba's name clearly visible at the end of the text. Out of curiosity I went closer, reached up (I had to stand on my toes), and took the frame from its hook. The message read:

I AM FREE FROM ALL PROMISES, BINDINGS,  
UNDERTAKINGS AND ARRANGEMENTS. NONE  
SHOULD THEREFORE ASK FOR ANYTHING MATERIAL  
OR SPIRITUAL FROM ME AT ANY TIME OR ON ANY  
ACCOUNT. I WILL DO WHAT I THINK TO BE THE BEST  
FOR ONE AND ALL AND WHEN I DEEM IT FIT.

— MEHER BABA

Suddenly it came to me that this was an excerpt from the message given by Baba to a small gathering in Rosewood on April 24, 1955. And I recalled that while it was being read, raindrops had pattered on the roof. With a dignified innocence, Baba had gestured, "See, this is the sign that these words have come from My heart."

On close observation of the frame and the style of lettering, I became sure that this was the same frame that had hung in that tiny room where Baba worked in seclusion, and which He had asked me to garland. It was the only frame displaying that unique message. Later I found out that the message was not printed, but hand-lettered, and this confirmed my feeling that it was indeed the same frame. I could also see that white ants had done some damage to the backing of the frame, which showed that it must have been hanging in that same spot for many years (it has since been repaired). In fact, the framed message had been on the wall of Meherabad Mandali Hall since the late '50s, silently offering Baba's message to those who met Him there during small meetings and large gatherings. Was Baba working on the truth of that statement during His seclusion in 1955, in order to release it into the hearts of His lovers at the appropriate time? Does it not clearly indicate the real nature of one's relationship with the Avatar — that it must be without any expectations, but only a cheerful, voluntary resignation to His divine Will? I feel that it does.

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Thus, that ordinary wooden frame had hung high on the wall in that large Hall for years without my noticing it. But then, at the most opportune time, in 1991, Baba brought it to my attention. Knowing its place in the chronological order of Baba's life, I took it as an indication from Him that He knew what part of His life I was "glimpsing." The short message rekindled my memories about the Satara meeting.

Once, at Rosewood, I confessed to Baba that I was worried as to how my finite mind with its innumerable weaknesses could possibly hold fast to the *damaan* of the Avatar — Infinite Consciousness Personified. And now, as I stood near Baba's chair, staring at this frame again after so many years, I felt that Baba was answering my question from another perspective replete with deep significance. It occurred to me now that holding on to Baba's *damaan* implies an awareness of how closely He is holding on to each one of us, in His unfettered freedom, for He knows what is best for every one of His followers.

Baba's ways of awakening the heart to His gifts are immensely graceful. He waits patiently until the specified time to reveal their true significance. In 1955, Baba showed me just the frame; the contents contained therein were brought to my notice thirty-five years later. To use a metaphor, He had given me the shell, and, in His deep compassion, He took that shell deep into the Ocean of His presence. Decades later, He offered it back to me with a precious lustrous pearl in it. This was both an indication and an assurance to me, that I should depend totally on Him and trust His message that His Will forever functions for the best of all. May He give me the ability to gratefully acknowledge the peerless dignity of His act of grace, and may Baba help me to keep this treasure in a befitting manner in my heart forever. The Avatar is the Unconditional Infinite, totally free, yet, out of mercy, becoming totally bound for one and all. The boundless freedom of the Avatar is unique — in this rests His authority to freely dispense His grace.

I would like to conclude this volume by recalling a *ghazal* that was sung in Baba's presence, and which I have often

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remembered during my writing. In this *ghazal* a lover of God relates something of his experience of God's presence:

The efficacy of obeisance offered with total purity of heart is indescribable — incredible! For whenever I bowed to the ground to offer my *sijda*, I found to my amazement that the Holy Stone of Ka'aba had slid underneath my forehead!

Really, I feel that I have neither the intensity nor purity of trust in God that are indicated in this couplet. But the Avatar, God in human form, is the Most Compassionate One. In His loving free Will He stoops down to the level of any of His followers. So Avatar Meher Baba has guided me in His marvelous ways in my attempt to share with the readers a few "glimpses" of His Infinite Life. Since the day I undertook this work many delightful and unexpected coincidences have happened: many times the information I was looking for was "slid under my door," and I would meet the people connected with the events I was writing about.

Timeless are the moments lived in one's heart in the company of the Avatar, the eternally Present One. These moments have the unique ability to reach anyone at any point in time in their original elegance and liveliness. Matchless are those Meher-Moments!

Now it is my heartfelt prayer to Baba that He continue to play the same Game with the readers as they glean through these pages — may He fill each scene and story with His lively presence to delight their hearts.

Avatar Meher Baba once conveyed through His graceful gestures:

I am the Ocean of Love.  
I have only love to give,  
and all I want is love.

Love knows best, and Meher Baba is That.



## GLOSSARY

*abhangā*: A meter used in Marathi poetry.

*Ahuramazd*: Almighty God.

*Allah*: God in the Beyond State; Almighty God.

*Allah-hu-Akbar*: God is the Greatest.

*anand*: Bliss.

*arti*: A cry from the yearning heart; an ancient Hindu method of concluding worship. Traditionally, at the time of *arti*, small lighted lamps or joss sticks are slowly waved in a circle before the person, idol, or picture of the deity, saint, Man-God, or God-Man being worshipped, while a special song with a theme or refrain of offering oneself to the One worshipped is sung. Meher Baba's lovers do not necessarily do this when His *arti* is sung.

*ashram*: A place for contemplation on the Divine; a place of residence for spiritual aspirants.

*avatar, an*: An incarnation manifesting a specific divine quality.

*Avatar, the*: "God-become-man." The incarnation of God, the infinite, in a finite human form. The God-Man, Messiah, *Christ*, Rasool, Saheb-e-Zaman.

*bhajan*: A devotional song or the singing of devotional songs.

*bhakti*: Wholehearted devotion.

*biryani*: A spicy rice dish.

*chapati*: Flat, unleavened wheat bread.

*chutney*: A paste made of spices, chillies, and other ingredients.

*damaan*: Lit., the hem of a garment.

*dakshana*: Money given, usually to a priest, for offering prayers; a gift in the name of God.

*dargah*: A place where a Moslem saint — wali, pir, or Qutub — is buried.

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***darshan:*** Formal or informal audience given by the Master who bestows his blessings on his devotees or visitors and receives their homage. Sometimes the Master uses the occasion to distribute *prasad* as well; also the act of bowing in reverence.

***dhal*** (also dal): A common preparation made from any of several types of lentil common in India.

***dharamshala:*** A free rest house for travelers.

***dhyān:*** Meditation.

***dnyan:*** Gnosis, Real Knowledge, discrimination.

***Ekadashi:*** The eleventh day of each fortnight on the Hindu calendar.

***ghazal:*** A short love poem. An ode. A special poetic composition in Persian, Urdu, or Hindi.

***jai:*** Hail, praise, victory to.

***jap:*** Repetition of a name of God or any sacred word.

***jhopri:*** (sometimes spelled zopdi): A hut.

***kamli:*** Coarse woolen blanket.

***kanya:*** Literally, daughter. Also, a virgin who has dedicated her life, from her youth, to God, the God-Man, or a Sadguru.

***karma:*** The working of the law of action and reaction in relation to oneself and others. Fate. The happenings in one's lifetime preconditioned by one's past lives.

***ki:*** A suffix indicating the possessive case.

***kirtan:*** The singing of devotional songs accompanied by music, interspersed with stories from the lives of the Avatar and His lovers, and also with some explanations on spiritual subjects.

***kusti:*** A sacred thread worn by the Zoroastrians.

***lila:*** Lit., sport. God's "Divine Sport" that manifests the universe.

## GLOSSARY

**mandali:** Lit., a group associated with a common activity. A group of intimate disciples of a Perfect Master or the Avatar.

**manonash:** Annihilation of the mind (self).

**mantra:** A sacred name or phrase repeated to invoke God.

**mast** (Pronounced must): A God-intoxicated person on the spiritual path.

**Maya:** Lit., illusion — that which does not exist. The principle of Ignorance, which makes the Nothing appear as everything. In a general sense, false attachment.

**mukti:** Liberation from the cycle of death and birth.

**namaskar:** The placing of one's palms together as a sign of respect or greeting.

**nazar:** Lit., glance. A glance of protective grace.

**nullah:** A gully.

**paan:** A masticatory containing a few spices wrapped in a betel leaf.

**pandal:** An awning.

**pinjra:** A cage.

**qawwali:** A traditional type of singing spiritual songs, usually in Urdu or Persian, accompanied by musical instruments. These compositions are addressed to the Beloved in a very intimate way.

**Qutub:** Lit., hub or axis. A Perfect Master.

**Rasool-e-Khuda:** The Messenger of God.

**Sadguru:** A Perfect Master. A Man-God. Infinitely conscious of God and creation simultaneously.

**sadhu:** A pilgrim; a seeker or wanderer; a rare one is an "advanced soul."

**sadra:** A thin, ankle-length muslin shirt.

**sahaj:** Natural, spontaneous.

**Sahaj Samadhi:** The spontaneous experience of the Perfect Masters and the Avatar of their infinite, effortless, and continuous life of Perfection — divinity in action.

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**sahas:** Lit., close companionship. An opportunity given by the Avatar to spend time with Him and to intimately feel His presence. A gathering held in His honor where His lovers and followers meet to remember Him.

**samadhi:** In a general sense, a trance induced by spiritual meditation. Also a place where the body or the last remains of a saint, a Perfect Master, or the Avatar are interred. **sanskaras:** Impressions left by thoughts, feelings, and actions.

**shloka:** A Marathi couplet.

**sijda:** Stooping so as to touch the ground with the forehead in adoration of God.

**wali:** Lit., a friend. In a special sense, a friend of God, or someone on the fifth plane of consciousness.

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