

GLIMPSES OF THE GOD-MAN
MEHER BABA
Volume VI
(March 1954 – April 1955)

By

Bal Natu

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GLIMPSES of the GOD-MAN
MEHER BABA



Meher Baba washes the feet of seven poor men during a mass darshan, September 12, 1954

GLIMPSES
of the
GOD-MAN

MEHER BABA

VOLUME VI
MARCH 1954 – APRIL 1955

BAL NATU

SHERIAR
FOUNDATION

1994

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Your Constant Companion

Showers of Grace

When He Takes Over

*To the Loving
and Abiding Presence
of the God-Man,
Meher Baba*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First things first: I feel immensely indebted to Avatar Meher Baba for the blessed opportunity given me to share a small portion of His divine life, a period of fourteen months, through this book, Glimpses of the God-Man, Meher Baba, Volume VI.

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It is very difficult for me to express adequately in words my feelings for the large team of Baba lovers, mostly from the West, who spent their time, talents, and energy over a period of four years helping me to present this sixth volume to the readers. It was amazing how the arrivals and departures of these dear friends seemed to have been arranged according to Baba's wish. At the appropriate times, they took their turns working with me on this volume whenever my body and mind were healthy enough to continue. Each one's contribution was of a special nature and enriched the contents. I deeply appreciate their help through all the different stages of this narrative, from the preparation of the first drafts to the final manuscript. Although everyone worked willingly, selflessly, and in a spirit of friendship in Baba's love, I especially wish to mention the names of some of my team members: Steve and

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Daphne Klein, Jeff Wolverton, Mark Keller, Ward Parks, Thom Fortson, Debbie Nordeen, Wendy Crabb, Laurel Magrini, and Kendra Crossen. And to those I haven't mentioned by name, my deepest thanks.

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And finally, let me express my gratitude to the enlightening company of the Meherazad mandali and the Meherazad atmosphere, suffused with Baba's love, that sustained me in writing this volume.

Once again, my wholehearted salutations to the Ancient One, Meher Baba. May His unbinding love be awakened more and more in the hearts of the people, and may Baba's most sacred Name be the breath of my life.

Bal Natu

February 25, 1992
Meherazad

PREFACE

It was December 1952. Avatar Meher Baba was in Delhi for a darshan program. In the morning, while sitting with His disciples in the house of one of His lovers, He heard someone singing softly. It was a young village boy who was sweeping the floor in the next room. Meher Baba sent for him and expressed a wish that the boy sing two of the Urdu lines again.

The boy happily did this, and Baba looked very pleased. He joined His thumb and index finger to form a circle, a sign conveying that He was really happy. He lovingly blessed the boy and then asked him to go back to his household work. Baba did not communicate anything to those with Him about the meaning of those lines.

However, the simple words of that Urdu couplet have a profound meaning. And many times I am reminded of these lines, especially when sharing Avatar Meher Baba's life with others, either in my personal conversations or while writing *Glimpses*. The couplet when freely translated into English is:

O Beloved Lord, it often surprises me to find how people
fail to understand the simple, obvious fact of our
relationship.

Not knowing this, they praise my love for You. In fact, it is
only a faint reflection of Your glowing love — a gift of
Your grace, reflected in the mirror of my dusty heart.

Thus, if any words in *Glimpses* touch the hearts of the readers, it is a fraction of Avatar Meher Baba's unconditional Love mirrored in their hearts. May He be praised!

For me, sharing Meher Baba's life of self-giving divine Love with others is a source of unfading joy. So there is no intention of drumming Meher Baba's Avatarhood in the ears of people.

Periodically, when God as the Ancient One assumes a human form and begins to function as the Avatar of the Age, He, in His conscious omnipresence, silently touches the heart of each soul and is ready to awaken it to His love according to the measure of one's longing.

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So my part in writing *Glimpses of the God-Man, Meher Baba* is to record and relate the glory of His love, compassion, and suffering for all. I have tried to express this Avataric life in words through some of the incidents in His ministry on earth that I have personally witnessed or have heard from others. This is also one of my ways of drowning my "self" in His presence. To what degree I am successful, don't ask me!

Over the last few years, I am not keeping good health, and my memory is not what it once was. I received the best of medical care at Meherazad, but the one thing that kept my spirits up was my remembrance of Baba. Only His grace has pulled me through those critical times. To feel His tender touch of intimate concern in all the daily happenings of life opened up a new and different dimension of the Avatar's presence.

However, the work of *Glimpses*, Volume VI, presented me with a great challenge; it was written during a period of suspense about whether it would be completed. But now that the volume is finished, it is an incredible, sweet surprise, a dream come true. In the interim period, the timely help from my friends — the Baba lovers — in completing the various details concerning the text, disclosed to me clearly Baba's guidance. There were a lot of coincidences which continued to sustain my interest and also convince me that Baba Himself was getting His work done, according to His own sweet will; He has made me the author for the name's sake.

Concerning this volume, while attempting to gather together the events of this period of Meher Baba's life, I was doubtful as to whether those captivating "Meher Moments" with their loveliness and splendor would ever return to me, and even if they did, would I be able to recapture them, even faintly, in words. But a miracle happened! Sometimes those moments most unexpectedly did come alive and even stayed with me for a while. And the perfume of Baba's presence that filled my being was as fresh as it was then. But this absorption, in a way, made the writing a little more difficult. The Avataric perfume reminded me of my inability to describe the events though

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in Baba's loving remembrance, I decided to "rush in where angels fear to tread." And in this adventure, many loving hands and hearts came forward to assist me. And here is the result of my attempt to share Meher Baba's messages as well as some incidents from His life along with some of His brief conversations with others when I happened to be present. In this volume, I have covered the period of Meher Baba's life from March 1954 to April 1955. During this span of fourteen months, I had the good fortune to be with Baba when He visited Sakori and Pandharpur. I was also present at Meherabad for over two weeks during the Final Declaration Meeting in September and later for a day's meeting in Satara, in April 1955.

For the accounts of these visits and meetings, I have followed my brief, sketchy notes as well as my personal observations and contacts with Baba's followers. I have also made use of Kishan Singh's diary after checking the contents with the notes written down by others. The book *Three Incredible Weeks with Meher Baba* has been of immense help. However, I wish to make clear that Baba's words in this volume are not always verbatim, except for the special messages dictated from the board and approved by Him. Of course, I have tried to be as close in meaning as possible. However, how can I claim that my understanding was entirely correct at all times? I have ventured to present in this volume the events of Baba's life in a plain way, although at times these accounts are interspersed with my personal comments. This is to point out how I feel, nothing more. Others are totally free to arrive at their own honest conclusions. Meher Baba, the Ancient Infinite One, shall ever remain beyond anyone's explanations and experiences.

The life of the Avatar is like the sky that we can see and move in but cannot fathom. It has in it a place for everyone and everything, yet this "sky" — the Beyond state — is ever incomprehensible. Avatar Meher Baba, in His all-encompassing compassion, accepts whatever comes to Him from a loving heart. He once conveyed, "Whatever anyone takes Me for, I am that." On another occasion He stated, "I am God in human

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form: don't try to understand Me; My depth is unfathomable. Just love Me." There are infinite ways of loving the Avatar, and He helps each one to find one's own path to Him.

I feel immensely indebted to Meher Baba for giving me this privilege to share the *lila* of His Avataric life with the readers. May Beloved Avatar Meher Baba inwardly and outwardly guide me to please Him more and more by depending upon Him — this is the path He has chosen for me. And may I lead a simple, natural honest life of total trust in Him, listening to and sharing the glories and stories of Avatar Meher Baba's love, more and more, until "I am" no more, in His eternal, lively Silence.

Bal Natu

February 25, 1992
Meherazad

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"MARCH ON" WITH MEHER BABA'S LIFE 1954 ~ PART XIII

"Wide Awake in Sound Sleep"

It is in God's plan to awaken everyone from the Dream of Creation and make one live in Him and experience His Infinite Bliss.

— Meher Baba

On one occasion in the 1950s, Avatar Meher Baba, His face lit with a gentle sweetness, was sitting in a chair conversing informally with a small group of followers and other visitors. Through graceful gestures, Baba was asking them about little incidents in their daily lives. The care and interest that Baba took in even seemingly trivial matters was one of the things that endeared Him to His lovers and touched their hearts. Suddenly, in the midst of this small talk, one of the visitors who had recently come to Meher Baba requested Him to enlighten them as to what was the goal of life.

Without looking the least surprised by this abrupt change of topic, Baba smiled and cryptically replied, "To be wide awake in sound sleep." With this, He gracefully resumed His family conversation. Baba's succinct and seemingly offhand reply is rich with insight for any earnest, ardent seeker of God, the Truth. At first His comment may seem paradoxical, but when one tries to fathom its depths, a world of meaning unfolds. Meher Baba elaborated on this point more fully in a message entitled "Dreaming and Dreaming":

What is called your "awake-state," your daily life with all its associations and experiences, is only you dreaming and in your dream creating all the persons and objects in that dreaming for your experience of them; what is called your dreaming when asleep is but another dream within this dream.

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When you wake from your asleep-dreaming into your awake-dream, you know that the asleep-dreaming was only a dream. When you awake from your awake-dreaming, you will know that you were the sole creator of both the dreams, and all the people, objects, and situations contained in them — that they existed only in you and were for no one but you and were nothing but dream experiences of your dreaming and that you alone have Real Existence.¹

But who is the dreamer? Who has real existence? In truth, it is the Ocean of Consciousness, God. Who, in His divine Whim, got Himself seemingly separated into an infinite number of drop-soul dreamers. Thus God, as the drop-soul, takes on the appearance of an individual identity, an act which seems to limit His awareness of His own Infinite Consciousness.

God's game is to awaken each drop-soul from its asleep state of unconscious Divinity to the fully awake state of conscious Divinity, God-realization, at which point the drop-soul realizes that it has never been anything but the Ocean of Consciousness, and that all the travails of the long journey, all the tossings and turnings of the awakening from the deep sound sleep to the wide-awake state, were in fact nothing but a dream. This dream is the Dream of Creation, the playground, as it were, of God's eternal game of awakening Himself to Himself.

And within this game of awakening, there is a special recurring period of dispensation, known as the springtide of Creation, when the Avatar, the first soul who consciously experienced Himself as God, assumes a human form on this earth. Each time He comes, the pace of the game picks up, and everything in Creation is nudged in its sleeping, gently, yet in ways uniquely suited to each one.

In this age it was in February 1954, first in the Hamirpur district and on through the glorious Andhra darshan tours, that Meher Baba, for the first time in this Advent, began to declare publicly that He is the Avatar of the Age. Once He explained:

¹ *Stay with God*, p. 167.

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The life of everything and everyone is an open book to Me. It is like a film show that I enjoy at My own cost. I am the sole Producer of this ever-changing and never-ending film called the universe, wherein I become you in your awake dream state, in order to awaken you to the Real Awake State ... This needs My Grace. When My Grace descends, it makes you Me.²

The Avatar is the eternally present One who, even in the sleep of Creation, is latently wide awake. He continues to awaken everyone gradually to the real, innate state of knowing oneself as God. His periodic Advent and His work serve the purpose of helping humanity to cross the bridge — to span the abyss — between Illusion and Reality. The Avatar's divinely human life in Illusion, in spite of its short duration, continues to radiate His lively presence to humanity. On this subject, Avatar Meher Baba once clarified:

God's life lived in Illusion, as the Avatar ... is not illusory; whereas God's life lived in Creation as all animate and inanimate beings is both real and illusory ... Illusory life means life in illusion with illusion, surrounded by illusion, and though it is life (as experienced by the 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.³

Each is destined to find his or her own way to God. In my case, two quotations of Meher Baba often wake me from my slumber and guide me on my journey to Him. The first is: "To resolve all problems, remember Me wholeheartedly, as much as you can, and remain happy." And the second: "To love Me is your business; the rest is My business." In the effort to attend to my business of loving Him by remembering Him, my mind often dwells on the incidents of Meher Baba's divinely human and humanly divine life. And by way of expressing my gratitude to Him I began sharing them through the volumes of *Glimpses*; this enables me to relive my times with Baba.

Whether these introductory remarks have helped to clarify

² Meher Baba, *The Everything and the Nothing*, pp. 54-55.

³ *Life Circulars of Avatar Meher Baba*, No. 24, April 10, 1955.

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the significance of the Avatar's Advent on earth or have obscured and mystified it, I do not know But here I am reminded of an episode in which the silver lining of Baba's humor dispelled the cloud of philosophy veiling the Truth. On this particular occasion a distinguished professor, after discussing certain metaphysical subjects with Baba, asked, "What is philosophy?" Baba's eyes sparkled, and His long, slender fingers gracefully moved on His board to convey just one sentence: "Simple things made difficult!" And this immediately brought a smile to the serious face of the professor.

So it is high time to stop philosophizing and straightaway begin with the life of Meher Baba, the Awakener, the One who rouses all from their dreaming by awakening love in their hearts. As Francis Brabazon has written:

He is the One who in the dress of dream
Clothed us to make us naked Truth supreme,
The One that all men seek and few men find,
For He lives in the realm beyond the mind.⁴

Love: A Gift of Total Commitment

In the early hours of the morning of March 6, 1954, the Visakhapatnam-Poona passenger train pulled into the Poona railway station, thus bringing Meher Baba's hectic yet glorious darshan tour of Andhra to a close. The shrill whistle of the engine awakened the slumbering passengers, who hurriedly rushed out of their compartments, as Poona was the terminus for that train. Joining the stream of exiting passengers, Baba, His head covered with a scarf, walked in His swift yet graceful manner through the station and out the front entrance. Waiting for Him there was the car of Adi K. Irani, Baba's secretary, which, according to prearrangement, had been brought from Ahmednagar. Adi drove Baba to Bindra House in Poona, where several members of the Jessawala family lived under Baba's instruction.

After having a wash and eating a simple breakfast, Baba

⁴ *A Singing to Meher Baba the Eternal Beloved*, c. 2.

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left with the men *mandali*, including Eruch and Kumar, for Mahabaleshwar. Upon reaching Florence Hall, the Aga Khan's bungalow in Mahabaleshwar — His headquarters at the time — Baba discussed plans with Adi for His upcoming visit to Sakori and for the public darshan program to be given in Ahmednagar.

Several months prior to the Andhra tour, communications had been exchanged with the Sakori Ashram, and Baba had fixed the date of March 20 for His visit there. Baba now wanted Adi to see whether it would be practical to hold a public darshan program in Ahmednagar on the next day, March 21. For over two decades, Baba's local followers had been requesting Baba to hold such a program for the people of the Ahmednagar district.

Even though the Andhra tour had been a strenuous one, Baba did not take time to rest before beginning His next public darshan. If anything, it seemed that Baba wished to intensify His spiritual work. So He told Adi to prepare a circular informing His followers not to write letters to Him for the next three months. Baba explained that He did not want to be disturbed by correspondence so that He would be free to concentrate on His inner work during the upcoming months. After meeting with Baba and taking lunch, Adi left in his car for Ahmednagar, a distance of about a hundred and fifty miles.

About this time, the mailman delivered a telegram bringing sad news to Baba. It had been sent by the daughter of Harjiwan Lal, a leading attorney in Delhi and, more importantly, one of Baba's close lovers. His daughter was to be married that very day in Delhi. But now the telegram read: "Mother died today (March 6). Marriage also today. Whether marriage should take place." Harjiwan's wife had died in the early hours of the morning, while that same evening his dear daughter's wedding was to be celebrated on a lavish scale. What a situation! No wonder the family looked to Baba for guidance.

After the cable was read out, Baba, the All-knowing One, immediately dictated from His board a reply to the sorrowful,

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confused bride. His reply surprised some of those who were with Baba. It read: "Marriage should take place. My blessings. BABA." This was immediately sent as an express telegram, which reached Delhi in an hour or so. What an unexpected response to an unexpected critical situation in life!

In total surrenderance to Baba's will, the family went ahead with the wedding function that very day. One can imagine how people in the general community criticized this family for not postponing the wedding. Some even ridiculed Harjiwan. Only love can bear such things cheerfully. How can one expect others to understand the relationship between a lover and the Divine Beloved?

Yet the willingness to pass cheerfully through ordeals such as these is one of the demands the Beloved makes on those whom He specially loves. Real love is no child's play. As Meher Baba stated in one of His messages:

Love burns the lover;
devotion burns the Beloved.
Love seeks happiness for the Beloved;
devotion seeks blessings from the Beloved.

Harjiwan's love for Baba flowed through his total commitment to the Beloved's pleasure. To win that pleasure, personal tragedy combined with public humiliation was not too great a price for him to pay. Later on, Harjiwan wrote a very heart-rending letter to Baba. In it he expressed his concern that perhaps he had failed in his duty to provide the best medical treatment for his very dear wife, a soul that had lovingly surrendered to Baba. He was often tormented by remorse at the thought that she had died a "premature death" because of his negligence. In the same letter he begged Baba's pardon and asked Him for the strength of heart to arrange programs at various places to spread Beloved Baba's message of Love. He wanted to share with the people that the Avatar, as Meher Baba, was once more amongst them.

Baba was deeply touched by Harjiwan's love and obedience to Him and in answer dictated several points to Kishan Singh to be conveyed in a letter. In His consoling reply, Baba, the

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Knower of all our lifetimes, with His divine authority assured Harjiwan that there was no such thing as "premature death." No amount of medical assistance or neglect could alter the divinely ordained moment of one's coming to Baba. Harjiwan's wife was destined to come to Baba on that day, so there was no need for Harjiwan to worry. Rather, he should feel happy at her return to Him — the Eternal Life. Baba's explanation comforted Harjiwan's heart and wiped out the thoughts of guilt weighing on his mind.

This episode illustrates the intimate, personal attention Baba gives to those who have surrendered themselves to Him. Since the story of the Beloved cannot be separated from the story of the love of His lovers, a few words about Harjiwan's earlier contact and relationship with Baba seem in order here. Harjiwan first met Baba in the 1940s and had the good fortune at that time to be able to feel Meher Baba's divinity and to accept Him as the God-realized Master. His heart ignited by Baba's love, Harjiwan did not miss an opportunity over the years to be in the Master's presence whenever this was permitted. His meetings with Baba kept the flame of love burning bright within him.

For this reason he, like many others in Baba's family, was greatly shocked to learn from the circular sent out from Adi's office in October 1949 that:

Baba ends His Old Life of cherished hopes and multifarious activities and ... begins His New Life of complete renunciation and absolute helplessness from October 16, 1949 . . . No one should try to see Baba ... No one should try to communicate with Baba . . . for any reason whatsoever.⁵

Like most of Baba's followers, Harjiwan was distraught by Baba's most unexpected decision. There was a note of finality to the circular that left Baba's lovers no alternative but to accept His will. They were not even allowed to write a farewell note expressing their loving salutations to Him. Divine Love is a law unto itself, and when it is manifesting through the life of

⁵ *New Life Circular*, No. 2, January 23, 1950.

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the Avatar, sometimes it is expressed in the most unpredictable and unprecedented ways!

The thought that Baba would be setting out on "a life of hopelessness and helplessness," journeying on foot and begging for food, grieved the hearts of His dear ones. The New Life started on October 16, and by the end of 1949 Baba was in Moradabad in Uttar Pradesh. The winter was exceptionally cold that year. When Harjiwan came to know through the New Life circular that Baba was in the north of India, his loving concern for Baba's comfort prompted him to ask Baba through an intermediary to allow him to send some warm clothing, blankets, and sweets for Baba and His companions. Baba lovingly agreed to accept this offering as *bhiksha* (alms given to wayfarers), which gave timely relief to the New Life companions, who had been suffering acutely from the cold. But at the same time He warned the family not to have any further contact or communication with Him or His New Life companions. Joyfully Harjiwan complied with these instructions, dispatching a large supply of these much-needed provisions through one of his employees.

The New Life ended just as it had begun — unexpectedly, although this time the surprise was much to the delight of His lovers everywhere. At the beginning of February 1952, Baba issued the first "Life Circular," which brought the joyous news that Baba would be taking up residence once more at Meherazad and resuming contact with His disciples, devotees, and followers. However, they were still not allowed to see Baba until He returned from His visit to the West, which was to last from April to August 1952. Harjiwan was most eagerly waiting for the first opportunity to be with Baba.

In November 1952, Harjiwan's joy knew no bounds when he was permitted to accompany Baba on His first visits to Hamirpur and Andhra. During Baba's second visit to Hamirpur in 1954, Harjiwan became so drenched in Baba's love that he longed intensely to be with Him also during His second tour of Andhra, which was to begin on February 20. But owing to the illness of his wife and the upcoming marriage of his

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daughter, he did not accompany Baba in His second Andhra Darshan. But then Harjiwan's wife unexpectedly died on March 6, the very day of their daughter's wedding.

Harjiwan was plunged into terrible grief. After all, he was a family man and not a saint. The memories of his dear wife who had suddenly passed away stung his heart and cast a shadow over all that used to delight him. Worse still, in addition to this profound grief over losing her, Harjiwan shed tears of repentance for having missed his chance to be with Baba on His glorious second Andhra tour. He even thought that, had he only participated in Beloved Baba's second Andhra Darshan, perhaps his wife would not have died; Baba might have taken care of her health!

The life of the lover is woven with moments of confusion and clarity, suffering and joy, and it is often subjected to overwhelming trials. Harjiwan was finally consoled by the letter from Baba, in which it was explained to him that His will is supreme and He knows best. Through Baba's letter Harjiwan came to understand that the purpose of suffering is to initiate a person bound by limitations into the unlimited bliss of God. Are not periods of happiness sometimes followed by seasons of almost unbearable agony? But it is also true that every sorrow carries with it its own special and intimate message from God.

While in Andhra, Baba had revealed in one of His messages that the life of the Avatar is like the burning flame (*shamma*) of a divine candle — His human form. The Avatar's lovers are like moths (*paravanas*). In their longing to merge in the Avatar's being, they do not care if their wings are burnt while hovering around the flame. Harjiwan's commitment to Baba's wish on March 6 and his consequent agony of heart present a moving example of the Avatar's all-consuming love and the lover's response to it.

Returned from Andhra, Left for Sakori

It had been my great and blessed good fortune to be allowed to accompany Baba on His marvelous and most moving Andhra

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tour. Early on the morning of March 6, I alighted from the train at my hometown, Kurduwadi, while Baba and the *mandali* proceeded to Pooa. I resumed my duties at school the same day.

I wonder whether the students learned anything from me in those first classes! I was still enthralled by the spell that the Andhra Darshan had cast over me. Although I had returned physically to Kurduwadi, my heart was still soaring in some unearthly realm, beguiled by memories of Baba's elegant movements and lively presence. Inwardly I was still reliving those precious moments spent in His company, while my mind went about its business in a most mechanical fashion.

On the next day, Sunday, March 7, I hardly came out of my room but mostly lay in bed, reminiscing over the exhilarating events of the precious two weeks in Andhra. I felt as though I were still accompanying Baba in that land of green paddy fields and tall, swaying palm trees, watching faces dazed with joy and lit with Baba's divine presence. Words fail to express what Baba conveyed to His dear ones through a simple glance or a pat on the shoulder. And the actual verbal messages that Baba gave, spelled out on the alphabet board or through gestures, communicated to people with luminous clarity the fundamental truths of life. The following words may help to capture the essence of the messages which Baba gave in Andhra:

God alone is Real. There is nothing but God; everyone is God, everything is God. To awaken this Truth in humanity, Infinite God periodically assumes a human form, known as the Avatar. Wholeheartedly loving the Avatar, God-become-Man, is the most natural way of realizing the goal of life — union with God the eternal.

The entire visit to Andhra had been a feast of love spread for many thousands of people, including hundreds of His devoted lovers. Soon after my return home, I received a letter written under Baba's direct instructions by Bhau Kalchuri. Although short, the letter expressed Baba's love and His sense of humor. Enclosed with it was a copy of His message, "Existence Is

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Substance; Life Is Shadow."⁶ This entire message had been read out in the early hours of the morning of March 2 at the workers' meeting in Rajahmundry, Andhra Pradesh. Baba had now asked me to translate this message from English into Marathi. Not being a learned person, I did not find this job easy. In fact, I had difficulty even in translating the title, to say nothing of elucidating the spiritual subtleties throughout the text. To this day I am not confident about the words I used and the way in which I translated this message.

However, I must mention that the part of the message that touched my heart most was its marvelous ending. In it, Baba pointed out that the four different types of yoga — *karma*, *dnyan*, *raj*, and *bhakti* — serve as signposts on the way leading to God. Then He introduced a fifth type, the yoga of self-surrender (*atma-samarpan*). At the end of this message Baba stated, "If you seek to live perpetually, then crave for the death of your deceptive self at the hands of complete surrender to Me. This yoga is the essence of all yogas in one." Perhaps this statement about the "fifth yoga" was a personal message which Baba brought home to me through the excuse of entrusting me with this translation work?

In the letter, Beloved Baba had asked me to arrange for the printing and distribution of this pamphlet. Although coming up with the money for this project was not easy for me, Baba had also added that I was not to ask Him for monetary help, not even in my wildest dreams! This bit of Baba's humor gladdened my heart, as it seemed to pluck on the happy strings of His intimacy with me. At the end of the letter, Baba had sent me His love, a sign that things would arrange themselves naturally and that all would be well. It was still difficult to apply myself to this task, but as I began, I found that it helped bring me back to earth. It shook me out of my Andhra reveries, helping me to concentrate on my daily duties at school.

Meanwhile, the plans for Baba's upcoming darshan programs were proceeding apace. On his return to Ahmednagar from Mahabaleshwar, Adi discussed with Sarosh Irani, one of the *mandali* and a former mayor of the city, the possibility of arranging a mass darshan in Ahmednagar on March 21,

⁶ See *Glimpses of the God-Man, Meher Baba*, Vol. V, p. 274.

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following Baba's visit to Sakori on March 20. After contacting several prominent local citizens, the two disciples returned to Mahabaleshwar on March 10. There they reported to Baba the various pros and cons of His proposed Ahmednagar darshan. Baba listened to the free and frank discussion that took place between Adi, Sarosh, and the other resident *mandali*, which focused on the practicality of such a program at this time. Baba often wanted discussions of this kind in the course of arranging for a program. In the end, Baba judiciously decided to postpone this darshan in Ahmednagar until May.

At the close of this meeting, Adi read out a draft of the circular which Baba had asked him to compose. This text was approved by Baba and was issued on March 15. It was the shortest of all the "Life Circulars" and, in its entirety, read:

Baba desires that, with effect from today up to the end of May 1954, no one should correspond with Him on any subject whatsoever.⁷

Adi was instructed to mail this information to Baba centers in India and to all of Baba's intimate devotees and followers.

After returning from his latest visit with Baba, Adi set out for Sakori to finalize the details of Baba's brief visit to Upasni Nagar on March 20. These arrangements attended to, he dispatched a telegram of reconfirmation to Baba. Adi also sent me a letter informing me that I would be allowed to accompany Baba on His Sakori visit. He mentioned that he had reserved a seat for me in a van that was to follow His car.

Baba's kind concern in permitting me to accompany Him to Sakori had a special significance for me. As a teenager, I had read in a Marathi monthly some very negative articles about Upasni Maharaj. In my ignorance of true spirituality and in my youthful patriotic fervor, I regarded Maharaj as a parasite on society and had passed some sarcastic remarks about him.

Even after coming into the orbit of Meher Baba's love, it came as a mild shock to me to learn that Maharaj was one of His *Sadgurus*. I would never have dreamed that the day would come when I would be eager to visit Sakori. However, in His all-forgiving presence, Baba, by allowing me to visit

⁷ *Life Circular*, No. 17, March 15, 1954.

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Maharaj's Ashram, was helping me to wipe out my feelings of guilt connected with the *Sadguru*, Upasni. So it was in the most delightful of spirits that, on March 19, I left Kurduwadi for Ahmednagar to accompany Baba on His Sakori visit.

Sakori: Maharaj and Gulmai, Jhopri and Pinjra

Before narrating the events of Meher Baba's visit to Sakori, I feel it appropriate to give some background information about a few important places in Sakori and about a few prominent people accompanying Baba or referred to by Him in His conversation with those who gathered there on that day — March 20, 1954. Sakori itself is a small village near Rahata in the district of Ahmednagar. After wandering for over two years, Upasni Maharaj finally settled there in 1918. This became his headquarters. In later years his disciples constructed many buildings around the original *jhopri* (hut) where Maharaj stayed. This larger community and complex of buildings came to be known as Upasni Nagar. Later an institution was founded at Sakori named Kanya Kumari Sthan. *Kanya* means "virgin." Some virgin girls willingly came to stay at Sakori and led their lives under the direction of Maharaj. Chief amongst those was Godavri Mai, who first came for Maharaj's darshan as a young girl of nine years in 1924. On first seeing her, Maharaj called out, "Come on, be quick, I have been waiting for you." As foretold by Maharaj, Godavri Mai later became the head of the Ashram.

Most of Maharaj's followers were Hindus, and the talks he gave were in Marathi — the vernacular spoken in Maharashtra. However, there were also a few Zoroastrian (Parsi) families that were drawn to Him, and they wholeheartedly accepted Him as their Master or *Sadguru*. Gustadji, Mehera, and other close disciples of Baba's had stayed with Upasni at various times in the 1920s. Yet particularly relevant to our present story is Gulmai, the mother of Adi, Meher Baba's secretary. In fact, Gulmai was the only woman to accompany Baba on His present visit to Sakori. It seems likely that Baba

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had especially asked her to come with Him owing to her long-standing connections with Maharaj and the Sakori Ashram.

From the time she was young, Gulmai had been spiritually inclined, and she first visited Upasni Maharaj as early as 1921. It was then that she also saw Merwan (as Baba was called then) for the first time. She was impressed with His genuine devotion to Maharaj and His interest in arranging *bhandaras* (free meals open to all people in remembrance of God) at Sakori. She felt very familiar with Merwan, but at the time, Gulmai remained one-pointed in her devotion to Maharaj.

In fact, Gulmai became so devoted to Maharaj that, while meditating before his picture at her home in Ahmednagar, she would often lose herself in a trancelike state. Her husband, Kaikhushroo, swayed by the warnings of elders of the Parsi community, became worried about her love for a Hindu Master. To honor her husband's wishes, Gulmai allowed him to remove Maharaj's picture from her room. It was around this time that her two sons, Rustom and Adi, met Meher Baba at Poona. They were so drawn to Him that they willingly gave up their worldly careers and surrendered their lives to Him. Merwan, now called Meher Baba, began to visit Rustom and Adi in Ahmednagar. Gulmai thus began to come into frequent contact with Baba. Over time, these visits engendered within her a tug of war, for she began to feel unsure as to whether to give her total allegiance to Maharaj or to Meher Baba, or how to balance the devotion she felt for both.

In the course of time, Maharaj and Baba inwardly and outwardly helped Gulmai to resolve this conflict in their own unique ways. One day in the '20s, Baba casually revealed to Gulmai and His *mandali* that she was His "spiritual mother." Naturally Gulmai's spontaneous love for Meher Baba and inner feeling of deep connection with Him were strengthened by this loving remark. At the same time, Baba continued always to show such deep respect and love for Maharaj that Gulmai's conflict was lessened to some extent.

It was further reduced by an incident that occurred in the '30s when Maharaj, on his own initiative, visited Gulmai's

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house, (then called Khushroo Quarters, now known as the Avatar Meher Baba Trust Compound). Maharaj went straight to the room that was always kept entirely at his disposal, sending his secretary off to do some errands in the city. Then he sat for a while on a gunny sack. Later, when Adi and Gulmai entered the room, they were astounded to find Maharaj standing with folded hands before Baba's picture, looking intently into His fascinating eyes. Turning to them, Maharaj said, "I like this photograph. I like Merwan. He is unique. I bow before Him. Please convey my salutations to Him."

Maharaj continued, "Give me a tray and a lamp. I want to perform *arti* to Merwan today." Gulmai fetched the tray, and Maharaj began waving the lighted lamp before Baba's picture, chanting *mantras* in Sanskrit. Such touches of the Master made it easier for her to love and serve Baba wholeheartedly without feeling that she was in any way betraying her devotion to Maharaj. Perhaps, in fact, it was at this moment that Gulmai truly accepted Meher Baba as the Avatar of the Age. Coincidentally, the date of Maharaj's visit was February 16, which, according to the Zoroastrian calendar, was Baba's forty-third birthday.

Thus Gulmai, like several others in Baba's group, was intimately familiar with the Sakori Ashram, its layout, and its prominent persons. Since several of the places and buildings in Sakori, especially the *pinjra* and *jhopri*, are charged with an important spiritual history relating not only to Maharaj but to Baba as well, I would like to recount something of their history.

Beginning from October 11, 1911, Sai Baba instructed Upasni Maharaj to stay at Shirdi. Under Sai Baba's direct orders, Maharaj spent three years living in the Khandoba temple, about half a mile from where Sai Baba himself resided. In 1914 Maharaj left Shirdi and traveled through parts of northeastern India, staying for some months in Nagpur and Khargpur.

In 1918, at the request of some of his devotees, Maharaj decided to settle down in Sakori, a tiny village about four miles from Shirdi. The site he selected for his permanent abode was

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in a cremation ground outside the village. A *jhopri* (hut) of mud walls was built for his residence. On October 15, Sai Baba passed away. In his honor a small temple was built in front of the *jhopri*, and Sai Baba's picture was placed in it for worship.

In the latter part of 1920, this temple was blown away by a violent gust of wind and had to be rebuilt. At the same time, it was felt essential to build several rooms and a *dharamshala* to accommodate the ever-increasing number of devotees visiting Sakori. Maharaj gave his approval to this new construction work, but to avoid the bustle of this building activity, he had a quickly improvised *jhopri* put up for himself some distance away.

The site preferred and chosen by Maharaj was in an old cremation ground thickly overgrown with prickly pear cactuses. Few ventured to go there because of the thorns and snakes. Maharaj neither liked nor allowed anyone to approach him in that new *jhopri*. He would drive away those who dared to approach him by pelting them with stones. Any time of the day, when he wished to see his devotees, he would go on his own to the original *jhopri*.

The move to the new *jhopri* and Maharaj's sudden desire for isolation may seem arbitrary or even capricious. But from the events that followed, this seems to have been the divinely ordained time for Maharaj to begin a unique and special work. For it was Maharaj's role to remove completely from Merwan that veil which had been placed upon Him by the five Perfect Masters. Merwan was the human form assumed by Infinite Consciousness, and it was for Maharaj to prepare Him to function as the Avatar. Outwardly the excuse Maharaj gave for the shift to this dwelling place was the din and noise of the construction work near the original *jhopri*, but inwardly, the real reason was that Maharaj wanted to have complete privacy: for he knew that soon Merwan would be coming for His final unveiling, and it was Maharaj's part to establish Him as the Avatar of the Age.

Merwan had been coming periodically to visit Maharaj since 1915, but usually His visits were of short duration. In July 1921, bringing almost nothing with Him, Merwan

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arrived at Sakori and remained there continuously for about six months. During the daytime He stayed in a makeshift room near the Datta Temple, but He spent nights secluded with Maharaj in the new *jhopri*.

It was here that the most momentous event in spiritual history was taking place — Merwan's final unveiling that consciously established Him in His status as the Ancient One. The ashramites and the disciples and devotees of Maharaj had no idea what was really happening in that secluded *jhopri*.

During Baba's night visits to Maharaj, no one else was permitted inside or around the *jhopri*. But generally by 2:00 A.M. Baba would take leave of Maharaj and return to His nearby improvised room. He did not sleep there, but He would allow Yeshwant Rao, who was attending Him at the time, to press His feet. During this long Sakori stay, in evident defiance of the laws of nature, Baba had almost completely stopped taking food. Yet He would often ask for *paan* at any time during the night or day. Each time, Yeshwant Rao would lovingly prepare it for Him. The months of November and December are quite cold in Maharashtra, and Baba had brought with Him only a few cotton clothes. Tending once again to Baba's needs, Yeshwant Rao made Him a coat out of a kind of warm, thick, but coarse blanket known as *kamli*, which is still preserved in the museum at Meherabad. In all these and other ways, it was Yeshwant Rao's blessed good fortune to serve the Avatar devotedly at the very beginning of this Advent. This loving service Yeshwant Rao performed in obedience to the wish of Maharaj, who told him in the early 1920s, "Merwan is Parabrahma [God the Beyond]; do whatever He tells you to do."

One night in December 1921, near the end of Merwan's last and longest stay in Sakori, when He and Maharaj were together in the new *jhopri*, Maharaj folded his hands to Merwan and said, "Merwan, You are the Avatar; You are Adi-Shakti [Primordial Divine Power]." This spontaneous proclamation of Merwan's spiritual status as Avatar or Ancient One seemed to indicate that Maharaj's work of removing the veil placed upon the Infinite Consciousness of Merwan was

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complete. It was after this moment that Merwan began to function consciously as Avatar. And so a few days later, shortly after mid-December 1921, Merwan left Sakori for Poona.

About this time, Maharaj declared to his disciples and devotees that the evil spirits which had infested the cremation ground where the new *jhopri* had been constructed were now liberated. What divine pretense and mischievous humor! Maharaj now allowed all ashramites and pilgrims to visit him freely, much to their delight and joy.

However, on December 25, 1921, when they all came for Maharaj's darshan, they were alarmed to find that he had confined himself in a small bamboo *pinjra* (cage) with no exit. Maharaj had contrived to do this with the help of one obedient disciple who was an excellent carpenter. Asking this disciple secretly to bring the needed materials and tools, Maharaj entered the *pinjra* unobserved by his devotees and had it nailed closed around him. Still maintained at Sakori in its original place, the *pinjra* is five feet high, six feet long, and five feet wide. The three sides were enclosed with bamboo bars, while a wall behind it formed the fourth side. The top was also covered.

The ashramites and the devotees were greatly upset and deeply grieved to find Maharaj in this condition, as his movements were now totally restricted. He was unable to stand upright. He could not leave the cage even for answering nature's call. Yet this self-imposed confinement was fraught with spiritual significance. A few days later, Maharaj, in a calm and cheerful mood, explained the matter thus:

It is the will of Providence that, for your sakes, I have to confine myself in this manner ... I wish to stand surety for all my devotees in the Divine Court. This confinement is to release you from the bonds of Maya — the greatest prison. ... Whosoever will breathe his last while thinking of it [the *pinjra*] will, without doubt, attain the state of Eternal Bliss.

Maharaj continued with this torturous inconvenience of

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self-confinement for over two years. Finally, on January 31, 1924, he called the same carpenter to open a doorway in the *pinjra*. From then on he would go in and out of it at his will and pleasure.

Maharaj dropped his body on December 24, 1942. This occurred in the premises of the new *jhopri*, where Maharaj had spent many nights all alone with Merwan to unveil Him as the Avatar. The next day, December 25, Maharaj's body was lowered into a pit a little to the east and adjacent to the *pinjra*, where, coincidentally, he had confined himself on that very date exactly twenty years earlier. This pit was then covered and a *samadhi* was built, enclosed on four sides.

In accordance with Upasni Maharaj's instructions, Godavri Mai and the *kanyas* continued to conduct the activities of the Ashram. After about three weeks, on January 13, 1942, Maharaj's full-size statue was installed inside the *pinjra*. Later, a large Sabha Mandap (a big hall) was built around the *pinjra* and *samadhi*. This place became the pivot and center of Ashram life in Upasni Nagar. It was in this Sabha Mandap that Baba, on His visit to Sakori on March 20, 1954, took His seat with Godavri Mai by His side and gave His *sahavas* to the assembled company.

Baba Reminisces in Sakori

On the afternoon of March 19, 1954, Baba arrived at Meherazad. Early the next morning, Sarosh drove Baba, along with Kaka, Eruch, Nariman, and Meherjee, from Meherazad to Sakori. Adi drove separately in his Chevy with his mother, Gulmai. Two additional vans took the rest of the *mandali* and a few others, including myself, who had been allowed to accompany Baba.

Saturday, the 19th, had been a full-moon night. As we left Ahmednagar just before dawn, the full moon was slowly sinking, while in the east the sun was rising in splendor. With the cool morning breezes, it was a pleasant journey for us. For the general public too, this was a special day – indeed, a day of fun

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and festivity. For on the previous night the local populace had lit large bonfires in their villages to celebrate Holi, a Hindu festival that marks the end of winter and the beginning of spring.

Our two vans reached Rahata, a small town a mile or so from Sakori, in advance of Baba's car. We got down and joined the crowd from the village that had already gathered to welcome Baba. When He arrived, He graciously accepted the homage with His charming smile. The vehicles then proceeded to Sakori, turning off the main road. When everyone had entered Upasni Nagar, just outside the premises of the Ashram proper, Baba stopped at the newly built house of Yeshwant Rao, that same devoted disciple of Maharaj who had served Him so faithfully three decades before. This "housewarming" celebration began with the garlanding of Baba and the breaking of coconuts. The pieces of coconut meat were then distributed as Baba's *prasad*, along with pieces of sugar candy: a sweet beginning to a memorable visit at Sakori. The warmth of Baba's compassionate companionship was flowing, radiating from His silent divine presence. Those who accompanied Baba were in the best of moods as they walked with Him.

On Baba's arrival at the Ashram (Upasni Kanya Kumari Sthan), Godavri Mai, the mother of the Ashram, together with Jiji, Wagh, and other old disciples of Maharaj, gave Him a very rousing reception. A band played, guns were fired, and Baba was led to a beautifully decorated awning where He was garlanded by Maharaj's disciples. Then all took Baba's darshan, placing their foreheads on His feet. Godavri Mai, although now the head of the entire Ashram, likewise bowed down to Baba without hesitation, the way she used to pay homage to Maharaj. Baba was very pleased. There was a look of appreciation on His face and a twinkle in His eye.

Baba then walked freely in and around the *jhopri* and the different temples, followed by Godavri Mai, the *kanyas*, and some of the *mandali*. During this tour a kaleidoscope of expressions flashed in quick succession across Baba's face, perhaps owing to His own intimate familiarity with these places from His early years in Sakori.

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After taking tea, Baba led the others to Maharaj's *samadhi*, close to the *pinjra*, which houses his statue. Taking His seat on the ground, with Godavri Mai and Gulmai sitting on His right, Baba gestured to the *kanyas* to make themselves comfortable. He had previously dictated a special message to be read out on this occasion, but now, apparently in a reminiscent mood, He wished instead to convey some intimate memories of Sakori to those gathered there, especially the *kanyas*. There were possibly two hundred people present, some sitting, others standing at the edge of the crowd.

Moments spent in Beloved Baba's presence during any darshan or *sahavas* were so full and so moving that taking notes was a distraction for me. I had learned, however, that on such occasions Baba would sometimes spontaneously convey points of great spiritual profundity that He rarely repeated. So, this time, to keep alive the memories of these timeless moments of love and wonder, I made the effort to take notes. These notes, consisting of words and lines that I jotted down quickly while Baba's board was being read out and His gestures interpreted, are the basis of the account that follows.

The task of reconstructing what Baba said during this spontaneous "talk" was made more difficult by the fact that Baba alternated freely between three languages — Marathi, Gujarati, and English. It was not easy for me, working from my hurried scribbles, to follow and recapture exactly what Baba had conveyed. I had to read between the lines and reconstruct the flow of ideas as best I could. The following record of Baba's informal reminiscences are, to the best of my knowledge, close in meaning to what originally transpired, but they definitely should not be taken as a verbatim recounting. After all the people had taken their seats and made themselves comfortable, Baba paused for a few moments longer, casting His loving glance upon the assembly. Then, with a benign smile, He began:

Upasni Maharaj is now witness to what I convey to you. Before I come to the special phase of Maharaj's work with the *kanyas*, I have to go back to the earlier part of My life.

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At the outset, I want you all to know that one of the aspects of God is Infinite Honesty; the least hypocrisy keeps you away from Him.

Now, to begin, Babajan kissed Me on My forehead in January 1914, and that very instant I experienced My Infinite, Ancient One State. This experience will ever remain beyond words. However, to give you some idea, first I entered the Infinite Vacuum. Nothing was there: no one, no *akash* [primordial matter]. The gross, subtle, and mental worlds ceased to exist, even as Illusion. This was followed by the Infinite Bliss of Self-Realization.

But soon after, for nine months, I had to go through indescribable spiritual agonies, and "something" urged Me to come down to normal human consciousness. I began to dash My forehead against walls and stones. And, as My forehead used to bleed, I would tie a kerchief around My head. Finally, this urge brought Me to Shirdi. When I prostrated Myself on a dirt road before Sai Baba, he uttered in a loud voice just one word, "Parvardigar" [God Almighty as the Preserver and Sustainer]. This contact with Sai Baba led Me to Khandoba's temple, which was most unclean. Here Maharaj, who was reduced to a skeleton, was sitting, almost naked.

Now see the paradox: I saw no one except Myself everywhere. As I approached Maharaj, he flung a stone at Me. It hit Me on the forehead and drew blood. [This blow left a permanent mark on Baba's forehead.] That spot was the same place on My forehead where Babajan had kissed Me. That hit was the first stroke of *dnyan* that initiated My apparent coming down from the Infinite, Ancient State. After several meetings and contacts with Maharaj, over a period of seven years, I established Myself in the full, normal, human consciousness of man as the God-Man. Then I had both the "infinite Divine" and the "ordinary human" simultaneously harmonized in Me. [This was in 1921.]

Baba's eyes flashed as He looked toward where the *kanyas*

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were sitting, intently listening to Him. He continued:

Now, I want you all to listen very carefully. Maharaj helped Me to establish Myself in My role and status as the Ancient One and entrusted Me with the Avataric work of this age. Then he engaged himself with his own spiritual work, ordained by the Divine Will. However, with this change, he outwardly commenced something new, his work with the *kanyas*, and this made Durgamai, Maharaj's "spiritual mother," upset and angry.

Baba was referring here to a rather stormy phase in the Sakori Ashram in the 1930s that was well known to those living there at the time of Baba's visit in 1954. But since few readers will be familiar with this old conflict, whose scars Baba was now wiping away with the healing balm of His infinite love and understanding, I feel a little supplementary information would be helpful. Durgabai, whom Baba always referred to as Durgamai, was a widow (*bai* is a term of respect, while *mai* means mother); she came to stay in Shirdi with her small son, Raghanath, so that she could spend her life in Sai Baba's service. Later, Sai Baba gave her the duty of looking after Upasni when he was living in the Khandoba temple, between 1911 and 1914.

At that time, Maharaj was refusing to allow anyone near him, hurling abuse and stones at all who approached. His body was slowly becoming thinner and thinner until he resembled a skeleton. Durgabai would bring Upasni food and, despite his threats and abuses, would insist that he partake of it. It was as though she had become his mother, and Maharaj would submit to her ministrations at a time when he would not accept them from anyone else.

When Maharaj settled in Sakori, Durgabai went along also to continue serving him. In this way, from the beginning, Durgabai became the unofficial "manager" of Maharaj's Ashram, and she was entirely devoted to Maharaj. Later, when Merwan visited him there, Durgabai looked after Him as well. Once Maharaj said to her, "Merwan will one day shake the world." This made Durgabai very happy, and she began to

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serve and love Merwan all the more. Although Maharaj revealed Merwan's real status to only a few of his followers, like Durgabai and Yeshwant Rao, nonetheless he would occasionally refer to Baba as Maha Deo (the Great Lord), which did not please some of his Hindu disciples. Religious attachments have their own intrinsic value and in some ways are beneficial. When they become rigid and fanatical, however, the prejudices that they create are difficult to overcome.

When Maharaj came out of the *pinjra* on January 31, 1924, he wished to start a new phase of his work. And within a few months, a nine-year-old girl came to visit him. This girl's name was Godavri, and she began visiting Maharaj frequently. He always took a special interest in her. On one occasion he told her, "Keep in mind all that you are seeing here. At present Durgabai looks after the Ashram and the visitors; later you will have to do this." Although Durgabai had by now been with Maharaj for thirteen years and believed in his spiritual perfection, she began to feel jealous.

Maharaj then started spending more time with Godavri and the other young virgins who, with the permission of their parents, came to dedicate their lives to God under Maharaj's direction. These youngsters, whom Maharaj referred to as *kanyas*, became the major focus of Maharaj's new work. He instructed them in the performance of Vedic rituals, taught them sacred Sanskrit *mantras*, and established the Kanya Kumari Sthan. Godavri was the chief participant in these Vedic rites. Maharaj seemed to be concentrating his work on the feminine aspect of God, at times even dressing as a woman himself.

The time and attention that Maharaj was showering on the *kanyas* aroused a certain amount of jealousy in Durgabai. At the same time, some of the more orthodox among his followers were upset, because they did not consider it proper for women to be performing these sacred Vedic rites. So a faction formed opposing them. This faction took advantage of Durgabai's jealousy and her basically innocent and trusting nature by telling her things which turned her against Godavri. She started to use her position as the Ashram head to make

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Godavri's life very difficult.

This dissension amongst the devotees continued for some years, until Durgabai finally left Sakori for Sholapur in 1933. Her misunderstanding of the relationship between Maharaj and the *kanyas* was later exploited by some orthodox Hindu scholars who wanted to repudiate Maharaj's spiritual status. For them, Durgabai's dissatisfaction with Upasni Maharaj, despite her long stay with him and the major role she had occupied in the Ashram activities, served as a justification for their accusations, which they disseminated in articles in Marathi journals.

Several years later, Durgabai realized her mistake and repented deeply. By this time she had become frail and feeble. Maharaj not only lovingly forgave her, but he also expressed his special concern by seeing to her medical care and arranging for her to receive a monthly allowance until her death on May 6, 1939. A *Sadguru's* love for his devotees is unconditional, and his ways of wiping out their mental impressions are often very mysterious. Despite the period of several years when she opposed Maharaj, Durgabai remained one of his close disciples. In fact, Meher Baba once confirmed to His early disciples that she was indeed Maharaj's "spiritual mother."

So by referring to Durgabai's jealousy in His 1954 Sakori visit, Baba was recalling a major controversy that occurred in the later years of Maharaj's ministry. All this was a part of Maharaj's spiritual work of wiping away the impressions of his followers to get them closer to God.

Now to resume, Baba reminisced about the early controversy in the Ashram:

Maharaj did all this on purpose. He was playing the "dual role." It was also at this time that he began to tell people about Me, saying, "I have given nothing to Merwan." And he was right. In fact, what was there for him to give Me? He only made Me *know* My Ancient One status as the Avatar. When some of My disciples visited him, he would say things against Me. In all such conversation

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Maharaj played his role to perfection. He was "perfection Personified."

Some years later [in the early 1930s], when I was at Meherabad, Raghunath, the son of Durgamai, came to Me. He sought Me alone as he wished to tell Me something very personal. He began, "My mother has especially sent me to see You. It is about Maharaj's present way of life and activities." Raghunath added, "My mother feels that now Maharaj seems to be overpowered with lust. It is as if he is won over by the young girls whom he calls *kanyas*. She requests you to visit Maharaj at Sakori."

At the close of Raghunath's conversation I clearly conveyed to him, "You and your dear mother are completely wrong. You cannot understand or even begin to fathom the infinite profundity of Maharaj's divine state and his spiritual work. There is no need for Me to visit Sakori. Tell Durgamai that she should neither lose her head over the activities of Maharaj nor lose her trust in him, irrespective of his outward behavior!"

By way of concluding His remarks on this particular topic, Baba conveyed the following striking and significant point:

Be assured that I knew everything about Maharaj's external life until he dropped his body. I knew because I was in him, as he was in Me. What I had to do with the women [the feminine aspect of God] Maharaj did for Me; and what he had to do with the West, I did for him.

All heard Baba in rapt silence and wonder as He disclosed these secrets about the unseen workings of the two Masters for the first time to those in Sakori. Whether Baba had ever previously revealed these facts to some of His intimate *mandali*, I do not know. For me personally, the significance of Baba's concluding statement is far beyond me, and I have never even attempted to gauge or fathom its meaning. Nonetheless, I have recorded it here, after verifying it with a friend and Baba lover who was also in attendance at the Sakori meeting.

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Maharaj's "dual role" in his relationship with the Avatar, as mentioned by Baba, continued for many years. During this period Gulmai acted as a link between these two Masters.

Having concluded these reminiscences about the earlier history of the Sakori Ashram, Baba now turned to His last meeting with Maharaj shortly before Maharaj's death. He continued:

In 1941, Maharaj sent Me a message through Gulmai, saying, "Soon I will drop my body. So tell Merwan to come and see me."

I replied, "I will not set foot in Sakori." So the meeting was arranged on a farm not far from Sakori, in a one-room thatched hut. [This meeting took place on October 17, 1941.]

I took Gulmai with Me on this trip to Dahegaon. When I saw Maharaj entering the room, I placed My forehead on his feet. There was no one else in the hut at the time. He raised Me up and embraced Me with love. He said, "Merwan, You are *Adi-Shakti* [Primordial Divine Power]," and began to weep. Tears were streaming down his cheeks. Then we both sat in the hut. Maharaj looked at Me and said, "Break your silence." Through gestures I conveyed, "The time has not yet come." In all, three times he asked Me to break My Silence, though he knew that I would not break it. In the end he said, "Keep an eye on Sakori." Then he made Me promise one thing about his beloved Godavri. Today, in fulfillment of My promise to Maharaj, you find Me here.

Two or three months after My meeting with Maharaj, he dropped his body [on December 24], and Godavri was given charge of the *kanyas*.

At this juncture once again Baba changed the topic. It was often Baba's way, after serious discussion, to lighten the atmosphere in His own inimitable way. On this occasion He did so by turning to His first meeting with Mahatma Gandhi on the steamboat *Rajputana* in September 1931. Baba conveyed:

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When I was on the steamer sailing from Karachi to the West, Gandhi was one of the passengers. On his own he came to see Me three times in My cabin. He talked on lots of subjects, including spirituality. I explained many things to him, using the board, which Chanji read out for Me. During one of these "talks" he mentioned, "I had been to Upasni Maharaj, but neither he nor his ways impressed me." Gandhi was honestly expressing his opinion. However, I conveyed to him, "What has impressed you in Me is due to him."

Later during our talks, Gandhi said, "Baba, now the oppression is too much; break Your silence and give the real message of love to the world." On hearing this I gestured, "Soon!" And now, twenty-two years have gone by! That's My way. But now, "soon," I have to break My silence!

Whatever I have told you today about Maharaj is witnessed by the five Perfect Masters — Sai Baba, Upasni Maharaj, Babajan, Tajuddin Baba, and Narayan Maharaj. What I am, what I was, and what I will be as the Ancient One is always due to the five Perfect Masters of that Age. I am the Ancient One.

Be honest in whatever you do. Be honest in your love for Me. Honesty will make you and will help you love God, so that you lose yourself in Him to find Me as your Self.

After a short pause Baba looked at Godavri Mai, and especially to where the *kanyas* were sitting, and His fingers began to move again on the board. He continued:

Although God is beyond all ceremonies and rituals, I want you to understand that whatever Maharaj has instructed you to do, do faithfully and one hundred percent honestly, not because of the ceremonies themselves but because Maharaj, your *Sadguru*, has entrusted this work to you. He has ordered you to conduct your worship in this way. Obey him.

However, for heaven's sake, do not perform these

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ceremonies mechanically with a dry mind, or else they will bind you instead of freeing you. Let all that you do be done with your whole heart in it; then, with Maharaj's grace, one day you will know that everything except God is Illusion. God is the only Reality. And, unless and until you experience this, all else is just bunkum.

Of what use is it if millions of people were to place their heads on your feet, garland you, call you a *Sadguru*, if you do not have that Experience (of the "I am God" state). On the other hand, even if the whole world goes against you but you have that Experience, then you do not mind, you remain unaffected by it, because it is you who do it.

I am happy to be at Sakori today.

Baba then put aside His board, a signal that whatever He had to say at that session was now said.

From Baba's reference to rituals, I have gathered that, if instead of getting attached to the external part of the ritual, one gets wholeheartedly bound to the presence of God in one's everyday living, that will open a way to real freedom. A ritual or ceremony is only a pointer, a sign, but not an end in itself. It can be dry or dull, on the one hand, or lively and fresh, on the other, depending on the spirit in which it is performed. The goal is to be more and more receptive to God's presence within oneself, whatever one may be doing externally.

That morning Avatar Meher Baba had skillfully explained the significance of Maharaj's "dual role." Baba's clear and straight-forward exposition, expressed very lovingly, dispelled the clouds from the hearts of those followers of Maharaj who had misgivings about Him. This meeting left all those who had participated with a new feeling of love and harmony. In fact, as a sequel to this, a few months later Godavri Mai visited Ahmednagar with some of the *kanyas* to participate in the public darshan that Baba gave there on September 12. And a week or so after that, Baba again visited Sakori with some of His dear ones from the West. A new understanding dawned between the followers of Maharaj and Meher Baba!

At the close of His discourse there was a resplendent smile

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on Baba's face, and His beauty was especially radiant and charming. He looked really pleased, and I felt that this morning session was indeed eventful.

The Divine Theme

Since it was now lunchtime, all rose and left the *Sabha Mandap*. Those who had accompanied Baba in His party from Ahmednagar went to the dining hall. We sat on the ground, which had been made smooth in the traditional Indian style by applying a "plaster" of cow dung. A simple, delicious lunch was served to the visitors on plates made of leaves. Meanwhile, Baba was moving about the ashram with Godavri Mai. At length He honored the loving request of the *ashramites* by tasting some dishes prepared for Him.

By 12:30 P.M. Baba was back in the large *Sabha Mandap*. For Baba's use a mattress with a clean bed sheet and several pillows had been placed near a wooden post where Maharaj used to sit while giving darshan. To express His respect for Maharaj, Baba sat beside the mattress, on the ground. In a short time the visitors and the *ashramites* gathered there. Baba asked Rustom Kaka (Hathidaru), one of His lovers from Ahmednagar, to sing some *bhajans* and *abhangas*. Again, the atmosphere was surcharged with love for God.

During interludes in the informal singing, Baba casually explained the nature of Reality in relation to Illusion, using His lively gestures and spelling out words on the alphabet board. The simplicity of His explanations made a deep impression on the minds and hearts of the listeners. The gist of what I could gather from some of Baba's words is as follows:

In the Beyond State of God, the Original Whim made Me sing, "Who am I?" and all Creation sprang up. And now I have to bear the burden of the entire Creation!

One who experiences Union with Reality or God and also comes down to normal human consciousness simultaneously experiences Himself on all planes of consciousness.

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At present you see Me sitting before you, but I am simultaneously with all, on the different levels and planes of consciousness. Those who are on the higher planes see Me on their levels.

However, all that you see, hear, touch, taste, and smell is illusion within illusion. And this illusion has such a hold on you all that it is extremely hard for anyone to escape it. In fact, each one of you has Infinite *Sat-Chit-Anand* [Power, Knowledge, and Bliss] within you, but everyone feels helpless and dissatisfied. How to wipe out this ignorance?

Try to follow this figure: suppose I appear to you in your dream and say to you, "My dear, all that you are seeing and hearing is just a dream." But in your dream state you will not believe what I say. Even now, while sitting before Me, you are still dreaming a dream. In this awake-dream state whatever you do, including *tap-jap* [an austerity or the repetition of any divine name] will bind you.

Then how do you get out of this Illusion? There is a remedy: it is to surrender yourself to Me, the Reality. The antidote is: whatever you think or do, feel that you are not the doer — it is Baba as the in-dweller who is getting it done through you. While feeling this, you have to be natural, very natural. Don't pose. No one should pretend to be what he is not. When I tell you to be natural and honest, I have to be honest too. So, with infinite honesty, I tell you, "I am God in human form."

The spiritual journey to God ends in the final *Fana* — a state of total annihilation [*Manonash*]. Then follows *Baqa-billah* — the experience of the "I am God" state of Perfect Ones. At the present moment you are convinced that you are a human being, so you never think that you are an animal. In the same way, when one is merged in and united with God, the lower self is totally annihilated. In this state, one *becomes* God. It is natural for such a one to say, "I am God." This "I" is not of the lower self but is the higher Self.

At present, one of my *mandali* sees hundreds of suns and moons. He sees them in Me. However, thousands of such

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experiences are far from the final experience of Union with God in which one experiences Reality as Reality. Truth is simple, infinitely simple, but this makes it infinitely difficult. You, as the lower self, are the curtain over your real Self. So what is the way out of this labyrinth, this quagmire? The most simple yet natural way is to try your best to surrender to Me and to love Me. I am the only Reality.

Baba explained these profound points with an easy fluency through His graceful gestures. I was amazed to find how, in such a short time, He could explain the entire divine theme: the beginning and end of Creation in relation to Reality, God, Who is the Alpha and Omega of the spiritual journey. While I have tried to reconstruct some of the substance of what Baba said, it is impossible to capture in words the nobility of the expressions on Baba's face. Infused in His every movement was a glow of divine charisma. To witness this was for me an unspeakable blessing; this was indeed a most precious and sacred time.

The day's program concluded with Baba distributing *prasad*. It was a charming sight to see Baba handing out fruit or sweets to those approaching Him. The *prasad* given was a visible gift of divine grace, drenched in His invisible love. For each one it had a special spiritual significance. Now and then, as one of the old-timers would approach Baba, there would be a quick interchange of glances between them. Through such brief exchanges Baba would convey to them how dear they were to Him and how intimately He knew their lives.

While Baba was giving *prasad*, Godavri Mai was sitting by His side. The last orange was given as *prasad* to her. As she bent down to pay her respects to Baba, He placed His hand on her head, blessing her. Then Baba stood up to leave, and His glance of benediction flowed over the whole gathering. Baba departed from Sakori at about 4:30 P.M.

On the way back, Baba's car stopped on the shoulder of the road. He got out and stood under a tree. Naturally, all of us gathered near Him. Baba began to convey:

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Today I am really pleased. Godavri is a pure-hearted woman, very lovable. When you were having lunch she took Me inside and requested Me to sit on the *jhoola* [the swing] used by Maharaj. She called the other *kanyas* and asked them to sing some devotional songs. I said to her, "Play your part as Maharaj has instructed you, without any doubts."

Then taking her aside I asked her, "Will you do one thing if I ask you to?" She frankly and honestly replied, "If I can do so in this Ashram atmosphere." I then asked her to do something that was quite simple but not very easy. She agreed.

Baba did not disclose the nature of that instruction, but was evidently pleased with her obedience. He continued:

You do not know what great sacrifice and suffering Godavri had to undergo throughout the years she stayed with Maharaj. She is really an exceptional person.

There was a look of satisfaction on Baba's face. His car then proceeded toward Ahmednagar.

Two Sadgurus: Babajan and Maharaj

Just before His hectic darshan programs in Andhra, Baba had dictated a special message which He intended to convey during His forthcoming visit to Sakori. However, after reaching Sakori on March 20, He chose instead to enlighten those gathered at the Upasni Nagar Ashram on the important subject of His life and relationship with Maharaj. The text of the prepared message, which Baba did not choose to give out at the Sakori darshan, is reproduced below:

In the Beyond-State of God, sex does not exist. There, only the One, Indivisible Existence prevails. It is in the realm of the illusory phenomenon called the universe that sex asserts itself.

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Babajan, the Perfect Master, who in less than an instant made Me experience My Ancient Infinite State, had the Muslim-form of a woman. Upasni Maharaj, who brought me down to normal consciousness, had the Hindu-form of a man. As a young and beautiful girl, Babajan, who was of a noble and rich family, renounced the world just before she was going to be married, because of her great love for God and the urge to be One with God.

Every one of you, whether man or woman, of any caste, creed or color, has an equal right to attain Divinity. It has been possible for man to become God through love of God. External renunciation is not at all necessary. Each and all, man or woman, whilst attending to all duties in every walk of life, can attain Divine Fatherhood and Universal Motherhood through honest love for God.

To express your love for God, you must live a life of love, honesty, and self-sacrifice. Merely to chant *arti*, to perform *puja*, to offer flowers, fruits and sweets, and to bow down can never mean that you love God as He ought to be loved.

Similarly, merely giving darshan to the masses, having crowds flocking around, delivering messages to the multitudes, and performing so-called miracles may be conventionally accepted attributes of a divine personage in your midst, but I say with Divine Honesty that all this is not necessarily a sign of true Divinity.

God is not to be lured, but is to be loved. God is not to be preached, but is to be lived. Only those who live the life of love, honesty and self-sacrifice can know Me as the Ancient One.

I can say with Divine Authority that I experience eternally, consciously, and continually being One with you all and One in you all. Any worship or obeisance to any deity (animate or inanimate), to any saint, master, advanced soul, or yogi, eventually comes to Me. By offering pure unadulterated love to anyone and to everything you will be loving Me, as I am in everyone and in everything, and also beyond everything.

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I want you all to know that whatever you do, good or bad, the one thing not forgiven by God is to pose as that which you really are not.

With divine authority I repeat that we are all One. Being rich or poor, literate or illiterate, of high caste or low caste, need not interfere with your loving God, the supreme Beloved.

I give you all My blessings for the understanding that loving God, in any form, in any way, will make you eternally free.⁸

Although Baba only refers to Babajan and Maharaj in the preceding message, Baba visited all five Perfect Masters, and Sai Baba, Upasni Maharaj's Sadguru, was actually the head of the spiritual hierarchy, or *Qutub-e-Irshad*. As Baba's message makes clear, however, His connections were primarily with Babajan and Maharaj. As Merwan, Meher Baba visited them both many times between 1913 and 1921. To give some idea of the nature of His relationship with them and the different role played by each, Baba once gave this analogy to His early disciples: "Babajan," He said, "gave Me a *rupee*, and Maharaj made Me *know* the value of it!"

The visible methods used by Babajan and Maharaj in their relationship with Merwan belied the inner import and impact of what they were really doing. While outwardly their activities may have seemed irrational, in truth they were performing the extraordinary task of unveiling Merwan to His status as the Ancient One and bringing Him down from that exalted experience of Oneness with God to the total awareness of creation. The "kiss" from Babajan was, to my way of thinking, actually a "kick" that caused Merwan to be reabsorbed in His Ancient One State. A small sharp stone, flung by Maharaj and drawing blood where it hit Merwan on the forehead, was like a divine kiss that spurred Him on to descend to the total awareness of creation to play His eternal role as the Avatar. It is also intriguing to note that Babajan, although clad in a female form, was often surrounded by male beggars, ruffians, or ordinary people. Babajan always asserted herself to be a man

⁸ *The Awakener*, Vol. I, No. 4 (Spring 1954), pp. 23-24.

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and became upset if anyone addressed her as *amma* (mother). On the other hand, Maharaj, who had a male form, worked closely with a group of pure-hearted, devout virgins (the *kanyas*), at times going to the length of wearing bangles and dressing in a *sari* like a woman. In whatever manner a Perfect Master manifests outwardly, he or she is always inwardly beyond the distinction of sex.

I feel truly blessed to have been permitted by Baba to accompany Him on His March 20 visit to Sakori. Witnessing with my own eyes the place where Maharaj spent so much of his life and hearing Baba's loving words about His own Master made a deep impression on my mind and touched my heart. For the ultimate good (*mukti*) of his disciples, Maharaj had taken on much suffering and allowed himself to be ridiculed by society. This quality of his unconditional love heightened and brightened my regard for this great *Sadguru*; and my visit to his Ashram wiped out any lingering misconceptions of mine about him.

After the brief stop along the roadside between Sakori and Ahmednagar, our small caravan of cars pressed on for Ahmednagar, which we reached on the evening of March 20. From there Baba continued His journey to Poona, where He stayed for a day at Bindra House, the Jessawala's home. The next day, March 21, was the Parsi New Year, known as *Jamshed-e-Navroz*. For the Jessawalas, overjoyed at Baba's presence at their home, this was a doubly blessed and especially festive occasion. Baba was in a good mood too. He listened for a brief time to a *qawwali* program that had been arranged there. The next day, with His intimate *mandali*, Baba left for His temporary headquarters at Mahabaleshwar.

I reached Kurduwadi in time to continue my duties at school. But what a contrast: the heart felt as though it were still moving with Baba. The balancing of mind and heart was not easy; but this was not unusual with Baba's lovers after returning from His *sahavas*. Baba's divinely magnetic personality and the regality of His movements continued to zoom up before my mind's eye. The love felt in Baba's physical presence was so intense that the fond memories of His Sakori

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visit lingered with me for some days.

If one is blessed with the privilege of entering the lane leading to the Avatar, one should regard this as a stroke of priceless good fortune. Sooner or later, one's journey in this lane begets an inner divine intoxication. From this intoxication comes a madness which grows and grows as the remembrance of the Avatar becomes more and more wholehearted. There is no going back. This blessed lane, once it has been entered, has no exit. Love awakened by Baba never dies.

**BABA LEAVES MAHABALESHWAR
FOR SATARA
1954 ~ PART XIV**

I Meet Vaijanath, a Saintlike Personality

In April 1954, not long after His return from the Sakori darshan, Baba set out from this pleasant hill station, with a few of His *mandali*, on a short but grueling journey to Dhalwar, in the southern state of Karnataka, and Kholapur, in Maharashtra. On this whirlwind tour, Baba contacted eleven *masts* (souls intoxicated by love for God) whose names, as it happened, were not recorded. Adi K. Irani mentioned that when he saw Baba on His return from the tour, He looked exhausted, yet there was a glow of satisfaction on His face — the *mast* work had gone well. This was the first *mast* tour of the year.

Tours such as this one had been common a decade earlier, when Baba had traveled extensively — often in intense heat or biting cold — in search of *masts*. Baba would journey for days together in crowded trains and buses, in bullock carts and cars, often to remote places to find these God-intoxicated souls. By the '50s, however, that phase of Baba's work with the *masts* had been largely completed, and mast tours were less frequent. Yet for those who accompanied Baba, these encounters were unforgettable.

The divine intoxication of the *masts* is so powerful that they are utterly indifferent to the standards of conventional living. Ingesting stale and moldy food and drinking dirty water do not affect their health; absorbed in their love for God, they are often found in the most unhygienic places avoided by normal people.

Prior to hearing of Baba, I had never run across any accounts of these unique souls. But in 1948 I read *The Wayfarers* by William Donkin. Based on explanations given by Baba Himself, this book offers a wealth of information and

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anecdotes about the different kinds of *masts* and the inner planes of consciousness on which they are stationed. It aroused my curiosity about this God-intoxicated "tribe" living in India, and I was anxious to meet them. At the time, however, I could not understand why Baba discouraged His lovers from meeting *masts* and saints. How could being in the company of such advanced souls impede one's spiritual progress?

Later it gradually dawned on me that, unless one's energy is wholeheartedly channeled in one direction, the longing to realize Truth cannot have the required depth and intensity. Jesus said, "Leave all and follow Me. I am the Way." In a similar spirit, Lord Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita* enjoins His followers, "Leave all other paths and totally surrender yourself to Me. I will free you from the bonds of Illusion."

I had never dreamed that one day I would have the blessed fortune to hear from Meher Baba, the Avatar of the Age, a similar declaration. Yet this is exactly what happened. In clear words Baba conveyed to me the truth of His being the Avatar, without in any way imposing it on me. But before I narrate more about this, I wish to describe the chain of incidents that led in a natural way to my meeting with Baba in Mahabaleshwar.

On my return from the March 20 Sakori meeting, the uplifted feeling of being with Baba made me more receptive to His inner guidance. This strengthening of my inner contact helped me to complete, as per Baba's instructions, the Marathi translation of Baba's message, "Existence Is Substance and Life Is Shadow," not an easy job. Starting the last week of April 1954, school closed for the six-week summer vacation. I had no interest in sightseeing or in visiting friends or relatives. A taste of the rare joy experienced in Baba's company had ruled out other interests from my life. Since it was not possible to see Baba during this period or even to send Him a letter, I opted for the next best thing: to spend my vacation in Baba's office in Ahmednagar where Adi resided.

After communicating my wish to Adi and being welcomed with his warm invitation, I left Kurduwadi on May 3, to stay with him at Khushroo Quarters (the present office of the

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Avatar Meher Baba Trust). The next day Adi asked if I would pay a visit to the town of Sangamner for the opening of a new Meher Center. Vaman Sabnis, one of Baba's close followers, wished to hold weekly meetings on Thursdays to share Baba's life and activities with the people there. I happily agreed, and a day later I set out for Sangamner, about sixty miles from Ahmednagar, where I attended a small but pleasant get-together of people interested in spirituality. After listening to my talk, one of Vaman's friends by the name of Gade invited me to visit his guru, Vaijanath Maharaj.

Remembering Baba's general instructions not to visit *masts*, saints, or masters, I clearly but politely declined. When Gade repeated his request, I offered the excuse that I had to return to Ahmednagar the next day on the noon bus. To my surprise, the next morning Gade came in his own car and said, "Let's go to meet my guru, Vaijanath Maharaj. You won't miss the bus." On such short notice, I could think of no polite excuse and so agreed to go. Gade drove me to a small temple a few miles away from the town, where his guru was staying. I offered my respects to Vaijanath Maharaj, who seemed to be a simple, unassuming person. He did not say anything to me; in fact, as far as I can remember, he was observing silence that day. His followers took me around the premises and told me that they regarded Vaijanath as an *avatar* of Dattatreya. One of them continued, "Many a time our guru goes into a trance, and we often notice tears rolling down his cheeks. When he comes out of that state, he writes very inspiring and spiritually profound verses. His notebooks are carefully preserved in the cupboards." They asked me if I was interested in reading them, and although I found these followers to be very warm and loving, I replied, "Not today."

Throughout the visit the thought continued to lurk in my mind that, even though I had not visited the place on my own initiative — it had just happened — it would nonetheless be best if I left as soon as possible. It was not my business to find out whether Vaijanath was genuine or fake. On one occasion Baba conveyed to a person of wavering mind, "Once you open your wings to fly, you must fly straight like a swan. Don't flit from

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tree to tree like a sparrow, else many things will distract you on the way." After coming into contact with Baba, my path was simple and straightforward: just to offer myself wholeheartedly and completely to Him. So I thanked my hosts for their courtesy and returned to Sangamner to catch the bus to Ahmednagar. I arrived there in the evening of the same day, May 8. I had no idea that this casual visit to Sangamner would soon bring me to one of my most unforgettable meetings with Baba.

"I Am the Real One"

I told Adi about my visit and the opening of the Meher Center at Sangamner. He was happy to hear about the cordial response of the people there. But then Adi conveyed some news of his own, which came to me as the most wonderful of surprises. "Tomorrow morning," he said, "I am driving alone in my Chevy to Mahabaleshwar to see Baba. Would you like to accompany me?" I had never expected or even dreamed that such a golden opportunity would come my way, and so soon after my last meeting with Baba! I quickly replied, "I would be a great fool to miss such a marvelous chance!" "Then get ready," Adi said, "we'll be leaving in the early hours of the morning." I could hardly believe my ears.

Although at the time I could not imagine how this invitation to visit with Baba had come about, I now suspect that it may have happened like this. Whenever Baba issued a circular stopping direct correspondence with Him, Adi used to send on the main points of important letters received through his office for Baba's instructions. I guess he had already informed Baba about my staying with him. Possibly it was even Baba who had suggested that I visit places in the Ahmednagar district, including Sangamner, for His work. This is just a guess, however, and I never asked Adi about it. In any event, the next morning at about five o'clock I found myself in a car with Adi leaving Ahmednagar. It was a very pleasant drive to Mahabaleshwar, a renowned hill station about 4,500 feet

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above sea level on the crest of the Western Ghats. As the car drove up along the serpentine road, I was enjoying the cool breezes, while Adi's talk about his life with Baba warmed my heart.

We reached Florence Hall before lunch. Returning to this beautiful estate in the hills of Mahabaleshwar revived memories of my earlier visit to this place, on October 16, 1950, when Baba was still in the New Life.¹ Now, four years later, it gave me great joy to be able to meet and greet the *mandali* here once again. Dr. Deshmukh, whom Baba would sometimes permit to stay with Him during his college vacation, was also there.

It was Baba's usual practice each morning to leave the main bungalow where He stayed and to visit with the men *mandali* in their quarters. What an inexpressible joy it was to see Baba again! Although being in Baba's presence was an experience like no other, each time was different. Like a garden that is never exactly the same however often one visits it, the charm of Baba's presence had so many subtleties that one never came to the end of them.

After Baba had greeted us, He took His seat, and discussion of the day's business began. In the course of my first morning session with Him, Baba asked me to report to Him about my visit to Sangamner. He listened with great interest to my account. In the end He gestured, "Anything left out?" I replied, "Nothing worthwhile." The next morning, after listening to some correspondence, once again He turned to me and gestured, "Do you remember any other detail about your visit to Sangamner?" I replied, "Yes, Baba." Finding Baba surprisingly interested in this insignificant visit of mine, I began telling him the names of Vaman's friends, including Gade, who had been in attendance at the meeting. I went on to describe my visit to the Pravara River, the water of which had impressed me with its remarkably sweet taste.² To entertain Baba, I even described the austere house of Vaman, my host, which consisted of one long room serving as living room, bedroom, and kitchen all in one. To tell the truth, I was purposely avoiding any reference to my visit to Vaijanath. While I spoke, a smile lit Baba's face, but He didn't press me to say anything more.

¹ For an account of this momentous meeting, see Bal Natu, *Glimpses of the God-Man, Meher Baba*, Vol. II, pp. 275-93.

² In fact, at that particular place the river is known as Amrita, meaning "nectar."

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But the next morning, to my surprise, Baba again raised the subject of my Sangamner excursion. "What else do you remember?" He gestured. Having exhausted all other details, I was compelled to "let the cat out of the bag." I began, "Baba, without my wanting to, I was compelled to visit a saintlike person who is regarded by his followers as the *avatar of Dattatreya*." Baba showed interest and, in His all-knowing ignorance, seemed to be waiting for more information. He gestured, "How did it happen?"

I told Baba the whole story, which I presented partly in the spirit of a confession and partly as a self-justification. During the narrative I would glance at Baba's face, but I didn't find any displeasure or condemnation there. After hearing out the entire incident, Baba asked me if I had told Vaijanath that Meher Baba is the Avatar. I answered, "No."

Some of the *mandali* were also present in the room. Pointing to Adi, Baba asked, "Don't you think that Bal should have told Vaijanath about My being the Avatar? Don't you take Me to be the Avatar?" Adi, in his characteristically forceful manner, replied, "Baba! You are the Avatar-supreme Perfection Personified." Baba cast a glance at me, and I understood what He meant. I kept quiet.

Then He turned to Dr. Deshmukh and gestured, "What do you think?" Deshmukh paused for a few moments, reflecting on the question. I thought he was going to say something in my favor. He began, "Baba, in a way, You are not just the Avatar; You are beyond any concept that is conveyed by the term *Avatar*. You are the Beyond One." Baba looked at me again. I felt nonplussed and even a little nervous. His eyes lit with a gentle glow of compassion mingled with flashes of divine authority, Baba continued the dialogue, sometimes gesturing, sometimes using the board: "If you on your own could not dare tell Vaijanath that Meher Baba is the Avatar, you could easily have said to him, 'Meher Baba says He is the Avatar.'"

This really silenced me, and I gazed at Baba in dumb adoration and submission. Returning my gaze, Baba explained, "At present, in the East and West, there are about seventy people who claim to be the Avatar, but I tell you, Bal, I am the Real One."

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The power and compassion in Baba's glance as He communicated this loving declaration to me carried with it conviction of the truth of what Baba was saying. Hearing these words, I could only fold my hands and lower my head to offer my respects to the Ancient One and mutter in a soft voice, "Yes, Baba!"

After a brief pause Baba resumed, "There are two types of so-called saintly persons: the hypocrites and the innocents. A hypocrite knows that he is posing, whereas the innocent one honestly feels that he is someone special, spiritually." Baba did not throw any more light on this subject at this time. However, He looked at me again and continued, "You have told Me all about your meeting with Vaijanath, and you have heard Me declare, 'I am the true Avatar.' Now I want you to visit Sangamner once more, see Vaijanath, and tell him, 'Meher Baba is the Avatar of the Age.'" With this order, Baba had unexpectedly arranged for an unexpected sequel to my earlier visit to Sangamner. Looking at Baba with a deep reverence imbued with wonder, I replied in a shaken tone, "Yes, Baba!"

I stayed in Mahabaleshwar for five days. Each morning, on Baba's arrival, different subjects connected with His work were taken up. Through these discussions I learned that Baba had finally agreed to give darshan to the people in the Ahmednagar district on September 12. The venue for this darshan was to be Wadia Park on Station Road in Ahmednagar. Sarosh Irani, one of Baba's close disciples, was in charge of arranging this program. In preparation for this event, Dr. Deshmukh was instructed by Baba to visit various towns in the Ahmednagar district, to give talks about "Meher Baba and His Divine Call." Further, Dr. Deshmukh was to inform the public about Baba's upcoming darshan in September. I was allowed to accompany him at these talks.

On May 14, Baba and seven of the *mandali* in two cars and Dr. Deshmukh, Adi, and I in Adi's Chevy all set out from Mahabaleshwar for Bhilar, a village in a forest near Panchgani. A large old stone house, surrounded by many trees and set off in a secluded part of the village, was selected by Baba for His special work. As Baba moved with the *mandali*

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through the spacious, half-dark, bare rooms of the house, He remarked, with a twinkle in His eye, "I intend to work here for seven days in the company of seven ghosts." This was Baba's joking way of referring to the *mandali* who would be staying with Him there. After the luggage was unloaded, Adi and Dr. Deshmukh and I drove back to Ahmednagar.

On reaching the city, Adi apprised Sarosh of his conversations with Baba about the darshan program. Sarosh diligently took up the work of fixing the dates of Dr. Deshmukh's talks in different towns. Owing to his eminent social standing, Sarosh received prompt and favorable responses from prominent people. So on May 17, Dr. Deshmukh gave his first talk in Ahmednagar. Since this day coincided with the full-moon day of Vaishaka, the birthday of Lord Buddha, Dr. Deshmukh first introduced the audience to the life and principles of Gautama, the Buddha. Then, with skill and deep conviction, he turned to the subject of Meher Baba, whom he presented as the same Enlightened One now living amongst us. An auspicious beginning to the work Baba had assigned to him! After Dr. Deshmukh was finished, I also spoke on this occasion.

During the latter part of May, it was arranged that Sarosh drive Dr. Deshmukh, Adi, and me to various towns in the district, leaving Ahmednagar early each morning and returning each night. Since I had no advance knowledge of the itinerary, it was to my great surprise that, after a visit to Rahuri, I found myself on May 21 back in Sangamner. The public meeting there had been organized by Vaman Sabnis, my former host, and Gade, and it was to take place in the high school building.

Although Baba had not given me a specific time limit in which to convey His message to Vaijanath, I felt that, in His loving compassion for me, He had expeditiously arranged my visit to this town within ten days of giving this instruction! Since Adi had been present when I related to Baba my encounter with Vaijanath, I asked him if we could go to the place where Vaijanath stayed, taking Vaman and Gade with us. Adi quickly explained the situation to Sarosh in Gujarati, and he happily agreed to the visit.

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When we reached Gade's farm, I noticed Vaijanath sitting in a room, or perhaps it was on the veranda. A calm, quiet atmosphere surrounded him. Knowing the weakness of my mind and body, Baba, with his sense of humor, seemed to have arranged the perfect situation. I stood before Vaijanath, flanked and fortified on one side by Sarosh, a tall, robust man, and on the other by strong-minded Adi. So it was with ease and confidence that I opened my discussion with Vaijanath. I said, "I was here some days back, but today I am here with a special message for you: Meher Baba says that He is the Avatar. He is going to give a public darshan on September 12 in Ahmednagar. I extend an invitation to you for His auspicious darshan."

Vaijanath listened intently to what I said, and simply nodded. We had no time to linger, and anyway, my mission had been completed; so we immediately left for Sangamner. I felt greatly relieved; everything had gone smoothly. Later, I learned that in June Vaijanath sent several verses in Marathi to Baba through Vaman Sabnis. These verses were read out to Him, and He seemed pleased. Accordingly, Vaman was instructed to convey Baba's love blessings to Vaijanath. Baba's ways of contacting saintlike persons and masts were unfathomable, and hence beyond comment or interpretation.

After visiting a few more towns for Baba meetings, I returned to Kurduwadi, where my job awaited me. I felt immensely beholden to Beloved Baba for helping me to obey His order as naturally as water flows in a stream winding its way to the river. And that direct glance of Baba's stayed with me in my heart, unbeknownst even to myself, watching over my sleeping spirit to awaken me to the reality of His ever-abiding presence as the Avatar. Sometimes I still envisage Baba's index finger pointing at me, gesturing, "I am the Real One."

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A Personal Tribute to Adi

Love felt in Meher Baba's physical presence penetrates to the innermost realms of the heart, and the fragrance of His divinity helps one to relive the felicity and glory of the moments spent with Him. On my return home in the beginning of June, thoughts about my stay in Mahabaleshwar, lit by His radiant presence and surcharged with His divinely authoritative statement that He is the Real One, would often transport me to a region of rapturous joy.

In addition to my precious moments with Baba, the month of May had given me many opportunities to move about with Adi, as we visited various places in the Ahmednagar district to give talks about Baba and His life. This intimate association with Adi provided occasions for me to witness his life at close quarters. In fact, from the first time I met Adi, I had felt a high personal regard for him. For more than a decade, from 1945 to 1956, I visited Adi frequently, my longest visit being this one in May '54. From 1957 on, Baba allowed me to stay with Him during my school vacations; therefore I did not spend as much time with Adi in these later years as I had before. Yet because of the warm and familiar feeling I still have for him, I wish to share my thoughts about this loving and unforgettable disciple of Baba's.

Many of the "firsts" in my life with Baba were directly connected with Adi. It was in a postcard sent to me through Adi in 1943 that I received my first communication from Baba, in which He conveyed His love. Adi was the only other person present when I first garlanded Baba and received my first loving embrace. On my first visit to Meherazad in 1946 — before Baba House was built — I was escorted by Adi in his car. And it was in a letter written by Adi that Baba conveyed to me that my contact was now directly established with Him, and that I was permitted to go and stay with Him whenever family and job circumstances would allow.

Whenever I had the opportunity to visit Adi, I would always look forward to having leisurely and intimate conversations with him about his life with Baba. I owe a great spiritual debt

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to him for those conversations, which gave me a new perspective on Baba's divinity as it can be expressed in everyday life. During some of my stays, I used to read out His Indian and foreign mail. This indirectly provided me with many occasions gradually to become aware of Baba's all-enveloping Omniscience.

Adi had been one of Baba's first disciples, joining Him in the early 1920s. After the death of Chanji (Framroze Dadachanji) in Srinagar, Kashmir, in 1944, Adi was directed by Baba to take up the secretarial work that Chanji had been handling until then; Adi remained Baba's secretary for the rest of his life. Adi's home in Ahmednagar — the Khushroo Quarters — gradually became Meher Baba's office, and all correspondence to and from Baba passed through Adi. Thus Adi played a vital role in keeping Baba's lovers informed about His life through personal letters as well as through circulars and books. Through his warm, inspiring, and instructive replies to the letters addressed either to him or to Beloved Baba in seclusion, Adi served as a link for many people in their coming closer to Baba.

Adi was a man of aristocratic taste and bearing: he relished good food, loved smoking cigarettes (which Baba limited to five a day), and enjoyed driving fast cars. He was also very kind and loving of heart. Adi was a fine singer, and accompanied himself on the harmonium when he sang *ghazals* to Baba. During the New Life, Adi would sing the deeply moving and powerful "Song of the New Life," training the companions to join him on the chorus.

Adi was typically frank and forthright, a man of strong likes and dislikes. Many of those whom Baba chose to have near Him were not only strong-hearted but strong-willed as well. This was certainly true of Adi, who could, when the situation called for it, become a true lion in Baba's cause. During one of Baba's visits to the West in the '50s, a Westerner asked Adi, "What have you learned during your years in the company of Meher Baba?" Adi, after a puff on his cigarette, replied with the conviction that was so natural to him, "Sir, I

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have learned two things: one, God exists; two, Meher Baba is God." The gentleman did not dare to question him further.

During the years that I visited him at Khushroo Quarters, from time to time Adi would pour out stories from the treasury of his own experiences with Baba. Some of these episodes had been utterly exhilarating, but some had been trying as well. Yet always I could feel the warmth of Adi's love for Baba as palpably as one would feel the heat while sitting near a fire. What shone out from our conversations together, as we sat up talking late into the night, was his unshakable conviction that Baba is the Avatar. That Baba is God was to Adi a certainty beyond all doubt. His one-pointed, overflowing love for Baba gladdened my heart even as it challenged my mind. For I was in awe of a conviction so complete that it had gone entirely beyond the level of intellectual interpretations and had become a basic reflex of his being.

In fact, one of Adi's favorite expressions was: "Conviction in Baba is nothing less than God-realization in disguise. "Baba's divinity was such a certainty in Adi's life that he would talk about it as freely and casually and naturally as most people would talk about the acts and traits of some good person who happened to live next door. Sometimes while talking about Baba, Adi's eyes would glisten with tears, and he would pause for a time before continuing. Those unshed tears and pregnant silences conveyed to me even more than his words. I still cherish the memory of those wonderful late-night hours in Khushroo Quarters.

After Baba set aside His physical body in 1969 and the waves of Westerners began coming in pilgrimage to Meherabad and Meherazad, Adi's office would be crowded in the late evenings. In the informal atmosphere that prevailed there, as cups of tea were passed around, newcomers who had never met Baba in person would be regaled with Adi's inspiring talk. In addition to sharing stories about Baba's life, Adi would welcome questions, especially those pertaining to living for Baba and the obstacles one encounters within oneself. Adi had given deep thought to the inner life with Baba, and his answers, which he gave forth to all, the ripened fruit of this

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long reflection, were always inspiring. When asked, for example, what Baba meant by the balance of mind and heart, Adi once gave this metaphor:

Mind and heart must work together. Mind without heart is like a river bed without water — lifeless and dry. Heart without mind is like a river without banks — the water, having nowhere to flow, becomes a swamp.

Mind and heart working together is a beautifully flowing river, lovely to behold.

What a superb figure illustrating the need to integrate these two aspects of one's personality!

Adi was not only a great lover of the Avatar, but he was a scholar as well. He had read widely in Sufism and Vedanta and always set aside time for a daily meditation on Baba. Though blessed through most of his life with a strong physical constitution, in his old age he came to suffer from arthritis and other bodily complaints. Yet he accepted these limitations with good grace, commenting humorously, "It is wonderful to grow old in the heart with Baba, miserable to grow old in the body!"

One-pointed and fiery in his love for Beloved Baba, Adi worked tirelessly in His cause until the end. It was on a visit to a city in Andhra Pradesh, where he had been invited to speak at the unveiling of a statue of Baba, that he died suddenly of a heart attack. This news was communicated to Baba's lovers in India and around the world in a cable sent by Baba's sister, Mani:

Adi Senior beloved secretary [and] disciple of Avatar Meher Baba passed away of a heart attack on fourth [March 1980] morning in Guntur, Andhra State, while in active service of His Beloved Lord Meher Baba . . . Jai Baba! — Mani

Adi truly lived for Baba and died serving Him. This is my humble, personal tribute to this great disciple and beloved secretary, as I remember him.

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Kohiyar Brings Fifty-six People to Baba

To resume the narration, on May 14, Baba left Mahabaleshwar for Bhilar, intending to stay there for a full week. But after only four days, on May 18, Baba returned to Mahabaleshwar. The lease of Florence Hall in Mahabaleshwar was due to terminate within two weeks, so in the first week in June, Baba intended to go to Satara. Generally, whenever Baba changed His long-term residence, by way of concluding His inner spiritual work, He would permit a darshan program to be held, or else He would offer help to some of the poor people of the area by personally contacting them. Such contact included His washing their feet and giving them *prasad*, either in cash or kind. On this occasion Baba wanted fifty-six people who were neither beggars nor from the middle class. The work of finding suitable individuals and bringing them to Baba was entrusted to Kohiyar Satarawalla, one of Baba's followers who lived in Mahabaleshwar and owned a general store there.

Baba's choosing Kohiyar for this task was part of a larger drama in the life of this very dear lover in Baba's family. To bring out the quality of Kohiyar's connection with Baba and the way of Baba's working with him, I would like to go back several years, to the time of Kohiyar's first meeting with his beloved Master. In fact, it was through his father that this contact first came about. Kohiyar's father was a very devout Zoroastrian who habitually spent long hours in prayers. He had heard of Baba as far back as the early 1930s, and though not devoted to Baba, he did regard Him as a saint. It was another fifteen years, however, before he or any of his family saw Baba in person.

This good fortune finally befell them in August 1947, when Baba was giving darshan in a villa in the cantonment area of Satara.³ News of the program reached the Satarawalla family, and they were determined to seize this opportunity. By the time they reached the villa in the early afternoon, a good-sized crowd had gathered in the hall where Baba was seated.

Singers were entertaining Baba with *bhajans* as the darshanites lined up to greet Him. From the first time Kohiyar

³ See Bal Natu, *Glimpses of the God-Man, Meher Baba*, Vol. I, pp. 231-35.

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saw Baba, he was immediately enthralled. His eyes fixed on Baba's resplendent face, he stood immobile, absorbed, staring at Baba from a distance. When his turn came, Baba responded to his longing with a knowing, gentle smile. This smile pierced his heart, and in the years that followed, Kohiyar eagerly longed for the occasion to savor once again the sweetness of Baba's company.

Soon after greeting Kohiyar, Baba called Kohiyar's father to Him. As he approached, Baba raised His right arm and put His thumb to His index finger, meaning "a good person." Baba gave him an orange as *prasad*. Then, without using the alphabet board but relying on gestures, Baba conveyed to him, "I am the Real One. I am the One who listens to your prayers. I am very happy to see you. Remember Me."⁴ In this way Baba responded to the old man's long years of devotion. The Satarawallas were thus drawn into Baba's contact, and Kohiyar, for his part, found in Meher Baba his beloved Master. But years had to pass before he could enjoy once more Baba's physical proximity.

Finally, in early February 1954, Kohiyar was overjoyed to learn that Baba was staying in his hometown of Mahabaleshwar. He had also heard that His women disciples were going to celebrate Baba's birthday on February 12 (since by the Zoroastrian calendar this was Baba's Birthday that year). This was to be a private celebration, and others were not supposed to know of it. Kohiyar, however, heard of it from the owner of a guest house who had been asked to prepare sweets for the occasion by Vishnu, one of the *mandali*. Even though outsiders were not permitted to attend, Kohiyar thought, surely there should be some way in which he could express his heart's love! Kohiyar decided to seize this opportunity to send a beautiful bouquet of roses to Baba. But, knowing that Baba was in seclusion and had given orders that none of His followers should attempt to see Him, Kohiyar sent the bouquet with a local gardener with strict instructions not to reveal the identity of the sender. However, Vishnu, who received the bouquet, reported the matter to Baba, and He immediately wished to know who sent it. The gardener had to disclose that

⁴ *Glow International*, May 1984, p. 21.

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the flowers had been sent by a local Parsi who kept a shop on the main road.

That same afternoon Kohiyar found two of Baba's men *mandali* visiting his store. Eruch asked him cordially, "Are you the person who sent the bouquet of flowers to Baba?" When Kohiyar admitted that he was, Eruch went on, "As Baba is in seclusion, He did not appreciate your anonymous gift. Why couldn't you have sent a card with the flowers? In fact, He was annoyed with you, and so He has sent us to let you know of His displeasure."

Kohiyar, groping for an excuse, replied, "Well, Baba is God, so there was no need to enclose a card with my name and address."

Eruch shot back, "Ha! So you were trying to be clever! What, did you wish to test Baba's omniscience? You should never do such things with Him. In your dealings with Baba you should always be practical and sincere. And don't let your emotions override your obedience to His orders!"

Kohiyar apologized, and Eruch softened. "Anyway, now that you have given yourself to Baba, He wants you to know that He has already pardoned you. But be warned: never try to approach Him unless He has summoned you. Now give your word." Kohiyar promised, and the meeting was concluded. But as time went by and his longing for the company of the beloved Master increased, Kohiyar eventually found it impossible to keep this promise.

In April of that year, Kohiyar learned that Baba was still in Mahabaleshwar and, further, that He was in the habit of taking an early morning walk along a particular route. On the morning of April 7, overpowered by his desire to meet Baba personally, Kohiyar hired a taxi and went there, hoping to catch a glimpse of Him. But after a while, disappointed by his fruitless search, he remarked to the taxi driver, "I wonder why Meher Baba has canceled His walk today." The driver looked at him in surprise and answered, "But didn't you see Him? We just passed Him."

Leaping from the taxi, Kohiyar raced back up the road to where he could see Baba walking with Ramjoo. Completely

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forgetting the instructions given to him, he ran and prostrated himself in front of Baba on the road. Then recollecting himself, without waiting even for the exchange of a single word, he immediately jumped up and rushed back to the cab, feeling rather shame-faced and guilty. Ramjoo told Baba that the person who had bowed down to Him was that same young Parsi storekeeper who had anonymously sent Him flowers. So again Baba sent two of His disciples to visit this rather impatient lover. But they learned from Kohiyar's father that his son had left town on a business trip to Bombay that very day. On the succeeding days, Baba kept sending someone to find out whether Kohiyar had returned. This kind of repeated inquiry, which may sound strange to those unfamiliar with Baba's ways, was actually one of His methods of expressing His intimacy with someone.

Finally, one day Eruch and Pendu found Kohiyar at the shop. As his act of prostrating himself before Baba had been in direct disobedience to Baba's instructions, he now received a severe scolding from Eruch. Yet, as before, this chastisement ended with Baba's compassionate pardon. But now, Eruch advised, Kohiyar should really do his best to obey Baba, without such failure and lapses. In conclusion, Eruch told him, "Baba sends His love and says that whenever He sends for you, you are to come immediately." Kohiyar was delighted to hear this, for it seemed that his longing to be with Baba again might at last be fulfilled.

More than a month passed, with Kohiyar waiting restlessly for the call. Then, on May 17, Eruch and Pendu appeared in his shop. He invited them into the living area in back, but they declined, saying, "We have come here for a special purpose. Baba has some work for you."

Impetuously Kohiyar replied, "I can do anything for Baba! What is the work?"

"Baba's work is not as easy as you think," Eruch warned, "and before we can tell you what it is, you have to assure us that you will do it." A vague anxiety registered on Kohiyar's face, and he replied, "I am sure that I can do what Baba expects me to do. But will you be kind enough to let me know a little about

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it? What kind of work will be assigned to me?"

But Eruch replied seriously, "Remember, don't be hasty in giving your consent. Baba's work is no joke! It is not like eating chocolates. Take a little time, but be firm and honest. Beware, before you give us your word."

Kohiyar felt puzzled, and he found it difficult to answer. He thought to himself, "What sort of people are these? What strange condition is Baba asking me to fulfill before I can meet him?"

Eruch and Pendu simply waited, saying nothing, refusing to enter the house before receiving from him an affirmative reply. In a pleading tone, Kohiyar repeated, "How can I give my full consent until you tell me what I am supposed to do?" From a rational standpoint, Kohiyar was entirely right, of course, but Baba's masterly ways are many a time beyond human understanding.

Eruch and Pendu were also helpless, because they were bound to act strictly according to Baba's instructions. Since Kohiyar had still not committed himself definitely, Eruch turned to Pendu and said, "Kohiyar is undecided — he doesn't know if he can obey Baba implicitly or not. Let's go. Why waste time?"

This alarmed Kohiyar, who now overcame his qualms. He blurted out, "I agree to carry out Baba's instructions, whatever they may be. Please come inside!"

Satisfied by this unconditional acceptance, Eruch and Pendu now accepted Kohiyar's invitation. When all were seated Eruch disclosed Baba's message, "On June 3, Baba wants you to bring to Him at Florence Hall fifty-six people, both men and women. They shouldn't be beggars, nor should they be blind or lame, but all should be hardworking individuals who are trying to earn a living for their families."

Kohiyar was relieved to hear this, since, as a longtime resident of Mahabaleshwar who had once been on the City Council, he knew some such people in that area. "Done! That's not difficult for me."

But Eruch cautioned, "Wait. You have to follow some specific instructions when you do this work. When you have found

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all the right people, you have to accompany them to Florence Hall yourself on that particular day — the third of June. They should know in advance that someone is going to wash their feet and offer them financial assistance. But under no circumstances should you let them know Baba's identity or where you are bringing them."

Kohiyar was taken aback. With a look of utter surprise on his face, he protested, "But surely they'll want to know where they are being taken and whom they're going to see? It's only natural!"

Pendu answered curtly, "You have agreed to do this work, and we have conveyed Baba's instructions to you. From here on, it's your lookout as to how to manage these details and to see that Baba's orders are fulfilled. The point is, in a nutshell, be at Florence Hall with these people on June 3 at exactly nine in the morning without fail. Also, bring with you some written background information on each person, which may or may not be read out to Baba." And with that, the two *mandali* rose and left the house.

Thoroughly bewildered, Kohiyar watched them until they were out of sight. "No fiction could be stranger than Baba's instructions," he thought. How was it possible to fulfill such orders, in view of the conditions that Baba had imposed? But somehow he felt certain that all would end well.

As it happened, as soon as he began making contacts, doors seemed to open before him. Though it seemed incredible to him, by June 2 he had succeeded in convincing fifty-four suitable individuals to accompany him on the designated day, without having to disclose to any of them where they were being taken or who they were going to meet. Yet on the morning of June 3, he was still two persons short of the fifty-six required by Baba, so he asked his own boy servant to come along, bringing the sum up to fifty-five. Then, as he was leading this motley group to Florence Hall like some modern-day Pied Piper, he noticed a poorly dressed man standing in the street. Since time was short, Kohiyar skipped the usual inquires and without further ado asked the man to join the party, using as bait that the man would be given some

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material help. Thus, it was in a state of nervous exhaustion mingled with relief and sweet anticipation that he arrived at Baba's residence on time and with the full complement of fifty-six people that Baba had asked for.

Eruch, Pendu, and Baidul were already there. A small wooden platform with a bucket and mug had been placed nearby in readiness. After Baba came and took His seat, one by one they filed before Him as the name of each one was read out. After Baidul had instructed them not to balk or try to pull away, Baba would wash their feet as they stood on the platform before Him, and would give each one a packet of money as prasad.

In this way, everything proceeded smoothly until the fifty-fifth person. Now, as Kohiyar's servant approached, Baba gave Kohiyar a quick, knowing look, and gestured, "In pleasing Me you have also tried to please yourself" — because he had sought some benefit for his servant. But when the last man reached the platform, the man whom Kohiyar had just picked up along the roadside, Baba's mood changed. "Not a good choice," He gestured, and added that the man was a money lender. Baba warned Kohiyar that in the future he should be more careful with the work entrusted to him. The program ended, and all filed out of Florence Hall.

This was Kohiyar's first chance to watch Baba working at close hand, and he was profoundly moved by His divine presence, which was both regal and humble. The sublime nobility of Baba's features and movements struck him with great force. Witnessing and participating in this work brought him closer to Baba as his beloved Master.

Kohiyar did not have a personal interview with Baba that day, but he felt Baba's love and compassion silently and continuously flowing out to him. Before departing, Baba told him that on the same day He would be moving to Satara for a long stay. He gave Kohiyar permission to see the *mandali* whenever he happened to visit there, but not Baba Himself.

Incidentally, Kohiyar later found out that the fifty-sixth man was indeed a money lender, as Baba had indicated. This glimpse of Baba's omniscience strengthened his conviction

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that Baba definitely knew his heart and mind. In giving Him a chance to serve Him, Baba had richly blessed Kohiyar.

The Avatar graciously offers many opportunities to His dear ones to participate in His divine cause. In His humor and compassion, He creates situations that give us the impression that He vitally needs us. Yet in reality He alone does His work. And when we are privileged to share in that work, it is He Who chooses us: we don't choose Him. All is by His grace. Yet ought we not to long and strive to become the recipients of that grace?

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New Meher Literature Released

In the '40s, Baba had journeyed many thousands of miles to contact God-intoxicated individuals known as *masts*. During this period of intensive inner spiritual work with these advanced souls, Baba rarely gave public darshan. During His travels His disciples were under strict instructions not to disclose His identity. If the people encountered along the way happened to ask who Baba was, the *mandali* would refer to Him as their elder brother, or as a businessman (*seth*) from Bombay.

This decade closed with Baba's inauguration of the New Life, which in turn was concluded in February 1952. From April to August of this year, Baba gave His darshan to His lovers in the West; it was after His return to India, during what He called the Fiery Free Life, that Baba visited the Hamirpur district in the north and Andhra Pradesh in the south. During these tours Baba gave out enlightening messages on a variety of spiritual topics during the large public darshan programs that had been arranged for Him. In a sense, Baba was letting His Name out of seclusion and allowing His message of love and truth to be disseminated openly among the masses; the public character of His working distinguished this phase in the early '50s from what had transpired previously.

For the purposes of His spiritual work, Baba was now making Himself available to large numbers of people. So, in 1954, when His lovers in Hamirpur and Andhra extended to their Beloved God in human form another loving invitation to visit various cities, towns and villages in their district, He accepted. And it was during these programs that, for the first time, Baba openly declared Himself to be the Avatar of the Age.¹

Among the tens of thousands who had His darshan were

¹ *Glimpses of the God-Man, Meher Baba*, Vol. III, p. 113ff.

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hundreds of men and women who willingly accepted Baba's divinity in their hearts and were longing to learn more about His life. Hearts were full, but the mind craved words! Always the Compassionate One, Baba invariably responds to the needs of His dear ones. So it was that at this time books and periodicals devoted to Baba began to appear.

In the United States, in July 1953, Filis Frederick started to publish *The Awakener*, a quarterly magazine. The next year witnessed the publication of Francis Brabazon's *Journey with God*, the first of many volumes on Baba by this close disciple from Australia. In this book, Francis portrayed in verse his personal impressions of Baba's second Andhra darshan tour in February 1954, to which he had been invited. In "Notes on 'The God-Man,'" Francis wrote the following sublime lines:

That man is the God-Man who makes the path easy —
Nay, who wipes out the path altogether,
Goes straight to the heart of the matter
And gives one realization of the Self.²

Also in 1954, the Indian periodicals *Meher Pukar* and *Velugu* began to publish, in Hindi and Telugu respectively, Baba's messages as well as articles on His life. In different parts of India, small groups of Baba lovers started to hold weekly meetings. Some Baba lovers were inspired to compose *bhajans* and songs in praise of Baba's divinity and Avatarhood, and singing these new compositions, singly and in chorus, gave them great joy. The first song book in praise of Baba was published under the title *Shri Meher Geetawali*. Edited by Baba's dear disciple Keshav Nigam, this volume included *ghazals*, *bhajans*, and other songs glorifying Baba in Urdu, Hindi, Marathi, Telugu, and Gujarati. The love through these songs helped make Baba lovers from various stations and walks of life forget their differences of caste, creed, and language; Baba brought them together like "beads on one string."

In June 1954, another collection of songs composed by Sulloo Meshram, entitled *Meher Prakash Bhajanwali*, was published by Meher Publications in Ahmednagar. These songs

² *Journey with God*, p. 17.

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gave expression to the sublime feelings that flowered in the garden of Sulloo's love for Baba.

In retrospect, it seems that a new avenue to Meher Baba opened up in 1954, an avenue of publications of Baba's words and books and booklets about Him, through which greater numbers of people could learn about the Avatar. The silence of the Avatar began to communicate itself to His dear ones through the words He inspired in some of His lovers' hearts!

Baba's Nagpur Visit and Sulloo Meshram

Each one in Baba's family has his or her own story of the Beloved. I would like to interject here an episode from the early life of Sulloo Meshram, one of Baba's dear lovers and the author of the song collection *Meher Prakash Bhajanwali*. Meshram first heard of Baba when he was just thirteen years old. He was living with his family in Nagpur, a city Baba visited for a few days in December 1937. Accompanied there by several of the *mandali*, including Princess Norina Matchabelli, Baba stayed at Mary Lodge, the home and estate of Papa Jessawala, Eruch's father, in a locality known as Chhavni.

Because of various incidents that took place at the time, a certain amount of publicity attended Baba's visit to the city, and reports about Him began to appear in the newspapers. Sulloo himself did not see Baba at this time. However, while reading the press reports about His visit, something touched his heart, and he felt impelled to find out more about this Man who had become the center of so much interest. Those around Baba have often noticed that, as the propitious moment of one's coming into the orbit of the Avatar's love draws near, a number of seeming "coincidences" occur. Sometimes gently, sometimes forcibly, these coincidences push one toward Him. In Sulloo's case, it was simply a newspaper account that made the initial contact.

But before continuing with Meshram's story, I cannot resist recounting a unique episode that took place during the course

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of Baba's stay in Nagpur in December 1937. While it does not relate directly to Meshram, it does convey a sense of the atmosphere that prevailed around Baba at this period. After all, Baba is the Timeless One. So any story that provides occasion for loving remembrance of Him serves the purposes of this chronicle.

This striking anecdote was told to me by Gaimai Jessawala, Eruch's mother, who was Baba's hostess for His visit. Gaimai recollects the story as follows:

Beloved Baba's stay at our house, Mary Lodge, in Nagpur, for three or four days in December 1937, was delightful and memorable for all of us. Some of the time was taken up with a public darshan program that was held on the estate for three consecutive days. On one occasion, soon after Baba arrived with Norina and a few of His men *mandali*, I noticed a woman entering. All of a sudden she began to shout loudly and repeatedly, "Kalanki Avatar has come!" Kalanki [Kalki] Avatar means the White Horse Avatar or the Expected One.

Trying to pacify her, I asked her where she had come from and what was the purpose of her visit. In a very agitated tone she told me her story. She said she was the wife of a judge in Baroda [Gujarat] and had a guru who had died some time back. She had a vision or a vivid dream in which the guru told her that she should go at once to Nagpur to a place called Chhavni [camp], where Sakshaat Parabrahma Paramatma ["God manifest in human form"] as the Kalanki Avatar was going to give darshan. Accordingly, she caught the first available train, and after arriving at Nagpur and getting directions, she came straight to our house. She brought her brother and sister-in-law with her for Baba's darshan. Hearing her story, I offered her food and refreshments. But she refused, impressing upon me that our entire household should desist from eating while Sakshat Parameshwar was in our home!

When the darshan program started, the woman worked herself into a frenzy, proclaiming repeatedly that the

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Kalanki Avatar had come and that all should hasten to take His darshan. She kept rushing back and forth in the great crowd of darshanites who kept filing past Baba. Eventually, Baba called for Norina and told her to instruct the woman to make her announcement to a group of women sitting in the far end of the hall and not to shout near Him. But Norina politely argued that, because of the language barrier between them, it would be difficult to make the woman understand what she was saying.

However, Baba gestured to her to speak to the woman anyway. So Norina threaded her way through the crowd and started to give Baba's message in English, speaking slowly. But evidently the woman guessed from Norina's beautiful features and continental manner where she was from and started conversing with her in broken Italian! Amazed, Norina then realized why Baba had insisted that it should be she, of all people, who should converse with the woman. Later on, when I was washing Baba's laundry, this same woman approached me and asked to be allowed the great privilege of also washing some of His clothes. But as it was Baba's order that I alone should perform this task, I had reluctantly to refuse her earnest request. But while Baba was out of His room, she managed somehow to get hold of a pair of His *chappals* [sandals] and, with great fervor, went around the house tapping the heads and faces of everyone with them!

Although the judge's wife was a stranger to Gaimai and did not return to Mary Lodge thereafter, what was significant about her visit was that she gave to the people of our age an early intimation that the Avatar was again in our midst. This came long before Baba Himself was openly to assert His status as that same Ancient One. Apparently the time had not yet arrived for people to hail Baba publicly as the Avatar.

The woman's sudden arrival and departure was like a streak of lightning flashing for a few moments across the sky, only to vanish as quickly as it had appeared. It seems that whatever little time she spent in Baba's presence must have

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filled her heart to the brim with His divine love. Silently, Baba bestowed upon her the deep conviction of His being the Avatar. This awakening to Baba's presence within her heart was so profound that she had no need to see Him again physically; nor did Baba inquire about her further. Incredible! In His all-encompassing divinity, Baba knows what one needs, how much, and when! Such was the divine charisma and magnetism of Baba's personality that, in His presence, extraordinary incidents like this were not unusual.

To resume Sulloo Meshram's story: in 1938, a year after Baba's darshan program in Nagpur, while Sulloo was still in his early teens, he took to visiting the Jessawalas, and there he learned more about Baba. Procuring Baba's address, he wrote Him a letter in which he expressed his desire to see Him in person. Baba, in response to Sulloo's longing, lovingly granted this request. And so, in the first week of April 1938, overjoyed at receiving Baba's invitation, this young boy of fourteen left Nagpur by train on a 700-mile journey to Panchgani (not far from Poona) where Baba was then residing. Some of the money for the trip had been provided by his school principal, who was interested in spirituality. At Kalyan, which is a junction, Sulloo had to change trains. But upon leaving the compartment he found to his dismay that his suitcase, containing clothes, some Baba photos, and all his money, had been stolen. He was literally penniless. Only two baskets of oranges, which the Jessawalas had entrusted to him to give to Baba, remained. What a predicament for a young boy venturing alone on such a long trip! Although he had lost even his ticket, somehow he managed to get onto another train, wondering all the while why such misfortunes should befall him when the journey he was engaged in was to meet the All-Compassionate One. Yet it is not uncommon for people to lose something tangible when they are traveling to meet the Avatar. Perhaps these tangible losses are an indication that one should be willing to part also with the intangible thoughts and feelings that stand in the way of seeing the God-Man as He ought to be seen.

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When he arrived in Poona, Sulloo had no idea how he would travel on to Panchgani with no ticket and no money. But as luck would have it, he met a bus driver bound for Panchgani and told him of the theft of his suitcase. The driver not only believed his story, but as it turned out, had formerly been one of the servants who years earlier had carried water to Baba's bungalow, and so had a special feeling for Him. This driver happily agreed to give Sulloo a free ride to Panchgani. Once again, Baba's unseen guiding hand had silently taken care of the details of a lover's journey to Him.

When he got off the bus in Panchgani, to the boy's complete surprise, a stranger approached him and asked if he was Sulloo Meshram. This stranger turned out to be Baba's brother Jal, who by Baba's order had been waiting to receive him. As it happened, Papa Jessawala had sent a telegram from Nagpur to Panchgani, informing Baba about Meshram's departure. Jal took Sulloo to the *mandali's* residence. A short while later, Baba arrived and took His seat, His long hair flowing and a radiance glowing on His face.

Sulloo's heart leapt within him, and he rushed to Baba, prostrating himself at His feet. Baba lovingly inquired about his journey, and He beamed a smile as He heard about the theft of the suitcase. For He had committed a far greater theft — He had stolen this young boy's heart! In his enthusiasm Sulloo exclaimed that he wished to offer his life to Baba and to obey Him implicitly. Baba did not respond at that moment but asked him to go with Vishnu, one of the *mandali*, to rest in a nearby lodge.

Sulloo stayed on in Panchgani for three days. On the second day, while he was having a bath, another of Baba's disciples, Gustadji, came into the room. Because he was observing silence, Gustadji conveyed through signs that Baba had summoned Sulloo to come to Him immediately. Sulloo had heard that whenever called, one was expected to go without delay. Although he had just started his bath and was wearing only his underwear, he left immediately without taking time to dress further.

He found Baba sitting with a few of His disciples. Half-naked,

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Sulloo stood before Him. Baba asked, "Have you slept well? Did you have any special thoughts?"

Sulloo replied, "Baba, I spent several hours singing songs in Your praise."

Baba looked happy and gestured, "Fit for the spiritual path." As Sulloo had obeyed Baba immediately without question, Baba gave him some guidelines to follow. They were: he should never tell a lie to anyone; he should abstain from lustful actions, smoking, and alcohol; and he should not eat meat, fish, or eggs. Further, Baba instructed Sulloo to meditate for an hour every day and to write "Om Parabrahma Baba" for another hour daily.

On the last day of Sulloo's visit, Baba ordered Vishnu to make arrangements for his return to Nagpur. Sulloo was taken by car to Poona on the first leg of this trip; and from there a train ticket to Nagpur was bought for him. In short, Baba paid for his entire return fare. What a royal send-off from the King to one of His teenage lovers! He had come to Baba penniless but was leaving with the coffers of his heart filled with real spiritual treasure. He arrived safely in Nagpur, where he gave a full account of his stay with Baba to the Jessawala family.

After this initial meeting, a rapport was established between Sulloo and Baba which continued to grow through the years. Baba sowed the seed of love divine in Sulloo's heart, and in time this seed began to germinate and flourish as naturally and spontaneously as a bud opening its brightly colored petals to the sunlight. In early 1954 he was inspired to compose songs about Baba in both Hindi and Marathi. Compiled in *Meher Prakash Bhajanwali*, these songs were the fragrant flowering of Sulloo's love for the eternal Beloved.

Correspondence Reopens: New Circular Issued

In June 1954, after concluding His long stay in Mahabaleshwar that had begun on November 1 of the previous year, Baba shifted His headquarters to Satara, a nice city in Maharashtra

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State. Like Mahabaleshwar, Satara was already familiar to those accompanying Baba, since Baba had established *mast ashrams* in both places in the late '40s.

Two bungalows, about a mile apart, were rented for Baba's use. The bungalow named Grafton was reserved for Baba and the women *mandali*, while the small group of His men disciples occupied Rosewood. In the mornings, Baba with one of His disciples, the night watchman or someone else ordered by Him, would walk briskly to Rosewood to attend to correspondence and to discuss the details of His day-to-day activities.

Both houses were located in the camp area, a quiet part of Satara with many pleasant bungalows, large and small, surrounded by well-kept gardens and hedges. The roads were broad, clean, and relatively uncrowded. The climate in this part of Maharashtra is comfortable throughout the year, neither too hot nor too cold. In general, Satara was an inviting place of residence, and it was a special favorite of Baba's.

By the end of May, the restriction on correspondence to Baba had ended. So mail began to flow in from Baba's dear ones who had been eagerly awaiting the opportunity to write Him about assorted family news and the programs they had arranged to spread His message of Love. Since Baba was often on tour, they had been directed to write to Him in care of Adi in Ahmednagar. Most of the mail bore the glad tidings of their love for Him, but there were a few problem cases. On June 2, Adi received the following telegram addressed to Baba:

Resigned job on first June 1954, in obedience to Your order. Left wife on eighteenth October 1953. Living separately in hotel. Kindly give me *sannyas* and allow me to live on begging, in any place.

This surprising communication came from Kuppuswami, who had been in contact with Baba for over a decade. Kuppuswami was sincere in his search for God but rigid in his ideas of how to conduct this search. The implication in his telegram, that Baba had ordered him to leave his wife and job, was totally unfounded. He was vaguely trying to use Baba's discourse on external renunciation to suit his own convenience.

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Baba's close ones knew that He did not wish His lovers to abandon their families and responsibilities. In meetings large and small, Baba had repeatedly conveyed to them, "Remember Me wholeheartedly. I will be with you; I will help you. Be in the world but not of it." Internal rather than external renunciation was what Baba wished of His lovers.

Under Baba's direction, Adi replied to Swami that Baba had not ordered him to renounce the world as he had done and that he had misconstrued Baba's words. A part of Adi's letter, which illustrates his forceful way of writing, is reproduced below:

I received your letter. It seems that once more a wave of deception and foolishness has come upon you, and so, once more — the third or perhaps fourth time in your life — you have given up your job. You say that you have given up your house and the world also.

This is not what Baba asked you to do. This has been a cowardly move on your part. You were repeatedly warned before not to dabble with whimsical, cynical moves in life and call them your own exalted spirituality ...

If you are still a wise man, if there is some sanity left in you, you must immediately give up your false thinking and unnatural way of life and immediately go back to your job, to your house, to your family, and resume discharging honestly the duties of life. Baba can be pleased by your taking up a life of a true *karma yogi* [a person leading a householder's life, in the loving remembrance of God, dedicating the results of his or her actions to Him].

Whether or not Swami went back to his duties at the income tax department in Bangalore, I do not know. In November 1955, however, I remember seeing him at a *sahas* program, dressed in ocher-colored pajama pants and knee-length shirt. Except for a general greeting in Baba's love, I had no chance to talk with him. At one point in the gathering, however, Baba, on seeing Swami's ocher-colored *kalni*, remarked, "One has to dye one's heart with the color of detachment and not just one's clothes."

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Apart from Swami's way of leading his life, here I am reminded of a significant anecdote that Swami had shared with me. In the mid-forties, during my stay at Meherabad, Swami told me that, while playing cards, Baba made a meaningful and symbolic observation about the Joker. In spite of being the highest card (in many card games), the Joker can replace any other card, high or low, in any suit. Baba conveyed, "The Avatar is like the Joker. He jokes and juggles with all, and yet He is above all."

From Baba's statement I gathered that the Avatar is equally approachable and available to all — the clever and the dull, the discreet and the whimsical. So Baba with His sense of humor and his unconditional patience must have guided Kuppuswami in acquiring the right perspective in His relationship with Him — the Avatar.

During the months of April and May, Adi had been keeping Baba informed on the progress of plans for a large gathering of His followers later that year at Meherabad. After considering various suggestions offered by the *mandali*, Baba finally decided to hold this Meeting in September. So on June 10, Adi issued a special circular to inform Baba's lovers residing in different parts of India of this decision. The complete text is reproduced below to give readers an idea of how particular Baba was about the details connected with any of His programs:

1. Avatar Meher Baba desires to meet at Meherabad (Ahmednagar) on 29th and 30th September 1954 His close disciples, devotees, associates and all those who love Him, irrespective of whether at any time they saw or did not see Him.
2. Only those who are genuinely interested in Baba as "Baba" or in His work need take the trouble of going to Him and availing themselves of the occasion of getting benefited by His presence and getting a true understanding of His work.
3. In the meeting or meetings that will be held at Meherabad, Baba wants to make absolutely clear, certain, and [original text has missing word error here]

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His work in this life. Just as the "Rajahmundry Meeting" in Andhra State called for His work and workers was the first and last of its kind, so also this Meherabad Meeting will be the first and last of its kind before He gives up His present physical body.

4. With the exception of a Mass darshan programme that will be held on 12 September 1954 in Ahmednagar proper, when He may give a message or messages, the above Meherabad Meeting occasion will be the last for Him to give a message or messages.
5. Amongst the many phases of Baba's work, the one that signifies the act of giving messages will be discontinued from the beginning of October 1954 onwards. They will veritably and literally be stopped.
6. All those (males only above the age of 16) who decide to attend the Meherabad Meeting should fill in the Acceptance Form provided herewith, sign it, and send it, so as to reach Adi K. Irani not later than 1st August 1954.
7. All those who decide to attend the meeting should individually send as *dakshana*, rupees twenty-two (Rs.22/-), by a money order to Adi K. Irani, to reach him not later than 1st August 1954.
8. On receipt of the Acceptance Forms and the money orders from the intending visitors, they will be provided with (by post or otherwise) an Admittance Form or a Token that will give them entrance to Meherabad and will permit them free-of-charge board and lodging for 29th and 30th September 1954, and a free bus ride from Ahmednagar Railway Station to Meherabad and back.
9. All should bring with them their bedding rolls, battery torches and clothes, enough to last them for their journey both ways and two days' stay at Meherabad for their greater convenience. Due to scarcity of water, it will not be possible to wash or get washed soiled clothes during their stay at Meherabad.

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10. All attendants at the Meeting will bear their own expenses for the journey from their place of residence to Ahmednagar railway station and back.
11. All those attending should decide, find out and fill in a column that will be provided in a Slip attached to the Admittance Form giving the precise time and day of their arrival at Ahmednagar Railway Station between the afternoon of 28th September and early morning of 29th September 1954.
12. To ensure your free bus ride from Ahmednagar Railway station to Meherabad, you should reach Ahmednagar Railway Station at the following hours:
28th September Via Dhond at 2:21 P.M. and 9:23 P.M. 28th September Via Manmad at 3:24 P.M.
29th September Via Manmad at 12:36 A.M.³

A wave of delight swept over Baba's lovers when they received this circular. Their eyes would soon rest upon their Beloved! Once again they would bask in His glorious presence! For some it was their first opportunity to meet Him. As it turned out, Baba inaugurated a new phase in His work with this meeting, despite the circular announcing this as the last *sahavas*, as several *sahavas* programs were held at Meherabad subsequently in the later '50s. Though none could guess the significance of this gathering, all were thrilled at the prospect of being in the company of the Avatar of the Age!

Links of Love

While the preparations for the meeting at Meherabad were getting under way, changes were occurring in the lives of several members of the Kotwal family. The Kotwals had long been living in close association with Baba. In June 1954, Najoo Kotwal completed her nursing degree and was expecting a position in Bombay. By this time her sister, Hilla, was married; and Adi, her brother, had just embarked on university study in Poona. Their father, Savak, was one of the resident

³ *Life Circular*, No. 18, June 10, 1954.

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mandali, traveling with Baba wherever He went; and their mother, Nargiz, had been living at Meherabad for many years. The children had grown up at Meherabad, and they would go there to stay for their school vacations. But now that her children were older, Baba suggested that it would be more practical for Nargiz to leave Meherabad and resume her life in Bombay, where she could be closer to her children.

Nargiz had heard of Baba through her husband, Savak, who had first met Him in the '30s. In the intensity of his love for Baba, Savak wanted to leave his bank job in Bombay and live with Him permanently. After several years, in response to his heart's longing, Baba granted this wish, on the condition that Savak "sell everything." Gladly availing himself of this rare opportunity, by March 1940, Savak had managed to sell off all of his property and came to stay with Baba in Bangalore, bringing with him his wife and three children.

Nargiz loved Savak wholeheartedly, as a woman loves a man. Coming from a wealthy family, for love's sake she had given up everything to become the wife of Savak, who was not a rich man. Later, she joined hands with Savak in his new spiritual adventure of leading an austere *ashram* life with Baba. She had not been consciously seeking God herself, but because of her love for Savak she agreed to adhere to this unforeseen and sometimes difficult way of life. Thus she shared in the good fortune of living at Meherabad, under Baba's direct instructions, for many years. Any link of selfless love with anyone, when it is accompanied by the spirit of willing sacrifice, eventually leads a person to God.

Since Nargiz was frail and delicate of constitution, *ashram* life was not easy for her. Once, not long after the family had joined Baba, while traveling on a bus with Him, she began to feel weak. In addition to the unaccustomed rigors of her new life-style, Nargiz was still recovering from an illness. Finally, to her relief, the bus stopped for a while, and Baba stepped out and stood by the bus. Suddenly the thought flashed through her mind, "What would happen to my three children if I were to die?" Baba, the Omniscient One, turned to her and lovingly responded to her thought. "Don't worry," He gestured. "You

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will not die soon. I am with your children, always." This greatly surprised Nargiz; she was deeply comforted by this timely response and felt sorry that she had doubted Baba.

In the challenges that she had to face in her life, she began to feel that Baba was definitely helping her, and this convinced her of His omnipotence. The seed of trust and reliance on Baba was sown in her heart, and gradually she came to accept Him as her spiritual Master. Her link with Baba was forged by His ongoing love. Over the succeeding fourteen years her three children were sent by Baba to the best schools and received their education.

Now in 1954, with her children finishing their schooling, Nargiz moved back to Bombay where she could attend to the needs of Adi and Najoo. So with His permission, she left the quiet atmosphere of Meherabad and took up residence in the noisy, crowded city once again. However, her inner contact with Beloved Baba remained intact. Once one comes into close contact with Baba, experiencing His presence is not dependent upon the proximity of His physical form. To follow His wish is what matters. This is what maintains the link with His omniscient Love.

Two days after Nargiz's departure from Meherabad to Bombay on July 6, 1954, one of Baba's close followers, Gabriel Pascal, passed away in Roosevelt Hospital in New York. A renowned Hollywood personality, Pascal had been working for some years on a film project on Meher Baba. At his death, another Baba follower and co-worker on this project cabled Baba: "It is finished. Phoenix [Baba's nickname for Pascal] loved you deeply." In reply, Baba sent the following telegram: "Pascal has come to Me. Love from Baba." Thus a brilliant and dramatic career came to an end in the loving remembrance of the Divine Beloved.

A genius in the world of filmmaking, Pascal first met Baba in Zurich, Switzerland, in 1934. In this first interview, as one of the *mandali* later commented, Pascal "went in as a lion and came out as a lamb." Baba's radiant presence touched his heart deeply. Baba expressed interest in Pascal's work, and after their meeting Pascal would write to Him about his

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various film projects.

In the '50s Pascal began to apply his energy and enthusiasm towards a film on Baba's life entitled "The Slippers of the Perfect Master." Intended for wide commercial distribution, this movie would include film footage from the anniversary of Baba's birthday, to be celebrated in Andhra on February 25, 1954. To oversee this filming, Pascal had already bought plane tickets to India. However, unavoidable complications forced him to cancel these plans. Soon afterwards he fell ill and was admitted to Roosevelt Hospital in New York.

In June 1954, while in the hospital, Gabriel wrote Baba two letters. The excerpts below give some sense of the flavor of his relationship with Baba:

My Beloved Baba,

. . . I am like a new-born boy starting to live again but it goes slowly. You gave me a terrific new outlook about human life and I now see everything from a new angle ... Here I had, I confess, many relapses in my health, and many temptations ... I will get healthy in Baden-Baden, and I will be, by the end of August, in your everlasting arms [i.e., in India]. I know you are always with me. Without you, I would be nothing but a little pariah in this world . . .

My body is so weak as never before, so you have the balance in your own Master hands. I trust that you are playing the Divine game, according to human rules ...

Maybe sometimes you hear a frivolous remark from me, even in my dying pain, but you know that thousands of years ago I was a pixie and a faun and I was allowed to make fun of the gods, and God Pan himself, and that is in my blood. So please forgive me if sometimes I talk like thousands of years ago. But I know that you love me as the Gods loved then. And that's my only comfort in this valley of misery . . .

Ever your Phoenix,
Gabriel⁴

⁴ *The Awakener*, Vol. II, No. 2 (Fall 1954), pp. 6-7.

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Pascal was indeed a brilliant personality. Throughout his life he was torn between his search for God and his passion for the flesh. He lived like a prince, but he was perpetually in debt and died penniless. Yet after his death, the musical *My Fair Lady*, based on the play *Pygmalion*, for which the author, George Bernard Shaw, had given Pascal all the rights, brought a fortune for Pascal's successors. What an irony of fate! But "Phoenix" won the real treasure, for as Baba said in His cable, "Pascal has come to Me." Thus by Baba's grace Pascal, the "Phoenix," was enabled to open his wings and fly to the abode of Baba's love!

On Religion and Silence Day

In July of 1954, several of Baba's disciples wrote a memorable article entitled "The Truth about Religion." Based on Baba's teachings and incorporating excerpts from His messages, the final English draft was read out to Baba, Who agreed that it should be translated and published in Hindi, Marathi, Telugu, Tamil, Malayalam, and Gujarati. The English text was first published in *The Awakener*, and some selected passages are reproduced below:

Irrespective of whether a person believes through the medium of ideas or idols, with sincere love and faith in God, he or she can get ever nearer to Him, Who is already the nearest of all. The essence of faith lies not in the shape or manner of one's belief, but in the depth and sincerity behind it. The faith that can move mountains can, and does, move the greatest of them — the mountain of Ignorance that denies an individual a glimpse of one's true Divinity and also conceals one's true Identity.

God is Freedom, Bliss, Knowledge Eternal. To put Him exclusively within the four walls of man-made churches is but added proof of our ignorance. God is Fathomless. To bind Him within narrow and limited channels of dogmas, creeds, and churchified conventions is to admit that we

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lack the true perception of God's Omniscience.

Unconsciously man is always seeking, aspiring, yearning for something higher — though he misinterprets that longing in the elusive expression of ambition, power, and human love ...

Faithful or infidel, touchable or untouchable, black, white, brown or yellow, every man and woman is ultimately destined for the Supreme Goal . . .⁵

Meher Baba has followers from among manifold religions. At one time or another they have been asked by friends and strangers whether Meher Baba asks His followers to give up their religion. On the contrary, Meher Baba states:

Follow whatever religion you like, but follow its innermost core. Do not make a mockery of it by adopting the conventional husk of religion and ignoring the underlying Truth. Religion should not be a convenience to be indulged in, but words of Truth to be lived ... I belong to no religion. Every religion belongs to Me. My personal religion is My being the Ancient, Infinite One, and the religion I impart to all is Love for God, which is the Truth of all religions.⁶

This passage is reminiscent of another laconic statement of Baba's: "All religions are great, but God is greater."

In the last week of June the following instructions concerning the observance of Silence Day were sent out to Baba's followers in India:

Avatar Meher Baba desires all His lovers to observe fast and complete silence beginning from 6:00 P.M. on July 10, 1954, to 6:00 P.M. of July 11, 1954 (Indian Standard Time); to try to keep pure thoughts and actions during the period of fast and silence; to repeat inwardly (inaudibly) any one name of GOD as frequently as possible during the 24 hours of fast and silence.

During the period of fast, tea and coffee is permitted thrice. Drinking water may be taken frequently.⁷

⁵ Ibid., pp. 10-110.

⁶ Ibid., p. 12.

⁷ *Life Circular*, No. 19, June 23, 1954.

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Meher Baba had begun observing silence on July 10, 1925, and His silence remained unbroken for over forty-three years, until He put aside His Man-form on January 31, 1969. From 1953 onwards, almost every year, a circular was issued at Baba's direction giving specific instructions to be followed by His lovers on Silence Day, if they wished to do so. Sometimes He asked them to repeat a name of God, audibly or inaudibly, other times He wanted them to fast or keep silence, or both. In the last circular of its kind, issued by Adi K. Irani in May 1968, Avatar Meher Baba expressed His wish as follows:

On the 10th of July, the 43rd anniversary of My Silence, I want all My lovers to observe complete silence for twenty-four hours, from midnight of 9th July to midnight of 10th July 1968.

Adi, Baba's secretary, added the following lines:

Please note that Baba has given no option of a fast for those who may find it impractical to observe silence. None must write for further clarification (to Baba) concerning it.⁸

This was the last time that Baba gave a specific instruction to His lovers about July 10. Now that the avataric "cloak" (the physical form that Infinite God put on to become Meher Baba) is removed from our sight, it is natural for some to ask the *mandali* whether or not silence should be observed on this particular day. In 1979 Mani, Meher Baba's sister, shared some of her thoughts in an informal talk on this subject in Mandali Hall at Meherazad. She said:

There should be no question in the minds of anyone [Baba lovers], whether we should observe silence or not. It is an opportunity that we should not let pass by! Every lover of Baba, to my mind, should observe silence on the 10th of July — Silence Day. You salute your Beloved Baba by giving Him a rose; you would not call that a routine or ritual. It is an expression of your love, a piece of your heart . . . Baba has observed silence for all — for each one of

⁸ *Life Circular*, No. 69, May 15, 1968.

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us — and if we cannot give that little response for one day — if we cannot keep our lips closed for one day of the year — then that's too bad. I don't feel that by keeping silence we are going to help the world or anything like that. That is not why we are doing it. It's just a salute, in homage to His Love for us; an expression of our love for Him. Beloved Baba observed silence for all these years, and for one day He has "said" we can share it with Him too. How blessed we are!

In 1954, on July 10, more than seventy percent of those from a particular village in the district of Hamirpur (U.P.) fasted and observed silence for twenty-four hours. A blessed village indeed!

The opportunity to observe silence on July 10 each year, as mentioned in the last Life Circular, remains an open invitation from Him to His lovers. To observe silence on this day is to invite Baba to revitalize one's relationship with Him. In exceptional situations, however, I personally feel the decision rests with the individual. Whatever one decides each year will please Baba as long as it is honest and sincere. He understands us more than we understand ourselves.

Rhoda's "Key Meeting" with the Avatar

In the middle of July I received a letter from Eruch written by Baba's directive. It stated:

Baba repeats, just to remind you once again that you should try your best not to forget to give Life Circular No. 18 (Ref. Meetings at Meherabad; September 29-30, 1954) to Baba lovers, devotees and admirers known to you ...

The most important part of this letter is that Baba, this time, not only wishes but personally wants all His lovers (men only) to attend these meetings which have their special, spiritual significance . . . Baba sends His love.

Accordingly, I shared the news with my friends and

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relatives. The response was not encouraging, but I had done my work; the rest was up to Baba. What was important to me was the trust Baba had reposed in me by assigning to me this task. Through this small task I felt that He had expressed His intimacy with me, planting in my heart the seeds for sharing His glorious life with others in the future.

At this time Adi was beginning to receive reservations for accommodation at Meherabad from Baba lovers who wished to attend the Meeting. He kept Baba informed of the names and total number of those expected. Meanwhile, Padri, Pendu, and Chhagan were busy making arrangements for accommodation at Lower Meherabad. Sarosh and Adi were given the task of seeing to the comfort and convenience of the Westerners who were to stay at Upper Meherabad from September 11.

Will Backett and Charles Purdom, longtime disciples of Baba from England, reached Bombay on August 20, three weeks early, as there were no steamers available that would reach India in time for the meeting. They stayed in a good hotel in Bombay, visiting frequently with Meherjee and Nariman, until the time for them to leave for Meherabad.

Baba decided to leave Satara for Ahmednagar on August 31, stopping for a few days in Poona on the way. The day before His departure, Rhoda Dubash, one of his dear ones, had a memorable meeting with Him at Rosewood, the bungalow where the men *mandali* were residing.

The meeting came about like this. In the '50s Rhoda and her husband, Adi, were living in Karachi, Pakistan. In August 1954, Rhoda came to India for vacation with her two sons, planning to stay at Panchgani, a health resort near Mahabaleshwar. But while she was in this country, Rhoda wondered whether it would be possible to have Baba's darshan. So she wrote to Baba's secretary, Adi, asking where Baba was staying at the time. He replied that Baba was in Satara and, although He was not actually in seclusion, He was not seeing any of His lovers.

Despite this somewhat discouraging news, Rhoda still yearned for Baba's blessed darshan, since she had not seen

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Him for over two years. During her stay at Panchgani, she learned that one of her cousins occasionally visited Satara (some fifty miles away) on business, leaving in the morning and returning in the evening. She asked if sometime she could accompany him. Her cousin readily agreed. So, on August 30, Rhoda set out with eager hopes of seeing her Beloved Lord, Meher Baba.

Arriving at Satara, Rhoda asked her cousin to take her to Grafton, the bungalow where Baba was staying. But on the way, Rhoda was filled with qualms. "What would Baba say about my dropping in unannounced!" she wondered. "What am I doing here?" But she persuaded herself that she had to go ahead with it, since she had something very personal and profound that she wanted to tell Him. In any case, it was too late for her to turn back now.

As the car drew near to the bungalow, she asked her cousin to stop at a little distance from the gate; there she got down, asking him to pick her up again in the evening. Knowing Baba's ways, Rhoda suspected that, if a car was waiting for her, Baba would see her for a few minutes and then send her packing. But on foot she would be helpless to depart. "All's fair in love and war," she concluded as she watched the car drive off. When it was only a tiny speck in the distance, she turned and walked to the gate to Baba's residence. Rano Gayley, one of Baba's American disciples, appeared and asked what she wanted. Rhoda replied, "I've come to see Meher Baba."

"He's not seeing anyone," Rano replied.

"That's all right, just give Him a message. Tell Him that a lover of His has come from Karachi to dedicate her life at His feet," Rhoda answered.

Rano was touched at Rhoda's words and instantly reached over the gate to shake hands with Rhoda. "Wait a minute," she said and disappeared into the house.

A few minutes later Rano returned and said, "I've given your message to Baba. He is very happy and wants you to come to Rosewood, where the men *mandali* are staying, at two o'clock."

Rhoda was overjoyed. "But could you please tell me where

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Rosewood is?" she asked.

"Why, don't you have anyone to take you there?" asked Rano. Rhoda was all innocence. "Not a soul!" she answered.

Rano asked her to wait again. Rhoda was sure that now Baba would ask her in. In a short time, however, Dr. Goher approached her, and they lovingly embraced. Goher told her, "Baba wants me to take you to Kohiyar Satarawalla's house. Under Baba's direction, he will take you to Rosewood at two o'clock, and Baba will see you there." With this, Goher escorted Rhoda to Kohiyar's house and cycled back. Now, years later, Rhoda laughingly says, "Well, you can't say I didn't try to see Baba at Grafton. But Baba is the Avatar, and He is always one up on us!"

Kohiyar welcomed Rhoda with open arms, since bringing her to Baba would give him an opportunity to see Baba too. Immediately after lunch Rhoda was impatient to be off, even though there was more than enough time. So she and Kohiyar set out on a shortcut across a field. They had just reached the main road when they saw a car coming towards them, honking.

"It's Baba! It's His car!" Kohiyar exclaimed, stopping abruptly. The car drew up alongside and Eruch's head popped out through the window. "You couldn't wait," he said to Rhoda, smilingly. "Well, Baba sent His car for you. He told me that it's too hot for you to walk, so I should bring you to Rosewood in the car."

"But where does Baba sit?" asked Rhoda.

"The front seat," came the reply.

Rhoda jumped into the front seat and sat silently throughout the drive, touched by Baba's thoughtfulness. When they reached Rosewood, Eruch told her, "Go in, Baba is waiting for you."

Rhoda entered the main hall, but since her eyes, accustomed to the bright sunlight, hadn't yet adjusted to the comparative darkness inside, she couldn't see Baba straightaway. Then suddenly she saw Him, sitting in an armchair to one side of the hall. Love radiated from His whole being. As she approached hesitantly, He smiled and opened His arms to her. The next

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second she was in His embrace.

There are moments in life for which one cannot find adequate words. For Rhoda, this was one of them. Suffice it to say that time stood still as the Beloved embraced her. Love, beauty, peace flooded her being. She had come Home.

Baba asked Rhoda to be seated at His feet and gestured, "Your love makes Me very happy." He inquired about her husband, Adi, and also about her son, Merwan, but He did not ask Rhoda about her second son, Homi. During the intimate conversation that followed, Baba put an unexpected question to her: "If I were to ask you to give Me one of your sons, would you do so willingly?"

Rhoda was overjoyed, interpreting this to mean that Baba wanted one of her sons to one day live with Him as one of the resident *mandali*. She spontaneously said, "Yes, Baba!" The answer pleased Him very much. It was only six months later, when her younger son, Homi, died in an accident, that the real significance of Baba's question came home to her. But that's another episode of love and obedience in Adi and Rhoda's life with Baba.

Then Baba called to Bhau, one of the resident *mandali*, and asked, "Do you know her?" When Bhau replied in the negative, Baba showed surprise and said, "Why don't you know her? She's the wife of Adi Dubash." Then, giving Rhoda a mischievous wink, He continued, "Adi, that tall, dark, handsome fellow who nearly drowned Pendu and Eruch in the creek when they were in Karachi!"

Baba then asked Eruch to tell Bhau what had happened at Karachi. While Eruch told the story, Baba illustrated it with His vivid gestures, entering into the spirit of the episode. Rhoda was fascinated by the simplicity and eloquence of His movements, by His fingers which flew over the alphabet board, and by the beauty of His many expressions. Watching Him, her heart overflowed with love, bringing to life the words, "My cup runneth over."

After a short time Baba asked Rhoda to wait at the other end of the hall while He gave some last-minute instructions to the *mandali* concerning their impending departure for Poona the

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next day. He told her, "You are very fortunate to have come today. If you had come a day later, I would not have been here."

As she sat quietly at the back of the hall, savoring the presence of her Divine Beloved as He attended to affairs of the household, tears rolled down Rhoda's cheeks. She was too far from Baba for Him to see her distinctly, and she gave no outward indication, apart from the tears themselves, that she was weeping. Yet even while engrossed in conversation with the *mandali*, Baba, with a look of compassion, flashed a gesture to her, "Don't cry," and immediately resumed his discussion with the *mandali*. In His perfect timing, the All-knowing One never misses a beat.

Shortly thereafter, Baba asked one of the *mandali* for a certain booklet. Then, calling Rhoda, He handed it to her with the instruction, "Go into that small room and read this. It will help you to understand." Again, Baba had shown His compassion. For just that very morning, on her way to Kohiyar's house, Rhoda had asked Dr. Goher, "What does Baba teach?" "We should simply love him," Goher had answered, which was too brief for Rhoda. But now Baba, by giving her the pamphlet, was responding with His characteristic sensitivity to the unspoken questions of her heart.

As she took the booklet, Rhoda thought, "At least I have something given to me personally by Baba." But Baba, with a twinkle in His eye, gestured, "By the way, don't forget to return the booklet after you've read it. It belongs to Bhau."

Someone then took Rhoda to the adjoining room and pointed to a place on the floor where she could sit and read. The booklet was entitled *Truth of Religion*. Also called "The Truth about Religion," this was the article written by Baba's disciples the previous July. As she prepared to read, Rhoda noticed that she was not alone. Gustadji, the disciple who under Baba's instructions had been observing silence for many years, was sitting cross-legged on the floor, patching his old coat. He nodded to Rhoda, his rosy-checked face lighting up with a sweet smile. Watching him, Rhoda thought, "He just needs wings and he'd be a perfect archangel!" Then she plunged into the booklet and remained engrossed in her reading for some

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time. She had just finished when someone came into the room to say that Baba was calling for her.

As she entered the main hall, she saw her cousin taking Baba's darshan! Returning to Grafton as they had prearranged that morning, he had been directed from there to Rosewood, where he had the good fortune of being ushered in to meet the God-Man.

So now the time had come for Rhoda to leave. To ease the pangs of parting, the compassionate Beloved gave her some consolation by reminding her that she would be seeing Him again in twelve days' time at the Wadia Park darshan in Ahmednagar. Once again Rhoda was enfolded in His beautiful, all-compassionate embrace. What an unforgettable day this had been, which Rhoda refers to as her "key meeting" with Baba.

For though Rhoda had first met Baba in 1945, this encounter in Satara was her first intimate time with Him since she had become convinced that Meher Baba was truly God in human form — the Avatar of the Age. This inner certainty had dawned within her one fine morning in 1952 as she was standing near a window in her house in Karachi. Suddenly the conviction of His divine status flowed through her entire being. It was so strong and vibrant that it left her filled with wonder and an exalted sense of upliftment. This experience had aroused in her the restlessness to tell Baba personally about His gift to her and to express her gratitude by dedicating her life totally to Him, hence her feeling of compulsion to see Him at Satara. During her visit to Rosewood she experienced the certainty that Baba had indeed accepted her and that He knew the deepest feelings in her heart.

The touching moments of Rhoda's "key meeting" with the Avatar remind me of a small incident in my visit to Meherabad in the mid-forties. A number of us had gathered with Baba in the old Ashram building for a singing program. When it was over, Baba teasingly gestured to one of His dear ones to sing. I was expecting a *bhajan* or a *ghazal*; but to my surprise, it turned out to be a Western song, the first I had heard in Baba's presence, sung in an unassuming yet endearing

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manner. The opening lines, as far as I can remember, were:
"Should I reveal exactly how I feel? Should I confess I love You?"
What an enviable open confession of love in response to a casual request of the Beloved! And Baba smiled His wonderful smile, as I imagine He may have done when Rhoda, having offered herself so naturally and freely to Baba, left Rosewood with His love deep within her heart — nay, permeating her entire being.

**THOUSANDS FLOCK FOR THE
AVATAR'S DARSHAN IN AHMEDNAGAR
1954 ~ PART XVI**

Mildred — One of Baba's Family on Meherabad Hill

In early September, shortly after Baba's arrival at Meherazad from Satara, He received a cable from "Eli-Nor-Kit" (Elizabeth, Norina, Kitty) that one of His dear ones, Mildred Kyle, had passed away on the 8th of that month in Myrtle Beach. This gentle and most devoted Baba lover was an intimate friend of Countess Nadine Tolstoy, one of Baba's early Western disciples. It was through Nadine that Mildred first heard of Him. One day, years later in the late '30s, when Nadine was living in Baba's Ashram in India, she showed a photograph of Mildred to Baba. "He accepted it gladly, and on His alphabet board spelled out: 'A great soul,' then placed the picture in His pocket with an endearing touch and smile."

During the '40s, when Mildred was over eighty years old, she lived in Seattle, Washington. After accepting Baba as the God-Man, she became the head of the Seattle Baba group. She was assisted in her work of spreading Baba's message by Warren Healy, who used to refer to Baba as "The Wondrous One."

In 1948, with Warren's help, Mildred published some beautiful Baba cards and, later, a special message that was received from Baba, entitled "The Religion of Life." This message has not appeared in any other books published since that time, so it seems that it was Baba's personal gift to her. I wish to share a paragraph from it.

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Living Truth

Man cannot permanently escape his own Divine Self and must inevitably yield to the life-giving Truth, which finally overtakes him, not in the form of a skillfully woven structure of dry and intellectual tenets, but in the form of an Incarnation or Living Manifestation. It then becomes an irresistible and emancipatory power, challenging the false without compromise, and releasing the limitless Divine Life of Love and Understanding.

Man can be dislodged from the sandy land of empty words, only when he voluntarily and wholeheartedly surrenders himself to a Perfect Spiritual Master, who in his example, brings to him the Religion of Life. The Religion of Life is not fettered by mechanically repeated formulae of the unenlightened, purblind and limited intellect. It is dynamically energized by the assimilation of Truth, grasped through lucid and unerring intuition, which never falters and never fails, because it has emerged out of the fusion of head and heart, intellect and love.¹

Mildred was widely read on the subject of spirituality, but found that it came to life only after hearing about Meher Baba. Baba's silence, which "passeth all understanding," spoke directly to her heart and initiated her into a living relationship with God. Baba, the "Living Truth," helped her to live a life in which "head and heart" were blended in everyday living, offered in service to Him.

Sometime around 1950 she moved to St. Petersburg, Florida, where a Baba group gathered around her. Owing to her advanced age and dedicated life, she was known endearingly to the group as "mother."

In 1952 Baba came to America, His first visit since 1934. Mildred met Him for the first time in July, in New York. Although she had been devoted to Him for many years, it was only now, at the age of ninety, that she finally had the opportunity to have the Avatar's physical embrace.

¹ *"The Religion of Life,"* sent by Baba to Mildred Kyle, 1948.

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In 1954, on Baba's sixtieth birthday, Mildred arranged a simple program at her home in Florida in which a cup of spiced tea was passed to each guest while a prayer was recited, "May Meher Baba bless this tea with health, happiness, and the New Life of the Spirit." The birthday cake was cut, and the first piece went to the Invisible, Omnipresent Guest — Meher Baba.

At the conclusion of the meeting, Mildred read her own composition in which she emphasized the cardinal teaching of each Avatar. About Meher Baba she wrote:

The Lord of Love once more is here,
His call to a world in need,
Is to cease the life of endless strife and turn to the loving deeds.
O world, give heed to that clarion call,
Proclaim it far and wide,
While Meher Baba walks with man
As Lover, Friend and Guide.

With Baba's approval, Mildred moved to Youpon Dunes, the home of Elizabeth Patterson, in the latter part of 1954. Baba had stayed there during His visit to Myrtle Beach in 1952. Kitty Davy writes in her book, *Love Alone Prevails*, that Mildred, in spite of her advanced age, was a help to her and Elizabeth, and her coming enabled Kitty to take a short vacation — which she needed.

After staying at Youpon Dunes for several months, Mildred passed away following a stroke. Kitty remembers that, near the end, while scarcely conscious, Mildred took Baba's photograph and kissed it. Baba was immediately notified of her death. He cabled the following reply: "Mildred has found eternal peace in Me. Baba." Later, Mani wrote in her letter to the West, "She [Mildred] is with Baba. She was one of His own, and has come to her 'Home' in Baba. He particularly wished her to spend her last earthly days in Myrtle Beach, and had therefore sent her the message to stay on."

Ben Hayman brought Mildred's ashes to India when he came for the three-week stay in September 1954. A year later,

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in November 1955, Baba brought her ashes to Meherabad from Meherazad, during one of the *sahas* programs. Accompanied by a few *mandali*, He went immediately up the hill to a place that had been prepared, next to the grave of Countess Nadine Tolstoy, the dear friend who had first told her of Baba. Don Stevens, who was present at that time, and who had known Mildred, was asked to be in attendance in order to share the event with those who had known her back in America. The stone slab was lifted from the small grave. The men were silent as Baba rolled up His sleeves and gracefully lowered a cloth pouch containing Mildred's ashes. Then, for some time, He stood there, shielded from the afternoon sun by an umbrella, staring pensively at the grave of this great yet unassuming soul, so dear to Him. The slab was then placed back over the opening. Thus, in a simple manner, the touching occasion was concluded.

On her tombstone are inscribed the words: "Mildred Kyle Has Come to Baba." How fortunate she is to be among the intimate family who were selected by Baba to be interred near His "final resting place" — the Samadhi.

Inside this Samadhi rests the human form of Avatar Meher Baba, so it is surcharged with Baba's divine presence. Hence this place — the Power House — has become the center through which the Avatar's ever-living Infinite Consciousness continues to function, radiating His unconditional love and compassion to one and all who visit Him.

Grand and Glorious Darshan at Wadia Park

September 12, 1954, was indeed a remarkable day in the annals of the spiritual history of Ahmednagar. On this day, thousands came for Avatar Meher Baba's darshan at Wadia Park (now known as Gandhi Park) in Ahmednagar. A huge *pandal* (a tent with no sides) had been erected for the occasion and was colorfully decorated and fitted with temporary lights and loudspeakers. Even before Beloved Baba's expected arrival at 9:00 A.M., about ten thousand people had congregated

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in and around the *pandal*. According to Indian custom, the men were seated on one side, the women on the other. A dais had been erected at one end of the *pandal*, covered by carpets, and a beautifully upholstered chair was positioned there for Baba. Soft, silken curtains draped all around added to the enchanting atmosphere. Rugs and coir mats had been laid out for the people to sit on, and placards indicated the entrance and exit for Baba's darshan. A group of seventeen Western men from the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia were seated close to the dais; they had come from their respective countries in response to the Beloved's invitation. Several of Baba's *mandali* were seated there also.

At exactly nine o'clock, Baba arrived looking fresh and radiant. He strode gracefully to the dais and took His seat. Gadge Maharaj, a well-known saint of Maharashtra, entered the *pandal*, approached Baba, and bowed down to Him. Then Baba addressed the crowd, spelling out on His alphabet board, "Not as man to man, but as God to God, I bow down to you, so as to save you the trouble of bowing down to Me." While this announcement was being broadcast in English and Marathi, Baba descended the steps of the platform and prostrated Himself before the assembled multitude. Again, He spelled out on the board, "To make you all share My feeling of being one with you and one of you, I sit down beside you." Baba then sat on the ground with the crowd, first with the men, then with the women.

Before returning to the platform, Baba washed and wiped dry the feet of seven men from poor families and placed His head on their feet. After this was done, the men stood in a line before Baba, as He conveyed to them, "As each of you is in one way or another an incarnation of God, I feel happy to bow down to you and lay at your feet this *dev-dakshana*," a gift offered to God. Then He gave each of the men *dakshana* of fifty-one rupees.

By this time, Godavri Mai had arrived from Sakori with some *kanyas*. Baba returned to His seat, and then, in the presence of Godavri Mai and Gadge Maharaj, His *arti* was performed. This was followed by speeches honoring Baba's

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Divinity and His spiritual work for the upliftment of humanity. Here are some excerpts from the welcome address given by the President of Ahmednagar County, which voiced the sentiments of the people of the district:

Most Adorable Shri Meher Baba! After a lapse of nearly twenty-five years, we, the people of the District of Ahmednagar, feel fortunate for being blessed by Your august darshan. And, on behalf of all the inhabitants of this district, I have the great privilege to welcome You wholeheartedly on this occasion when You have blessed us all through Your great love and Your holy darshan ...

Your ever-peaceful and ever-smiling face, and Your ever-bright eyes, full of spiritual radiance, are sufficient to fill any man with joy, and to make him pay homage at Your feet ...

On behalf of the men and women of this District, I most humbly offer this address to You with all devotion.

While the speeches were being given, Baba expressed His happiness that Gadge Maharaj, the great saint of Maharashtra, and Godavri Mai, the favorite disciple of His Master, Upasni Maharaj, were present on the dais. At the conclusion of the speeches, Baba conveyed, "The one real thing to be understood is that the greatest hypocrite is he who, himself being a hypocrite, asks others not to be a hypocrite." Baba looked often with intense, compassionate feeling on the thousands gathered there for darshan, who gazed back at Him with expectant eyes. The loveliness of His presence filled their hearts with a rare delight that calmed their wearied minds. Meher Baba had dictated special messages in English for this occasion, which were read out in response to all the speeches by the attending dignitaries. These messages were "Meher Baba's Call," "When I Say I Am the Avatar," "On My Observing Silence," and "How to Love God." The Avatar's words given at any time hold meaning for all time, and this seems especially true of these messages. The first message, "Meher Baba's Call," was read only in Marathi. The rest of the messages were given both in Marathi and in English, and are reprinted

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below. The first relates to people's reactions to Baba's declaration of His Avatarhood. The second concerns the divine mystery of His silence, and the third gives practical, everyday ways to love God.

When I Say I Am the Avatar

When I say I am the Avatar, there are a few who feel happy, some who feel shocked, and many who, hearing Me claim this, would take Me for a hypocrite, a fraud, a supreme egoist, or just mad. If I were to say every one of you is an Avatar, a few would be tickled, and many would consider it a blasphemy or a joke.

The fact that God being One, Indivisible, and equally in us all, we can be nought else but one, is too much for the duality-conscious mind to accept. Yet each of us is what the other is. I know I am the Avatar in every sense of the word, and that each of you is an Avatar in one sense or the other.

It is an unalterable and universally recognized fact since time immemorial that God knows everything, God does everything, and that nothing happens but by the Will of God. Therefore, it is God who makes Me say I am the Avatar, and that each one of you is an Avatar. Again, it is He Who is tickled through some, and through others is shocked. It is God Who acts, and God Who reacts. It is He Who scoffs, and He Who responds. He is the Creator, the Producer, the Actor, and the Audience in His own Divine Play.

On My Observing Silence

If you were to ask Me why I do not speak, I would say I am not silent, and that I speak more eloquently through gestures and the alphabet board.

If you were to ask Me why I do not talk, I would say, perhaps for three reasons: Firstly, I feel that through you all I am talking eternally. Secondly, to relieve the boredom of talking incessantly through your forms, I keep silence in My personal physical form. And thirdly, because

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all talk, in itself, is idle talk. Lectures, messages, statements, discourses of any kind, spiritual or otherwise, imparted through utterances or writings, are just idle talk when not acted upon or lived up to.

If you were to ask when I will break My silence, I would say when I feel like uttering the only real Word that was spoken in the beginningless beginning, as that Word alone is worth uttering. The time for the breaking of My outward silence to utter that Word is very near.

How to Love God

To love God in the most practical way is to love our fellow beings. If we feel for others in the same way as we feel for our own dear ones, we love God.

If, instead of seeing faults in others, we look within ourselves, we are loving God.

If, instead of robbing others to help ourselves, we rob ourselves to help others, we are loving God.

If we suffer in the sufferings of others, and feel happy in the happiness of others, we are loving God.

If, instead of worrying over our own misfortunes, we think ourselves more fortunate than many, many others, we are loving God.

If we endure our lot with patience and contentment, accepting it as His will, we are loving God.

If we understand and feel that the greatest act of devotion and worship to God is not to hurt or harm any of His beings, we are loving God.

To love God as He ought to be loved, we must live for God and die for God, knowing that the goal of all life is to love God, and find Him as our own Self.²

Thus, through such direct and clear statements, Meher Baba explained in simple yet powerful words the meaning of the Avatar's Advent. He also provided guidelines for His followers and seekers of Truth. And He showed humanity ways of living a spiritual life in the midst of daily activities. These messages were received with profound respect and

² *Three Incredible Weeks with Meher Baba*, pp. 5-7.

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deep appreciation, in spite of the vast size and diversity of the assembly.

After the messages were read out, Baba left His chair and sat on the edge of the dais for the day's main event — the darshan and distribution of *prasad* (a blessed gift). The women were given the first chance to come forward. Many garlanded Baba, and He gave each a handful of sweets as they touched His feet with their hands or their heads, receiving His darshan. Then it was the men's turn. Through this whole long day, Baba looked most loving and radiant, showing not even the slightest sign of fatigue. All were amazed to witness His untiring strength, selfless love, and compassion.

Intense Darshan Continues up to Six O'Clock

The darshan program was well organized and progressed in an orderly fashion. However, hundreds of people continued to throng the *pandal* and were becoming restless: all were anxious to come before Baba to receive His darshan and *prasad*. Around noon, the queue of women receiving *prasad* was interrupted by a crushing wave of men, impatient for their turn, who pressed forward to the edge of the platform. The Ahmednagar police and Baba's *mandali* were finding it difficult to restrain them. It seemed as though Baba might be physically endangered by the disorder. Several of Baba's *mandali* pleaded over the announcement system for the crowd to calm down. The din continued until Baba Himself stood up and, with folded hands, motioned to the crowd to retreat, which it did. However, later in the program, the people's enthusiasm was so great that Baba had to stand up four or five times to restore order. He gave His assurance that He would give *prasad* to them, even if this required Him to sit there for a much longer time. The crowd was comforted by this, and the program resumed in an orderly way.

Gadge Maharaj was near Baba during the whole darshan program. He first sat at Baba's feet, but then Baba had him sit by His side. He assisted Baba, and, out of loving concern, worried that the intense work must be a severe strain for Baba. Several times he suggested that Baba stop the

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distribution, but Baba did not agree. In his desire to give Baba some relief, Gadge would gently press His hands. Baba smiled as he did this service, and gestured that it was giving Him strength to continue.

During the darshan program, a *mast* by the name of Kutrewala Baba came before Baba. *Kutrewala* means "he who has dogs" or "one who lives in the company of dogs." Kutrewala carried a tin containing food for dogs, which he ate also. He approached Baba and bowed before Him. Baba embraced him and had him sit for a while on His right side. Baba also ate a little of the food from Kutrewala's tin, which looked unclean.

During the glorious occasion of the Avatar's presence, the eyes of most of those gathered in the *pandal* remained fixed on His resplendent divine form. His face and eyes radiated love, and His every smile was a treasure to behold. Baba's loving expression seemed to magnify when He was in the company of a mast or a saint. Fortunate were those who witnessed the brilliance of Baba's face on this occasion, with Gadge Maharaj, a great saint, on His left, and Kutrewala, a God-intoxicated soul, on His right.

The darshan program continued until about 3:00 P.M. Then Baba left the dais briefly to inaugurate the *bhandara* (a large feast offered freely in the love of God). The reception committee had arranged this program in Baba's honor to provide food for those who had come for darshan. Baba seated Himself on the ground, joining the first batch of about twelve hundred men, women, and children of different castes and walks of life. The food was served to Baba and the others on *pattals* — plates made of leaves. The meal consisted of *lapsi* (a preparation of wheat, raw sugar, and clarified butter) and *amli* (spiced liquid lentil). During this time, and all through the day of *darshan*, a movie crew was filming Baba.

While Baba was eating amongst the crowd, there were some near Him longing to have a little *prasad* of food from Him. Responding to these unspoken longings, Baba gave a bit of His food to one or two fortunate ones near Him. This prompted many others to extend their hands to Baba, but He quickly

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finished His food and returned to the dais to continue the darshan. The *bhandara* program continued after Baba left, and it was estimated that over fifteen thousand people were fed that day.

Around four o'clock the darshan crowd became restless again. Baba stood up so all could see Him clearly. A little later, one of the most exceptional moments of the program occurred. This was the first public appearance of Baba's women *mandali* — including Mehera. Baba gave *prasad* to each of them.

Darshan and the distribution of *prasad* continued. Gadge Maharaj, impelled by his concern for Baba, asked Him to stop the program. It was close to six o'clock. A little later, the restlessness of the crowd increased. Turning to Gadge, Baba gestured that He now wanted to stop. Baba touched the remaining *prasad* in blessing and indicated that it should be distributed after He left. Although the remaining crowd of people did not receive *prasad* from His own hand, His presence amongst them for so many hours was itself a gift from the Avatar.

Now, as then, those who wait for the Avatar with tear-filled eyes will receive, in His time, the sight to see Him; those who meditate wholeheartedly on His words will receive new understanding; those who remember Him with unprejudiced minds will have their minds refreshed; and those who come with devotion in their hearts will have their hearts awakened to His call.

It isn't possible to say how many people had Baba's darshan that day, but it was estimated that nearly fifty thousand people had come for that moment of lifetimes. All castes and creeds were present: Hindus, Muslims, Parsis, Christians, and Sikhs. There was no question of high or low, rich or poor, man or woman, young or old. The rows of bullock carts and automobiles parked nearby showed the diversity of people coming for this unique opportunity.

Several thousand villagers had arrived at Wadia Park the night before the darshan lest a possible rain or flooding of nullahs on the way to Ahmednagar delay their journey. The

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people from Arangaon, the village next to Meherabad, came in a procession with a large photograph of Baba decorated and mounted on one of their carts. In the crowds no difference existed between officer and subordinate, coolie and landlord. It was wonderful to see all congregated side by side for the darshan of the Highest of the High.

For Baba's family from the West, it was an experience to treasure for the rest of their lives. Summing up the day's events, Malcolm Schloss and Charles Purdom wrote:

The last glimpse we had of Baba as He left the park was one in which He was seated on top of an automobile, bowing in every direction to crowds of people reluctant to let Him go. He had seated Himself first on the hood, giving darshan to late-comers, but the press grew too great, and He retreated to the top, and the car moved slowly out of the park with the Avatar in a distinctly novel position.

For all of us, this . . . "mass darshan" of Baba will be a memorable event which will grow in significance as we grow in understanding. We are grateful to Baba for having made it possible for us to participate in it.³

Meher Baba's Call

During the momentous and moving darshan at Wadia Park, the Avatar's message "Meher Baba's Call" was read out only in the local language, Marathi. Because it is a profoundly important statement concerning the Avatar and His authority, the English text is reproduced here.

Beloved Baba's message "The Highest of the High," given in September 1953 in Dehra Dun, had many ifs: . . . "if I am just an ordinary man . . .," ". . . if I am the Highest of the High . . .," "if you truly and in all faith accept your Baba as the Highest of the high . . .," etc. But in His message "Meher Baba's Call," given a year later, He clearly confirmed that He is the Avatar. And while addressing the thousands sitting before Him in Wadia Park, He was symbolically appealing to all of

³ *The Awakener*, Vol. II, No. 3 (Special Issue, 1955), p.7.

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humanity to harken to His Call. Openly and authoritatively, He invited all people: "Come All unto Me."

In later years, to those who gathered around Him during big and small assemblies, Baba would add to His statement "I am the Avatar" by also declaring with divine humility, "I am the slave of those who love Me." And He would gesture in silence to His lovers, "Take Me with you." Those who trusted Him then, and trust Him now, feel His sparkling presence and enlightening guidance whenever they call on Him. He gave the Call; it is He who never fails to respond to it. Through the Call, Meher Baba has gracefully unveiled His divine status and authority as the Avatar, the Awakener of the age. For the reader's convenience, this message has been subtitled under five headings taken from the original text.

Come All unto Me

Age after age, when the wick of righteousness burns low, the Avatar comes yet once again to rekindle the torch of Love and Truth. Age after age, amidst the clamor of disruptions, wars, fear and chaos, rings the Avatar's call: "Come all unto me."

Although, because of the veil of illusion, this Call of the Ancient One may appear as a voice in the wilderness, its echo and re-echo nevertheless pervades through time and space, to rouse at first a few, and eventually millions, from their deep slumber of ignorance. And in the midst of illusion, as the Voice behind all voices, it awakens humanity to bear witness to the Manifestation of God amidst mankind.

The time is come. I repeat the Call, and bid all come unto Me.

This time-honored Call of Mine thrills the hearts of those who have patiently endured all in their love for God, loving God only for love of God. There are those who fear and shudder at its reverberations, and would flee or resist. And there are yet others who, baffled, fail to understand why the Highest of the High, who is All-Sufficient, need necessarily give this Call to humanity.

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Irrespective of all doubts and convictions, and for the Infinite Love I bear for one and all, I continue to come as the Avatar, to be judged time and again by humanity in its ignorance, in order to help man to distinguish the Real from the false.

Invariably muffled in the cloak of the infinitely true humility of the Ancient One, the Divine Call is at first little heeded, until in its Infinite strength it spreads in volume to reverberate and keep on reverberating in countless hearts as the Voice of Reality.

True Humility

Strength begets humility, whereas modesty bespeaks weakness. Only he who is truly great can be really humble.

When, in the firm knowledge of it, a man admits his true greatness, it is in itself an expression of humility. He accepts his greatness as most natural and is expressing merely what he is, just as a man would not hesitate to admit to himself and others the fact of his being a man.

For a truly great man, who knows himself to be truly great, to deny his greatness would be to belittle what he indubitably is. For, whereas modesty is the basis of guise, true greatness is free from camouflage.

On the other hand, when a man expresses a greatness he knows or feels he does not possess, he is the greatest hypocrite.

Honest is the man who is not great and, knowing and feeling this, firmly and frankly states that he is not great.

There are more than a few who are not great, yet assume a humility in the genuine belief of their own worth. Through words and actions they express repeatedly their humbleness, professing to be the servants of humanity. True humility is not acquired by merely donning a garb of humility. True humility spontaneously and continually emanates from the strength of the truly great. Voicing one's humbleness does not make one humble. For all that a parrot may utter, "I am a man," it does not make it so.

Better the absence of greatness than the establishing of

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a false greatness by assumed humility. Not only do these efforts at humility on man's part not express strength — they are, on the contrary, expressions of modesty born of weakness which springs from a lack of knowledge of the truth of Reality.

Beware of modesty. Modesty, under the cloak of humility, invariably leads one into the clutches of self-deception. Modesty breeds egoism, and man eventually succumbs to pride through assumed humility.

The greatest greatness and the greatest humility go hand in hand, naturally and without effort.

I Am the Greatest

When the Greatest of all says, "I am the Greatest," it is but a spontaneous expression of an infallible Truth. The strength of His greatness lies, not in raising the dead, but in His great humiliation when He allows Himself to be ridiculed, persecuted and crucified at the hands of those who are weak in flesh and spirit. Throughout the ages humanity has failed to fathom the true depths of the humility underlying the greatness of the Avatar, gauging His Divinity by its acquired limited religious standards. Even real saints and sages, who have some knowledge of the Truth, have failed to understand the Avatar's greatness when faced with His real humility.

Age after age history repeats itself when men and women, in their ignorance, limitations and pride, sit in judgment over the God-incarnated man Who declares His Godhood, and condemn Him for uttering the Truths they cannot understand. He is indifferent to abuse and persecution, for in His true compassion He understands, in His continual experience of Reality He knows, and in His Infinite Mercy He forgives.

There Is Nothing but God

God is all, God knows all, and God does all. When the Avatar proclaims He is the Ancient One, it is God Who proclaims His manifestation on earth. When man utters for

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or against the Avatarhood, it is God Who speaks through him. It is God alone Who declares Himself through the Avatar and mankind.

I tell you all with My Divine authority, that you and I are not "WE," but "ONE." You unconsciously feel My Avatarhood within you; I consciously feel in you what each of you feels. Thus, every one of us is Avatar, in the sense that everyone and everything is everyone and everything, at the same time, and for all time.

There is nothing but God. He is the only Reality, and we all are one in the indivisible Oneness of this absolute Reality. When the One who has realized God says, "I am God. You are God, and we are all One," and also awakens this feeling of Oneness in His illusion-bound selves, then the question of the lowly and the great, the poor and the rich, the humble and the modest, the good and the bad, simply vanishes. It is his false awareness of duality that misleads man into making illusory distinctions and filing them into separate categories.

I repeat and emphasize that, in My continual and eternal experience of Reality, no difference exists between the worldly rich and the poor. But, if ever such a question of difference between opulence and poverty were to exist for Me, I would deem him really poor who, possessing worldly riches, possesses not the wealth of Love for God. And, I would know him truly rich who, owning nothing, possesses the priceless treasure of his Love for God. His is the poverty that kings could envy and makes even the King of kings his slave.

Know, therefore, that in the eyes of God the only difference between the rich and the poor is not of wealth and poverty, but in the degrees of intensity and sincerity in the longing for God.

Love for God alone can annihilate the falsity of the limited ego, the basis of life ephemeral. It alone can make one realize the Reality of one's Unlimited Ego, the basis of Eternal Existence. The Divine Ego, as the basis of Eternal Existence, continually expresses Itself; but shrouded in

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the veil of ignorance, man misconstrues his Indivisible Ego and experiences and expresses it as the limited, separate ego.

Pay heed when I say with My Divine authority, that the Oneness of Reality is so uncompromisingly unlimited and all-pervading that not only "We are One," but even this collective term of "WE" has no place in the Infinite, Indivisible Oneness.

Deep Longing for Love of God

Awaken from your ignorance, and try at least to understand that in the uncompromisingly Indivisible Oneness, not only is the Avatar God, but also the ant and the sparrow, just as one and all of you are nothing but God. The only apparent difference is in the states of consciousness. The Avatar knows that that which is a sparrow is not a sparrow, whereas the sparrow does not realize this, and, being ignorant of its ignorance, identifies itself as a sparrow.

Live not in ignorance. Do not waste your precious life-span in differentiating and judging your fellow men, but learn to long for the love of God. Even in the midst of your worldly activities, live only to find and realize your true Identity with your Beloved God.

Be pure and simple, and love all because all are One. Live a sincere life; be natural, and be honest with yourself.

Honesty will guard you against false modesty and will give you the strength of true humility. Spare no pains to help others. Seek no other reward than the gift of Divine Love. Yearn for this gift sincerely and intensely, and I promise in the name of My Divine Honesty, that I will give you much more than you yearn for.

I give you all My Blessing that the spark of My divine love may implant in your hearts the deep longing for Love of God.

This message soon reached Baba's dear ones in the West. In response to the Avatar's clarion call, Josephine Esther Ross —

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who had met Baba during His first visit to the United States in 1931 — succinctly expressed the kernel of Meher Baba's message in the form of a poem entitled "Avatar: Shri Meher Baba." Her inspired and inspiring verses that trumpet the God-Man's invitation, "Come All unto Me," are given below:

"Above the tumult of the world
His Message pure and sweet —
The Voice of Baba calls us
To worship at His Feet.

"From Heart to heart His Love goes forth,
From Soul to soul His Light,
From Mind to mind His Wisdom,
From Life to life His might.

"His Beauty is a Flaming Sword,
A Beacon shining bright
That penetrates the clouds of self
To guide us through the night.

"His Wordless Word a Challenge,
His Tenderness a flower,
That soften with compassion
The impact of His Power.

"Above the tumult of the world,
His message sweet and clear:
"Come unto Me, my children,
Draw nigh and have no fear.

"Come unto Me, ye weary,
As birds unto the nest,
Drop at My Feet your burden
And find in Me your rest."

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"Come unto Me, my loved ones,
And find in Me release.
Be still and know that I am God,
The Messenger of Peace.

"Be still and know that I am God.
Be done with doubt and strife,
I am the Resurrection,
I am Eternal Life.

"For I am He that cometh
And I am He that came,
The Crucified, the Glorified,
Eternally the same.

"Behold, My pierced hands and feet,
The thorns upon My Head!
And yet, again, I come to give
The sacred Wine and Bread.

"And, once again, upon the Path
Which blessed Jesus trod,
I come to guide a sinful world
Back to the Heart of God."⁴

The Avatar's periodic call is a loving overture from God, whenever He assumes a human form. Although omnipotent, the Avatar does not impose His wish on anyone. Until it is willingly honored, He continues to suffer silently, patiently waiting for each one to come to Him and to realize that everyone is intrinsically God. The best way to experience consciously one's innate nature as the Infinite Reality is to harken to the Avatar's Call: "Come All unto Me."

⁴ *The Awakener*, Vol. III, No. 4 (Summer-Spring, 1956), pp. 34-35.

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Sidelights of the Darshan Day

Thousands of people visited Wadia Park for Meher Baba's darshan. All but a few of them received *prasad* from Baba's hands. However, the opportunity to be in the Avatar's physical presence had bestowed His blessing of unconditional compassion on all of them, and planted seeds of love in their hearts to sprout and eventually blossom at the appropriate time. Many of Baba's lovers experience His omniscience and omnipresence in a variety of ways. So, in concluding the account of this great event, I would like to record a few of these personal accounts. They express some of Baba's incredible methods, and speak for themselves of His love and care for those who came to meet Him.

Although this darshan program was mainly for the people of Ahmednagar district, a few groups of Baba lovers from different parts of India, and one from Pakistan, had also come. Rhoda Dubash of Karachi, Pakistan, reached Wadia Park early in the day, but it was not easy for her to find a place near the dais where Baba was seated. The memories of her meeting with Him in Satara in August were fresh in her heart, and she wished to catch His eye and send Him a silent message of love and dedication. But this did not seem possible in that big crowd.

Soon it was time to queue up for Baba's darshan. "Now," she thought, "I will surely catch Baba's glance." However, as she came closer and closer in the queue, Baba was always busy looking the other way. When it was her turn for darshan, she looked up expectantly at Baba, only to find that He was asking the next person in line how she was! Before Rhoda knew it, her time before Baba was over. However, she was still determined to capture His attention, if only for a moment. So she managed to go up onto the stage platform where Baba was sitting, but there was hardly enough room even to stand.

At one point, she heard someone say, "This platform may collapse any minute. Let's get down." But Rhoda remained determined. She fought her way towards Baba and eventually found a place right behind Him, and silently implored Him to

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look her way. He did turn, but only to caress the face of someone on her right . . . to pat someone on her left . . . to ask a question of someone behind her. But for Rhoda, it seemed as though she did not exist for Him. She felt deeply upset. She couldn't believe that her Beloved Avatar, who only a few days earlier in Satara had showered her with so much love, was now totally ignoring her.

She did not know then that this was one of Baba's ways of awakening one's heart to be more receptive to His love. In the late 1930s, Baba conveyed to one of His dear American disciples, Jean Adriel, the author of Avatar, "It is My way of working — I draw you to Me, and I push you away, then I draw you closer and push you farther away, until, at last, I draw you so close that you become one with Me forever." In fact, this happened literally in Jean's relationship with Beloved Baba.

Without Rhoda's realizing it, she had been given a little taste of this method that day. In His masterly way, the Divine Beloved, Baba, was showing Rhoda that her adolescent love must grow and give way to a mature, selfless love. In Baba's words: "Love does not need recognition at every step. It has to burn silently in the heart ..." Rhoda's love was initiated into a new phase that day.

Another story, revealing yet another aspect of the Avatar's relationship with His lovers, involves a man named Shiwaji Chinchawade. As a teenager, Shiwaji had caught the habit of repeating the name of God as "Malhar." He would become so absorbed in this practice that in the bliss of repetition he would sometimes lose awareness of his gross surroundings. The name Malhar seemed to flow out of his being with every beat of his heart.

While still a young man, he married and got a job with the Indian railways. In his thirties, he began to read the writings of the saints and Sadgurus of Maharashtra. From this he gathered that although the repetition of God's name was beneficial in itself, it would not reach its real fructification unless it were given to him personally by a master or saint.

In 1947 he was sent for some special training to Bina, a railway junction in the north of India. His spiritual search

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continued. As his family was not with him, he was able to devote his evening to his spiritual practice, repeating the divine name Malhar. At the same time, he began to visit various *sadhus* on the outskirts of town. God always responds to the yearning of the heart, and Shiwaji was led to meet a Sikh *sadhu* whose quiet, contented presence impressed him very much. This *sadhu* stayed mostly by himself in a small hut, remembering God. Shiwaji asked him to initiate him in the spiritual path with a *guru-mantra*. The *sadhu* agreed, giving Shiwaji a long *mantra* consisting of several sentences, the same one that the *sadhu* himself was repeating. Shiwaji was delighted.

His job training was completed in a few months, and he returned to Maharashtra. He devotedly continued repeating the sacred *mantra*. However, he began to feel somewhat confused — the *mantra* given to him was not in Hindi, but in Gurumukhi (a dialect of the Sikhs). He could hardly make sense out of it. Although he diligently maintained his spiritual discipline, he felt more and more dissatisfied. He even thought of visiting his master in Bina, but before he could contact him, he heard that the *sadhu* had passed away. "How can I resolve this conflict now?" he wondered. About this time he was transferred to the Ahmednagar railway station as an assistant stationmaster.

In the early 1950s Shiwaj had the good fortune to hear about Meher Baba and to have His darshan. This had a great impact on him; his heart was filled with joy at Baba's touch. Feeling the love and truth of Baba's divine authority, he began to bring Baba's form before his mind's eye while repeating the *mantra*. Still, his inner conflict continued: his life-long affection for God's name as Malhar, his respect for his guru, and now his awakened love for Meher Baba — these elements of his inner life were difficult for him to resolve.

At last, in July 1954, he wrote to Baba in Satara, telling Him the story of his spiritual struggle. "I take this letter-writing to You as a divine opportunity to open my heart," he wrote. "My master really loved me. And I have great respect for him. So, even after his passing away, I wish to please him and follow his

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directives. Nowadays, while I repeat the *mantra* I feel that my master is inwardly directing me to approach You. You are beyond names and forms. Even so, I request You to give me the name that will lead me to God." This is in keeping with an Indian tradition. Shiwaji assured Baba that after receiving His reply, he would repeat and write that Name until Baba's darshan in September.

The Avatar is above all traditions, and His name encompasses all the divine names. So Baba had His own unique way of replying. He conveyed through one of the *mandali* that he was pleased with Shiwaji's letter, and instructed Shiwaji to speak aloud wholeheartedly the name Malhar when standing before Baba for His darshan on September 12, in Wadia Park. It was implied that this would resolve his dilemma and clear the way to God within. And so, on September 12, when Shiwaji humbly stood before Baba, he spoke aloud his favorite name of God from childhood, Malhar. From that moment, the restlessness of Shiwaji's spirit was over. His repetition of God's name now had the Avatar's sanction. Baba in His compassion took that name unto Himself as a way for Shiwaji to come to Him.

With the confusion in his mind and heart erased, Shiwaji returned to his daily life, carrying with him the certainty that his inner contact with Baba would not be interrupted by the normal course of his external life — his job, his family responsibilities, even his love of playing cricket. The natural repetition of the divine name, Malhar, flowed through everything and carried with it Baba's love.

Another incident reveals Baba's love and concern for His lovers. Bapi Raju had heard that Baba was going to give darshan in Ahmednagar on September 12. Though he was not in a financially sound position, he decided that this was an opportunity he could not afford to miss, and left his hometown with his entire family so they could be in the physical *sahavas* of the Avatar.

To reach Ahmednagar, they had undergone a strenuous railway journey of twenty-four hours in a crowded compartment. However, any discomfort or inconvenience encountered during an individual's visit to the Avatar is richly rewarded

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by the All-knowing One, Who sees to every detail of His dear ones' coming to see Him.

They arrived in Ahmednagar on the morning of the 12th. By the time the family reached Wadia Park, there were already hundreds of people waiting in the queue for Baba's darshan. There was also a huge crowd sitting on the ground before the dais where Baba was seated. The family sat at the back of the crowd until noon, when Baba, spotting them in that vast multitude, sent for them to be brought to the dais.

They were led outside the awning, around the edge of the crowd, and up to the platform where Baba was seated. Bapi Raju was so overwhelmed at this unexpected attention that he wasn't aware of anything that happened around him. Later, his wife told him that Baba took his solar topee (pith helmet) and put it on His own head at a rakish angle, which made the darshan crowd laugh. With His delightful sense of humor, Baba would sometimes express His intimacy and love through such unexpected "pranks."

Baba instructed this family to visit Meherabad that evening for the *dhuni*. (Ever since December 12, 1941, the *dhuni* is lit on the twelfth of each month, by Baba's order.) At seven in the evening, the *dhuni* was lighted, and the family was ready to leave Meherabad. But in those days there were no regular buses into town. It was getting dark and chilly. There was no one around to ask for help, and their one-year-old infant was beginning to shiver. Bapi Raju prayed to Baba to help them out of this predicament.

Just then, to his surprise and delight, an empty van coming from Arangaon stopped right next to them! The driver was a kind person, who, seeing the family gathered near the *dhuni*, must have guessed that they had come for Avatar Meher Baba's darshan and were now stranded. And so, without being flagged down, he stopped and lovingly invited the family to climb in. He drove them to Wadia Park without even asking where they were going.

Their hotel was nearby, so the family was able to collect their baggage and reach the station in time for their train to Andhra. All along the way, until they reached Tadepalligudem,

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they experienced "coincidences" which convinced them that Baba was seeing directly to their comforts during the entire Journey.

I have observed, personally, that whenever the Avatar wishes someone to visit Him, the journey is invariably filled with incredible happenings. These coincidences can only be attributed to His effortless omniscience, compassion, and humor. This remains true, to an even greater degree, to this day.

Another story of a Baba lover who was destined to meet Baba for the first time on this day is about Bhanudas Gawade. He had been longing for Baba's darshan for eleven years. In 1943, before he had heard of Baba, Bhanudas was working as a primary teacher in the interior part of the Sholapur district in Maharashtra. He taught in a one-room school house which served the first through fourth standards (grades). In addition to his teaching in the mornings, he would spend his weekends tending his family's ancestral farm some miles away.

December to January is the harvest season, and the end of January found Bhanudas at the farm over the weekend, as usual. However, on this particular weekend he was unable to complete the harvest work, and so decided to spend Monday, January 31, on the farm as well. He returned to his work at the school the next morning.

Now it was customary according to the departmental rules that at the end of every month each teacher had to submit certain forms to the District Office concerning the attendance of the pupils, the lessons taught during the month, etc. Although he had been absent on the 31st, Bhanudas filled out the form for that day as though he had been present. And, without giving it much thought, he mailed the report off to the District Office.

The next day he learned in the village that the section inspector had been to the school the previous day, January 31, and had noted that Bhanudas was absent from his duties. The inspector had told the villagers that he was going to report the matter to the District Officer.

Bhanudas was very troubled when he heard this. He knew

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that this was grounds for suspension or even dismissal, and if he lost his job he didn't know how he would be able to support his family. So he went to the headmaster of a nearby school and asked his advice. Bhanudas knew that the District Officer was a good man, but also a strict disciplinarian, so he feared the worst.

When Bhanudas shared his deep concern, the headmaster replied, "Don't worry. I know what you should do. It is really very simple and easy."

"What?" asked Bhanudas eagerly.

"Go to the District Office with a friend and wait outside until the officer arrives in a horse cab. When he gets down, you ask your friend, 'Do you know anything about Meher Baba?' Ask this in a very loud voice so that the officer hears you. Your problem will be solved!"

Bhanudas shook his head in disbelief. "I can't imagine how this will solve my problem! And who is Meher Baba?"

"What have you to do with that? I personally do not know anything about this Baba, but I do know that asking this question about Meher Baba works. He may even offer you a cup of tea!"

It was Bhanudas' only resort, so the next day he took a friend with him to Sholapur. They went to the District Office and stood under a tree near the gate and waited for the officer to arrive. After a while he appeared, and as he passed, Bhanudas asked his friend in a loud voice, "Do you know anything about Meher Baba?"

Instantly the officer stopped and came over to him. "Are you asking who is Meher Baba?" he inquired.

"Yes," Bhanudas replied.

"Come with me. I will tell you." He led Bhanudas to his office, opened the door for him, and beckoned him inside. "So you want to know about Meher Baba. Good."

The officer's enthusiasm and friendliness were too much for Bhanudas, who was aware that he was there under a false pretense. If this were discovered, it might make his case worse. So, before taking his seat, he confessed his real reason for coming. The officer waved this aside as if it wasn't very

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important. He called for one of his clerks to get the file of monthly reports and said, "Don't worry. If what you wrote wasn't accurate, don't do it again. Be honest in your duties. Fill out a new form and sign it." And he concluded, "I am happy that you want to know about Meher Baba." The officer most lovingly shared some events from Baba's divine life expressing His compassion for one and all. He also gave Bhanudas a pamphlet with Baba's picture.

The name of this officer was R. K. Gadekar. He was one of Baba's close disciples. In his one-pointed, innocent devotion, he was always eager to speak of Baba, and had also composed many songs on Baba's divinity.

Bhanudas was completely taken aback by all this. He thought, "What must Meher Baba be like, if the mere mention of His name produces such an outpouring of devotion on the part of this officer. If His name alone can do that, what must He be like personally?"

Bhanudas went home happy that his job was secure, but was deeply intrigued and touched by the magic of Meher Baba's name. Soon after this, however, the District Officer was transferred to Poona, and there was no chance to find out more about Baba. Still, his earnest longing to know more about Baba was responded to. By chance, a few months later, one of his friends sent him a book on Meher Baba. After reading it, Bhanudas felt in his heart that Baba was a Sadguru — a God-realized Master.

Now his desire to have Baba's darshan was kindled. For the next eleven years a restlessness consumed him with the thought, "When will I get the opportunity to see Meher Baba in person?" To know that such a great Sadguru was alive and yet not be able to see Him made Bhanudas' longing all the more acute.

Then, one day in 1954, he happened to notice in a newspaper that Avatar Meher Baba was giving darshan to the public in Ahmednagar. Noting the date, Bhanudas made up his mind to go. On September 11, he took a bus from his village to reach a small railway station to catch the train for Ahmednagar. As it turned out, his bus was delayed, and he reached the station

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just as the train was pulling away. There were no other passenger trains that day, and Bhanudas stood there, devastated by this lost opportunity.

Just then a lorry stopped, and the driver called to him, asking where he was going. When he heard Bhanudas was trying to reach Ahmednagar, he replied, "I'm going there, too. Get in, and we'll go together." Bhanudas was amazed by this, especially because he was standing on the highway leading to Poona, not to Ahmednagar. He had not thought of catching a ride with a lorry, and had made no signal for the driver to stop. Delighted, Bhanudas climbed into the truck, and when he told the driver that he wanted to attend the darshan program the next day, the driver said, "I am also going for Baba's darshan." How marvelous are Baba's ways! By evening the truck reached Wadia Park. When Bhanudas offered to pay for his ride, the driver answered, "You'll see me tomorrow; if you like, you can pay me then."

The next day Bhanudas reached the darshan site. Baba had not arrived yet, but *bhajans* were being sung. From the songs Bhanudas got the impression that soon Lord Vishnu, who had assumed human form as Meher Baba, would come and occupy the seat on the dais. Shortly after this, Baba arrived, and Bhanudas saw Him from a distance and became lost in wonder, awe, and spontaneous devotion, as it appeared to Him that Baba was indeed the Lord Vishnu who had been hailed in the *bhajans*. Later, he related, "I became lost to myself. In fact, I have no words to say what happened to me then."

For a while he waited for his friend who had driven him to Wadia Park. But, after an hour or so, not finding him, he decided to join the darshan queue. When he reached Baba's seat and bowed down to Him, he silently said, "O Lord Baba, I offer You my body, mind, and heart." And when Baba gave him some *prasad*, he felt that Baba had granted his prayer, and that he had received the most precious gift of lifetimes. It was as though his old life had reached its end, and he was beginning a new life — a new life of spiritual relationship with Meher Baba, the One residing in his heart.

Bhanudas never saw the lorry driver again. Who could he

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have been? Most lively and humorous are the ways of the Avatar. He is God-become-Man who assumes a human form for people from all walks of life. The incidents through which He draws His dear ones to Him are sometimes sublime, and sometimes also mischievous. In the case of Bhanudas Gawade, Baba used a wonderful excuse — the filling out of a false report — to get in touch with His disciple, and finally, get him into the net of His real, unbinding Love.

To give a further idea of how encompassing the effect of Baba's darshan was, I would like to end this collection of sidelights with the story of a person who just happened to be one among the crowd. This particular incident involves an informal gesture that Baba made to a man named V. Burgul. He was working in the State Transport Corporation in Ahmednagar. He was not a Baba follower at the time, nor is he today. However, having been raised in a religious family, he decided to have Meher Baba's darshan on September 12.

He stood in line for hours to reach Baba. When at last he was before Baba, in spite of the busy crowd all around, Baba gave Burgul a look of recognition and gestured, "I've known you since you were a child." Somehow Burgul was able to interpret Baba's gestures, and was deeply affected.

As he was returning home he suddenly recollected that, when he was young, his parents had frequently told him, "You are very fortunate; you have been blessed by Meher Baba." The story connected with this is as follows.

Burgul was an only child, all of his siblings having died in infancy, much to the distress and concern of his parents. His mother had gone from saint to saint, and from temple to temple, praying for children who would survive. In the mid-'20s, hearing of Meher Baba, she wrapped her two-year-old son, Burgul, in a cloth, slung him from her back as was the custom in those days, and walked the four miles from her home to Meherabad. There she made her wish known to Baba, who gave her *prasad*, both for herself and for her child. He also gave her a small shirt for Burgul, telling her to have him wear it as long as possible.

After this, the family visited Baba on a regular basis for

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some time, until He moved to Toka. With the new phase in Baba's work, the family lost contact with Him. Burgul had forgotten about all of this; it was just one of many vague childhood memories.

Once, in the late '80s, he casually shared this story with one of his co-workers, a Baba lover, who is a friend of mine. I was deeply touched by it, and decided to include it here.

Isn't this astonishing! It reminds me of what Baba conveyed to one of His Western lovers when they met for the first time after many years: "I never forget; I never leave."

Baba's gesture to Burgul shows clearly how total the Avatar's contact is with each person. Every individual is an open book to Him. The Avatar's darshan, even in a dream, is a blessing for lifetimes; it is a quantum leap, unbeknownst to the person concerned, wherein Infinity in human form touches the finite self. The Avatar never forgets; the link with Him is everlasting; the light of darshan glows and gradually intensifies within the individual's heart.

Thus ends this account of the glorious darshan in Wadia Park, although the wealth of moving and personal stories of that day is no doubt endless. From nine in the morning until six in the evening, Beloved Baba poured out the cooling showers of His love continuously on the thirsty multitude. And although Baba contacted thousands of people for only a few seconds each during this great darshan, that momentary contact held enormous spiritual significance for each one. Jalaluddin Rumi, a matchless poet and Master, wrote, "One moment in the presence of a Perfect Master is equivalent to a hundred years of sincere penance and prayer." How much more fortunate were those who basked in the presence of the Avatar!

And in this special "Avataric period" the opportunity to be in the living presence of the Master of Masters is available to anyone, every day, in their hearts, and especially at Meher Baba's Samadhi in Meherabad.