



IN HIS SERVICE

JUNE / 2010

A NEWSLETTER FROM MEHERABAD

Government of Maharashtra Designates Trust as “Appropriate Authority”

On 24th February 2010, by order of the state Government of Maharashtra, the Avatar Meher Baba Perpetual Public Charitable Trust was designated the “appropriate authority” to oversee the development of Meherabad as a recognized pilgrimage center.

This recognition culminates decades of work by the Trust in its efforts to protect and develop Meherabad in view of the vast numbers of pilgrims that Meher Baba told us would come here one day. In effect, under the new order the Trust will have authority similar to that of a government agency in the development of Meherabad and its immediate environs. Such authorization is unprecedented, and it attests to the government’s confidence in the Trust’s Master Plan and the vision that it embodies.

WHAT PURPOSES THIS DESIGNATION WILL SERVE. While the government’s decision to authorize a public charitable trust in this way has surprised many observers, it stems from a growing government recognition of the significance of centers of pilgrimage, with which India in general, and Maharashtra in particular, are

richly endowed.

Many famous pilgrimage sites have been developed

haphazardly, and their rapid growth

has brought in its wake problems of traffic congestion, commercialization, lack of open space, pollution, and other woes. Meher Baba Himself commented on the cheapening and exploitation of Sai Baba’s memory at Shirdi.

The government, like much of the Indian public, now understands the need to preserve and prevent the spoiling of the spiritual

atmosphere connected with such sacred sites.

As the local “appropriate authority,” the Trust can now consolidate its estate through the purchase of about 175 acres of land. The government endorsement affirms three major Trust objectives. First, the Trust can oversee future development relating to the large green zone in the triangle between the Samadhi, the Meher Pilgrim Retreat, and the new Amartithi site to the west, a zone that encompasses two seasonal lakes and water catchment areas. Second, the Trust can create appropriately located parking areas that will come into use particularly in large events such as Amartithi. Third, the Trust can take such steps as are necessary for its road network, some of which has already been constructed and which integrates with regional public roads, including the “ring road” link currently under construction along the Meherabad Estate’s southern and western border.

HISTORY OF MEHERABAD ESTATE DEVELOPMENT. As readers of this newsletter will know, land procurement has been a major focus of Trust effort since the 1970s. This was inspired by Baba’s own comments during various Meherabad sahas programs during the 1950s. Bhau still recalls Baba making a sweeping gesture with His arm to indicate vast, drought-stricken landscape around Meherabad and gesturing that in the future a large township would spring up there. On other occasions Baba said that Meherabad would become the greatest place of pilgrimage on earth. Since the Trust owned only a few acres in Lower Meherabad and on the Hill when Baba dropped His body in 1969, clearly more land would be needed in years ahead.

Inspired by the memory of what Baba had foretold, it was largely Bhau, after he became a trustee in the early 1970s, who took up this land work. Spearheaded by his efforts, over the next twenty-five years the Trust succeeded in procuring over three hundred acres of land, though this proved indeed to be a herculean task owing to the government’s land use restrictions. In 1998 the Trust formulated its Master Plan which included, at its center, a vision of Meherabad Hill, with five view corridors from different points of the compass converging on the Samadhi.

New Security Arrangements by Government

The closing months of this past pilgrim season brought a fresh reminder of why security must remain a top priority on the Trust Estate.

As many will know from mainstream news media accounts, on 13th February, at 7:15 p.m., a bomb exploded in the German Bakery in Pune, killing seventeen people and injuring over fifty. Many of Baba’s lovers are well-acquainted with this busy snack-and-food bar, and over the last few years a growing stream of pilgrims to Meherabad has originated from the Koregaon Park neighborhood in Pune where the German Bakery has long been a popular hub.

It would seem that the terrorists responsible for the attack targeted this eatery as a favorite resort of non-Indians. Concerned that terrorists would turn their attention increasingly to places of pilgrimage and sacred sites, the government has implemented new security measures around the state that became very visible at Meherabad this year during the season of Baba’s birthday.

Starting in the second half of February, the government provided four armed guards twenty-four hours a day, two at the Samadhi and two at the Meher Pilgrim Retreat. (Since the end of pilgrim season on 15 March, this force has been reduced to two.) Further, visitors to the Samadhi and the Meher Pilgrim Retreat are now required to check in their handbags and similar items, which are kept at deposit areas at a safe distance from crowds.

In another significant development, the state government is establishing a police station (or chowki) with a round-the-clock force of eleven police, including two sub-inspectors and two or three constables. For police use the Trust has provided what used to be the veterinary centre, located on the Hill side about a hundred meters south of the old Pilgrim Centre along the Ahmednagar-Daund highway.

These new government measures supplement the private security arrangements the Trust put into effect this past December, as described in the last newsletter. While politically motivated violence seems to have become a reality of the world in which we live, the Trust will continue to do all that it can to keep its pilgrims safe.

Over the next few years Trust representatives entered into an ongoing conversation with government officials in urban planning and other departments, particularly regarding the need for low density zoning, demarcation of a green zone area near Beloved Baba’s Samadhi, and a road network with suitable parking facilities. Impressed with the Trust’s plan, the state government designated

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Government of Maharashtra Designates Trust as “Appropriate Authority”

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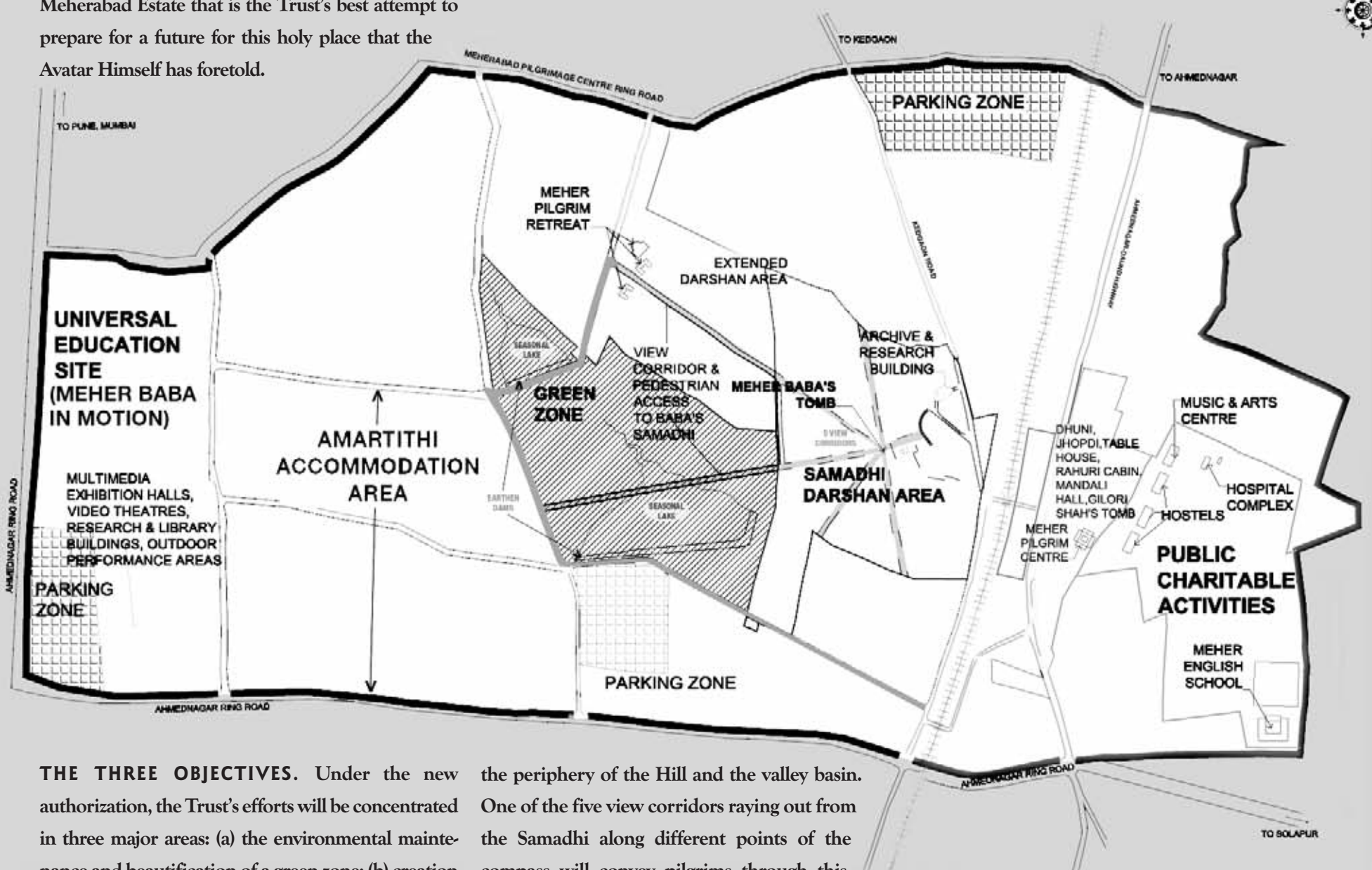
the Trust as a pilgrimage center and incorporated many of its recommendations into the Ahmednagar Regional Plan of 2005.

Thus the new “appropriate authority” designation awarded by the state government this past February crowns the intensive efforts of more than a decade and, in a larger sense, almost forty years. While many of the Trust’s objectives have previously been approved in various ways and degrees, now the Trust has been authorized to directly oversee the carrying out of this plan. Under Indian law this authorization has a ten-year limit, after which time, it lapses. Thus the Trust now enjoys a limited-term, one-time opportunity for fulfilling a vision of the Meherabad Estate that is the Trust’s best attempt to prepare for a future for this holy place that the Avatar Himself has foretold.

between the Samadhi and the Meher Pilgrim Retreat. The new green zone—technically what the government designates as a “Recreation Zone” extends to the west of the Samadhi and encompasses much of the valley between Meherabad Hill and the next hill to the south. It includes two watershed catchment areas and the two associated seasonal lakes that come to life annually in the months following the monsoon. The Trust envisions this tract of land as a large park area, home to birds and other wildlife, also usable for the overflow of large crowds during the Amartithi gathering. The Trust hopes to purchase 110 acres in this neighborhood. This permanent open space will provide a necessary balance to the areas of building development around

To keep vehicles away from the Samadhi and other historic areas, the Trust plans to purchase sixty acres for three parking areas at locations one to the north, one to the near southwest, and one to the far southwest of the Hill. When these facilities have been put in place, the Trust will arrange for a transportation system to convey pilgrims between key locations on the estate.

C. ROADS. With construction and paving of the road between the Meher Pilgrim Retreat and the Arangaon railway crossing three years ago, a crucial artery in the Trust’s road network has already been put in place. The new authorization will ease considerably the Trust’s task in smoothing and



THE THREE OBJECTIVES. Under the new authorization, the Trust’s efforts will be concentrated in three major areas: (a) the environmental maintenance and beautification of a green zone; (b) creation of parking areas; and (c) road infrastructure. You can see these three areas within the greater periphery of the Trust Estate on the map above.

A. THE GREEN ZONE. Nearly eighty acres of property around the Samadhi on Meherabad Hill have already been purchased and secured. Most of this land is being afforested, as is the property

the periphery of the Hill and the valley basin. One of the five view corridors raying out from the Samadhi along different points of the compass will convey pilgrims through this scenic green zone on their walk to and from the Amartithi accommodation area.

B. PARKING ZONES. When large numbers of pilgrims start to pour into Meherabad throughout the year and especially at certain peak times, proper traffic management will prove essential to the preservation of Meherabad’s spiritual atmosphere.

finalizing this road and all other roads in the network. In response to Trust solicitations in 2003–4, the government agreed to reroute the ring road, which now, partly completed, runs along the Meherabad Estate’s southern and western boundaries. This ring road, the Ahmednagar-Daund highway, and the Kedgaon road are the crucial public roads on the periphery of Meherabad with which Meherabad’s own road network meshes.

Pilgrim Demographics, 2009–10

The 2009–10 season saw a slight decrease in the number of pilgrims to Meherabad both from India and abroad. The exceptionally large 41st Amartithi Gathering might largely explain the drop-off in numbers of pilgrims from India during the rest of the year. Internationally the decline may index the harsher economic conditions in America and Europe. On the other hand, the pilgrim population continues to grow more diverse, with the number from Iran for the first time almost equaling that

from the United States—perennially the leader among non-Indian nations.

Meherabad offers two major pilgrim accommodation facilities, Hostel D in Outer Meherabad on the east side of the Meherabad Estate, and the Meher Pilgrim Retreat about two kilometers to the west. The seasonal tally for Hostel D (exclusive of Amartithi) came to 4865, compared with 6998 pilgrim visits in 2008–9 and 6083 in 2007–8. As in the past, most

pilgrims hail from Maharashtra, Andhra, or the greater Ganges river basin in north India.

With Amartithi falling on a Sunday this year, attendance set an all-time record. The 13,602 who pre-registered were joined by several thousand more who registered late, for a grand total of 16,270. The corresponding numbers in 2009 were 11,661 and 14,769—both of which represented high water marks until that time.

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The 41st Amartithi and 2010 Birthday Celebration

Avatar Meher Baba's birth and death dates fall within four weeks of each other. In consequence, the final months of the annual pilgrim calendar are always the busiest time of the year.

The forty-first Amartithi on 31st January was the largest gathering to date, with a registered pilgrim attendance surpassing previous highs by about 2000 people. With many years' experience on the part of the Trust staff and a volunteer force approaching a thousand, the event passed off smoothly. It is no longer possible, however, for all pilgrim attendees to have their moment of darshan at Baba's Samadhi on the 31st itself. At some date in the future the Trust

expects the Amartithi gathering to extend for the full seven-day period of Baba's interment, from 31st January through 7th February. This will afford greater opportunity for darshan for the larger crowds expected then.

Baba's birthday at Meherabad is always a much smaller event, since most of Baba's lovers, in keeping with Baba's wish, prefer to celebrate the occasion at their home centers. The Meherabad festivities begin at 5 a.m. at the Samadhi, where pilgrims gather for prayers and several hours of informal singing.

This year's birthday play was written and brought to Meherabad by Buck Busfield, a Baba

lover and theater director in Sacramento, California. Entitled "I Will Be Yours," the play was a delightful comedy about a young Indian violinist who, through the mastery of the musical art, acquires occult powers which enable her to fulfill the materialistic wishes and desires of the local populace, who pester her for small miracles. In time she discovers the futility of this undertaking and discovers a higher fulfillment through the love of Avatar Meher Baba, whose signature musical theme in the play is the Gujarati Arti.



One of the village women in the play played by Maya Andrau.



The violinist's young suitor played by Indie Mednick.



The Jester played by Michael Files, who also helped with the stagesets.



Meher Mistry narrating the birthday play.

Three-Day Program in November on "Discovering the Avataric Legacy"

On the weekend of the Divali festival, from 6th–8th November, the Trust is planning a three-day program entitled "Discovering the Avataric Legacy." Comprised of a full-length dramatic performance (on the 6th) along with six or seven individual or small-group presentations (on the 7th and 8th), the event inaugurates what is envisioned as a regular feature in the Meherabad calendar, to be scheduled around Divali in the autumn months of each year.

WHAT IS "DISCOVERING THE LEGACY"?

Over the last forty years most of the activities at Meherabad and Meherazad have centered around the talks and reminiscences of Meher Baba's mandali and others who personally met the Avatar of the Age. Yet with the passage of time most of these people have passed away or grown old. Future generations will require activities and programs that do not depend on the living human memory of His darshan but that bring into view and express the legacy that His Advent has left for mankind. This legacy is "discovered" by the aftergenerations of His lovers, and not "created" by them, since it results from His own Avataric working and not from anything that His lovers do. The role of His lovers is to cultivate the seeds of His sowing and help bring them to flower. This they can accomplish through any and many mediums—through the arts, through talks and lectures, through research into His life and message, and in other ways. The "Discovering the Legacy" series is intended as one channel in this greater effort.

THE 2010 PROGRAM. This year's program divides essentially into two parts. Saturday's much-awaited event will be the ninth and final two-hour dramatic performance in a series of plays that the Bombay group has created and staged over the last decade recounting Baba's life-story from childhood through 1969. With the original

Hindi dialogue and songs prerecorded, the plays have featured wonderful performances in which the amateur actors of the Bombay group have played the parts of Baba's mandali, notable characters in the unfolding of His life story, and Baba Himself, whose mannerisms and gestures are vividly rendered. The previous eight plays, staged annually at Meherabad and other places, have carried the story up through 1965. This year's final installment will complete the action through Baba's passing away in January 1969 and the Great Darshan in Poona three months later.

The next two days will highlight a series of lectures and multi-media presentations on a variety of topics. Ted Judson and Alan Wagner, two of the mainstays at Meherabad over the past thirty-five years, will give presentations, respectively, on the creation of a physical architecture on the Trust Estate, as emblemized, for example, by the Pilgrim Centre and Meher Pilgrim Retreat, and the cultivation of drama, which now finds its main venue in the theater in Outer Meherabad. Naosherwan Anzar, editor of the *Glow International*, will discuss his own work in the nurturing of this magazine and the development of an archival collection. Representatives of the Bombay Centre will present a history of Baba's connection with that great metropolis, and members of the Hyderabad group will do the same for their own home town. Invitations have been extended to other groups as well; Baba's lovers will be kept informed through Tavern Talk, the Trust web site, and other channels.

The entire three-day program will be broadcast live through the Trust web site. Many Baba lovers around the world are familiar with the Amartithi-season webcasts. Audio-visual coverage of the November program will follow the same general pattern.

ASSOCIATED PROGRAMS IN RECENT YEARS.

The "Discovering the Avataric Legacy" series is the natural outgrowth of a series of major programs over the last six or seven years. Major fiftieth-year anniversary programs have commemorated Baba's "Three Incredible Weeks" and "Final Declaration" gatherings in September, 1954; the great Meherabad sahavas in November of the next year; Baba's Satara accident in December, 1956; and the Meherabad sahavas of February, 1958. There have been many additional small events and programs, including three talks that inaugurated the "Discovering the Avataric Legacy" during the 2009–10 season.

The Trust is currently planning a major, several-day event in November 2012 for the fiftieth anniversary of Meher Baba's East-West Gathering in Guruprasad, Poona. Persons who attended the East-West Gathering and would like to participate in this commemoration are invited to contact the Trust.

Meherabad Young Adults Sahavas

The 2010 Meherabad Young Adults Sahavas is scheduled for the five-day period from 23rd to 28th June at Meherabad. The Sahavas is open to all young adult Baba-lovers between the ages of 19 and 35. Sahavas details are available on the Trust website at <http://www.ambpct.org/events/sahavas.php>

Ample Monsoon Rains

The 2009 monsoon brought twenty-four inches of rain to Meherabad, capping a four-year run in which the average annual rainfall has been in excess of twenty-seven inches. As of mid-summer (April–May) the wells are still supplying water, and the new plantation of trees between the Samadhi and Meher Pilgrim Retreat continues to thrive.

Demographics

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At the Meher Pilgrim Retreat, the annual pilgrim tally (inclusive of Amartithi) crossed the 3000 threshold for the first time: the total came to 3170, as against 2893, 2751, and 2180 during the three preceding years. But since on the average this year's pilgrimages had shorter duration, average bed occupancy declined about 15% from the 2008–9 seasonal high, back to about the level of 2007–8.

Indian nationals constituted 71% of the total MPR pilgrim count; yet since most Indians visit Meherabad on short leaves from work, they comprised only about 30% of the pilgrim total on an average day. Nonetheless, these figures index a significant increase in the Indian MPR population, probably reflecting the continuing growth of the Indian middle class.

The total number of foreign (that is, non-Indian) pilgrims at the MPR during the four years of its operation, starting from 2006–7, is 772, 958, 956, and 909. Only 341 pilgrims hailed from the United States, by comparison with 334 in 2006–7, 460 in 2007–8, and 392 in 2008–9. Generally similar patterns of decline appeared in the case of other Western nations. By contrast, Iran provided 305 pilgrims, a number which has risen from 109 in 2006–7. This figure is somewhat misleading, however, since many Iranian pilgrims actually reside in Pune, a mere two-and-a-half hour drive from Ahmednagar.

Overall, the 2009–10 MPR pilgrim rosters show that thirty-six countries were represented. After India (2261), the leaders were: the United States (341), Iran (305), Australia (55), the United Kingdom (45), Russia (28), Canada (25), Germany (23), Mexico (11), France and Slovenia (9 each), Serbia (8), Japan (6), and Israel, Sweden, Switzerland, and Turkey (5 each).

How to Contribute

The Avatar Meher Baba Trust is supported entirely by love-gifts from Meher Baba's lovers around the world. In truth, it is Baba Himself who gives through your hands, and it is Baba Himself who brings these objects to completion, objects that He Himself laid down in the Trust Deed, when it pleases Him to do so.

For those who have not taken the opportunity to contribute, here is how. In the UK, please send your tax-deductible contribution to Avatar Meher Baba Association c/o Sue Chapman, 3 Whin Hill, Craster NE663TP, UK tel 01 665 57 69 57, e-mail suchapman@hotmail.com. In the United States, persons who wish to make tax-deductible contributions or wish to name the Trust as a beneficiary in their will, 401K, IRA, or Insurance policy should contact Emory and Susan Ayers, P.O. Box 398 Mystic CT 06355 (tel. 860-535-0370, e-mail TrustPlan@ambppct.org). They will send you relevant information along with a list of eight Meher Baba tax-exempt organizations that have grants in place to support the Trust. (These include a Trust Development Plan grant, an Operating Expense grant, and a grant for the construction of the Memorial Tower.) Baba lovers from other parts of the world should send contributions directly to the AMBPPC Trust, Post Bag No. 31, King's Road, Ahmednagar 414001, Maharashtra State, India. Further information can be found in the Trust's web site at www.ambppct.org.

Vishnu Narayan Deorukhar

26th June 1903—13th May 1962

When the disciple is ready, it is said, the Master appears. Vishnu Deorukhar, later known as "Vishnu Master," must have completed his preparations in previous births, since he met Baba when just a boy of fifteen, and remained His permanently.

The year was 1919, and the place was Poona. Vishnu lived with his mother just across the street from Merwan's toddy shop located in the Kasba Peth district, a neighborhood near the river inhabited by poor fishermen. In those days, Baba would perform arti in a small room adjacent to the shop that He had established as a temple, and after prayers He gave out prasad to all comers. Baba was drawing many of His earliest disciples to Himself at this time.

One day while Baba was distributing prasad, a boy came forward, holding out his hands. Before he could leave, Baba asked him, "Where is your father?" Young Vishnu told Baba that his father had died and that he lived with his mother. Baba told the lad, "From now on I am your father." With these words Baba sealed the connection, which proved to be lifelong.

Soon after this Vishnu's mother, who was cooking Baba His lunch each day, complained that her son was associating with a bad group of boys and going to movies. Immediately Baba set off to the neighborhood theater, caught the boy, and slapped him several times. Shocked, Vishnu protested that he had bought the ticket with his own money. "But did you ask me if you could go to the movies?" Baba scolded him. "Didn't I tell you that I would be your father?" From that time on, Vishnu knew that he could not do anything without Baba's permission.

Four years later, in early 1923 Vishnu was called to join Baba as one of His mandali at the Manzil-e-Meem in Bombay; and a year after that he came to live with Baba at Meherabad. During this period Baba designated Vishnu as bazaar-wala responsible for shopping and keeping the accounts. And this duty stuck throughout the years, whether Baba was on tour, in Meherabad, in Meherabad, in Guruprasad, or other places.

Vishnu accompanied Baba on His first trip to Persia in 1929 and during His sensational, high-profile visit to the West in 1932. On other tours during this phase of Baba's intensive world travel, He assigned Vishnu the duty of sending Him a daily telegram reporting on the routine activities and health of the mandali back in

the ashram. If Vishnu happened to miss a day, Baba would demand, "What happened? Why hasn't Vishnu sent the telegram?" And Baba would have His own telegram sent out asking the reason for the lapse.

From the mid-1920s until he passed away, Vishnu was closely associated with Meherabad. Indeed, he was one of the "Four Pillars of Meherabad," along with Padri, Pendu, and Adi Senior. Baba gave them this title in the great meetings in August 1949 in which He announced the New Life. During those meetings Vishnu came forward as one of the "yes-walas" and set out with Baba as one of His twenty companions on October 16.

After the New Life Vishnu continued in his role as



Vishnu in the late 1920s

one of Baba's resident mandali. He was one of Baba's fellow-travelers when He met with His second automobile accident in Satara in December 1956. When Eruch regained consciousness and staggered out of the car with broken ribs in the accident's immediate aftermath, he asked Vishnu, who was the least hurt, what had happened. But it seems that Vishnu had experienced a vision of Baba in His universal body, surrounded

by effulgent light. Stunned by what he had witnessed, Vishnu could only speak to Eruch about the radiance of Baba's face, who had appeared to him like Krishna triumphant on the battlefield of Kurukshetra! Perhaps Baba had granted him some glimpse of the inner dimensions of His Avataric working on that momentous occasion.

Though Vishnu did not often stay at Meherabad, when Baba shifted residence to Guruprasad in Poona in the summer months, Vishnu accompanied Him there. And so it came to pass, one afternoon in 1962 shortly after the usual Sunday darshan gathering had dispersed, that Vishnu passed away after a heart attack. Informed by Goher of what had happened, Baba came from His room and sat by His old disciple, who had worn out his life in his Beloved's service, for a full hour. "Never before have I sat near the body of any of My mandali as I am doing today by Vishnu," Baba commented. "He is most fortunate. Vishnu is now merged in Me."

A "smallish man of regal bearing," as Mani afterwards described him, Vishnu kept a low profile among Baba's mandali, but was one of the stalwarts in His work. His body now rests in the men's graveyard in Lower Meherabad next to the grave of his fellow disciple and longtime friend Nilu.

WHAT IS THE AVATAR MEHER BABA TRUST?

CREATED IN 1959 under Meher Baba's direction and bearing His signature on its Deed, the Avatar Meher Baba Trust had at its founding two purposes: to provide means of subsistence to certain named disciples of Meher Baba's, and to fulfill certain charitable objects. Today, the first of these functions is discharged under "Avatar Meher Baba Trust, Firstly," and the second under "Avatar Meher Baba Perpetual Public Charitable Trust."

The Trust Deed calls for maintenance of Avatar Meher Baba's Tomb and the creation of pilgrim facilities; for educational, medical, veterinary, and other charitable services; for estate development and procurement of sources of water; for the

promulgation of Avatar Meher Baba's love-message through melas, lectures, publication, and the arts; and for spiritual training. The Trust's current Development Plan focuses on the creation of new facilities for pilgrim accommodation at Meherabad and other goals.

Inquiries and contributions can be sent to: The Chairman, Avatar Meher Baba Trust, King's Road, Post Bag 31, Ahmednagar 414 001, M.S., India. Subscriptions to this newsletter can be sent to that address or to: Avatar Meher Baba Foundation, PO Box 398, Mystic, CT 06355-0398, USA (tel. 860-535-0370, e-mail TrustPlan@ambppct.org). To subscribe to *Tavern Talk* (the Trust's

electronic newsletter), send an e-mail to Listserv@ambppct.org and include in the text of your message the words: "subscribe tavern-talk." Further information about the Trust can be found on its web site at www.ambppct.org and www.avatarmeherbabatrust.org. Subscriptions to *In His Service* or *Tavern Talk* can be submitted through the web site in its "Events and News" section.

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