

GLIMPSES OF THE GOD-MAN
MEHER BABA
Volume V
(January 1 – March 6, 1954)

By

Bal Natu

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GLIMPSES of the GOD-MAN
MEHER BABA



*Avatar Meher Baba
in a railway compartment at Vijayawada
on the last day of His Andhra Darshan Tour
March 4, 1954*

GLIMPSES
of the
GOD-MAN
MEHER BABA

VOLUME V
(JANUARY 1 - MARCH 6, 1954)

BAL NATU

Sheriar Press

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Our Constant Companion

Showers of Grace

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

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First things first: my deepest gratitude to Avatar Meher Baba for the blessed opportunity given me in sharing His life stories with others.

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Kishan Singh was allowed to accompany Baba on His *darshan* visits in February 1954 to Hamirpur District and Andhra. At Baba's instruction he kept a diary of the events of these tours and this was my main source for checking dates, incidents and messages. It was a Baba joke that when I was looking for this diary, I most unexpectedly received a Xeroxed copy of it through Bruce Ecker of Berkeley, California, U.S.A.; my earnest thanks to the late Kishan Singh and also to Bruce.

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Last, but never the least, I feel greatly indebted to many Baba lovers who, through letters and conversation, have expressed their appreciation of the messages and stories from Baba's life recorded in earlier volumes of *Glimpses*. I was delighted to learn that these books, in providing a focus on

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Beloved Baba, have become companions to many: some like to read a few minutes each morning; some during their lunch break; a few groups read out several pages at their weekly Baba meetings; and still others like to end their day by browsing through some "glimpses" before retiring. These comments cheered my spirit.

I must conclude, as I began, by trying to express my wholehearted salutations to the One residing in the hearts of His dear ones with whom I attempt to share His love through these volumes. Beloved Avatar Meher Baba be praised!

Bal Natu

July 10, 1986
Meherazad

PREFACE

This fifth volume of *Glimpses* covers just nine weeks of Avatar Meher Baba's life, beginning with January 1, 1954. It concentrates mostly on His *darshan* tours of the Hamirpur area of Uttar Pradesh, and Andhra Pradesh (two Indian states) in February. The reason for this extensive coverage of such a short time span is that I came across so many inspiring and interesting events which occurred in this period that it was hard for me to resist including them.

After all, Baba's life of perfection is revealed through everything connected with Him, and I am not running a race to finish writing these volumes of His biography, which is ever renewing. To be honest, I enjoy this work of presenting His life; to me it is a delightful, leisurely excursion with Baba through moments made alive by His time-penetrating presence.

The information compiled in this volume comes from many sources: my notes and memory; Kishan Singh's diary; and the incidents I later heard from Baba's *mandali* and His dear ones in Hamirpur and Andhra.

Meher Baba's words recorded in conversation and shared through discourses given from His alphabet board were interspersed with His gestures and hence should not be treated as verbatim. Sometimes during the interviews and *darshan* programs, Baba also used words or sentences from various Indian languages, and these were not always easy to translate. I have tried to check the available sources with some of the *mandali* and Baba's followers as closely as possible; however, the text is open to correction.

For the present volume, as I walked along a memory lane of over thirty years, I found the *darshan* reminiscences were still fresh and vibrant but that it was a very delicate and difficult task to try and express in words what I felt.

Meher Baba's *darshan* visits to villages and towns in Hamirpur and Andhra were crowded with many heartwarming and profound events. Each and every *darshan* program of

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Meher Baba presented a unique dispensation—a selfless giving of Himself as Love.

If my attempt to relate them in words has smothered the spirit—the "feel"—of those incredible *darshan* days, I hope to be excused. But, with Baba's grace, if even a little perfume of His divinely human presence is retained and shared through this volume of *Glimpses*, I would feel immensely grateful to Him.

One of the main topics in this volume deals with Meher Baba's open declaration of His being the Avatar, which was made on February 10, 1954. From that day onward, Meher Baba unconditionally and in a most natural way, referred to Himself privately and publicly as the Avatar—the Ancient One who periodically visits the earth to awaken humanity and to release it from its shackles of ignorance.

I have expressed my thoughts about the impact of Meher Baba's divine announcement on the world in general, and His followers in particular; but these should only be taken as my subjective conclusions which I have shared without a thought of imposing them on others—each one is free to have one's own viewpoint.

Meher Baba once quoted a Persian aphorism:

Grace of God cares not for merit,
Grace of God eagerly looks for an excuse to flow out.

This adage is most applicable when God descends on earth as Man, the Avatar. This periodical "divine excuse" of God acts in a most natural manner, allowing events to seemingly take their own course. He uses these, as well as surprising coincidences, as excuses to bestow His love on those who happen to come into His contact.

By the same token, His very naturalness and willingness to live God's Life as it comes provides many with an excuse to deny Him. What a marvelous manifestation! That is why the Avatar is ignored, criticized and even crucified by contemporary humanity for whose sake He assumes a human form.

On top of this, each time the Avatar comes, He ignores the traditional paths to God and reestablishes a pathless living in

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loving remembrance of the God-Man as Love. To discover one's way to the God-Man through the age-old traditions or through reasoning alone is difficult. Even when confronted with the life of the Avatar, the mind finds many reasons not to believe in Him.

And yet the Avatar, through various incredible selfless incidents expressed in His divine life on earth, awakens love for God in the hearts of His lovers. He inspires humanity through His divinely human example to begin to "feel with mind and think through heart." In one of His messages to a large gathering in 1954, Meher Baba stated:

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

The Avatar's life is just the excuse He uses to sow the seed of love in humanity's heart. There is no way to approach Him, there is no way to understand Him, except through love.

One time, at the end of a long discussion with His lovers, Avatar Meher Baba smiled and with lively gestures conveyed, "Your business is to love Me, the rest is My business." Isn't this the best indication from the Avatar to each of us as to what our job is. So, with deep gratitude for Meher Baba's timely help offered through loving hearts and hands, and with wholehearted salutations to Beloved Baba for His benevolent love, I offer this volume in His charge, for His business.

The writing of the next volume depends on how long He pulls me through the years and how much He pushes me toward additional *Glimpses*. He knows best. Until then, all glory and victory to Avatar Meher Baba who loves us more than we can ever love ourselves. Jai Meher!

Bal Natu

July 10, 1986
Meherazad

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THE AVATAR'S GAME OF CONCEALING AND REVEALING HIMSELF 1954 - PART 1

Babajan Unveils "The Avatar" in Merwan

1954 is one of the most eventful years in the life of Avatar Meher Baba. In February, He toured Hamirpur and Andhra for the second time and gave many of His important messages. In September, there were the "three incredible weeks" (the only *sahavas* program ever held for Westerners at Meherabad), which culminated in a large meeting attended by His lovers from all parts of India at which Baba gave the momentous message known as "Meher Baba's Final Declaration."¹ In October, Baba stopped using the alphabet board and relied thenceforth exclusively on gestures to communicate. But perhaps 1954's greatest significance lies in the fact that it was during this year that Meher Baba began to unequivocally assert, in public and in private, that He was God in human form—the Avatar of the Age.

People are often curious to know exactly when it was that Meher Baba first declared Himself to be the Avatar. It is hard to give a definitive answer for, starting as early as the '20s, Baba would occasionally hint at His true status and, sometimes, would even directly disclose it to a few of His early Eastern and Western disciples. In general, however, Baba was content to let His followers regard Him as a *Sadguru* (Perfect Master). Baba's intentional concealment and purposeful revelation of His true status is itself a part of Baba's Avataric game.

According to the divine plan, whenever Reality descends into Illusion to assume a human form as the Avatar, the five Perfect Masters of the Age put a veil upon Him to maintain the balance between Infinite Reality and Illusion.² At the ordained time, this veil is removed by one of the Masters. In the present Avataric Advent, this was done by Hazrat Babajan with a

¹ *The God-Man*, p. 222.

² See: *Beams From Meher Baba*, p. 27.

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matchless kiss that made Merwan experience the Reality of His Infinite Being.

Hazrat Babajan was Baba's first *Sadguru*. She was born into a religious Muslim family in Baluchistan. By the time she was a teenager she could recite the *Koran* by heart. Being deeply devoted to God, she secretly left her house to find Him, and went to Rawalpindi where she met her spiritual master. Babajan could speak Arabic, Persian, Pushtoo and Hindustani fluently, although her conversation with most people consisted of cryptic and seemingly disjointed utterances. The little information we have of her life comes from Meher Baba with whom, in private, she spoke freely and quite lucidly.

She was in her nineties when she came to Poona (now known as Pune) in 1903. After wandering about the city for several years, she finally settled in the cantonment area, under a neem tree on Malcolm Tank Road (now called Rao Saheb Kedari Road). During the day, she would wander about the city, often choosing to rest under a mango tree near the Bund Gardens, (not far from Guruprasad where Baba stayed for the three summer months, mid-March to mid-June, in the '60s). Each evening, however, Babajan would return to the neem tree where she would spend the night with no other shelter to protect her from the weather.

Babajan's real name was Gulrukh (one whose face is as charming as a rose) and even in her old age, despite her shabby and loose tea-stained clothes—a long apron and pajamas—her beauty shone forth. She had silvery curly hair and bright piercing eyes. She was fond of wearing rings on her fingers.

At the turn of the century, the area around the neem tree where Babajan stationed herself at night was dirty and squalid. However, her personality was such—she was so charismatic—that every night a large crowd would soon gather around her. It was her habit to keep a fire burning nearby. Occasionally people would sing *ghazals* or *qawwalis* to her. At some point before dawn, she would cover herself with a coarse and rather old bedsheet and sleep. But no amount of rags or filth could disguise her radiance and many people began to accept her a holy woman, a great saint. In fact, she was one of

THE AVATAR'S GAME OF COCEALING AND REVEALING HIMSELF

the five God-realized Perfect Masters of this Age.

All of this, however, was of little concern to Merwan, as Meher Baba was then known by his friends and family. He was interested in cricket and games and school-boy activities—not spirituality. Although Babajan was well known in Poona, Merwan had no reason to visit her.

One day a Bengali classmate gave Merwan a small book on the life of Gautama, the Buddha. Merwan casually opened it to a page that mentioned the second coming of the Buddha as Maitreya—the Lord of Mercy. Suddenly, that very moment, Merwan felt deep within himself, "I am that One." Then he totally forgot about the incident and continued his life as an energetic, sports-loving and intelligent schoolboy.

In 1913 Merwan was nineteen years old and attending Deccan College. One day in May, while riding his bike to class, Babajan caught his eye and beckoned to him, "Come here, my child." Without hesitation, Merwan got down from his cycle and, "like iron drawn to a magnet," he walked toward her.

Babajan got up from her seat and very lovingly embraced Merwan who sat near her for a while and then got up to return home. Not a word had been exchanged between them, yet this unexpected contact was to change the entire course of Merwan's life. From that day he began to experience thrills of indescribable bliss. His interest in college, or any worldly concern, began to fade away and he started visiting Babajan every night. He would sit by her side, usually in silence, pleased whenever Babajan would permit him to render some small service for her.

One night, in January 1914, Merwan arrived and kissed Babajan's hand with profound respect and stood reverentially before her. Babajan lovingly took Merwan's face in her hands and kissed him on the forehead, between his eyes. Then, turning to the people who happened to be around her, she pointed to Merwan and announced, "This child of mine will, after some years, create a great awakening in the world; He will do immense good to humanity."

Merwan stood there for a few moments and then walked away. After arriving home, around 11:00 P.M., while in bed,

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Merwan began to experience something akin to electric shocks coursing through his body. Soon he lost consciousness of everyone and everything except the Infinite Bliss of His own Eternal Existence.

For three days Merwan lay on His bed, His eyes wide open but vacant, unseeing. He was dead to everyone and everything of Illusion. On the fourth day, He became slightly conscious of His physical body and after nine incredible months He became somewhat conscious of His surroundings, but that's a different story altogether.

Merwan continued to visit Babajan occasionally after this unique unveiling and she would always refer to Him as her "Beloved Son." Knowing fully well what immense and untold suffering the Avatar has to bear in coming among men as Man, Babajan would sometimes refer to the Avatar's descent in Illusion by softly repeating the following Persian couplet:

Khud bekhud azad budi, khud gireftar amadi;
Ta kuni kudra tamasha, sooye bazar amadi.

When freely translated, this means:

You were absolutely Free
But you allowed yourself to be bound.
You came among men as Man
To awaken yourself in Creation.

In an *arti* which Merwan composed on Babajan, not too long after she had unveiled Him, He wrote:

*Tan karoon gar kaphshe paye, Hazrat-e-Roshan Zameer;
Phirbhi zeebare ahesan, kamtareen maherban hai.*
(Even if I were to make shoes of my own skin and offer them to you, O Master of Light,
It would still be too little to express the gratitude that I owe you.)

In later years, whenever anyone spoke of Babajan in Meher Baba's presence, a special glow illumined His face, and He always referred to her as *Shahenshah* (the Emperor).

It is interesting that Buddha was also unveiled by a woman.

THE AVATAR'S GAME OF COCEALING AND REVEALING HIMSELF

Beloved Baba once remarked that the woman who gave Gautama a bowl of *kheer* (rice cooked in sweetened milk) at Uruvela, near Gaya, was in fact a Perfect Master. She was the one who unveiled the Buddha in Gautama who became known as the Enlightened One. With a kiss, Babajan unveiled the Avatar in Merwan who became known as the Ancient One, the Awakener.

Maharaj Declares: "Merwan, You Are The Avatar. "

Babajan's kiss unveiled Merwan to the infinitude of His being the Ancient One. Afterward, he felt impelled to visit the other four Perfect Masters of the Age. In April 1915, Merwan visited Kedgaon, thirty-four miles from Poona, where he paid his respects to Narayan Maharaj. Baba later mentioned that this was a very special meeting, but He did not disclose its significance.

Within a month, Merwan traveled to Nagpur where he offered his obeisance to Hazrat Tajuddin. Toward the end of the year, in December 1915, with one of his close friends, Merwan went to Shirdi, fifty-two miles from Ahmednagar, where Sai Baba resided. Sai Baba was the *Qutub-e-Irshad*, or the head of the five Perfect Masters of the Age. It was morning and Sai Baba was returning in a procession from Lendi, a *nulla* which he used to visit every day to relieve himself. There were many people about him but Merwan made his way through the crowd and prostrated on the dirt road at Sai Baba's holy feet.

When Merwan got up, Sai Baba, whose eyes were exceptionally lustrous, looked straight and deep into Merwan's eyes and uttered one word aloud, "Parvardigar!" (God-Almighty-Sustainer: the Avatar). With this declaration, Sai Baba moved on. Perhaps this one word, Parvardigar, was a sign that it was time for the Avatar, as Meher Baba, to come out of His state of absorption in His own Infinite Being.

After this meeting, Merwan was intuitively drawn to Khandoba's temple which was nearby. Upasni Maharaj was

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staying there under Sai Baba's orders. Upasni Maharaj was born Upasni Kashinath Govi ndrao in a Brahm in (*Shastri*) family. Upasni was the family name; the name Maharaj (meaning great king) was given to him by his followers, and is commonly used by Hindus to show their respect for their Master.

In Maharaj's case, however, the name was unusually apt for he had a towering, kingly personality. His skin, like heated copper, was bright and luminous, and the radiance and bliss of his perfection were unmistakable. He had tremendous personal dignity and authority and was an imposing figure—naked except for the burlap sack which he draped over his shoulder. He could be very gentle and tender, but when he was in a fiery mood all quailed before him.

The moment Maharaj saw Merwan entering the temple, he threw a stone which hit Merwan on the forehead, exactly where Babajan had kissed him. The stone was flung with such force that it drew blood, but the significance of its impact was even greater, for this blow helped Merwan begin to regain consciousness of the ordinary world.

From then, until the end of 1921, Merwan began visiting Upasni Maharaj for varying lengths of time. The last such visit was from July to December 1921. Merwan and Maharaj usually sat together in a small *jhopri* at Sakori and during one of these meetings Maharaj folded his hands to Merwan and said, "Merwan, you are the Avatar." By this he meant that Merwan, who had been conscious of, but absorbed in, His Infinite Being (the Ancient One state), ever since Babajan's kiss, had now also become fully conscious of Illusion as Illusion and of His being the Avatar.

Decades later, in November 1955, Meher Baba in a gathering of His lovers recounted:

That blow from Maharaj was the stroke of *dnyan* (*Marefat* of *Haqiqat*, or divine Knowledge). Figuratively, Maharaj had started to rouse me from "sound sleep." But in ordinary sound sleep man is unconscious, while I, being super-conscious, was wide awake in sound sleep. With that

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stroke, Maharaj had begun to help me return to ordinary consciousness of the realm of illusion.³

Babajan, in a flash, made Merwan experience His own Infinite Being. She made Him *feel* His Avatarhood. Upasni Maharaj made Merwan *know* Himself as the Avatar—the Eternal Master. In a meeting with His lovers in the early '50s, Meher Baba stated:

What I am, what I was, and what I will be as the Ancient One, is always due to the five Perfect Masters (*Sadgurus*) of the Age. During the Avatatic periods, these five make God incarnate as Man.

Sai Baba, Upasni Maharaj, Babajan, Tajuddin Baba and Narayan Maharaj are the five Perfect Masters of this Age for me. Of these five, Babajan and Upasni Maharaj directly played the main roles.

Thus, with the dawn of 1922, Merwan began to consciously function as the Avatar.

Avatar Disguised as a Disciple and Master

By January 1922, Merwan, having become conscious of His being Infinite as God and finite as Man, began to function as the Avatar. Any time Merwan visited Babajan, He would show the greatest respect, sitting quietly near her and, if she wished it, doing any personal service He could, such as scratching her back.

Whenever Merwan visited Sakori, He would first fold His hands to Maharaj from a distance and then circumambulate the place where Maharaj was sitting with his followers. Before entering the room, He would bow to the threshold of the door and, while leaving, He would retrace His steps from Maharaj so as not to show any disrespect by turning His back to him.

Even after Maharaj saluted Merwan as the Avatar, He continued to play the role of a perfect, humble disciple. In the

³ *Listen, Humanity*, p. 249.

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early '20s, Merwan composed songs of praise (*artis*) in honor of His two Masters. With His early group of followers, He would sing these *artis* with profound respect before pictures of Babajan and Maharaj. Through these simple acts, Meher Baba was demonstrating how we should honor, respect and praise the Master, the One united with God.

At the end of 1921, Maharaj told Gustadji and Beheram (Meher Baba's first disciple whom He nicknamed Bua Saheb), "I have given my charge to Merwan. Your friend is now spiritually perfect. Stick to him and obey him in everything." Several months later, Merwan was given the name Meher Baba by His followers, for even those who had not been specifically told so by Maharaj began to feel that Merwan Himself had become a Perfect Master.

In June 1922, during Baba's stay with His early group of disciples in Manzil-e-Meem, Bombay, He started giving hints, although indirect ones, about His spiritual status. Once He explained:

From the viewpoint of Divine gnosis, the Muslims progress [proceed] from Oneness (*Wahadat*) to manyness (*kasrat*) and the Hindus from manyness to Oneness. Thus the Muslims and the Hindus represent the extreme and opposite points of a diameter of a circle with God as the Center. Zoroastrianism is midway between the two extremes and hence the choice at this juncture of a Zoroastrian form in me as the vehicle of spirituality, derived from Muslim and Hindu sources.⁴

During this stay, Baba would sometimes even refer to the coming of the Avatar and His circle of 120 members.

In the '30s, Baba began to gather His Western disciples. In 1937 He wrote to Delia DeLeon in England, "I know all the present and future and nothing can stop the work that I am here to do. Am I not the Avatar? The world will know it soon and will accept me as such. Be calm, be steady and firm as a rock in your faith and love for me."

Still, through the '30s and '40s, most of Meher Baba's followers regarded Him as a *Sadguru* (Perfect Master). In those

⁴ *Meher Baba Journal*, December, 1940; p. 107.

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days, at the end of a *darshan* program, Baba's devotees, in praise of their Master, would shout, "Sadguru Meher Baba Ki Jai." In 1937 the first biography of Meher Baba in English was published in England. It was written by C.B. Purdom and, along with a brief outline of His life, it presented Meher Baba as a Perfect Master; indeed it was even titled, *The Perfect Master*.

On February 10, 1954, Meher Baba was in the midst of His lovers at Meheras tana in the district of Hamirpur. Keshavnigam, who was present, recalls, "Baba was in an extremely happy mood, spelling the words, "Avatar Meher Baba Ki Jai," on His alphabet board and simultaneously raising up His right hand to confirm that "Jai!"⁵ In this extremely happy mood, Baba told those gathered that it was the first time in this Incarnation He had openly and clearly declared Himself to be the Avatar. And from that day on, Meher Baba continued to assert His Avatarhood in public and in private.

There were some people who came to know of Baba only after 1954 who were, in fact, disturbed by Baba's repeated assertions of His Avatarhood. Sometimes they critically thought, "If Meher Baba is really the Avatar, the Christ, why does He need to repeat this so often? People should be able to know it without His telling them so."

One of Meher Baba's dear ones in a casual conversation with Him remarked, "Baba, as far as I know, your statements about your being the Avatar are only keeping people away from you." Baba, with a calm, serene countenance, but not without His characteristic smile, replied, "Divine honesty demands that I say what I am. I am the Ancient One."

But this answer did not seem to convince the general public. Some said, "Why then didn't Meher Baba's divine honesty demand that He openly declare His Avatarhood from the beginning of 1922?" To try to explain why Baba did not declare Himself openly as the Avatar then, and why He did in 1954, is not only beyond me, but I am sure that it would be foolish on my part to attempt to either interpret or judge the significance of this. How can a finite mind ever assess the working of the Infinite One? The Avatar ever remains a

perfect mystery!

⁵ *Glow International*, May, 1985; p. 10.

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Baba, however, always encouraged people, even His adversaries, to freely express what they felt about Him. So, with my limited understanding, and from what little I could gather in His company, I would like to share, in this introductory chapter, a few thoughts and some quotes of Baba and His *mandali* about the general nature of the Avatar's role.

The Ocean Becomes "The Oceanized Individual"

During one of the massive public *darshan* programs Meher Baba held in the year 1954, more than 70,000 people assembled at Wadia Park in Ahmednagar. At that time He gave a special message entitled, "Meher Baba's Call." It began:

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, fears 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. . . .

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

Years earlier, Baba had explained to His close ones that God in the Beyond State is not consciously man, and that man in the world of Illusion is not consciously God. However, the God-Man, being God as well as man, becomes a divinely human link between God and humanity. He not only brings God of the Beyond State to one and all, but He also helps each one to come closer to, and finally merge in, God.

In one of His circulars to His lovers Meher Baba stated:

God is absolutely Independent, and the universe is

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entirely dependent upon God. Yet when the Perfect Masters effect the descent of God on earth as the Avatar, they make Reality and Illusion interdependent, each upon the other. And thus it is that His infinite mercy and unbounded love are eternally drawn upon by those who are immersed in Illusion.

Between God and the universe, infinite mercy and unbounded love act as a prominent link which is eternally made use of by men who become God (*Sadgurus*, Perfect Masters, or *Qutubs*), and by God who becomes Man (Avatar, Christ, or *Rasool*), and so the universe becomes the eternal playmate of God. Through this prominent link the Avatar not only established life in His divine play, but also established law in Illusion.⁶

Francis Brabazon, one of Meher Baba's close Australian disciples and a great poet, in his book *The Silent Word* expresses something of the mystery of the Avatar:

Men are born, and die, and are reborn; until they die into the deathless and are never born again. But one Man, being birthless and deathless, takes birth again and again because of the cry of the world for relief from the burden of living.

This man is the God-Man: Whole God; Perfect man. Because he is God his actions as a Man are perfect; and because he is a Man, mankind partakes of the divine qualities of His Godhood. . . .

He is the junction of Reality and Illusion: Bliss and misery, Knowledge and ignorance, Power and helplessness.

His birth as the Creation and his birth as The Divine Beloved are both stories told out of a dream until he is born in us and we in him . . . the purpose of the Creation was the individualization of the Ocean of Being into drops, and the purpose of God's Man-form was that the drops should know that they are the Ocean.⁷

On one occasion, Baba conveyed, "Man realizing God is like a drop of water swallowing the entire Ocean, no less!" I gather

⁶ *Life Circular*, No. 24.

⁷ *The Silent Word*, pp. 1-8.

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that in the case of the Avatar's Advent, the Ocean first contracts itself into a drop (human form). Then, at the ordained moment of unveiling, this "drop" realizes its "Ocean-ness." And again, out of compassion, the Ocean consciously returns to its "drop-ness" while retaining its "Oceanity": this is the state of the Avatar.

Referring to the recurrent advents of the God-Man, Meher Baba stated, "In me I am Free, but in you I feel bound. In the Beyond State there is no binding; there is absolute Freedom, absolute Existence. What a sublime State it is! From that sublime State, I have come to your level." But this was not easy, even for Baba!

One day, while sitting with His *mandali*, Baba gestured:

When, after the kiss from Babajan, I knew that I was the Ocean, I did not want to come back to ordinary "drop" consciousness from that Blissful State where I alone was. But despite My resistance, the five Perfect Masters kept "pulling Me down" to ordinary consciousness for My destined Manifestation as Avatar. . . . Upasni Maharaj brought Me down to normal consciousness.⁸

Meher Baba's sister, Mani, wrote in one of her letters to the West, "That we may 'find' Him, He allows the finite to 'bind' Him. And while bound, He is human enough to miss His infinitely Free State of Being."⁹ And in another letter she shared the following concept, "For the world, while oblivious of it, the greatest event is when God visits the earth as Man. . . . The cloak of human-ness that God puts on for our human sakes is the highest revelation of His God-ness. Time and again God manifests His glory to man in the supreme image of the God-Man."

Beloved Baba seldom gave spiritual discourses as such. However, He would at times, while in the company of His close *mandali*, casually make comments which, though succinct, were nonetheless deeply profound. One such remark was that the Avatar is the "Oceanized Individual." This means that the Avatar knows that as the Ocean He lies hidden within each individual (drop), and that simultaneously all drops are contained

⁸ 82 *Family Letters*, p. 153.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

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within the Ocean. What a paradox!

But because it is impossible for an individual to conceive of Infinity or to approach an infinite shoreless Ocean, that Ocean, out of love and compassion, becomes its own shore; that shore is the God-Man, the "Oceanized Individual," the divine link between man and God.

The boundless love and compassion of the Avatar is the hidden Ocean in every heart. When anyone remembers Him wholeheartedly, the waves from the Ocean flood one's heart, cleanse it of its impurities and gradually dissolve one's "dropness" revealing the drop's intrinsic unity with the Ocean.

Baba, Himself, simplified the whole matter, putting it in proper perspective when He gestured to one of His dear ones, "Pour your 'drop' into my Ocean and become the Ocean which in reality you are."

Personal Reflections on the Avatar's Grand Game

The foregoing was a somewhat abstract look at the nature of the Avatar's role in general but it does not precisely answer the question raised earlier: "Why did Baba declare His Avatarhood in 1954 and not in 1922?" Perhaps the answer to this question lies in relation to the introduction in 1954, as in other phases, of a new rhythm in the functioning of the Avatar's work.

Just as there was the ordained moment for Babajan to unveil the Infinite Consciousness in Merwan, so too there was a divinely planned moment for Meher Baba to openly declare His true status, and this was in February 1954.

Perhaps it would be interesting, and also amusing to recount how Baba's statements concerning His divinity affected my own slowly evolving and involving relationship with how Baba's statements concerning His divinity affected Him. My acceptance of Baba as the Avatar was a very slow process and the certitude I eventually developed continues to renew itself and spread its roots and shoots in the depths and heights of my consciousness today.

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Baba does not impose anything on anyone but allows one's faith and love to develop at their own natural pace. The fact that my conviction in Baba's Avatarhood blossomed so gradually is testimony to my overestimation of the importance of intellectual understanding. More significantly, however, it bears witness to the Avatar's grand game of loving patience and His patient love for each of His followers.

In the mid-'40s I was blessed to hear about Meher Baba and had a craving to read anything written by Him or about Him, although I had no intention of following Baba as my Master. To me, at first, He was simply a great man. Later I accepted Him as a saintly person, but my heart was on yogis and especially the *Poorna* Yoga of Sri Aurobindo. Baba's life, and His words, impressed my heart, but at the same time they challenged my mind. Why Baba observed silence I thought I could understand a little, but the importance given to its breaking and the effect this would have on world consciousness was hard for me to accept.

I started reading the *Discourses* by Meher Baba, which were in those days published in India in five volumes.¹⁰ The first article in the first volume was on the Avatar. According to my understanding, saints and *Sadgurus* could glorify the Avatar but they could not write about His status. As the Avatar is far above them I thought, "How can Meher Baba write about the function of the Avatar?" So I simply skimmed the article and went on to the next.

I must, however, admit that Baba's other articles impressed me with their finely pointed logic and the simple yet elegant style with which they were written. The discourses on: "Love," "The Search For God," "True Discipleship," "The Ways of The Master," and the series of articles on "Reincarnation," "Ego" and "Maya" stole my heart. These articles shed light on the various points that had been troubling me for some time. Nowhere in my reading had I ever found these subjects dealt with so lucidly and directly as Meher Baba had done in the *Discourses*.

I read Baba's biography in Marathi by Dr. C.D. Deshmukh and later I read *The Perfect Master* by C.B. Purdom. In this

¹⁰ In 1987, these five volumes were published as one volume by Sheriar Press, Inc., Myrtle Beach, SC 29577 USA.

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latter book, I was deeply struck by Baba's answers given to James Douglas, a famous reporter of the time, in an interview first published in London's *Sunday Express*, April 10, 1932. The reporter asked Baba, "Are you divine?" Baba smiled and answered, "I am one with God. I live in Him, like Buddha, like Christ, like Krishna. They know Him as I know Him"

Baba's other answers, although they seemed cryptic to me, nonetheless moved me with their profundity. But Baba's reply to the question, "Are you divine?" appeared to me to be rather boastful. It seemed Meher Baba was implying that He was superior to Buddha, Christ and Krishna! I felt that the most Meher Baba should have said was, "I know Him as they know Him," and not the other way around! In Purdom's book the whole subject of the Avatar, or of Baba being the Avatar, was not directly dealt with.

In 1947 Jean Adriel published a narrative of her spiritual experiences in relation to Meher Baba under the title, *Avatar*. The book was published in California and it was not until 1948 that a hard cover edition of this book was mailed to me by Adi K. Irani, Meher Baba's secretary (hereafter referred to as Adi). I grumbled about its high price but when I learned that Baba had approved the list of who was to be sent a copy, I felt that I must read it thoroughly.

Opposite the title page was a picture of Meher Baba. It showed a slim figure, with flowing hair, and fingers tucked in the pockets of His Parsi-style white coat. The focus of the picture was not sharp and behind Baba one can dimly make out some hazy mountains in the distance. This lent an air of mystery to the picture, enhanced by the far-off look in Baba's eyes and the suggestion of sunlight partially illuminating His face.

Under the picture there was this quote:

It is my part in the Divine Plan to bring to the weary world a fresh dispensation of Eternal Love.—Meher Baba.

(Incidentally, the 1971 paperback edition has a different cover, a different photo and a different message under it.) Jean had dedicated the book to:

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The Living Christ—Whose beauty the very heavens cannot contain, but Whose presence may be found in every humble, loving heart.

I read this book with great interest; I was captivated by Baba's photo and I was greatly impressed with the contents of the book. But both Baba's quote and the dedication sounded exaggerated, at least according to my understanding. The quote attributed to Baba a claim which I thought was too great for even a Perfect Master to make. My heart was repeatedly stirred to accept Baba's divinity unconditionally, but my mind was just as repeatedly provoked to challenge His divine status as too far reaching.

Yet, despite my doubts, Baba's love and compassion were such that not only did He allow me to spend time with Him, but He never let my doubts interfere in any way with the love He showered upon me. I was like a piece of worthless iron, pulled to Baba solely because of His magnetic divinity.

I continued to have my personal interests in literature, astrology and social work. Baba never forbade this, nor did He ever give me direct specific instructions as to how I should live my life. In those early years, however, in reply to the letters I sent Him, Baba would send me His love and blessings. And even as I read the words Baba had dictated, I felt the charge those words carried with them and I would feel blessed.

Whenever I would be in Baba's presence, all questions and doubts about His divine status totally disappeared. Baba's presence was overwhelming, supernal. During my visits I never asked Baba any questions about anything. Each time it was a silent *sahavas* immersed in His unconditional love.

Over the years, my interest in theological and metaphysical matters, as well as my desire to see any "spiritual" personalities, began, on their own, to wane. But this was a long drawn out affair and had its ups and downs. As I read books by and about Baba or His messages, I would sometimes feel confused and the old doubts would surface, but His love always sustained me. I did not know then of the Avatar's exquisite skill in allowing one's mind to meander capriciously this way and

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that, while all the time He is secretly drawing one's heart ever closer to Him!

1954, the year Baba declared Himself openly to be the Avatar, was also an important year for me on my way to accepting Baba on His terms. That year, in May, I somehow got involved in a visit to a saintly person. Baba was in Mahabaleshwar, near Poona, and I went to see Him along with Adi. As always, in His company my heart was filled with exultation, but during our conversation, when Baba asked me whether I had told the saintly person that Meher Baba is the Avatar, I felt ashamed and replied in a low voice, "No, I didn't."

Baba knew that I did not have the courage to say that so He continued, "If you do not have faith in me as the Avatar, you could have at least told him that Meher Baba says that He is the Avatar."

I was abashed by my own lack of faith and remained silent. The topic of the saintly person I had visited provided an occasion for Baba to deal humorously, yet critically, with this subject. At the close of the conversation, Baba looked straight at me and gently, but with an air of divine authority gestured, "Bal, know well, I am the Real One!"

What a blessing to have the Avatar declare His status directly to me in such a way! Yet, for a dunce like me, the propitious moment of grace which allows for total acceptance had not yet come. What patience the Avatar has in drawing His people to Him; what unconditional love!

The God-Man has a personal relationship with each of His lovers, yet He lets it unfold very naturally. This relationship becomes a channel through which He awakens love in the hearts of His dear ones, for no heart can remain untouched by His boundless concern, His infinite caring displayed in so many impersonal yet intimate ways. And it is this love which leads and helps His lovers finally to accept Him, without any doubts, for what He is—the God-Man, the Prophet, the Christ—the Avatar.

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Correspondence about Darshan Programs

To herald the beginning of the new year, at the stroke of midnight on December 31, 1953, the church bells in Bombay began to ring and railway engines stopped wherever they were and began to whistle. People greeted each other in the traditional way: "Happy New Year! Ring out the old and ring in the new."

In general, there was great joy and merriment to greet the new year, 1954, but little did the millions of people living in Bombay realize how spiritually auspicious the start of the year really was—for at that moment Avatar Meher Baba happened to be staying in one of the Bombay suburbs and thus the whole city was silently blessed with the Awakener's physical presence.

In 1953, Baba had spent a period of over nine months in Dehra Dun, a town in the north of India near the foothills of the Himalayas. On December 1, 1953, Baba with His men and women *mandali* moved to Mahabaleshwar, a hill station in Maharashtra, about 120 kilometers south of Poona. This was to be Baba's residence, when He wasn't traveling, for the next seven months.

That previous July, during a meeting at Dehra Dun, Baba had casually remarked, "In December, I will be on the move." And a tentative itinerary for *darshan* tours in Hamirpur District and Andhra Pradesh (Andhra) had been chalked out. From July of '53 onward, however, Baba had been very busy with various aspects of His work, and although there was considerable correspondence on the subject of Baba's upcoming *darshan* tours, final dates had not been set.

Reaching Mahabaleshwar, Baba felt that after concluding His intense spiritual work at Dehra Dun, and before beginning

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the *darshan* tours, He would like to spend some time in a quiet, secluded place in a very big city like Bombay. As He wished to remain totally undisturbed, He did not want even His close lovers and devotees to know about this brief change in His plans.

Meherjee Karkaria and Nariman Dadachanji, two of Baba's old-time disciples who lived in Bombay, found a beautiful two story building in Varsova (Andheri), a suburb of Bombay, and leased it for a month. Not only was it in a quiet secluded locale, but it had a superb view of the beach and ocean only a few hundred yards away. On December 30, Baba, with just a few of His men *mandali* from Mahabaleshwar, arrived at Varsova.

Baba looked quite happy as He moved through the house that Meherjee and Nariman had obtained for Him. The house itself, and the wonderful view from the verandah, were ideal. After staying there only four days, Baba felt so refreshed and relaxed that He decided to return to Mahabaleshwar. The *mandali* were used to such sudden changes in Baba's plans, and it did not even occur to them to wonder at the reasons behind them. So, on January 3, with practically the whole month still remaining on their lease, the whole party left Varsova and by that evening reached Florence Hall (also known as the Aga Khan's Estate) in Mahabaleshwar where they were staying.

On their return, Eruch found that there were many letters waiting for Baba's attention. Most of them were in reference to the projected *darshan* tours. Baba lovers throughout Andhra and Hamirpur had written to Baba, pleading with Him to visit their towns or villages. They were all anxiously looking forward to Baba's visit so they could have the Avatar's blessed *darshan*.

Touched by these loving invitations, Baba wanted to reach a final decision as to exactly when these programs would be held. So, on January 7, 1954, He sent the following express telegram to Keshav Nigam, the group-head for the Hamirpur area, and to K. Sastri, one of the four group-heads for Andhra:

Due to my own working, I definitely wish that either

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programmes at Hamirpur and Andhra both be curtailed or one of them be fully retained and the other postponed. Therefore wire immediately after consulting workers and lovers whether you would like curtailment of half the number of days . . . of my stay for programmes or prefer postponement . . . If curtailment of whole programmes preferred then you will have the option to fix more houses . . . for me [to visit]. —BABA

Within a week, K. Sastri cabled on behalf of KDRM (Baba's abbreviation for the four main organizers He had appointed in Andhra—formed by taking the first initial of their names: Kutumba Sastri, Dhanapathi Rao, Ranga Rao and Mallikarjuna Rao) the following:

Workers, lovers assembled yesterday at Rajahmundry [and] resolved preferring curtailed programme [in] February. Kindly intimate programme dates. Namskars.

In Andhra the summer sets in by the middle of March and the Baba lovers there did not wish to delay Baba's visit until after the rainy season. They were also eager to have Baba come in February as this would give them the chance to celebrate Baba's sixtieth birthday while He was in their midst. Perhaps the All-knowing One, in response to this wholehearted, but unexpressed wish, sent an immediate telegraphic reply on January 13, as follows:

Reaching Bezwada [Vijayawada] February twentieth night and leave Andhra fourth March. Accordingly arrange Andhra programmes and if necessary add extra hours to my daily house visits. Love to Andhrites. —BABA

About the same time, Keshav Nigam replied:

Due to rains and bad communication rural centres could not be consulted. Paliwal is out [of town] while Shripat Sahai is absent in spite of telegraphic intimations. Khare prefers postponement now for full programme in future, while workers and lovers of Hamirpur proper crave curtailment, if full programme impossible. But all

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equally surrender to Baba's decision and shall cheerfully take it as for our best. Pray wire gracious decision—Keshav.

Baba looked pleased with the candid opinions of His lovers in Hamirpur and dictated the following reply:

Andhra decided curtailment programmes which I have accepted. Would also prefer Hamirpur curtailed programmes in February on condition you, Khare, Shribhai, Paliwal and other responsible workers feel that curtailed programmes can be carried out satisfactorily, satisfying even new ardent lovers, in all villages concerned. If necessary you [may] curtail my stay in old places and add extra hours of my daily house visits [in] new villages contacting new ardent lovers. If curtailed programme possible I reach Kanpur February third morning, leaving Hamirpur District on tenth. Otherwise indefinite postponement. Wire decision immediately. Love to Hamirpurites. —BABA

After receiving Baba's long explanatory telegram, Keshav contacted all the persons connected with Baba's visit and sent the reply which was received at Mahabaleshwar on January 13.

We unanimously decided and [have] chalked curtailed programmes opening third February [at] Ichhaura and ending tenth noon at Mahewa. Pray wire approval for general publicity. Details follow—Keshav.

On the same day, Baba sent His reply of approval to Keshav and asked His lovers in Hamirpur to go on with the necessary arrangements for His second visit. In fact, this was a real test for the Baba lovers in Hamirpur as they had barely two weeks to make all the preparations to receive, in a befitting manner, their Beloved Master, Meher Baba.

The telegraphic communication quoted above will give readers a little flavour of one of Baba's ways. He would sometimes encourage His lovers to help in the planning of some

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program—to freely express all their ideas and views on the project. This would continue sometimes for months and then, unexpectedly, Baba would ask them to make a final decision in a very short time.

This characteristic method of Baba's stirred up many emotions and even brought His lovers into conflict with each other. For example, owing to the curtailed program, the organizers in Hamirpur and Andhra had to cancel Baba's visits to some towns or houses which had previously been arranged. Often this meant displeasing their friends and neighbors of many years standing. Thus the organizers became the targets of criticism and had to bear the brunt of people's dissatisfaction with their arrangements.

Sometimes this was too much for them to bear, and they complained to Baba about the attitude of the others. Baba comforted them by saying that their withstanding such criticism made Him happy. Baba commented that by trying to observe His instructions, they were trying to please Him rather than their friends and relatives and He appreciated this devotion. Love gradually links the lovers to their Beloved while it unlinks them from others. It has often been observed that those who come into the orbit of Baba's love have to be ready for many changes in their lives with Him and in their relationships with others. The Avatar is the most unpredictable One!

Baba's last minute change of plans often created confusion in the minds of some of His lovers, but this process also has helped Baba lovers develop a one-pointed faith in Baba which enables them to face unexpected situations in life with a courage compounded of His love and His presence. Meher Baba, as the Avatar, is timeless, Infinite Consciousness and, as such, He continues to play this sort of game with some of His lovers even to this day. Truly, the God-Man's relationship with His lovers is inconceivable!

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Easy to Write; Difficult to Do

In the middle of January, Kishan Singh sent a letter to Baba requesting to be allowed to accompany Him on His *darshan* tours. Baba not only permitted him to do so, but even asked him to be at Mahabaleshwar a week in advance. This permission turned out to be of tremendous benefit to Baba's lovers as Kishan Singh maintained a day to day diary of Baba's second visit to Hamirpur and Andhra. A considerable portion of this book is based on that account.

Another person, who had recently met Baba, also sent a letter asking to be allowed to accompany Baba and His *mandali* during the upcoming *darshan* tours. Under Baba's direction, Eruch sent a reply and the excerpts from it, given below, will help others to better understand what Baba expected of those who wanted to stay with Him. Baba did not impose rules on His followers, but when some, on their own, expressed a wish to stay with Him, even for a short period, He gave them certain guidelines to observe implicitly. The prerequisite for staying with Baba was an earnest, voluntary and implicit acceptance of Baba as the Beloved Master. Eruch wrote:

Before you join Baba He wants you to make a firm determination that you absolutely surrender to His will so that you forget your own self and live only in the presence of Baba all the time; Baba wants you not only to forget your own self but [to] die to your own self, once and for all, only to live for Baba and live only to obey Him implicitly and willingly.

When you stay with Baba, He wants you to stay in such a manner that you should not let your presence be felt around you nor should you suggest to Baba anything [unless asked] . . . If you agree to this then come to Bombay on 1st February '54 and [also] inform Adi [at Ahmednagar] accordingly.

In short, Baba wanted those who wished to stay with Him to wholeheartedly and totally accept Him as God in human form. Meher Baba's directions, mentioned in Eruch's letter, stand

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equally good today for those who love Baba or who would want to love Him as the Eternal Master.

The person who wrote Baba, on getting Eruch's reply, answered that he wished to offer himself totally to Baba and to serve His divine cause. Yet, within a year, he left Baba. Although it was easy for him to write, "I will obey," it proved difficult for him to do. A saint was once asked, "When does one become a servant of the Lord?" and he replied, "When one is free of self-interest."

Meditation: A Delightful Companionship with the Divine

A Baba lover from Andhra, interested in concentrating on Beloved Baba's form in a traditional way, requested Baba to give him special instructions. Baba gave him directions on how to reply, the gist of which is given below:

At the beginning of your meditation, Baba wants you to sit before a large photo of Him. Look intently at Baba's picture and try to fix His form in your mind's eye, so that even when you close your eyes the image remains vivid. If you feel that the image of Baba's form has faded, open your eyes and again fix your gaze on His picture. While doing this repeat, "Parabrahma, Paramatma." Don't involve any other yoga practice or try to awaken the *kundalini*. Let your meditation be only *on* Baba and for Baba.

You should also know well that these instructions are only for you and you should not advocate this practice to others. Baba sends His love and blessings to you.

Baba did not discourage those who were already devoting regular time for meditative practices from continuing their efforts. I personally know two people who led ascetic lives; Baba periodically gave one of them special instructions to follow, while He asked one of the *mandali* to send the other a specific amount of money every month, for years, so that the person could continue his routine of meditation without worrying about having to provide himself with the bare necessi-

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ties of life.

In general, however, Baba would remark that simply remembering Him with love, as much as possible during the day, in a most natural way is the best meditation. Some people find it difficult to believe that meditation can be as simple as that. I admit that, before coming to Baba, and even in my early association with Him, I placed a heavy premium on the outward postures and forms of meditation. I had read Swami Vivekananda's book, *Raj-Yoga*, with great interest. I was also deeply drawn to one of the greatest yogis of India, Sri Aurobindo, who was residing at Pondicherry on the southeast coast of India.

Pictures of Lord Shiva, as well as *rishis*, sitting in the lotus posture, with half closed eyes and a look of absorption in something beyond this world, were among my favorites. I thought spirituality without yoga postures and trance/meditation was no spirituality. I presumed that unless one had occult experiences, visions or revelations, the way to spirituality was closed. At the time, I was more concerned with becoming oblivious of the world than I was with longing to love God while living in it.

As the years passed, I had more opportunities to be in Baba's *sahas* and I gradually discovered that although yoga/meditation helps some people to get closer to God, for most people these practices are not practical. Baba did not condemn the path of meditation, but He stressed that life becomes spiritual only to the extent that one brings God's presence into it, and lovingly offers all one's actions to Him.

The various meditative practices are, in a way, like steep spiral stairs leading toward God. And the different methods used for concentrating one's thoughts are the steps one has to climb. But this climbing entails effort and often brings one into conflict with one's worldly duties.

Life, including the various practices of meditation, is a journey from manyness in Illusion to the Oneness of Reality. Periodically, however, Reality descends into Illusion in a human form, as the Avatar or God-Man. His name and His form provide a direct path to Reality for one and all. His

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coming among humanity is like an elevator to God being installed. When one remembers the God-Man, it is as if one is stepping inside the elevator and, depending on the intensity with which one calls on Him, one is lifted that much closer to Him.

One can still attend to all of one's worldly duties; there need not be a division between the worldly and the spiritual. One should not shun the world, but make it spiritual by dedicating one's actions to the Avatar. Thus, one's inward journey becomes not a matter of mechanical effort, but a natural and spontaneous remembrance of the One whose love makes it easy. Our meditation on Him becomes a delightful companionship with Him, overflowing into praise and gratitude.

As Francis Brabazon wrote in *The East-West Gathering*:

Sing! O sing Meher's Name;
ring, heart-bells, his boundless fame.
He is God and he is Man,
at his Nod the world began.
He is Truth and All-beauty,
he is true Infinity.¹¹

As one remembers the Avatar and sings His praise, the heart—a lute with seventy-two thousand strings (veins) as it is referred to in yoga books—becomes tuned and eventually one finds that even the common things of life strike a responsive chord and a melody of His companionship is sounded. Such "music" gradually inspires the individual to place one's entire life, as a love offering, at the service of the Avatar—a heartfelt wish to live and die for Him. Such meditation becomes an unbroken discovery of pleasing the Avatar by taking refuge in Him.

In the early '70s, a Baba lover from the West requested Eruch to share his views on the subject of meditation. Eruch wrote:

Meditation has to serve but one purpose—to steady the mind of the aspirant, to make one think less of one's self, and eventually to make one forget totally one's false exis-

¹¹ *The East-West Gathering*, p. 49.

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tence. If, on the contrary, meditation were to remind one of his/her self, then the purpose of meditation is not at all served. One has to beware not to become attached to any form of meditation, for meditation would then become a ritual!

Meher Baba has revealed to us who lived with Him that true meditation is to remember Him constantly in all our everyday life and acts; whether we eat or drink, feast or fast, attend to nature's call or take a bath, whether we are busy in the office or with business, or relaxing in bed, whether we are meditating at a place or making merry, resting or moving about, we should always think of Him and have Him always as our constant Companion. There is no better meditation than this!

This is spontaneous meditation. There is no set time, place, posture, principle or austerity for this meditation where every breath is dedicated to His remembrance. Eventually we totally forget ourselves and live in His Grace alone. Blessed indeed is such a life!

Baba Leaves Mahabaleshwar for Hamirpur

In the third week of January 1954, Eruch informed Adi of the final dates for Baba's *darshan* tours in Hamirpur and Andhra. Adi wrote Baba asking to be excused from these tours as his health was not good and, in addition, he had to attend to a lot of correspondence. Baba, however, directed Adi to report to Mahabaleshwar immediately.

So, on January 26, Adi was in Mahabaleshwar. Baba gave Adi some general instructions about work at the office and also at Meherabad. Baba concluded by telling Adi that although he could miss the Hamirpur tour, he had to accompany Him when He went to Andhra, no matter what. Not only that, but he was ordered to come to Mahabaleshwar on February 19, the day Baba was to leave for Andhra, to drive Baba to Poona where they would board the train for Vijayawada.

For the Hamirpur trip, Gustadji, Ramjoo, Jal (Baba's

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brother), Pendu, Eruch, Aloba, Kumar, Bhau and Kishan Singh were to accompany Baba from Mahabaleshwar. Baidul had been previously sent to Poona by Baba for some work and was supposed to rejoin the group there. In addition, Sadashiv Patel (also known as Patil), along with Dhake, Chhagan, Sidhu, Savak Kotwal, Yeshwantrao and Krishnaji were also to join the party at Poona. Meherjee was to meet and accompany them from Bombay onward, while Nana Kher and Pankhraj of Nagpur were allowed to join the *mandali* at the Itarsi railway station.

Before leaving Mahabaleshwar, Baba told the *mandali* that in the upcoming programs, thousands of people would come for His *darshan* and hundreds of them would rush to get closer to Him, to touch Him, especially to bow down at His feet. Baba also conveyed that His health was not good and that it would be the responsibility of those traveling with Him to carry Him as if He were a "flower" so that after the *darshan* tours of Hamirpur and Andhra, He would arrive back in Mahabaleshwar still fresh and blooming.

In addition, Baba gave specific duties to some of those going with Him. During this tour, Eruch and Meherjee were to remain close to Baba. Eruch had to read Baba's board and interpret Baba's gestures, while Meherjee had to always be with Baba whenever He traveled anywhere by car. Chhagan, with Sidhu's help, was to see to Baba's food and other personal needs.

Pendu was appointed the "controller of movements." Arranging the exact times for the *darshan* programs at all the various places, making the transportation arrangements from one place to another for Baba and His party, all this was Pendu's responsibility. Ramjoo was supposed to compile whatever extemporaneous messages Baba gave while Kishan Singh was to keep a day-to-day diary.

Kumar was designated as the commanding officer (C.O.) and, with the help of other *mandali* members, he was to lead Baba safely to the dais for each program. He was also supposed to control the crowds during the programs if they became too restless or, in their loving eagerness to see Baba,

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left the *darshan* queues and tried to rush toward the stage where Baba was sitting. This was quite a responsibility for if Baba were a "flower," He was also intent on contacting the masses and letting as many people as possible benefit from the fragrance of His love.

On February 1, Baba left Mahabaleshwar for Poona. After being joined there by the others, they all traveled to Bombay where Baba had a short rest at Nariman and Arnavaz's flat, Ashiana. As instructed, Meherjee joined the group here and they all left for Victoria Terminus where they were to catch the Pathankot Express which was scheduled to leave at 11:00 P.M. A coupe had been reserved for Baba.

A small group of intimate Baba lovers had gathered on the platform to greet their Beloved Master. For a time, Baba, with a pretty garland around His neck, quietly sat on a seat near the window—His eyes flashed with love as He received the salutations from His dear ones in Bombay. As they looked at Baba's radiant face, their hearts were moved to their depths.

Soon, the guard, in his spotless white uniform, waved a green flag and whistled. This was the signal for the passengers to board the train and for the visitors to say their final good-byes. It was hard for some Baba lovers to check their tears; when love fills the heart to the brim, it overflows through the eyes—a natural expression of love reciprocated.

As the train pulled out of the station and picked up speed, it settled into its usual rhythmic clickety-clack; but this was not a usual train, for this night it was carrying the Avatar of the Age. A little over a year earlier, in November 1952, during a phase of His work known as the Fiery Free Life, Baba had visited Hamirpur for the first time. And the hearts of the Hamirpurians had indeed been set on fire; they had been longing ever since to have Baba's *darshan* again. In response to their silent call, their intense longing, the Divine Beloved Himself was irresistibly drawn to return, to dispense once more His love and blessings to His dear ones there. The second *darshan* tour to Hamirpur had finally begun.

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Language of the Heart

According to a discussion held earlier with Keshav Nigam at Dehra Dun, Baba's visit was to end with His visiting Ichhaura, a small village in the district of Jalaun. Subsequently, the program had been changed and now Ichhaura was to have the honor of being the first village Baba would stay at on His tour. Thus the last did indeed become the first!

Those who wish to follow the Timeless One have to be ready to cheerfully accept and adjust to the pathless path of love—a path which is not a matter of direction, but an attitude of surrender to the Will of the Beloved. Nor, usually, is the Will of the Beloved made explicit; it is conveyed and received only through the language of the heart.

Leaving Bombay for Ichhaura on the night of February 1, Baba and the *mandali* reached Orai at 3:00 in the morning of the third. Keshav, Pukar, Baghel (R. S. Singh Baghel) and other Baba lovers from Hamirpur joyfully received their Beloved Master. Baghel was given the responsibility of making arrangements for Baba's brief halt of three hours in the town.

Baghel, an advocate, lived in Orai. A day or so prior to Baba's arrival, he noticed a *mast*—a person overpowered by love of God—near the *dharamshala* which he had reserved for Baba and the *mandali*. This particular *mast* was regarded as the spiritual chargeman of a large area. As Meher Baba explained in *The Wayfarers*:

Certain masts and certain salik-like pilgrims are known as *spiritual chargemen*. . . . Such a man sees to the spiritual and material welfare of the place of which he is the spiritual chargeman. The spiritual chargeman in a small place is a mast, but in a large place he is a salik-like pilgrim, and in some centres of peculiar importance the chargemanship is in the hands of both a mast and a salik-like pilgrim.¹²

About such people we can say with Francis Brabazon that although "drunkenness" is their nature, "sobriety" is their

¹² *The Wayfarers*, p. 37.

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duty. Meher Baba's contacts with the *masts*, including spiritual chargemen, is another subject altogether. To me it seems that Baba was like a divine dynamo generating infinite power and the *masts* were like transformers, stepping down the current of His love to voltages which ordinary people could make use of.

In this particular case, the *mast's* sudden appearance at the *dharamshala* right before Baba's arrival seemed directly related to Baba's impending visit. Baghel took this as a sign of welcome, in a spiritual sense, to the Avatar. After Baba's visit, Baghel found that this *mast* never returned again to Orai.

Tea and a sumptuous breakfast refreshed those who had been traveling for two days on the train. At about 6:00 in the morning of February 3, before leaving for Ichhaura, Baba was pleased to give the first message of the tour:

God does not listen to the language of the tongue or the mind; He listens and responds to the language of the heart—the song of love for God, the Beloved.

To love God, we have to keep ourselves ever present before Him and never be absent from Him. While discharging all our duties—thinking all thoughts, speaking all words, doing all deeds—we have to remember Him as the source of everyone and everything.

Baba's above words, expressed mostly through His simple lively gestures, formed a theme which was to be repeated throughout the subsequent *darshan* programs, and perhaps this was an indication as well as to what the *darshan* tour was all about. For Baba's visit to Hamirpur was itself a response to the language of the heart of His lovers there. He was personally going to them so that they could learn to remain with Him all the more in their hearts. Baba, as the Beloved, was not only responding to their songs of love for Him, but He was also bringing them new melodies to sing.

At the end of His message, Baba gave all a loving smile and then signaled that it was time to board the bus which was to take them on to Ichhaura.

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Ichhaura: "Prem Teertha"

Ichhaura is only 15 kilometers from Orai, but in 1954 this whole area was largely undeveloped. The only road between Orai and Ichhaura was an unpaved, dirt track with no bridge spanning the Betwa river which separated Ichhaura on one side from the small village, Teekar, on the other. However, out of their great love for Baba, the villagers had toiled very hard, personally repairing and improving the road so that Baba's car would be able to pass without difficulty.

As Baba had many places to visit and little time, it was essential that good transport be arranged for Him. Baghel had hired an old bus for Baba's party, and a good jeep for Baba. But the very night Baba arrived, the wealthy owner of the jeep, despite his promise to make it available to Baghel, sent the jeep and its driver to Punjab. Apparently, he had just heard of an opportunity to make a lot of money smuggling illicit drugs and so forfeited his opportunity to be of service to the One who is priceless.

The man, as it turned out, did not make any money either, as the police found out about the smuggling, the driver fled and the jeep was seized by the authorities. Thus the man lost both materially and spiritually. God proposes, man disposes!

In 1929 during Baba's second visit to Iran, a bus had been hired to take Baba and the *mandali* from Bam to Duzdab. Baba gave specific instructions that the bus should be reserved exclusively for His party and should not even carry anything belonging to anyone else. As they prepared to leave, the driver took along two bags of almonds, although he had been told of Baba's instruction. But the bags were light and didn't take up much room so he felt it would be okay. Baba looked displeased but didn't say anything.

The journey, however, soon turned into a nightmare for the driver as the bus kept constantly and inexplicably breaking down. Eventually it dawned on him that his troubles might be due to his disobedience of Baba's order. He saw Afseri, one of Baba's *mandali*, and confessed his mistake. He begged Afseri to plead for Baba's forgiveness for him, as he felt too ashamed

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to now show his face before Baba. Afseri, however, led him to Baba who not only forgave him, but advised him, "Never break a promise. Be true to your word, to whomsoever you give it." How much more this applies when one voluntarily dedicates one's life to Baba, determined to live His message of Love and Truth.

Resuming the account, on February 3, Baghel learned that the jeep would not be available for Baba and, naturally, he was very upset. When Baba inquired as to their means of transport to Ichhaura, he dejectedly and helplessly replied, "No means, except an old bus." But Baba, the Omniscient and the Compassionate One, knowing full well Baghel's sincere efforts, assured him, "Don't feel sorry; don't worry. I will travel with the *mandali* in the bus."

Baba got in the front seat and all His people quickly seated themselves in back and they all started off for Ichhaura. They hadn't gone very far when the bus, attempting a turn from a canal bridge to the canal road, hit an obstacle in the road and stopped. The driver was about to restart the bus and try to move forward when someone happened to glance out the window and saw that they were on the very edge of a ten foot deep pit which had been dug to get earth with which to repair the road.

Anxiously someone yelled to the driver to stop. There was much excitement and many comments about how close to disaster they had come, but Baba was very calm and serene. He simply smiled and told the driver to put the bus in reverse. Soon they were once more on their way.

The bus reached the village of Teekar which was on the banks of the Betwa river. No program had been planned here, but when Baba got down and sat on a small carpet which had been spread under a pipal tree for Him, the villagers lined up for *darshan*. Among them was a poor man who had come with his two-year old son clinging to his neck. The boy, due to paralyzed eye lids, had been blind from birth.

Baba casually asked the man what he wanted and he impulsively replied, "Baba, please, give sight to my child." Baba gestured, "What is there in the world worth seeing?" Looking

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at Baba with his tear-bright eyes, the man replied, "My son could see You if he had sight." I do not know if the simple villager even knew the depth of his reply, for in illusion the form of the God-Man is the only thing worth seeing, but Baba seemed touched by this spontaneous response and blessed the boy.

Later, on a similar occasion, Baba remarked that the only "sight" worth longing for, was the sight which would enable one to see God, and that this was equally accessible to all, whether one was blind or not.

With the passage of time, the paralysis disappeared and the boy was able to raise his eyelids and see. Being skeptical about such things, before including this incident in the narrative I verified the details with a Baba lover who is living in that area. He confirms that not only did this happen, but that the boy is now a healthy young man with good vision.

When the villagers learned that Baba wanted to go to Ichhaura, with great enthusiasm they began volunteering their bullock carts to take Baba. But just then, Prabhu Dayal Khare from Ichhaura arrived and informed Baba that he had already arranged for 40-50 bullock carts to carry Baba and His party across the river to Ichhaura.

Soon Baba's cart, rigged with a cloth covering to protect Baba from the sun, could be seen at the head of the procession. The others climbed into the other carts and the long line of around forty carts slowly moved off.

It was a sight for the angels to witness. As the God-Man's caravan proceeded at its stately pace, Kishan Singh in his diary wrote that some were reminded of Muhammad, the Prophet leading His camel caravans through the desert centuries before. To the jingling of the bells the bullocks wore around their necks, the carts wound down to the Betwa.

Coincidentally, February 3 that year happened to fall on the *amavas* (the no-moon night) of *Magh*, (one of the months in the Hindu calendar). According to tradition, it was on this day that the twelfth "Poorna Kum bha Mela" was being held at Allahabad. Millions of pilgrims, at that very moment, had gathered there to bathe at the confluence of the Ganges and

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the Jamuna rivers.

As Baba crossed the Betwa river, He sanctified it by dipping His hands and the toes of His right foot into the water. Baba's face seemed suffused with a golden glow and He looked so divine that even His physical body seemed to be made of some heavenly substance. To all around Him in that special intimacy His smile created, Baba confided, "The Lord of the universe is here, in Betwa, with His dear and near ones, while the masses are all crowding together at Allahabad."

After crossing the river and reaching Ichhaura around 10:30 in the morning, Baba was garlanded by His lovers and *arti* was sung in His praise. At its conclusion, Baba conveyed, "Today, I am giving one of the most important days to Ichhaura; this has become a sanctified place in my love. In the future thousands will gather here to bathe in the Betwa." Baba renamed the village and the area down to the banks of the Betwa as "Prem Teertha."

Prem means love and *teertha* literally means anything sanctified by God. But generally it refers to something liquid. A solid offering to God is usually referred to as *prasad*, while a liquid one is known as *teertha*. In India, any place of spiritual importance, especially if it is situated by a river, is known as *teertha kshetra* (*kshetra* means place). By naming this particular site "Prem Teertha," Baba was, perhaps, emphasizing that those visiting this place would reap the blessings of His love.

Prabhu Dayal and the others felt themselves very fortunate and extremely blessed to be in Beloved Baba's divine presence at this historic moment.

Baba Asks for Forgiveness!

It was arranged that, while in Ichhaura, Baba would stay in Shriramcharan's house, and His people would be accommodated in the rooms adjoining a Rama temple. On His arrival, Baba ordered some water to be brought from the Betwa for His bath. Then He visited the temple where the *mandali* were staying. During this short visit, Baba silently strolled back

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and forth in front of the statue of Rama. All became enveloped in His Divine presence. Then He sat on a small parapet in the temple compound and lovingly accepted the garlands brought by some of His lovers. Baba's silent touch plucked the secret chords of His lovers' hearts. It was a silent and moving occasion.

In the evening, Baba walked through a part of the forest which lay just outside the village; only Eruch accompanied Him on this walk. When Baba returned, He issued a typically exceptional order that that night, February 3, not only His people, but all the inhabitants of Ichhaura, young and old, should observe complete silence as He wished to do some special spiritual work on that night of the *amavas* of *Magh*.

Prabhu Dayal, Pukar and Keshav Nigam informed everyone in the village of Baba's order and emphasized the importance of obeying it literally and wholeheartedly. The villagers were most willing to do their part in Baba's cause and lovingly cooperated. The entire village was united in their effort to obey Beloved Baba. What a blessing for them all!

For the previous two years, a person by the name of Kalicharan had been living in Ichhaura. Kalicharan was a harmless but seemingly mad person who wandered the streets speaking incoherently and collecting bread which he begged from people. Although he lived in the village, he was not of it; he lived in a world of his own.

When Baba was there, Kalicharan went to Him and begged, "Bhaiya roti dey" (Brother, give me bread). Baba gave him real food by laying His hand on his head and also giving him a sweet dish as *prasad*.

Thereafter, the villagers found that Kalicharan would sometimes talk about Baba. These talks were impossible to follow but invariably he would end them with a loud shout of "Meher Baba rey ki jai," which was his version of "Meher Baba ki jai." Some years later, when Kalicharan died, someone brought this news to Baba's attention. Baba remembered him and remarked that He had given Kalicharan liberation. Thus, Kalicharan turned out to be a lucky lunatic.

The outer standards of life and ways of living are not the

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criteria for judging someone's inner spiritual relationship with God. Baba sees beyond appearances, to the longing in the heart.

On February 4, Baba gave *darshan* to all. A small platform was built in Shriramcharan's house. It was decorated nicely with paper banners and a bunting of woven leaves. Near the house was a tree laden with bunches of sweet berries. Baba learned that some of His people had eaten the berries and this displeased Him. He asked Prabhu Dayal to call Shriramcharan and also all of His people.

Shriramcharan, when he learned what all the excitement was about, very humbly folded his hands to Baba and said, "Baba, I am yours. The house is yours and so also the berry tree is yours. The *mandali* are also yours. The berries they ate belong to you, not to me." This reply did not seem to please Baba, however, and looking stern He conveyed, "While it is true that the whole Creation belongs to me, still my laws have to be adhered to by all. It is not good to take anything that does not belong to you without the consent of its worldly owner. Some of my people have failed to observe this simple rule."

Baba paused for a while. Then He joined His palms together in *namaskar* and, with an air of great seriousness about His face, looked at Shriramcharan and gestured, "On behalf of my people, I ask your forgiveness." All looked at Baba in speechless wonder.

Baba's solemn mood made those concerned feel very deeply that they had indeed erred in tasting the berries without asking permission. The sight of Baba, their Beloved Master, humbly apologizing on their behalf made a lasting impression on them and brought home to them for all time that they had to be scrupulously particular in all matters, however seemingly insignificant. Baba was always very particular that none of His lovers should ever take advantage of any one in His name, even in simple things. Perhaps Baba's humbling of the *mandali* was a lesson, not only for them, but for any who go out to do Baba-work.

It has been observed by Baba's close disciples that on some occasions when He wished to accomplish some special spiritual

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work on the inner planes of consciousness, there would be a sudden change in Baba's mood that often precipitated some unexpected and dramatic situation involving some of the dear *mandali* as well. In the above case, one of Baba's dearest disciples, Gustadji, was included among those asked to be present during Baba's apology even though Gustadji had only tasted a single berry which had fallen to the ground.

At any rate, after the apology was made, Baba's mood seemed to lighten and by 8:00 that morning, He took His seat on the platform to give *darshan*, His divine beauty and purity radiating from His face.

Prabhu Dayal read out a simple yet animated welcome address. In reply, Baba gave an equally simple and loving message to the villagers who were fortunate enough to attend this small program.

Baba reassured them:

I am happy to be here among you. Try to love Me wholeheartedly and you will begin to find that I am always with you and that I ever live in you.

Baba then gave *prasad* and His *darshan* to all the eager villagers who had assembled. A little later He visited four houses in the village.

A car and a bus were supposed to arrive early that morning to take Baba and party to Nauranga. But, owing to heavy rains, the roads, even though they had been repaired earlier by Baba's lovers, had become completely impassable. The villagers of Ichhaura immediately put their bullock carts at Baba's disposal once more. Some of Baba's party were worried that another long journey by bullock cart would not be good for Baba's health as such a ride is very bumpy and uncomfortable, but Baba's love for the people of Hamirpur was so deep that He smilingly agreed to the arduous journey.

On February 4, therefore, after lunch at about 2:00 P.M., Baba and party once more got into the bullock carts. While leaving Ichhaura Baba gestured that it had a high spiritual atmosphere and that He wanted to stay there longer but He couldn't as His *darshan* schedule had already been fixed.

SECOND VISIT TO HAMIRPUR DISTRICT BEGINS

Recently Prabhu Dayal visited Meherazad. He related how his contact with Baba had greatly changed his entire life. He belonged to an Arya Samaj family which did not believe that the Infinite God could assume a finite human form; they did not even accept Rama or Krishna as the Avatar. But Baba's presence performed a miracle in Prabhu Dayal's heart. Baba's loving look went deep into his consciousness; it evoked within him a feeling of love and peace. From then on, he found that Baba's presence would return to him whenever he would lovingly remember Him. So he came to accept Baba in time, not just as his Master, but as the Avatar, God in human form.

In fact, his one-pointed devotion to Baba was so great that he had no room in his heart for another and so he never got married. Although outwardly he led an ordinary life of a primary school teacher, his free time was always spent in the inner joy of remembering Beloved Baba. The day Baba sanctified the Betwa and renamed Ichhaura as "Prem Teertha" was a memorable day for Prabhu Dayal. So much so that for the last thirty-one years, every *amavas* of *Magh*, he returns there to commemorate this unique and glorious occasion.

Thus Baba's second visit to Hamirpur had a most memorable beginning—declaring Himself the "Lord of the universe" on February 3, having the entire village of Ichhaura observe complete silence that night, apologizing on behalf of the *mandali*—the *darshan* tour seemed to be filled from the first with a profound spiritual significance.

DISCOMFORTS AND DELIGHTS OF THE HAMIRPUR DARSHAN

1954 - PART III

The Avatar's Whim Has Rhyme and Reason

Traveling with Meher Baba was an unforgettable experience. In many ways it was like one's inner journey to Him made manifest and, perhaps, intensified in the process. Sometimes, all of one's resources—physical, mental and emotional—were not only brought into play, but strained to the utmost. However, these occasions were suffused with a sense of divine purpose and fulfillment.

But if one's mind and body and emotions were overtaxed, one's heart often experienced an exhilarating sense of delight which belied the restrictions and hardships one traveled under. Perhaps this is why people were eager to journey with Baba whenever He traveled.

Up to Ichhaura, Beloved Baba had agreed to travel in bullock carts, but He did not seem at all pleased that the car and the bus had not arrived as planned. Gaya Prasad Khare, a local Baba lover, was to be Baba's host at Rath. He was also the proprietor of a local bus service and owned two buses and a car. His son, Adarsh, was in charge of the transportation. But Adarsh was with the bus and car heading toward Baukhar and there was no way to get in touch with him. Everyone was upset at the inconvenience caused to Baba by the absence of the vehicles. Sripat Sahai Rawat, known as Shri bhai, was sent out on cycle by Baba's Hamirpur lovers to find out what had happened to them.

The road from Ichhaura to Nauranga was not, in the real sense of the word, a road at all. There were irrigation canals in that area and a dirt track had been scraped out parallel to them (with bridges periodically crossing the canals connecting these tracks) to facilitate their inspection by the government canal inspection officers. These "roads" had been

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repaired by Baba's lovers so that His car could travel over them, but recent rains had destroyed the results of all their labor.

Shribhai, after cycling for some miles, returned with the news that the roads were so muddy that he had had great difficulty traveling on them with his bike and that it seemed highly unlikely that a car or bus would be able to reach them from Nauranga. So, with some hesitation, Baba and His party again got into the bullock carts and started off.

The journey, however, soon proved to be a rather perilous one. The path in places was quite steep and very slippery with mud so that the carts slid from side to side and, at times, threatened to overturn completely. Fortunately, the entire party made it to Baukhar, a village approximately six kilometers from Ichhaura, without a mishap.

Baba had arranged to give *darshan* here, but as the village was small, the Meher lovers there thought it would be best to hold the *darshan* program at the Government Canal Inspection House, which was located just outside the village. One of the villagers, a devotee of Baba's who worked as a land surveyor, agreed to the proposal but he didn't have the authority to open the house itself for any one's use. So it was decided to simply use the verandah.

Shiv Prasad and some of the other Baba lovers of Baukhar set up a platform there but, to everyone's surprise, when Baba arrived He insisted that a carpet be spread on the ground in front of the verandah and it was from here that He gave *darshan*. The radiant peacefulness and beauty of Baba's face filled the open air. He gazed at the assembled villagers with a loving look and gave the following message:

Consider Me as one of you and try to love Me. But do it honestly, because God wants honesty. If you love Me, you will find Me in your hearts and homes. I give you My blessings.

Although the Baba lovers were naturally overjoyed to have had Baba's *darshan*, still some were troubled that Baba had refused to use the platform on the verandah of the bungalow. They had put their hearts into decorating it nicely and they

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wondered if they had done something to displease Baba. The reason became clearer the next day when a high government official visited the Inspection House and came to know of Meher Baba's *darshan* program. He remarked that the local Baba lover did not have the authority to give permission for the verandah to be used for any purpose whatsoever and he reported the incident to the head office, demanding that the land surveyor immediately be transferred from Baukhar.

The surveyor explained that although he had arranged for Baba to use the vacant verandah, in fact, Baba had given *darshan* on the ground in front of the house. He apologized to the officer and assured him that he would not do such a thing again. But the officer continued to harass him and demand his transfer.

Now it was clear why Baba, in His Omniscience, had refused to use the verandah. He had inconvenienced Himself to protect His lover. So many times it has been observed that Baba's sudden decisions, which often entailed changing plans and seemed inexplicable at the time, were always done with a reason. Even what seems like a whim, when it is the Avatar's whim, is full of significance. In this case, as the government premises had not actually been used, the officer's complaints against the surveyor were ignored by the head office and the officer himself was soon transferred to a distant place!

This episode not only reveals Baba's compassion for His lover, the land surveyor, but also brought home to the villagers of Baukhar His omniscience. Even today, Baba lovers witness Meher Baba's characteristic trait of making sudden and, at the time, baffling changes in their lives. But experience eventually convinces them that such unexpected "surprises" are for their own good. The Avatar's whim always has its own rhyme and reason.

"Elimination of the Ego is My Specialty"

After giving *darshan* at Baukhar, Baba called Keshav, Pukar and the other main workers and asked whether the car and

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bus would come or not. Keshav and the others, of course, had no way of knowing, but they assured Baba that the necessary permits to use a private vehicle on the government canal inspection roads had been secured and they were sure the drivers were doing their best to traverse the muddy roads and that eventually the car and bus were bound to arrive.

Baba was not happy with this answer. It was not the physical discomfort which bothered Him, but the delay of traveling by bullock cart was interfering with His spiritual work which was a matter of great concern to Him. Baba declared that if the bus and car did not arrive, He would be unable to give *darshan* to the villagers on the way as originally planned, for it was essential that He reach Nauranga by that evening.

All waited anxiously for the car and bus but when they did not arrive, Baba and His people set off once more in the bullock carts. Fortunately, they had only gone a short distance when, near Islampur, they heard a car horn sounding in the distance and shortly a mud-splattered car and bus were spotted lurching over the road.

Adarsh Khare had left Rath, only 33 kilometers away, with the bus and car at 6:00 in the morning so they could arrive in time. It was now 3:30 which meant they had managed only a little over three kilometers an hour! It had been only with the greatest difficulty that they had traversed the muddy and, in places, flooded roads. Adarsh, in fact, was actually feeling triumphant that he had managed to bring the vehicles at all since the roads were so bad. Excited with his success, he was not prepared when Baba began to reprimand him for not having the vehicles there on time.

As Baba took Adarsh to task, it came out that his father, Gaya Prasad, had gone to Allahabad to bathe in the confluence of the Ganges and Jamuna during the "Kumbha Mela." Although he was planning to return to Rath before Baba arrived there, Baba became even more displeased and conveyed, "Gaya Prasad invites me to give *darshan* and then he himself goes to Allahabad! What a pity!"

Baba then began to scold Adarsh once more for not having the vehicles there earlier. Adarsh began to weep, not just

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because of the reprimand, but because of the inconvenience that Baba had undergone in traveling by bullock cart.

But to what extent Baba was truly displeased with Adarsh is hard to know. It has been noticed that Baba sometimes expressed His displeasure at the way His orders were carried out, even when a person did his best to obey them. Perhaps this was done in order to wash away any feeling of egoistic pride that the person might have developed at having successfully accomplished the work entrusted to him.

Baba once told an English reporter, "Elimination of the ego is my specialty." He sometimes used to say, "Other ashrams are a vacation—nice, quiet meditation, yoga, etc. Here we do real work." This work is sometimes painful but is nonetheless necessary. The trick in doing something for Baba is to do one's best but know well, if one succeeds, that it is His will and His working which have accomplished that success. We have to be very particular about doing Baba-work, but without the thought, "I did it."

In the case of Adarsh, Baba soon relented and forgave him. He even embraced him with that sudden beaming happiness of His which had the effect of completely banishing any lingering feelings of unhappiness or guilt that the one scolded otherwise might have had.

Baba's Love Revives a Dead Tree

The journey from Baukhar to Jarakhar (a distance of about twelve kilometers) was a lot smoother now that the bus and car were at Baba's disposal. At Jarakhar Baba visited the hostel of the Meher Baba Junior High School which was founded and run by Baba's dear Shribhai. The students and teachers alike had labored in building the hostel. In its foundation they had respectfully placed a brick which had been touched by Baba and given to them during His previous visit to Jarakhar on November 26, 1952.

Baba now inaugurated the hostel by cutting a ribbon of flowers, strung across the door. Instead of sitting on the dais

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that had been erected, Baba sat on the floor with the students. Then tea and sweets were served to all. At this small and informal gathering, Baba gave the following message:

I feel very happy today because of what My dear Sripat has told me about the students, school and hostel here. I wish that along with the secular education, the students should also learn to love God who is the only Reality. I give My blessings to them for this. My love and blessings to you all.

Although Nauranga was only five kilometers from Jarakhar, Baba made a slight detour and visited a tiny village, Dhagwan, on the way. Dhagwan was the home of one of Baba's people, Vishwanath Sharma, known as Vishnu Singer. He had first heard of Baba from Babadas, one of Baba's *mandali* who, in the '40s, had traveled extensively through the Hamirpur District telling people about Meher Baba. Vishnu first accepted Baba as a Perfect Master and later as the Avatar of the Age. Vishnu worked with a burning heart in Baba's Divine cause and tried to please his Lord, Avatar Meher Baba, by composing and singing songs glorifying Baba's love.

To reach Dhagwan it was necessary to leave the canal roads and cut across the open fields. Once again the love and longing of the villagers to have Baba's *darshan* was touchingly evident as they had worked tirelessly to make the paths through the fields passable. They had even put red flags along the route so that Baba's car would not mistakenly make a wrong turn onto some local bullock track.

Even so, as it was now getting dark, the driver missed the turn and approached the village from the wrong side. Just as they neared the village, they heard a lot of people shouting at them to stop. They did so and thus narrowly averted falling into a deep ditch which was a little ahead of them. They had to backtrack to find the right turn and then approach the village again, from the right side this time.

Baba did not actually enter the village itself. A little way outside, Baba stopped the car and sat under a withered sheesham tree to accept the homage of the people for a little while.

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Actually the whole stop at Dhagwan was somewhat impromptu. Maybe it was the love of the villagers which touched Baba's heart and prompted Him to allow His car to be driven across the fields in answer to their longing. Love is a law unto itself.

After giving *darshan*, there was no time for the people to perform *arti*. But, as it turned out, Baba sat in the car for a while giving instructions to one of the *mandali*, and this gave the women devotees their chance to perform Baba's *arti* to their hearts' consent. Perhaps, Baba's instructions were given precisely for that reason! Baba then continued on His way to Nauranga.

A few days later the villagers were astonished to observe that the withered sheesham tree, under which Baba had sat, was suddenly putting out new leaves and beautiful yellow flowers. Since then, this tree has continued to be healthy and even to this day (1985) is flourishing. There is now a platform built around its trunk, commemorating Beloved Baba's visit and His life-giving love which made even the barren tree under which He sat, revive and blossom.

This brings to my mind another incident which occurred years later in Madras. In 1930, while visiting the home of C. V. Sampath Aiyangar, Baba planted a tree there. It soon grew into a huge majestic tree. Later when Baba gave *darshan* in Madras in 1947, He was led to the tree so He could see how large it had grown. A parapet had been built around it and Baba sat on this and leaned back with His head resting against the tree's trunk. Several beautiful photos were taken of Baba in this position.

But, in 1968, it became obvious that something was seriously wrong with the tree and horticulture experts were consulted. They all agreed that the tree had dried up and should be uprooted. The Aiyangar family would not consent to this and said that the tree had to be saved somehow. The experts said it was impossible. The tree had been planted by Baba so the family decided to write Him, although He was in strict seclusion at the time. They sent Him a letter explaining the whole situation.

The very next day they were astonished to see a tender green

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leaf flutter at the spot where Baba's head had rested against the tree. Was it just a coincidence or a prompt divine response? Soon the entire tree sprouted new leaves in a spectacular display which left the horticulturists amazed. If Baba's love can revive withered trees, just think what it can do for any heart that is given to Him. Truly Baba's love, compassion and omniscience are unfathomable.

Baba in a Subterranean Meditation Chamber

Baba reached Nauranga at 9:00 that night. He and most of His party were put up in a basic primary school while a few stayed in a *pandal* outside the hut of Narsingh Das. The next day, February 5, will remain as one of the most significant days in the history of the village, for it was on this day that Beloved Avatar Meher Baba majestically strolled through the streets of Nauranga, accepting the homage of the villagers as God and visiting their homes as a Friend.

Babu Ram Prasad (Babuji) was the main host. When Baba went to his house, it was crowded with relatives. Babuji introduced his family to Baba and then Baba asked him about a young woman standing at the back of the crowd whom Babuji had forgotten to introduce. Babuji explained that she wasn't actually one of his family, but came from a nearby village. She had had many troubles there and was finally forced to leave her husband and seek refuge elsewhere. Babuji had generously granted her space in his house to live.

Baba called her near and gave her some *prasad*. He lovingly consoled her, told her to remember Him daily and assured her that everything would be well and that all her troubles would be over in around fifteen days, and she would be able to return to her village then.

Although Babuji had not thought to introduce this woman to Baba, Baba, being the friend of the forlorn, seemed to know she was there. And, just as He had said, within two weeks all of her problems were resolved one by one and she returned to her village not long afterward.

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Baba's visit to Nauranga was marked by His informal visits to the homes of His lovers. He seemed completely at ease as He walked through the streets, visiting now this person's home, now another's. As Baba strolled through the streets, His divine effulgence seemed to flow from Him in delightful waves. The villagers were overjoyed to have Baba in their midst in this way. His every gesture or movement was so captivating, so enchanting, and suffused with divine meaning. Many of the house visits had been arranged previously, but some Baba visited spontaneously.

This happened in the case of Lala Ram Bharose. He lived in a very poor dilapidated house which happened to be on the route Baba was taking. Lala Ram wanted Baba to visit him but he had been too shy to express this wish to Babuji. When Babuji was in the process of leading Baba to the next scheduled visit, Baba, on His own, stopped and entered Lala's house. The *mandali* had taken a short cut to the next house, but Baba sent word that they should all return. Baba gestured, "Love has drawn me here."

With great joy Lala and his wife performed Baba's *arti* and distributed plums afterward. Baba instructed the *mandali* not to throw any of the plum away but to eat it all (excluding the pit of course). Baba's gracious response to the call of love is immediate.

One of the places Baba visited in Nauranga was unusual. This was the subterranean meditation chamber of Narsingh Das, a saintly ascetic. In the floor of his hut were stairs dug out of the ground, leading down some twenty feet to two rooms. There was another tunnel going down an additional ten feet to a small niche (4' x 3') carved out of the side of a deep well. The niche had originally been made for those who wanted an isolated spot to meditate. Access and egress was effected by means of a rope from the top of the well. It served as a ventilation shaft for the two rooms Narsingh Das had excavated. In the larger one, Baba and the *mandali* gathered while Narsingh Das performed Baba's *arti*.

The great love and devotion that Narsingh Das expressed touched all present. Baba gestured, "Whenever you remember

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Me wholeheartedly as you have done today, I will be here with you."

"Say, 'Baba! May You Never Forget Me'"

After visiting a potter's house, Baba went to Dillipat's home. In honor of Baba's visit, all the women in the family stood at the gate with large earthen pitchers (used for carrying water) on their heads. On top of these pitchers were placed small clay lamps, each with a wick burning in it. The women were singing devotional songs. It was a touching sight.

As Baba entered Dillipat's home, a smile illuminated His face and His eyes flashed with such brilliance that His divinity seemed to be contained therein. After *arti* was performed, Dillipat poured out his heart in adoration to Baba, his Beloved, and then began to weep bitterly, saying, "Baba, you are God, the Ocean of purity. I feel ashamed to say that although I try to love you and remember you, impure, lustful thoughts sometimes assail me and I feel greatly disturbed."

With infinite compassion, Baba told him not to feel upset about such thoughts. He gestured, "Do not worry. I will help you." And Baba lovingly offered him some *prasad* with His own hands. This filled Dillipat's heart with confidence to remain unaffected by his unruly thoughts.

When a wick in the heart is lit with Baba's love, it should be kept burning by remembering Him with the deepest gratitude. One finds then that the temptations of the world gradually fade away. With Baba's reassurance, Dillipat felt his faith gloriously fortified and his heart glowed with new hope.

Baba also visited the home of Hiralal who had great love for Him. Although a special space had been made for Baba to sit, He sat on the floor like one of the family. With a beaming smile, Baba expressed His happiness to be in Hiralal's house and asked him if there was anything he wanted. "Ask Me anything and I will give it to you," He gestured.

After a moment's hesitation, Hiralal replied, "Baba, I don't know what to ask for. My mind is all confused." Baba then, on

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His own, lovingly guided Hiralal. "Say, 'Baba, although I might forget You, may You never forget me'." Hiralal then repeated this request. When he finished, Baba made His graceful sign, "Given." Perhaps this is an indirect but meaningful indication as to what we should ask Baba.

Baba wanted to stay in Hiralal's house a little longer so He asked Amar Dan, a *qawwal*, to sing some good songs on love. This made the atmosphere even more charged with Baba's love and some of the people were moved almost to tears while one of them broke down and wept uncontrollably.

At Lal Diwan's place, Baba ignored the decorated seat outside the house and walked in and sat on a *charpai* (a wooden bed strung with thin rope). Meanwhile two men stood outside and fired a volley of rifle shots in Baba's honor which He enjoyed. At Badri Prasad's home, Baba again preferred to sit on the floor with the family instead of the chair that had been placed for Him.

After these two visits, Baba continued to move through the village but in a car. At one spot the car passed a group of women who were standing in the road ready to perform *arti* to Baba. Seeing their obvious disappointment as the car passed them, Baba told the driver to stop and then got down and walked back so that the village women could have their hearts' desire of performing His *arti* fulfilled. Then He continued walking to give a chance to some of the other women who were also hoping to worship Him in person.

"My Religion Is Love"

Nauranga seemed ablaze with love for Baba. Kishan Singh wrote, "In fact the whole village was having a touch of ecstasy It seemed as if the whole sky was echoing and reechoing the loving song, "Welcome to our dear Lord Meher Baba."

After lunch, around 2:00 P.M., there was a public program which lasted most of the afternoon, during which some 5,000 people took Baba's *darshan*. At such a time, Baba's eyes especially seemed full of love and life, and sometimes what can

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only be described as a divine splendor seemed to radiate from them. The villagers rushed forward eagerly to see Baba, as the Avatar's human form and face, each time He comes, is Divinity personified in its finest design. Baba distributed *prasad* to all and then gave the following message:

Although I appear to be silent, I speak through you all. I am ever silent and everlastingly speaking, but the time has arrived when I will soon break this apparent silence and then those who love Me will see My Real Self. Take the *prasad* of love that I give with love, eat it with love and the seed of love will be in it.

The Baba lovers of the village, out of their love for Baba which this visit had awakened, decided to build a place of worship on the very spot where Baba had given *darshan*. To help them get over the conventional ideas of temple and religion, Baba named this place for them as "Meher Dham" (Meher House). A year later, Baba sent one of His *mandali* to lay the foundation stone of Meher Dham. After five years, Babu Ram Prasad installed a life-size statue of Avatar Meher Baba inside Meher Dham. At the time of its inauguration, Meher Baba sent some profound messages to be displayed on the inner walls so all who came to Meher Dham would read and ponder over them. They are still there today and in part they read:

I belong to no religion. My religion is love.
Always remember that ceremonies cover Me but pure worship reveals Me.
All those who surrender themselves in love to Me will see and adore and realize the Reality behind My form.

The Perfect Master, Rumi, wrote the following two lines which seem to refer to the Avatar's advent:

That Monarch Supreme had shut the door fast;
Today He has come to the door, clothed in the garment of mortality.

The Avatar is Infinite Consciousness, clothed in human form

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so all that humanity may eventually find the Infinite Reality within themselves. The form of the Avatar is a bridge to the Reality behind it, because when we think about His form, or repeat His name, or remember any of the external details of His life, we are inwardly traversing the path to our Real Self.

Meher Dham at Nauranga thus helps keep the memory of Baba's visit to that village in the first week of February 1954 ever fresh and alive in the hearts of His lovers there. Of the importance of places like Nauranga, in the district of Hamirpur and elsewhere, we can say with Hafiz:

O Divine Beloved! Your foot-prints, on the ground You have trod, will be places of worship, even for advanced souls, for years and years to come.

A Special Form with Three Options

On the night of February 5, there was a *qawwali* program for Baba and the next morning, the 6th, Baba left Nauranga for Rath by car, while His *mandali* followed in the bus. Baba had warned the bus driver several times that he should stay close to Baba's car, but invariably the bus would fall behind. At one point, with Baba's car out of sight, those in the bus found a locked gate across the canal road. They had the necessary permit to travel on that road but the gate keeper was not around. They didn't know what to do and were anxious because they knew Baba would not be pleased if they were delayed.

A little investigation showed that Baba's car must have gone around the gate, going down a ditch and then up the other side to rejoin the road. It seemed doubtful, however, that the bus, with its much greater size and all of the baggage piled on top, would be able to duplicate such a feat without toppling over.

Some of the Baba lovers on the bus got all their keys together and started trying them in the lock on the gate, hoping that one of them might just open it, but to no avail. Finally, after half an hour or so, they devised a scheme for driving the bus around

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the gate and, with everyone's help, despite a few tense moments, they succeeded in getting onto the canal road and were soon hurrying to catch up to Baba's car. A typical adventure while traveling with the Avatar!

Gaya Prasad Khare was Baba's host in Rath, but Baba stayed at the residence of the principal of the B.N.V. Inter College. After lunch, Baba visited the College where Swami Brahmananda, who had founded that institution, welcomed Him. Baba expressed His appreciation of the Swami's efforts to serve the people by providing them with educational facilities. Such service, Baba explained, is an aspect of love for God.

Two years earlier when Baba had visited Rath for the first time (November 1952), the *darshan* program held then had been one of the largest given in the whole Hamirpur District. This year, the *darshan* program held on February 6, at 3:00 P.M. was not that large. Baba's face however beamed with affection as He took His seat on the dais and the faces of His dear ones sitting near the platform sparkled like fresh flowers after a springtime shower. Part of the message which was read out to those assembled is as follows:

I have come down from the Highest to your level. So take Me to be yours and naturally, automatically, you become Mine. . . . I have come down to your level and if, on that level, you love Me with all your heart, you will come to My Real level, because I am in you all. . . .

Before leaving Rath, Baba gave a sort of forewarning to the *mandali* traveling with Him. Just as He had reprimanded some of them for eating berries without asking the owner's permission at Ichhaura, now, in a general way He admonished some for being lax in their duties. With a serious look, Baba added, "Today I want you all to understand one thing. You all have been given duties, and Pendu is the 'controller.' You all must cooperate with him." Baba went on to warn that in the ensuing Andhra tour there would be so many people pressing forward to have His *darshan*, to touch Him, that unless the *mandali* were more diligent in attending to their duties and in cooperating with Pendu, there could be unfortunate incidents.

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In 1952, before going to the West, Baba had sent Eruch and Pendu to travel around India disseminating His message of Love and Truth. During their travels, if they found someone whose heart seemed overflowing with love for Baba, they would give that person a copy of a certain form they carried with them. This form had four separate categories to be checked. The person receiving the form was supposed to sign it and check whether they were willing to dedicate their money, their property, their service, or their very life to Baba.¹³

Similarly, in December 1953, about a month before Baba left for Hamirpur, Keshav Nigam, at Baba's request, had a form printed in Hindi which was distributed to Baba lovers in the Hamirpur District. Once again, there were options, each indicating a different level of commitment to Baba.

The first option was to be checked only by those who were ready to completely renounce all worldly attachments so they could be free to do anything Baba wanted and who were willing to give their lives for Baba if need be.

Those who were partially, but not completely, free from their worldly responsibilities, but who were willing to do any sort of work that Baba asked them to do, without sacrificing their lives, were to check the second option.

And the last option was for those who had many pressing worldly commitments but who were nonetheless willing to do anything Baba asked in whatever spare time they had.

After leaving Rath, Baba reached Dhanauri. It was here that Baba had called a meeting of all those who had signed one of the options in the form given them by Keshav.

Darbar-e-Khas at Dhanauri

Several times, during Baba's Hamirpur tour, He emphasized the importance of the meeting to be held at Dhanauri which He referred to as *darbar-e-khas* (special session of the court). Earlier, Baba had given instructions that a quiet place be found to hold it in, because He did not want any interruptions

¹³ See *Glimpses of the God-Man, Meher Baba*, Vol. III, p. 113ff.

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or disturbances once the meeting was under way.

That morning Baba made some visits to the homes of His lovers and then was led to the place where the *darbar-e-khas* was to be held. When He saw that it was near the pandal which had been set up for the public *darshan*, He was not at all pleased. Baba considered this site totally unsuitable for such an important meeting and so the primary school in the village was chosen as an alternative. However, the school proved to be too small to accommodate all the lovers who had checked one of the three options. In addition to this, the school was open on all sides.

Baba was upset and gestured, "I wanted to hold this meeting where we would be free from all disturbances from outside. This place, the school, is totally unsuitable. It seems the organizers did not realize the importance of this meeting."

Baba asked all those who had chosen either of the last two options to leave. When this was done, He then asked Keshav Nigam whether all those who had volunteered for the first option were present. Keshav said that all who had come to Dhanauri were present but that two people had not yet arrived in town. Baba looked displeased and conveyed through gestures, "These are the lovers who wish to dedicate their lives to me, yet, from the very beginning, there is not 100% obedience to a simple instruction—to be present here at a certain time. If the foundation is weak, the whole structure will collapse. Those who have expressed their readiness to completely renounce their worldly attachments and have signed the form, did not realize the significance of the opportunity given to them by Me."

Baba then turned to one of those present and asked, "Are you ready to give your life for me?" The person replied, "Yes, Baba." But Baba was not mollified; He still looked serious and annoyed over the absence of the two who had signed the form but had not arrived in time for the meeting. Baba gestured, "My mood has been spoiled."

Baba then canceled the whole meeting, commenting that if they could not even follow the preliminary order, given through Keshav to be at Dhanauri on the 7th, they would

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undoubtedly fail to follow any of His subsequent orders. Baba pointed out that if they couldn't obey Him in such simple things, they would never be able to give their very lives for Him. It was their enthusiasm which had prompted them to check the first option, Baba remarked, but mere enthusiasm was not enough as it lacked real strength of heart.

Baba continued, "People give their lives for their families, their friends and for their country, but to give one's life for Baba's cause is a different matter entirely." Baba explained further, "I have not assumed human form to give *darshan*, or so that people can perform my *arti*, or *puja*. The angels have been doing that for me for ages; those things don't interest me. I have come for a different purpose. Now I will have to do my work personally with and through my *mandali*."

Seeing the distress on the faces of His lovers, Baba softened the blow of the meeting's cancellation by assuring those present that they shouldn't worry about renouncing the world; they should simply go on attending to their every day duties but while doing them, from now on they should try to think of Him—their main concern should be to love Him. This love should reach such a pitch that their hearts became mad with divine agony and yet there shouldn't be the least element of show in it.

If this was not possible, Baba explained, then the next best thing was for all to attend to their worldly duties, but with the understanding that they were doing it all for Baba. And if they could not do that, then lastly they should serve the people without any desire for name or fame. Baba continued:

The essence of *lok-seva* [service of the people] is to give happiness to others at the cost of your own happiness. But, in a sense, true *lok-seva* is that which inspires others to love Me because in loving Me they shall find everlasting freedom.

Baba concluded with a remark that the meeting He had wanted to conduct that day at Dhanauri would have to be held in 700 years when He came again. Baba then embraced all who were there individually. Most of them were weeping

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because Baba had felt it necessary to cancel the meeting in which they had expected Him to accept them in His cause.

To console them, Baba repeated that they should simply continue to do their duty but all the while remember Him more and more. It did not occur to all those who were so terribly disappointed that in declaring that He would have to hold the meeting in 700 years, Baba was perhaps indirectly promising them that they would be with Him when He comes again! Of course this is only a guess. Unfathomable are the Avatar's ways, but every disappointment always bears within it the seeds of even greater future happiness.

"Who Are the Mandali?"

After the postponement of the *darbar-e-khas*, Baba left the school to give *darshan* to the public and the villagers. During such *darshan* programs, Baba would sometimes converse with the *mandali* and workers who were on the dais with Him, seeing to all the small details that had to be attended to. As someone approached, Baba might, for example, ask one of the *mandali* if the person had been given the message which He had wanted to give to him. Or Baba would remind someone that they should notify a certain person about a meeting which was to be held later.

One of the reasons Baba occupied Himself with such concerns may be that if He hadn't, if He had simply sat there, silently focusing His full attention on those before Him, His presence would have been too great for people to endure. Baba once remarked that the hardest thing for Him was not to reveal His glory, but to conceal it. Yet, out of His compassion for us, He took pains to do just that, so that we might have the courage to approach Him on our level.

As Baba took His seat, His divine radiance enveloped the crowd. His message for this particular program was:

I am now one of you. I am on your level. Wherever you find yourself, I am there too. I am small, big, poor, rich,

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illiterate, literate. . . . Try to love Me and make Me yours, because already you are mine.

As the *darshan* program continued, one of Baba's close ones asked Baba just exactly who the *mandali* were. This question was prompted by Baba's earlier remark during the abbreviated *darbar-e-khas* that He would now have to do His work personally and with the *mandali*. In the midst of the busy *darshan* program, with messages being read out and translated, and Baba singling out certain individuals for special attention, He found time to gesture, "The main thing is that there has to be a feeling of intimacy on both sides. To be one of the *mandali*, one must feel intimate with me, but at the same time, I too must feel intimate with them."

Baba added that those people who had been staying with Him for years and who asked for nothing were His *mandali*. He concluded:

The *mandali* are those intimate ones who are prepared to sacrifice their all for me. The one who gives his life to Baba, and leads a life totally under His guidance, who does not ask for any kind of reward, who does not care what happens to him—whether he is ruined or whether he prospers—and who takes pleasure in pleasing Baba is one of the *mandali*.

As there were several other villages Baba planned to visit that day, He did not distribute *prasad* as He usually did at a *darshan* program. Baba told those assembled that because people were waiting for Him en route, He could not stay longer or distribute *prasad*. "Take my *prasad* of blessings," Baba gestured as He stood, raised his hands in blessing to the crowd and then left the *pandal*. Baba got into the car but there were so many people crowding about it, hoping for one more glimpse of His radiant form, that Baba compassionately got out and climbed on top of the bus to give all there His *darshan*. Even so, the people were unwilling to disperse, so eager were they to have another few moments in the God-Man's company.

It proved very difficult to get the car and the bus out of the

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crowd. Baba called for Kumar, whom He had appointed as C.O. (commanding officer) to deal with such situations. All took up the cry for Kumar but it turned out he was on the bus which had been pushed aside so that Baba's car could pass. Later Baba admonished Kumar for neglecting his duty and told him that thereafter he should take care to see that he was always near Baba in case he was needed until Baba got into His car.

On the other hand, Kumar knew that once Baba started to leave, He wanted all the *mandali* to board the bus quickly so it could follow Baba's car without delay. That was why Kumar had gotten in the bus as soon as Baba's car had started to move. To live with Baba and please Him was not an easy thing! Traveling with Baba was no vacation, but an arduous and exacting ordeal wherein obedience was taken for granted and what counted was the degree to which one could happily forget oneself in pleasing Baba.

The mind has a tendency when confronted with orders from anyone to question, or to justify one's inability to comply. Some, ever after their hearts have been drawn into the love orbit of Meher Baba, find it difficult to cheerfully subordinate their will to His. But the life of those who live with Baba, and the way of love for any who wish to please Him is, as Francis Brabazon's *ghazal* illustrates, quite different:

Mind demands proof of what is entirely beyond mind.
One day it will learn to sit still and not ask, and find.

Love delights in poetry and parables, of itself it is sure;
Mind demands the prose of logic because it is insecure.

Let the demander question and sort—for trash is his
treasure.
The lover has another occupation—his Beloved's
pleasure.¹⁴

¹⁴ *In Dust I Sing*, p. 48.

"AVATAR MEHER BABA KI JAI!"
1954 - PART IV

Rock-like Faith, Flame-like Love

When Meher Baba left Dhanauri on February 7, His tour of the Hamirpur District was more than half over. It was filled with, and characterized by, the humble love and faith of the villagers who flocked to have Baba's *darshan*. Baba, in turn, was most loving to them in an informal yet intimate way, and His messages to them, which were given spontaneously, reflect His compassion and constitute a rich heritage for humanity.

How awe inspiring to think that during that week in February, God in human form was going from village to village in a remote undeveloped area of India, revealing to the people the profundity of His being the Infinite One in the utter simplicity of love!

An hour after leaving the *darshan* program at Dhanauri, Baba was in Muskara where He visited a junior high school. Every such occasion, aglow with Baba's presence, was to its participants a sacred, spiritual festival. It remained fragrant for them with its lively associations. To the pupils, as well as the villagers who had assembled to offer their respects, Baba spelled out on His board the following few words:

I feel very happy to be among you all. I feel every one of you to be Mine, and I want that every one of you should make Me yours. . . . I am the Emperor of emperors, but I am the slave of those who love Me. My coming here would be worth it if you could love Me. I give you My blessings.

Although Baba had originally agreed to give public *darshan* at nine different villages and towns in Hamirpur, He actually ended up giving *darshan* at many more places. Whenever people heard that Baba's car was going to pass by their village, they would all congregate on the road hours before He

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was due and invariably Baba would have His car stopped and would give His love and blessings to them.

At Nahdaura, for instance, a day or so earlier, around 400 people had gathered on the road singing, "Jai Meher Baba, Jai, Jai Meher Baba," and "Hare Baba, Hare Baba, Baba Baba, Hare Hare." As Baba's car approached, a number of women from the village came rushing forward. Baba gave *darshan* to all and just as He was about to leave, another group of women was noticed hurrying to the spot.

Baba got down from the car and sat on the ground and waited for them, thus allowing those who were already there a few more precious moments in His presence. When the women arrived, Baba touched the head of one, an elderly woman, who kept repeating "Jai" constantly, and blessed her with His touch. Later, Baba casually mentioned to the *mandali* that there had been something special behind that particular contact, but He didn't elaborate further.

It is hard to estimate the number of people who had Baba's *darshan* during this tour but it was obviously in the thousands. Baba ended up stopping at most of the villages along His route. At most places Baba distributed *prasad* with His own hands. Wherever Baba went, the people, irrespective of caste, religion, age, or sex flocked to Him and seemed overwhelmed by His divine presence. As Kishan Singh writes: "It seemed as if the Divine Saqi [tavern keeper] was busy making everyone intoxicated with His wine of love. Poor and rich alike were busy drinking this wine, forgetting all about their differences in worldly status."

Yet when Baba reached Chhani, in the afternoon of the seventh, only a few villagers were present. This was because most of them, not being particular about time, had gone to a nearby fair. They were having a good time, enjoying the delights of the fair and entranced by a wrestling match being held there, unaware that at that very moment Baba was sitting on the verandah of the government village dispensary giving *darshan* to the few who had stayed behind.

When the villagers learned that Baba had arrived, they came rushing back from the fair. The rest of the wrestling

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matches were canceled and over a thousand people ran back to Chhani, arriving at the dispensary just as Baba had gotten in His car and was starting to drive off.

The crowd surged around Baba's car and, despite requests from the *mandali*, refused to budge. In fact, those closest to the car probably could not have moved even if they had wanted to as so many others at the back of the crowd were pressing forward to try and get a glimpse of Baba. Seeing their enthusiasm, Baba agreed to come out and give *darshan* if they would all sit in an orderly fashion. Within five minutes about fifteen hundred people were sitting quietly around a platform in front of the dispensary. Baba, with His glowing eyes and a soft radiance about Him, sat on the platform so all could see Him.

At such times, there often appeared on Baba's face a serene sweetness which is impossible to describe but which melted the hearts of all who were fortunate enough to witness it. Baba's compassion and love were so divinely blended that the poor villagers felt themselves immeasurably enriched at having His *darshan*.

Baba dictated on His board:

If you have rock-like faith in God and flame-like love for God, nothing in this world will affect you. Flattery will not touch you, happiness will not humiliate you, misery will not trouble you.

I give you all My blessings to love Me and find that God alone is Real, and that will make you rise above this imaginary phenomenon and make you understand that BABA alone is Real.

At the close of this program, Nana Kher and Pankhraj sang Baba's *arti* in Marathi, which had been composed by Dr. C.D. Deshmukh. The refrain was, "Meher Baba, Sri Guruuraya. . . ." (O Meher Baba, glorious majestic Master! Bowing down to your feet, O Purifier, we perform your *arti* with the flame of love.) This *arti* was sung throughout both the Ha mirpur and Andhra tours of 1954.

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What Counts Where

After leaving Chhani, Baba reached Hamirpur that evening and spent the night at a *dak* bungalow. Early the next morning Baba was in the mood to give one of His infrequent discourses. He dictated the following profound message to Meherjee, which Eruch read from the board:

In the material world, every *pie* [cent] of money counts. In the subtle world, every ounce of energy counts. In the mental world, every force of thought counts. In the Beyond state, only God counts, and in the realm of the God-Man, everything counts as nothing and nothing counts as everything.

By this time, more of the *mandali* had entered the room and Baba continued:

God does not listen to the language of the tongue which consists of *jap*, *ziker* and *mantras*. He does not listen to the language of the mind which consists of thoughts about God through meditation and concentration. He listens only to the language of the heart which is Love.

So love God and become free in this very life. This love can be expressed in various ways, ultimately resulting in Union with God. The practical way for the common man to express this love, while attending to every-day life's duties, is to speak lovingly, think lovingly and act lovingly toward all mankind, irrespective of caste, creed and position, taking God to be present in each and everyone.

Later that morning, Baba paid visits to the homes of ten of His lovers. In addition to the principal workers such as Keshav Nigam, Bhawani Prasad and Rama Shankar, He also visited the homes of a student named Ram Lal and an office boy, Imam Ali. Pukar's flour mill was inaugurated by Baba visiting it and pouring grain into it with His own hands. The mill was thus started for the first time in Baba's august presence.

Although it was still only 9:00 in the morning, a large crowd had gathered at the *darshan* ground. The sun was softly shining

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and it was a glorious day. At public gatherings of this sort, Baba's splendor radiated outward so that even those sitting in the last line, at quite a distance from Baba, felt the warmth of His intimacy. Each one had the impression that Baba was sitting there, aware of their presence and bestowing His love on them in a special personal way.

At such programs, in addition to the *bhajans* and *artis* which were sung, local Baba lovers usually gave welcoming speeches to Baba as well. Pukar's brief introduction on this occasion was unusual as he began by confessing that in the past he had discouraged his acquaintances from loving Baba. On several occasions he had warned them against making the mistake of surrendering completely to Baba. But now, he continued, he realized his mistake. Baba was the fountain of love. To all who were interested, Pukar now wanted to testify to Baba's greatness. And those who scoffed, as he had done, would eventually have to admit their own ignorance in failing to recognize Meher Baba's Godhood.

As the crowd filed past, one by one, Baba folded His hands in *namaskar*. Sometimes He would sit motionless, sometimes He seemed preoccupied and the rapid movement of His index fingers seemed to suggest He was working on the inner planes. And then again, Baba would seem at other times to be fully interested in what was happening around Him, familiarly asking those who passed by about the members of their family—taking a personal interest in them and making them feel that they held a special place in His heart.

The message Baba gave to the public was similar to the discourse He had given earlier that morning:

We are all one. Everyone—rich, poor, man, woman, small, big, literate, illiterate—is entitled to realize the Divinity that is equally within us all. And the only way to know ourselves as God is by loving Him.

God does not listen to the language of the tongue. . . God does not listen to the language of the mind. . . He only listens to the language of the heart which consists of love, and this love does not need ceremonies or shows, but only

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silent devotion for the Beloved.

Infinite honesty is one of the aspects of God. So the least hypocrisy creeping in ourselves keeps us aloof from God. I am happy to be among you all and give you all My blessings.

"By Your Love Make Me Your Slave"

From Hamirpur, Baba traveled to Inghota where He visited the homes of the Paliwal and Nigam families; both were members of the reception committee. It was at Laxmichand Paliwal's house that Pukar, during Baba's first visit in November 1952, saw Baba in the form of Rama.¹⁵ It was a turning point in Pukar's life, for it was this experience which led him to wholeheartedly accept Baba as his Master.

After the house visits on the morning of February 8, 1954, a *darshan* program had been arranged for that afternoon. It was a common practice in the Hamirpur area to shower flowers on Baba. Now, at Inghota, as Baba's car approached the *darshan* grounds, the crowd lining the road showered it with flowers; it seemed to be raining blossoms. As Baba entered the *pandal*, flowers continued to be tossed on Him from all directions. It was an incredible sight, like a soft fireworks display created out of flowers!

A man named Varma got up and told the crowd that he had come from Allahabad for Baba's *darshan* even though all his companions had urged him to stay and bathe in the *triveni* (the confluence of the three rivers—Ganges, Jamuna and Saraswati—considered very holy) on the auspicious day of the "Kumbha Mela."

He proclaimed that by coming for Baba's *darshan* instead, he was bathing in the holiest *triveni* of all, and went on to impress upon everyone how fortunate they all were to be able to avail themselves of this rare opportunity to be in the God-Man's physical presence.

Baba's message for this program was:

¹⁵ *Glimpses of the God-Man, Meher Baba*, Vol. III, p. 208ff.

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The only Reality is to experience the Infinite within us. We are all One. From the beginningless beginning to the endless end, we all were, are, and will be One. I am within you all. . . . I give you all My blessings so that you can love Me and, by your love, make Me your slave.

Baba spent the night in Inghota and traveled the next morning to Khanna, arriving there long before He was scheduled to. There were very few people, therefore, standing near the place that had been selected as the site for Baba's *darshan*. But when the villagers saw Baba's car, they rushed to it. Baba gave *darshan* to them, but as there were many who were still coming, Baba walked straight into the interior of the village.

Here Baba sat on a raised platform in the street while the villagers beat a drum which was their usual method of announcing that all should assemble. Baba spelled out on His board that instead of their coming to Baba, Baba had come to them. He then proceeded to give *darshan* to one and all. Fortunate people!

As Baba was returning from Khanna, He noticed that one of His close ones, who had been ordered to stay near Him, was leisurely walking behind. Baba called him forward and admonished him for his negligence. It seems as if Baba was all love for the masses, but a strict taskmaster for those traveling with Him.

"Ask for My Forgiveness"

At Mahoba, which was the next stop on Baba's itinerary, He visited the home of Ram Sevak Khare. There, at the urging of Gaya Prasad, Baba participated in a very traditional Hindu form of worship. In general, Baba would not perform such ceremonies, nor did He encourage His followers to hold them, yet out of love for Gaya Prasad, Baba agreed to take part in it for awhile.

It was at Ram Sevak Khare's house that Janak Singh saw Baba again. Janak lived in Nauranga but was going to school

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at Allahabad. Janak's father, Babu Ram Prasad, was one of the main workers for Baba in Nauranga. Janak had returned home on February 3, with fruit and baked goods for Baba and His *mandali*. Having had Baba's *darshan* at Nauranga, he was now preparing to return to Allahabad. He had come to Mahoba to catch the train, but when he learned that Baba was there, he decided to take the opportunity to see Him again. So it was that Janak saw Baba once more. Baba said that Janak should now go straight back to Allahabad.

As Janak left the house, his friend Dillipat saw him and inquired where he was going. Janak said he was going to catch the next train for Allahabad. "But why not come to Mahewa where there will be a program this evening?" Dillipat asked him. This seemed like a good idea to Janak who was eager to see more of Baba. In fact, at the exciting prospect of spending the evening attending a Baba program, Janak totally forgot what Baba had just told him about returning straight back to Allahabad.

The thought that by going to Mahewa he would be disobeying Baba never occurred to him. Nor is this surprising. After all, Janak was new to Baba and he did not realize that Baba sometimes gave orders in a rather off-hand manner, as if He were merely making a suggestion. What makes it so hard to obey Baba is that often one is not even conscious of disobeying while in the very act of doing just that!

During the public *darshan* program at Mahoba, Baba had the following message read out that afternoon:

Throughout eternity, My message has been of love for God. If we love God wholeheartedly and honestly, we find Him within ourselves. So I give you My blessings that at least some of you may try to love God and find Him within you. Then My purpose of being among you will have been served.

On the way to Mahewa, Baba stopped at Ganhari, near the Kabrai railway station where He visited the village junior high school. He told the students there:

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For you students two things are necessary—honesty and humility. By humility I do not mean modesty, but that humility which upholds greatness.

From Gauhari, the road to Mahewa is just a dusty bullock cart track. The car and bus bounced so much on this road that it was feared the vehicles' springs might give out at any moment. On the way, Baba provided all with a little slapstick humor. He ordered the car to stop and Kumar, whose duty it was to escort Baba, ran from the bus to the car in case Baba was getting down. Just as Kumar neared the car, Baba ordered the driver to start again. So Kumar returned to the bus. But just as he got there, Baba's car stopped again. Once more Kumar had to run back to the car and, once again, just as he got there it started up. This time, however, Kumar jumped and managed to land on the carrying rack at the back of the car where he hung on as the car lurched over the roads. Finally, Baba stopped the car and, in a delightful mood, asked Kumar to go back and rejoin the others in the bus.

As Baba's car drove along the road, He passed Janak who was cycling the sixteen kilometers from Mahoba to Mahewa. Baba had the car stopped and Eruch called Janak over. Baba asked him where he was going. Janak replied that he was on his way to Mahewa to attend the program that night. "Didn't I tell you to go straight to Allahabad?" Baba demanded. Janak suddenly realized his mistake and simply folded his hands to Baba, standing there in embarrassed silence.

Seeing Janak too overcome to speak, Baba compassionately prompted him, "Ask for my forgiveness," which Janak then did. Immediately Baba forgave him and gave him a new order, which was to attend the program at Mahewa that night! See Baba's compassion. He not only forgives, but even reminds us to ask for His forgiveness so that we can be freed from the consequences of our mistakes!

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Baba Hears a Lover's Silent Yearning

Baba reached Mahewa a little before sunset on the evening of February 9. A small crowd of people had gathered to welcome Baba. Spontaneously Baba on His own decided to sit with this group for a while, giving *darshan* to those assembled. He looked happy and His presence exuded a feeling of tender, human closeness. At the end of this impromptu *darshan*, Baba looked lovingly at the crowd and gestured, "It is your great fortune that my tour of the Hamirpur area is ending here, at Mahewa." Perhaps this was a prophetic hint of the unique drama which was to unfold later that night.

Previously, Baba had told Keshav Nigam that He wanted a selected few of His lovers to keep a vigil that night, staying awake until the early hours of the morning. This was to take place at Meherastana (*astana* literally means a threshold), a wooded hilltop about a half mile or so outside the village of Mahewa itself. There, a small clearing had been made and a *kuti* (hut) constructed for Baba in November 1952 at the time of Baba's first visit to Mahewa. This had been done so that Baba could stay near the village and yet have a secluded place to retire to.

Keshav, according to Baba's instructions, had prepared a list of those who were invited to participate in the night vigil. As people arrived for the program, all those who had not been selected were asked to cooperate by returning to the village, which they did, although some of them, naturally, went back disappointed.

Baba arrived well before 9:00 and took His seat on a specially prepared *gadi* in the *kuti*. He emphasized to the *mandali* and all those invited that they would have to stay awake the entire night. But to make it easier for them, Baba arranged for coffee to be served several times throughout the night and also had three *qawwals* present to entertain all and to keep the atmosphere lively.

After finishing his supper at Mahewa, Janak Singh cycled the short distance to Meherastana, but as he approached the clearing in front of Baba's *kuti* where a *pandal* had been set

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up, he was told he could not enter. Twice he approached and twice he was turned away without being given a chance to explain his situation to Keshav.

Others, who had similarly been denied admittance, were leaving the hill, taking the path that led back to the village. Janak, Matrudatta Shastri and one other Baba lover, however, decided to stay. Even if they could not join those under the *pandal*, they thought at least this way they would be nearer Baba and could enjoy His presence from where they were.

After a little while, Janak decided to try again to gain admittance and this time a heated argument with Keshav ensued. Eruch came over to inquire what it was all about. On seeing Janak, he told Keshav that Baba had given special permission for Janak to attend the program. Thus Baba made sure that Janak didn't disobey His second order. What perfect timing that Eruch happened to come by just at that moment!

This left the other two still waiting outside. As time passed and it seemed clear that they were not going to be allowed to enter, one of them became discouraged and went back to the village to sleep. Shastri decided to stay on by himself.

Matrudatta Shastri came from a prominent Brahmin family in Nauranga. He and his brothers were *Shastris* (Sanskrit scholars). The three brothers became quite well known as pandits in the Hamirpur District and M. Shastri became the most renowned for his ability to recite the *Bhagawata* in Sanskrit, the *Ramayana* by Tulsidas in Hindi and for his erudite elucidations on both books.

He was in great demand at religious gatherings throughout the district to recite from these sacred works and to explain the spiritual truths mentioned therein. And he was handsomely rewarded for his commentaries through the lavish gifts that people presented to him. Matrudatta became so well-known that he started his own school and soon had a group of Brahmin students.

In 1952, during the mass *darshan* in Rath, he had Baba's *darshan* for the first time. He was not convinced that Baba was the Avatar, but that initial glimpse seemed to ignite

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spark of longing for God within him and he began visiting many famous places of pilgrimage. One time, on returning from Hardwar, he confided to Janak, who also lived in Nauranga, that although he had visited so many holy places and met so many saintly personalities and holy men, he still wasn't satisfied.

In fact, all of Shastri's searching had only convinced him that Meher Baba was definitely a great spiritual authority. He put Baba's photo in his room and used to meditate on it. One day, during his meditation, Baba appeared before him and revealed that He was Rama. After this experience, Shastri felt that Baba was not just a spiritual authority but God in human form, the Avatar.

After this, Shastri began attending every program held by Baba lovers throughout the Hamirpur District. At each program he would give speeches in praise of Baba, affirming His divinity. His brothers, and the other pandits in the area, became quite upset. They told him to stop making such speeches and his brothers said if he continued they would disown him.

His former students also deserted him for they could not accept this change in their teacher. It was hard for them to understand the depth of his faith in Baba. Many times in the presence of other Baba lovers, Shastri was verbally abused by the more orthodox in the community, but he would merely humble himself and continue to tell one and all that Baba was the Avatar. Some Brahmins excommunicated him and he gladly accepted this, saying, "If they excommunicate me and my family, I still have Baba, but if Baba were to disown me, I would have no place to go!"

Ever since Baba had returned to Hamirpur, Shastri had been following Him through every stop on the tour. Now he was sitting alone at Meherastana, so close to Baba's *kuti* and the group sitting in front of it under the *pandal*, but excluded from their company. Shastri was silently yearning to be with Baba, and Baba not only heard the cry of his heart, but He responded to it—just as He had declared in the very first message He gave in Hamirpur this time, "God does not listen

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to the language of the tongue or the mind; He listens and responds to the language of the heart."

Just as the program was about to begin, Baba asked Keshav if all those selected had come. Keshav replied that they had. Baba then asked Keshav to go out and see whether anybody was hanging around outside the clearing. Keshav went out and checked and reported that Matrudatta Shastri was sitting outside the gate, whereupon Baba told Keshav to call him in. When Shastri was informed of this he was overjoyed that Baba had responded to his inner call of yearning and his love and faith became still even deeper.

Ecstatic Night Vigil

At 9:00 on the evening of February 9, the night vigil began with some devotional songs. The three *qawwals* proceeded to keep the assembly spellbound while Baba's vibrant presence was such that none felt sleepy. Baba sat on the *gadi* prepared for Him in the *kuti*, while the others sat outside the hut, under the *pandal*. Illumination had been arranged for the program with the delightful result that all could see Baba.

In between songs, Baba would sometimes comment on the profundity of the lyrics, or make a joke or send a message to one of His lovers sitting under the awning. It is difficult to capture the divine intimacy or the glorious atmosphere which prevailed that night around Baba. His very skin seemed translucent, glowing with a divinity which He could not contain; yet His personal liveliness, wit and charm made all feel that Baba loved them as individuals on a very human level. This blending of the divine and human is the hallmark of the Avatar.

At some point before midnight, Baba told everyone to go wash their faces and hands and then return within ten minutes for prayers. Baba washed His own hands and, exactly at midnight, all stood as Eruch read out the Prayer of Repentance in English. Ramjoo then read its translation in Hindi and Dhake in Marathi.

After the prayers, the singing continued but, if anything,

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the atmosphere was even more charged. The sweetness in Aziz's voice and the heart-touching *ghazals* he sang moved everyone there. In Baba's presence, the songs took on deeper meaning and no longer were merely words, but spoke the feelings of the heart directly. One felt one's own love for Baba given expression in those *ghazals* and songs and Baba's beaming smile of appreciation made it clear that one's love was accepted and then returned a thousandfold.

Vamanrao expressed the thoughts of many when he sang, "O Parabrahma, Parvardigar, won't you please cast a sidelong glance of Grace at me!" Then the solemnity of the atmosphere was changed to lightheartedness by Amar Dan's comic story-songs. His humorous acting as he narrated the stories kept everyone in stitches and the hours passed quickly.

At ten minutes of 1:00, on the morning of February 10, Baba called Keshav to Him and, referring to all those sitting before Him, gestured, "You all have no idea what good fortune is being granted to you at this moment!" Keshav, with deep affection and reverence reflected on his face, folded his hands to his Divine Beloved and said, "It is all your grace, Baba!"

Writing about this evening at a later date Keshav recalls:

At that time, Baba was in an extremely happy mood! His fingers ran on the alphabet board and spelled the words: 'AVATAR MEHER BABA KI JAI' and He simultaneously raised His right hand up to confirm that JAI. Baba also declared in His extremely happy mood that it was for the first time in this Incarnation of His that He had here openly and clearly declared Himself to be the Avatar. He also declared there that after dropping this body of His He would come after 700 years again. By declaring His Avatarhood at that particular spot of His creation, who knows what fortune Baba granted to that place, Meherastana, and to me and to the people there at that time.

A little bit after Baba had spelled out "Avatar Meher Baba ki jai" on His board, Meherjee mentioned to Keshav that by the Zoroastrian calendar February 10 was Baba's birthday. Keshav shared this unexpected news with all sitting outside.

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With this announcement an ecstatic feeling of love and happiness swept through the hearts of all there.

Keshav was moved to spontaneously chant Meher Chalisa, forty beautiful poetic stanzas of praise of Baba, which he had composed in Hindi during Baba's first visit to Meherasana in November 1952. Vishnu Singer then led everyone in a birthday song, "*Badhai gao aye hain Meher Avatar*" (Let us rejoice and sing: Avatar Meher has come) which he composed then and there. At the conclusion of this song, the atmosphere became even more intense. Kishan Singh writes in his diary: "This song worked wonders over the hearts of all. . . and the atmosphere was charged with love to such an extent that it was as if 'a bomb of love' had burst." Vamanrao was sitting outside Baba's hut weeping in ecstasy and Baba called him in and embraced him.

M. Shastri extemporaneously recited some Sanskrit verses of welcome to the Avatar. Baba expressed His appreciation of Shastri's recitation. The impact of the whole experience on Shastri's heart was such that from then on he gave up all other work and devoted himself to traveling from place to place, telling people about Baba and declaring Him as the Avatar.

Vishnu performed *arti* to Baba and then recited the "O Parvardigar" prayer in Hindi and almost all there spontaneously joined in and chanted the prayer with him. Baba then called all, one by one, into the *kuti* where He embraced them. As His lovers entered that small hut, Baba's divinity was so palpable that many were moved to tears. Baba's eyes seemed like two pools of infinite compassion and as He embraced His lovers in His arms, they embraced Him in their hearts. On leaving the hut, some started reciting odes of praise to Him. It was truly an ecstatic love feast for the heart and that night is enthroned in the memory of those who were lucky enough to be there!

After all had had Baba's embrace, the night vigil ended. It was now close to 5:00 in the morning, the time when, on February 25, 1894, the Avatar had taken birth once again to awaken the slumbering heart of humanity.

Although he was not present, Francis Brabazon seems to

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have captured something of the flavor of what transpired that night and early hours of the morning in the following couplets:

By God! but those glances that the Beloved was flashing
Were nut-crackers to our hearts, and floods from eyes were
splashing.
Our beloved Master was hugely amused at the loving
quarrel
Of each singer with each, to outdo him and win the night's
laurel.
When the last cups were drained and song settled into a sigh
Young dawn was scattering rose-petals all over the sky.¹⁶

Day of Demarcation

So overwhelming was the experience of being in Meher Baba's presence at Meherastana during those early hours of February 10, that many who were there did not realize the deep significance of what had just transpired: this was the first time that Baba had openly introduced Himself as the Avatar in a large public gathering of His lovers.

As early as 1921, Upasni Maharaj had said to Baba, "You are the Avatar, I salute You," but Baba referred to His true status only obliquely to His close ones. Although He had conveyed to a few of His *mandali* in the '20s that He was the Avatar, they did not comprehend the true significance of this remark.

In the early '30s during His second visit to England, when a reporter asked, "Are you divine?" Baba answered, "I am one with God, I live in Him, like Buddha, like Christ, like Krishna." Kitty Davy's mother first met Baba at this time and she asked Him, "How can I understand and love you?" Baba replied, "When you pray, have my picture before you." "I have always the picture of Christ," she responded, to which Baba answered, "Keep looking at Christ's picture. It is the same."

In the late '40s, Jean Adriel wrote a book about Baba

¹⁶ *In Dust I Sing*, p. 116.

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entitled *Avatar*, but its subtitle was: The life story of the Perfect Master Meher Baba.

Until the mid-50s, Baba was unmindful whether people called him a Perfect Master or Avatar or both. He seemed content to let His lovers at large regard Him in any way they chose. For example, during Baba's two *darshan* visits to Ha mirpur and Andhra, His lovers sang songs proclaiming Him as the Avatar, but despite this, at the end of each program, Baba's *arti* in Marathi praising Him as a *Sadguru* would be sung and then everyone would shout, "Sadguru Meher Baba Ki Jai." Or sometimes they would hail Baba as, "Avatar Sadguru Meher Baba."

But February 10, 1954 serves as a day of demarcation. For on that day Baba disclosed, not just to a few of His close ones but to all that had gathered, that He is the Avatar. And after that date, Baba always referred to Himself as the Avatar. He would sometimes even tell the *mandali* who were writing replies to letters His lovers had sent, that they should not just refer to Him as Meher Baba but as Avatar Meher Baba so that His devotees and lovers would be reminded of who He really is.

And in His book, *God Speaks*, which was published in 1955, Meher Baba cleared away the confusion surrounding the terms *Sadguru* and Avatar. He explained in detail the difference in functioning, authority and status of the two. Although they both share the same gnosis of "I am God," the *Sadguru* works for a limited section of humanity while the Avatar's work is universal.

Also, after dropping his body, a *Sadguru* eternally remains consciously and individually as Infinite God, but never returns to the world. It is only the Avatar who periodically assumes a human form to awaken humanity to a realization of its true spiritual nature. Even when the Avatar drops His body, He remains accessible to all as the Master of masters, and resides in the hearts of His lovers as the Eternal Beloved.

As Jesus said, ". . . I lay down My life that I might take it again. No man taketh it away from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have the power to lay it down and I have the power to take it up again." (John 10: 17-18.)

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It seems that the Avatar's public declaration of His Avatarhood is an important event in His work and that there is a divinely ordained moment, each time the Avatar comes, for Him to make it. For years, Krishna allowed Himself to be accepted by the cowherds as a playmate, by the *gopis* as a companion, by His subjects as the king, and by some as the Lord, but it was not until the battle of Kurukshetra that He revealed His Universal Form to Arjuna and gave to the world His teachings, as compiled in the *Bhagavad Gita*, which declare that He is the Avatar.

Jesus's ministry in Palestine was very short, but even so He was careful not to proclaim Himself as the Son of God, except to His disciples or cryptically to the public. This can be well seen from the passage in St. Matthew in which Jesus asks His disciples who the people take Him to be. They replied that some took Him for Elias, some for John the Baptist, some for various other prophets. Jesus then asked who they took Him to be, to which Simon answers, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." After blessing Simon for this answer, Jesus then "charged His disciples that they should tell no man that He was Jesus the Christ." (Matthew, 16:20.)

It was only during His trial, before His crucifixion, that He unequivocally affirmed His Divinity as He answered the questions, "Are you the Christ?" by responding, "I am." (Mark, 14:62.) Although expressed in a different way, we can also see a comparison in the enlightenment of Gautama the Buddha, and the revelation of Muhammed, the Messenger of God. Until the moment of His public declaration, the Avatar (the Christ, the Buddha, the Rasool) seems unconcerned about who the people take Him to be.

There also seems to be an ordained moment in everyone's personal relationship with the Beloved to accept His Avatarhood. Few are blessed by Meher Baba to accept Him as the Avatar the moment they first see or hear of Him. Usually one is drawn to Baba because of His attributes—His love, His charm, His wisdom. One easily accepts Him as a good man, a reliable guide, a saint, or even a master and Baba is content with this. Baba does not insist or expect that people should

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accept Him as the Avatar right away. His game of loving patience is unfathomable. Whatever His lovers take Him to be—friend, guide, master—He not only accepts, but fulfills that role to perfection. Accepting Him as the God-Man takes time and invariably is an act of His grace.

Over the years, one's relationship with Baba slowly thrives, conviction in His divinity gradually deepens until, at the ordained blessed moment, one's heart very naturally and totally accepts Meher Baba as the Ancient One. Baba's open affirmation of His Avatarhood, in that hut at Meherastana, helps hasten this process and, as such, seems to have both a divine and a human significance.

On the one hand, it served as a day of demarcation which initiated a new rhythm in the Avatar's divine work. But on the human level, Baba's declaration that He is the Avatar serves as an external symbol of the inner grace He bestows on His dear ones, awakening in their hearts the certitude that He is not just a saint or a Master, but the Avatar—God in human form.

Baba Draws His Mandali to Him

When the Avatar takes human form, His very presence draws His intimate disciples to Him in a most natural way. They need no discourses or declarations, just a look into His eyes, or a gesture from Him to follow, and their lives are transformed and they are ready to live and die for Him.

For these close ones, if they do not come to Him in the natural course of events, the Avatar Himself goes to them. Thus Jesus sought out Simon (Peter) and his brother, Andrew who were fishing and said, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." And, "They straightaway left their nets and followed Him."

Similarly, the early group of Meher Baba's disciples did not come to Him because of any promise of spiritual advancement that Baba held out to them, or because of Baba's declaration of His divinity, but simply because of the love awakened in their hearts for Him which made them "straightaway leave their

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nets" to follow Him. This was true not only of the early Eastern disciples like Buasaheb, Masaji, Pendu, Padri, Baily, Daulatmai (Mehera's mother), Gulmai (Adi's mother), Pilamai (Dr. Goher's aunt), Mehera, Khorshed, Naja and others, but also for the early Western disciples.

During Meher Baba's first visit to England in 1931, He stayed at Kitty Davy's parents' house at 32 Russell Road, Kensington. When He arrived, Margaret Craske held the door open for Him. As she did, she saw Baba as, "a vision of gentleness, grace and love that touched the heart immeasurably." Later, describing her initial meeting with Meher Baba, she recalled, "I only knew that from that moment . . . there has never been a moment's doubt as to His being the embodiment of love and life."¹⁷

Kitty Davy was another whose life was changed from her initial contact with Baba. Recalling the first night that Baba spent in her parents' home, Kitty writes:

About six of us packed into the large spare room. I slept on the floor. Margaret tells me that in the middle of the night I jumped up from the floor and, going to her bed, shook her. She awoke with a start. "What is the matter? Anything wrong? Why are you weeping?" I replied "He is so wonderful—so lovely!" In the morning I had no recollection of the incident whatsoever.¹⁸

Delia DeLeon's first meeting with Baba occurred a day or so after Kitty's. She reminisced about her time with Baba during that London visit as follows:

During that week I went about like one in a dream ; I was stunned with the wonder of Baba, nothing else existed for me. I saw him every day, and from then on I had an implicit trust and faith in him; I asked no questions, I wanted nothing from him. I gave my life into his keeping and knew my search was at an end.¹⁹

¹⁷ *Dance of Love*, back cover.

¹⁸ *Love Alone Prevails*, p. 13.

¹⁹ *The God-Man*, p. 96.

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"When the Master is Ready"

However, not all of Baba's close ones accepted Him instantaneously upon their first meeting. Malcolm Schloss's account reflects another aspect of Baba's drawing His dear ones to Him.

After visiting England in 1931, Baba decided to visit the U.S. that same year, although He didn't know anyone there. He cabled Malcolm and his wife Jean, who had only heard about Him but had never met Him, to prepare to be His hosts when He came. With the help of Margaret Mayo who offered the use of a large gray stone house overlooking the Croton River in Harmon, New York, they, with the help of friends, prepared for Baba's arrival.

In 1953, Malcolm sent Adi a manuscript titled, "When the Master is Ready," describing Baba's stay and his personal experiences with Him. The following is an excerpt from it:

My first interview with Baba was . . . the next afternoon. I was chopping wood for the fireplace in his [Baba's] room when he passed with Chanji. . . . He stopped and picked up a comb which had dropped, unnoticed from my pocket. I was touched. Something warm stirred within me. I had had as yet, almost no personal contact with Baba, but I knew that he was revered by thousands of people in India as a God-realized being, another Krishna. And here he was, noticing a lost comb, stooping to pick it out of the dust, handing it to me with a sunny smile! I thanked him, and he asked, in gestures, if I would like to join them for a walk.

We descended the long flight of narrow wooden steps that wound from the house down to the private landing on the Croton River far below. The sun was setting as we reached the landing. . . . We gazed for a moment, silently. Then Baba took the alphabet board out of his pocket, and turned to me. "I am God," he spelled out on the board, simply and directly.

"I know," I answered, quietly thinking to myself, "so am I."

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I did not realize, then, the vast difference between Baba's constant experience of the indwelling divinity and my bland, intellectual assumption of it. But Baba did not mind. He knew my limitations, even if I didn't—and he knew my potentialities, better than I did. That was why he had come, to help me to realize both. So he continued patiently, "I am the Ancient One. . . ."

I was still convinced, then, that the way to realization was to find the God within oneself, without dependence on outer things, or other persons. I was not seeking a master. I did not wish to become a disciple.

It was not, however, until the twelfth night of his visit that I capitulated. The Westerners had gathered in the living room after dinner. Meredith [Starr] was explaining to some of the group, who had Theosophical backgrounds and Theosophical ideas, Baba's teachings in regard to the inner planes. I grew suddenly very tired of words. I was glad that Baba, at least, was silent. And as [politely] as I could, I excused myself for bed.

Before I retired, Meredith came to tell me that Baba wished everyone to meditate on him just before going to sleep. . . . I did not then believe in meditation on any person. I had never done it, nor did I wish to do it. I determined not to accede to this request.

But when I started to go to sleep I found myself thinking about Baba in spite of my decision. I could not seem to get him out of my mind. . . .

It must have been about midnight that I awoke from sleep, with tears pouring from my eyes, and a realization, in my mind, of Baba's true nature and mission. I have never been able to put this into words. As Kabir has said, "It can never be told with the words of the mouth, it can never be written on paper." Baba had revealed to me his Universal Form, as Krishna revealed to Arjuna—and with the revelation went all my reservations. I capitulated. I knew what Baba was. I knew what his mission was. I knew it was my destiny to serve him.

The next morning, when I saw Baba, he embraced me

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and asked in pantomime, with a twinkle in his eye—whether I had slept well. I nodded, then exclaimed, "Baba! Why don't you reveal yourself to everyone as you revealed yourself last night to me. . . ?"

Baba smiled, said nothing, and embraced me again.²⁰

Avatar Meher Baba's relationship with each of His dear ones is unique, just as His relationship with each soul in creation is unique. For each individual the Avatar reveals Himself at a different time and in a different way. The one constant is that with everyone the Avatar relates in a simple, direct and loving manner.

This long digression was meant to illustrate a point—that, in general, the Avatar's declaration of His being the Son of God, the Prophet, the Buddha, the Ancient One is not primarily for His *mandali*. It is for His dear ones who have been connected with Him for lifetimes, but who did not have the good fortune to live with Him. Their relationship with the Avatar, however, is very deep, and His declaration of His Avatarhood is like a well which suddenly taps and releases the waters of His love, bubbling forth in the conviction in the hearts of His dear ones that He is indeed who He says He is—the Ancient One, the Avatar.

Second Lease on Life

Returning to our account of Baba's second Hamirpur tour, Baba agreed to visit the homes of some of His lovers in Mahewa on the morning of February 10, only an hour or so after the memorable all-night vigil had ended. That morning, Keshav's wife brought him the news that her younger sister, Lalit Kishori, was on the verge of breathing her last.

She had been suffering from both typhoid and double pneumonia. The doctors had given up hope and informed the family that she was not going to live much longer. By the evening of February 9, she had lost the power of speech and her eyes had turned to a stony stare. Yet, even in this critical

²⁰ *The Awakener*, Vol. XIX, No. 1, pp. 53-58.

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state, she had gotten up and tried to rush for Baba's *darshan* as soon as she heard about His arrival. But, overcome by weakness, she had collapsed unconscious at the door-step.

Now, the next morning, it seemed as if the end was fast approaching. Hearing of this, Baba consented to also visit Kishori's house. Just before He arrived there, she regained consciousness and began to stare fixedly at a small framed photograph of Baba which she held upon her breast.

Baba went to her side and lovingly caressed her face. In a very faint voice she implored, "Baba, my Lord, please help me. I am in great agony!" Baba gazed at her with His bright, soothing eyes, and left the room. With gestures, He conveyed to the others that it was 99% certain that Kishori would not recover. He asked Keshav to tell her to take His name until her last breath. "When she has no more strength to utter My name audibly," Baba instructed, "tell her to repeat it mentally." Keshav went in and conveyed this message to her.

Then, to Keshav's younger brother, Devendra, Baba prescribed a special treatment to be administered to Kishori according to an exact schedule. Devendra later confided his impression that if there had been any chance of recovery at all, Baba's prescription, at least from the standpoint of medical science, would have ended it. Yet, to the amazement and delight of all, Kishori's health was restored.

It was felt by everyone there that Baba had granted her a second lease on life. The best medicine may not prolong a patient's life, yet an apparently wrong treatment by the Avatar can bring the hoped for result. The Avatar's blessing and loving remembrance supervene all laws of medical science, and can turn what would ordinarily be "bad medicine" into a pure boon. By Baba's grace, Kishori is alive even to this day (1986)!

Meherastana: Threshold to Meher, the Avatar

Within a few hours, Baba returned to Meherastana from His house visits in Mahewa. It was here that He wished to conduct

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a meeting He had called of some of His workers and lovers residing in the Hamirpur area.

During this intimate gathering, Baba took His seat outside the kuti, and His close ones sat on the ground around Him. Whenever Baba was in the company of His lovers, a gentle blissful feeling seemed to emanate from Him reaching the hearts of all. Sometimes, without a word being exchanged, those with Baba felt their hearts call out to Him and heard His answers in a silent loving dialogue.

This meeting was to discuss the activities being done by those in Hamirpur to disseminate Baba's message of love to the public. Baba emphasized that all should be completely frank in expressing what they felt. At His urging, a member of the reception committee, Gaya Prasad, mentioned that the selection of the people to attend the night vigil struck him as arbitrary and a bit unfair.

This complaint indirectly reflected on Keshav but instead of reprimanding Keshav, Baba with His swift and subtle humor conveyed that throughout Eternity, whenever the Avatar visits the earth, such differences of opinion among His dear ones are present. Even at the time of Krishna such disagreements among His close ones were there. Baba smiled and added that His habit of patiently hearing such disputes in a way broke the monotony of His work.

Baba pointed out that until one realized God, one could not escape one's ego. Even advanced souls, up to the fourth plane are not free from egoistic tendencies. Only one who is established on the fifth plane is saved from the ill effects of egoism.

Then, looking around the gathering, Baba asked if any of the others wished to say anything. Pukar tried to make some conciliatory comments, but Baba insisted that all should use this opportunity to unburden themselves of any misgivings they might be harboring in their hearts concerning one another. Baba lovingly conveyed that He wanted all to feel completely free and none should hesitate when asked by Him to speak out what he honestly thought or felt.

Reverting then to the earlier disagreement between Gaya Prasad and Keshav, Baba asked them questions in such a way

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that it soon became apparent that Keshav had been acting on instructions from Baba which Gaya Prasad hadn't known about. On the other hand, it also became clear that while Keshav had literally followed Baba's orders, he had also in some cases used his discretion. Under Baba's skillful and lively handling of the situation, both Gaya Prasad and Keshav realized that the other was sincerely trying his best to obey Baba and each asked forgiveness of the other for his failings and lack of tolerance. Baba looked pleased at this open admission of error and determination to cooperate fully in the future.

Baba then spelled out on His board:

I bring out your weaknesses because I love you. Be honest. Weaknesses are there in everyone. You should not be afraid of them; you should be afraid of dishonesty. Who does not get bad thoughts? Even if you have the worst possible thoughts, the important thing is to take care of your actions.

With a short pause, Baba continued:

Had it not been for the weaknesses in every one, there would have been no difference between Me and you!

During this short meeting, which was really another *sahavas* for Baba's Hamirpur workers and lovers, He skillfully let everyone get everything off their chests and yet saw that there was no lingering bitterness or disharmony resulting from the frank exchange of opinions.

Baba once stated that He alone does His work. He does it in spite of us and not because of us. What one does outwardly in Baba's cause is less important than what Baba does inwardly for that person. To one of His dear ones, Baba once conveyed, "Your business is to love Me; the rest is My business." If we take refuge in Baba's heart—His everliving presence—and take care, while doing Baba's work, not to turn a breeze of disagreement into a hurricane, we will be attending to our business. In addition, we will be more receptive to Baba's business in us.

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Baba's second glorious and eventful *darshan* tour of the Hamirpur area ended at Meherastana. It concluded, however, amidst transportation problems. The permit to travel on the canal roads had expired on the ninth. So, on the tenth, not long after Baba's workers' meeting at Meherastana, He and His party had to board a new bus to take them to Hamirpur and yet another from there to take them to Lucknow where they boarded a train for Bombay.

In Bombay, the *mandali* found they couldn't reserve seats on the bus to Mahabaleshwar from Poona. As Baba had specifically expressed His wish to have the entire party reach Mahabaleshwar by February 12, there was a certain amount of urgency and anxiety to get advance booking.

On arriving at Poona, they found that all the seats on the Mahabaleshwar bus had already been booked. The *mandali* were in a fix. In the lives of His lovers, Baba makes the impossible possible but, concerning His own plans, the possible was sometimes rendered nearly impossible. Fortunately, at the last minute, someone who had bought a block of seats on the Mahabaleshwar bus appeared at the reservation office wanting to sell the tickets back to the clerk. Pendu immediately purchased them and thus all were able to reach Mahabaleshwar on the twelfth. A good ending!

Meher Baba's second visit to Hamirpur will be remembered primarily for the night vigil at Meherastana. *Astana* literally means "threshold" and Meherastana, in a way, served as a threshold between Meher Baba's disclosing His Avatarhood to His *mandali* and His affirming it to the world at large.

Only the year before, at Dehra Dun, Baba had stated in one of His messages, "If I am the Highest of the High. . . ." Now, at Meherastana, that "if" was removed for good. The next year a new *arti*, "*Divya Sanatana*," glorifying Baba as the Ancient One, the Avatar, was composed by Madhusudan. This replaced Deshmukh's *arti* acclaiming Baba as a *Sadguru*, which was no longer sung in public programs.

Thus, the little hut on a hill known as Meherastana has become a place of immense spiritual importance, while February 10, 1954 is regarded by many who love Baba as one of

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the most significant dates of His ministry; for it was on this day that Meher Baba openly rang the bell of His being the Avatar and it continues to ring to this day: "Avatar Meher Baba Ki Jai!"

**BABA LEAVES MAHABALESHWAR
FOR ANDHRA
1954 - PART V**

Small Darshan at Poona Railway Station

During Meher Baba's tour of the Hamirpur District, He conveyed to His *mandali* that once they were in Andhra they would witness one of the aspects of His *Lila*—the tremendous fervor of the masses to greet the Avatar. And this proved true from the day Baba reached Vijayawada until the day He left Andhra Pradesh. The exciting twelve-day non-stop tour remains unsurpassed in the memories of the *mandali* for everywhere they went, in the villages as well as the towns, thousands rushed to have Baba's *darshan*.

While some in the crowds stared in amazement at Baba's radiant face, in which His Avataric beauty and divinity were perfectly blended, others, in their surging enthusiasm to reach Baba, to garland Him, to bow down to Him or offer their respects in some way, became so unmanageable that the *mandali* and the volunteers, despite their best efforts, could not control the crowds.

In response to the people's fervor, Baba's outpouring of love, His gracious giving was unparalleled. And despite the uproar, in His All-knowing love, Baba reigned over all in silence, in complete control of every situation. His very presence was a healing balm for the masses. No wonder that later many "miracles" were attributed to Baba, but He, Himself, as always, remains the greatest Wonder in creation—God-become-Man.

Just a week after returning from the strenuous *darshan* tour of Hamirpur, Baba left Mahabaleshwar once again for a whirlwind twelve-day tour of Andhra. Adi, as previously ordered, drove Baba to Poona with Eruch and Gustadji accompanying them. They arrived at the railway station by 8:30 on the morning of February 19, 1954.

About fifteen minutes earlier, the passenger train to Vijayawada

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had steamed into the station precipitating the customary frantic rush of passengers to find seats and to get all their luggage aboard. In the midst of this maelstrom, a group of about eighteen of the *mandali* were busy loading all of their baggage into a third-class compartment. No sooner had they done so than someone brought the news that Baba had arrived and most of them went out to see Him.

There was also a small crowd of Baba lovers from Poona waiting at the station to take advantage of this opportunity to see their beloved Master. They gathered around Baba as soon as He got out of the car and, with them following, He walked through the station to the platform where the train was waiting. The Poona lovers had arranged for a comfortable chair to be brought to the platform for Baba and, as there was still an hour before the train was scheduled to depart, Baba sat there, looking radiant in His pink coat and white *sadra*.

The Baba lovers who gathered there were in a happy, buoyant mood at being in His company once more after a long time. Their faces glowed and their eyes sparkled with their love for Baba, the Avatar of the Age.

One of Baba's early disciples from the Meherabad days happened to live in Poona. This was R. K. Gaddekar. He had come from a poor Arangaon family, but had risen to a high position as a deputy director in the state government. Yet, despite this, his nature remained completely unaffected. In fact, his utter simplicity and child-like devotion to Baba was astonishing to witness. He had been a teacher in the school Baba established at Meherabad in the late '20s. And later, with Baba's help, he completed his own higher education in England.

On seeing him, Baba started teasing him that he had gained weight. Unaware that Baba was joking, Gaddekar answered with complete seriousness, "I don't think so." With a captivating smile on His face, Baba continued, "You're getting fat and no wonder! It's because you don't worry about anything; you leave all of that to me!" Much laughter greeted this jest, for Gaddekar's absolute faith in Beloved Baba was well-known to all.

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And so the time passed, with Baba chatting with His close ones; asking after their family members and generally creating that atmosphere of light-hearted and loving intimacy which was so much a part of Baba's gracious companionship.

Sadashiv Patel, another of the early *mandali*, put a beautiful garland around Baba's neck and was rewarded with an embrace. But as people on the platform caught a glimpse of Meher Baba sitting there, they too came hurriedly to greet Him. Not just the passengers, but some of the guards on duty at the station, railway officials and even the hawkers came rushing forward to pay their respects. Soon the scene resembled a small *darshan* program and the *mandali* were hard pressed to control the situation. All were pushing forward to get closer to Baba and it was only after strenuous efforts that the *mandali* finally managed to make a queue so that all could file by Baba in an orderly fashion.

"I Have Never Seen Another Like Him!"

One of those standing at the back of the crowd was K. K. Ramakrishnan. He had first heard of Meher Baba in the early '40s while stationed near Poona in the Indian Army. He had purchased a copy of *Geeta-Rahaspa*, an English translation of the *Bhagavad Gita*, with a commentary by Sri Lokamanya B.G. Tilak. The book also included an appreciation of the *Gita* by Meher Baba. Ramakrishnan was impressed with Baba's words although he did not know who Meher Baba was. He carried this book with him throughout his travels in Southeast Asia and read it often, thus frequently being reminded of Meher Baba's name.

In 1951, he met Adi. K. Irani at his office in Ahmednagar. Adi greeted him warmly and offered him tea. When Ramakrishnan mentioned that he had been studying the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and the works of Vivekananda since 1943, Adi remarked, "You will find, embodied in Meher Baba, the Brahman [ultimate reality] which you have been reading about."

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Ramakrishnan began to develop great love and respect for Baba, but it was not until three years later that he finally got the chance to see Him, on that sunny morning of February 19. About his impression of this first glimpse he writes:

I saw Meher Baba for the first time on platform number two of the Poona Railway Station. He was on His way to Andhra Pradesh with a large number of His disciples; Francis Brabazon, the Australian poet, was among them. Meher Baba was seated on a comfortable upholstered chair, radiant and garlanded, receiving the homage of His devotees. He was flanked by two tall men standing on either side and a large number of people were struggling to get near Him. Most of His devotees in Poona were there, besides the passengers. . . seeking His *darshan*.

I have an inherent aversion toward crowds. Hence, though longing to go near Him, I left the idea of forcing my way through the crowd and contented myself with seeing Him from a distance. I climbed over a raised portion of the bridge connecting the platforms from where I could see Him clearly.

The moment I got there, Baba coincidentally got up and walked into the train and occupied a seat near a window where I was able to see Him every moment very clearly. I stood there absorbed in His presence for over an hour or so.

It was, I think, a specially reserved compartment for Baba and His men. People were crowding in front. . . trying to get near. . . if possible to touch Him. Some were offering Him gifts of fruit and small packets of sweets, biscuits, etc. He was accepting them with one hand and giving them to people as *prasad* with the other. He was a magnetic personality, utterly impersonal in being.

There was a smile on His face—a beam of light shining into the hearts of all, giving an ineffable joy that made people forget their woes, at least for as long as they were in His presence. His smile was so enticingly enchanting that those who were blessed to witness it would want to lose themselves in it.

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There was Eruch mopping perspiration from Baba's face. There were other *mandali* around Him who, later on, were destined to enter deeply into my life. Gadekar was there too, busy running up and down. All were so absorbed in Him that they paid no attention to the world around them. When the train moved out of the platform, I got down and went to work.

"I have never seen another like Him," was the impression I carried with me when I returned. And His smiling face seemed to accompany me.²¹

Baba Introduces Francis to the Mandali

A third-class compartment had been reserved for most of the *mandali*, and two second-class coupes as well: one for Baba and Eruch, another for Adi and Francis Brabazon. As they were traveling, Baba came to the third-class compartment to introduce Francis to the *mandali*. This was Francis's first visit to India and only those who had been with Baba in Myrtle Beach in 1952 had met Francis before.

Baba told the *mandali* that Francis had been head of a Sufi group in Australia but had flown to India to join them on this *darshan* tour. Baba then turned to Francis and continued:

I will tell you why I called you. I will also tell you what you have to do later on. In the meantime, all that you have to do is observe minutely everything the people do there [Andhra] and then you will have to tell me everything you've seen, heard and grasped.

Remember I am perfectly Divine and perfectly human simultaneously. So no one, even the *rishis*, can fathom Me.

When Francis returned to Australia later that year, he wrote a booklet, a brief poetic account of Baba's Andhra visit; in the introduction Francis writes:

I had met Meher Baba nearly two years before at Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. This meeting was the culmination

²¹ *Divya Vani*; September, 1975; "Reminiscences V", pp. 5-7.

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of ten years of spiritual search for that ideal Guide in whom I could unreservedly place my confidence; the man who, I felt, had mastered every difficulty and obstacle which still confronted me.

During the previous ten years, I had studied the methods and practices of the great Sufi schools, and had read fairly widely in Vedanta, Buddhism and other systems, including Taoism and Confucianism. In Meher Baba I found that person who not merely *knew* these things, but was the living embodiment of all these systems of knowledge. In other words, he was a man who had reached the summit of Truth; in religious terms, was God-Realized.

Of course, I knew that Baba, as everyone affectionately calls him, had been saying for many years that he was God-realized, was, in fact, an incarnation of Godhead, a God-Man (in the same meaning as Christ is believed to be by the Christians, Mohammed by the Mohammedans, Buddha by the Buddhists, etc.); and I knew that the Sufis and thousands of people everywhere recognized this claim, but as with Thomas, I had to see for myself.

Well, I had seen; and the cry of the deepest parts of my consciousness had been answered. I was satisfied that if ever it was possible to "see" God on this earth, I had seen Him.²²

A Foretaste of Andhra

The passenger train carrying Beloved Baba and the mandali reached Kurduwadi, where I was working as a schoolteacher, at around 3:00 in the afternoon. The entire platform was crowded with people who wanted to have a glimpse of Baba, while in the waiting lounge, over 500 pupils from the school were assembled. I spotted Baba sitting with the mandali in the third-class compartment. I approached and requested Him to bless the people with His darshan. The platform was jam-packed, but luckily Baba's compartment had stopped just opposite the waiting lounge and Baba quickly walked there.

²² *Journey With God*, p. 3ff.

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The lounge had a roof but was really part of the platform and instead of walls it had arched openings so that even once inside, Baba could be seen by those on the platform. However, the crowd was so large that only those near Baba could really see Him. So Baba climbed up onto the counter of a fruit stall which was in the corner of the lounge and sat there. He folded His hands in *namaskar* (greeting) and turned to all sides so that none was excluded from His divine welcome. He looked enchantingly beautiful.

Even so, the crowd began to press forward to get a better look. The *mandali* formed a cordon in front of Baba, but the crowd continued to push forward. On the right-hand side of the counter were different sized wooden cupboards containing fruit. Eruch helped Baba to climb onto one of these so that He would be more visible. From there, Baba climbed onto an even higher cupboard until, at last, He was perched at the very top so that all could see Him clearly.

Eruch, Kumar and the others had a difficult time, however, getting Baba down and safely escorting Him through the crowds to the train once more. I had arranged with the railway caterer, before the train arrived, to serve tea to Baba and the *mandali*, but the crush was so great, none of the waiters dared to attempt it. They were afraid the tea would only be spilled and all the crockery broken.

As the train whistled and pulled out, I noticed that in the mad rush, the glass panes of the cupboards of the fruit stall had been smashed to pieces. As Baba had allowed me to join Him for His Andhra tour at Kurduwadi, I made my way through the crowd and entered the third-class compartment where Baba and the *mandali* were. People were still flocking to the train windows to get a glimpse of Baba and following the train as it pulled out of the station. Perhaps this short, but intense, interlude was a foretaste of what it was going to be like in Andhra.

Before I got settled in my seat, Baba expressed His concern over the broken panes of the fruit counter. Then He instructed me to read a typed sheet which one of the *mandali* handed me. It was a list of instructions for those traveling with Baba. The

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main point was that all were duty bound during the entire tour to take care of Baba 's person as if protecting the freshness and perfume of the most delicate flower!

As I finished reading, Baba looked at me and gestured, "Did you follow it?" I replied, "Yes." With a twinkle in His eye, Baba continued, "Then you must pay your fee for reading it! Give ten rupees to the *faltu fund*." *Faltu* literally means "good for nothing!" Very willingly and happily, I opened my purse and gave the amount to one of the *mandali*.

To my surprise, he asked me whether I had purchased my railway ticket. I said that of course I had. "How much did it cost?" he asked. I told him a little over twenty-five rupees, whereupon he immediately gave me that amount. So I gave ten and got back more than double! Aren't Baba's ways wonderful? One moment the Avatar, the Highest of the High, was perched on the top of a dusty cupboard, giving *darshan* to the people and receiving their adoration, and the next moment, the fairest Flower of humanity was sitting in a third-class compartment with His close ones, teasing and joking with them in easy familiarity.

As I had wanted to give Baba and the *mandali* tea at Kurduwadi, Baba graciously granted me permission to provide it at another station. As it turned out, this station between Kurduwadi and Sholapur was famous for the quality of its tea, whereas Kurduwadi enjoyed no such distinction. Thus, Baba not only fulfills even the insignificant wishes of His dear ones, but when we allow Him to do so in His time, the result is better than we could have arranged on our own!

Baba then went back to His coupe, but before the train pulled into Sholapur, He returned to our compartment. A Baba lover, Sri Jaju, who was an active social worker and an ardent follower of Gandhi, came into the compartment to urge Baba to give *darshan* to the crowd which had collected in the open grounds just outside the station building.

Baba lovingly agreed and was led to a small dais which had been set up. Jaju gave an exhortatory speech in which he dramatically called upon Baba to break His silence soon so that humanity would be freed from its suffering. In response

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to Jaju's emotional appeal, Baba spelled out on His board words to the effect, "Until I break my silence, I hear through you all and speak through all of you." Continuing, for the benefit of the people, Baba added, "To know Me, you have to love Me. Only through love can you know Me. If you honestly serve the people, that too is love."

Although the *darshan* program at Sholapur seems to have been an impromptu affair, it was a great occasion for the people there. Baba had last given *darshan* there in March 1943. At that time, there had been printed in one of the local newspapers a very brief item about Baba along with His picture. Most people probably never even noticed it, yet for me it had enormous significance. In my case it was the beginning of that soft, almost imperceptible, yet ultimately irresistible pull of the Avatar that finally drew me to Him.²³

So too, it is impossible to know what other hearts were started on their journeying to the Avatar's feet from this brief *darshan* that evening of the 19th. Baba can use the most insignificant thing to awaken hearts, and any contact with the Avatar, no matter how brief, is anything but insignificant! Unfathomable are His ways.

Baba Catches a Hand and Captivates a Heart

The Poona-Bezwada (Vijayawada) Passenger train was not an express. It stopped at all stations along the way and often for more than twenty minutes at each junction. This had the advantage of giving Baba enough time to give *darshan* at places like Kurduwadi and Sholapur, and it also meant that Baba, whenever He wished, was able to come and visit with the *mandali* in their compartment. With the incomparable pleasure of Baba's company, that thirty-three hour journey was quite enjoyable.

All through the night of the 19th and for all day of the 20th we journeyed, finally arriving at Vijayawada at about 8:30 on the night of February 20. There was a huge crowd on the platform waiting for the train which was bringing them their

²³ See *Glimpses of the God-Man, Meher Baba*, Vol. I, p. 25.

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beloved Master and when they saw Baba they all began rushing toward His second-class coupe shouting, "Avatar Meher Baba Ki Jai."

As Baba stepped down to the platform, He was welcomed by the reception committee and garlanded, while others in the crowd eagerly pressed forward to have a better glimpse of Baba's divine face. In the midst of this tumultuous reception Baba plunged into the crowd and walked straight up to one of the men standing there and reached out and took his arm. Y. Manikyala Rao (Baba later nicknamed him as Manik), who was one of the main workers, introduced the person to Baba saying, "Baba, this is Majety Rama Mohan Rao. He is the host in whose house you will be staying."

Majety had never met Baba before. He was a prosperous businessman who, along with his partner Chinta Sarva Rao, had been approached by KDRM to see if they would contribute anything to help out during Baba's upcoming visit to Vijayawada. Neither partner was especially interested in Meher Baba, but their family doctor, K. Suryanarayana, loved Baba and they respected him so they agreed to contribute some money.

Meanwhile, the organizers were looking for a house for Baba in a quiet locality as Baba had indicated that He preferred such a semi-secluded residence. In spite of their best efforts, they were unable to find such a place for Baba. They mentioned this to Majety and Chinta and the former generously offered his newly constructed house for Baba's use.

Manik wrote Baba asking if this met with His approval and received the reply that the house was acceptable but only on condition that Majety's family move out when Baba was there. Majety and Chinta, however, were given the rare privilege, even though neither was yet a "Baba lover," to stay on the ground floor when Baba and a few of the *mandali* occupied the first floor. Both men decided to take advantage of this opportunity while Majety's family readily consented to the unusual condition laid down by Baba, and went to live with Chinta's family.

On February 20, when the train arrived, Chinta and Majety

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were there to greet Baba. The crowd was large and, as they had never met Baba and didn't have the same fervor to get close to Him as some of the others, they ended up caught in the middle of the throng, some distance away. Yet, unerringly, Baba walked up to Majety and took him by the arm. The others were amazed that Baba seemed to know that Majety was His host even before Manik could introduce him. But undoubtedly, Baba knew that Majety and Chinta would later become stalwarts in His cause in Andhra—silently doing whatever needed to be done, never wavering in their conviction in Baba and their love for Him.

Recently, when Chinta was asked about his and Majety's first impression on meeting Meher Baba, he remarked, "We both loved Him from the first, as the Avatar. For us there were no dramatic incidents or anything of that sort; He was just irresistibly lovable and we loved Him. It was so natural." It seems that the true significance of Baba's first meeting with Majety was not that He picked him out of the crowd and caught hold of his hand, but that He caught hold of his heart as well!

Even to this day, Baba continues to "catch the hands" of His dear ones, often when they aren't even aware of it, and captivates their hearts as He guides them on their journey to Him.

Announcement of the Workers' Meeting

Some of Meher Baba's lovers who were residing in different parts of India were graciously allowed by Beloved Baba to accompany Him during His second Andhra tour. They had been asked to join Baba and the *mandali* at Vijayawada. As Baba got down, He was warmly received by KDRM and surrounded by the crowd who had come to greet Him. So those who had been invited to join Baba had to pay their respects to Him from a distance. However, the very proximity of their Beloved Master filled their hearts with joy. They happily called out greetings to the *mandali* and embraced them. It was a glorious and festive get-together, a warm family reunion

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in Baba's boundless love.

Baba was conducted to a large comfortable, well-decorated car which was waiting outside the station. The *mandali* were led to a bus which had been kept for them, while all their baggage was loaded into a truck. KDRM had told Majety and Chinta that they shouldn't ask Baba to visit their cloth shop, but that on the way to Majety's house Baba's car would pass it. Baba, however, on His own asked N. Dharmarao, who was to be Baba's driver for the whole Andhra tour, to stop the car as they drove by the cloth shop. The two partners, whom Baba later used to refer to as "twins," were given the opportunity of presenting Baba with some nice cloth.

The caravan then proceeded to Majety's house which was to serve as Baba's residence. There He was introduced to more of the Andhra lovers as well as Majety's family. Baba's *arti* was performed in the traditional Hindu way by burning camphor on a plate.

The burning camphor, when waved before an image of God or, in this case the God-Man Himself, symbolized the individual self being consumed in love for the Beloved. When *arti* is over, it is customary that the plate with the burning camphor be passed among those present who reverently hold their palms over the flame and then touch their forehead or heart with them. This gesture, a symbolic *darshan*, represents a bowing down to the flame of love, the Light within each one's heart.

After *arti*, Baba started telling KDRM and the others from Andhra about the important meeting of His workers that He was going to hold. He concluded, "I want all my workers in Andhra, small or big, to be present on March 2 (at Rajahmundry). What I want to explain to all my workers I will tell there. This is my last trip to Andhra. . . so anyone whom KDRM thinks might work for Me should be present."

Baba then asked the *mandali*, except for the few that were to stay with Him, (Eruch, Pendu, Chhagan and Sidhu) to go to the *choultry*²⁴ where they were to stay and have dinner and then retire. Baba told them not to stay up late but to rest well so they would feel fresh for the next day's programs.

²⁴ A resting place for visitors where rooms and food are provided by a charitable institution for nominal rates.

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By 5:00 the next morning, on the 21st, most of us had had a refreshing hot water bath and were ready for the first full day of Baba's Andhra tour. Soon a caravan of two cars, a jeep, a bus, a van and a truck were parked outside on the road. Quickly, but in an orderly way, we all put our baggage in the truck. Pendu, the "Controller of Movements," then gave the order to board the bus. We all got in. Little did we realize that during our twelve days in Andhra, although we had many hosts and stayed in a variety of houses, our home more often than not was the bus. Even our seats remained constant as it was found practical for everyone to sit in the same place each time. That way, at a moment's glance, we could tell who, if anyone, was missing.

The bus pulled up in front of Baba's residence before 7:00 and we found a number of people outside the house waiting for Baba to come down the stairs so they could pay their respects to Him. We walked up the steps to the first floor where Baba was staying. He was telling Dr. Dhanapathi Rao and others of the importance of the workers' meeting. He repeated, "On March 2, I want all my workers at Rajahmundry." Continuing, Baba explained:

I have been doing My work since the beginning of time. I am the only One who really works, but if you want to share or help in My work, then it must be done honestly, no compromise. No competition, no ego, for that spoils the work.

Baba then had the three messages read out which He had dictated earlier that morning. These three messages were given out over and over again during the Andhra tour but as their contents are similar to the messages given during the Hamirpur *darshan* tour, only the first and concluding sentences are quoted below:

Don't listen to the voice of the mind. Listen to the voice of the heart. . . .

Love God wholeheartedly and honestly, sacrificing every thing at the altar of His Supreme Love and you will realize

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the Beloved within you.

E. N. Murthy, from Penugonda, brought it to Baba's attention that although Penugonda had originally been scheduled for a *darshan* visit, now it seemed that KDRM had left it out of the schedule entirely.

An animated discussion ensued during which the organizers justified their position and pointed out the practical difficulties of such a visit and Murthy insisted that Baba should come. After letting everyone express himself on this affair, Baba decided that as KDRM had originally promised that He would go, in order to keep their word He would visit Penugonda for five minutes on the night of the 24th.

In retrospect, it seems as if Baba had already set the ball rolling for the ensuing workers' meeting with this discussion, as the differences of opinion among the Baba lovers in Andhra were being brought to the surface by Him.

After this serious discussion, Baba, as was one of His ways, lightened the mood of the gathering by teasingly reminding the organizers to be careful about the food arrangements during the Andhra tour. "I need only a little rice and *dal*," He remarked, "but some coming with me are good eaters!" And with a twinkle in His eye, Baba added, "So you will have to take care to see that they get enough to eat!" Baba's expression as He made this joke was so delightful that some chuckled and some could not help laughing. With this natural break in the proceedings, Baba and the *mandali* descended the stairs to the waiting vehicles.

"I Am the Ocean of Purity"

Baba left Vijayawada for Guntur on the morning of the twenty-first at around 7:00. Baba's car was followed by another car and a jeep which carried some of the Andhra workers. The *mandali* traveled in a large bus, while a truck carried the luggage.

This caravan reached Guntur at about 9:00 that morning.

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M. Sudarsanam was the host. As we pulled up in front of his house, volleys from guns were fired to welcome Baba. He was received with great love and led inside the house where a dais, with statues of lions on either side, had been set up for Him.

Baba allowed those present to file by and greet Him, but prior to this they had been reminded that they should not touch Baba's feet or bow down to Him. Much before Baba's arrival in Andhra, He had sent some specific and some general instructions to the local and over-all organizers. These were to be followed strictly by all. In one of the letters from Baba, He had stated, "This time I am coming there [also] as a *sadhak* [an aspirant], so no one should bow down to Me prior to My bowing down to them and no one should touch My feet."

As His lovers filed past, Baba gently patted some on the head, some on the cheek and occasionally He embraced some. Baba had, at first, taken His seat on the decorated dais but this arrangement proved inconvenient for those approaching Him for His *darshan*. So Baba got up and sat on a window ledge which was more accessible to all. After a while He walked into the family's *puja-room* which was used exclusively for prayers and meditation. A full-size picture of Meher Baba graced one of the walls.

As Baba entered, the host and his family accompanied Him. M. Sudarsanam asked Baba to sanctify His own picture by touching it, which Baba did. Then Baba asked the host where his wife was. M. Sudarsanam explained that she wasn't there because it was the time of her monthly period. According to Hindu custom, she had to keep herself away so as not to defile the things that were to be offered to Baba.

Baba smiled compassionately and conveyed: "I am God in human form. I am in everything; I am everything. I am that Ocean of purity which is not defiled by anything. Call her." When she came, Baba patted her and took the sweets she offered Him, tasted a little of it and then distributed these to all gathered as His *prasad*. The Avatar's presence is like a blazing fire that consumes all dross; nothing can contaminate His divine life.

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Praja (Public) Darshan at Guntur

Baba left Sudarsanam's house to visit the Sai Baba Samaj (Society). Baba had once stated that Sai Baba was the *Qutub-e-Irshad*, or "head," of the five Perfect Masters who precipitated His Advent. A chair had been arranged for Baba under an awning facing the proposed site of the temple to be built for Sai Baba. Out of deep reverence for His Master, Baba preferred to sit on the ground.

A welcome address was read out, a part of which follows:

Bhagwan! We feel highly blessed and purified by Thy august presence in our midst. . . . Thy feet have sanctified the site. It is our fervent prayer that by Thy blessings, the *mandir* [temple] to be constructed on the site, should serve as a spiritual Center in this holy land.

At the request of the Sai Baba devotees, Baba then touched Sai Baba's photo and also the foundation stone for the temple. Baba remarked:

I feel very happy on this occasion. This grand old Man [Sai Baba] was and is a unique personality in the spiritual world. He knows, and only a few like Him who are the personification of Perfection know, that I am the Ancient One.

Then, Baba proceeded toward a park in the middle of town where a *pandal* had been erected for *praja* (public) *darshan*. Baba was garlanded and the welcome addresses were read out. Afterward, Baba had Ramjoo read in English "The Real Darshan" message, which He had given earlier in Dehra Dun.²⁵ This message was the first among the thirteen that Baba had earlier sent to KDRM from Mahabaleshwar. These messages in English were translated into Telugu and then printed in the form of a booklet, as well as loose pamphlets, which were distributed freely to the people.

After one of the Andhra Baba lovers read out the Telugu translation of the message, Baba dictated:

²⁵ See *Glimpses of the God-Man, Meher Baba*, Vol. IV, p. 149.

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We are all one. Every one of you has the Infinite within and yet because of ignorance, every one feels some kind of helplessness. It is a mighty divine joke that although every one of you is All-power and All-bliss, you feel completely weak and miserable. The moment this ignorance goes, you become the Infinite Source of All-power and Bliss.

As I am within you all, I authoritatively say that if you love Me with all your heart and lose yourself in Me, this ignorance will go.

On the dais, Baba looked charmingly radiant. It is difficult to capture that special feeling which permeated the *pandal* whenever Baba gave *darshan*. His smile was at once so warm and engaging that on a purely human level one was captivated by it. But simultaneously, there was a grandeur, a magnificence to Baba's expression which made people feel that they were in the presence of the Divine One who had only assumed a human form.

After the message was read out, Baba started distributing *prasad* to the thousands of men and women who had assembled there. Near the end of the program, a young boy suddenly came running toward Baba from the crowd and placed his head on Baba's holy feet, despite the previous announcement that none should do so. Baba, however, gestured to the *mandali* not to be concerned about it. However, as if to nullify the boy's action, Baba touched the feet of some of the *mandali* who were around Him.

Baba returned to M. Sudarsanam's house and spent some time walking in the garden. Suddenly, He stopped and sat on the ground and had water brought to Him and washed His hands. At the time, no one thought much about this, but later Dr. K. Suryanarayana suggested that the spot should be marked as there was probably some significance to Baba's sitting there. M. Ramakrishna, the second son of the host, put a piece of marble there and began placing flowers on it each day in remembrance of Baba.

Recently a big hotel was built there by the family and a large marble bust of Baba is prominently displayed in the

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lobby on the spot where Baba sat. A curious footnote to this story is that it was here, in this hotel, that Adi K. Irani, Baba's disciple from the *Manzil-e-Meem*²⁶ days, died suddenly of a heart attack on March 4, 1980 after inaugurating a new building to be used as a Center for Baba lovers in Guntur.

On the afternoon of the twenty-first, after a delicious lunch provided by the host, Baba called the *mandali* to His room. We had thoroughly enjoyed the spicy south Indian food and now we were happy to hurry over to be with Beloved Baba. It was about 1:00 P.M. We found Baba sitting on the bed with the boy who had touched Baba's feet during the *darshan* program standing at His side.

This boy was somewhat mast-like and was clapping his hands together and singing a *bhajan*. Baba then asked him to sing a song in praise of Lord Siva which the boy did wholeheartedly. Someone from the local workers remarked that Guntur was well known for *kirtan* and *bhajan* and Baba spelled on His board, "The real *bhajan* is here." It is one thing to sing a song of devotion to the Lord, but to do so in the presence of the Lord in human form is indeed the real *bhajan*!

The boy then started giving a lecture on Baba and Baba embraced him when he completed it. The boy said he could talk like that all day long but that the people would beat him with their *chappals* if he went on at that length. Baba laughed and gave him a Baba-locket, took him on His lap and gestured, "Remember, Baba is God. Don't forget this."

Shortly afterward, Baba left Guntur. On the way back to Vijayawada, Baba stopped at Sita Ram Kshetram. One of the members read out the following welcome address:

Most Beloved Baba!

We present Your Holiness this welcome address as a token of reverence and devotion. May Your Holiness accept the same. . . .

Not only we, but none can understand You fully, unless You will it. . . . May You be always alive in our hearts.

Raghuwar Das, a well-known devotee of Lord Rama, sang a very touching song, "Rama Meghasyama," in a melodious

²⁶ The name of a building in Dadar (Bombay) where Meher Baba stayed with a group of His early disciples from June 7 to December 31, 1922.

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voice, accompanying himself on the harmonium. Baba was so touched that He blessed the singer and remarked, "Your song reminds Me of My past Advent as Rama."

Baba also stopped at the Omkar Kshetram where He was welcomed thus:

Master! We salute Your lotus feet. Lead kindly light! Lead us out of the darkness. The *Bhagavad Gita* proclaimed that age after age, to uphold righteousness, the Avatar assumes human form. That divine promise has been fulfilled in Your sacred personage. . . . Master! Bless us all, bless the entire humanity.

Although the crowds were relatively small at these two stops, the people welcomed Baba very devotedly. The excerpts given above perhaps give some idea of the reverence with which Baba was received. Baba made one other brief stop before proceeding to Vijayawada.

A public *darshan* program had been arranged there for 3:00 P.M. It was already close to 4:00 P.M., but halfway across the road spanning the Krishna River on the outskirts of Vijayawada, Baba had His car stopped and washed His hands in the river. Baba then got back in the car. Because of the various stops Baba made on the way back to Vijayawada, the car with Adi in it had already arrived at the *darshan* site. Raghavulu, one of the local workers, immediately asked Adi where Baba was, as it was getting late and Baba was supposed to have been there an hour earlier.

Adi didn't know, so Raghavulu and Prasad Rao got into a car and headed toward Guntur to find out what was delaying Baba's arrival. As soon as they reached the Krishna River, they saw Baba sitting silently in the rear seat of the car. He was wearing dark sunglasses and had covered His face with a scarf. He seemed deeply absorbed in His inner work.

Eruch, seeing Raghavulu approach, walked over to him so that Baba would not be disturbed. "Why have you come?" he asked. "I wanted to see what was keeping Baba," Raghavulu replied. "He is here, as you can see," Eruch said. "But I can't disturb Him now. Don't worry. He will be there soon. Go back

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and tell the organizers that Ba ba is on His way. " Baba had His own way and time to attend the programs.

Dramatic Darshan

A little later, Baba's work apparently done, He told the driver to go on. But instead of directing him to the *pandal*, Baba told him to drive to Majety's house so He could change His clothes. Once there, Baba walked up the stairs to His room, but instead of changing His clothes, Baba immediately descended to the ground floor by the back stairs and began roaming through all the rooms. He stood for a while before the *puja* room and then asked Majety's wife for a cup of tea. Majety had told her that Baba might want tea at any time so she was prepared and it was not long before the tea was ready and she sent it upstairs with her son. Baba took only a sip and then gave the rest to the boy.

Then, without ever changing His clothes or taking a rest, Baba left the house to attend the *darshan* program. None of the *mandali* ever asked Baba the reasons behind such apparently random actions; they were certain that whatever Baba did was in connection with His universal work and that was enough for them.

Baba reached the *pandal* at 5:00 P.M., two hours later than scheduled. There was a huge crowd waiting for Him. Baba bowed to the assembled masses with folded hands. After the usual garlanding and *arti*, the welcome address, "The Humblest of the humble greeting to the Highest of the High," was read out over the public address system. A part of it is given below:

Beloved! One without a second!

Thou art the effulgence—All-pervading Being. . . . Thou art the Master of the world, the Self of the universe and supreme Refuge. . . . May our minds be filled with pure devotion and love for Thee and love for all beings. We salute Thee, Lord of auspiciousness.

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Baba then got up from His seat on the dais and walked to the edge of the platform and down the steps to the ground where He sat with the crowd. As soon as Baba did this, all those at the back could no longer see Him. They pushed forward, fearing that Baba had left and they had missed their chance of having *darshan*. Those who were closer also surged forward to be better able to take advantage of this rare opportunity of getting a closer glimpse of the God-Man, sitting in their midst.

Three or four times Baba stood up so all could see Him and gestured to the crowd to remain calm and to stay seated where they were. And, surprisingly, each time the frantic pushing and shoving stopped immediately and a calm and serene atmosphere prevailed for a while.

Returning to His seat on the dais, Baba dictated:

I want you to feel that I am one of you and that is why I sat here on the ground with you all. I am on the level of each one of you: whether poor or rich, small or big, I am like each of you. But I am approachable only to those who love Me. . . .

This is not idle talk, but an authoritative statement that eternally I have been and will always be the slave of My lovers.

Then the message, "Playing with Illusions,"²⁷ was read out in English and Telugu. The thousands who had assembled were enraptured by Baba's divine dignity and beauty. His presence, His love seemed to flow out toward all and made everyone intent only on having Baba's *darshan* and receiving the *prasad* which He started to distribute after the Telugu translation was read out.

Although it had been repeatedly announced that none should touch Baba's feet, several people in their enthusiasm, overcome with emotion, reached down to touch Baba's feet. One man was so intent on bowing down to Baba that Pukar, who was a big sturdy fellow, was unable to prevent him even though he used all his strength. For Pukar this was a lesson; he had thought he was strong enough to see that none disobeyed Baba's order, but he realized now that the feelings of the heart

²⁷ Ibid., p. 148.

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were much more powerful than physical strength.

Men and women had been asked to form separate queues to receive *prasad*. First the women were told to come forward but soon, on His own, Baba stopped the women's queue and had the men's queue begin. Several times Baba stopped one queue and had the other started. This created much confusion in the crowds and, once again, fearing that they might lose their chance of receiving *prasad*, people started pushing indiscriminately toward the dais.

Every effort to get people to stand quietly in a queue was overwhelmed by the mass of humanity now surging toward the platform. The volunteers could not restore order and finally they surrounded Baba to protect Him. Sadashiv Patel, one of Baba's oldest *mandali*, got incensed at the way the crowd was ignoring the *mandali's* requests to form queues and started berating people in Marathi which, of course, no one understood. They answered back in Telugu which Patel could not understand. Carried away in the heat of the moment, Patel, who had been a wrestler in his youth, hitched up his dhoti and challenged the unruly members of the crowd to wrestle with him.

Eventually, the *mandali* and the other workers were able to form a ring around Baba and shove their way through the tumultuous crowd to the safety of Baba's car. Baba got inside and was driven back to His residence.

Baba in the Happiest Mood

KDRM, Manik and the other organizers were upset and embarrassed. There were several prominent people they had brought to the darshan program to introduce to Baba but now the opportunity was gone. They were also now faced with the monumental job of trying to distribute the remaining *prasad*, heaps and heaps of plantains which Baba had blessed, to the chaotic sea of humanity. But the most difficult thing for them was the feeling that Baba had been displeased by the unruliness of the crowd.

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On His return to Majety's house, Baba surprised the *mandali* and the local Baba lovers who were there by declaring how happy He had been with the program. Baba suddenly conveyed from His board:

Today's programme I liked. I liked it very much. First of all, I sat down, there on the ground in the midst of the people, on their level. I sat there not for show, but wholeheartedly. . . . As Kumar said, had I really wished, there would not have been this confusion. It was I who repeatedly asked for the women's queue to be stopped and the men to be called for receiving *prasad*. Anyway, I liked the programme.

Baba continued:

You have no idea. I was in the happiest mood. . . . For one moment, after many years, today I felt all alone in that whole crowd. God, who is absolute Honesty, is My witness. Today I was reminded of the experience I had after Babajan kissed Me. I was all alone there for a moment!

Sometimes you too may feel mentally that you are all alone, that everything else is a blank. But in comparison to the real experience of Oneness, all these experiences are absolutely insignificant, nothing. Today I am happy; My work has been done one hundred percent, I am satisfied.

One of the local Andhra Baba lovers asked, "How are we to know of your Oneness?" Baba replied, "Honestly I tell you, even I sometimes don't understand why I am so infinitely Infinite! How can you understand Me?"

"Pull Your Ears"

The local Baba lovers had been very disappointed when Baba had had to leave the *darshan* program early. And those who were at Majety's house couldn't understand what Baba really meant by His remark that He was immensely happy in spite of the fiasco. It was all "Greek and Latin" to them, but they

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felt much relieved that Baba seemed so pleased with the program.

One of those who was traveling with Baba throughout Andhra was Adarsh Khare from Mahoba in Hamirpur District. He had also been present at the worker's meeting Baba had held on February 10 at Meherastana, just before He left Hamirpur. At that meeting, Adarsh had voiced a complaint to Baba. He had said that Baba should allow the local organizers to arrange the *darshan* programs and conduct them as they saw fit and without the *mandali's* interference.

Adarsh went on to point out that when Baba had given *darshan* at Mahoba, they had arranged for the important people of the town to meet Baba. But instead of being allowed some time in Baba's company, they were treated like everyone else—no sooner had they had Baba's *darshan* than one of the *mandali* was escorting them away so the next person could have *darshan*. "Let the local people handle things, Baba," Adarsh suggested. "They know who should be allowed a little more time, and they know how to treat these people with the proper amount of respect."

Baba didn't say anything at the time, as Adarsh went on to complain that the *mandali* were rather rude and pushed people about without reference to their social position in their efforts to insure that the *darshan* queues flowed smoothly. He simply smiled, and left it at that.

But now, almost two weeks later, Baba turned to Adarsh and signed, "Pull your ears." (Pulling one's ear lobes is an old Indian gesture to express repentance.) Adarsh was taken aback but he immediately did as he was ordered. But he could not help himself from asking, "What have I done?"

"Today's program was organized by the local lovers. Tell me, when you were leading Me to the car, what were you doing?"

"I linked arms with the other volunteers, Baba, and I kicked out with my feet, fighting a way through the crowd so we could clear a path for you."

"And when you were kicking people, did you stop to see whether they were important people or not? Whether they

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were the influential people? Did you stop to consider whom you should be respectful to?"

Instantly all of Adarsh's previous complaints against the *mandali* came back to him. But he realized now, from his own experience, that the *mandali's* main duty was protecting Baba's physical form. That took precedence over all forms of conventional social etiquette. Adarsh was filled with remorse and looked up at Baba who gestured again, with a large smile on His face, "Pull your ears."

What an amazing awareness Baba had; to know what each of His lovers was doing in such a crowd! And Baba's awareness of each of His lover's actions and thoughts continues unabated to this very day. Baba willingly allows His lovers to criticize Him, without attempting to defend Himself, until they have had the inner experience to be able to wholeheartedly accept the validity of His reason. This is a humility which is unfathomable, a patience which is matchless, and a compassion which only the God-Man possesses!

After this incident, Adarsh was able to see the *mandali's* actions in the right perspective—as the actions of those whose only concern is pleasing Baba. The *mandali* have turned their backs on the world's opinion of them, indifferent to praise or blame, they live only for their Beloved Baba; knowing well that in serving Him, they are serving the purest expression of the Divine Will, for Baba's work, though limited in the physical sense, actually affects and is for all of humanity.

Conditions Imposed and Withdrawn in Love

After conversing with all in Manjety's house for a while, Baba asked everyone to return to the *choultry* to have their dinner and then go to bed. Manik, on leaving Baba's room, went downstairs to spend some time with Manjety and Chinta. They were discussing that afternoon's tumultuous *darshan* program when Ramulu and Seshagiri Rao came rushing in, wanting to know why Baba had not arrived at the Vijayawada Center for the program which had been arranged.

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Manik had been so preoccupied with the distribution of *prasad* at the *darshan* site after Baba left, and so upset with what he perceived as the program's failure that when he had finally rejoined Baba at Majety's house, he had totally forgotten to tell Him that he had previously scheduled a special gathering at the Vijayawada Meher Center for that night.

It was now around 9:30 at night and there were nearly a thousand people waiting to receive Beloved Baba with garlands and gifts of love. When Baba didn't arrive as scheduled, Ramulu and Seshagiri got into a jeep and drove to Majety's house, around a kilometer away to see what was keeping Baba.

Manik now found himself in a terrible dilemma. He didn't know what to do. He didn't want to disappoint all those people gathered at the Center, but he didn't know how he could disturb Baba who had already retired for the night.

Just then he saw Pendu going upstairs carrying a medicine chest and he intercepted him and explained the situation. After a moment, Pendu came down and told Manik to go up and see Baba. Manik entered the room and saw Baba sitting at a table by Himself, about to have His simple supper. Baba was mixing His rice and a vegetable dish together. Manik watched, fascinated to see how the God-Man would eat. Just then Baba looked up, saw Manik and gestured for him to come forward.

Manik was shy. He felt it wasn't proper for him to intrude on Baba's privacy in that manner and so he stayed at the door. But in the midst of all of his anxiety and conflicting emotions, a funny thought suddenly popped into his head, "I wonder if Baba has any teeth?" Seeing Manik hesitate at the door, Baba got up and walked toward him, with a morsel of food in His right hand.

As Baba approached, Manik backed away. What a humorous situation; the God-Man "pursuing" His lover who was retreating! Baba got close, however, and as He did so, opened His mouth, indicating that Manik should do the same. Thus Manik's unspoken question was answered, as he could see that Baba had no teeth. And before he could recover from his surprise at Baba's gratifying his curiosity, Baba had put the morsel of food into Manik's mouth. Baba then wiped His hands

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with a napkin, a sign that His supper was over. He did not take a single mouthful Himself. Perhaps, He had heard the call of love from His dear ones.

At this point Eruch came into the room. On seeing Manik, he demanded to know what he was doing there. No one was supposed to disturb Baba at that hour. Nervously, Manik explained the dilemma he had found himself in; that he had completely forgotten to notify Baba of the *darshan* program that had been arranged at the Vijayawada Center.

"So what do you want?" Eruch asked. "I thought I should tell Baba now to see if He will go," Manik replied apologetically. "Is this the time for a *darshan* program?" Eruch demanded. It was now after 10:00. "Can't you see that Baba hasn't even had His food yet? Aren't you going to let Baba eat or sleep?" Eruch scolded, and then continued to upbraid Manik for coming at such an hour. Eruch stated emphatically that it was not possible for Baba to leave now to give *darshan* at the Center. For one thing, Eruch explained, Baba would not go without the rest of the *mandali* and they had already been sent to their own quarters for the night.

But, being the Com passionate One, Baba gestured that He was willing to go, that He could spare five minutes to appease the longing of those waiting at the Center for Him. Still, Eruch insisted that it was too late and that Manik shouldn't even ask Baba to do such a thing. In his eagerness to protect his Beloved Baba, to see to His comfort, Eruch categorically declared, "Even if the angels were to come down from Heaven to ask Baba to go, Baba would not leave this room!"

Baba immediately got up, and cupped Eruch's chin in His hand, a typical Indian gesture used to mollify a person. Then He took Manik by the hand and led him to His bedroom where He held His arms behind His back so that Manik could help Him put on His *sadra*. Manik had never done this before and was fumbling when Eruch came and took over.

Once He was dressed, Baba conveyed that He would visit the Center only if all there agreed to three conditions. These were: no one should shout, "Avatar Meher Baba Ki Jai"; no one should bow down to Baba or touch His feet; and no one should

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offer gifts to Baba or garland Him.

Manik assured Baba that he felt the conditions would be willingly agreed to. "But how will you find out?" Baba asked. "I'll run to the Center and ask and then run back here and inform you," Manik replied enthusiastically.

Baba commented that this would take too long, and asked what arrangements had been made for His transportation to the Center and back. Manik said that two of the organizers had come in a jeep and that that would be made available to Him. Baba then suggested that Manik come with Him. So Baba, Eruch, Pendu, Chhagan, Sidhu and Manik left Baba's room to visit the Center.

When they reached the street where the jeep was parked, it was obvious that there wasn't enough room. Manik was wondering where he could possibly sit when Baba joked that as Sidhu was large and Manik was tiny, Manik could easily sit on Sidhu's lap!

Before they started, Baba asked Manik to direct them to the Center by a circuitous route. As they were driving, they happened to pass by the *choultry* where the rest of the *mandali* were staying. Manik pointed out the place to Baba and said that if Baba wanted His *mandali* with Him, it would be easy to arrange. Teasingly, Baba replied, "Why? Isn't it enough that you have disturbed Me, now you want to see that none of My *mandali* get any sleep either?"

Manik kept quiet and when they arrived at the Center he ran up the stairs to explain to everyone who was there about Baba's three conditions. With one voice all gathered in the hall said they would obey the instructions; they only wanted to see Baba in their midst.

Manik rushed back down and told Baba that all had readily agreed. Baba seemed pleased at this. He got out of the jeep and, with His four *mandali*, mounted the stairs. As He entered the hall there was pin-drop silence. Baba bowed with folded hands before the large portrait of Himself which Y. Ranga Rao had drawn.

Baba was so touched with the wholehearted and unanimous acceptance of the conditions He had imposed, and the way they

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were being scrupulously observed that He turned to the assembly and announced, "I sent a message that I would give *darshan* on three conditions. But now, if you wish to say, 'Avatar Meher Baba Ki Jai,' I give you my permission."

A thundering cry of "Avatar Meher Baba Ki Jai" rent the night air. Baba smiled and added, "I had instructed that none could touch My feet, or bow to Me or garland Me or give Me anything. But now I allow everyone to come forward to have My *darshan*. Don't worry, I will stay here until everyone has had My *darshan*. You will all have your chance. And if any of you wish to garland Me, or offer Me anything or bow down to Me, you may do so."

Baba asked that *bhajans* be sung while people were taking His *darshan* and, at the end of the program, He stood up and joined in the *arti* Himself that was offered to His portrait. It was nearing midnight when the program finally concluded. Baba had proposed the conditions to help His dear ones become more responsive to His love and compassion. But all the conditions were withdrawn by the loving acceptance of His wishes by His lovers. The Avatar is truly the slave of the love of His lovers.

It was indeed a memorable meeting and that night some left the hall with the blissful heartache to feel Baba's presence more and more, and this heartache is still following them.

MACHILIPATNAM AND GUDIWADA 1954 - PART VI

Baba Keeps the Pot Boiling!

By 7:00 in the morning, on February 22, the *mandali* were at Majety's house, ready to move on to the next town. As they entered Meher Baba's room, they found that once again He wished to reconsider the proposed visit to Penugonda with KDRM. Some were in favor of Baba's going, while others, primarily because of their prejudice against E. Moorthy, the Penugonda representative, were against it. Baba seemed to want to keep stirring this particular "pot" of dissension.

The debate appeared to me to be quite heated, but later I learned that Andhra people tend to express themselves with gusto and that the discussion had not been as acrimonious as I had feared. Meanwhile, Baba seemed to be thoroughly enjoying the argument, purposefully getting a rise out of this one or that one.

This reminds me of the time when one of Baba's disciples was distressed to notice that after living with Baba for some time, instead of becoming more composed, he seemed to flare up periodically. When he brought this to Baba's attention, Baba smiled and replied that in a sense this was true, but it was not without reason. He then explained this by using the analogy of boiling sugar cane juice.

When farmers in India want to make raw sugar they squeeze the juice out of sugar cane stalks and then boil the liquid for hours until it becomes very thick. Then they pour the liquid into molds and, as it cools, it hardens into a solid mass of raw sugar which is then used in cooking.

Baba asked the disciple, "What happens when the sugar cane juice is boiled?" The disciple replied, "Scum rises to the surface." "And then?" "And then it is scooped off." Baba gestured that similarly, with some of His lovers, He uses this "boiling technique" to cleanse their hearts and in the process

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the "scum" (impurities caused by *sanskaras*) rises to the surface where it can be scooped off. Baba added that although this happens in some cases, His lovers should not use it as an excuse to refrain from restraining their behavior or controlling their moods.

Perhaps during the discussion of the Penugonda visit, Baba was keeping the pot boiling so that the scum of ego conflicts and disharmony would be brought to the surface for Him to "scoop it off" during the upcoming workers' meeting on March 2.

At any rate, regarding the Penugonda visit, Baba turned to one of the members of KDRM and spelled on His board, "I know you love Me, but do the people of Penugonda love Me? I don't want crowds; I want lovers. I can make the whole world come to Me, but what I want now is love. Are there lovers in Penugonda?"

When Baba asked this question, the immense import of the word "lover" was brought home to them and no one said a word. The conversation seemed to have suddenly become very serious. There was a marked silence as each pondered whether he could consider himself a Baba lover in the real sense of the word. Someone then suggested that, at any rate, as Baba had promised yesterday that He would go, then He should go to keep His word.

With a mischievous smile, Baba quickly quipped, "I am *ustad* [an expert] in not keeping promises!" Baba's quick-witted banter lightened the atmosphere and Baba then added, "But since KDRM have given their word, let's go." It has been noticed that Baba's delightful sense of humor has helped many to get closer to Him. Once Baba told His sister Mani, "I am the only One who never breaks a promise." However, being the Timeless One, Baba fulfills His promises in His own time.

The topic then changed and Baba told Majety how happy He was with him and He even allowed a photograph to be taken of Himself with Majety's family and some local Baba lovers. Meanwhile, a large crowd had gathered in front of the house to give Baba a hearty send-off. In addition to KDRM, Baba permitted some of His lovers in Andhra, such as Manik , Y. Ramamohan Rao, Poornachandra Rao, and others to accompany

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Him throughout this tour.

With shouts of "Avatar Meher Baba Ki Jai" ringing in our ears, the caravan left for Machilipatnam a little before 8:00.

Ever since Baba stayed in Majety's house, the room He used was set aside exclusively for prayers and as a meeting place for Baba lovers. The house itself was renamed Meher Abode. Truly, from this initial contact, Majety was lucky to have his abode in Baba's heart. It is also interesting to find that coincidentally, the very spot where Baba gave mass *darshan* in Vijayawada was chosen by the municipality as the site for a large public auditorium. Now, when public programs are held in Vijayawada, they are held in the Kshatriya Kala Kshetram, which stands on the grounds where Baba gave *darshan* in 1954. In fact, thirty years after Baba's visit there, in October 1984, a gathering of Baba lovers was held there to which over a thousand people from all over Andhra came.

Visit to M. S. R. Sastri's House

On the way to Machilipatnam, we passed through a village named Kankipadu where the villagers were holding an annual fair in honor of a Hindu goddess. To entertain the people and children, a small wooden merry-go-round had been set up. Baba asked Dharma Rao to stop the car and, unexpectedly but to the delight of all, Baba sat on the merry-go-round for a few turns. Madan Arora, Kishan Singh's son, who had joined the *mandali* on the morning of February 21 and who had been filming Baba's tour, was fortunate enough to get a nice shot of Baba smilingly enjoying His ride.

At the village of Pammaru, a small *darshan* program had been arranged. *Arti* was performed to Baba but, due to a lack of time, Baba was unable to personally distribute *prasad* to the five hundred or so villagers who had gathered. However, Baba touched the sweets and bananas and dictated on the board, "I give you all my blessings and this *prasad* will have my love behind it when you receive it." Baba then folded His hands in *namaskar* to the villagers and left.

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Baba reached Machilipatnam a little after 10:00 in the morning. On the outskirts of town, Baba had a musical welcome as a brass band played for Him, accompanied by the sweet sounds of a *sanaai*. Baba's car was taken in a procession to P. Lokanadha Rao's house.

M. Seetha Ram Sastri was the one who had extended the loving and humble invitation to Baba to visit Machilipatnam, but his house was too small to accommodate Baba and so he asked his neighbor and friend, Lokanadha Rao if he would give his house for Baba's use. L. Rao said he would, although he was not particularly interested in Baba, and his family was against letting Baba use the house.

Baba was led to the upstairs of the house where L. Rao was fortunate to have his first meeting with Baba. He was so deeply impressed with Baba's divinity that when he came downstairs, he wanted to bow down to the *mandali* just because they were Baba's disciples. Baba is so infinitely generous that He rewards even disinterested help offered in His cause, by awakening love in the heart of the one who proffers it.

M. S. R. Sastri had heard from Y. Ranga Rao (the "R" of KDRM) that Meher Baba was the Avatar. He was especially touched by Jean Adriel's book, *Avatar*. Although he was a Brahmin, born in an orthodox family, Baba's love cut through the orthodoxy and reached his heart.

On the 21st, Sastri had gone to Vijayawada to greet Baba and to repeat his invitation to Baba to visit Machilipatnam. At Guntur, Baba gave Sastri one of His coats and asked him to wash and iron it and then hand it over to Him when He came to Machilipatnam. Sastri lovingly obeyed this order and for days after Baba's departure he could smell the sweet fragrance of His coat permeating his house. Love is madness, but a blessed madness!

Now that Baba had arrived in Machilipatnam, He wanted to begin the day's program by visiting Sastri's house. But the house was situated in a lane which was too narrow for Baba's car to pass, so Sastri spread costly, brightly colored *saris* all the way from the main road to the entrance of his house. The

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riches of Sastri's heart were made manifest during this visit. In one of the rooms of his house, Sastri had kept a photograph which Adi had given him which Meher Baba had signed. This room was to be used as a Baba Center for Machilipatnam. When Baba came, He Himself garlanded the photograph and bowed down to it. Some newcomers were surprised at this and, knowing what was going on in their minds, Baba dictated:

I find no one to bow down to except Me, because I find My Self in everything. My coming here physically, and opening this center will be of avail if you all make Me yours, as you already are eternally Mine. This centre will be worth its name if it spreads My message of love by making people understand that God is the only Reality.

In these few words, while specifically blessing this particular center, Baba has given guidelines for any group of His lovers wishing to work for Him.

During *arti*, the room was so full that some of us were squeezed out. Yet I could still clearly hear Sastri reciting Sanskrit *slokas* in praise of the Avatar. He sniffled in between lines because a flood of ecstasy had overcome him and he could not keep back the tears. Baba's presence during such programs often filled the hearts of His devotees with joy while their eyes overflowed with His love.

Usually when making house visits, Baba would have the head of the house introduce his family and close friends to Him. But here, Sastri didn't introduce his family to Baba. When one of them complained to him about this, he said, "Baba is God. He knows everyone, so where is the need for any introductions?"

Once, during a *sahas* program in 1958, while attending to other duties entrusted to me, I forgot to introduce one of my very dear friends, Parkhe, to Baba. Baba later had Eruch write Parkhe directly to say,

Baba also wants me to convey to you that you need NOT feel disturbed for NOT being personally introduced to

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Him. Introductions are felt essential only when there is absence of genuine give and take of love between the lover and the Beloved. . . . Baba is happy with your love. He wants you to remember Him always.

So Sastri's reply was indeed most apt!

"Self Lost Is Freedom Gained"

From Sastri's house, Baba went to the Sai Samaj, an institution which took care of orphans as part of its social service. As Baba was listening to the devotional songs performed by these children, He took a small *kartal* (hand percussion instrument) from one of the boys and played along. The woman who managed the *samaj* also sang for Baba. Baba casually touched her head. This seemed to awaken such ecstasy in her that she suddenly flung herself at Baba's chair, sobbing. Baba comforted her.

After noon, we all returned to our residence where L. Rao served us another nice South-Indian meal. While the *mandali* enjoyed the delicacies, such as *pulihara*, *pachadi*, *payasam*, *papadam*, *perugu*, etc., Baba continued to give brief audiences to the families of Baba lovers who had come there to see Him. Throughout the Andhra tour, Baba would have a little rice and *dal*, but on some occasions went without food entirely to feed His dear ones with His presence and love.

The *praja* (public) *darshan* program was arranged for 3:00 P.M. in the Town Hall. Hundreds of people had already assembled there and a bagpipe band was playing when Baba arrived. He enjoyed the music and the verve of the pipe master so much that a little later He conveyed:

I feel very happy to hear this music. It reminds Me of the first song that was sung ages ago that produced this phenomenon called the Universe.

Baba looked very pleased as the program began. After the usual formalities of a public program, Baba had His message,

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"Self Lost is Freedom Gained" read out in English and then its translation into Telugu. The full text is given below:

When lust, greed, anger, jealousy, hatred, backbiting and selfish desires are totally absent, God manifests His Presence. However, these "evils" are the outcome of impressions [*sanskaras*] of past lives and must necessarily be expressed. Getting rid of them is ordinarily impossible; it is like a rock trying to lift itself.

Nevertheless, past impressions must be expressed to be gotten rid of, but at the same time that these past impressions are being expressed and spent, new ones are forged because of the assertion of the lower self. If one is to be free of the endless chain of impressions, past and present, this assertive lower self must be abolished. . . .

To follow the path of true *karma*, *dnyan* or *bhakti-yoga* is the best remedy for the uprooting of this heritage of "evils" derived from past impressions, expressed by constant actions and sustained by the continual formation of new ones.

In *karma-yoga*, one tries to lose one's self in selfless service for others; in *dnyan-yoga* one tries to lose one's self in contemplation and meditation. In *bhakti-yoga*, one tries to lose one's self in devotion to God. Even in these yogas, it is only at their very ultimate that the lower assertive self is lost [in God-consciousness].

The easiest and safest way to lose one's self is by completely surrendering to the Perfect Master. Then the past, present and future impressions of the one who has surrendered are drowned in the Master, [Perfect Master's Divinity] and one is no longer either bound by or responsible for any of one's actions whether good or bad, expressed during one's [life of] implicit obedience to the Master.

Thus, complete surrender to the Perfect Master is, in itself, Freedom.

Once Baba succinctly put the entire message quoted above into a single sentence, "Lose yourself in your Self and find yourself in Me."

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During the *darshan* programs, when the messages were read out, Baba would occasionally have a remote look on His face, His eyes would seem to be staring at something far away, and His fingers, especially His index fingers, with their rapid movements almost seemed to be transmitting the spiritual truths of the messages directly to those whose hearts were receptive. The Avatar's life is a selfless giving of His love, a giving of His unbounded compassion to humanity.

After the message, Baba distributed *prasad* to thousands of people and by 6:00 in the evening the program ended.

"My Answer Will Reach Your Heart"

On His way back to L. Rao's house, Baba made several house visits to various of His lovers in Machilipatnam. First Baba's car pulled up outside the home of V. R. Naidu, who was very old and ill and unable to leave his bed. He had sent his daughter to wait at the gate for Baba so she could welcome Him and garland Him.

As Baba got out of the car, she stepped forward to offer the flowers, but, to her surprise, Baba walked right past the gate without turning in and gestured, "I have enough around my neck." He seemed in a hurry, and in amazement she watched Baba quickly stride by, turn the corner, and then disappear down a side lane, as if He were quite familiar with the neighborhood and knew where He was going.

At a little distance, there were several hovels clustered together. The organizers who were following Baba looked at each other in surprise. They had scheduled no such visit and they knew of no Baba lover living here. Baba walked up to one of the thatched huts, the home of a low-caste mason who was an ardent devotee of Lord Siva.

This man, whose name was B. Laksmudu, had heard of Baba's visit and had wanted to have His *darshan*. But, being a poor person of low caste, he had felt that even if he had attended the public program, he would have been denied access to Baba. Then he had heard that Baba would also be

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visiting the homes of some of His lovers, but as far as Laksmudu could tell, all of these people were well off high-caste Hindus and he complained to his wife, "How can this Baba be the Avatar? He is only for the privileged few and neglects those who are lowly and downtrodden!"

Imagine the man's surprise, therefore, when, immediately after the public *darshan* program, Baba came personally to his hut. Baba smiled forgivingly at the man, with such tender acceptance in His eyes, that instantly he felt ashamed of his earlier denunciation of Baba. Now that he was in Baba's presence, he could not deny His compassion or love. Baba sat with the man silently for five minutes and then got up and left as suddenly as He had come.

At the time, none of the *mandali* or KDRM knew why Baba had visited the mason's hut, or what had transpired in the poor man's heart. It was only later that one of the local Baba lovers went to talk to B. Laksmudu and learned the whole story. But even though no one with Baba knew of the mason, Baba had heard the cry of his heart and had instantly responded to it. For Baba, no one is high-caste, no one is low-caste, no one rich, no one poor; Baba wants only one thing, love, so that in return He can give more of His love.

Baba walked back to V.R. Naidu's house where his daughter was still waiting at the gate. This time, Baba lovingly accepted her garland. The girl then read out to Baba a letter her father had dictated to her, expressing his desire to surrender to Baba. He was too ill to be able to talk much so he had poured out his heart in the letter.

Baba went inside to visit the father who was lying on his bed, unable to even get up to welcome the Master. As Baba entered the room, the old man looked at Baba with obvious love and Baba's eyes seemed to fill with compassion.

Baba took a few quick steps across the room and sat down on the old man's bed and tenderly began to massage his legs and feet. Baba gestured that He was very happy with Naidu's love and added, "Always think of Me. I am the Ancient One; I am Krishna." These statements, made with Baba's incomparable divine simplicity, seemed to fill the room with His timeless

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presence.

Some sweets were brought and Baba touched them and had them distributed as His *prasad* to all the members of the family. Baba looked pleased with the love of the Naidu family and He turned again to the invalid and reassured him, "When I say I am the slave of my lovers, it is not just an idle remark. Till the last moment repeat My name, BA-BA, BA-BA. I will be with you." Perhaps this is Baba's assurance to all His dear ones who are bedridden or ill and dying; perhaps to all who are hale and healthy as well!

At this point, Dr. Dhnapathi interjected that Naidu was so deaf he couldn't follow what Eruch was saying. This caused a humorous twinkle to appear in Baba's eye and He gestured, "I am also deaf. I listen only to very, very. . . ." but before He could finish, the daughter who was standing a little distance away began to sing *arti*. When she and the family had finished, Baba left for a few more house visits and never completed the sentence.

Naidu's deafness, however, was immaterial for Baba does not need any words to reach the hearts of His lovers. A brief incident which happened at the Rome airport during Baba's visit to the West in 1956 illustrates this. As Baba and Eruch were walking through the airport, a man, attracted by Baba's radiant face, approached and asked Eruch if He (Baba) knew Rumanian. Eruch said, "No," and just then Baba, who was walking a few feet in front, turned and gestured, "I don't speak Rumanian, but I know what is in your heart and my answer will reach your heart!"

After the house visits, Baba returned to L. Rao's residence at about 7:00 that evening. Supper was served to the *mandali* and then they hurriedly packed their small bedding-rolls and got ready to travel to Eluru, a three-hour car journey. The Baba lovers in Machilipatnam gathered to see Baba off. At 8:00 the caravan left, as usual to the rousing cheers of "Prem Avatar Meher Baba Ki Jai!"

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Cold Drinks that Warmed the Heart

No stops were scheduled on the way to Eluru so all were surprised when Baba's car stopped at a crossroads in Gudiwada. Baba sat quietly in the car, without explaining why He had asked Dharma Rao to stop. After a few minutes a man was seen approaching the intersection carrying a lantern and a bunch of bananas. He was accompanied by a small group of men and women.

They approached Baba's car and the man walked up to Baba and asked in Telugu, "Is Meher Baba here?" Baba indicated that he should ask Kutumba Sastri who was sitting in the back seat so the man repeated his question and explained that he had come there just so he could have Meher Baba's *darshan*.

On learning that Meher Baba Himself was the one he had first addressed, he looked overjoyed. He lifted his lantern and gazed at Baba's resplendent face and then humbly offered the bananas to Him. Baba accepted this gift and then graciously gave *darshan* to him and to his group of friends and relatives. With great joy the small group then left.

Once again, the significance of this chance meeting was discovered only after Baba had left Andhra. At the time, no one knew why Baba had stopped the car or where those people had come from. But later it was discovered that the man lived in a village which was between Gudiwada and Machilipatnam. He had seen one of the flyers announcing Avatar Meher Baba's *darshan* at Machilipatnam and wanted to go, but he couldn't because he had to attend a court case instead.

So he asked the organizers when Baba was leaving Machilipatnam for Eluru and was told "8:00." Knowing that Baba's car would have to pass through Gudiwada on its way, he decided he would go there from his village and see Baba as He passed. He figured out approximately how long it would take Baba's car to reach Gudiwada and set out from his village on foot accordingly.

His friends thought it pointless, but he told them, "If Baba is really a 'Great One,' then He will know the yearning of my heart and He will grant me *darshan*." The man's faith was

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strong enough that eventually some of his friends and relatives decided to go with him. Not only did Baba grant him *darshan*, but Baba was found at the crossroads, waiting for him to arrive so He could give it. His friends and relatives, who had been dubious about Baba's divinity, left convinced that He was indeed omniscient.

As this small group walked away from the car, instead of proceeding directly to Eluru, Baba expressed a wish for a soft drink. So some of those with Baba started looking for a shop which was open at that hour of the night. As the search was going on, the bus carrying the rest of the *mandali* and the others arrived. Baba decided that everyone should have a soft drink and one of the local people said there was a cold drink shop a little further down the road which might have enough drinks for the large group.

They drove on a little way and then pulled up in front of the Durga Cold Drink Shop. Eruch and some of the Andhra lovers entered the shop. Eruch asked for a glass and then proceeded to clean it thoroughly himself. The shop owner was intrigued at this and wanted to know for whom such care was being taken. Eruch replied it was for Meher Baba and the local lovers explained that Meher Baba was the Avatar, Rama come again.

Hearing this, the shopkeeper was thrilled and even more excited, moments later, when Baba Himself entered the shop. Baba wanted drinks distributed to all and the shop owner set to handing out cold drinks as quickly as he could. The first few were given to Baba who then personally distributed them to those who were traveling with Him.

The walls of the shop were lined with mirrors so Baba's face was reflected in multiple images on all sides. What a delightful scene that was; a most memorable evening when cold drinks warmed the heart! The owner discovered that he had just enough stock on hand so that everyone there could have a drink. When all had been served, Baba told one of the *mandali* to pay, but the shop owner refused to accept any money.

He insisted that it was his good fortune to have been given the privilege of serving Baba and His party and that he could

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not accept any money for this. Baba told the *mandali* member to explain that He (Baba) was giving the money, not as payment, but as His *prasad*. At this, the man relented and lovingly accepted the money with great reverence.

Incidentally, some years later the shop owner became a very prosperous and wealthy businessman. There are many such instances where people who have offered even a little service with love and respect to Baba, without necessarily accepting Him as the Avatar, have been rewarded in a material way. But in each case, the real reward, the true treasure, has been that their link with the Avatar—God in human form—has no doubt been strengthened by these brief and unexpected contacts.